

Sanctification

How God Makes Us Holy

By Martha Peace

The Bible teaches us that when God saves someone, he cleanses them from their sin – past sin, present sin, and future sin as the Lord Jesus Christ “bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24). Thus begins a transformation of our life from darkness to light. This transformation was set in place by God in eternity past and will end ultimately when He gives us a new, sinless body in heaven.

Scriptures call this process *sanctification*. Sanctification is defined as “the continuing work of God in the life of the believer, making him or her actually holy.¹ The basic idea is to “set apart” or “consecrate.” The root word for sanctification in the Greek is *hagios* which means to be holy.

There are three aspects or phases of God sanctifying us.

1. **Positional Sanctification:** You are placed in righteous standing with God at the moment of your salvation.
 - a. When the Apostle Paul was converted to Christianity, Jesus spoke directly to him and told Paul that he was to go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel.
 - b. According to Acts 26:18, the new converts would be turned from _____ to _____ and from _____ to _____. They would also receive _____ from sin. How, then, would they be sanctified? _____
 - c. According to 1 Peter 1:2, which member of the Trinity is the agent of positional sanctification? The Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit?

This beginning process of making us “holy as He is holy” is a 100% work of God, a supernatural miracle of God’s grace and mercy.

2. **Progressive Sanctification:** This aspect of Sanctification begins at the moment God saves you and “progresses” throughout the rest of your life. It is a life-long process of being transformed into more of

Christ's image. You will still sin, but it should be less and less as you mature as a Christian.

- a. Progressive sanctification is a work of God helping and convicting you *and*, at the same time, your responsibility to discipline yourself.
- b. Romans 8:28-29 has a clear and magnificent promise. In that promise, what has God predestined to conform you to?
_____.
- c. 1 Timothy 4:7 tells you to “train yourself for _____.”
- d. 1 Timothy 4:8 compares the benefits of physical exercise and godliness. What is the difference?

So, this second aspect of sanctification is a work of God (to give you grace) *and* your responsibility to work at renewing your mind and pursuing Christlikeness.

3. **Perfection:** This aspect of sanctification happens when we go to heaven to be with the Lord. Then, we will never sin again and we will worship Him with a truly pure heart. When a Christian dies, their body goes into the grave and their soul goes to be with the Lord. At some point in time later, their bodies will be raised from the dead and changed into a body that will never get sick or die or sin again. God will, then, reunite our resurrection body with our soul.
 - a. Read 1 Corinthians 15:52 to see how quickly this happens.
 - b. According to 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, what are the differences between how the physical body is buried (some versions of the bible use the word “sown”) and raised (“resurrected”)?

This last aspect of sanctification is a 100% work of God.

When God sanctifies you, He makes you holy by cleansing you from your sin and placing you in supernatural union with Him. From that point-in-time until you go to be with the Lord, He works in your life to convict you of sin and mature you into Christlikeness – never sinless perfection in this life but definite progress as the Lord give you grace to “... discipline yourself for the

purpose of godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7). Then will come the glorious day when you go to be with the Lord in heaven and eventually will receive your then-glorified body back from the grave.

Up to now, we have only studied about being holy in general terms. So, I want you to study further what true holiness looks like in a Christian’s life.

Biblical Principles on True Holiness

[The following biblical principles on true holiness were adapted for use from Pastor Walter Marshall’s book, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*.]ⁱⁱ

- Prayerfully read each one carefully.
- Read the Scripture references and think about them as they related to the principle.
- Circle the ones that you know you struggle with.
- In those areas in which you know you need help, ask God to help you and mold you more and more into Christlikeness.
- Write out the Scriptures that accompany the principles that you circled and review them regularly. Perhaps you might want to place them on index cards that are easily carried around.

1. True holiness understands that we are by nature totally powerless and unable to live a holy and righteous life that God requires.

