

## **GRACE and SANCTIFICATION**

Sanctification means to be set apart as God's possession and for His purpose. Related to this word are the words saint, holy, holiness, and hallowed.

### **1) POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION**

In Acts 26:18, Jesus speaks of those who receive forgiveness of sins and “an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” Through faith, the believer is in the position of being set apart to God.

In addressing the church at Corinth, Paul addressed them as “those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:2). In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul explains that in conversion, “you were sanctified”. To the Thessalonians Paul said, “God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). The writer of Hebrews says of believers, “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10). Hebrews 10:14 says of Jesus, “by one offering He has perfected forever...”.

In Hebrews 13:12 it says, “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” Peter speaks of believers as, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit...” (1 Pet. 1:2).

God sees believers as set apart in Him as perfectly holy because of their position of being “in Christ”. This position never changes! It is a position of GRACE, and this will never change. Positional sanctification is a forever never-changing position.

#### **1 Corinthians 1:8–9 (NKJV)**

**8** who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**9** God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJV)**

**23** Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **2) PRACTICAL or PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**

Positional sanctification results in practical or progressive sanctification. One verse that puts BOTH together is Hebrews 10:14.

### **Hebrews 10:14 (NKJV)**

**14** For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Christ's finished work is PERFECT. He didn't make us right for just a little while. He didn't perfect us temporarily. NO! On the basis of His one offering He has perfected the believer forever! This is eternal salvation! This is eternal perfection. This is eternally having a right relationship with God solely on the basis of Christ's work. No wonder we sing His praises! No wonder we love Him. Christ is everything to us who are true believers!

Note this is POSITIONAL sanctification. Our position in Christ is that of being PERFECT forever. Our position in Christ never changes. When a person accepts Christ, they get a once for all complete and eternal pardon. This is perfection and you can't improve on perfection!

This is why absolutely every believer in the NT is called a saint – which means a “holy person” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2, Heb. 13:12). Positionally we are absolutely holy because the blood of Christ has forever cleansed us from all sin forever. We are not saints because of what we do but rather because of what Christ has done for us. He by His one offering has perfected us forever.

But note that POSITIONAL sanctification is only half of the story – it is only half of the verse (Heb. 10:14). It is always good to read to the end of the sentence. It is amazing how much error one can get into by simply not reading to the end of the sentence. And then read the sentence in the context of the paragraph. And then of course read the paragraph in the context of the entire letter.

Note it carefully that POSITIONAL perfection in Hebrews 10:14 applies only to “**those who are being sanctified.**” This last half of the verse refers to our PRACTICE. Sanctified means to be “**set apart**” for God. Positional sanctification cannot be divorced from practical sanctification. Where you find the one you find the other.

Hebrews 10:14 combines both the truth of POSITIONAL sanctification as well as PROGRESSIVE sanctification. Both are true for the true believer. While our position is PERFECT forever, in our PRACTICE we are in progress. We grow in grace (cf. 2 Pet. 3:18). We are being conformed to

the image of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:29). We are being transformed little by little by the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).

He Who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ (cf. Phil. 1:6). As the writer of Hebrews goes on to say in chapter 12, God disciplines all those who are truly His children to build holiness into their lives (cf. Heb. 12:7-11).

Jesus said, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit." (Mt. 12:33) In the parable of the Sower and the Soils the seed that fell on the good ground (representing true believers) "yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Mt. 13:8). The gospel is "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" and then Paul says, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" (Rom. 1:16-17) The just are saved by faith and then live by faith (cf. Gal. 2:20).

It is those who are led by the Spirit of God - "these are sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). Those who practice the works of the flesh (as an unbroken pattern of life) "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). In contrast to the works of the flesh is the fruit of the Spirit, "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Gal. 5:22-24).

We are saved by grace through faith and "are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:8-10). Paul told the Philippians, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Paul spoke of those who, "profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." (Titus 1:16) In contrast the grace of God teaches us that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age" (Titus 2:12). Christ gave Himself for us, "that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." (Titus 2:14) We are of the household of Christ "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end" (Heb. 3:6).

Paul told the Corinthians they were saved, "if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:2). Hebrews 12:14 exhorts the reader, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." In Revelation 3:19 Jesus says, "As

many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” Paul told the Corinthians that as a result of chastening, “many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” (1 Cor. 11:30-32). God uses trials to test us and build spiritual character into our lives (James 1:2-4). Peter wrote to the suffering saints, “may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” (1 Pet. 5:10)

Many claim to be Christian while practicing a life of sin. Repeatedly the New Testament tells believers not to be deceived in this regard. Paul said to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will NOT inherit the kingdom? Do NOT be deceived.” (1 Cor. 6:9 – emphasis mine).

In Ephesians 5:5 Paul says, “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” And then he said, “Let no one DECEIVE you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” (Eph. 5:6).

Paul had a great concern that many would profess Christ and yet live lives governed by sin. His concern is that while living this way they would DECEPTIVELY claim to be Christian and so he repeatedly warns God’s people not to be DECEIVED into thinking that one can live this way and still be a Christian.

And John too reinforces this “do not be deceived” theme. John says, “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” (1 Jn. 3:7-8) The issue is one’s PRACTICE.

The righteous practice righteousness (not perfectly but as a direction of life).

In contrast those who practice sin as a lifestyle pattern show they are the children of the devil. The devil has an unbroken pattern of sinning and so do his children. The works of the devil in the life of a person are an unbroken pattern of sin. Christ came to “destroy the works of the devil” and free His people from both the penalty as well as the power of sin (cf. Rom. 6).

John writes: “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” (1 John 3:10).

People are known by their lifestyle patterns and practice. Practice tells! DO NOT BE DECEIVED! God’s people have been delivered from sin and are saved to bear fruit by God’s grace (Jn. 15:8, 16). God’s people are not perfect in their practice, but they are in the process of being sanctified. God is molding them and shaping them little by little to be more and more like Jesus (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18).

As believers we have been sanctified (made holy) once for all by the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10:10). This is our never-changing POSITION “in Christ”. As believers we are now in the process of being sanctified (Heb. 10:14). This is our PRACTICE.

In our practice we are progressively becoming more and more like Jesus. And as believers we look forward to PERFECTED sanctification when the process of becoming like Jesus will be complete.

1 John 3:2 says that when we see Him “we shall be like Him”. The entire process is all because of the GRACE of God.

### **Ephesians 1:3–6 (NKJV)**

**3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,  
**4** just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,  
**5** having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,  
**6** to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

Indeed, “to the praise of the glory of His grace”!

Salvation is a comprehensive concept relating to all the redemptive acts and processes under its heading. Salvation, by its very nature, relates to election, encompasses calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification. Salvation is from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. We have been saved (2 Tim. 1:9); We are being saved (1 Cor. 1:18); and we shall be saved (Rom. 5:9).

For the believer, justification and positional sanctification relate to the past and glorification relates to the future, but sanctification (practical) relates to the present.

Grace brings all of these to pass in relation to God's purpose for all of the elect. Christians are born immature and may experience periods of carnality, but the grace of God is expected to produce fruit (to some degree) in the life of every believer. Biblically, the expected norm for believers is a life of progressive/practical sanctification. This is the testimony of Abraham, the great example of saving faith (cf. Genesis; John 8:39; Rom. 4; Heb. 11).

The God of spiritual birth is the God of growth and ultimately perfection. His grace is responsible for them all! The God of all grace elects, calls, regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies. Grace and salvation encompass them all. What God in grace has purposed cannot fail! He works all things after the counsel of His will to the praise of the glory of His grace! (Eph. 1:6, 11).

This is our song through endless ages: TO GOD BE THE GLORY!