

## SANCTIFICATION

In **Hebrews 10:10** we read “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” In **Hebrew 13:12** we read “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” In

**II Thessalonians 2:13**, Paul writes: “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you for the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” **It is clear from these passages that another one of the key words of grace salvation is sanctification.**

**QUESTION #1** – What does the word “sanctify” or “sanctification” actually mean?

The word “sanctify” or “sanctification” is used, as Dr. Chafer observed, some 106 times in the Old Testament and some 31 times in the New Testament (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 7, p. 275).

In the Old Testament the word is “qadesh.” The basic meaning of this word is to declare something as holy and sacred and consecrated (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 725).

In the New Testament the word is “hagiazō” (αγιαζω). The basic meaning of this word is to dedicate or separate or to set apart something as holy or sacred (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 5).

In fact, sometimes this word is translated by the English word “holy.” Several English words are translated from the same root word for “sanctify” or “sanctification”—hallowed, saint, holy, holiness, sanctuary all come from the same root.

**The basic idea is that a person or thing has been set apart or separated from the rest by God in a position and relationship with God so that God views it as holy, sacred and dedicated to Him.**

**A saint is one who has been set apart by God as a believer.** In Romans 1:7 and I Corinthians 1:2 God classifies every believer as a saint. It is interesting to observe that God gave His people the name “saints,” but men gave God’s people the name “Christians” (Acts 11:26).

**QUESTION #2** – What is the problem when it comes to sanctification?

**The central problem or error when it comes to sanctification is a lack of careful study and accurate analysis of the Word of God on the doctrine.** Perhaps of all the grace words, this word is the one that has been most misunderstood and misapplied.

God saw fit to use this word, and to properly understand it will take study and accurate analysis of the other doctrinal words, to which it is related.

A major mistake that people make when it comes to sanctification is that since they believe they have been sanctified, they understand what it means. Human experience is not our authority for what we believe; the Word of God is our authority for what we believe.

Experiences must be interpreted in view of Scriptures. If a person is elevating experience above Scripture, as Dr. Chafer said, “it should be judged as a device of Satan” (*Ibid.*, p. 275). We base what we believe about sanctification on the written Scriptures, not on someone’s personal experience.

As Chafer said, “It is the function of the Bible to interpret experience rather than the function of experience to interpret the Bible. Every experience which is wrought of God will be found to be in accord with the Scriptures.”

**QUESTION #3** – What are some things that the word “sanctification” does not imply?

It is important to realize that in its general use, there are certain things that this word does not imply:

**Non-implication #1** - The word does not automatically imply past improvement when it comes to holiness.

Some suggest that they are sanctified because they have improved in their holiness. Well God is said Himself to be sanctified (Lev. 21:8; John 17:19). Certainly it cannot be based on an improvement in holiness because God cannot improve in Holiness. This is a major error of the Catholic Church. According to them, sainthood is achieved by the Catholic Church after one’s life has proved worthy.

**Non-implication #2** - The word does not ever imply a state of sinlessness.

In other words, sanctification is not the same as sinless perfection. In fact, in the case of the Corinthians, Paul says they were sanctified and yet they were a fleshly and sinful mess (I Corinthians 6:11).

When you read the word “holy prophets” or “holy apostles” or “holy men” or “holy women” or “holy brethren,” it does not mean these were sinless people. As Dr. Chafer said, “None of these were sinless before God. They were holy, nevertheless, according to some particular standard or issue that constituted the basis of their separation from others” (*Ibid.*, p. 276).

**Non-implication #3** - The word does not always imply finality.

There is a part to sanctification that is progressive. For example, there were multiple times when the Israelites, who had been set apart for God, needed to be sanctified again and again.

To accurately understand sanctification or any other doctrine, we must search the Scriptures where the word is used.

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**QUESTION #4** – Who sanctifies whom?

**It is God who does the sanctifying and it is God who determines who or what is sanctified and set apart unto Him. God the Father sanctifies (I Thess. 5:23). God the Son sanctifies (Eph. 5:25-26; Heb. 2:11; 13:12). God the Spirit sanctifies (Rom. 15:16; II Thess. 2:13).**

God the Father sanctified God the Son coming to this world (John 10:36). God sanctified Israel and her priests and place of worship (Ex. 29:44; 31:13).

**QUESTION #5** – How is a believer sanctified now?

According to I Thessalonians 4:3, it is the will of God to be sanctified. So how does this happen?