Romans 5:12-21; Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 8:7-8ⁱⁱⁱ

2. True holiness understands that God will not help you live a holy life unless you use the means God has given you to pursue this holy life – salvation and sanctification that will give Him *all* the glory.

2 Timothy 2:5^{iv}

3. True holiness is produced in someone who has received from God a heart that is freely willing to live a godly life. Thus, they must fight against sin and hate it.

Psalm 19:8 Galatians 5:17; Psalm 36:4^v

4. True holiness is produced in someone who is assured that they are forgiven and reconciled to God.

Romans 4:5-7; John 8:36; Philippians 2:13; Romans 8:7-8^{vi}

5. True holiness is produced in someone who is assured that God loves them. 1 John 4:19; 1 Timothy 1:5.
6. True holiness is produced in someone who has received from God assurance of a happy, eternal future with the Lord. Hebrews 12:2; 10:34 2 Corinthians 4:16-17; Philippians 3:20-21^{vii}
7. True holiness is shown in the lives of those who have sufficient strength to will and to do what God [enables and] calls you to do. [“Your real goal is not simply to change some bad habits. Your real goal is to put to death your corrupt, sinful desires which give rise to those bad habits. Also, you are called not only to stop fulfilling your sinful lusts, but also to become filled with holy love and holy desires.” Obeying God is ‘easy’ and pleasant only if God is at work in your heart, empowering you to obey!” Philippians 2:13; Romans 6:2-4^{viii}
8. True holiness means that you have holy thoughts, motives, and feelings. Acts 15:9; Galatians 5:6; Hebrews 4:1; Hebrews.12:28; Hosea 3:5.^{ix}
9. True holiness means that you delight in doing God’s will; you long to do it more than you long to do anything else! ^x Romans 8:1-4
10. True holiness means that you love everything in him; his justice, his holiness, his sovereign authority, his all-seeing eye. Psalm 26:3; Psalm 73:25^{xi}
11. True holiness means that you have a single minded devotion, seeing God as the fountain of all goodness. Psalm 31:14; Psalm 18:2; Isaiah 12:2; Psalm 42:11; Psalm 116:7
12. True holiness means that you have a real love for God. He is the greatest pleasure of your life. 1 John 5:3^{xii}
13. True holiness is shown in the lives of those who avail themselves of the means of grace [church, the Scriptures, communion] realizing that these means do not in themselves make you holy. They draw you into deeper fellowship with *Christ*, the True Vine, *who makes you holy* as you abide in him.^{xiii} 2 Peter 3:18

14. True holiness bases the Christian life upon God's love for you, and not upon [your ability to love God] legalism or easy-believism. It results in:^{xiv}

- a. Rejoicing in the Lord always. Philippians 4:4
- b. Having a hope that does not make you ashamed. Romans 1:16
- c. Acknowledging the Lord as your God and Savior. Titus 3:4-7
- d. Praying to the Lord as your Father in heaven. Matthew 6:9-13
- e. Offering up your body and soul as an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord. Romans 12:1-2
- f. Casting all your care, both body and soul, upon the Lord.
1 Peter 5:6-7
- g. Having contentment and thanksgiving in every circumstance.
1 Thessalonians 5:18
- h. Boasting only in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:26-31
- i. Triumphant in his praise. 2 Corinthians 2:14
- j. Rejoicing in tribulation. Romans 5:3-5
- k. Committing your soul willing to God as your redeemer, whenever he will be pleased to call for you.
Job 19:25; Psalm 78:35
- l. Loving Christ's second coming, and looking for it as the blessed hope.
2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; James 2:5

15. True holiness involves a resolve:^{xv}

- a. "... to do what Christ and the power of his spirit will be pleased to work in you." Philippians 2:13
- b. That trusts Christ to enable you to live far beyond your own natural strength, because you have a new nature from Christ.
2 Corinthians 5:17
- c. That does not try to gain the forgiveness of sins, the favor of God, a new holy nature, spiritual life, or happiness by any works of the moral law...or any religious ritual.
Ephesians 2:8-9
- d. That does not "trust in the actions of their own will [power] – their purposes, resolutions, and endeavor, instead of upon Christ."
Proverbs 3:5; 2 Corinthians 1:9

