

## **The Blueprint What We Believe and Why Sanctification**

**Introduction:** If you grew up in church, you've likely heard the term sanctified or sanctification. It sounds like a big fancy word, but it's really not. It simply means to be "set apart" for something unique and different. Specifically, in the New Testament, it "refers broadly to the concept of being set apart as sacred."<sup>1</sup> You read that right. If you are sanctified by Christ, you have been set apart by Him as sacred; that is, you have been made blessed and righteous in a way the rest of creation is not! Now, to fully appreciate what that means, you need to remember what we've studied the last two Sundays.

Because Adam disobeyed God, he and all of mankind with him were kicked out of the Garden of Eden, the place God made to dwell with man (Genesis 2-3). As such, humanity experienced a "reverse" sanctification in that we were all set apart not for blessing and righteousness but rather for sin and death! We are literally born into this world, dead to the life God created us to walk in (Ephesians 2:1-3). We call this reality total depravity, and it's a truly desperate situation because it not only means we are born separated from God, but it demonstrates that we are all incapable of ever earning the right to get back into the garden. We fall completely short of the righteous expectation of God to love and obey Him with all our heart, soul, and mind (Exodus 20:3-5, Matthew 22:36-40), and therefore, we are left in this wretched reality of human depravity that can never truly experience the love of God; that can never experience true oneness with Him, one another nor even with ourselves. It's truly terrible news, but it's also not the final story in the news!

Last week, Thomas Crane started our journey through the Good News by walking us through the only thing that gives us the right to access the life we lost in the Garden and keep it—the penal substitutionary death of Christ that fully atoned for our sins! That is, Christ's death has given us full access to God and His eternal life because in Him we fully deserve it (Isaiah 53)! Christ didn't just erase the record of our sin with His blood; in doing so, He also added His righteousness to our account, so much so that we now stand before God with as much right to be there as Jesus Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). Nothing less than the blood of Christ can give us the right to access God, and there is nothing more either! He gave His life so that we can have God and His life!

But what does it mean to have God and His life? What exactly has Christ's blood given us access to? Well, that's where the Good News continues. The Gospel isn't simply that we've been given the opportunity to have something, but that God Himself is at work ensuring that what Christ accomplished for us will be brought to completion (Philippians 1:6). The Father not only sent the Son to make a way for us, but He also then sent the Holy Spirit to accomplish that Way in us. God has set us apart, is setting us apart, and at the return of Christ, will finish setting us completely apart from the total depravity we were born into and fully into the total reality of His glory and righteousness. We call this process

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<sup>1</sup> Mangum, D. (2016). [Sanctification](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

sanctification, and it's such an essential doctrine of the Christian faith that without it, there is no Christianity at all. Like every doctrine we are talking about in this series, the doctrine of sanctification is an unmistakable, irreplaceable, and non-negotiable part of the blueprint to have and fully experience the life God made for us to have in Him! It's also distinctly presented in the Bible as a three-step process of something that has already occurred, is presently occurring, and will occur.

Specifically,

**Proposition: In the New Testament, sanctification refers to the three specific actions of God in our life that fully set us apart from the depravity that leaves us separated from Him, ourselves, and one another.**

**God's first action in our sanctification is called regeneration.**

- (1) All who repent and believe in Jesus have been set free from the penalty of sin and are set apart to be His Children (regenerated/born again!).**
  - A. Numerous Scriptures speak of this sanctifying action of God, also known as salvation. For example,**
    - 1. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)**
    - 2. 13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13)**
    - 3. 12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. (Hebrews 13:12)**
  - B. However, as fundamentally important as those Scriptures are, they don't fully explain what it means to be saved, that is, to be set apart as God's children. Their intention is to declare what Christ did to sanctify us but not so much about what it means to be sanctified. Therefore, we need to look elsewhere in Scripture to understand what it means to be sanctified. One such instance is in the third chapter of John's Gospel. Here, we meet a deeply religious and sincerely pious man who ended up getting one of the most well-known lessons on the first act of God's sanctification in our lives. Here's what happened,**
  - C. 1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to**

you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." (John 3:1-18)

