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### **Christ as Sanctifier**

The Christian and Missionary Alliance's doctrinal statement declares, "It is the will of God that each believer should be filled with the Holy Spirit and be sanctified wholly, being separated from sin and the world and fully dedicated to the will of God, thereby receiving power for holy living and effective service. This is both a crisis and a progressive experience wrought in the life of the believer subsequent to conversion (1 Thessalonians 5:23, Acts 1:8, Romans 6:1-14)."

### **What Is Sanctification?**

To be sanctified has a two-fold meaning that is derived from the Greek language of which the earliest Bible manuscripts were written. The word sanctification or "*hagiasmos*" means to dedicate to the service of and to loyalty to deity" (Louw & Nida, 540). The word sanctified or "*hagiadzo*" means to cause someone to have the quality of holiness" (Louw & Nida, 745). These two Greek words, as well as all their derivatives used in the New Testament, denote (1) something being separated from sin (2) for the expressed purpose of serving God.

### **The Crisis and Progression of Sanctification**

There are several perspectives of sanctification that are important to understand. There is a perspective from God's vantage point, as He is all wise and all knowing. There is a

perspective of sanctification from man's vantage point as he is ever growing in his understanding of the knowledge of God. And there is a final perspective of sanctification that is shared by both God and man.

### ***God's Perspective***

*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. Romans 6:1–4*

It is important to note, my saying "God's perspective" does not mean that man cannot hold the same view. As a matter of fact it is important for man to come to this point of understanding. However, as people come to the saving knowledge of the Lord they generally do not hold this understanding due to their lack of theological knowledge.

God's perspective is that sanctification starts and is completed at the point of conversion. "All true believers are saints, officially released from the condemnation due to their sins, the guilty record, and the tyranny of a sinful disposition. This first element in sanctification has been called "positional sanctification" because it is the condition of every true child of God" (McQuilken, 159). I prefer to refer to this point of positional sanctification as the point of actual sanctification. At the point of salvation God indwells us with His Holy Spirit, who gives us all the resources we need to live a life separated from sin and dedicated to God for service. This communicates an actual sanctification taking place in God's economy.

God has wrought a radical change at the point of salvation. That's why the passage

above states “We died to sin.” Sin is no longer the master of our lives, instead we are slaves to God. As we know from 1 John 1:8, sin is not eradicated from our existence. But the habit of living in sin has been broken from our lives. We have “*died to Sin*” and we “*may live a new life*” dedicated to God.

### ***Man’s Perspective***

*“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! Romans 7:10–13, 24–25*

As a person comes to the saving knowledge of Christ, he or she does not normally come with their focus being affixed on the strategy of living the Christian life. Typically the person’s focus is on their being made right with God. It’s usually after time has elapsed that an individual begins to mature in their knowledge and then realizes their need for responsiveness in the area of sanctification.

Our perspective of sanctification begins to take form at the point of crisis, or the point of our realization that a more victorious Christian life is available to us. “The second element of sanctification has been called ‘experiential sanctification,’ the outworking of one’s official position in daily life” (McQuilkin, 159). It’s at this point that the individual begins to avail themselves of the Holy Spirit’s empowerment to live the holy life. Our view of sanctification is the point at which we realize that God has set us apart to be holy for His purposes. It is the point at which we realize He has equipped us through His Holy

Spirit to live a life of consistent obedience rather than consistent sin.

In the Romans passage above Paul explains this point of realization (crises) for us. Here is a man that realizes that he cannot be holy no matter how hard he tries to be so in his own strength. His realization ends with the understanding that *“thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ”* he can be holy. He realizes that *he* will experience the sanctification God has already wrought once he decides to stop trying on his own initiative and instead rely on Jesus Christ as his sanctifier.

### ***God and Man’s Shared Perspective***

*“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”* Romans 6:22

This final perspective of sanctification is one that God has always realized and one that we are able to understand after as we grow in our knowledge of His revelation. This shared view is what is commonly referred to as “progressive sanctification,” and it occurs throughout the whole process of our lives with Christ. It begins at salvation with God’s view of sanctification and continues throughout life. Progressive sanctification is the persevering power of living the Christian life.

