

*What Difference Does It Make?*

*The Differences Greatly Impact Your Understanding of the Christian Life & SANCTIFICATION*  
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1. **Difference #1: What Aspect Sanctification Are We Talking About?** Although there are similarities in the definition of sanctification, there is a difference in emphasis.
  - a. It is interesting to note the *differences* and *similarities* between both the lordship view and the free grace view when it comes to the topic of sanctification.
  - b. Ironically enough, their *definitions* are quite *similar*. See if you can tell the difference between the free grace/dispensational view and the covenant/reformed view:
    - 1) “The verb *ἁγιάζω* (*hagiazō*) means to separate, to set apart from...so when we see sanctify or sanctification or holy or holiness, all of those come from the same root. They all have the idea of being separated, set apart.”
    - 2) “The word *sanctify* basically means ‘to set apart.’ It has the same root as the words *holy* and *saint*.”
    - 3) “*Sanctification* is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”
    - 4) “The Bible commonly uses the term *sanctify* (the same Greek word behind the words *sanctification*, *saint*, and *holy*) to mean set apart from sin to God, to be holy.”
    - 5) “Sanctification in the Westminster Catechism is said to be ‘the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.’
    - 6) “Sanctification may be defined as that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.”
  - c. In addition to the similar definitions, both covenant/lordship writers and free grace/dispensational writers tend to agree that there are *three aspects* to sanctification.
  - d. Now, although the definitions from each side are similar, the *emphasis* of each side is completely different.
    - 1) When studying the attention that biblical writers give to positional sanctification and progressive sanctification, it is astounding to note that over 75% of the passages

in the Bible dealing with sanctification refer to positional sanctification, whereas the remaining 20+% deal with progressive sanctification.<sup>12</sup>

- a) This is an insightful observation, which should at the minimum, be reflected in one's teaching of the subject. However, when one observes Covenant teaching, one would think the exact opposite were true – that over 75% of the sanctification passages deal with experiential/daily sanctification and only 20% deal with past or positional sanctification. The exact *opposite* emphasis should be alarming! Why is the biblical emphasis and that of the covenant teachers so different?
- b) The answer is that Covenant teachers miss the impact of this completed past positional aspect of sanctification even though their definition of sanctification incorporates it.

## 2. Difference #2: What is the Believer's Relationship to the Mosaic Law?

- a. The *FIRST* distinction that must be discussed is the unity of the Mosaic Law, and whether or not it can be divided or sub-divided in the Church Age.
  - 1) Covenant Theology teaches that the Mosaic Law can be divided into three sub-groups of laws — those regulating the government of Israel (civil laws), ceremonial laws, and moral laws. The ceremonial law and civil law are no longer in force because the former was fulfilled in Christ and the latter only applied to Israel's theocracy, which is now defunct. But the moral law continues.
  - 2) Dispensational Theology holds the position that Christians today are not under any aspect of the Mosaic Law, even the moral aspect. It should be noted that although the Mosaic Law had three aspects (civil, ceremonial, and moral), it functioned as

