

## Sanctification

### Introduction:

Sanctification is another doctrine of extremes — it is either neglected, with little being heard about it from the pulpit; or grossly distorted, with an emphasis giving it a weird and wonderful (unscriptural) meaning.

Theologically, most false concepts of sanctification are found within the Arminian spectrum — among the so-called “holiness churches.” Because Arminianism holds that at salvation God only forgives past sins, that the believer can at any time forfeit his justification, and that a soul must ‘endure to the end,’ a second work of God is often sought as a means of maintaining the state of salvation.

Religious groups which fall into this category are:

- The Roman Catholic ‘Church’
- Methodist denominations
- The Salvation Army
- Pentecostal denominations
- Charismatic groups
- The ‘Church’ of the Nazarene
- Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination

With the exception of Roman Catholicism, these other denominations are classified as being part of the “Holiness Movement.” Each of them — in one form or another, and to varying degrees, and with different terminologies — teach the need for every believer to experience a second work or grace. This work falls under the general heading of “sanctification,” but is referred to by many terms such as “

The second blessing  
Perfect Love  
The Higher Life  
Cleansing From Inbred Sin

Dr. Harry Ironside, in his book, *Holiness: The False And The True*, states the basic holiness concept:

When converted, God graciously forgives all sins committed up to the time when one repents. But the believer is then placed in a lifelong probation, during which he may at any time forfeit his justification and peace with God if he falls into sin from which he does not at once repent. In order therefore to maintain himself in a saved condition, he needs a further work of grace called sanctification. This work has to do with sin the root, as justification had to do with sin the fruit.

Those seeking such an “experience” are often faced with long frustrations of self-delusion, because they seek an experience that can never be this side of eternity — the eradication of the sin nature.

Let us determine the Biblical teaching.

### I. The Meaning of Sanctification

Most theological definitions see sanctification as a work of grace, wherein the believer is gradually cleansed from his corrupt nature to the end of being presented faultless before God.

Dr. Ironside gives 12 uses of the word in Scripture to define its real meaning, and to show the absurdity of the “Holiness” position.

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The Bible shows:

- A. That Inanimate Objects May Be Sanctified.  
See: Exodus 40:10-11

Does this mean a change occurred in the nature of these vessels?

See: Exodus 19:23

Was there a change in the composition of the mountain?

- B. That People Can Sanctify Themselves Without The Help of God.  
See: Exodus 19:22

Did God require these priests to change themselves?

- C. That a Man Could Sanctify Another Man.  
See: Exodus 13:2; 19:10

The fact that Moses did not and could not eliminate the sinful nature of the first-born is shown in the preceding history of Israel.

- D. That People Can Sanctify Themselves To Do Evil.  
See: Isaiah 66:17

There is no thought of inward cleaning or conformity to the nature of Christ here.

- E. That The Lord Jesus Christ Was Sanctified By the Father.  
See: John 10:36

There was no sin in Christ to be eradicated. (Interestingly, some groups within the Holiness Movement teach that Jesus had a “taint” of sin!)

- F. That The Lord Jesus Christ Sanctified Himself.  
See: John 17:19

Why would One who was sanctified by the Father then need to sanctify Himself?

- G. That Unbelievers Are Sometimes Sanctified.  
See: I Corinthians 7:14

Will an unsaved husband undergo a gradual change in nature (or become perfect!) because his wife is saved?

- H. That Carnal Christians Are Sanctified.  
See: I Corinthians 1:1-2 with 3:1-3

It is impossible to be carnal and yet free from inbred sin.

- I. That Christians Are To Follow Sanctification.  
See: Hebrews 12:14

In what sense could one follow a change of nature?

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- J. That Believers Are Called Upon To Sanctify God.  
See: I Peter 3:15
- K. That Christians Addressed As Being Sanctified Are Afterward Exhorted To Be Holy.  
See: I Peter 1:1-2 with 1:15-16
- L. That Those Sanctified Are Declared To Be Perfect Forever.  
Hebrews 10:14

This verse gives the lie to the “perfectionists’ who teach the possibility of total apostasy.

