

# Progressive Sanctification



**What is progressive sanctification?** Progressive sanctification is a process by which the Spirit produces in believers a gradual increase likeness to Christ. It is a life long process. The extent of progress varies in believers but should be gradually increasing. Since progressive sanctification forms the crux of the believer's life on earth, it is vitally important to understand it. These notes will not attempt to address every theological nuance, but give a plain, simple explanation of progressive sanctification with the prayer being that you will (1) truly understand the importance of this truth for your Christian life and (2) that you will put it into everyday practice and grow, grow, grow, until you "go" (to be with Jesus)!

First look at the word **progressive** which means

- gradually advancing in extent;
- characterized by progress;
- happening or developing gradually or in stages
- moving forward or onward
- change that occurs gradually over a period of time.

Second **sanctification** is defined as..

- the act or process of acquiring sanctity, of being made or becoming holy.
- act or process of being set apart as or declared holy; consecrated
- the state of growing in divine grace as a result of Christian commitment after conversion
- process by which a Christian believer is made holy through the action of the Holy Spirit (Secular dictionary!)
- The act of making holy. In an evangelical sense, the act of God's grace by which the affections of men are purified or alienated from sin and the world, and exalted to a supreme love to God. The act of consecrating or of setting apart for a sacred purpose. (Webster's 1828 Dictionary)
- the process of God's grace by which the believer is separated from sin and becomes dedicated to God's righteousness. Accomplished by the Word of God (John 17:7) and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:3-4), sanctification results in holiness, or purification from the guilt and power of sin. Sanctification as separation from the world and setting apart for God's service is a concept found throughout the Bible. (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

Note that there are three aspects in the sanctification of a believer which are depicted in the [Table below](#) (with Scriptures supporting each phrase of sanctification) often described as the Three Tenses of Salvation -

1. **Past Tense - Positional Sanctification** at time of Justification by faith, a one time event when a person passes from spiritual death to spiritual life, becoming a new supernatural creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). It is also known as "Initial Sanctification" and "Past Tense Salvation" = We have been saved.
2. **Present Tense - Progressive Sanctification** that begins at the time we are justified by faith and continues throughout our life on earth. It is also known as "Growing in Christlikeness," and "Present Tense Salvation" = We are daily, moment by moment being saved. "He Who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Php 1:6).
3. **Future Tense - Perfect Sanctification** most commonly known as Glorification which is a one time event. A synonym is Perpetual, Eternal Sanctification.

## [ROCK OF AGES](#)

Let the water and the blood,  
From thy riven side which flowed,

**Be of sin the double cure,  
Save from wrath and make me pure."**

**Save from wrath** is justification (Romans 3:21-5:11+), **make me pure** is progressive sanctification, the breaking of the power of indwelling sin (Romans 5:12-8:27+). Hallelujah! Thank You Lord! Amen.

## THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

Who accomplishes the work of **progressive sanctification**? God? Man? Both God and believers in a "synergistic" relationship.

**God's Work** - We are sanctified by God the Father (Jude 1), God the Son (Heb. 2:11), and God the Holy Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2). Perfect holiness is God's command (1 Thess. 4:7) and purpose. As Paul prayed, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely" (1 Thess. 5:23). Sanctification is a process that continues during our lives as believers (Heb. 10:14). Only after death are the saints referred to as "perfect" (Heb. 12:23). (NNID)

**Man's Work** - Numerous commands in the Bible imply that believers also have a responsibility in the process of sanctification. We are commanded to "be holy" (Lev 11:44+; 1 Pe. 1:15–16+); to "be perfect" (Mt. 5:48+); and to "present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness" (Ro 6:19). Writing to the church of the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul made a strong plea for purity: "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Th 4:3–5). These commands imply effort on our part. We must believe in Jesus, since we are "sanctified by faith in Him" (Acts 26:18+). Through the Holy Spirit we must also "put to death the evil deeds of the body" (Ro 8:13). Paul itemized the many "works of the flesh" from which we must separate ourselves (Gal. 5:19–21+). Finally, we must walk in the Spirit in order to display the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–24+). (NNID)

I am not an advocate of the Biblically inaccurate phrase "**Let go, let God**," for it is more Scripturally accurate to say **Let God and Let's go!** Notice the juxtaposition of God's part and our responsibility. The all too popular phrase "Let go, Let God," suggests that our role as believers is simply to passively surrender and God will do the rest, but that is not accurate. Paul says our role, our responsibility is to "**Work out** ([present imperative](#) = continually obey this command) your salvation in fear and trembling," (Php 2:12+) which is another way to say we are to actively participate in the process of progressive sanctification, the **Let's go** part of the preceding phrase. Paul quickly explains how it is possible to continually **work out** our salvation, a command we could never obey relying solely on our natural strength. Our main problem is seen every morning in the mirror! Our problem is that we still have the indwelling residual "**anti-God**" tendency known as [the flesh](#). So Paul gives us the key to continually pursuing progressive sanctification, writing that "it is God Who is (**present tense** - continually) at work (energizing) in you, both to **will** and to **work** for His good pleasure." (Phil 2:13+) The New Living version paraphrases it "For God is working in you, giving you the **DESIRE** and the **POWER** to do what pleases him." (Phi 2:13NLT+) I call the "DESIRE" the "*want to*" because the truth is when I rely on my old nature, I do not "*want to*" obey and work out my salvation. While Paul does not "God the Spirit" in this Phil 2:13+, it is clear from other passages that it is the Spirit of God Who indwells every believer and provides the necessary supernatural power to overcome the anti-God inertia of [the flesh](#) (see this juxtaposition of the Spirit and flesh and the ongoing spiritual war in Galatians 5:16-17+). As we daily surrender and yield and are filled and are controlled by the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18+), And so the Spirit continually gives us the **DESIRE** (cf God's part = "Let God") to obey the commands (cf our responsibility = "Let's go"), and we are enabled to obey in a manner that is pleasing to God. It is vitally important to understand this truth, for it is the **foundation of progressive sanctification**. In fact I would suggest memorizing Php 2:12-13 and frequently [meditating on it](#) (cf Ps 1:2-3+, Joshua 1:8+), because it is that important to your spiritual growth. Reading the Bible without meditating on it is like eating without chewing. We must read...

Read Scripture every day  
And meditate on what God said  
To fight temptation from the world  
And live a life that's Spirit led  
([see note](#)) --Sper

So let's say it another way -- We as believers are to work out our salvation and that is 100% our responsibility and yet it is 100% God's enabling ability/provision! This is a picture of "Divine-Human synergism" where synergism is defined as the interaction of discrete agents such that the total effect is greater than the sum of the individual effects.

### **Jerry Bridges explains this synergism this way**

The synergistic work refers to occasions that combine our effort with His enabling power. But this isn't a pure synergism, as if we and the Spirit each contributed equal power to the task. Rather, we work as He enables us to work, so we use the expression qualified synergism. We're 100 percent dependent on His power in order to participate in the work, as the psalmist illustrated: Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain (Psalm 127:1). Two activities

are mentioned: **building** a house and **watching** over a city. The Lord's involvement isn't one of helping but of building the house and watching over the city. At the same time, the **builder builds** and the **watchman watches**. The verse's message is that the Lord doesn't merely help the builder and the watchman; He's totally involved with them in this qualified **synergism**. He supplies all the (SUPERNATURAL) **enabling power**, and they do all the tangible work. There are many such examples in the New Testament. We're to "put to death the deeds of the body" (Our part) —the sin that remains in us—yet we do so "by the Spirit" (His power) (Romans 8:13<sup>±</sup>). We are to use the spiritual gifts we've received to serve God and other people (OUR RESPONSIBILITY), yet we do so "by the strength that God supplies" (GOD'S PROVISION). Peter writes

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks (OUR PART), is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God (GOD'S PART); whoever serves (OUR PART) is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies (GOD'S PART); so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.(1 Peter 4:10,11). (The Bookends of the Christian Life - Jerry Bridges, Bob Bevington )

**For more discussion** including additional Scriptural support of this principle of God's Provision and Our Responsibility see the "[Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)" (100/100)

In another book **Bridges** notes that "**progressive sanctification** very much involves our activity. But it is an activity that must be carried out in dependence on the Holy Spirit. It is not a partnership with the Spirit in the sense that we each—the believer and the Holy Spirit—do our respective tasks. Rather, we work as He enables us to work. His work lies behind all our work and makes our work possible. The Holy Spirit can and does work within us apart from any conscious response on our part. We have seen this in the initial act of sanctification when He creates within us a new heart and gives us an entirely new disposition toward God and His will. He is not dependent on us to do His work. But we are dependent on Him to do our work; we cannot do anything apart from Him. In the process of sanctification there are certain things only the Holy Spirit can do, and there are certain things He has given us to do. For example, only He can create in our hearts the desire to obey God, but He does not obey for us. We must do that, but we can do so only as He gives us the enabling power to obey. So we must depend on the Holy Spirit to do within us what only He can do. And we must depend on Him just as much to enable us to do what He has given us to do. So whether it is His work or our work, in either case, we are dependent on Him. We are not just dependent on Him; we are desperately dependent on Him. Because we so often equate Christlike character with ordinary morality, we fail to realize how impossible it is for us to attain any degree of conformity to Christ by ourselves. But if we take seriously the long lists of Christlike character traits we are to put on, we see how impossible it is to grow in Christlikeness apart from the sanctifying influence and power of the Spirit in our lives." (See excerpt from [Transforming Grace](#) below)

**Jerry Bridges - The Great Exchange - Sanctified** (see Heb. 2:11; 9:13; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12). This term, sometimes translated "consecrated," is related but not identical to the word purified. Both words assume the prior existence of sin, which disqualifies the sinner from relationship with a holy God. However, whereas purified refers to the objective and subjective cleansing away of the effects of sin and its stain, sanctified literally means believers are set apart for holy and sacred use.

It is useful to draw the distinction between the theological terms definitive, progressive, and final sanctification. In definitive sanctification, the blood of Christ makes believers holy in God's eyes and sets them apart as God's own. This is a single, moment-in-time event that occurs when they first believe; they become united to Christ as their representative and are thus considered holy by God because they are cloaked in Christ's righteousness.

Definitive sanctification is monergistic, i.e., God acts independently of man to cause the sinner to see the glory of Christ in the gospel. This is the sense in which the term sanctified is used in the above references in Hebrews, for example, "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10).

When the Bible uses the word sanctification, it is frequently referring to progressive sanctification, which is the gradual transformation of the believer in his or her day-to-day experience. Progressive sanctification is synergistic; the believer works in cooperation with God in dependence on his providing the enabling power to change. The process of progressive sanctification continues from the moment of definitive sanctification until the believer vacates his body of flesh.

Final sanctification (sometimes referred to as completed or perfect sanctification) refers to the ultimate destination of all true believers upon their removal from the body—a sinless state of eternal existence in which "we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). It is a condition described by the author as "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" (Heb. 12:23).

In sum, **progressive sanctification** is the evidence in the life of believers that they were united to Christ in definitive sanctification and are on their way to final sanctification. Definitive, progressive, and final sanctification—all three emanate from the atonement; none of them is possible without the atonement. In other words, we are not free to become experientially holy or to exist as finally

holy until we are first set apart and considered holy by being forgiven and cloaked by Christ's transferred righteousness by virtue of our union with him as our representative in the atonement.

---

## **GROWING IN CHRISTLIKENESS Jerry Bridges**

In the last few pages, we have been focusing on the initial act of sanctification: the radical change God brings about in the heart of a person who trusts Jesus Christ as Savior. It is the passing from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is the beginning of a new creation in Christ and the writing of God's law in our hearts. It means a new relationship to the law of God and a new attitude toward it. And all this is from God. It is a gift of His grace just as surely as is the gift of justification.

God does not bring us into His Kingdom then leave us on our own to grow. He continues to work in our lives to conform us more and more to the likeness of His Son. As Paul said, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). This continuing work of God is called "progressive sanctification." It differs from initial sanctification in two respects.

Initial sanctification occurs instantly at the moment of salvation when we are delivered from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ (see Colossians 1:13). Progressive sanctification continues over time until we go to be with the Lord. Initial sanctification is entirely the work of God the Holy Spirit who imparts to us the very life of Christ. Progressive sanctification is also the work of the Holy Spirit, but it involves a response on our part so that we as believers are actively involved in the process.

The progressive nature of sanctification is implied throughout the New Testament epistles in all those instances where we are exhorted to grow, to change, to put off the deeds of the old man and put on Godlike character, and so on. It is also clearly implied in Paul's own testimony that he had not yet been made perfect and his statement that he had learned to be content in all circumstances (see Philippians 3:12–14; 4:11).

Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 explicitly teach the progressive nature of sanctification:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The common word in both passages is transformed. In both instances the verb transformed is in the present tense, indicating that the action is continuous. William Hendriksen translated the phrase be transformed in Romans 12:2 as "continue to let yourselves be transformed." And John Murray commented,

The term [transformed] used here implies that we are to be constantly in the process of being metamorphosed by renewal of that which is the seat of thought and understanding.... Sanctification is a process of revolutionary change in that which is the centre of consciousness.... It is the thought of progression and strikes at the stagnation, complacency, pride of achievement so often characterizing Christians.

As to the nature of this process, 2 Corinthians 3:18 indicates it is the work of the "Lord, who is the Spirit," while Romans 12:2 indicates it is through the renewing of our minds. In both passages, however, the verb transformed is passive, indicating it is a work done in us rather than by us. (Plenty of Scripture passages stress our part in the work of progressive sanctification. And I have examined our responsibility in detail in an earlier book, *The Pursuit of Holiness*.) Since in this book we are studying God's grace, I want to focus primarily on the work of God in our sanctification. And the passive voice of the verb be (or being) transformed indicates that the transforming work of progressive sanctification is the work of God's Spirit. He is the One who changes us more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

This transformation is much more than merely a change of outward conduct. It is a renovation of our inner being, or as someone has said, it is a transformation of the essential man. It means our motives as well as our motivations are being constantly changed, so that we can say with the psalmist, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long," and "I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches" (Psalm 119:97, 14).

However, although the verb be transformed is in the passive voice, it is in the imperative mood; that is, it is a command to do something. This indicates that we as believers are not passive in this transforming process. We are not like blocks of marble being transformed into a beautiful sculpture by a master sculptor. God has given us a mind and heart with which to respond to and cooperate with the Spirit as He does His work in us. That thought leads naturally to the Scripture passage that is considered to be the classic statement of the working together of the believer with the Holy Spirit who is at work within him. The passage is Philippians 2:12–13:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my

absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

In Phil 2:12 Paul urged the Philippian believers to apply themselves diligently to working out their salvation. He urged them to display the evidences of salvation in their daily lives through their obedience to God's commands and through putting on the godly character traits that Paul elsewhere called the fruit of the Spirit. And, according to William Hendriksen, the tense of the verb continue to work out indicates "continuous, sustained, strenuous effort." Here again we see that sanctification is a process, and a process in which we, as believers, are very actively involved.

But Paul's strong exhortation to the Philippians is based on the confidence that God's Spirit is working in them. He is working in them to enlighten their understanding of His will, to stimulate in their emotions a desire to do His will, and to turn their wills so they actually obey. Most of all, He gives them the enabling power so that they are able to do His will.

So **progressive sanctification** very much involves our activity. But it is an activity that must be carried out in dependence on the Holy Spirit. It is not a partnership with the Spirit in the sense that we each—the believer and the Holy Spirit—do our respective tasks. Rather, we work as He enables us to work. His work lies behind all our work and makes our work possible. The Holy Spirit can and does work within us apart from any conscious response on our part. We have seen this in the initial act of sanctification when He creates within us a new heart and gives us an entirely new disposition toward God and His will. He is not dependent on us to do His work. But we are dependent on Him to do our work; we cannot do anything apart from Him. In the process of sanctification there are certain things only the Holy Spirit can do, and there are certain things He has given us to do. For example, only He can create in our hearts the desire to obey God, but He does not obey for us. We must do that, but we can do so only as He gives us the enabling power to obey. So we must depend on the Holy Spirit to do within us what only He can do. And we must depend on Him just as much to enable us to do what He has given us to do. So whether it is His work or our work, in either case, we are dependent on Him. We are not just dependent on Him; we are desperately dependent on Him. Because we so often equate Christlike character with ordinary morality, we fail to realize how impossible it is for us to attain any degree of conformity to Christ by ourselves. But if we take seriously the long lists of Christlike character traits we are to put on, we see how impossible it is to grow in Christlikeness apart from the sanctifying influence and power of the Spirit in our lives.

Consider, for example, the lists of Christlike character traits found in Galatians 5:22–23 and Colossians 3:12–15 (I have eliminated five duplications in the two lists):

Galatians 5:22–23 Colossians 3:12–15

- Love
- Compassion
- Joy
- Kindness
- Peace
- Humility
- Patience
- Gentleness
- Goodness
- Forbearance
- Faithfulness
- Forgiveness
- Self-control
- Thankfulness

Those are fourteen positive character traits we are to put on (and there are others in Scripture), in addition to the many negative traits—pride, envy, jealousy, lust, covetousness, selfish ambition—we are to put off. Surely we must say with Paul, "And who is equal to such a task?" (2 Corinthians 2:16).

We've all been to the circus or the carnival or the county fair and watched with amazement the juggler tossing and catching his four or five Indian clubs. Think what it would be like to juggle fourteen! Yet that is essentially what we are called to do when we are told to put on fourteen—or more—different character traits, as well as trying to put away some bad ones.

Only the Holy Spirit is equal to such a task. Only the Holy Spirit can orchestrate such a diverse and well-rounded development of Christian character. And yet we are told to clothe ourselves with these Christlike qualities. We are to do it; we are responsible. But in Galatians 5:22, Paul called the qualities the "fruit of the Spirit"—the result of the Spirit's work in our lives. Putting together those two thoughts leads to the conclusion that we are both responsible and dependent. We are responsible to clothe ourselves with Christlike

character, but we are dependent on God's Spirit to produce within us His "fruit." We cannot make one inch of progress in sanctification apart from the powerful working of the Spirit in us. And He does this, not because we have earned it with our commitment and discipline, but because of His grace.

God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing—including the working of the Spirit in our lives—in Christ Jesus, that is, by His grace through the infinite merit of Christ. As we pray for the sanctifying influence and power of the Spirit in our lives, we can do so in confidence that God will answer our prayers because His answers are not dependent on us and our holiness, but on the merit of His Son.

We have seen, then, in this chapter a threefold view of sanctification or holiness. We have seen that our holiness is first of all an objective, perfect holiness, which is ours by virtue of our union with Him who is perfectly holy. Then we have seen that there is an initial act of sanctification in which a person's basic disposition toward God and His law is changed. This change is experienced by the believer, but is not dependent on the believer. It is solely a work of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we have seen that this initial act of sanctification is followed up by the continuous action of the Holy Spirit throughout our lives as He works in us "to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13).

