



Ordo Salutis (Order of Salvation)

Lesson 6: Sanctification

Key Verse: Hebrews 10:14

“For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Introduction

In salvation all those whom God has elected are regenerated, converted, justified, and adopted into His family. At the moment of regeneration, the sinner is made alive, granted repentance and faith (conversion), forgiven and declared righteous on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ (justification), and adopted into the family of God (adoption). This all happens simultaneously. There is another aspect in the application of redemption that begins at regeneration and that is sanctification. However, although sanctification begins at regeneration, where God separates the believer unto Himself, it is applied throughout the entirety of the Christian’s life where God makes him increasingly holy.

Three Stages of Sanctification

The word sanctification (Gk. *hagiasmos*) means “separation” or “a setting apart.”¹ The dominant idea of sanctification is separation from the secular and sinful and setting apart for a sacred purpose.² When most Christians talk about sanctification, they are referring to the progression in the believer’s life whereby they are growing in holiness and becoming more like Christ. However, while that is true, there is more to sanctification than just growth. Sanctification is a reference to initial salvation, then to progressively growing in Christlikeness, and ultimately to final sanctification and glorification.³ Therefore, sanctification can be broken down into three stages—positional, progressive, and perfected sanctification.

Positional Sanctification: Sanctification is primarily understood to be a process in which we, as believers, are conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). However, that process has a definite beginning at the moment of regeneration. This is referred to as positional sanctification by which we have been “set apart” from the world unto God. This is the past-tense aspect of sanctification that began at regeneration. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” Positional sanctification happened when “the old things passed away.” This was the moment when we were set free from the power of sin (Rom. 6:2) and able to live in obedience to Christ, whereas before salvation we were slaves of sin (John 8:34; Rom. 6:6) unable to please God (Rom. 7:5, 8:8).

As those who have been regenerated, sin is no longer our master as it was before regeneration. Therefore, because of the power of the Holy Spirit and the resurrection life of Christ working within us, we now have the power to overcome temptation and the enticement of sin.⁴ This means, although we

¹ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, R.K. Harrison, ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 1124.

² *Ibid.*

³ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen. eds. *Biblical Doctrines: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 936.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 747.

will never become perfect, we should never give the excuse of being defeated by sin and give up. To give up is to deny the truth of Scripture that tells us, “sin shall not be master over you” (Rom. 6:14).

Progressive Sanctification: The sanctification that began at regeneration is something that continues throughout the entirety of our Christian life. Although the penalty of sin is paid for and the power of sin is broken, the presence of sin still remains in our flesh (Rom. 7:14) and must be continuously put to death (Rom. 6:11–12, 8:13). Believers are not to be conforming themselves to the world but are to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). The continual, progressive nature of sanctification is substantiated in the Bible’s numerous calls to holiness in the present tense, indicating ongoing, continuous action (Rom. 6:19).⁵

The Christian life is characterized by putting to death the deeds of the body. Since this will never come to final perfection while here on earth, this is something that continues until death. Paul spoke about the imperfection of his own sanctification in Philippians 3:12 saying, “Not that I have already obtained *it* [being like Christ] or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” The old self was put off once for all at conversion, but the new self is continuously “being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Col. 3:10). The Holy Spirit’s work in our lives will cause us to increase in sanctification until death.

Perfected Sanctification: Just as sanctification began at regeneration and will continue throughout our life, it will come to completion either at the end of our life when we are glorified or when we see Christ face-to-face. First John 3:2 says, “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

For all those who have died in Christ before His return, the perfection of sanctification comes in two stages: the soul is fully sanctified at death, while the body awaits its perfected sanctification at the second coming of Christ. When believers pass from this present life, their soul is separated from their bodies and is present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). The author of Hebrews refers to them as “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (12:23). However, Christ did not provide half salvation. Christ died to redeem both spirit and body (Rom. 8:23).⁶ Paul says in Philippians 3:20–21, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.” This perfect transformation of our bodies will happen when Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:51–53).

Key Verses:

1. 1 Peter 1:1–2. What happens to all who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God? _____

2. 1 Corinthians 6:11. What does Paul say about the believers? _____
3. Romans 6:19. How is a believer sanctified? _____

4. 1 Peter 2:2. How does a believer grow in respect to salvation? _____

⁵ *Biblical Doctrines*, 635.