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Wilkin, President of the Grace Evangelical Society, wrote in his article *We Believe In: Sanctification—Part 2: Past Sanctification* the following: When most authors or speakers write or speak about *sanctification*, they almost always mean *progressive* (or *present*) *sanctification*. In fact, many of the books and articles on sanctification never even mention past sanctification. One wonders why there is such a neglect of the subject of past sanctification. It is not because the Scriptures are silent on the subject. One might well think that the reason for this lack of attention is because many *more* passages speak of present sanctification than speak of past (or future) sanctification. Before embarking on this study, I thought that way. However, after doing a study of all New Testament passages dealing with sanctification, I found that over three quarters deal with past sanctification! By comparison only 20% deal with present sanctification.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkin, "We Believe in Sanctification." **Appendix I: NT Passages Dealing with Past, Present, and Future Sanctification (Total = 117):** Past Sanctification (90 Passages, 76.9%), Present Sanctification (24 Passages, 20.5%), and Future Sanctification (3 Passages, 2.6%). **Appendix 2: Passages Dealing with Present Sanctification (Total=24):** John 17:17, 19 (both *hagiazō*), Rom 6:19 (*hagiasmos*), 1 Cor 7:34 (*hagios*), 2 Cor 7:1 (*hagiosyne*), 1 Thess 3:13 (*hagiosyne*); 4:3, 7 (both *hagiasmos*); 5:23 (*hagiazō*), 1 Tim 2:15 (*hagiasmos*); 4:12; 5:2 (both *hagneia*), 22 (*hagnos*), 2 Tim 2:21 (*hagiazō*), Titus 2:5 (*hagnos*), Heb 12:10 (*hagiotēs*), James 4:8 (*hagnizo*), 1 Pet 1:15, 16; 3:5 (all *hagios*), 1 John 3:3 (*hagnizo*), Rev 22:11 (*hagios* and *hagiazō*). **Appendix 3: Passages Dealing with Past Sanctification (Total=90): I. Pre-Conversion Sanctification (Total = 5):** 1 Cor 7:14 (*hagiazō* [twice] and *hagios*), 2 Thess 2:13 (*hagiasinos*), 1 Pet 1:2 (*hagiasmos*). **II. Forensic Sanctification (Total = 13):** 1 Cor 1:30; 6:11 (both *hagiazō*), Col 3:12 (*hagios*), Heb2:11 (*hagiazō* [twice]); 3:1 (*hagios*); 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12 (all *hagiazō*), 1 Pet 1:22 (*hagnizo*), 2 Pet 1:21 (*hagios*), Rev 20:6 (*hagios*). **III. Intrinsic Sanctification (Total = 5):** Rom 6:6 (concept), 22 (*hagiasmos*), Eph 5:26 (*hagiazō*), Heb 9:14 (*katharizo*), Rev 22:11 (*hagios* and *hagiazō*). **IV. Positional Sanctification (Total = 67):** A. Passages Using *Hagiazō* (Total = 3) Acts 20:32; 26:18, Jude 1; B. Passages Using *Hagios* (Total = 64), Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:20, Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25, 26, 31; 16:2, 15, 1 Cor 1:2 (twice); 6:1,2; 14:33; 16:1, 15, 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:13, Eph 1:1,4, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18, Phil 1:1; 4:21,22, Col 1:2,4, 12,26, 1 Thess 3:13; 5:27 (in the Majority Text), 2Thess 1:10, 1 Tim 5:10, 2 Tim 1:9, Phlm5,7, Heb 6:10; 13:24, Jude 3, 14, Rev 5:8; 8:3,4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 15:3; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:8; 20:9

an indivisible unit. Thus, to place oneself under one aspect of the Mosaic Law is to obligate oneself to be under the entire Law. If a person is under the moral aspect of the Law, he is required to keep all the civil and ceremonial regulations as well. (Galatians 3:10, 5:3; James 2:10)

- b. The **SECOND** distinction that must be discussed is whether or not the Law is the rule of life for the believer in the Church-age.
  - 1) Covenant theologians would whole-heartedly agree that the Law should indeed be the rule of life for the believer in Jesus Christ. Without it, according to them, the believer will be lawless in their conduct.
  - 2) Dispensational theologians would reject the notion that the Law should be the rule of the life for the believer in Jesus Christ, because God Himself has changed the relationship of the believer to the Law; He has removed it as the rule of life in the Church-age.
    - a) According to 1 Timothy 3:16, godliness is a mystery in the Church-age, meaning God's method of producing godliness in the Church-age was **NOT** something revealed in the Old Testament (i.e., within the Mosaic Law). God's "rule of life" in the Church-age is grace, administering the righteous requirements of the Law, via the means of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- c. The **THIRD** main distinction is that Covenant theologians misunderstand the general flow of Romans, and this leads to some faulty interpretation as it relates to the sanctification of the believer, especially as it relates to the Law.
  - 1) The book of Romans is a clear road map for the Christian life. Romans 1-5 describes how one is saved from the penalty of sin or the doctrine of justification. Romans 6-8 describes how one is saved from the power of sin in daily life, and how one is saved from the very presence of sin in the future (the doctrines of sanctification and glorification). Romans 9-11 deals with God's plans for the nation of Israel and describes His distinct purpose for them. Romans 12-16 finishes the book with practical instruction involving daily life for the believer in Jesus Christ.
  - 2) It is interesting to note that the Covenant teachers who place the believer under the law for the Christian life tend to view Romans 6-8 from a justification perspective rather than a sanctification perspective.
  - 3) Romans 6 is not dealing with the unbeliever's deliverance from the penalty of sin (i.e., justification) through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for the unbeliever, but rather it is dealing with the believer's deliverance from sin's power (i.e., sanctification) through one's own co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ.
    - a) What then is Romans 6:14 talking about when it says we are "not under Law, but under grace?"