In every one of these views of sanctification we see the grace of God. God in His grace sees us as perfectly holy in Christ. God in His grace sends His Holy Spirit to create a new heart within us and to write His law on our hearts, thus changing our basic disposition. And God in His grace continues to work in us through His Spirit to transform us more and more into the likeness of His Son. (from [Transforming grace : living confidently in God's unfailing love](#) - CLICK LINK TO BORROW THIS BOOK - recommended)

---

**Jerry Bridges** in his book [The Pursuit of Holiness \(click to borrow a copy\)](#) makes the following observations: "Our first problem is that our attitude towards sin is more self-centered than God-centered. We are more concerned about our own "Victory" over sin than we are about the fact that our sin grieves the heart of God. We cannot tolerate failure in our struggle with sin chiefly because we are success oriented, not because we know it is offensive to God...the pursuit of holiness is a joint venture between God (**Ed note: Jehovah MeKeddeshem**) and the Christian. No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part. God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But He has given to us the responsibility of doing the walking; He does not do that for us...holiness is a process, something we never completely attain in this life. Rather, as we begin to conform to the will of God in one area of life, He reveals to us our need in another area. That is why we will always be pursuing - as opposed to attaining - holiness in this life...The idea of exactly how to be holy has suffered from many false concepts. In some circles, holiness is equated with a series of prohibitions - usually in such areas as smoking, drinking & dancing. The list of prohibitions varies depending on the group. When we follow this approach to holiness, we are in danger of becoming like the Pharisees with their endless lists of trivial do's and don'ts, and their self-righteous attitude. For others, it means a particular style of dress and mannerisms. And for still others, it means unattainable perfection, an idea that fosters either delusion or discouragement about one's sin. All of these ideas, while accurate to some degree, miss the true concept. To be holy is to be morally blameless. It is to be separated from sin and, therefore, consecrated to God. The word signifies " separation to God, and the conduct befitting those so separated." (Jerry Bridges excellent and practical book [The Pursuit of Holiness](#) is highly recommended). (Or **listen to his audios** - see [list of multiple Mp3's related to pursuit of holiness](#))

---

#### Related Resource:

**Click on the books below all of which can be freely borrowed**

- [The practice of Godliness](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [A Bible study on The practice of Godliness](#) by Bridges, Jerry ([click borrow a copy](#))
- [The chase: pursuing Holiness in your everyday life: a contemporary adaptation of The pursuit of holiness](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [The Fruitful Life : the overflow of God's love through you](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [Respectable Sins : the truth about anger, jealousy, worry, and other stuff we accept](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [The Gospel for real life : turn to the liberating power of the Cross ... every day](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [You can Trust God](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [The Joy of Fearing God](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [I will follow you, O God : embracing Him as Lord in your private worship](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [I exalt you, O God : encountering His greatness in your private worship](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [I give you glory, O God : honoring His righteousness in your private worship](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [The Pursuit of Holiness](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [A Bible study on The Pursuit of Holiness](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [True Fellowship : the biblical practice of koinonia](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [The Crisis of Caring : Recovering the meaning of true fellowship](#) by Bridges, Jerry

- [Grow in Christlike Character](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [Growing your Faith : How to Mature in Christ](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [Holiness day by day : transformational thoughts for your spiritual journey](#) by Bridges, Jerry (GREAT DEVOTIONAL)
- [Transforming grace : living confidently in God's unending love](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [The discipline of grace : God's role and our role in the pursuit of holiness](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- [God took me by the hand : a story of God's unusual providence](#) by Bridges, Jerry
- Holiness by Striving or Resting? Jerry Bridges (see also [Mp3's related to pursuit of holiness](#))

## Kevin DeYoung - HOLINESS BY HOLY SPIRIT POWER

It makes sense that the Holy Spirit would have a big role in making us holy. According to 1 Peter 1:2, we are saved “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit,” that we might be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled by his blood. Sanctification in this verse has two senses. The Spirit sets us apart in Christ so that we might be cleansed by his blood (definitive sanctification), and he works in us so that we can be obedient to Jesus Christ (progressive sanctification). Through the Spirit we are given a new position and infused with a new power. Or to put it in Pauline language, since we are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit, by the same Spirit we ought to put to death the deeds of the flesh (Ro 8:9–13).

**But this brings us back to the practical question: how does the Spirit work in us to make us holy? One of the ways is to strengthen us with power in our “inner being” (Eph. 3:16).** The work of the Spirit is often connected with power (Acts 1:8; Ro 15:19; 1 Cor. 2:4; 1 Th 1:5). This power can manifest itself in signs and wonders, in spiritual gifts to edify the body, and in the ability to bear spiritual fruit. The same Spirit who was present at creation and caused you to be born again is at work to empower your inner person (that is, your will or heart) so that you might resist sins you couldn’t resist before and do the good things which would otherwise be impossible. Defeatist Christians who do not fight against sins because they figure they were “born this way” or “will never change” or “don’t have enough faith” are not being humble. They dishonor the Holy Spirit who strengthens us with supernatural power.

**But that’s not all the Spirit does to sanctify us. The Spirit is power, but he is also a light.** He shines into the dark places of our hearts and convicts us of sin (John 16:7–11). He is a lamp to illumine God’s Word, teaching what is true and showing it to be precious (1 Cor. 2:6–16). And the Spirit throws a spotlight on Christ so that we can see his glory and be changed (John 16:14). That’s why 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Just as Moses had his face transformed when he saw the Lord’s glory on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:29; cf. 2 Cor. 3:7), so will we be transformed when, by the Spirit, we behold God’s glory in the face of Christ.

**To summarize, then, the Spirit is a light to us in three ways. (1) He exposes sin so that we can recognize it and turn away. (2) He illumines the Word so that we can understand its meaning and grasp its implications. (3) He takes the veil away so that we can see the glory of Christ and become what we behold.** Or to put it another way, the Spirit sanctifies by revealing sin, revealing truth, and revealing glory. When we close our eyes to this light, the Bible calls it resisting the Spirit (Acts 7:51), or quenching (1 Thess. 5:19) or grieving the Spirit (Eph. 4:30). There may be slight nuances among the three terms, but they all speak of situations where we do not accept the Spirit’s sanctifying work in our lives. If we give in to sin or give up on righteousness, the fault is not with the Spirit’s power but with our preference for the darkness of evil rather than the Spirit’s light (John 3:19–20). (The Hole in our Holiness)

## THE ROLE OF PRAYER IN PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

One other point not mentioned above is we should pray for ourselves and others that God would progressively sanctify us! Is there any Scriptural support for this premise? I think so...and notice the motivating truth that we will all appear before our Lord Jesus Christ. This truth should motivate us profoundly to pursue progressive sanctification!

Now may the God of peace Himself **sanctify you entirely**; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame **at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**. (MOTIVATED BY THE CERTAINTY OF THE [SECOND COMING](#)) 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. (1

Th 5:23, 24<sup>+</sup>)

Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another (THIS IS CLEARLY A PRAYER FOR PROGRESSIVE GROWTH IN HOLINESS AND CHRISTLIKENESS, AKA "PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION"), and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that (PURPOSE) He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness (IS THIS NOT THE ENDPOINT OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION) before our God and Father **at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.** (SAINTS WHO HAVE ALREADY GONE AHEAD OF US)(1 Th 3:11-13<sup>+</sup>)

**Believer's Study Bible** has a good note on verse 13 - The apostle's desire is to see them standing fast in holiness when the Lord returns to examine them. The form of the word "holiness" ([hagiosune](#), Gk.) emphasizes not an act of holiness but the state or condition of holiness. **God's will is that our lives be characterized in every area by Christlikeness** (ED: AKA "PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION"). This includes both attitudes and actions. **"The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" provides incentive to holiness.** (ED: 1 IN 20 NT VERSE DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY MENTIONS THE [SECOND COMING](#)) Paul's statement that all of God's people will be together at the return of Christ reflects a concern about the status of God's people at the rapture of the church. Perhaps some taught that the dead in Christ would be absent from this event. Paul will answer this question when he addresses it more fully in 1 Th 4:13-18. Paul's statement is possibly a response to those who doubted there would be a resurrection and were concerned about Christian loved ones now dead.

And this I pray, that **your love may abound** ([present tense](#) - continually, "progressively") still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment (THIS DESCRIBES PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION), 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless **until the day of Christ** (AGAIN NOTE THE [SECOND COMING](#) AS INCENTIVE FOR PURSUING PASSIONATELY PROGRESSIVE HOLINESS); 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil 1:9-11<sup>+</sup>)

To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power (IS THIS NOT A PRAYER FOR PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION?); 12 in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Th 1:11, 12)

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, **to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man** (PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT THE SPIRIT'S POWER! SIMPLY PUT - NO SPIRITUAL POWER, NO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS!)...." (Ephesians 3:14-16<sup>+</sup>)

It would be very easy to read the preceding prayers and nod your head in agreement that Paul seems to be passionate in praying for **progressive sanctification**. The question however is this -- Will the way Paul prayed for his sheep change the way you pray for those in your sphere of influence? Will you call your church to begin to intercede to the Father for one another to experience Spirit wrought, God glorifying progressive sanctification in the Name of Jesus? I would submit that if you are bold enough to pray this way and to call your congregation or Bible study group or Sunday School class or Home group to pray this way specifically (in the Spirit as in Eph 6:18<sup>+</sup>, not mechanically, not vain repetition), then God's Spirit will move mightily in your midst! Why can I say that with complete confidence? Because God's Word tells us "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything **according to His will** (IS PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION ACCORDING TO HIS WILL? OF COURSE IT IS) He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, **we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him** (1 Jn 5:14-15<sup>+</sup>) This is the real version of "Name it and Claim it!" Beloved, do you believe the promise penned by the apostle? If you do then be a doer and not just a hearer (or an agreeer)! (James 1:22<sup>+</sup>).

---

The following is NOT the type of prayer that leads to **progressive sanctification** - Someone has characterized the average professing Christian's pursuit of holiness as follows: "Some professing Christians spend the first six days of each week sowing their wild oats, then they go to church on Sunday and pray for a crop failure."

---

**John Murray** states, "Nothing is more relevant to progressive sanctification than the reckoning of ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 6:11)."

---

**Warren Wiersbe** has an interesting comment relating the verb "**know**" to the three tenses of salvation - The believer must grow in



his knowledge of God. To know God personally is salvation (John 17:3). To know Him increasingly is sanctification (Phil. 3:10). To know Him perfectly is glorification (1 Cor. 13:9–12). Since we are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–28), the better we know God, the better we know ourselves and each other. It is not enough to know God only as Saviour. We must get to know Him as Father, Friend, Guide, and the better we know Him, the more satisfying our spiritual lives will be. The goal of Paul's prayer for believers is that we...

**“know God personally** (in) salvation (John 17:3)...

**know Him increasingly** (in) sanctification (Php 3:10+)...

**know Him perfectly** (in) glorification (1Cor 13:9-12+).” ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

---

**Joel R. Beeke** has an excellent article "[Cultivating Holiness](#)" dealing with the subject of progressive sanctification or Spirit-worked holiness. Here is a brief excerpt...

The godly farmer who plows his field, sows seed, fertilizes and cultivates, is acutely aware that in the final analysis he is utterly dependent for an assured crop on forces outside of himself. He knows he cannot cause the seed to germinate, the rain to fall, the sun to shine. But he pursues his task with diligence anyhow, both looking to God for blessing and knowing that if he does not fertilize and cultivate the sown seed his crop will be meager at best. Similarly, the Christian life must be like a cultivated garden in order to produce the fruits of holy living unto God. “Theology,” William Ames wrote in the opening words of his classic, *The Marrow of Theology*, “is the doctrine or teaching of living to God.” God Himself exhorts His children, “You shall be holy for I am holy” (1 Pe 1:16+). Paul instructs the Thessalonians, “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification” (1 Th 4:7+). And the author of Hebrews writes, “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14+). **The believer who does not cultivate holiness diligently will neither have much genuine assurance of his own salvation nor be obeying Peter’s call to seek it** (2 Pe 1:10+). In this article I will focus on the Christian’s scriptural call to cultivate Spirit-worked holiness by using diligently the means God has provided to assist him. (See full article [Cultivating Holiness](#))

## THE ROLE OF THE WORD OF TRUTH IN PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

In John 17 Jesus prayed for us to experience progressive sanctification...

**Sanctify** (aorist imperative) them in the truth. Thy word is truth. 18 As Thou sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that **they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.** (John 17:17-19)

As you observe Jesus' prayer, how are believers to be **progressively sanctified or set apart** from the world and unto God? The Word of God, the Truth is used by the Holy Spirit to set us apart. Therefore it behooves us to daily be in the Word of Truth because we are living in a world that daily bombards our minds with lies (just watch the news tonight if you don't believe me!) How foolish of believers to not "flush" or "purge" the lies of the world system headed by the chief liar Satan (Jn 8:44) using the precious and holy Word of Truth! (cf Mt 4:4+, Lk 4:4+).

## ARE YOU IN THE WORD OF TRUTH DAILY TO COUNTER THE LYING WORDS OF THE WORLD?

If your answer is "**No**" (I'm too busy, I'll do it later, etc, etc), then you are in trouble! Your **progressive sanctification** will be impacted (negatively). It is like riding a bicycle. What happens if you stop pedaling? You have an accident. This same principle is true spiritually if you are failing to eat the Word of Truth EVERY DAY!!! There will be NO growth in your spiritual life! (Read and ponder 1 Pe 2:2+) And don't say you are too busy, because if that is really true, than the truth is you are way too busy with the world system and you need to cut back some of that **secular busyness** or you will end up with **spiritual barrenness**!

**Sanctify** in John 17:17 and **sanctified** in John 17:19 is [hagiazo](#) which means to separate from profane (common) things and dedicate to God. God progressively sanctifies believers in the sphere (*en*) of the Truth of God's Word. The process of sanctification or being set apart from this world for His service is accomplished through the Word of God and the Spirit of God. In 2 Cor 3:18+ we read "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord (BEST SEEN IN HIS WORD), are being

transformed ([present tense](#) DESCRIBES A PROCESS, AKA "PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION") into the same image from glory to glory (PROGRESSIVE GROWTH IN CHRISTLIKENESS), just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

**Truth** is Greek **aletheia** which is that which is true in any matter under consideration. GOD'S WORD IS TRUTH ON ANY MATTER UNDER CONSIDERATION. That which is in accord with what really happens. Francis Schaeffer "So this change in the concept of the way we come to knowledge and truth is the most crucial problem, as I understand it, facing Christianity today." I would add let us avoid the "bypaths" of worldly wisdom and hold fast to the ancient paths (Jer 6:16, 18:15). Aletheia basically refers to the content of that which is true. God's TRUTH is absolutely essential for the believer in his battle against the LIES of Satan. Without knowledge of biblical teaching, believers are vulnerable to being "carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Eph 4:14+).

---

The respected British expositor **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** said the following regarding the crucial importance of Romans 8:13 -

**"These are the crucial verses with regard to this old problem around which there is and has been for a number of years a good deal of controversy."**

Listen to his sermon [A Call for Action - Romans 8:12-13](#) **Memorize** Romans 8:12-13 so that in the Spirit you can [meditate](#) on it and [pray](#) it to the Father! Your walk of holiness (progressive sanctification) will never be the same! I say that based on the authority of God's Holy Word enabled by His Holy Spirit for the glory of His Holy Son. Amen.

Romans 8:12-14 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit** (GOD'S PROVISION) you are **putting to death the deeds of the body** (THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITY), you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

#### Related Resources:

- [Study the in depth commentary](#) on Romans 8:13
- [Romans 8:12-13: Kill Your Sin!](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 8:12-13 The Key to Spiritual Victory](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 8:12-13 The Spirit Empowers Us for Victory](#) - John MacArthur
- [Romans 8:12-13 The Spirit Empowers Us for Victory - Study Guide \(click dropdown menu\)](#) - John MacArthur
- [A Call for Action - Romans 8:12-13](#) - D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones - Mp3
- [The Way of Sanctification - Romans 8:12-13](#) - D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones - Mp3
- [Sin and the Christian - Romans 8:12-13](#) - D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones - Mp3
- [Sin and the Body - Romans 8:12-13](#) - D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones - Mp3

---

#### Got Questions asks: What is progressive sanctification?

**Answer:** The word translated "sanctification" in most Bibles means "separation." It is used in the New Testament, according to Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, of the separation of the believer from evil, and it is the result of obedience to the Word of God. Progressive sanctification is what gradually separates the people of God from the world and makes them more and more like Jesus Christ.

**Sanctification** differs from justification in several ways (**ED:** But see [preceding explanatory comment](#)). **Justification** is a one-time work of God, resulting in a declaration of "not guilty" before Him because of the work of Christ on the cross.

**Sanctification** is a process, beginning with **justification** and continuing throughout life. **Justification** is the starting point of the line that represents one's Christian life; sanctification is the line itself. Sanctification is a three-stage process – past, present, and future.

**The first stage occurs at the beginning of our Christian lives** It is an initial moral change, a break from the power and love of sin. It is the point at which believers can count themselves "dead to sin but alive to God" (Romans 6:11). Once sanctification has begun, we are no longer under sin's dominion (Romans 6:14). There is a reorientation of desires, and we develop a love of righteousness. Paul calls it "slavery to righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18).

**The second stage of sanctification requires a lifetime to complete.** As we grow in grace, we are

gradually – but steadily – changing to be more like Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18). This occurs in a process of daily spiritual renewal (Colossians 3:10). The apostle Paul himself was being sanctified even as he ministered to others. Paul claimed that he had not reached perfection, but that he “pressed on” to attain everything Christ desired for him (Philippians 3:12).

**The third and final stage of sanctification occurs in the future.** When believers die, their spirits go to be with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). Since nothing unclean can enter heaven (Revelation 21:27), we must be made perfect at that point. The sanctification of the whole person—body, soul, and spirit—will finally be complete when the Lord Jesus returns and we receive glorified bodies (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:35-49).

God’s work in sanctification involves all three members of the Trinity. God the Father is constantly at work in His children “to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). He changes our desires, making us want to please Him, and He empowers us to do so (ED: I BELIEVE THIS IS MORE ACCURATELY VIEWED AS GOD THE SPIRIT). Jesus earned our sanctification on the cross and, in essence, has become our sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30) and the “perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of our sanctification (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2) (INDEED IF HE IS THE PRIMARY AGENT OF OUR SANCTIFICATION, IT MAKES SENSE THAT HE IS THE ONE CONTINUALLY GIVING US THE DESIRE AND POWER TO WORK OUT OUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING), and He is the one who produces in us the fruit of sanctification (Galatians 5:22-23).

Our role in sanctification is both passive and active. Passively, we are to trust God to sanctify us, presenting our bodies to God (Romans 6:13; Ro 12:1 - ED: NOTE THAT BOTH OF THESE ROMANS PRESENTATIONS ARE ACTUALLY IN THE [ACTIVE VOICE](#) SIGNIFYING NOT A PASSIVE PRESENTATION BUT AN ACTIVE, VOLITIONAL CHOICE TO MAKE THIS PRESENTATION, A PRESENTATION THAT IS ENABLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT) and yielding to the Holy Spirit. “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified” (1 Thessalonians 4:3), and God will have His way.