Some teachings emphasize the “crisis” point of salvation in a way that suggests progressive sanctification begins at the point of crises. I’m uncomfortable holding to such a position. My belief is that the crisis under such an understanding is exalted to a level that confuses some Christians. Listen to this quote from an article available at the Christian and Missionary Alliance’s website. “It is both a crisis and a process, a decision and a development, a turning point and a new direction, it is a continual experience marked by an altar and a road. ‘It is a crisis, a willful event, a decision. It may be

emotional or rational, behavioral or aesthetic but it is a turning point, a moment of exchange, a definite and thorough surrender, an altar” (www.cmalliance.org). This teaching sounds like our sanctification—as we are able to experience it—begins at the point we determine to surrender all to God. My response to that is if a person has not surrendered and turned completely to God by accepting Jesus as both Savior and Lord, the person is not saved (Romans 10:9–10). It is true that there is a point that we realize our ability to take hold of the sanctification God has secured for us. We respond to this realization by surrendering fully to God and consequently there is a marked difference in our lives from that point onward. It may be that my perception of this terminology would be considered as mere semantics by most. However, we must be clear in the understanding that it is not the individual Christian that initiates experiential progress in sanctification. Sanctification is a process of progress that begins with God, continues with our response and never ends until Christ returns.

The passage above supports the claim of continual progressive sanctification. The process begins by being “*set free from sin and*” becoming “*slaves to God.*” The process continues as it “*leads to holiness.*” And the process’ “*result is eternal life.*”

Again, sanctification is a process which culminates when we see Christ. We are radically changed at salvation as our master changes from sin to God. That process continues as we grow in our understanding of Christ and are able to claim like Paul that we’re “*being transformed into [Christ’s] likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit*” (2 Corinthians 3:18). The process is completed when we are totally transformed into the perfection that is Christ at His second coming and not before (1 John 3:2).

## **Identification of the Believer with Christ's Death, Resurrection and Ascension**

Christ's death, resurrection and ascension are central to the sanctification of the Christian. These three *states* of Jesus Christ not only make our justification, atonement and eternal salvation possible, but also represent significant truths regarding our separation from sin and dedicated service to God. It is imperative that the connection of Christ's states to our sanctification be understood as one complete thought and not as a type of symbolism meant to illuminate an inexplicable concept. The relationship between the two is real and active.

### ***Death***

Sinful man is in a dilemma that only the perfect Jesus Christ could resolve. Because everyone is sinful (Romans 3:23) and the penalty of sinfulness is death (Romans 6:23), a remedy is needed if anyone expects to escape eternal death which is the second death of eternal fire as described in Revelation 21:8. The only remedy is Jesus Christ because He was our death substitute. *"Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous"* (Romans 5:19). Jesus was completely obedient even to the point of death (Philippians 2:8). Jesus Christ's death is what sets people free from sin. *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45).

Jesus' physical death affords everyone the opportunity by faith to experience a death to sinful life (Ephesians 3:12, Hebrews 2:14–15, John 3:16). Christians have been liberated from the guilt of sin and from its power in our lives (Romans 6:1–4).

The correlation between Christ's physical death and our death to sin is not a relationship of simile, it is a cause and effect relationship. A comparison is not being made between two different things in our identification with Christ's death and our freedom from sin. Rather, the identification is connected in that it is an explanation of Christ's death as being the reason of our being set free. Albert B. Simpson writes "We must step down into the death of all our strength and all our life, and, surrendering ourselves completely to Him, rise in newness of life with Christ, and thus receive the Holy Ghost as the seal and source of that new life. The most important condition of the baptism with the Holy Ghost is that we shall truly die to all our own life" (23).

### ***Resurrection***

There is a two-pronged focus by which the Christian should identify with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. One way we identify with the resurrection is in the process of our sanctification—the resurrection enables the Christian to obey Him consistently. Another way of identification is in the completed work of our sanctification as we see Jesus when He returns.

The resurrection has empowered Christians at the point of their actual (positional) sanctification to withstand sin. Through the resurrection, sin, death and the grave were all conquered affording us the ability to conquer sin as well. Christians can identify with Christ's resurrection in as much as He lived a new life, we too have been given a new life to live. *"Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace"* (Romans 6:13–14). "The

fact that we have this new resurrection power over the domination of sin in our lives is used by Paul as a reason to exhort us not to sin any more” (Grudem, 616).

