

The Benefits of Salvation Series

Progressive Sanctification, A Divine-Human Activity

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“They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

“This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remains of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

“In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (*Westminster Confession of Faith, XIII/i-iii*)

The biblical material. The OT word-group specifying the believer’s holiness of life comes primarily from the Hebrew root for holy, *kadosh*. The ancient root meaning is: set apart from the rest for a special function. It comes from a word meaning separating and joining to something. So it is to set someone or something apart for a special purpose, and thus to sanctify, hallow, dedicate, holy, prepare, consecrate, appoint, bid, purify. (Benner, Jeff A. *The Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible*, College Station: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2005, pages 432, 433)

Exodus 19:6: **and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”** ESV

Leviticus 11:44, 45: **For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”** ESV

Leviticus 19:2: **“Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”** ESV

The primary NT word-group addressing the same topic comes from a verb that means to sanctify or make holy:

John 17:17: **Sanctify them in/by the truth; your word is truth.** ESV

1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24: **Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.** ESV

Peter cites the OT command to fortify his demand in 1 Peter 1:15, 16: “But like the holy One who called you, be yourselves holy in all your behavior, because it has been written; ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” ESV

1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7: For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ESV

Hebrews 12:14: Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ESV

2 Corinthians 7:1 gives the Christian’s obligation to perfect a holy walk –

“...let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” The word for cleanse here has in it Greek for cathartic.

The nature of the sanctified life. Throughout his life, from the moment of his regeneration and conversion to the moment of his elevation to heavenly glory, the believer, by virtue of his union with Christ’s death and resurrection and through the power of God’s Word and Spirit dwelling within him, will experience progressive sanctification. In this process the deeds of the flesh which still remain will be put to death and all saving graces will grow in their place. Thus:

Romans 8:13: For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ESV

Colossians 3:5: Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ESV (See Colossians 3:5-17.)

Paul expects the believer to conform his ongoing experience with sin to his definitive death to sin. Thus...be transformed:

Romans 12:2: Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ESV

2 Corinthians 3:18: And 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. ESV

Ephesians 4:11-16: And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. ESV

Philippians 1:9-11: And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled

with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. ESV

Philippians 3:13, 14: Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ESV

Colossians 1:9-12: For this reason also, since the day we heard of *it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. ESV

1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13: and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. ESV

1 Peter 2:2: As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: KJV

2 Peter 3:17, 18: Therefore, beloved, since you already know these things, be on your guard so that you will not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure standing. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. Berean

There is nothing status quo about the Christian experience. The believer dies more and more unto sin and lives more and more unto righteousness and holiness. I say for myself that I do not want to stagnate; I do not want to be shelved. By God's grace, I want to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3)

The threefold pattern of the sanctified life. The Scriptures set forth a distinct and unmistakable threefold standard of holiness according to which believers are to pattern their lives, namely, the ethical holiness of God, His preceptive* will, and Christ Himself.

1. Since man was created originally in God's image (Gen 1.26, 27) and, according to Paul, is recreated by grace according to God's image in knowledge and true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24; Col 3:10), the Scriptures summon the believer to strive to equal the ethical holiness of God Himself. Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15, 16. Also, Mt 5:48, Luke 6:36, Eph. 4:32, Col 3:13, e.g. Strive, though it doesn't fully happen due to the sin nature and finiteness of humankind. Become what God declares us to be.
2. Revelation defines that likeness to God according to which believers' lives are to be patterned concretely in terms of conformity to His preceptive* will for them—the moral law or ten commandments (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21), i.e., the precepts of God. This use of the law has come to be known as the "third use of the law," the other two uses being, first, its moral standards which are to serve as the rule of all true civil righteousness, and second, its "tutorial" work of convicting sinners, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, of their sins and thus driving them to Christ that they may be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24).

Christ did not dissolve the moral law but strengthened this obligation. Although true believers are not under the law, as a covenant of works or law-keeping, to be thereby justified, or condemned, nevertheless, it is of use as a rule of life informing of the will of

God and man's duty. It directs and binds believers to walk accordingly. It reveals the sinful pollutions of one's nature, heart, and life. By examining oneself against the standard of God's moral law, one may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin and also gain a clearer sight of the need of Christ and more appreciation of the perfection of Christ's obedience.