Actively, we are responsible to **choose to do what is right** (ED: BUT THERE IS A CAVEAT - BE CAREFUL! DO NOT TRY TO “DO WHAT IS RIGHT” IN YOUR OWN STRENGTH, FOR IF YOU DO, YOU RUN THE RISK OF SLIPPING INTO LEGALISM - I.E., A LIST OF “DO’S AND DON’TS”! INSTEAD SEEK DAILY TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT SO YOU MAY WALK BY THE SPIRIT AND HE GIVES YOU THE NECESSARY DESIRE AND POWER TO “DO WHAT IS RIGHT!” cf THE “TRAP” THE CHRISTIANS IN GALATIA WERE LED INTO BY THE JUDAIZERS - Galatians 3:2-3+, Galatians 5:7+). “Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable” (1 Thessalonians 4:4). This involves putting to death the “misdeeds of the body” (Romans 8:13+), striving for holiness (Hebrews 12:14), fleeing immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18), cleansing ourselves from every defilement (2 Corinthians 7:1+), and making every effort to supplement our faith (2 Peter 1:5-11). (ED: NOTE THAT THESE VERSES ARE COMMANDS EXCEPT 2 Cor 7:1 WHICH CALLS FOR US TO JETTISON SELF-EFFORT AND RELY WHOLLY ON THE HOLY SPIRIT TO OBEY THESE COMMANDS. - [See discussion of the Need for the Holy Spirit to obey NT commands](#))

Both the passive role and the active role are necessary for a healthy Christian life. To emphasize the passive role tends to lead to spiritual laziness and a neglect of spiritual discipline. The end result of this course of action is a lack of maturity. To emphasize the active role can lead to legalism, pride, and self-righteousness. The end result of this is a joyless Christian life. **We must remember that we pursue holiness, but only as God empowers us to do so.** (AMEN AND AMEN!) The end result is a consistent, mature Christian life that faithfully reflects the nature of our holy God.

John makes it clear that we will never be totally free from sin in this life (1 John 1:8-10). Thankfully, the work God has begun in us He will finish (Philippians 1:6+, CF 1 Th 5:23, 24+).

---

**QUESTION - [What is sanctification? What is the definition of Christian sanctification? See accompanying video.](#)**

**ANSWER** - Sanctification is God’s will for us (1 Thessalonians 4:3). The word *sanctification* is related to the word *saint*; both words have to do with holiness. To “sanctify” something is to set it apart for special use; to “sanctify” a person is to make him holy. Jesus had a lot to say about sanctification in John 17. In verse 16 the Lord says, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it,” and this is before His request: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). In Christian theology, sanctification is a state of separation unto God; all believers enter into this state when they are born of God: “You are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30, ESV). The sanctification mentioned in this verse is a once-for-ever separation of believers unto God. It is a work God performs, an intricate part of our salvation and our

connection with Christ (Hebrews 10:10). Theologians sometimes refer to this state of holiness before God as “positional” sanctification; it is the same as justification.

While we are *positionally* holy (“set free from every sin” by the blood of Christ, Acts 13:39), we know that we still sin (1 John 1:10). That’s why the Bible also refers to sanctification as a practical experience of our separation unto God. “Progressive” or “experiential” sanctification, as it is sometimes called, is the effect of obedience to the Word of God in one’s life. It is the same as growing in the Lord (2 Peter 3:18) or spiritual maturity. God started the work of making us like Christ, and He is continuing it (Philippians 1:6). This type of sanctification is to be pursued by the believer earnestly (1 Peter 1:15; Hebrews 12:14) and is effected by the application of the Word (John 17:17). Progressive sanctification has in view the setting apart of believers for the purpose for which they are sent into the world: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified” (John 17:18–19). That Jesus set Himself apart for God’s purpose is both the basis and the condition of our being set apart (see John 10:36). We are sanctified and sent because Jesus was. Our Lord’s sanctification is the pattern of and power for our own. The sending and the sanctifying are inseparable. On this account we are called “saints” (*hagioi* in the Greek), or “sanctified ones.” Prior to salvation, our behavior bore witness to our standing in the world in separation from God, but now our behavior should bear witness to our standing before God in separation from the world. Little by little, every day, “those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14, ESV) are becoming more like Christ.

There is a third sense in which the word *sanctification* is used in Scripture—a “complete” or “ultimate” sanctification. This is the same as glorification. Paul prays in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (ESV). Paul speaks of Christ as “the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27) and links the glorious appearing of Christ to our personal glorification: “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). This glorified state will be our ultimate separation from sin, a total sanctification in every regard. “We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

To summarize, “sanctification” is a translation of the Greek word *hagiasmos*, meaning “holiness” or “a separation.” In the past, God granted us justification, a once-for-all, positional holiness in Christ. Now, God guides us to maturity, a practical, progressive holiness. In the future, God will give us glorification, a permanent, ultimate holiness. These three phases of sanctification separate the believer from the penalty of sin ([justification](#)), the power of sin ([maturity](#)), and the presence of sin ([glorification](#)). [GotQuestions.org](#)

#### Related Resources:

- [What is positional sanctification? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is entire sanctification? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Justification vs sanctification—what are the differences? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [How are justification, sanctification, and glorification related? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What are some Bible verses about sanctification? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is sanctifying grace? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is the Keswick movement, and is it biblical? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Who was Oswald Chambers? | GotQuestions.org](#)

---

#### Glen Spencer - Progressive Sanctification

Progressive sanctification is different from Positional sanctification, in that positional sanctification is entirely the work of God, while progressive sanctification includes human responsibility. Progressive sanctification is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) This is Christian growth; putting away sin and putting on godliness (Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4; 1 Peter 1:14-16) All believers are exhorted to pursue Progressive Sanctification, For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication. (1 Thessalonians 4:3) This aspect of our sanctification is a matter of choice to the believer. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:21-22) Unfortunately the choice of many Christians is to ignore God’s clear command to separate, and they never become a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use. The Scriptures that command the Christian to be separated and sanctified are practically endless. Here are just a few:

- Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

- I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)
- But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16)
- Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)
- Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. (2 Peter 3:11)

God intends that the process of sanctification continue throughout the believer's life. This present process of sanctification never ends in this life. There are those who claim to have grown to the point of sinless perfection, but the Word of God offers no proof for their position. In fact we see just the opposite. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10) The Christian is to combat and resist sin until he is taken from this world at death, or at the return of Christ.

### Perfect Sanctification

This is the final perfection of the believer, which will take place at the return of Christ. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23) Perfect sanctification is the plan and purpose of God for every believer. This phase of sanctification cannot and will not be attained while we are in our mortal bodies. However, it will be accomplished. What God started in the believer, He will finish. Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6) Perfect sanctification will be the completion of what God started in us on the day of our salvation. Like positional sanctification, this is wholly the work of God. At Christ's coming, every believer will receive a new body that will have no sin. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2) The Christian will no longer have to resist sin within or to grow toward perfection. His sanctification will be complete. He will be wholly and forever set apart to God from sin.

---

### Warren Wiersbe on Sanctification

**Sanctification** is the gracious work of God in setting the believer apart for Himself and for service in the world. Sanctification has three aspects to it. The theologians call them positional sanctification, practical, or progressive, sanctification, and perfect sanctification. (ED: ALSO KNOWN AS THE "[THREE TENSES OF SALVATION](#)" - PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE)

#### Positional Sanctification

Positional sanctification means that, in Christ, we have been set apart to belong to God and to serve Him. Positional sanctification never changes. 1 Corinthians 1:2 says, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours."

You can hardly call the people in the church at Corinth godly people. Some of them were getting drunk; some of them were living in immorality; some of them were suing each other. And yet Paul addressed them as a church (called-out people), sanctified in Christ Jesus. That is positional sanctification; it never changes.

#### Practical, or Progressive, Sanctification (ED: SYNONYM = PRESENT TENSE SALVATION)

Practical, or progressive, sanctification has to do with our everyday life. Our Lord Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17. Since we have a holy position in Christ, we should live like it.

One theologian said, "It is one thing for sin to live in us; another for us to live in sin." We can't help the fact that our old nature is a sinful nature. But God has given us a new nature, and this new nature enables us to live a holy life. This is practical, or progressive, sanctification—day by day becoming more like the Savior, day by day overcoming sin and temptation, day by day growing stronger in spiritual things.

I want to focus on 2 Cor. 7:1<sup>+</sup>: "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." In this verse we have a series of dual truths. If we understand these truths, it will help us in our progressive sanctification.

## **Two Aspects of Sin**

To begin with, Paul pointed out that there are two different aspects to sin: There are sins of the flesh, and there are sins of the spirit. "Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). In other words, we have here the prodigal son (he was guilty of sins of the flesh) and the elder brother (he was guilty of sins of the spirit). When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, that was a sin of the flesh. When David numbered the people in pride and rebelled against God, that was a sin of the spirit. There are sins of action, and there are sins of attitude.

### **(1) Sins of the Flesh**

Let's talk about these sins of the flesh. By the flesh, of course, Paul meant the old nature. When you and I were born again, God gave us a new nature, but He did not change the old nature. You and I are capable of sinning today. We don't want to, because the desires of the new nature have lifted us higher. But now we see what sin is really like. The Word of God and the Spirit of God have revealed to us the awfulness of sin, and we want nothing to do with it. But we are capable of sinning.

Everything the Bible has to say about the flesh is negative. "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing" (John 6:63). We are to have no confidence in the flesh (see Phil. 3:3). The flesh is that which produces sin. Out of the heart of man (the old nature) comes all sorts of evil things—lying and lust and all the things that wreck our lives and ruin our testimonies. Galatians 5:19-21<sup>+</sup> has recorded the works of the flesh, and seventeen different sins are mentioned there. In Romans 1:19-32, at least twenty-four different sins are mentioned. The flesh is very productive when it comes to producing sin, and the flesh cannot be changed. We need to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh.

### **(2) Sins of the Spirit**

There are also sins of the spirit. You and I may not be guilty of drunkenness, adultery, gluttony, or laziness, but how about pride, stubbornness, or criticism? G. Campbell Morgan used to call the sins of the spirit "sins in good standing." You have to be careful about them. You may not be a prodigal son, but you might be an elder brother—so critical that you won't fellowship with your brother. There are two aspects of sin, and we have to deal with them both—the filthiness of the flesh and also the filthiness of the spirit.

## **Two Aspects of Holiness**

2 Cor. 7:1<sup>+</sup> reveals that there are also two aspects to holiness. There is a negative aspect—"let us purify ourselves"—and a positive aspect—"perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."

### **(1) Cleansing**

"Let us purify ourselves" means once and for all let us cleanse out of our lives the defilement of sin. In fact, Paul wrote about this in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14). This is a farm picture. You don't yoke an ox and an ass together. They have two different temperaments, and they are not going to be able to work together. Believers should not be yoked together with unbelievers in marriage or in business.

"For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?" (2 Cor 6:14). The word common is a commercial term—it means "partnership." Righteousness cannot be in partnership with unrighteousness. "For what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (v. 14). The word communion means "to have in common." It is a family term. We do not have anything in common with unsaved people other than our humanity, because we are light and they are darkness. We have righteousness and they have unrighteousness.

"What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?" (2 Cor 6:15). The word harmony here is a musical term. We aren't even playing in the same orchestra with the unsaved! We aren't following the same conductor or reading the same score. Therefore, how can we ever make music together? It is such a sad thing when believers try to manufacture harmony with unbelievers. You can't make a beautiful home that way.

"What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (2 Cor 6:15-16).

So the first aspect of holiness is to cleanse ourselves. This doesn't mean we become isolationists. We must live in the world but not like the world. We are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world; we must have contact but not contamination. This is what the Bible calls separation—setting ourselves apart and saying, "I am not going to be yoked with unbelievers. I don't agree with them. I am not going to try to make music with unbelievers, because I just don't have the same conductor that they have." Separation—not isolation or insulation, but biblical separation—means cleansing ourselves.

Often we pray, "O God, cleanse me." And God comes back and says, "Why don't you cleanse yourself? Get rid of those videos. Get those books and magazines out of your library Put away these things and be separate." Isaiah 1:16 says, "Wash and make yourselves clean."

## **(2) Living in His Presence**

It isn't enough to be negative like the Pharisees and not do certain things. We have to be positive, "perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1+). We have here a consistent, constant process. Holiness is what God is, and as we grow in holiness, we become more like God.

In the Old Testament tabernacle, there was a laver. The laver made cleansing possible. That's negative. But there was also a Holy of Holies. The priest was only allowed to enter there once a year. You and I can enter into God's presence at any time. In fact, we should live in His presence. The laver cleanses us, but being in fellowship with God in the Holy of Holies perfects us. Don't be afraid of holiness. Holiness is not the "brittle piety" that some people manifest—a religiosity that is artificial. No, holiness is wholeness. Holiness is to your soul what health is to your body. There are two aspects to sin—sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. And there are two aspects to holiness—cleansing ourselves and perfecting holiness.

## **Two Aspects of Obedience**

Finally, 2 Cor. 7:1+ reveals two motivations for obedience—love of God and fear of God.

### **(1) Love of God**

Why should we cleanse ourselves? Why should we perfect holiness? Because of God's love. "Since we have these promises, dear friends" (2 Cor. 7:1). What promises? "Therefore come out from them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty'" (2Cor 6:17-18). Notice the promises here.

When you were saved, God became your Father. But He cannot be a Father to you if you are disobedient. We parents long to love our children and share the very best with them, but sometimes they won't let us. So God promises to receive us into a deeper fellowship if we are obedient. He will be a Father to us, and we will be His sons and daughters. Not only is His love available to us, but His power is also available to us, for He is the Lord Almighty. He promises to receive us. He promises to bless us. He promises a deeper fellowship with Him through the Word of God and through the Holy Spirit. Listen to John 14:21-23:

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

That is a deeper fellowship with God, because we are cleansing ourselves and perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

### **(2) Fear of God**

The first motive for obedience is reverence; the second is fear—"perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1+). We don't have just God's promises; we also have God's discipline. If we do not walk in separation, God has to discipline us. He does not want us to become prisoners; He wants us to be sons and daughters who walk with Him. He says, "Therefore come out from them and be separate.... Touch no

unclean thing, and I will receive you" (2 Cor 6:17). We do this out of reverence for God.

There is a sweet, deep fellowship with God that is so precious. There is also a walk with God that demands fear and reverence. We ought to reverence our Father in heaven, because it is He who has commanded us to be holy. This is practical, progressive sanctification—being aware of the sins of the flesh and of the spirit, being diligent to cleanse ourselves. We are motivated by the love of God because of His promises and by the fear of God because of His discipline. "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1+).

(ED: SEE [The Fear of the Lord](#))

**Perfect Sanctification** (ED: TWO SYNONYMS = GLORIFICATION, FUTURE TENSE SALVATION)

Perfect sanctification, of course, will take place when we see the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming, and we will be like Him, "for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2+).

These three aspects of sanctification relate to each other. Because we know we have been set apart by God and because we know that Jesus is coming and we will be like Him, we want to keep our lives clean today. We want to seek to become more like the Lord Jesus Christ. (Borrow a copy of [Key Words of the Christian Life](#) - recommended)

---

### **Glen Spencer - Progressive Sanctification**

Progressive sanctification is different from Positional sanctification, in that positional sanctification is entirely the work of God, while progressive sanctification includes human responsibility. Progressive sanctification is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) This is Christian growth; putting away sin and putting on godliness (Romans 6:19, 22; 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4; 1 Peter 1:14-16) All believers are exhorted to pursue Progressive Sanctification, For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication. (1 Thessalonians 4:3) This aspect of our sanctification is a matter of choice to the believer. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:21-22) Unfortunately the choice of many Christians is to ignore God's clear command to separate, and they never become a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use. The Scriptures that command the Christian to be separated and sanctified are practically endless. Here are just a few:

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16)

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. (2 Peter 3:11)

God intends that the process of sanctification continue throughout the believer's life. This present process of sanctification never ends in this life. There are those who claim to have grown to the point of sinless perfection, but the Word of God offers no proof for their position. In fact we see just the opposite. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10) The Christian is to combat and resist sin until he is taken from this world at death, or at the return of Christ.

---

### **Rod Mattoon - Three Stages of Sanctification**

#### **A. Positional Sanctification**

When you trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you were immediately set apart for God, permanently, once-and-for-all.

\* 1 Corinthians 6:11—And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the



Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

\* Hebrews 10:10—By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

### **B. Progressive Sanctification**

As the Christian yields to the Lord and attempts to be set apart for Him, the Holy Spirit empowers and helps him to grow in grace and make him more like Christ. Peter spoke of this.

\* 2 Peter 3:18—But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

### **C. Perpetual, Eternal Sanctification**

Someday we will be perfectly set apart unto the Lord and His service. We will be without sin and failure. Our day of total redemption will have arrived when Christ returns at the Rapture. The Bible urges us to "keep the faith" because someday we will be like Him in whom we have believed.

\* 1 John 3:2—Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

---

**Stephen Olford** - (from Chapter 3 on page 65 of his recommended book [Not I But Christ](#))

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. Ephesians 3:14-20

It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20

In our last chapter we focused on death to our sinful flesh as the Holy Spirit keeps our old self nailed to the cross (Roman 6; 8:13). We learned that if we live according to the flesh, everything we do will wither and die. But if by the Spirit we go on mortifying (putting to death) the deeds of the body (here "body" is equivalent to "the flesh" as in Romans 6:6), we shall live to the glory of God.

In this chapter I want to examine the vivifying truth of Christ as our life (Col. 3:4). By nature we are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). But when Christ becomes alive to us and in us, all that changes. Paul experienced this resurrection life in Christ, and he could testify, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Of course, this happened initially at his conversion on that Damascus road (Acts 9).

But to say and mean "Christ lives in me" is more than conversion. Many theologians call it **progressive sanctification**. Three aspects of this truth suggest themselves:

### **The Miracle of Christ's Indwelling**

"Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). These words mean more than Christ's initial entrance. I am assuming that this has happened to you already. I am accepting the fact that you and I have bowed at the cross; we have experienced redemption through the precious blood; we have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit; we have been baptized into the body of Christ. As a result Christ is alive in us by His indwelling Spirit (Rom. 6:3-4).

This is one of the greatest miracles and mysteries of Holy Scripture. In describing this to the church at Colossae, the apostle searched for words to convey the mystery hidden from humans and angels in all ages but now revealed to us, namely, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Paul proceeds to teach the Ephesian believers that this "mystery" takes place through a miraculous operation. He prays, "I bow my knees to the Father... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph 3:14-17). In praying for this miraculous operation to take place, he has believers in mind—those who were already "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13).

Dr. Handley Moule comments on this verse:

Why do we need a supreme empowering just in order to receive [the Indweller]? Does the hungry wanderer need power in order to eat the food without which he will soon sink? Does the bewildered mariner need power to welcome onto his deck the pilot who alone can steer him to the haven of his desire? No; but there is another aspect of the matter here. For the heart, though it immeasurably needs the blessed Indweller, has that in it

which dreads His absolute indwelling [*italics mine*].... So the hand stretched out to "open the door" (Rev. 3:20)... falls again and shrinks from that turning of the key which is to set the last recess ... open to the Master. Here is the need for the Spirit's empowering work.

You may be wondering why so many Christians aren't rejoicing in the wonder of an indwelling Christ. They are afraid to make Jesus absolute Lord. They hesitate to throw open every door of the house life in which they dwell. Yes, He can come through the front door and go into the living room. He can go into the dining room and kitchen, but there are other rooms of the house they don't want Him to enter. So they keep those doors locked—the doors to those last inner recesses of the human personality. They don't want Him to be at home in their hearts. This is why they need the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Not only is a miraculous operation needed, but also a miraculous revelation. Paul had two encounters with our Lord Jesus Christ that especially impact our present study. First, on the road to Damascus God broke in on his soul and revealed Christ to him. By the illumination and enabling of the Holy Spirit he cried, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6). I believe his conversion took place right there, for "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). The second encounter occurred later when Christ was not only revealed to him, but Christ was also revealed in him. Galatians 1:15-16 states, "It pleased God, who... called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles."