- D. Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that all of his sincere religious devotion and practices did nothing to set him apart from who he was—a sinner separated from God! It wasn't that Nicodemus's actions were bad, but that they were powerless. The reason is that the root problem wasn't necessarily what Nicodemus was doing or not doing, but who was doing them—Nicodemus! Nicodemus needed to become somebody he wasn't! He needed to be reborn!
- E. Let me explain it this way. Years ago, Bill Farnsworth and Jody Chapman asked me to train their sons to run faster. Both were outstanding baseball players, but both needed to get faster to succeed at the next level. Meanwhile, my son was getting into playing baseball, a sport I had no useful knowledge to help him with, so we decided to swap. I would help Will Farnsworth and Cody Chapman get faster, and Jody and Bill would help Ari learn how to properly throw and hit a baseball! In the end, Will and Cody certainly got faster but not remotely enough to be track athletes, and Ari improved as a baseball player, but there's a reason he now plays lead guitar for the Liberty University Worship Collective and not baseball! The reason is you can never do what you're not made to do! Will and Cody were both outstanding baseball players. Cody is now playing in college, and there is no doubt Will would have as well if he hadn't decided to step away from the game, but there was zero chance either one of them would ever end up on a college track team! They weren't born with the ability to be successful track

athletes. Therefore, no amount of training could change that. You can't do something you're not made to do, which is precisely why we must be born again and, thus, why Christ died so that we could.

- F.** Therefore, when the Bible speaks of the blood of Christ sanctifying us, it doesn't mean that we are made different from the world because Christ's blood was somehow literally sprinkled on us like some religious tattoo or symbol, but rather, through Christ's death, the wrath of God that separated us was totally satisfied so that we could be reborn as people not under the condemnation of God but rather under the blessing of God! Through the death and resurrection of Christ, we have a new identity that is totally different from the one we were born with in this world! We who were once cast out from God are now reborn as children of God! Listen to what the Bible says,
- 1. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)**
  - 2. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)**
  - 3. 1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:1-10)**
- G.** Therefore, the first sanctifying act of God in our life is the act of setting us apart from who we were (sinners separated from Him and incapable of living in fellowship with Him and His life) by causing us to be reborn/regenerated as His children who will forever live in fellowship with Him and all who are in Him. We, who were once only capable of living in the death of this world and our own lives, are now capable of living the life that is not of this world!

- H. Now, that's really good news, but it doesn't stop there. God's sanctification doesn't just stop with making us "capable" of his life. He doesn't just leave us with potential, but rather, He actively causes it and ensures it! Did you notice that Ephesians 2:10 doesn't point us to the possibility of something we might do but something we will do? This takes us right to the second action of God in our sanctification.

**God's second action in our sanctification empowers us to live His life while living in the reality of a world separated from it.**

**(2) All who repent and believe in Jesus are being set apart from the power of sin by the work of the Holy Spirit, who empowers them to live God's life now.**

- A. Two weeks ago, when I was preaching on the doctrine of total depravity, I pointed out the conundrum we are left in after we are born again. The Westminster Confession states,
- B. **"This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself and all the motions thereof are truly and properly sin."**<sup>2</sup>
- C. Similarly, speaking of sanctification as something that has already happened but is also still happening, the writer of Hebrews wrote,
- D. **14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14)**
- E. In other words, even though we are born again as children of God and given access to Him and His life, we are still living in a sin-sick, cursed world as humans who still suffer from corruption. Even though we have been perfectly set apart as God's through the blood of Christ, we still clearly struggle in sin, which is also clearly NOT what we were reborn to be and do. Christ didn't die for us to happily live in sin but to totally free us from it so that we can live in His life instead! Listen to what Jesus said to His disciples,
- F. **12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ... 15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:12, 15-17)**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/chapter-6>

