

SANCTIFICATION

1. Definition.

- a. To sanctify means to set aside someone or something for a special purpose or use.
 - (1) God himself.
 - (2) The Sabbath day.
 - (a) **Ge 2:3** 3 God blessed the seventh day and set it apart (שָׁדַק), because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.
 - (3) Firstborn sons.
 - (a) **Ex 13:2** 2 Set apart (שָׁדַק) to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine.
 - (4) The nation of Israel.
 - (a) **Ex 31:13** 13 ... You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, Yahweh, set you apart (שָׁדַק).
 - (b) **Le 20:7-8** 7 Set yourselves apart (שָׁדַק)...and be holy (שְׁדֻקָּה). For I am Yahweh your God. 8 Keep my statutes and observe them. I am Yahweh. I set you apart (שָׁדַק).
 - (5) The Jewish priests.
 - (6) The temple in Jerusalem.
 - (a) **2 Ch 36:14** 14 All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of Yahweh that he had set apart (שָׁדַק) in Jerusalem.
- b. The sanctification word group is flexible.
 - (1) In phase one, the believer is set apart as positionally holy.
 - (2) In phase two, the believer is in the process of becoming experientially holy.
 - (3) In phase three, the believer is set apart as holy in an ultimate and eternal sense.
- c. Usually, “sanctification” refers to experiential sanctification, as explained below.
- d. Similar concepts are:
 - (1) Spiritual formation.
 - (2) Discipleship.

2. Three Phases.

- a. Charles C. Ryrie:
 - (1) “The word sanctify basically means to set apart. It has the same root as the words saint and holy. For the Christian, sanctification includes three aspects. The first is called positional or definitive sanctification, which relates to the position every believer enjoys by virtue of being set apart as a member of God’s family through faith in Christ. This is true for all believers regardless of different degrees of spiritual growth. Paul addressed the carnal Christians with all of their sinful practices as sanctified (and thus as saints, 1 Cor. 1:2; see also 6:11 where the verbs indicate accomplished facts, not something to be attained). The second aspect of sanctification concerns the present experiential or progressive work of continuing to be set apart during the whole of our Christian lives. Every command and exhortation to holy living concerns progressive sanctification (1 Pet. 1:16). The third aspect is usually called ultimate sanctification, which we will attain in

heaven when we shall be completely and eternally set apart to our God (Eph. 5:26–27; Jude 24–25).”

- (2) In other words, phase one sanctification is “positional sanctification.” Phase two sanctification is “experiential sanctification.” Phase three sanctification is “ultimate sanctification.”
- b. We usually can tell which phase of sanctification a biblical author refers to by observing a verb’s tense and mood.
 - (1) If ἁγιάζω is used in the aorist or perfect tense and indicative mood, the author likely refers to phase one sanctification.
 - (2) If ἁγιάζω is used in the present tense or the imperative or subjunctive mood, the author likely refers to phase two sanctification.
 - (3) The command to “be holy,” for example, always refers to believers in phase two. This is because there is nothing for an unbeliever to do in phase one but believe in Jesus. By contrast, there are many imperatives for the believer in phase two, one of which is to “be holy.”

3. Positional Sanctification (Phase One).

- a. Our positional sanctification is instantaneous at the moment of faith in Jesus.
- b. The agents of our positional sanctification are:
 - (1) The Son.
 - (a) **He 10:10** 10 ...It is by God’s desire that we have been set apart (ἁγιάζω, perf. pass.) through the offering of the body of Jesus Messiah once for all.
 - (2) The Holy Spirit.
 - (a) **2 Th 2:13** 13 ...We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification (ἁγιασμός) by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.
 - (3) Not us!
- c. Our positional sanctification is permanent and irrevocable.
- d. Just as Israel was positionally set apart so are believers.
 - (1) **Le 20:7-8** 7 Set yourselves apart (ἁγιάζω)...and be holy (ἁγιάζω). For I am Yahweh your God. 8 Keep my statutes and observe them. I am Yahweh. I set you apart (ἁγιάζω).
 - (2) **Dt 7:6** 6 ...You are a people holy to Yahweh your God. Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.
- e. Every believer is a saint, a “sanctified one.”
- f. Our positional sanctification provides the context for our experiential sanctification.
 - (1) **Re 22:11** 11 Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy (ἅγιος) still be holy (ἁγιάζω, aor. pass.).
 - (2) We are to live differently than we used to live because we are different than we used to be. We are to live holy because we are holy.
- g. Application.
 - (1) Correctly identify when a biblical author is referring to positional sanctification.
 - (2) Don’t confuse positional sanctification with experiential sanctification.
 - (3) Rejoice in your positional sanctification, especially that you can’t lose it.