Martin Luther offers us this beautiful insight:

Paul is saying, "When I was not yet born, God ordained me to be an apostle and in due time confirmed my apostleship before the world. Every gift, be it small or great, spiritual or temporal, and every good thing I should ever do, God has ordained while I was yet in my mother's womb where I could neither think nor perform any good thing. After I was born God supported me. Heaping mercy upon mercy, He freely forgave my sins, replenishing me with His grace to enable me to learn what great things are ours in Christ [*italics mine*]. To crown it all, He called me to preach the Gospel to others...What prompted Him to call me? His grace alone."

He had a revelation not only of Christ, but of great things in Christ. Christ was not only real to Him, but Christ was real in Him.

I remember the testimony of a missionary home on furlough. She had been overseas for a number of years without any real joy, spiritual power, or fruitfulness. She had gone to the mission field more from a desire to put her nursing skills into practice than from a compelling love for Christ and souls. Soon she became dissatisfied with the monotony of service and the barrenness of her own life. With spiritual hunger in her heart, she went to a spiritual life conference where she heard the message of the indwelling life of Christ. At the end of the service she asked the speaker for a private talk. She recounted how she had come to the field with great enthusiasm, but the whole experience had become so fruitless and frustrating that she was on the verge of going home.

As they sat down together, the preacher asked her, "Has there ever been a time in your life when you asked Christ to come into your life, when you realized you were a sinner—'dead in trespasses and sins'? Are you aware that Christ died for your sins and shed His precious blood for the cleansing of your sins—that He rose again to be your living Savior and wants to come into your life? And have you asked Him in?"

She replied, "Yes, I have."

Then, pressing the matter further, God's servant posed this question: "Can you say, 'Christ lives in me now'?"

"No," she replied.

"Do this," counseled the man of God. "Go into a quiet room and recall that it was a miracle for Christ to come into your life in the first place. That was the miracle of regeneration. Now ask for the miracle of revelation. Verbalize this prayer: 'O God, reveal Your Son in me.'" (For some people these two miracles take place consciously at the same time.)

"It was all so simple," she explained, referring to the speaker's counsel. "At first I was disappointed. I thought he was going to give me some theological explanation and then tell me why I felt so frustrated and why I wanted to leave the field. But all he said was to ask God to reveal His Son in me." She went and knelt by her bedside, opened the Bible to that passage in Galatians 1:15-16, and prayed, "O God, reveal Your Son in me." Suddenly, the glory of that wonderful fact became a reality, and she burst into tears, and then into laughter and joy. Afterwards she went back and told the speaker, "I can't wait to go back to my work because Christ NOW is alive in me!"

I lived for many years as a Christian and even led people to Jesus Christ before that truth broke in upon my life and changed me forever. Major Ian Thomas, author of *The Saving Life of Christ*, helped me. He had been studying to become a doctor. He was right at the top of his class and had won all kinds of awards, but then he learned that God expects nothing more or less from our self-life than utter failure (John 15:5). By studying the Word he further realized that God has condemned, crucified, and buried our sinful flesh and that Christ can be a living reality when He is revealed in us. This discovery was so transforming that Thomas dropped his

studies and went into the ministry to share this Good News. Ever since, he has crisscrossed the world with the victorious message of the indwelling life of Christ. Do you know that experience in your life?

---

### **Walking Toward the Light - Ray Pritchard**

The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. Proverbs 4:18

Here is a wonderful promise for the believer. God has ordained that as we walk in His ways, obedient to His will, our path will grow brighter and brighter. Theologians call this “progressive sanctification,” which refers to the process whereby we are changed little by little, day by day into the likeness of Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 3:18+).

This is God’s promise, but like most of His promises, it isn’t fulfilled all at once. No matter how long we live, God has more light for us to receive. We’ll never be completely in “the light” until we stand in the presence of Jesus, the Light of the world.

Not long ago I ran into a friend who is involved in a twelve-step program. As we talked, he passed along a slogan that he first learned in his weekly meetings: “Our goal is not perfection, but progress.”

A little bell started ringing in my mind when I heard those words. “Not perfection, but progress.” My friend told me that whenever he falls back into his old way of thinking, he feels so defeated he wants to give up. When that happens, he said, the key is to remember that his goal is not perfection—which is always unattainable— but simple day-by-day progress.

What difference does it make?

- Perfection says, “I must do this right all the time or I am a failure.” Progress says, “I know I’m going to fail occasionally, but that won’t stop me from getting up and trying again.”
- Perfection says, “If I fail, people will think I’m a loser.” Progress says, “If I fail, people will understand as long as I don’t give up and quit.”
- Perfection says, “It’s wrong to admit my weaknesses.” Progress says, “Admitting my weaknesses is the only way to get better.”
- Perfection says, “I’ve got all the answers.” Progress says, “I’ve got a few answers and a lot of questions.”
- Perfection says, “It’s not my fault.” Progress says, “I was wrong.”
- Perfection says, “I can do it by myself.” Progress says, “I think I can do it, but I need the help of God and a few good friends.”

If we dwell on our failures, we will soon grow despondent. Who among us has not made mistakes that today make us blush with shame? But the past is more than a record of personal failure. It’s also the story of God’s amazing grace to us. Time after time God bailed us out when by all rights He should have given up on us. We were bankrupt and badly overdrawn in the Bank of Heaven when suddenly we discovered Someone had put more grace in our account.

In a fallen world we should not be surprised that we fall flat on our faces from time to time. It’s what you do after you fall that makes all the difference. Remember, with God’s help you can get back up and start moving in the right direction again.

Lord Jesus, You are a wonderful Savior. May I never delay when You call me to take another step toward the light. Amen.

How would you chart your spiritual growth over the last five years? In what areas would you most like to grow in the next five years?

Name several ways in which you have experienced God’s grace recently

---

**P G Matthew** - If by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. —Romans 8:13+

Verses 12–13 reveal to us the heart of progressive sanctification—how we can defeat the sin that remains in us as believers. Here the apostle Paul moves from exposition to exhortation, from the indicative to the imperative. In other words, in light of what God has done for us, let us live for him. Let us put to death the sin in us by the power of the mighty Holy Spirit. Progressive sanctification is not accomplished through our passivity, nor through sheer self-effort, but rather by our taking action in the might and direction of the Spirit who dwells in us.

Christians are a set-free people—set free from slavery to sin, Satan, and death. As emancipated slaves, we are no longer obligated to obey sin as our master; instead, we are now glad debtors to our triune God. God the Father planned redemption from all eternity; God the Son accomplished redemption; and God the Holy Spirit applies that redemption to each of the elect. We owe everything to our Redeemer.

Our life of progressive sanctification consists in two elements: mortification and conformation. Mortification speaks of putting sin to

death. If we live by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). Conformation speaks of our being gradually conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). As believers in Christ, we now have real freedom not to sin.

Though sin still dwells in us, so does the Holy Spirit, who is infinitely greater. By his mighty power, we can say “No” to sin and make it stick. Now, in the strength of Christ we can wrestle against the devil and cause him to flee. Like David of old, we can strike down Goliath and enjoy the victory. But make no mistake; this is a battle unto death. We must daily kill our enemy, for his intent is to destroy us. We must reject sinful thoughts and temptations at their very inception. Be ruthless. Be violent. Be angry, hating sin enough to kill it. Neutrality and negotiation are not options.

Holiness is essential to our eternal fellowship with God. It is our present delightful obedience—our progressive sanctification—that proves our past justification and assures us of our future glorification.

---

## **Roy Gingrich - THE TWELFTH DOCTRINE—The Progressive Sanctification of Christians**

### **I. THE MEANING OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**

Progressive sanctification is the continuous, progressive work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, gradually changing him from a carnal Christian to a spiritual Christian (from a baby Christian to a mature Christian, from a weak Christian to a strong Christian, from an unprofitable Christian to a profitable Christian).

### **II. THE RECIPIENTS OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**

All Christians are the recipients of progressive sanctification. God immediately begins to sanctify all those whom He justifies. If God is not sanctifying us, then He has never justified us. Justification cannot be divorced from sanctification.

### **III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION TO THREE OTHER KINDS OF SANCTIFICATION**

The Bible speaks of four kinds of sanctification connected with believers: (1) Pre-salvation sanctification, 2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2, a sanctification which prepares us for salvation; (2) Positional sanctification, 1 Cor. 6:11, a sanctification which positionally sets us apart from the world, the flesh, and the devil to God at the time of our entrance into salvation; (3) Progressive sanctification, 1 Cor. 1:30, a sanctification which experientially sets us apart more and more from the world, the flesh and the devil after our entrance into salvation; and (4) Plenary sanctification, 1 Thes. 5:23, a sanctification which permanently completes our sanctification at the time of our resurrection.

### **IV. THE TWO SIDES OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**

The Holy Spirit constantly and progressively sanctifies us by motivating and empowering us to put off the vices of our old nature and to put on the virtues of our new nature, Eph. 4:22–32; Col. 3:8–17.

### **V. THE AUTHOR OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**

The triune God sanctifies us but the triune God does this work through the Holy Spirit (all the merits of the cross work of Christ are applied by the Holy Spirit).

### **VI. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION AND PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**

Justification declares the believer righteous (thus changing his standing before God) while progressive sanctification makes the believer righteous (thus changing his state before God). Justification deals with the guilt of sin while progressive sanctification deals with the pollution of sin. God immediately begins to sanctify all those whom He justifies.

God gave His Son for us that He might justify us and He gave His Holy Spirit to us that He might sanctify us.

### **VII. THE MEANS OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**

(There are divine means and human means (this divine-human cooperation is not a two-horses-pulling-a-wagon kind of cooperation but a leader-follower kind of cooperation).

#### **A. THE DIVINE MEANS—God uses three things in progressively sanctifying believers:**

1. The Word of God—The Word of God tells believers what not to do and what to do.
2. The Spirit of God—The Spirit gives us the desire to do and the power to do, and won't let us rest until we do do, that which the Word of God tells us to do.
3. The Providence of God (the trials and the chastenings of God)—The providence of God causes us to get busy and do that which the Word of God tells us to do.

The Word of God, plus the Spirit of God, plus trials and testings from the hand of God, all mixed together in the proper proportion by the wisdom of God, if received in the right manner by a child of God, will make a child of God a man of God.

**B. THE HUMAN MEANS—We must exercise vital faith, which is made up of three elements, knowledge, acknowledgment, and committal (appropriation, trust).**

1. We must have knowledge of our two-fold union with Christ (our union with His death and His resurrection), Rom. 6:3, 6, 9.

2. We must acknowledge our twofold union with Christ (Rom. 6:11)
3. We must commit ourselves to acting out our two-fold union with Christ (by yielding our members, not to the sin nature to commit acts of sin, but to God to commit acts of righteousness), Rom. 6:12, 13.

#### VIII. THE IN-THIS-LIFETIME INCOMPLETENESS OF PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

The holiest of men (contrary to the teachings of perfectionists, "holiness people") never reach the goal of entire sanctification in this life, Eccl. 7:20; 1 Cor.13:12 ; Phil. 3:11–13; James 3:2. We will reach the goal on resurrection morning, Eph. 5:26, 27; Col. 1:22; Jude 1:24, at which time we will be perfectly conformed to the image of Christ, Rom. 8:29.

**Timothy Morton - SANCTIFICATION** Sanctification means to be set apart unto God for God's use; to be set apart from sin unto holiness. It is an act of God where He consecrates the believer unto Himself.

The topic of sanctification (or holiness) is found over one thousand times in the scriptures. It is a doctrine the Holy Spirit wants believers to especially understand.

There are three distinct tenses of sanctification concerning New Testament salvation:

- a. Positional, which refers to the initial act.
- b. Progressive, which refers to the believer's present life.
- c. Final, which refers to the completion of its work.

#### A. Positional Sanctification

1. This is the instantaneous sanctification the believer receives the moment he trusts Christ. At that time, Christ sets his soul apart from sin and imparts unto him His own holiness and righteousness. God's law, a reflection of His nature, demands that man be perfect and holy. This, however, is impossible for the natural man because he is by nature sinful and unholy (Rom 8:8; Eph 2:1-4).

2. God's work of sanctification supplies every moral virtue He requires man to have. When a person receives Christ, he gets all of Christ's moral virtues with Him—he meets all the law's requirements in Him (Rom 10:1-4).

3. When God looks at the position of a Christian, He sees the separated, sanctified, righteous, and perfect life of His son Jesus Christ. The saint need never fear of losing this standing before God because it is his union with Christ that brought it about. This union can never be broken (see Regeneration; Justification; Rom 15:16; 1Co 1:2, 1Co 1:30, 1Co 6:11; Gal 2:20; Eph 1:3-4; Heb 2:11, Heb 10:10, Heb 10:14, Heb 13:12, Heb 13:21; 1Pe 1:2).

4. Also, the instant one believes, his soul is cut loose from his flesh by a spiritual circumcision performed by Christ (Col 2:10-15). As a result, the believer is no longer a slave to his old, Adamic nature (though he can still yield to it); he is set free to serve his new righteous nature which is Christ's. The saint is now capable of living a holy life that is pleasing to God (Rom 6:11-14; Col 3:1-4).

#### B. Progressive Sanctification

1. This tense speaks of how the Christian's present life is to become holier and more Christ like day by day. Since the believer's soul is sanctified in Christ, God expects this holiness to affect his behavior and be manifested in his daily walk. He wants him to follow his Savior and live a clean, separated life (Rom 12:1-4; 2Co 7:1; Gal 5:22-25; 1Th 2:12, 1Th 4:1-4).

2. Before a person is saved it is impossible for him to live a holy life. However, after salvation he can; he has the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to assist him. The Spirit prompts him to live "...not conformed to this world...", but after Christ. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col 2:6). See also: Rom 12:1-4, Rom 16:19; 1Co 6:12-13, 1Co 6:19-20, 1Co 7:23; 2Co 6:14-17, 2Co 7:1; Php 2:15, Php 4:8; Col 3:5-15; 1Th 5:5, 1Th 5:22-23; 2Th 2:13; 1Ti 6:11-12; Heb 12:1-4; Jam 1:24-27, Jam 4:4; 1Pe 2:11-12, 1Pe 2:24).

##### a. How To Resist Temptation And Live Above Sin

1. Every Christian knows what it means to be tempted. However, being tempted to sin is not a sin in itself. The Lord was tempted in all the areas we are, yet He did not sin (Heb 2:17-18). God will allow His people to be tempted for several reasons. Some of them are: to try their faith (1Pe 1:7), to keep them humble and dependent on Him (1Pe 5:6), to cause them to know the victory that is in Christ (Heb 2:18), and to enable them to win the crown of life (Jam 1:2-4, Jam 1:12).

2. The Bible gives the believer some guidelines to follow concerning temptation.

- a. He is to watch and pray that he enters not into it (Mat 26:41).
- b. He is to stay away from any thing or situation that may lead him into it (Rom 16:19; 1Th 5:22).
- c. And he is to be transformed from worldly thinking to godly thinking by the renewing of his mind (Rom 12:1-4).

3. Nevertheless, even after abiding in these guidelines, temptation may still come. The Christian can defend himself against it by

following three scriptural principles. He should:

- a. Follow his Savior's example and resist the Devil by rebuking him with scripture (Mat 4:1-11; Jam 4:7).
- b. Yield himself to God and reckon himself dead to sin (Rom 6:2-11; Gal 2:19; 1Pe 2:24).
- c. Earnestly watch for the way of escape God has promised, taking it immediately once it is discovered (1Co 10:13).

4. If the believer will sincerely and prayerfully follow all three of these principles when he is tempted, he will, by the power of God, overcome the temptation. Furthermore, the experience he gains in dealing with it will make him stronger and better able to serve the Lord. However, if a believer gives in and does sin (and all Christians do at times), it is because he neglected one or more of the above means of defense.

5. When a Christian sins he must remember that God will by no means abandon or forsake him. He is still his Father no matter what happens! God will instantly forgive any believer when he confesses his disobedience as sin (1Jn 1:8-10). He may have to pay in the flesh for the sin (reap what he has sown), but he will not suffer eternal condemnation. Though sin cannot break a saint's relationship with God, it can cause a break in fellowship until he confesses it as sin and forsakes it.

6. Finally, concerning doubtful things (thoughts and actions the believer is not certain about), the Holy Spirit has given some more principles to guide Christians.

- a. Can the believer do the action he is thinking about in the name of Jesus Christ (Eph 5:20)?
- b. Can he give thanks to God for it (Col 3:17)?
- c. Can he do it with the belief that it pleases God (Rom 14:23)?
- d. Would he like the Lord to find him doing it when He returns (1Th 5:1-3)?

The safest and surest way to deal with doubtful thoughts, actions, and circumstances is, "when in doubt, don't."

#### b. The Means Of Progressive Sanctification

The Lord Jesus Christ prayed to His Father that all believers be sanctified by the word of God (Joh 17:17). The scriptures can sanctify because they reveal God's nature and show the saint where he needs correction and instruction (2Ti 3:16-17). Before a believer can continue to live a godly life he must read, study, and submit himself to the Bible. By doing this the Holy Spirit will give him all he needs to live above sin

#### C. Final Sanctification

1. This tense refers to a future event where God sanctifies the believer completely—body, soul, and spirit (1Th 5:23). This will occur when Christ comes back for His people at the rapture (1Th 4:13-18). Now, the believer's body is not yet sanctified, but in that glorious day it will be, making the him unable to sin! God will separate his body from iniquity, as his spirit is now, and his old nature will become literally dead to sin (Rom 6:7). This event is also called "...the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30; also see Adoption). When the Lord returns, all His saints will have a glorified body like His, completely and totally separated from sin (1Co 15:35-38; Php 3:21; Col 3:4; 1Jn 3:2).

The Term "Salvation" Also Has Three Tenses:

- a. Past - The believer has been saved from the guilt and penalty of sin (Luke 7:50; 2Co 5:18-21; 2Co 2:15; Eph 2:5-8; 2Ti 1:9; Titus 3:5; Heb 5:9; etc.).
- b. Present - He is being saved from the power of sin in his daily life (Rom 6:14; Php 1:19, Php 2:12-13; 2Th 2:13; 1Ti 4:16).
- c. Future - He will be saved from the presence of sin at the second coming (Rom 13:11; 1Pe 1:5).

---

**Gene Getz - A Principle to Live By** Philippians #10: Progressive Sanctification from Philippians 3:10-21 (Life Essentials Study Bible)

To live in a manner worthy of the gospel, we must become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Lv #7: A Living Sacrifice, p. 140.)

After penning some very harsh words regarding the false teachers who were promoting works as being necessary to inherit eternal life, Paul quickly and humbly confessed that he was still growing in his own faith. Utilizing another athletic metaphor, he ran his race with his eyes on the goal—to become like Christ.

It's important to note that the "prize" (v. 14) was already guaranteed. Paul had already received eternal life through faith and had been "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph 1:13-14). Furthermore, he was looking forward to that moment when, with him, the Philippians would all receive glorified bodies at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Php 3:20-21). (See 1Co #31: Resurrected

Bodies, p. 1590.)