- G.** Jesus made it clear that if we genuinely repent and believe in Him, we will do the same kind of works He did and even do greater ones! Furthermore, we will also do what He commanded us to do. Now, if you know what Jesus did and what He commanded, that sounds pretty intimidating! But then, Jesus added that He would send us a helper to get all that done—The Holy Spirit!
- H.** In other words, in and of ourselves, we would not do or even be able to do what Christ commanded, but the Holy Spirit will come and live in all who repent and believe in Christ to ensure we can. As such, those who have the Holy Spirit in them are, first and foremost, set apart in a world cast out by God because they no longer are. But in addition, those works Paul referred to in Ephesians 2 that God predestined us to accomplish, the same works Christ was referring to in John 14 that would be even greater works than He accomplished in His ministry, the Holy Spirit is going to come and ensure we do them. As such, we will not only be sanctified (set apart) from this world in who we are but also in what we do! Listen to what the sanctifying work of God accomplishes in our lives now,
- 1. 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)**
  - 2. 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Peter 1:2)**
  - 3. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:13-14)**
  - 4. 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (Hebrews 12:10)**
- I.** Now, before we move on, let me clarify that there is NO promise anywhere in the Bible that we will live our lives sinlessly on this side of Christ's return. As a matter of fact, the opposite is promised,
- J. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)**
- K.** Therefore, even as those who have been set apart as God's children and filled with the Spirit who helps us walk in His ways and accomplish His works, we do so as those who are still very much inclined to sin. We still have within

ourselves the constant pressure of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16) that constantly leads us away from His life and into death, which is precisely what the Westminster confession was getting at in speaking of the corrupt nature that remains in the regenerate believer. As a matter of fact, as one who has been set apart to God, if you don't have a war going on in your life, it's because the Holy Spirit isn't in you, and you are not actually saved! The Holy Spirit is in us to convict us about what righteous living really looks like and the lack of it in our lives and to stir us to say no to sin and yes to life!

- L. So, to those who don't believe they are saved because they battle with sin in their life, let me assure you that the battle is the testimony of The One within you who has sanctified and saved you; it is a testimony that you have been reborn as one who can no longer be satisfied living a life of sin; you have been and are being sanctified, and the war in you is testifying of it!
- M. But this is also why there's still yet another action of God in our sanctification! No child of God is satisfied by a life still stained with sin, a life as a child of God that still feels the effects of separation from Him both in their relationship with God and with themselves and others. Therefore, every child of God longs for the day when God's third act of sanctification happens.

**God's third action in our sanctification is one every true believer longs to happen!**

**(3) All who repent and believe in Jesus will be forever totally set apart from the presence of sin at His return!**

- A. We are going to get much deeper into this in a few weeks when we talk about eternity, the Second Coming of Christ, and what's next in the Kingdom of God, but for now, listen to the promise of the third and final act of God setting us apart from sin so that we can be completely set apart to Himself and His glorious life!
- B. **5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:5)**
- C. **18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. (Romans 8:18-24)**

- D. 50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:50-55)
- E. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)
- F. Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus!

**Challenge:** Are you walking in the sanctifying work of the Spirit in your life or against it? The following actions do NOT sanctify us, but rather, if done with sincerity and consistency, they will fuel our faith by aligning our hearts and minds with what the Holy Spirit is doing!

For time's sake, I won't read these Scriptures to you, but we've included them in your notes so that you can read them on your own and consider how your life reflects them. The following are five actions that can help fuel your faith and align your heart and mind to walk in step with the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:25).

- (1) Regularly attend worship gatherings to be Biblically informed and inspired by the singing and preaching of God's Word. (Acts 2:42-27, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:1-2 & 13, Hebrews 10:24-25)
- (2) Get plugged in with a small group of Christians to study God's Word, encourage each other, and pray for one another. (Proverbs 27:17, Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:42-27, Colossians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:24-25, James 5:16)
- (3) Read God's Word not to trivialize it but to learn it and be transformed by it. (Psalm 119:147-148, Mark 8:38, John 6:63, Romans 15:4, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- (4) Pray God's Word over yourself and others. (Romans 10:17, Isaiah 55:11, John 15:7-8, Ephesians 6:18-20)
- (5) Discipline your mind by refusing to justify or entertain that which is not true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, or worthy of praise. (Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:8)