4. Ultimate Sanctification (Phase Three).

- a. Ultimately, every believer will be holy and blameless before God.
 - (1) **Eph 1:3-4** 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Messiah, who has blessed us in Messiah with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy (ἅγιος) and blameless before him.
- b. Ultimately, Jesus will present the church to himself as a sanctified bride.
 - (1) **Eph 5:25-27** 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Messiah loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 in order to sanctify (ἁγιάζω) her by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, 27 so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot, wrinkle, or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be sanctified (ἅγιος) and without blemish.
- c. Ultimate sanctification occurs when we receive our resurrection body and enter the Messianic kingdom.
- d. In the new universe, we will always be eternally sanctified to the Trinity.
- e. Perhaps there is a progress aspect of our ultimate sanctification in phase three.
- f. Application.
 - (1) Rejoice that, whatever happens in this life, we will be set apart to God in the next.

5. Experiential Sanctification (Phase Two).

- a. This phase may be called “sanctification proper” because it is normally what we mean when we speak of “sanctification.”
- b. Experiential sanctification is the day-to-day, operational, practical development of Jesus-likeness in a believer.
 - (1) **Ro 12:1** 1 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy (ἅγιος) and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
 - (a) **Ro 6:4** 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Messiah was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
 - (2) **1 Th 4:1-7** 1 Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the desire of God, your sanctification (ἁγιασμός): that you abstain from fornication; 4 that each one of you know how to control your own body in sanctification (ἁγιασμός) and honor (τιμὴ), 5 not with lustful passion, like the [Gentile] nations who do not know God; 6 that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God did not call us to impurity but in sanctification (ἁγιασμός).
 - (a) **2 Co 3:18** 18 ... 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.

- (3) **1 Pe 1:14-16** 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy (ἅγιος), you also be holy (ἅγιος) in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, You shall be holy (ἅγιος), for I am holy (ἅγιος).
- (4) Sanctification is the process of becoming a normal human being again, the person we were truly created by God to be.
- c. In the Old Testament, the Israelite were to live in a sanctified way.
- (1) **Le 11:44-45** 44 For I am Yahweh your God. Sanctify (שׁדק) yourselves therefore, and be holy (שׁדק), for I am holy (שׁדק). You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. 45 For I am Yahweh who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy (שׁדק), for I am holy (שׁדק).
- (2) **Le 20:7-8** 7 Set yourselves apart (שׁדק)...and be holy (שׁדק). For I am Yahweh your God. 8 Keep my statutes and observe them. I am Yahweh. I set you apart (שׁדק).
- d. Unlike positional sanctification and ultimate sanctification, experiential sanctification happens progressively from the moment of faith in Jesus to the moment of our physical death or the rapture.
- (1) **2 Co 7:1** 1 Because we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness (ἁγιωσύνη) to completion in the fear of God.
- (2) “Sanctification is not an instantaneous affair. It takes time and discipline, guarding one’s eyes and thought life, staying away from certain places, minding even what sort of clothing you wear and music you listen to.”¹
- (3) “When I speak of growth in grace, I only mean increase in the degree, size, strength, vigor and power—of the graces which the Holy Spirit plants in a believer’s heart. I hold that every one of those graces admits of growth, progress and increase. I hold that repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, zeal, courage and the like—may be little or great, strong or weak, vigorous or feeble—and may vary greatly in the same man at different periods of his life. When I speak of a man growing in grace, I mean simply that his sense of sin is becoming deeper, his faith is becoming stronger, his hope is becoming brighter, his love is becoming more extensive, his spiritual-mindedness is becoming more marked, he feels more of the power of godliness in his own heart—and he manifests more of it in his life. He is going on from strength to strength, from faith to faith and from grace to grace. I leave it to others to describe such a man’s condition by any words they please. For myself I think the truest and best account of him is this—he is growing in grace.”²
- e. God intends experiential sanctification for every believer.
- f. The agents of experiential sanctification are:
- (1) God the Father.
- (a) **Jn 17:17** 17 Sanctify (ἁγιάζω, aor.) [my disciples] in the truth. Your word is truth.