## Reflection and Response

In terms of becoming fully mature in Christ, why is it important for all believers to balance God's enabling grace and power with our human responsibility?

---

### **Elmer Towns - Sanctification in State and Standing - Concise Bible Doctrines**

The word "sanctification" is used in the Bible to identify that person, institution, act, or thing set apart by God as holy. The confusion over sanctification is that many groups have wrongly defined "sanctify" to mean "eradicate the sin nature," or to gain a position where it is no longer possible to sin. Those who hold this position call it "entire sanctification." In both the Old and New Testament, the Hebrew and Greek words for both "holy" and "sanctify" mean "to set apart to God." When sanctification is used of things, it does not mean that a vessel or piece of furniture has moral qualities (only God is holy). It means they are set apart for God.

Sanctification for the Christian is past, present, and future. Paul reminded the Philippians that "he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Our practical sanctification is a continual process beginning with conversion and finally being accomplished at the coming of Christ.

Positional sanctification. Positional sanctification is the relationship with God which we enter by faith in Jesus Christ. What God made holy by redemption, remains holy. Positional sanctification applies to our completed standing in heaven. The moment a person is saved, he becomes a "new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17). His position is changed from an alien (Gal. 2:12) to a citizen (Heb. 11:13-16). In the books of heaven he is set apart as holy, having obtained the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:25). The rest of his Christian life is an attempt to apply that truth to his practical level of living.

Progressive sanctification. This is called experimental or practical sanctification. It involves the struggles of victory and defeat of the Christian in this present life. But God continues to work in the life of every Christian (Phil. 1:6) to change him into the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29). The various circumstances and experiences we encounter in our lives are the result of God's work in us (Rom. 8:28). We need to cooperate with God in living under the discipline of the Word of God which is given for our direction and spiritual growth (2 Tim. 3:17). As we grow and mature "in Christ" it will become more natural for us to practice the godly habits God desires that we develop.

Prospective sanctification. This is consummational sanctification, for God will not complete the process until we arrive in heaven. Then our position and our walk will be harmonious. That day is soon coming when "we shall be like him [Jesus]; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). At the coming of Christ, all the limitations we now experience will be removed, allowing us instantly to be transformed into holiness (1 Cor. 13:10-12). The Christian today can only anticipate that future day by striving to make needed changes in his or her life as revealed in the Word of God (Phil. 2:12).

---

### **Donald Macleod - A Faith to Live By - Understanding Christian Doctrine**

#### **Progressive Sanctification**

But the Christian experiences not only instantaneous, definitive change, but also progressive transformation. By grace we move ever closer to complete Christ-likeness (Romans 8:29).

This progressive sanctification involves, first of all, mortification. We have to mortify sin. There is a great treatise by John Owen on this subject, based largely on Romans 8. St. Paul's teaching there is so categorical! 'If you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if you mortify the deeds of the body you will live' (Romans 8:13). The versions obscure the force of Paul's language. What he says, literally, is this: 'If you murder sin, if you club it and batter it to death, then you will live.' He is not referring simply to sin in the abstract. It is very easy to live with sin in the abstract! But the Bible asks us to be interested not simply in sin, but in sins: in the deeds of the body, in the works of the flesh, itemised and individualised so that we know precisely those things in our own lives that we have to murder. And if we don't mobilise ourselves against these enemies the result is going to be fatal. Mortification is not something that happens to us automatically and unconsciously, merely by regularly attending church or being in Christian company or having regular seasons of prayer. It is not a process of osmosis. It is something we must do deliberately and consciously to our own sins.

Yet it is never something we do on our own. We do it as those who are led by the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit who leads this great death-squad as it goes about its business of searching for sins and clubbing them to death. We are terribly deluded if we imagine that we are being led by the Spirit while at the same time we are cavorting with sin. Being led by the Spirit means we are at war with sin; and not only with the grosser and more carnal and more obvious sins, but with the inward sins of envy, pride, malice, hypocrisy and self-righteousness. We are at war with everything that leads us to feel superior to others; and with all that tempts us to walk by

on the other side when we stumble on the lost and the wayward. We need the Spirit of God to take us into those areas of self-knowledge where we are up against the truth about ourselves: face to face with our own guilt and our own failure. If we do not live at that interface, then God's Spirit is not dealing with us at all. We must ask God, 'Lord, show me myself. Give me your view of me.' And when He shows us something He finds obnoxious, we have to act as executioners and bludgeon it to death.

### **Renewal**

The second element in progressive sanctification is renewal: 'we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God' (Shorter Catechism, Answer 35). In the New Testament this renewal is invariably progressive rather than definitive. Romans 12:2 is typical: 'Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.' It is also total: a renewal of the whole man. Every single aspect of the human personality is affected. Before conversion, we are totally depraved. After conversion we are totally sanctified. This affects our desires, our ambitions and our emotions. It is never merely a matter of the intellect. It is certainly not a matter of simply adopting a new set of beliefs.

Yet there can be no doubt but that the New Testament places very special emphasis on renewal of the mind. This is not simply a matter of what we think. It is more a matter of how we think. In his book, *The Christian Mind*, Harry Blamires argues that Christians often attack problems in exactly the same way as non-Christians. Their judgements on political issues, their attitudes to professional problems and their approaches to ethical dilemmas are often no different. Surely there is something wrong here. If we are Christians, shouldn't we approach a problem differently? Shouldn't we approach it from the Bible's point of view? Our instinct should be to ask, 'What would Jesus do? How would He see this particular problem?' If we are Christians, both our starting-point and our method of approach are different because our minds are different.

All this comes out very clearly in the account of the disciples' reaction when Jesus told them He was to be crucified (Mark 8:31). They were horrified! But what did Jesus say? That they were thinking of the cross from a perspective that was entirely human: 'You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men' (Mark 8:33).

We have to learn, instead, to look at everything from God's standpoint, asking Christ's questions and presenting biblical challenges as we face every dilemma in our own lives.

This renewal has a template. We are to be renewed according to the image of Jesus (Ephesians 4:24). This depends, again, on how we see this Christ. For me, the essential thing is Christ as the Servant: the One who made Himself nothing (Philippians 2:7). Holiness is Christ-likeness, and Christ-likeness is service. Holiness is the mind of a servant, the mind that says, 'I have no rights; I have only obligations.' That is the Bible's teaching. It challenges the medieval legacy: the Christ of the icons and the tapestries; the great, imperial, dominant, grand, terrifying figure. To many of us a 'holy man' is an august, unbending, judgmental person. Such a paradigm cannot stand in the light of Christ: this Christ who never condoned sin, yet is always there for others.

So much of my Christianity is only a pale reflection of the real thing. The real thing was the Man who was willing to be crucified between two thieves on the garbage heap outside the city walls. The pilgrimage I am called to is not along a road lined with acclaim or power or influence or ease or comfort. It is routed along the Via Dolorosa, where nothing is easy and nothing is comfortable, because we have no right to use our divine sonship to claim favours.

### **Growth**

Thirdly, growth. It is, after all, progressive sanctification. We start from a position of spiritual infancy and childishness and grow up into spiritual maturity. We grow in grace: in graciousness, pleasantness and beauty. The Christian gets lovelier and lovelier. At least, that is the way it should be. Growth does not mean that the Christian becomes more and more austere in relation to others, more and more remote, more and more terrifying, more and more witch-doctor-like. He becomes lovelier and lovelier: gracious, pleasant, beautiful. He grows in knowledge. He grows in his ability to resist temptation. He grows in the ability to fit into the body, to be part of the Christian social organism (Ephesians 4:16). How dreadfully difficult that is! So many of us are tempted to conclude that we can only have freedom and only find spiritual space if we become individualists. But growth means being compacted, co-ordinated into the body, becoming more adapted, more adaptable, more useful to the body itself. We are not meant to function except as members of the body of Christ. We have no right to be growing away from the body of believers. We should be growing into it.

### **Responsibility**

In sanctification a great deal of the responsibility devolves upon ourselves. In the New Testament there is considerable emphasis on the fact that it is God the Father who sanctifies us, God the Son who washes us and God the Holy Spirit who renews us. What a magnificent thing it is that the three Persons of the Godhead are busily employed around each believer's life, sorting it out, renewing it and cultivating it. Yet, at the same time there is constant stress on our own personal responsibility. We mortify the deeds of the body. 'Everyone who has this hope,' the apostle John says, 'purifies himself, just as God is pure' (1 John 3:3). 'These are the ones,' the same apostle says later, 'who have come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes' (Revelation 7:14). They've washed their own robes. They've done it themselves.

I emphasize this because a growing number of Christians seem to regard sanctification as simply an experience. It is something



God does to you in some quick, painless operation, as if you were under anaesthetic. Holiness, they seem to say, is something you get: a Second Blessing in which the Christian is as passive and noncontributing as he is in the new birth.

There is a very pertinent word on this from Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his exposition of Romans 6:13, 'yield yourselves unto God'. There are people, he says, who seem to spend the whole of their lives trying to surrender themselves, but that is not what we have here. What we have is an appeal to the will. The church is not a clinic, but a parade ground. What we all need is not a doctor, but a sergeant major shouting out commands: 'Let not sin reign in your mortal body'. Stand up and do your exercises! Practice your self denial! Get on with this business of sanctification! God doesn't allow us to sit in bed taking our own spiritual pulse and saying that we're not very well spiritually. He tells us to get up and do something about it: to take our medicine, eat our food, do our exercises, get on with washing our robes and purifying ourselves. The holy men of the past were holy because they wanted to be. They worked at it.

In a way, Roman Catholicism has often been closer to the truth on this than much of our Protestantism. It has stressed spiritual discipline and spiritual exercises. In fact, I have a vivid memory of preaching once in Northern Ireland on the text, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12) and being approached immediately afterwards by an extremely angry man who told me in no uncertain tones, 'That was a Catholic text you had tonight.' But, of course, it was not. God commands us, unequivocally, to work away at the great business of mortification, renewal and grow

---

### Practical Application -

You may not "feel" holy today but if you are in Christ by grace through faith (Eph 2:8, 9+), you can rest assured that you ARE HOLY before the LORD. You are a SAINT (which is not a special class of believers). (See related excellent discussion by F B Meyer entitled **Fact! Faith! Feeling!**)

Since you are a SAINT, you have a **RESPONSIBILITY** to live a saintly, sanctified, holy life, making God glorifying choices (not keeping lists of do's and don'ts) so that you "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called," (Eph 4:1+)

Paul wrote "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (BY HEARING WITH FAITH!) Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit (AND BY FAITH), are you now being perfected (bringing about progressive sanctification) by the flesh?" (Gal 3:2-3) Of course not. Past tense salvation is entered into by faith and daily present tense salvation (progressive sanctification) is also by faith, not by works, not by self-effort, but by denying self and trusting the enabling supernatural power of the Holy Spirit!

Renew your mind daily (Ro 12:2+; Ep 4:23+; Col 3:10+) with the truth that you are an alien & stranger (1Pe 2:11+) in this present age & that you have awaiting you a glorious "inheritance which is imperishable & undefiled & will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pe 1:4+)

**John Newton** spoke to progressive sanctification when he said

I am not what I might be, I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I wish to be, I am not what I hope to be. But I thank God I am not what I once was, and I can say with the great apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

---

### Resources on Sanctification:

- Three Tenses of Salvation
- [Divine Passive](#)
- Jehovah Mekeddeshem: The LORD Who Sanctifies ("Makes Holy") (Part 1) (Part 2)
- Discovery House Booklet [Why Would Anyone Want To Be Holy?](#)
- Holiness Quotes
- Thomas Watson [Sanctification - Real, Counterfeit, Necessity, Signs, Inducements, How Attained?](#)
- Exposition of 1 Peter 1:15-16 "Be Holy as He is Holy"
- Holiness - J.C. Ryle
- The Attributes of God - His Holiness
- The Holiness of God - by A W Pink
- [What God Goes By - Study of 11 Names of God by Brian Bill](#)
- [Holiness: The Root of His Grace - by Sammy Tippit: Part I; Part II; Part III](#) - scroll down for articles
- Greek Word Studies: Holiness: hagioσmos / Holy: hagioσ / Holy (One): hōsioσ

- Integrity - A Few Thoughts
- [What is sanctification? What is the definition of Christian sanctification?](#)
- [What is progressive sanctification?](#)
- [What is positional sanctification?](#)
- [What is entire sanctification?](#)
- [What is sanctifying grace?](#)
- [Sanctification - Torrey's Topical Textbook](#)
- American Tract Society [Sanctify](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Sanctification](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Sanctification](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Sanctification](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Sanctification](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Sanctification](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Sanctification](#), [Sanctify](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Sanctification](#) [Sanctify](#), [Sanctification](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Sanctification](#), [Sanctify](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Sanctification](#)

THE THREE STAGE OF SANCTIFICATION AKA THE THREE TENSES OF SALVATION		
POSITION (PAST)	PRESENT EXPERIENCE	FUTURE CERTAINTY
Past Sanctification is... <b>A condition</b>	Present Sanctification is... <b>A process</b>	Future Sanctification is... <b>A promise</b>
<b>Justification</b>	<b>Sanctification</b>	<b>Glorification</b>
One time event Occurs in the past	Daily event moment by moment Occurs in the present.	One time event Our blessed, living hope to be fulfilled in the future
<b>Past tense Salvation</b> I have been saved	<b>Present tense salvation</b> I am being saved	<b>Future tense salvation</b> I will be saved

SCRIPTURE SUPPORTING 3 "STAGES" OF SANCTIFICATION		
1 Cor 6:11 Such were some of you (1 Cor 6:9, 10); but you were washed, but <b>you were sanctified</b> ( <a href="#">passive voice = divine passive</a> ), but you were justified ( <a href="#">passive voice = divine passive</a> ) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.	1 Thess 4:3+ For this is the <b>will of God</b> , your <a href="#">sanctification</a> ; that is (Paul gives one definition of sanctification), that you <a href="#">abstain</a> ( <a href="#">present tense middle voice = make the choice continually - just try this in your own strength! Demands dependence on the Spirit</a> ) from sexual immorality. (cf 1 Pe 2:11± "abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against your soul.")	
	1 John 3:3± And everyone who has this hope (absolute certainty of future good = being like Jesus experientially) fixed on Him purifies ( <a href="#">hagnizo</a> in <a href="#">present tense, active voice</a> [choice of our will, but enabled by the Spirit Who gives us the Desire and the Power] = habitually, progressively) himself, just as He is pure.	1 John 3:2± Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, <b>we will be like Him</b> (1 Cor 15:52), because we will see Him just as He is.

<p>2 Th 2:13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through <b>sanctification by the Spirit</b> and faith in the truth.</p>	<p>Hebrews 10:14+ For by one offering He has perfected for all time those <b>who are sanctified</b>. (<a href="#">hagnizo</a> in <a href="#">present tense, active voice</a> [choice of our will, enabled by the Spirit Who gives us the Desire and the Power] = habitually, progressively)</p>	<p>Romans 8:18; 19+ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with <b>the glory that is to be revealed to us</b>. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God</p>
<p>1 Peter 1:1+ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, <b>by the sanctifying work of the Spirit</b>, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.</p>	<p>1 Peter 1:14+ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, <b>be holy</b> (<b>B e</b> sanctified)(aorist imperative = <a href="#">Need the Spirit to obey</a>) yourselves also in all your behavior.</p>	<p>Colossians 3:4+ When Christ, Who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be <b>revealed with Him in glory</b>.</p>
<p>1Cor 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who <b>have been sanctified</b> (past tense salvation) in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours...</p>	<p>Hebrews 12:14+ <b>Pursue</b> (<a href="#">present imperative active voice</a> [choice of our will, enabled by the Spirit Who gives us the Desire and the Power] = habitually, progressively) peace with all men, and t h e <a href="#">sanctification</a> (holiness) without which no one will see the Lord. (See <a href="#">MacDonald's note below</a>)</p>	<p>Jude 1:24+ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the <b>presence of His glory blameless</b> with great joy,</p>

**RELATED NOTES:  
PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION  
GROWTH IN HOLINESS**

**John 17:17 Sanctify** (aorist imperative) **them in the truth. Thy word is truth. 18 As Thou sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.**

So how are believers progressively sanctified or set apart from the world and unto God? The Word of God, the Truth is used by the Holy Spirit to set us apart. Therefore it behooves us to daily be in the Word of Truth because we are daily living in a world filled with lies (just watch the news tonight if you don't believe me!) How foolish of believers to not "flush" or "purge" the lies of the world system headed by the chief liar Satan (Jn 8:44) with the precious and holy Word of Truth! (cf Mt 4:4+, Lk 4:4+, 1 Pe 2:2).

**ARE YOU IN THE WORD OF TRUTH DAILY  
TO COUNTER THE LYING WORDS OF THE WORLD?**

If your answer is "No" (I'm too busy, I'll do it later, etc, etc), then you are in trouble! Your progressive sanctification will be impacted (negatively). It is like riding a bicycle. What happens if you stop pedaling? You have an accident. This same principle is true spiritually if you are failing to eat the Word of Truth EVERY DAY!!! And don't say you are too busy, because if that is really true, than the truth is you are way too busy with the world system and you need to cut back some of that busyness or you will end up with spiritual barrenness!

**SANCTIFY** is [hagiazo](#) which means to separate from profane (common) things and dedicate to God. The **aorist imperative** conveys the sense of a command to be carried out effectively. It can even convey a sense of urgency. Consecrate, devote, set apart from a common to a sacred use since in the Jewish ritual, this was one great object of the purifications. To make a person or thing the opposite of [koinos](#), "common". Set them apart from the world & their old nature for God's holy purposes. God sets apart men from common use to His

sacred purpose (2Ti 1:9-note). To consecrate or set apart persons or things to God. (Ex 28:41; 29:1,36; 40:13). This is done in the sphere (*en*) of Truth God's Word. The process of sanctification or being set apart from this world for His service is accomplished through the Word of God (see note) by "the Spirit and faith in the truth" (2Th 2:13, cf 1Pe 1:12-note) as believers obey the truth revealed, working out their "salvation in fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in (them), both to will and to work for His good pleasure." (Php 2:12, 13-see notes Php 2:12; 13 )

**Truth** is Greek **aletheia** which is that which is true in any matter under consideration. GOD'S WORD IS TRUTH ON ANY MATTER UNDER CONSIDERATION. That which is in accord with what really happens. Francis Schaeffer "So this change in the concept of the way we come to knowledge and truth is the most crucial problem, as I understand it, facing Christianity today." I would add let us avoid the "bypaths" of worldly wisdom and hold fast to the ancient paths (Jer 6:16, 18:15). Aletheia basically refers to the content of that which is true. God's TRUTH is absolutely essential for the believer in his battle against the LIES of Satan. Without knowledge of biblical teaching, believers are vulnerable to being "carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Eph 4:14-note).

---

There is a myth that exists that says we can live comfortably in our world of faith and then flirt with the world. God calls us to another standard, sanctified in the Truth! Whatever else the professing Christian church may be known for today—great crowds, expensive buildings, big budgets, political clout—it's not distinguished for its holiness. Bible-believing evangelical Christians make up a sizable minority in the United States, but our presence isn't making much of an impact on society. The salt seems to have lost its saltiness, and the light is so well hidden that the marketplace is quite dark. Eight times in Scripture, God said to His people, "Be holy, for I am holy!" This is one of the major themes of Leviticus, a book that teaches us how to avoid sin and how to grow in holiness. Happiness, not **holiness**, is the chief pursuit of most people today, including many professed Christians.