- b) Sanctification deals with deliverance from sin's dominion on a daily basis; whereas, justification deals with sin's penalty. If Romans 6:14 and the phrase "under law" refers to justification, then Paul would have discussed sin's penalty and NOT sin's dominion or power.
- 4) The reason Covenant teachers interpret Romans 6:14 through a justification lens is because the Law, in their teaching, holds a very special place in believers' sanctification. Even more, according to these men, they think that believers are now equipped, through the Holy Spirit, to keep the Law!
  - 5) Paul's statement in Romans 6:14 is given to convince the believer that a "new sheriff" is in town (so to speak). God's method of producing holiness in the believer's life will **NOT** be accomplished through efforts to keep the Law. Romans 7 addresses this very issue and also reveals why the believer **cannot** and **must not** seek to grow spiritually by keeping the Law.
    - a) How do the Covenant teachers handle Romans 7? They twist Romans 7 to promote a legalistic Christian life teaching, which is a direct outflow of their commitment/surrender gospel.
    - b) It is clear from Romans that believers will not/cannot bear fruit unto God if they are still trying to do so by relating to the Law. It is only as they learn to relate to their new spouse, in union with Him, that they bear fruit. (John 15:5)
    - c) In an attempt to introduce "why" the believer should still strive to keep the Law, Piper introduces the "New Covenant." Piper quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 and then states the following two points: "1. We learn that in the new covenant the Law will no longer mainly be external, written on stone (that's what "letter" means), but will be mainly internal, written on the heart (verse 33). In other words, the decisive thing about the Law will no longer be that it is a *demand* from outside, but it will be a *desire* from inside. 2. Or, as verse 34 puts it, knowing God will not be an external command so much as an internal experience."
    - d) How then does God make believers righteous? If they are dead to the Law, does that mean they are antinomian lawbreakers, as Covenant teachers would suggest that free grace proponents teach?
3. **Difference #3: Is Progressive Sanctification Guaranteed in the Life of a Believer?**
    - a. The ***FIRST*** distinction between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology as it relates to progressive sanctification, is whether or not one's Justification guarantees their (progressive) Sanctification.
      - 1) For the Covenant Theologian, Sanctification is guaranteed following Justification. They often quote a well-known phrase attributed to first Calvin and then Luther: "It is faith alone that saves, but saving faith is never alone."

