

Sanctification, Part 1 of 3

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Introduction

Passages using the term "sanctification" in the NT:

Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3,4,7; 5:23;
2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:2

WSC # 35: "What is sanctification? 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."

The image of God – distorted and broken by the fall, but now being progressively renewed in Christ and by the Spirit (Gen. 1:26; Col. 3:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 3:5).

Two-age eschatology – the framework of the already and the not-yet. We are already dead to sin and alive to God in union with Christ, yet we must still put death our members which are on the earth. The tension of the already and the not-yet explains why we still struggle with sin and temptation. Spiritually we are already raised with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly places (the already), but we still live in the flesh as we groan in this tent and long for the resurrection of our mortal bodies (not yet).

Errors regarding Sanctification

A. Views that emphasize sanctification at the expense of justification

1. Confusing justification and sanctification

According to the Roman Catholic Church, justification is a process by which the believer is actually made righteous. "Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1989, citing the Council of Trent).

Critique: This position fails to recognize that sanctification is imperfect and therefore cannot be the basis of our acceptance before God.

Calvin: "But as it is too well known by experience, that the remains of sin always exist in the righteous, it is necessary that justification should be something very different from reformation to newness of life. This latter God begins in his elect, and carries on during the whole course of life, gradually and sometimes slowly, so that if placed at his judgment-seat they would always deserve sentence of death" (*Institutes*, III.xi.11).

Charles Hodge: "Again, justification according to the Scriptures gives a title to eternal life. For this our own righteousness is utterly inadequate. So far from anything in us being meritorious, or entitled to reward, the inward state and the exercises of the holiest of men, come so far short of perfection as to merit condemnation. In us there is no good thing. There is ever a law in our members warring against the law of the mind. Indwelling sin remains. It forced even Paul to cry out, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death.' (Rom. 7:24). 'No believer ever performed one work which, if tested by the strict judgment of God, could escape condemnation.' (Calvin, *Institutes* III.xiv.11) ... If these fruits [of regeneration] are, as our consciousness testifies, defiled by sin, how can they merit eternal life? How can they cancel the handwriting which is against us? How can they be the ground of Paul's confident challenge, 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?' It is not what is within us, but what is without us; not what we are or do, but what Christ is and has done, that is the ground of confidence and of our title to eternal life." (*Systematic Theology*, vol. III, p. 131)

That is why Paul clearly distinguishes between justification and sanctification (Rom. 5:1ff; 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11).

WLC # 77: "Wherein do justification and sanctification differ? Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputes the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuses grace, and enables to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection."

| Justification | Sanctification |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Imputation | Transformation |
| Once-for-all | Progressive |
| Perfect | Imperfect in this life |
| External Righteousness | Inherent righteousness |

2. Entire sanctification or Perfectionism (Wesley)

In the 18th century John Wesley taught the necessity of a second work of grace, after conversion, in which a person achieves what he called "entire sanctification." In this state of entire sanctification, one has perfect love for God untainted by conscious sin.

Critique: The NT does not teach a two-stage theory of the Christian life: conversion, followed by a second work of grace. The passage most frequently used to support this is Romans 6-8 – with the turning point occurring at 8:1 – but this is a misinterpretation of the passage. The Wesleyan theory does not work in practice. It leads to one of two possibilities. The sensitive Christian will never be certain that he has

achieved entire sanctification, for he will always be sensitive to his continued sinfulness. This will lead to discouragement in the Christian life and lack of assurance. The pharisaic Christian will claim that he has achieved entire sanctification and will try to explain away and justify his sinfulness – it wasn't a conscious sin, or it was only a sinful thought but not a sinful action, or I'm not really guilty of sin because it was just my flesh that did it, not my heart. In my experience such super-spirituality breeds self-deception and hypocrisy.

3. Sanctification by the law

"The progressive sanctification of the Christian life ... is inseparably tied to the law of God ... The means of grace which are calculated to build us up in the faith are ineffective without obedience to the law. In short, the law is indispensable in sanctification" (Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pp. 177, 181).