The final result of sanctification is that we will be like Christ, perfect in every way—“*we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*” (1 John 3:2). The Christians regeneration and justification is insured through Christ’s resurrection (1 Peter 1:3, Romans 4:25). The resurrection of Christ also insures our complete sanctification in that we too will receive perfect resurrected bodies at Christ’s second coming. “The most extensive discussion of the connection between Christ’s resurrection and our own is found in 1 Corinthians 15:12–58. There Paul says that Christ is the ‘first fruits’ (Gk. *aparche*), Paul uses a metaphor from agriculture to indicate that we will be like Christ. Just as the ‘first fruits’ or the first taste of the ripening crop show what the rest of the harvest will be like for that crop, so Christ as the ‘first fruits’ shows what our resurrection bodies will be like when, in God’s final ‘harvest,’ He raises us from the dead and brings us into His presence” (Grudem, 615).

### ***Ascension***

A Christian’s identification with Christ in His ascension can be summed up in two words: hope and authority. Christ’s ascension gives a foreshadowing of what is in store for the Christian. His ascension also illuminates a power given to us as God gives Christ authority by putting Him back into a position of power at the right hand of the Father.

The Christian’s hope of eternal relationship with God in heaven is more than a wishing well dream. It is a confidence of promise from a trust worthy God. “*We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever*” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Jesus told us

that He would go before us and prepare a place for us in order that we could follow Him (John 14:2–3). The fact that He has ascended and completed the first half of His promise gives the Christian confidence that He will return for us and fulfill His Word.

Christ’s authority made attainable to the Christian is an encouraging identifiable characteristic of the ascension for the believer. As a child, I was happy to befriend the biggest kid on the playground because of the benefits that relationship afforded. Personally, I was just as weak as always, but there was a strength that my big friend transferred to me. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians tells us that we have been raised up with Christ into the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). We presently can experience that authority. The Christian’s working orders, given by Christ, are found in the Great Commission. I believe a less studied component of the Great Commission that encourages and enables the Christian to accomplish their task is this identification with Christ’s authority. *“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’”* (Matthew 28:18–20).

### **The ministry of the Holy Spirit in Sanctification**

If the Christian is sentenced to live a life where they are imprisoned to sin how can one ever expect to walk in a way that communicates a loving God to those who have not yet accepted Him as such? Why should a Christian bother resisting sin if they are doomed to continually revisit it? If we continue to view the Christian walk as such it begins to seem like an impossible way of life.

There is truth in that last statement, the “Christian” walk is impossible. As Christians we are men and women who have been redeemed by God. However, we still live in a world whose god is Satan, and we still are left to face our daily lives in a body corrupted by sin. *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8). I said the “Christian” walk is impossible because it communicates the source of our dependence being centered on ourselves, the Christian. Whereas our dependence needs to be in God, and the aid He gives to us communicated through His Spirit. Didn’t Christ promise us that we would receive power *“...when the Holy Spirit comes on you...?”* (Acts 1:8). The “Christian” walk is impossible, but the ministry of sanctification enables us to walk in the Spirit.

Bill Bright of *Campus Crusade for Christ* has illustrated this teaching. It wasn’t until a man who was discipling me, sat me down and expounded this teaching that I finally realized what it meant to walk in the Spirit and live a life of victory. Walking in the Spirit is the Holy Spirit’s ministry to Christians throughout the process of sanctification.

For many years after becoming a Christian I was living in defeat. Sin was still present in my life as I’ve explained earlier from 1 John 1:8. I didn’t understand what to do with it. Because of the radical break that God made for me from sin, I was miserable in a life that wasn’t consistently obeying Him. When I understood this and learned how to deal with it I began walking in victory because I learned how to walk in the Spirit.

A revolutionary truth that turned my life around was when I understood the truth of conviction. The man who was discipling me in effect asked, “Why are you afraid of the Holy Spirit’s communication with you? Isn’t this something you should receive gladly?” He helped me to see conviction for what it is. It is not an instrument used by God to point

out my short-comings, but it is communication from His Holy Spirit directed towards me in order to empower me to resist sin. We are not being punished when the Holy Spirit convicts us, we are being instructed how to react to a given situation.