**(Way #1)** - One is sanctified by a union with Jesus Christ that comes by faith in Him.  
I Corinthians 1:2, 30

**(Way #2)** - One is sanctified by the Word of God. John 17:17; I Tim. 4:5

**(Way #3)** - One is sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ. Heb. 13:12; 9:13-14

**(Way #4)** - One is sanctified by Christ's actual body that was sacrificed on the cross.  
Heb. 10:10; Gal. 6:14

**(Way #5)** - One is sanctified by the Holy Spirit. I Cor. 6:11; II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:2

**(Way #6)** - One is sanctified by faith in Christ. Acts 26:18

**QUESTION #6** – Is it possible for a believer, in some way, to sanctify himself?

**Yes.** Once one has believed on Jesus Christ, there is a part to sanctification of which man may participate.

**I Peter 3:15** - Peter challenges believers to sanctify Christ as Lord in their hearts.

**II Timothy 2:21** - Paul challenges believers to cleanse themselves to be sanctified.

**Romans 12:1** - Paul says that we are to present ourselves a living sacrifice that is holy and acceptable to God.

**II Corinthians 6:17** - Paul says to come out from false religion and separate ourselves from it.

**II Corinthians 7:1** - Paul says that we are to cleanse ourselves from flesh defilement so that we may reach a complete holiness.

**QUESTION #7** – What are the three types of Sanctification?

Here is one reason why this doctrine has been so misunderstood.

**Type #1** - There is positional sanctification.

At the moment one believes on Jesus Christ, one is positionally set apart as the property of God. The person becomes God's sacred property as now they are justified, redeemed, cleansed, and forgiven.

Every single believer is positionally set apart and is now classified as a saint. It is positional sanctification that makes one a saint in the mind of God (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; 6:11; II Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2).

This classification of being a saint positionally has nothing to do with behavior. This is one of "the marvels of saving grace." The weakest of believers is still set apart unto God and is just as much a set apart saint as the strongest of believers.

**Type #2** - There is progressive or practical sanctification.

This is the subjective side of sanctification that is personal to the daily life of one who has been positionally set apart unto God. **Positional sanctification has nothing to do with how one lives their daily lives, but progressive and practical sanctification has everything to do with how one lives their daily life.** The Bible challenges believers to pursue a holy and sanctified life in view of what has happened positionally - Romans 12:1; Rom. 6:22; I Pet. 1:15; I Thess. 5:23.

It is a fact that believers do sin and need the cleansing grace of God found in Jesus Christ through confession to maintain fellowship with God (I John 1:8-9; 2:2). This is why practical sanctification does not mean practical perfection. It means there is a pursuit of things that lead us to godliness and holiness.

To be practically sanctified into becoming holy and godly one must:

- 1) We must yield to God and His Spirit who lives in us. Gal. 5:16, 25 - not grieve or quench
- 2) We must continually renew our minds on the Scriptures. Rom. 12:2
- 3) We must study the Word and walk in accordance with God's Word. Prov. 16:20; John 17:17; Eph. 5:26
- 4) We must pursue a separation from evil and sinful people and things. Eph. 4:1, 17-32; 5:3-12; I Thess.4:3, 7
- 5) We must pursue a growth in grace and knowledge. II Pet. 3:18  
Actually growth is the effect of meeting the previous mandates.

It is possible to pursue this sanctification to the point that God considers one blameless and fruitful, even though one still has a sin nature. It is possible to actually reach a point where we stand in the presence of God with great joy and blameless (Jude 24). Jesus, Himself, spoke of faithful believers being able to bear much fruit (John 15:7-8).

Progressive sanctification should be the goal of every believer who has been positionally sanctified.

**Type #3** - There is permanent or ultimate or final sanctification.

The word “sanctification” is not used specifically in regard to the ultimate perfected state that a believer will have in eternity, but the idea of it is contained in many passages.

Ultimate sanctification is that which every believer will ultimately have in eternity. They will forever be set apart unto God and will be presented faultless to God (Jude 24).

Our bodies will be changed into a glorious body like that of Jesus Christ and we will forever be with the Lord—Philippians 3:20-21; I John 3:2.

**QUESTION #8** – What are the false views of sanctification?

There are primarily four false views pertaining to sanctification:

**False View #1** - Only those who act saintly are saints.

Every believer is a saint positionally regardless of how they act.

**False View #2** - Only the church can determine who saints are.

Only God can determine who saints are and frankly some in the church may not be saints.

**False View #3** - Saints should completely eradicate and kill the sin nature.

No believer, no matter how godly or spiritual, can completely eradicate the sin nature. The Apostle Paul still struggled with it years after coming to faith in Christ and after writing inspired Scripture (Rom. 7:18-23). In fact, in the last letter he wrote before he died he said that “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom...” (II Tim. 4:18). Why would Paul say such a thing if he were sinlessly perfect?

**False View #4** - Once one is classified as a saint, it does not matter how one lives life.

There are those who believe that their saintly status means they can use their liberty in Christ to live life any way they want. The Bible does not teach antinomianism. As we have already pointed out, the Bible teaches a progressive sanctification that should be the expectation and goal of every believer.

Henry Thiessen said, “Sinless perfection is an unscriptural doctrine, so also is sinful imperfection” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 383).

In other words, it is wrong to use the doctrine that we are not perfect people to pursue an imperfect sinful life.