For the regenerate, the moral law restrains corruption in that it forbids sin. The threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. Likewise, the promises of it show God's approbation [approval] of obedience and what blessings may be expected upon the performance thereof; although not as due by the law as a covenant of works since a person's doing good and/or refraining from is no evidence of his/her being under the law and not under grace. By the works of the law, no one is justified.

Paul speaks of the law of God as holy, just, spiritual, and good (Romans 7:12, 14, 16; 1 Timothy 1:8) and contends that all the world is accountable to God because all men are "under the law" (Romans 3:19). Man has nothing to say against the charge of sin; the law was intended to convict and convince all people of their guilt, or liability to punishment, before God. All are guilty, and so no one can be justified by his/her own personal character or conduct. Romans 3:20. All have sinned. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, subdues and enables the will of man to comply with God's preceptive* will freely and cheerfully.

NT writers directly cite some of the commandments:

Romans 7:7 (the 10th)
Romans 13:8, 9 (the 6th, 7th, 8th, 10th)
Ephesians 6:1-3 (the 5th)
James 2:10, 11 (the 6th and 7th)

Likewise in James 2:10 James emphasizes the principle of the law's unitary wholeness. Also, the apostles allude to every commandment:

Commandments 1-3: Romans 1:21-30; 2:22, 1 Cor. 6:9, Eph. 5:5, Col 3:5, James 2:7, 19, Rev 21:7
Commandment 4: Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2, Rev 1:10. Hebrews 3:7-4:13
Commandment 5: Romans 1:3; Eph. 6:2, 3; Col 3:20; 1 Timothy 1:9
Commandment 6: Romans 1:29; 13:9; 1 Timothy 1:9, 10; James 2:11; 1 John 3:15; Revelation 21:8
Commandment 7: Romans 2:22; 13:9, 1 Cor. 6:9, Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3, 1 Timothy 1:10, James 2:11; Rev 21:8
Commandment 8: Romans 2:21; 13:9, 1 Cor. 6:10, Eph. 4:28; 1 Timothy 1:10
Commandment 9: Romans 13:9, Eph. 4:25, Col 3:9, 1 Timothy 1:10, Rev 21:8
Commandment 10: Romans 1:29; 7:7-8; 13:9, 1 Cor. 6:10, Gal 5:26, Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:5, Hebrews 13:5

Jesus Himself summarized the OT law as love commandments, namely, to love God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength; and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Deut. 6:5; Lev 19:18, Mt 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-31 and also Romans 13:8-19). Indeed love for God is defined in terms of obedience to God's law: "This is love for God, that we keep His commandments." (1 John 5:3)

Why? God's law shows us what love looks like. It also gives us boundaries between what is life and what is death, between what is holy and what is not holy, between what is clean and what is not clean, etc. Whatever threatens the life—whether a person or community or even of the creation—moves outside the boundaries into death, and is, therefore, sin. It misses the mark. It is not loving and it is not contributing to life. It does not reflect the nature of the Living and True God.

3. Since Christ was “born under the law” and perfectly fulfilled all of its precepts, and since conformity to the image of Christ is the Father's predestinated end for them (Romans 8:29), Christ Himself is set before the believer as the supreme example of the pattern of sanctification. (John 13:15; Phil 2:5ff; 1 Peter 2:21; 2 Cor. 3:18)

The goal of the sanctified life. The first and foremost goal of progressive sanctification is the glory of God Himself. We are transformed from glory to glory. Romans 5:2; Phil. 1:11; 1 Thess. 2:12; 1 Peter 5:10.

And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. ⁶And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. ⁷He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. ⁸But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. Revelation 21:5-8. KJV

*Preceptive - Definition: **adjective**

1. Of, relating to, or expressing a rule or principle that prescribes a particular course of action or conduct.
2. Instructive; didactic.

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition.

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PRAY:

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. ESV Lord, grant that we might cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for

God. Grant us what we need to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ESV

Let us grow so that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, may we grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. ESV

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Colossians 1:9-12: We ask that to be filled with the knowledge of Your will, O Lord, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. ESV

1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13: and may the Lord cause us to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, so that You, Lord, may establish our hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. ESV It is in Jesus’ Name that we ask it, Amen.

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