- 2) For the Dispensational theologian, progressive Sanctification is desired for every believer, but it is **NOT** guaranteed.
- a) Biblically, believers have the ability to walk according to the flesh, which when they do, they will commit acts of sin, whether in thought, word, or deed. Thus, obedience is **NOT** guaranteed!
- i. In fact, when one considers the body of imperatives that Paul uses in his writings, regarding this area of the believer not living in carnality and not being dominated by sin, one sees that it is quite staggering. Consider the following non-exhaustive list: **Romans:** 6:11 (*reckon*), 6:12 (*reign*), 6:13 (*present*), 6:19 (*present*), 12:2 (*conformed and transformed*), 12:21 (*overcome*), 13:14 (*put on and make*); **1 Corinthians:** 4:16 (*imitate*), 6:18 (*flee*), 6:20 (*glorify*), 7:2 (*have*), 7:3 (*due*), 7:5 (*deprive*), 7:9 (*marry*), 10:7 (*become*), 10:10 (*complain*), 10:14 (*flee*), 10:31 (*do*), 11:1 (*imitate*), 15:33 (*deceived*), 15:34 (*awake and sin*) 15:58 (*be*); **2 Corinthians:** 6:14 (*be*), 6:17 (*out and separate and touch*), 8:24 (*show*), 13:5 (*examine and test*); **Galatians:** 5:13 (*serve*), 5:16 (*walk*), 6:1 (*restore*), 6:7 (*deceived*); **Ephesians:** 4:25 (*speak*), 4:26 (*angry and sin and go*), 4:27 (*give*), 4:28 (*steal and labor*), 4:29 (*proceed*), 4:30 (*grieve*), 4:31 (*put away*), 4:32 (*be*), 5:1 (*be*), 5:2 (*walk*), 5:3 (*named*), 5:7 (*be*), 5:8 (*walk*), 5:11 (*fellowship and expose*), 5:15 (*see*), 5:17 (*be*), 5:18 (*drunk and filled*), 5:22 (*submit*), 5:25 (*love*), 5:33 (*love*), 6:1 (*obey*), 6:2 (*honor*), 6:4 (*provoke and bring*), 6:5 (*obedient*), 6:9 (*do*), 6:10 (*strong*), 6:11 (*put on*), 6:13 (*take up*), 6:14 (*stand*), 6:17 (*take*); **Philippians:** 1:27 (*conduct*), 2:12 (*work*), 4:1 (*stand*), 4:6 (*anxious*), 4:8 (*meditate*), 4:9 (*do*); **Colossians:** 2:6 (*walk*), 3:1 (*seek*), 3:2 (*set your mind*), 3:5 (*put to death*), 3:8 (*put off*), 3:9 (*lie*), 3:12 (*put on*), 3:15 (*rule*), 3:16 ( *dwell*), 3:18 (*submit*), 3:19 (*love*), 3:20 (*obey*), 3:21 (*provoke*), 3:22 (*obey*), 4:1 (*give*); **1 Thessalonians:** 5:13 (*peace*), 5:14 (*warn*), 5:15 (*see and pursue*), 5:16 (*rejoice*), 5:17 (*pray*), 5:18 (*give*), 5:19 (*do no quench*), 5:21 (*hold fast*), 5:22 (*abstain*); **2 Thessalonians:** 2:15 (*stand fast and hold*); **1 Timothy:** 4:7 (*reject and exercise*), 4:11 (*command and teach*), 4:12 (*be*), 4:15 (*meditate and give*), 4:16 (*take and continue*), 4:22 (*share and keep*), 6:2 (*do not despise and serve*), 6:5 (*withdraw*), 6:11 (*flee and pursue*), 6:12 (*fight and lay hold*); **2 Timothy:** 1:13 (*hold fast*), 2:15 (*diligent*), 2:16 (*shun*), 2:19 (*depart*) 2:22 (*flee and pursue*), 3:14 (*continue*), 4:5 (*watchful*); **Titus:** 3:9 (*avoid*), 3:14 (*learn*). Because of its emphasis in Paul's writings, it is clear that believers can be carnal (fleshly); otherwise, he would not have addressed the possibility of it with so much consistency!
- b) Additionally, the biblical authors, through the use of Greek *moods*, teach that Sanctification is desired but **NOT** guaranteed.

- b. The **SECOND** distinction between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology as it relates to progressive sanctification, is whether or not Carnal Christians exist.
- 1) Covenant Theologians use extremely confusing and undefinable terms to describe what “true” believers should look like.
    - a) Hence, to keep a tally on all of the ways one can tell who is and who is not a Christian, the following has to be true, according to the covenant authors quoted above: (1) One cannot engage in a pattern of unrepentant sin, or one cannot persist in patterns of disobedience and have assurance of one’s salvation, (2) One has to deeply desire to worship and sing to the Lord, (3) One has to fight lust and generally have a persevering fight in relation to sin, (4) One lacking assurance should run to God and pursue the means of grace, and one should gain assurance through inward evidences of grace and immediate witness of the Holy Spirit.
  - 2) Covenant theologians directly contradict the Word of God in an effort to promote their theology.
    - a) Consider MacArthur’s direct contradiction of Scripture when he states, “Though Christians do fall into sin from time to time, through their own disobedient choices, *they are never again the slaves of sin* as they were before being rescued by Christ and set free. *Sin no longer has the power to control them*” (italics added).
    - b) Consider John MacArthur’s direct contradiction of Scripture when he states, “The tragic result is that many people think it is fairly normal for Christians to live like unbelievers. As I noted...contemporary theologians have devised an entire category for this type of person - the ‘carnal Christian.’ Who knows how many unregenerate persons have been lulled into a false sense of spiritual security by the suggestion that they are merely carnal? Please do not misunderstand me. Christians can and do behave in carnal ways. But nothing in Scripture suggests that a real Christian might pursue a lifestyle of unbroken indifference or antagonism toward the things of God.”