⁶ *Ibid*, 636.

5. 2 Corinthians 5:8. What happens at the moment of physical death? _____

6. Philippians 3:20–21. When will we have a perfect soul and body? _____

The Differences Between Justification and Sanctification

Sanctification is connected with justification in that both benefits are enjoyed when we are united to Christ. However, sanctification is not to be confused with justification as it is in Roman Catholic theology. Justification is a once-for-all judicial declaration of righteousness that defines man’s legal standing before God. Sanctification, although it begins at the moment of justification, is a gradual, ongoing transformation of our nature.⁷ In justification, Christ has secured forensic righteousness *for* the believer. In sanctification, the Spirit progressively works practical righteousness *in* the believer.

The following table lists the difference between justification and sanctification:⁸

<u>Justification</u>	<u>Sanctification</u>
A legal standing	An internal condition
Once for all time	Continuous throughout life
Entirely God’s work	We cooperate with God
Perfect in this life	Not perfect in this life
The same in all Christians	Greater in some than in others

God’s Work in Progressive Sanctification

Christians are commanded by God to pursue holiness. However, we cannot do this apart from God’s work in us. Fundamentally, sanctification is a supernatural work of God in the inner nature of man. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely.” He also tells the Philippians, “it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). In sanctification, God not only causes us to want His will done in our lives, but He also gives us the power to do it.

Christ also earned sanctification for us. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 it says, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” Moreover, Christ is also the example for us as we run the race of the Christian life. First Peter 2:21 says, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.”

More specifically, Scripture identifies God the Holy Spirit who works within us to sanctify us and grow us in holiness in life. Peter speaks of, “the sanctifying work of the Spirit” in 1 Peter 1:2. Paul identifies the Spirit as “the Spirit of holiness” in Romans 1:4. While it is the Spirit who wages war against the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:17), it is the Spirit who produces the fruit of holiness in our lives (Gal. 5:22–

⁷ *Ibid*, 632.

⁸ *Systematic Theology*, 747.

23). Therefore, Paul says that our transformation into the image of Christ comes from “the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Our Role in Sanctification

While sanctification is properly said to be an internal work of the Spirit, we play a role in it that is both passive and active. Unfortunately, the passive role is so strongly emphasized in churches today that it is the only thing people are told about. This happens through the popular phrase “let go and let God.” This, however, is a distortion of the doctrine of sanctification. God repeatedly calls us to give effort, action, and obedience to His commands. Paul commands us in Philippians 2:12, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” While God works in us, we must also work it out. Scottish Puritan, Henry Scougal, gives an effective illustration:

“All the art and industry of man cannot form the smallest herb, or make a stalk of corn to grow in the field; it is the energy of nature, and the influences of heaven, which produce this effect; it is God “who causeth the grass to grow, and the herb for the service of man” (Ps. 104:14); and yet nobody will say that the labours of the [farmer] are useless or unnecessary.”⁹

In other words, while God causes the grass to grow and makes the land produce its crops, it is only a foolish farmer who would wait passively for the land to produce crops by divine fiat. Instead, he understands that God brings forth the crops by means of the farmer’s labors. The same is true in sanctification. Only a foolish person waits passively for his heart to spring forth in righteousness by divine fiat. However, the faithful Christian acknowledges that God brings forth the fruit of holiness by means of the believer’s labors.

What are the means of sanctification?¹⁰

1. Reading and meditating on God’s Word. (Ps. 1:1–2; John 17:17)
2. Praying (Ps. 119:37; Luke 11:9; Heb. 4:16)
3. Fellowship with the saints in the context of the local church (Prov. 27:17; Eph. 4:11–16; Heb. 10:24–25)
4. Understanding our experiences in light of God’s providence (Rom. 8:28–29), especially in our trials (Ps. 119:71; Rom. 5:3–5; James 1:2–4)
5. Obeying God’s commandments (Rom. 6:17–19, 22)

Key Verses:

1. Romans 8:12–13. What does Paul say about those who live by the Spirit? _____

2. Philippians 2:12–13. What does Paul command us to do? _____

3. Hebrews 12:14. What are we to pursue? _____

Application

1. Are you putting yourself under the means of sanctification?

⁹ Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man: Real Religion* (1677; repr., Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 78–79.

¹⁰ *Biblical Doctrines*, 641.