Most Reformed theologians state that the law is merely the standard of sanctification, defining the obedience that God requires. But other Reformed theologians take this a step further and teach that the law is a means of grace. Although it is the Spirit who provides the empowerment to obey, the law is one of the means that God uses to restrain our corruption, mortify the flesh, and progressively make us more holy. This is not legalism (justification by the law) but nomism (sanctification by the law).

Critique: Paul says that the law cannot sanctify, and that it in fact stirs up sin (Rom. 7). Sanctification is by faith and by virtue of union with Christ in his death and resurrection, not the law. The promises and threats of the law, the law as a covenant of works, are abolished along with the old covenant. In the new covenant, sanctification is by grace through faith and by the Spirit transforming us from within to be more and more like Christ.

B. Views that emphasize justification at the expense of sanctification

1. Antinomianism

John Saltmarsh said that the believer should not pray for pardon of sin, since he is reckoned as perfectly righteous in Christ. John Eaton said that God does not see any sin in the Christian, since he is clothed with the covering of Christ's righteousness. The label "Antinomian" was actually somewhat of a slander, since they did not deny the importance of obeying the moral law. However, their emphasis on justification did lead to a downplaying of the need to pursue progressive sanctification. They did not call Christians to pursue holiness, because they believed that holiness and obedience would spontaneously flow from a renewed heart without any need for external commands or imperatives.

Critique: The NT teaches that the sins that we commit as Christians are real and that we need to confess them (1 John 1:7-10). Although they cannot bring us back under the wrath of God, our sins are not ignored by God. It is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30), to be in need of

God's fatherly discipline (Heb. 12). Moreover, the NT is replete with moral imperatives and exhortations to pursue holiness, thus contradicting the Antinomian view that such exhortations are not needed.

2. Non-Lordship Salvation

This contemporary view is more radical than 17th century Antinomianism. It is held by some, not all, Dispensationalists. Zane Hodges rejects the idea that one must submit to Jesus as Lord in order to be saved. He reduces faith to mental assent to the gospel and argues that once a person prays the sinner's prayer, he or she is saved forever and cannot lose that salvation, even if they turn away from Christ and stop professing faith in him. Sanctification, obedience, and holiness are not necessary for salvation. These things are optional. Of course you should want to do them, because you will receive additional rewards in heaven. The Non-Lordship Salvation view is also associated with the "carnal Christian" theory.

Critique: All those whom God justifies, he also sanctifies (Rom. 6:1-5). Sanctification is necessary, not optional (Heb. 12:14). Those who give themselves over to the flesh do not have the Spirit and do not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9-13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 6:7-8; Eph. 5:5).

3. Lutheranism

"Sanctification is ... simply the art of getting used to justification. It is not something added to justification" (Gerhard O. Forde, in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, p. 13). It's what I call "Law-Gospel" ping-pong. The law convicts you of your sin and drives you to Christ in order to be justified. But then, having been justified, Christ sends you back to the law again in order to inform you of your Christian duty. Of course, you try to keep the law for a while, but you ultimately fail. The law convicts you of your sin again and drives you to Christ again. Where does sanctification fit into this "Law-Gospel" ping-pong?

Critique: The NT clearly teaches that there is more to the Christian life than getting used to your justification, or constantly bouncing back and forth from the law to the gospel, and from the gospel to the law. There is a real process of spiritual change and growth that we are to expect.

Metaphors that teach concept of progressive transformation and renewal:

Transformation: Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:18

Renewal: Titus 3:5

New Creation: 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15

Flesh-Spirit conflict: Rom. 8:1-14; Gal. 5:16-18

New Man: Eph. 4:17-24; Col. 3:9-10

Fruit-bearing: John 15:4-5, 8, 16; Rom. 7:4-6; Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 1:9-10

Good works: Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:11-14

Spiritual growth: Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18