**Warren Wiersbe** recounted the following experience as an example of the trivialization of **holiness**..."We will stand and sing hymn 325," announced the worship leader, " 'Take Time to Be Holy.' We will sing verses one and four." If I had been sitting with the congregation instead of on the platform, I might have laughed out loud. Imagine a Christian congregation singing "Take Time to Be Holy" and not even taking time to sing the entire song! If we can't take the time (less than four minutes) to sing a song about holiness, we're not likely to take time to devote ourselves to "[perfecting holiness](#) in the [fear](#) of God." (2Co 7:1- See notes).

---

**John MacArthur** comments: You see, the effectual call of salvation was a call to **holiness**, not unholiness. God has not called us for the purpose of impurity. It isn't grace so that sin may abound. Paul's point is that the very nature of God's calling and justification is a calling to **sanctification**. He called us to Himself for the purpose of **sanctifying** us, **making us holy, making us pure, making us sinless**. You have a holy, pure, and sinless God who brings salvation through His holy, pure and sinless Son, who then applies that salvation through His holy, pure and sinless Spirit in order to produce a people who are holy, sinless and pure. And thus the heart of the Apostle is to present the church without blemish and without spot, holy before God. [**Ed note:** MacArthur does not mean to imply by "**sinless**" that we can ever achieve a state of perfect sanctification in these bodies of flesh. See 1 John 1:8]. ([Abstaining from Sexual Sin, Part 2](#))

---

**John Piper** comments on 1 Th 4:3. Note Dr Piper uses the phrase "Practical Holiness" which is synonymous with Progressive Sanctification.

"Now let's see what we can learn from this text about the way a pastor should preach in order to help his people make progress in **PRACTICAL HOLINESS**. I'll only mention four things briefly. These are not the only way to preach practical holiness. Nor must every sermon include them all. But in your overall ministry of the word I believe these should have a large place.

#### 1. TEACH YOUR PEOPLE TO KNOW GOD.

Brothers and sisters, our people do not know God very well. If you asked them to talk for five minutes about the character of God most couldn't do it. Preachers shy away from the doctrine of God because it seems abstracted from what immediately moves people. But Paul implies in v5 ("*not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God*") that the key to conquering sexual temptation is to **know God**. "Don't give reign to your passions like Gentiles who don't know God." If our people could only get a taste of the majesty of God it would have more practical consequences in their lives than many messages about human relationships -- and I believe in such messages. I am only pleading for a new emphasis and focus on God. Charles Colson hit a dry spell in his Christian life a few years ago and one of his friends suggested he listen to some lectures by R. C. Sproul on the **holiness of God**. He said,

All I knew about Sproul was that he was a theologian, so I wasn't enthusiastic. After all, I reasoned, theology was for people who had time to study, locked in ivory towers far from the battlefields of human need. However, at my friend's urging I finally agreed ... By the end of the sixth lecture I was on my knees, deep in prayer, in awe of God's absolute holiness. It was a life-changing experience as I gained a completely new understanding of the holy God I believe in and worship.

Teach your people to **know God** and you will touch every area of their lives with the **practical holiness of God**.

## 2. EXHORT YOUR PEOPLE TO PRACTICAL HOLINESS

We need to be specific and earnest in urging our people to change their behavior. Practical holiness is a gift of God not a merely human achievement. That is clear from (1Th 3:12+) ("*may the Lord make you increase and abound in love*") and from 1Th 5:23+ ("*May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly*"). But how does God produce practical holiness in the lives of his people? He does not do it apart from the apostolic word of exhortation. Right after praying that God would make the Thessalonians abound in love (1Th 3:12+), Paul himself commands them not to transgress and wrong a brother (1Th 4:6+). Our word of exhortation is essential. It is the means of grace which the Lord uses to do his sanctifying work. "Father, sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth!" (Jn 17:17)

## 3. PUT ONE AND TWO TOGETHER AND HELP YOUR PEOPLE SEE ALL THEIR LIFE IN RELATION TO GOD

Drive home 1Th 4:8+. **If you reject the exhortation to sexual purity you reject God**. It is amazing how many professing Christians think that their day to day choices have no bearing on their relation to God. We must tirelessly remind them that a sharp word at the breakfast table is rebellion against the Holy Spirit. Breaking the speed limit is probably a failure to trust God to take care of your schedule. Lust is an insult to the all-satisfying fellowship of God. Holding a grudge cuts one off from the forgiveness of God. And all the joys of life can either be exalted by a spirit of gratitude and worship toward God, or debased to idolatry by ignoring their relation to God. Our great aim must be to give our people a God-saturated experience of life.

## 4. FINALLY WE MUST WARN THE PEOPLE OF GOD'S VENGEANCE

Thousands of pastors do not believe this because they cannot make it square with their view of eternal security. How can you warn the saints on Sunday morning of God's vengeance if their faith in Christ delivers them from the wrath to come?

**Zane Hodges** of Dallas Seminary in a recent book, wrote that... It may be safely said that no man in Christian history -- with the exception of our Lord Himself -- ever motivated believers more or threatened them less than did [Paul]. Hodges must say this because he concludes 3 pages earlier that "works have nothing to do with determining a Christian's basic relationship to God." If the way you behave -- say in your sex life -- has nothing to do with your basic relationship to God, then warnings of God's vengeance make no sense.

It makes no sense when Paul says to Christians in Rome (Ro 8:13+), "If you live according to the flesh you will die." It makes no sense when he says to the Corinthians (1Co 10:9), "We must not put the Lord to the test, as some of the Israelites did and were destroyed by the serpents." It doesn't make sense when he says to the Galatian churches (Gal 5:21+), "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not enter the kingdom of God." And it doesn't make sense here in 1Th 4:6+ when Paul says, "Let no man transgress and wrong his brother ... because God is an avenger in these things as we solemnly forewarned you." That is, it doesn't make sense unless your premise is wrong that the behavior of man has nothing to do with his salvation. And it is surely wrong. For the tree is known by its fruit. Therefore, I urge you all to immerse yourselves more and more in the Scriptures and learn for yourselves how to preach practical holiness. And from this one very typical passage in 1 Thessalonians I believe you will find at least that you should...

1. Teach your people to know God.
2. Exhort your people to practical holiness.
3. Help your people see all their life in relation to God.
4. And warn the people of God's vengeance.

(See Dr Piper's entire message [Preaching Practical Holiness - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8](#))

are basically single-mindedness. He is a person who has his eye on a goal, on a person whom he follows, & that person is so thoroughly all-important to him that he is not interested in anything that does not relate to that person. That is single-minded, dedicated. There is something attractive about that. Any time you meet a Marine who takes pride in his outfit you can see the kind of single-mindedness I am talking about. He is proud that he is a Marine, and he walks like it and he talks like it."

---

### Holiness is to unholiness as...

- whole is to broken
- usable is to unusable
- special is to ordinary
- valuable is to worthless
- a clear conscience is to guilt
- honesty is to deception
- excellent is to unacceptable
- pure is to stained
- good is to bad
- happy is to sad
- fresh is to spoiled
- gain is to loss
- complete is to incomplete

In the **Radio Bible Class** Booklet [Why Would Anyone Want To Be Holy?](#) we read that...

The key to living a holy, Christ-like life is not simply to attend church, try harder, read the Bible, or take a stand against Satan and his lies--as important as all those actions are. The key is this: We are to live the Christian life the way we began it--depend on God's grace and place all our hope and trust in Him. [Ed Note: [Jehovah Mekeddeshem \(Mekadesh\): LORD Who Sanctifies \(Jehovah M'Kaddesh\)](#)] The apostle Paul put it this way, "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him" (Col 2:6-note)....In a footnote in *The Discipline of Grace* (NavPress, 1994), author Jerry Bridges writes, "I am aware that a vast number of professing Christians display little or no commitment to spiritual growth or discipleship, and for them the Christian life is no more than the mere formalities of attending church and avoiding scandalous behavior" (p.233)...What do you think? Do you agree with him? Are you assessing your own degree of passion for spiritual growth and discipleship? Are we coasting through life without examining our attitudes and actions in the light of God's Word? Do we view ourselves as pretty decent individuals who don't do any of the "big" sins that get people tossed into jail or out of churches? It's easy to begin to coast spiritually. After all, growth requires hard work. It means sacrificing some short-range "want to's" for some long-range "need to's" that will honor the Lord. There are no quick fixes. Mountaintop spiritual thrills are followed by valleys of spiritual battles and even crushing failures. Becoming holy and Christ-like takes a lifetime. Summarize in your own words the key ways that holiness is to be evidenced in your daily life. What is your greatest struggle right now in your pursuit of holiness? What is God telling you to do as you rely on Him? Take a few moments to pray and respond to what God has said in His Word.

RBC booklet [Why Would Anyone Want To Be Holy?](#)

---

**William MacDonald** has a straightforward explanation of Hebrews 12:14 **Pursue** peace with all men, and **the sanctification** (HOLINESS) without which no one will see the Lord."

We should also strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. What is the **holiness** referred to here? To answer the question we should remind ourselves that **holiness** is used of believers in at least three different ways in the NT.

(1) First of all, the believer becomes **positionally holy** at the time of his conversion; he is set apart to God from the world (1Co 1:2; 6:11). By virtue of his union with Christ, he is sanctified forever. This is what Martin Luther meant when he said, "My holiness is in heaven." Christ is our holiness, that is, as far as our standing before God is concerned.

(2) Then there is a **practical sanctification** (1Th 4:3; 5:23) (**ED: AKA "PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION"**). This is what we should be day by day. We should separate ourselves from every form of evil (**ED: THIS "SEPARATION" MUST NOT BE LEGALISTIC, ME TRYING HARDER TO NOT DO**

SOME SIN, ETC, BUT SHOULD BE ENABLED BY LEANING CONTINUALLY ON THE SUPERNATURAL POWER OF THE INDWELLING SPIRIT OF CHRIST). This holiness should be **progressive**, that is, we should be growing more and more like the Lord Jesus all the time.

(3) Finally, there is complete or **perfect sanctification**. (ED: GLORIFICATION - FUTURE TENSE SALVATION) This takes place when a believer goes to heaven. Then he is forever free from sin. His old nature is removed, and his state perfectly corresponds to his standing.

**Now which holiness are we to pursue?** (In Heb 12:14) Obviously it is **PRACTICAL SANCTIFICATION** that is in view. We do not strive after **positional sanctification**; it is ours automatically when we are born again. And we do not strive after the **perfect sanctification** that will be ours when we see His face (1Jn 3:2). But practical or **PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION** is something that involves our obedience and cooperation (ED: BUT EVEN THIS OBEDIENCE ENABLED BY THE SPIRIT GIVING US THE DESIRE TO OBEY AND THE POWER TO OBEY - Phil 2:13NLT; we must cultivate this holiness continually. The fact that we must follow it is proof that we do not fully attain it in this life.

**Wuest** writes: The exhortation is to the born-again Jews who had left the Temple, to live such consistent saintly lives, and to cling so tenaciously to their new-found faith, that the unsaved Jews who had also left the Temple and had outwardly embraced the New Testament truth, would be encouraged to go on to faith in Messiah as High Priest, instead of returning to the abrogated sacrifices of the Levitical system. These truly born-again Jews are warned that a "**limping Christian life**" would cause these unsaved Jews to be turned out of "**the way**".

But a difficulty remains! Is it true that we cannot see the Lord without practical sanctification? Yes, there is a sense in which this is true; but let us understand that this does not mean that we earn the right to see God by living holy lives. Jesus Christ is our only title to heaven. What this verse means is that there must be practical holiness as a proof of new life within. If a person is not growing more holy, he is not saved. When the Holy Spirit indwells a person, He manifests His presence by a separated life. It is a matter of cause and effect; if Christ has been received, the rivers of living water will flow. ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#)) (Bolding added)

---

### C. H. Spurgeon had much to say about holiness...

Though you have struggled in vain against your evil habits, though you have wrestled with them sternly, and resolved, and re-resolved, only to be defeated by your giant sins and your terrible passions, there is One who can conquer all your sins for you. There is One who is stronger than Hercules, who can strangle the hydra of your lust, kill the lion of your passions, and cleanse the Augean stable of your evil nature by turning the great rivers of blood and water of his atoning sacrifice right through your soul. He can make and keep you pure within. Oh, look to him!

Holy desires are grace in the blade, and the heavenly Husbandman will cultivate them till they come to the full corn in the ear. God-fearing men desire to be holy, to be useful, to be a blessing to others, and so to honor their Lord. - Faith's Checkbook

If we divide ourselves between God and mammon, or Christ and self, we shall make no progress. We must give ourselves wholly to holy things, or else we shall be poor traders in heavenly business; and at our stock-taking, no profit will be shown. Faith's Checkbook

You will not gain holiness by standing still. Nobody ever grew holy without consenting, desiring, and agonizing to be holy. Sin will grow without sowing, but holiness needs cultivation. Follow it; it will not run after you. You must pursue it with determination, with eagerness, with perseverance, as a hunter pursues his prey.

The bloom of the hawthorn or White May looks like snow out in the country, but near the vast city or along the roadside its virgin whiteness is sadly stained. Too often contact with the world has just such an effect on our piety. We must make our way to the far-off garden of Paradise to see holiness in its unsullied purity, and meanwhile we must be much alone with God if we would maintain a gracious life below

There can be no such thing as perfect happiness till there is perfect holiness.

I would sooner be holy than happy if the two things could be divorced. Were it possible for a man always to sorrow and yet to be pure, I would choose the sorrow if I might win the purity, for to be free from the power of sin, to be made to love holiness, is true happiness.

A faith which works not for purification will work for putrefaction. Unless our faith makes us pine after holiness, it is no better than the faith of devils, and perhaps it is not even so good as that. A holy man is the workmanship of the Holy Spirit.

We say of a river that it runs to the south, although there may be eddies along the banks which run in an opposite direction to the main stream. Still, these are inconsiderable matters. The main stream of the Thames is running constantly toward the sea, and we speak not untruthfully when we say that it is so. And the main stream and set of the current of the life of a child of God runs toward that which is right and true and holy, both toward God and man. If it is not so with you, you do not know the Lord. You need to be born again...

Of all the griefs the church ever feels, the keenest is when those who once stood in her midst dishonor the name of Christ by unholy living.

Did you ever see a bush burn, and yet not be consumed? Did you ever see a spark float in the sea, and yet not be quenched? Many persons here are, to themselves, just such wonders. They are living godly lives in the midst of temptation, holy in the midst of impurity, serving God in spite of all opposition. They are strange things!

If your religion does not make you holy, it will damn you. It is simply painted pageantry to go to hell in.

Holiness is better than morality. It goes beyond it. Holiness affects the heart. Holiness respects the motive. Holiness regards the whole nature of man. A moral man does not do wrong in act; a holy man hates the thought of doing wrong. A moral man does not swear, but a holy man adores. A moral man would not commit outward sin; a holy man would not commit inward sin. And if committed, he would pour forth floods of tears.

"While the Austrian general was staying at the Hotel de Ville, upon the Grand Canal at Venice, I lodged at the same house, and as often as I passed his rooms, whether during the day or at night, I encountered two sentries on guard at the door. My heart said to itself, whenever the King of kings deigns to make a chamber of my spirit, let me set holiness and devotion to be sentries at the entrance. When our Beloved visits us He must not be disturbed. Ill thoughts must be repulsed, and carnal desires kept at a distance. With drawn swords let watchfulness preserve the sanctity of Immanuel's rest. "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field that ye stir not up nor awake my love, till he please." "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;" (2 Cor 5:14)

"In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD"—Zechariah 14:20  
HAPPY day when all things shall be consecrated, and the horses' bells shall ring out holiness to the Lord! That day has come to me. Do I not make all things holy to God? These garments, when I put them on or take them off, shall they not remind me of the righteousness of Christ Jesus, my Lord? Shall not my work be done as unto the Lord? Oh, that today my clothes may be vestments, my meals sacraments, my house a temple, my table an altar, my speech incense, and myself a priest! Lord, fulfill thy promise, and let nothing be to me common or unclean.

Let me in faith expect this. Believing it to be so, I shall be helped to make it so. As I myself am the property of Jesus, my Lord may take an inventory of all I have for it is altogether His own; and I resolve to prove it to be so by the use to which I put it this day. From morning till evening, I would order all things by a happy and holy rule. My bells shall ring: why should they not? Even my horses shall have bells: who has such a right to music as the saints have? But all my bells, my music, my mirth shall be turned to holiness and shall ring out the name of "The Happy God." - Faith's Checkbook

**Spurgeon** commenting on the truth that God "saved us and called us with a **holy calling**" (2 Timothy 1:9) wrote that...

The apostle uses the perfect tense (completed action at a point in time in the past with continuing effect/result) and says, "Who hath saved us." Believers in Christ Jesus are saved. They are not looked upon as persons who are in a hopeful state, and may ultimately be saved, but they are already saved. Salvation is not a blessing to be enjoyed upon the dying bed, and to be sung of in a future state above, but a matter to be obtained, received, promised, and enjoyed now. The Christian is perfectly saved in God's purpose; God has ordained him unto salvation, and that purpose is complete. He is saved also as to the price which has been paid for him: "It is finished" was the cry of the Saviour ere he died. The believer is also perfectly saved in his covenant head, for as he fell in Adam, so he lives in Christ. This complete salvation is accompanied by a holy calling. Those whom the Saviour saved upon the cross are in due time effectually called by the power of God the Holy Spirit unto holiness: they leave their sins; they endeavor to be like Christ; they choose holiness, not out of any compulsion, but from the stress of a new nature, which leads them to rejoice in holiness just as



naturally as aforetime they delighted in sin. God neither chose them nor called them because they were holy, but he called them that they might be holy, and holiness is the beauty produced by his workmanship in them. The excellencies which we see in a believer are as much the work of God as the atonement itself. Thus is brought out very sweetly the fulness of the grace of God. Salvation must be of grace, because the Lord is the author of it: and what motive but grace could move him to save the guilty? Salvation must be of grace, because the Lord works in such a manner that our righteousness is for ever excluded. Such is the believer's privilege—a present salvation; such is the evidence that he is called to it—a holy life. (Morning and Evening)

**Spurgeon** commenting on Jesus' command to "**sanctify** them through Thy truth" (John 17:17) reasoned that...

Sanctification begins in regeneration. The Spirit of God infuses into man that new living principle by which he becomes "a new creature" in Christ Jesus (Ed note: He is "positionally" holy in Christ at this point in time). This work, which begins in the new birth, is carried on in two ways—mortification, whereby the lusts of the flesh are subdued and kept under; and vivification, by which the life which God has put within us is made to be a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. This is carried on every day in what is called "perseverance," by which the Christian is preserved and continued in a gracious state, and is made to abound in good works unto the praise and glory of God; and it culminates or comes to perfection, in "glory," when the soul, being thoroughly purged, is caught up to dwell with holy beings at the right hand of the Majesty on high. But while the Spirit of God is thus the author of sanctification, yet there is a visible agency employed which must not be forgotten. "Sanctify them," said Jesus, "through thy truth: thy word is truth." The passages of Scripture which prove that the instrument of our sanctification is the Word of God are very many. The Spirit of God brings to our minds the precepts and doctrines of truth, and applies them with power. These are heard in the ear, and being received in the heart, they work in us to will and to do of God's good pleasure. The truth is the sanctifier, and if we do not hear or read the truth, we shall not grow in sanctification. We only progress in sound living as we progress in sound understanding. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Do not say of any error, "It is a mere matter of opinion." No man indulges an error of judgment, without sooner or later tolerating an error in practice. Hold fast the truth, for by so holding the truth shall you be sanctified by the Spirit of God. (Morning and Evening)

## Cultivating Holiness

Joel R. Beeke

The godly farmer who plows his field, sows seed, fertilizes and cultivates, is acutely aware that in the final analysis he is utterly dependent for an assured crop on forces outside of himself. He knows he cannot cause the seed to germinate, the rain to fall, the sun to shine. But he pursues his task with diligence anyhow, both looking to God for blessing and knowing that if he does not fertilize and cultivate the sown seed his crop will be meager at best.