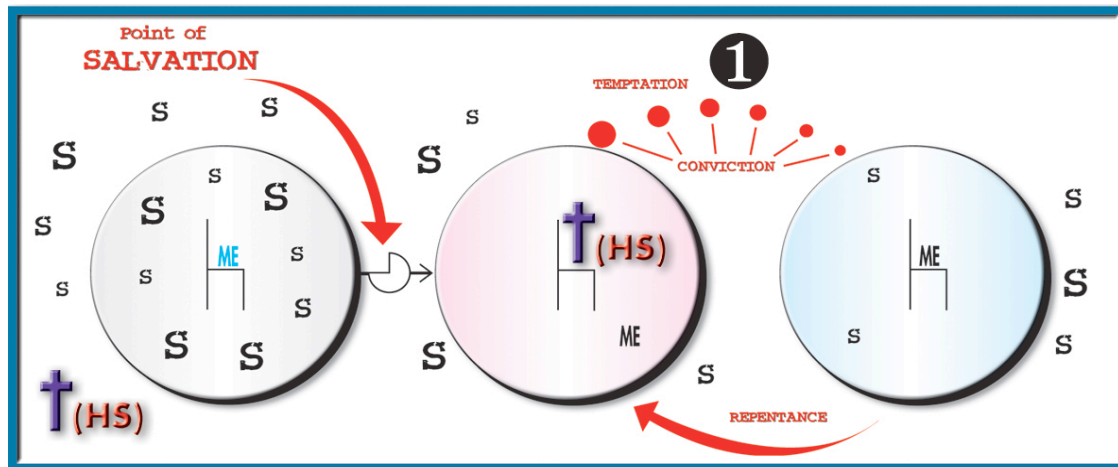


Figure 1 Originally based on Four Spiritual Laws written by Bill Bright. This graphic has been expounded upon by J Spurling.

If you look at (1) in figure 1 you can see that the devil uses temptation in order to persuade us into a life that is selfish-controlled rather than Holy Spirit lead. When we do not listen to the conviction of the Holy Spirit we are in essence dethroning the Holy Spirit from a position of control in our lives. It is at this point that we feel defeated—we have grieved the very person to whom we have committed our lives. “...do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30).

There is a way for Christians to resist Satan’s temptations and thereby live a consistent life of obedience (victory). This way of resisting the devil and relying on the Holy Spirit is what is known as “walking in the Spirit.” The first action to be taken when relying on the Spirit is to run from sin prior to sinning. However, if we do not run and fall into sin we should confess and repent as we realize our unfortunate mistake. “If we confess our

*sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9).*

The Christian life becomes an exciting adventure when we learn and begin to practice walking in the Spirit. We must learn to listen to that still small voice of conviction and obey it prior to being persuaded to sin. This will save the Christian the feelings of defeat and the consequences that accompany disobedience—guilt or other more outwardly visual consequences (orgies and drunkenness, sexual immorality and debauchery, dissension and jealousy, etc.).

If a Christian finds himself living in the third circle of figure 1, they must confess their sins to the Lord and have an attitude of repentance. When they became a Christian they entered into a relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. These are not just names that are used to describe a nebulous being, idea or thing. These are individual personalities that the Christian is able to relate to and get to know. Just as I am a person you can befriend, so are the three persons of God. If this is true, does it not make sense that you can offend the person of the Holy Spirit just like you would be able to offend me? If you offended me don't you think you would owe me an apology? Why is the Spirit of God any different?

Prior to my understanding of this truth I had spent several years of offending (grieving) the Spirit of God and ripping control of my life away from Him. I was on the throne of my life because I disregarded His guidance and allowed sin to enter into our relationship. God is all light and He cannot tolerate sin (darkness). *“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the*

*truth*” (1 John 1:5–6). In essence, the Holy Spirit was pushed off to a remote corner of my life because He was not able to tolerate the sin I had allowed to enter.

If a Christian is in a similar position where they have not understood the depth of relation they have with Christ, all they need to do is surrender to Him. You do this through confession and repentance. “*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret...*” (2 Corinthians 7:10). This ministry of the Holy Spirit will bring the Christian back to that victorious Christian life they experienced prior to sinning (circle 2).

### ***Conclusion***

Sanctification is the continuous working of God that takes place in our lives. The fact that sanctification is continuous is exciting because of its applicable importance to our living the victorious life. Sanctification is the work of being separated from sin for the expressed purpose of serving God. It’s important to mention one more characteristic of sanctification in closing: Sanctification is not supposed to be the abnormal Christian life, it should be the experience of every believer. “Men and women who do not press on in their Christian experience to gain the fullness of their inheritance in Him will often become cold and formal. The evil in their own heart will assert itself again and may very likely overcome them, and their work will bring confusion and disaster to the cause of Christ” (Simpson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 25). “*Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:14).

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