As each of the above verses are carefully studied the Biblical meaning of “Sanctification” becomes obvious:

SANCTIFICATION means “SEPARATION”  
To SANCTIFY means to “SET APART”

### II. The Nature of Sanctification

In relation to the believer the Word of God is clear that our sanctification is both absolute and eternal **and** progressive and internal.

#### A. Absolute Sanctification

This is ‘imputed’ or ‘positional’ sanctification. It is the result of the finished work of Christ on the cross, whereby the believer is forever “set apart” to God.

Absolute sanctification is taught in the Book of Hebrews. In this book we are told:

1. The basis of Absolute Sanctification is the Blood of Christ. — Hebrews 13:12
2. Absolute Sanctification is the Perfection of the Conscience. — Hebrews 10:2
3. Absolute Sanctification is Eternal — Never to be Repeated. — Hebrews 10:10, 14

Because of this absolute sanctification, all believers are called “saints” — ‘sanctified ones’ — though their lives may not necessarily be saintly. See: I Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; Colossians 1:2; 3:12.

#### B. Progressive Sanctification.

Absolute sanctification concerns the believer’s standing — whereas progressive sanctification has to do with the believer’s state.

1. It is a Holy Walk.  
I Thessalonians 4:1-7; II Timothy 2:19-22; II Peter 3:17-18; Psalm 119:37.
2. It is a “Putting Off,” a “Putting Away,” and a “Putting On.”  
Ephesians 4:20-25; Colossians 3:9-10, 12, 14; Romans 12:1-2
3. It is a “Reckoning.”  
Romans 6:11-12
4. It is a Continual Work.
  - a) The apostle Paul experienced problems with his ‘old nature’ as a great servant of the Lord — Romans 7:15-25; II Corinthians 12:7.

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- b) Only at the return of Christ will the believer be completely sanctified —  
Philippians 3:20-21; I Thessalonians 3:12-13; 5:23; I John 3:2

### III. The Work of Sanctification

#### A. In General

Like regeneration, sanctification is entirely the work of God. The Bible teaches the Christian is sanctified by:

1. God the Father. — I Thessalonians 5:23-24
2. God the Son. — I Corinthians 1:30
3. God the Holy Spirit. — Romans 15:16; I Corinthians 6:11; II Thessalonians 2:13; I Peter 1:1-2

A careful study of these verses shows that sanctification by the Spirit is closely linked with salvation.

In actual fact, this sanctification **is** salvation, in particular the work of the Holy Spirit within man by bringing him to salvation — convicting, converting, cleansing, etc.

Rather than being a “second blessing” which follows the salvation experience, it is the ‘first’ blessing of salvation!

Like salvation, sanctification is by faith — Acts 26:18.

#### B. In Daily Life.

See: Philippians 1:6

Progressive Sanctification is not a second definite work of grace (i.e. an experience,) but a life. It is a practical sanctification.

This work is accomplished in the believer through:

1. The Application to the Christian of the Word of God.  
The Word of God is the means by which the Spirit works within. The “Sword of the Spirit” not only effects salvation but continues to life-long work of sanctification.

The reading of the Scriptures and growth in grace will cause a believer to conform more and more to the perfect will of God.

See: John 15:3; 17:16-19; Ephesians 5:25-26; Psalm 119:9, 11

This is illustrated by the example of our Lord washing the feet of His disciples in John 13. Practical Sanctification is likened unto foot-washing. It deals with the sins of the saints.

2. The Attitude of the Christian towards Sin.  
Romans 6:13; II Corinthians 7:1
3. The Association of the Christian with other Godly Believers.  
Proverbs 13:20; Hebrews 10:24-25

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Sanctification is evidenced by the way a believer lives his life. The word “Christian” means ‘Christ-like’ — and as such really ought not to be used so lightly as to include all who profess salvation.