Similarly, the Christian life must be like a cultivated garden in order to produce the fruits of holy living unto God. "Theology," William Ames wrote in the opening words of his classic, *The Marrow of Theology*, "is the doctrine or teaching of living to God." God Himself exhorts His children, "You shall be holy for I am holy" (1Pe 1:16-note). Paul instructs the Thessalonians, "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification" (1Thes 4:7-note). And the author of Hebrews writes, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14-note). The believer who does not cultivate holiness diligently will neither have much genuine assurance of his own salvation nor be obeying Peter's call to seek it (2Pe 1:10-note). In this article I will focus on the Christian's scriptural call to cultivate Spirit-worked holiness by using diligently the means God has provided to assist him.

For the Christian, to be set apart means, negatively, to be separate from sin, and positively, to be consecrated (i.e., dedicated) to God and conformed to Christ. There is no disparity between Old Testament and New Testament concepts of holiness, though there is a change in emphasis on what holiness involves. The Old Testament stresses ritual and moral holiness; the New Testament stresses inward and transforming holiness (Lev 10:10,11; 19:2; Heb 10:10-note; 1Thes 5:23-note)...

In the first place, personal holiness demands personal wholeness. God never calls us to give Him a piece of our hearts. The call to holiness is a call for our entire heart: "Give me your heart, my son" (Pr 23:26).

Second, holiness of heart must be cultivated in every sphere of life: in privacy with God, in the confidentiality of our homes, in the competitiveness of our occupation, in the pleasures of social friendship, in relation with our unevangelized neighbors and the world's hungry and unemployed, as well as in Sunday worship. Horatius Bonar writes:

Holiness ... extends to every part of our persons, fills up our being, spreads over our life, influences everything we are, or do, or think, or speak, or plan, small or great, outward or inward, negative or positive, our loving, our hating, our sorrowing, our rejoicing, our recreations, our business, our friendships, our relationships, our silence, our speech, our reading, our writing, our going out and our coming in—our whole man in every movement of spirit, soul, and body.

The call to holiness is a daily task. It is an absolute, radical call, involving the core of religious faith and practice. John Calvin put it this way:

Because they have been called to holiness, the entire life of all Christians must be an exercise in piety.

In short, the call to holiness is a whole-life commitment to live “toward God” (2Cor 3:4), to be set apart to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Thus, holiness is an inward thing that must fill our entire heart and an outward thing that must cover all of life. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thes 5:23-note).

“Holiness,” Thomas Boston maintained, “is a constellation of graces.” In gratitude to God, a believer cultivates the fruits of holiness, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22, 23-note).

This call to holiness is not a call to merit acceptance with God. The NT declares that every believer is sanctified in principle by the sacrifice of Christ: “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). Christ is our Sanctification (1Cor 1:30); therefore the church as the bride of Christ is sanctified (Eph. 5:25, 26-notes). The believer’s status before God is one of sanctity in Christ, on account of His perfect obedience which has fully satisfied the justice of God for all sin.

The believer’s status, however, does not infer that he has arrived at a wholly sanctified condition (1Cor 1:2). Several attempts have been made to express the relationship between the believer’s status and condition before God, foremost among them being Luther’s well-known *simul justus et peccator* (“at once righteous and a sinner”). That is to say, the believer is both righteous in God’s sight because of Christ, and remains a sinner as measured according to his own merits. Though the believer’s status makes an impact on his condition from the onset of Christian experience (which coincides with Regeneration), he is never in a perfectly sanctified condition in this life. Paul prays that the Thessalonians may be sanctified wholly as something still to be accomplished (1Thes 5:23-note). Sanctification received is Sanctification begun, though not yet perfected.

This explains the NT’s emphasis on holiness as something to be cultivated and pursued. NT language stresses vital, progressive Sanctification. The believer must strive for Sanctification (Heb 12:14-note). Growth in holiness must and will follow Regeneration (Eph 1:4-note; Phil 3:12-note).

Thus, true believer, holiness is both something you have in Christ before God and something you must cultivate in the strength of Christ. Your status in holiness is conferred; your condition in holiness must be pursued. Through Christ you are made holy in your standing before God, and through Christ you are called to reflect that standing by being holy in daily life. Your context of holiness is Justification through Christ, and your route of holiness is to be crucified and resurrected with Him, which involves the continual “mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man” (Heidelberg Catechism, Question 88). You are called to be in life what you already are in principle by grace.

## The Cultivation of Holiness

Concretely, then, what must you cultivate? Three things.

**1) Imitation of the character of Jehovah.** God says, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1Pe 1:16). The holiness of God Himself ought to be our foremost stimulus to cultivate holy living. Seek to be like your Father in heaven in righteousness, holiness, and integrity. In the Spirit, strive to think God’s thoughts after Him via His Word, to be of one mind with Him, to live and act as God Himself would have you do. As Stephen Charnock concludes:

This is the prime way of honoring God. We do not so glorify God by elevated admirations, or eloquent expressions, or pompous services for him, as when we aspire to a conversing with Him with unstained spirits, and live to him in living like him.

**2) Conformity to the image of Christ.** This is a favorite Pauline theme, of which one example must suffice (Phil 2:5, 6, 7, 8notes)

Christ was humble, willing to give up His rights in order to obey God and serve sinners. If you would be holy, Paul is saying, be like-minded.

Do not aim for conformity to Christ as a condition of Salvation, however, but as a fruit of Salvation received by faith. We must look to Christ for holiness, for He is the fount and path of holiness. Seek no other path. Follow the advice of Augustine who contended that it is better to limp on the path than to run outside of it. Do as Calvin taught: Set Christ before you as the mirror of Sanctification, and seek grace to mirror Him in His image. Ask in each situation encountered: "What would Christ think, say, and do?" And then trust Him for holiness. He will not disappoint you (James 1:2-note, Jas 1:3, 4-note, Jas 1:5, 6-note, Jas 1:7-note).

There is room for unending growth in holiness because Jesus is the bottomless well of Salvation. You cannot go to Him too much for holiness, for He is holiness par excellence. He lived holiness; He merited holiness; He sends His Spirit to apply holiness. "Christ is all, and in all" (Col 3:11-note :11)—holiness inclusive. As Luther profoundly set forth

**We in Christ = justification**  
**Christ in us = sanctification**

**3) Submission to the mind of the Holy Spirit.** In Romans 8:6 Paul divides people into two categories—those who let themselves be controlled by their sinful natures (i.e., the carnally minded who follow fleshly desires), and those who follow after the Spirit (i.e., those who mind "the things of the Spirit" [Ro 8:5-note]).

The Holy Spirit was sent to bring the believer's mind into submission to His mind (1Cor 2). He was given to make sinners holy; the most holy increasingly bow as willing servants under His control. Let us beg for grace to be willing servants more fully and more consistently.

**How does the Spirit work this holy grace of submission to His mind, thereby making us holy?**(1) He shows us our need for holiness through conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn 16:8). (2) He implants desire for holiness. His saving work never leads to despair but always to Sanctification in Christ. (3) He grants Christlikeness in holiness. He works upon our whole nature, molding us after Christ's image. (4) He provides strength to live a holy life by His indwelling in and influencing of our soul. If we live by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of our sinful nature (Gal 5:16-note). To live by the Spirit means to live in obedience to and dependence on that Spirit. (5) Through humble feeding of Scripture and the exercise of prayer, the Spirit teaches us His mind and establishes an ongoing realization that holiness remains essential as being worthy of God and His kingdom (1Thes 2:12-note; Eph 4:1-Note) and for fitness for service (1Co 9:24, 25; Phil. 3:13-note). "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18-note). Thomas Watson writes:

The Spirit stamps the impression of his own sanctity upon the heart, as the seal prints its likeness upon the wax. The Spirit of God in a man perfumes him with holiness, and makes his heart a map of heaven.

## **How to Cultivate Holiness**

That believers are called to holiness is indisputably clear. But the cardinal question remains: How does the believer cultivate holiness? Here are seven directions to assist us.

**1) Know and love Scripture.** This is God's primary road to holiness and to spiritual growth—the Spirit as Master Teacher blessing the reading and searching of God's Word. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth. Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). And Peter advised, "Long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow" (1Peter 2:2-note).

If you would not remain spiritually ignorant and impoverished, read through the Bible at least annually. Even more importantly, memorize the Scriptures (Ps 119:11), search (Jn 5:39) and meditate upon them (Ps 1:2-note), live and love them (Ps 119; 19:10). Compare Scripture with Scripture; take time to study the Word. Proverbs 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 5 sets before us several principles involved in serious personal Bible study: teachability (receiving God's words), obedience (storing God's commandments), discipline (applying the heart), dependence (crying for knowledge), and perseverance (searching for hidden treasure). Do not expect growth in holiness if you spend little time alone with God and fail to take His Word seriously. Plagued with a heart prone to be tempted away from holiness, let Scripture teach you how to live a holy life in an unholy world.

Develop a scriptural formula for holy living. Here is one possibility drawn from 1 Corinthians. When hesitant over a course of action, ask yourself:

Does this glorify God? (1Cor 10:31)

Is this consistent with the lordship of Christ? (1Cor. 7:23)

Is this consistent with biblical examples? (1Cor 11:1)

Is this lawful and beneficial for me—spiritually, mentally, physically? (1Co 6:9, 10, 11, 12)

Does this help others positively and not hurt others unnecessarily? (1Co 10:33; 8:13)

Does this bring me under any enslaving power? (1Co 6:12)

Let Scripture be your compass to guide you in cultivating holiness, in making life's decisions, and in encountering the high waves of personal affliction.

## **2) Use the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper diligently as means of grace to strengthen your faith in Christ.**

God's sacraments complement His Word. They point us away from ourselves. Each sign—water, bread, and wine—directs us to believe in Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. The sacraments are visible means through which He invisibly communes with us and we with Him. They are spurs to Christlikeness and therefore to holiness.

Grace received through the sacraments is not different from that received through the Word. Both convey the same Christ. But as Robert Bruce put it, "While we do not get a better Christ in the sacraments than we do in the Word, there are times when we get Christ better."

Flee often to Christ by Word and sacrament. Faith in Christ is a powerful motivator for holiness; for faith and the love of sin cannot mix. Be careful, however, not to seek your holiness in your experiences of Christ, but in Christ Himself. As William Gurnall admonishes:

When thou trustest in Christ within thee, instead of Christ without thee, thou settest Christ against Christ. The bride does well to esteem her husband's picture, but it were ridiculous if she should love it better than himself, much more if she should go to it rather than to him to supply her wants. Yet thou actest thus when thou art more fond of Christ's image in thy soul than of him who painted it there.

## **3) Regard yourself as dead to the dominion of sin and as alive to God in Christ (Ro 6:11-note).**

"To realize this," writes Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "takes away from us that old sense of hopelessness which we have all known and felt because of the terrible power of sin... I can say to myself that not only am I no longer under the dominion of sin, but I am under the dominion of another power that nothing can frustrate."

That is not to imply that because sin no longer reigns over us as believers, we have license to forego our duty to fight against sin. Bridges rightly admonishes us,

"To confuse the potential for resisting sin (which God provided) with the responsibility for resisting (which is ours) is to court disaster in our pursuit of holiness."

Westminster's Shorter Catechism balances God's gift and our responsibility when stating,

"Sanctification is 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" (Question 35).

Seek to cultivate a growing hatred of sin as sin, for that is the kind of hatred against sin which God possesses. Recognize that God is worthy of obedience not only as the Judge, but especially as a loving Father. Say with Joseph in temptation, "How then can I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (Ge 39:9).

Believe that Christ is mighty to preserve you alive by His Spirit. You live through union with Christ. Live unto His righteousness. His righteousness is greater than your unrighteousness. His Saviorhood is greater than your sinfulness. His Spirit is within you: "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1Jn 4:4). Do not despair; you are strong in Him, alive in Him, victorious in Him. Satan may win many skirmishes, but the war is yours, the victory is yours (1Co 15:57; Ro 8:37-note). In Christ, the optimism of divine grace reigns over the pessimism of human nature.

**4) Pray and work in dependence upon God for holiness.** No one is sufficient to bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing but God (Job 14:4). Hence, pray with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10-[Spurgeon's note](#)). And as you pray, work. John Owen wrote, "God works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself."

The Heidelberg Catechism (Question 116) points out that prayer and work belong together. They are like two oars, which, when both utilized, will keep a rowboat moving forward. If you use only one oar—if you pray without working or you work without praying—you will row in circles.

Holiness and prayer have much in common. Both are central to the Christian life and faith; they are obligatory, not optional. Both originate with God and center upon Him. Both are activated, often mutually, by the Spirit of God. Neither can survive without the

other. Both are learned by experience and through spiritual battles. Neither is perfected in this life, but must be cultivated lifelong. Both are easier to talk and write about than to exercise. The most prayerful often feel themselves to be prayerless; the most holy often regard themselves as unholy.

Holiness and work are also closely related, especially the work of nurturing and persevering in personal discipline. Discipline takes time and effort. Paul exhorted Timothy, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1Ti 4:7-note).

Holiness is not achieved sloppily or instantaneously. Holiness is a call to a disciplined life; it cannot live out of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called cheap grace—that is, grace which forgives without demanding repentance and obedience. Holiness is costly grace—grace that cost God the blood of His Son, cost the Son His own life, and costs the believer daily mortification in exercising holiness, such that with Paul he dies daily (1Cor 15:31). Gracious holiness calls for continual commitment, continual diligence, continual practice and continual repentance. If you "sometimes through weakness fall into sin, you must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since ... we have an eternal covenant of grace with God" (Baptism Form). Resolve with Jonathan Edwards:

Never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.

These two things, fighting against sin and lack of success, appear contradictory, but are not. Failing and becoming a failure are two different matters. The believer recognizes he will often fail. Luther said that the righteous man more often feels himself to be "a loser than a victor" in the trial of and struggle against sin, "for the Lord lets him be tested and assailed to his utmost limits as gold is tested in a furnace." This too is an important component of discipleship. Nevertheless, the godly man will persevere even through his failures. Failure does not make him quit; it makes him repent the more earnestly and press on in the Spirit's strength.

"For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity" (Pr. 24:16)

Let us never forget that the God we love, loves holiness. Hence the intensity of His fatherly, chastising discipline (Heb 12:5,6-notes, He 12:10-note)! Perhaps William Gurnall says it best: "God would not rub so hard if it were not to fetch out the dirt that is ingrained in our natures. God loves purity so well He had rather see a hole than a spot in his child's garments."

**5) Flee worldliness.** We must strike out against the first appearance of the pride of life, the lusts of the flesh and eye, and all forms of sinful worldliness as they knock on the door of our hearts and minds. If we open the door and allow them to roam about in our minds and take foothold in our lives, we are already their prey.

"But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself" (Da 1:8).

The material we read, the recreation and entertainment we engage in, the music we listen to, and the conversations we have affect our minds and ought to be judged in the context of Philippians 4:8:

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."

We must live above the world and not be of the world while yet in the world (Ro 12:1-note, Ro 12:2-note).

**6) Seek fellowship in the church; associate with mentors in holiness**(Eph 4:12,13-notes; 1Cor 11:1). The church ought to be a fellowship of mutual care and a community of prayer (1Cor 12:7; Acts 2:42). Converse and pray with fellow believers whose godly walk you admire (Col 3:16-note).

"He who walks with wise men will be wise" (Pr 13:20)

Association promotes assimilation. A Christian life lived in isolation from other believers will be defective; usually such a believer will remain spiritually immature.

Such fellowship, however, ought not exclude the reading of godly treatises of former ages which promote holiness. Luther said that some of his best friends were dead ones. For example, he questioned if anyone could possess spiritual life who did not feel kinship with David pouring out his heart in the Psalms. Read classics that speak out vehemently against sin.

Let **Thomas Watson** be your mentor in *The Mischief of Sin* ([choice excerpts](#)); **John Owen**, in *Temptation and Sin*; **Jeremiah Burroughs**, in *The Evil of Evils*; **Ralph Venning**, in *The Plague of Plagues* ([click here](#)).

But also read **J. C. Ryle's Holiness** ([Click here for what is considered by many as the best book on the Christian life ever written other than The Book!](#)), **Octavius Winslow's** *Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul* ([click here](#)), and **John Flavel's** *Keeping the Heart* ([click here](#)).

Let these divines of former ages be your spiritual mentors and friends.

## 7) Live “present-tense,” total commitment to God.

Don't fall prey to the “one-more-time” syndrome. Postponed obedience is disobedience. Tomorrow's holiness is impurity now. Tomorrow's faith is unbelief now. Aim not to sin at all (1Jn 2:1), asking for divine strength to bring every thought into captivity to Christ (2Cor 10:5-see notes), for Scripture indicates that thought-life ultimately determines our character: “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Pr 23:7a). An old proverb says it this way:

Sow a thought, reap an act;  
Sow an act, reap a habit;  
Sow a habit, reap a character.

## Encouragements for Cultivating Holiness

The cultivation of holiness is demanding. Thomas Watson called it “sweating work.” Happily, God provides us with several motives to holiness in His Word. To encourage us in the pursuit of holiness, we need to keep our eyes focused on the following biblical truths.

**1) God has called you to holiness for your good and His glory.** “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in Sanctification” (1Thes 4:7-note). Whatever God calls us to, is necessary. His call itself, as well as the benefits which we experience from holy living as described below, should induce us to seek and practice holiness.

Holiness benefits us by augmenting our spiritual well-being. God assures us that “no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Ps 84:10, 11).

“What health is to the heart,” John Flavel noted, “that holiness is to the soul.”

In Richard Baxter's scarce work on holiness, the very chapter titles are enlightening: Holiness Is the Only Way of Safety, Holiness Is the Only Honest Way, Holiness Is the Most Gainful Way, Holiness Is the Most Honourable Way, Holiness is the Most Pleasant Way ([see entire Google book "The Practical Works of Richard Baxter"](#)).

But most importantly, holiness glorifies the God you love (Isaiah 43:21). As Thomas Brooks affirmed, “Holiness makes most for God's honor.”

**2) Holiness makes you resemble God and preserves your integrity.** As Watson notes: “We must endeavour to be like God in sanctity. It is a clear glass in which we can see a face; it is a holy heart in which something of God can be seen.” Christ serves here as a pattern of holiness for us—a pattern of holy humility (Phil 2:5-see notes, Phil 2:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13), of holy compassion (Mark 1:41), of holy forgiveness (Col 3:13-note), of holy unselfishness (Ro 15:3-note), of holy indignation against sin (Mt 23:1ff), and of holy prayer (Heb 5:7-note). Cultivated holiness which resembles God and is patterned after Christ saves us from much hypocrisy, from resorting to a “Sunday only” Christianity. It gives vitality, purpose, meaning, and direction to daily living.