- e. “to...continually go to Christ first, by faith [as opposed to “just do it”]. Then, you will receive a gospel motivation to live a holy life. This gospel motivation will strengthen and empower you to live a holy life.” Galatians 2:20
- f. “...to meditate on the wonderful truths of the gospel, [and] God will be very lovely to your heart.
 - i. You have fellowship with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3
 - ii. You are the temple of the living God. 2 Corinthians 6:16
 - iii. You live by the Spirit. Galatians 5:25
 - iv. You are called to holiness, and created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Ephesians 2:10
 - v. God will sanctify you through and through, and make you perfect in holiness at the very end.
1 Thessalonians 5:23
 - vi. Your old man is crucified with Christ, and through him you are dead to sin, and alive to God. And, being made free from sin, you have become servants of righteousness, and have fruit unto holiness, the end of which is everlasting life. Romans 6:6,22
 - vii. You are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then you shall also appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:3-4

16. True holiness worked by God in your heart would enable you to answer “Yes” to the following questions:^{xvi}

- a. Do you want to trust in the Lord with all your heart, and cast your cares upon him?
- b. Do you want to give all your concerns over to him?
- c. Do you want to be strengthened to submit to the hand of God, with a joyful patience, even when you face trouble or death itself?
- d. Do you want to faithfully worship God in the way that he has commanded you to?
- e. Do you believe that you are complete in Christ, and that you have all the spiritual blessings in him that you need?
- f. Do you want to confess your sins to God, pray to him, and praise him from your heart for all his goodness to you?

- g. Do you want to praise God for suffering as well as for prosperity?
- h. Do you believe that all of God's ways are mercy and truth to you, whether he chooses to prosper you or make you suffer in this life?
- i. Do you want to hear and receive the Bible as the Word of God?
- j. Do you want to meditate on the Word with delight?
- k. Do you believe with assurance that the word of God is "the power of God for salvation?"
- l. Do you want to have a pure love toward your brothers in Christ?
- m. Do you want to live with others in all humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness and love?
- n. Do you want to be free from fleshly and worldly lusts that war against your soul and hinder you from godliness?
- o. Do you trust that God will enable you to do everything that is necessary for his glory and for your eternal salvation? That he will be very gracious to you?
- p. Do you see Christ and his grace as the only thing you really need for your salvation?
- q. Do you enjoy Christ above everything else?
- r. Do you desire Christ with your whole heart as your only happiness – no matter what you might suffer for his sake?
- s. Do you desire with your whole heart to be delivered from the power and practice of sin, as well as from the wrath of God and the pains of hell?

This study shows you *where* you fall short of true holiness. Go back and review the principles and questions. Pray, asking God to "further his work in you" – to make you more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ – all for his glory.

The next study in this series, "the Put-Off and Put-On Dynamic" will tell you *how* by God's grace that you can change.

All of sanctification -- positional, progressive, and perfection – is God's will for the believer. He will see it through until the end.

I will leave you with this thought:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and blameless before him.* In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

Ephesians 1:3-6, emphasis added

ⁱ Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books House), p.967.

ⁱⁱ Marshall, Walter. *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. Original version written in the 1600's, new version in modern English by Bruce McRae. (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid, p.18.

^{iv} Ibid, p.22.

^v Ibid, p.27.

^{vi} Ibid, p.29

^{vii} Ibid, p.35

^{viii} Ibid, p.37

^{ix} Ibid, p.15

^x Ibid, p.17

^{xi} Ibid, p.16

^{xii} Ibid, p.30

^{xiii} Ibid, p.224

^{xiv} Ibid, p.140

^{xv} Ibid, p.176-178

^{xvi} Ibid, adapted from pages 184 – 187 and page 200