¹ William L. Craig, *Reasonable Response*, 346.

² J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*.

- (b) **1 Th 5:23-24** 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify (ἀγιάζω, aor.) you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Messiah. 24 He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it.
- (2) God the Son.
 - (a) **Jn 17:19** 19 And for their sake I sanctify (ἀγιάζω, pres.) myself, that they also may be sanctified (ἀγιάζω, perf. pass.) in truth.
- (3) God the Holy Spirit.
 - (a) Prayer.
 - (b) Living by the Spirit.
 - (c) Guidance.
- (4) God's word.
 - (a) Inductive Bible study.
 - (b) Preaching and teaching.
- (5) God's people.
 - (a) Every believer need their groupings of 120, 12, 3, and 1
- (6) Ourselves.
 - (a) **2 Co 7:1** 1 Because we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness (ἀγιωσύνη) to completion in the fear of God.
- g. Experiential sanctification is by grace, not law.
 - (1) "...[W]e are saved by believing the gospel, and then we are transformed in every part of our mind, heart, and life by believing the gospel more and more deeply as our life goes on."³
 - (2) "Preach the gospel to yourself every day."
- h. Sinless perfection, that is, total Jesus-likeness, is not possible in phase two.
 - (1) **Php 3:1-14** 12 Not that I [Paul] have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Messiah Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Messiah Jesus.
 - (2) "They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. Also those who contend that some may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin."⁴
- i. Spiritual maturity, not sinless perfection, is the goal.
 - (1) See *Spiritual Maturity*.

6. Enemies.

- a. Flesh.
 - (1) Believers who are living by the flesh cannot progress in experiential sanctification.
- b. Satan.
 - (1) Satan cannot touch our positional sanctification or ultimate sanctification.

³ Tim Keller, quoted in Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 273.

⁴ Philipp Melancthon, *The Augsburg Confession*.

- (2) But he can, by God's allowance, impact our experiential sanctification.
- c. World system.
 - (1) We are positionally different from the world, so we are to live differently than the world.
 - (2) Sanctification is the process of thinking, speaking, and acting like Jesus and therefore differently than the world around us.

7. Failure.

- a. We may fail in our venture of sanctification.
 - (1) "From long experience and observation, I am inclined to think that whoever finds redemption in the blood of Jesus—whoever is justified—has the choice of walking in the higher or lower path. I believe the Holy Spirit at that time sets before him 'the more excellent way' ...to aspire after the heights and depths of holiness—the entire image of God. But if he does not accept this offer, he insensibly declines to the lower order of Christians."⁵
- b. As believers, we tend to drift away from the sanctified life.
 - (1) "People do not drift toward Holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."⁶
- c. If we fail, we:
 - (1) Disappoint God.
 - (2) Become a useless Christian.
 - (3) Receive divine discipline, even the sin unto death.
 - (4) Lose rewards at the judgement seat of Messiah.
 - (5) Suffer extreme regret.

8. Benefits.

- a. Jesus' public commendation.
- b. Rewards in time and eternity.
- c. Satisfaction knowing you have fulfilled God's plan for your life.

⁵ John Wesley.

⁶ D. A. Carson.

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