**3) Holiness gives evidence of your Justification and Election, and fosters assurance.** Sanctification is the inevitable fruit of Justification (1Cor 6:11). The two may be distinguished, but never separated; God Himself has married them. Justification is organically linked to Sanctification; new birth infallibly issues in new life. The justified will walk in “the King's highway of holiness.” In and through Christ, Justification gives God's child the title for heaven and the boldness to enter; Sanctification gives him the fitness for heaven and the preparation necessary to enjoy it. Sanctification is the personal appropriation of the fruits of Justification. B. B. Warfield notes,

Sanctification is but the execution of the justifying decree. For it to fail would be for the acquitted person not to be released in accordance with his acquittal.

Consequently, the justifying decree of Christ, “Neither do I condemn you,” is immediately followed by the call to holiness, “Sin no more” (Jn 8:11).

Election too is inseparable from holiness:

“God has chosen you from the beginning for Salvation through Sanctification by the Spirit” (2Thes 2:13).

Sanctification is the earmark of Christ's elect sheep. That is why Election is always a comforting doctrine for the believer, for it is the sure foundation that explains the grace of God working within him. No wonder our Reformed forebears deemed election to be one of the believer's greatest comforts.

Calvin insisted that Election should discourage none, for the believer receives comfort from it, and the unbeliever is not called to

consider it; rather, he is called to Repentance. Whoever is discouraged by Election or relies upon Election without living a holy life is falling prey to a satanic misuse of this precious, encouraging doctrine (cf. Deut 29:29). As Ryle asserts,

It is not given to us in this world to study the pages of the book of life, and see if our names are there. But if there is one thing clearly and plainly laid down about election, it is this,—that elect men and women may be known and distinguished by holy lives.

Holiness is the visible side of their Salvation.

“You will know them by their fruits” (Mt 7:16-note).

Consequently, holiness fosters assurance (1Jn 2:3; 3:19). “Everyone may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof” (Heidelberg Catechism, Question 86). Reformed divines are agreed that most of the forms and degrees of assurance experienced by true believers—especially daily assurance—are reached gradually in the path of Sanctification through careful cultivation of God’s Word, the means of grace, and corresponding obedience. An increasing hatred of sin by means of mortification and a growing love to obey God by means of vivification accompany the progress of faith as it grows into assurance. Christ-centered, Spirit-worked holiness is the best and most sound evidence of divine sonship (Ro 8:1-see notes, Ro 8:2, 3-notes, Ro 8:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16).

The way to lose a daily sense of assurance is to forego the daily pursuit of holiness. Some believers live too carelessly. They treat sin lightly or neglect daily devotions and study of the Word. Others live too inertly. They do not cultivate holiness, but assume the posture that nothing can be done to foster Sanctification, as if holiness were something outside of us except on rare occasions when something very special “happens” inside. To live carelessly or inertly is to ask for daily spiritual darkness, deadness, and fruitlessness.

#### **4) As a believer, holiness alone can purify you.**

Conversely, “To those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure” (Titus 1:15-note). Holiness cannot be exercised where the heart has not been fundamentally transformed through divine Regeneration. Through the new birth, Satan is deposed, the law of God is written upon the heart of the believer, Christ is crowned Lord and King, and the believer made “desirous to obey God and live holy for Christ’s sake.” Christ in us (Christus in nobis) is an essential complement of Christ for us (Christus pro nobis). The Spirit of God not only teaches the believer what Christ has done, but actualizes the holiness and work of Christ in his personal life. Through Christ, God sanctifies His child and makes his prayers and thanksgivings acceptable. As Thomas Watson has noted: “A holy heart is the altar which sanctifies the offering; if not to satisfaction, to acceptance.”

#### **5) Holiness is essential for your effective service to God.**

Paul joins Sanctification and usefulness together: “If a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2Ti 2:21-note). Holiness is used by God to assist the preaching of the Gospel, to build up the credit of the Christian faith which is dishonored by the carelessness of Christians and hypocrites who often serve as Satan’s best allies. Our lives are always doing good or harm; they are open epistles for all to read (2Cor 3:2). Holy living preaches reality. It influences and impresses like nothing else can; no argument can match it. It displays the beauty of religion; it gives credibility to witness and to evangelism (Phil 2:15-note). “Holiness,” writes Hugh Morgan, “is the most effective way of influencing unconverted people and creating within them a willingness to listen to the preaching of the gospel” (Mt 5:16-note; 1Pe 3:1-note, 1Pe 3:2-note).

Holiness manifests itself in humility and reverence for God. Such are those whom God looks to and uses (Isaiah 66:2). As Andrew Murray notes:

The great test of whether the holiness we profess to seek or to attain is truth and life will be whether it be manifest in the increasing humility it produces. In the creature, humility is the one thing needed to allow God’s holiness to dwell in him and shine through him. In Jesus, the holy one of God who makes us holy, a divine humility was the secret of his life and his death and his exaltation; the one infallible test of our holiness will be the humility before God and men which marks us. Humility is the bloom and the beauty of holiness.

**6) Holiness fits you for heaven** (Rev 21:27-note). “Pursue ... Sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14-note).

As John Owen wrote:

There is no imagination wherewith man is besotted, more foolish, none so pernicious, as this—that persons not purified, not sanctified, not made holy in their life, should afterwards be taken into that state of blessedness which consists in the enjoyment of God. Neither can such persons enjoy God, nor would God be a reward to them. Holiness indeed is perfected in heaven: but the

beginning of it is invariably confined to this world. God leads none to heaven but whom He sanctifies on the earth. This living Head will not admit to dead members.

## **Obstacles to Cultivating Holiness**

The cultivation of holiness will inevitably meet with numerous obstacles. Much impedes holiness. Five common problems against which we need to be on guard are these:

### **1) Our attitude to sin and life is prone to be more self-centered than God-centered.**

We are often more concerned about the consequences of sin or victory over sin than about how our sins grieve God. Positive consequences and victory then wrongly become by-products of obedience and holiness. The cultivation of holiness necessitates hating sin as God hates sin. Holiness is not merely loving God and our neighbor; it also involves hatred. The hatred of sin is the essence of holiness. Those who love God hate sin (Prov. 8:36). We must cultivate an attitude of viewing sin as always being preeminently against God (Ps. 51:4).

Low and distorted views of sin reap low and distorted views of holiness. "Wrong views about holiness are generally traceable to wrong views about human corruption," J. C. Ryle asserted. "If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul's diseases, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies." Cultivating holiness demands a rejection of the pride of life and the lusts of the flesh as well as the prayer, "Give me the single eye, Thy Name to glorify" (Psalter 236, stanza 2).

We fail when we do not consciously live with our priorities centered on God's Word, will, and glory. In the words of the Scottish theologian, John Brown,

"Holiness does not consist in mystic speculations, enthusiastic fervours, or uncommanded austerities; it consists in thinking as God thinks, and willing as God wills."

### **2) Our progress is hindered when we misunderstand "living by faith" (Gal. 2:20) to imply that no effort towards holiness is commanded of us.**

Sometimes we are even prone to consider human effort sinful or "fleshly." Bishop Ryle provides us with a corrective here:

Is it wise to proclaim in so bald, naked, and unqualified a way as many do, that the holiness of converted people is by faith only, and not at all by personal exertion? Is this according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it. That faith in Christ is the root of all holiness no well-instructed Christian will ever think of denying. But surely the Scriptures teach us that in following holiness the true Christian needs personal exertion and work as well as faith.

We are responsible for holiness. Whose fault is it but our own if we are not holy? As Ralph Erskine counsels, we need to implement the fight-or-flight attitude with regard to sinful temptations. And sometimes we simply need to heed Peter's plain injunction, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul" (1Pe 2:11-note). Abstain—often it is that simple.

If you have put off the old man and put on the new (Eph 4:22-see notes, Eph 4:23, 24, 25, 26, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32), live accordingly (Col 3:9-note, Col 3:10-note). "Consider the members of your earthly body as dead," and seek those things which are above (Col 3:1-see notes, Col 3:2, 3, 4, 5), not as a form of legalism, but as a repercussion of divine blessing (Col 2:9-see notes, Col 2:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23). Make a covenant with your eyes and feet and hands to turn from iniquity (Job 31:1). Look the other way; walk the opposite way. Put away uncontrolled anger, gossip, and bitterness. Put sin to death (Ro 8:13-note) by the blood of Christ. "Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin," wrote Owen, "and thou wilt ... live to see thy lust dead at thy feet."

### **3) On the other hand, we fail miserably when we take pride in our holiness and think that our exertions can somehow produce holiness apart from faith.**

From beginning to end holiness is the work of God and His free grace (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 13). As Richard Sibbes maintained, "By grace we are what we are in Justification, and work what we work in Sanctification." Holiness is not partially God's work and partially our work. Holiness manufactured by our heart is not holiness after God's heart. All working out of the Christian life on our part is the fruit of God working in us and through us: "Work out your Salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-note, Phil 2:13-note).

"The regenerate have a spiritual nature within that fits them for holy action, otherwise there would be no difference between them and the unregenerate," wrote A. W. Pink.

Nevertheless, self-Sanctification, strictly speaking, is nonexistent. "We do good works, but not to merit by them (for what can we



merit?), nay, we are beholden to God for the good works we do, and not he to us" (Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 24).

As Calvin explained,

"Holiness is not a merit by which we can attain communion with God, but a gift of Christ which enables us to cling to him and to follow him."

John Murray put it this way:

God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did his part and we did ours... God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work.

**And every virtue we possess,  
And every conquest won,  
And every thought of holiness,  
Are His alone.**

**Kenneth Prior** warns:

There is a subtle danger of speaking of Sanctification as essentially coming from our own effort or initiative. We can unconsciously do this even while acknowledging our need for the power of the Holy Spirit, by making the operation of that power dependent upon our surrender and consecration.

Our dependence on God for holiness ought to humble us. Holiness and humility are inseparable. Not least of what they have in common is that neither one recognizes itself. The most holy complain of their impurity; the most humble, of their pride. Those of us who are called to be teachers and examples of holiness must beware of subtle and insidious pride working its way into our supposed holiness.

**Holiness is greatly impeded by any number of wrong views of holiness in its relation to humility.** For example:

- (1) As soon as we think, speak, or act as if our own holiness will somehow suffice us, without being clothed upon with Christ's humility, we are already enveloped by spiritual pride.
- (2) When we begin to feel complacent with our holiness, we may be sure we are far from both holiness and humility.
- (3) When self-abasement is lacking, holiness is lacking.
- (4) When self-abasement does not make us to flee to Christ and His holiness for refuge, holiness is lacking.
- (5) Without a dependent life on Christ, we shall possess no holiness.

#### **4) Embracing unscriptural, erroneous views about holiness can greatly impede our holiness.**

The need to experience "the second blessing," an earnest search for our own special gift of the Spirit or to exercise various charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues or faith healing, and the acceptance of Jesus as Savior but not as Lord—these are but a few of the many erroneous interpretations of Scripture which can skew a proper understanding of biblical holiness in our lives. Though addressing these issues lies beyond the scope of this article, allow me to quote three summary statements. Concerning the first error mentioned above, H. A. Ironside quips:

Far from being 'the second blessing,' subsequent to justification, [holiness] is a work apart from which none ever would be saved.

Or, to put it another way: It is not just the second blessing that the believer needs, but he needs a second blessing, as well as a third and fourth and fifth—yes, he needs the continual blessing of the Holy Spirit in order to progress in holiness so that Christ may increase and he may decrease (Jn 3:30).

Concerning the second error mentioned above, John Stott wisely comments that

when Paul wrote to the Corinthians that they were not lacking in spiritual gifts (1Cor 1:7), he makes it clear that the evidence of the Spirit's fullness is not the exercise of His gifts (of which they had plenty), but the ripening of His fruit (of which they had little).

And with regard to the third error of separating the Savior from His lordship, the Heidelberg Catechism provides a summary corrective in Question 30:

One of these two things must be true, that either Jesus is not a complete Savior or that they, who by a true faith receive this Savior,

must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation.

### **5) We are prone to shirk the battle of daily spiritual warfare.**

No one likes war. The believer is often blind to his real enemies—to a subtle Satan, to a tempting world, and especially to the reality of his own ongoing pollution which Paul so poignantly expresses in Romans 7:14-see notes, Ro 7:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25.

To be holy among the holy takes grace; to be holy among the unholy is great grace. Maintaining personal holiness in an unholy world with a heart prone to backslide necessitates a perpetual fight. It will involve conflict, holy warfare, struggle against Satan, a battle between the flesh and the spirit (Gal 5:17). A believer not only has peace of conscience, but also war within (Ro 7:24-note, Ro 7:25-note, Ro 8:1-note).

As Samuel Rutherford asserts,

“The devil’s war is better than the devil’s peace.”

Hence the remedies of Christ’s holiness (Heb 7:25, 26, 27,28-see notes) and of His Spirit-supplied Christian armor (Eph 6:10-see notes, Eph 6:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20) are ignored at our peril. True holiness must be pursued against the backdrop of an acute awareness of indwelling sin which continues to live in our hearts and to deceive our understanding. The holy man, unlike others, is never at peace with indwelling sin. Though he may backslide far, he will again be humbled and ashamed because of his sin.

## **The Joy of Holiness Cultivated**

A holy life ought to be one of joy in the Lord, not negative drudgery (Neh. 8:10). The idea that holiness requires a gloomy disposition is a tragic distortion of Scripture. On the contrary, Scripture asserts that those who cultivate holiness experience true joy. Jesus said,

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s command, and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you that your joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full (John 15:10,11).

Those who are obedient—who are pursuing holiness as a way of life—will know the joy that flows from communion with God: a supreme joy, an ongoing joy, an anticipated joy.

### **1) The supreme joy: fellowship with God.**

No greater joy can be had than communion with God. “In Thy presence is fulness of joy” (Ps 16:11). True joy springs from God as we are enabled to walk in fellowship with Him. When we disfellowship ourselves from God by sin, we need to return with penitential prayer to Him as did David: “Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation” (Ps 51:12-[see notes](#)). The words Jesus spoke to the thief on the cross represent the chief delight of every child of God: “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

### **2) The ongoing joy: abiding assurance.**

True holiness obeys God, and obedience always trusts God. It believes, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God” (Ro 8:28-note)—even when it cannot be seen. Like faithful workers on a Persian carpet, who blindly hand up all colors of strand to the overseer who works out the pattern above them, God’s intimate saints are those who hand Him even the black strands He calls for, knowing that His pattern will be perfect from above, notwithstanding the gnarled mess underneath. Do you too know this profound, childlike trust in believing the words of Jesus: “What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter” (Jn 13:7)? That is ongoing, stabilizing joy which surpasses understanding. Holiness reaps joyous contentment; “godliness actually is a means of great gain” (1Ti 6:6).

### **3) The anticipated joy: eternal, gracious reward.**

Jesus was motivated to endure His sufferings by anticipating the joy of His reward (Heb 12:1-note, Heb 12:2-note). Believers too may look forward to entering into the joy of their Lord as they pursue holiness throughout their lives in the strength of Christ. By grace, they may joyously anticipate their eternal reward: “Well done, good and faithful slave... Enter into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:21, 23). As John Whitlock noted:

Here is the Christian’s way and his end—his way is holiness, his end, happiness.

Holiness is its own reward, for everlasting glory is holiness perfected.

The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 37).

But also their bodies shall be raised immortal and incorruptible, perfect in holiness, complete in Glorification (1Co 15:49, 53).

Finally, the believer shall be what he has desired to be ever since his Regeneration—perfectly holy in a triune God. He shall enter into the eternal glory of Jesus Christ as a son of God and fellow heir with Him (Phil 3:20,21; Ro 8:17-note). He shall finally be like Christ, holy and without spot or wrinkle” (Eph 5:25-note, Eph 5:26-note, Eph 5:27-note), eternally magnifying and exalting the unfathomable bounties of God’s sovereign grace.

Truly, as Calvin stated,

the thought of the great nobility God has conferred upon us ought to whet our desire for holiness.

### Concluding Application

I once read of a missionary who had in his garden a shrub that bore poisonous leaves. At that time he had a child who was prone to put anything within reach into his mouth. Naturally he dug the shrub out and threw it away. The shrub’s roots, however, were very deep. Soon the shrub sprouted again. Repeatedly the missionary had to dig it out. There was no solution but to inspect the ground every day, and to dig up the shrub every time it surfaced. Indwelling sin is like that shrub. It needs constant uprooting. Our hearts need continual mortification.

As John Owen warns us:

We must be exercising [mortification] every day, and in every duty. Sin will not die, unless it be constantly weakened. Spare it, and it will heal its wounds, and recover its strength.

We must continually watch against the operations of this principle of sin: in our duties, in our calling, in conversation, in retirement, in our straits, in our enjoyments, and in all that we do. If we are negligent on any occasion, we shall suffer by it; every mistake, every neglect is perilous.

Press on, true believer, in the uprooting of sin and the cultivation of holiness. Continue to fight the good fight of faith under the best of generals—Jesus Christ, with the best of internal advocates—the Holy Spirit, by the best of assurances—the promises of God; for the best of results—everlasting glory.

Have you been persuaded that cultivating holiness is worth the price of saying “no” to sin and “yes” to God? Do you know the joy of walking in God’s ways? The joy of experiencing Jesus’ easy yoke and light burden? The joy of not belonging to yourself, but belonging to your “faithful Savior Jesus Christ,” who makes you “sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him” (Heidelberg Catechism, Question 1)? Are you holy? Thomas Brooks gives us sixteen marks on “how we shall know whether we have real holiness.” The list includes these: The holy believer “admires the holiness of God; possesses diffusive holiness that spreads itself over head and heart, lip and life, inside and outside; stretches himself after higher degrees of holiness; hates and detests all ungodliness and wickedness; grieves over his own vileness and unholiness.”

It is a daunting list, yet a biblical one. No doubt we all fall far short, but the question remains: Are we striving for these marks of holiness?

Perhaps you respond, “Who is adequate for these things” (2Co 2:16)? Paul’s ready answer is, “Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves but our adequacy is from God” (2Co 3:5). “Would you be holy? ... Then you must begin with Christ... Would you continue holy? Then abide in Christ.”

“Holiness is not the way to Christ;  
Christ is the way of holiness.”

Outside of Christ there is no holiness. Then every list of marks of holiness must condemn us to hell. Ultimately, of course, holiness is not a list; it is more than a list—it is a life, a life in Jesus Christ. Holiness in believers proves that they are joined to Christ, for sanctified obedience is impossible without Him. But in Christ, the call to holiness is within the context of sola gratia (grace alone) and sola fide (faith alone). “If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared” (Ps 130:3-note, Ps 130:4-note).

“Since Christ cannot be known apart from the Sanctification of the Spirit,” Calvin writes, “it follows that faith can in no wise be separated from a devout disposition.”

Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, holiness, grace, and faith are inseparable. Make it your prayer:

“Lord, grant that I will cultivate holiness today—not out of merit, but out of gratitude, by Thy grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Sanctify me by the blood of Christ, the Spirit of Christ, and the Word of God.”

Pray with Robert Murray M'Cheyne,

“Lord, make me as Holy as a pardoned sinner can be.”