

Perfected Sanctification

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[0 : 00] As it pertains to sanctification thus far, we've looked at positional, I checked it off, and we've looked at progressive.

And when God saved us, He sanctified us in Christ. And that's why the Scriptures often speak of our sanctification in the past tense. In God's mind, it is a completed act. We were sanctified. We have been sanctified.

But we also have the reality of progressive sanctification. And that's easy to define or remember. As the name implies, we are supposed to make progress in sanctification.

That's why it's progressive. It improves with age. And some of us in here are getting quite old. That is our contribution to the process. And let me assure you, with great assistance from the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In our Christian walk, we are being recreated into the image of Christ. I've said many times, every individual believer goes at a different speed.

[1 : 41] There's not a cookie cutter, you know, and this fits one size fits all. We're all going at different speeds. Don't be envious of someone's going ahead of you. Don't be critical of someone that's lagging behind you.

And there waits for us this third category of our sanctification. And it goes by the name of perfected sanctification.

And we could drop the ED even say perfect sanctification. Now, as we have seen, sanctification has a definite beginning.

It occurs at regeneration. For the genuine follower of Christ, it increases throughout one's life. You know, I've gotten to the point, I don't ask, well, when did you get saved? Or when did you do this? I say, where are you at in the sanctification process? You ever heard someone say that? Willard, where are you at in the sanctification process?

[2 : 44] It has a beginning. Regeneration. It is to increase throughout our life. And it is true that sanctification has a very definite end.

Instead of using the word end, it would be much better to describe it as a definite completion. It is completed when the believer's life ends on this earth.

For most people, that occurs at the moment of death when they are immediately in the presence of the Lord. I've never bought into, well, there was this tunnel and I saw a light at the end.

Yeah, I did that once and it was a freight train, you know. But I've never bought into, there's no walking through a dark tunnel and you're going toward a light. I just don't buy that.

To be absent from the bodies, to be present with the Lord. I think you close your eyes, you open them, there's Jesus. I really believe that. When our life ends, we are translated, transported to heaven, and we're in the presence of the Lord and we are sanctified.

[4 : 02] Now, for some, that will occur at the moment of the rapture of the church. And I'm starting to think more and more it could happen at any moment. I do know this, nothing has to happen prophetically for it to happen.

We're not waiting for the temple to be rebuilt or the red heifer to be found. All that's Jewish. For some, that it will occur at the rapture when they are snatched away and go immediately into the presence of the Lord.

A passage to consider is found in Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth. 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. Now, the words from one degree of glory to another are very instructive. Some translations say from glory to glory.

In this life, God wants us to go from one level of glory to the next level of glory. We're growing through sanctification. How do we achieve that?

[5 : 20] Well, we do it through progressive sanctification. That's the subject we're looking at, sanctification. In verse 2, this verse in 2 Corinthians speaks to progressive sanctification.

Glory to glory. So how do we do this? Mark this thought down in your mental files. Or if you're taking notes, write this down. Or if you can get copies of the talk.

The more believers grow in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the more they grow in sanctification.

That's just it, guys. Now, it's easy for me to do it because I'm retired, but I read three Old Testament chapters. I read a New Testament chapter, and then I start reading things about Christ and reading Paul's words and Peter's.

Because I can do it. I mean, I have the time. But we grow through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Now, remember, knowledge for knowledge's sake is not enough.

[6 : 34] The more we know about Christ, the more we are to be like Him. An increase in Christ's likeness is another way of saying an increase in sanctification.

There is a passage that speaks to this. We read it last week, and you're going to hear it again. Philippians chapter 3, verses 12 to 14. Verse 13.

Other versions say forget the past. That's past victories, past failures. They'll both debilitate you. Look forward. Press on toward the goal. Christ is the goal. So be pressing on in your Christian water. And twice in that passage, Paul says we're to press on.

Press on from water to what? From glory to glory. We press on from one degree of glory to another. Again, that verse 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18.

[8 : 03] But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as the Lord the Spirit. We do know that we see Christ in this life imperfectly.

We just do. I mean, that's part of life in this body, in this fallen world, in unredeemed flesh. The translators use the word mirror here.

In Paul's day, mirrors were not at all like ours today. The mirrors in the ancient Roman Empire were made of metal and not glass. The metals used were usually bronze, silver, or if you were wealthy, gold.

The metal was beaten flat, then polished to a high gloss. The image that they projected was adequate, but far from perfect.

Now, we live in a fallen world, and inside us is unredeemed flesh. In this life, we do behold Christ, but our vision is obstructed by sin, by the sin nature that is in us and wars with our redemptive life, our regenerated life.

[9 : 26] There's a war going on inside. We do not yet see a perfect representation of God's glory now, but we will one day.

And when will that happen? When we behold the beauty of Christ in heaven. Well, can I support that in Scripture? Well, of course, or I wouldn't have said it.

1 John 3, 2. Beloved, we are God's children now. 1 John 3, 2. And what we will be has not yet appeared.

But we know that when He appears, that's Christ, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And that's that perfected sanctification when we go to be with the Lord.

The passage reveals that our progressive sanctification is occurring in life now. One day it shall be completed when we see Christ in heaven, and we will be like Him, totally sanctified.

[10 : 34] That sanctification will be perfected in glorification. That is the moment we go from progressive sanctification to perfected sanctification.

I heard Dr. MacArthur one time talking about it, and he said, you know, I'm going to be really caught up with heaven when I get there on pearly gates and transparent gold roads.

And he said, that's going to just mesmerize me for about 10 minutes. And then that's out of my system. But he said, the appeal for me to heaven is a place where there is no sin.

Can you imagine a place, the absence of sin, the total absence of sin? I mean, when we get together to play basketball or to play softball, and Mike Dershman is a lot better than I am, I'm going to be envious.

And I remember, wait a minute, there's going to be envy in heaven. I won't be envious. Envy is a sin. A place of no sin. Just amazing. Every Christian who dies before the return of Christ will experience sanctification in two stages.

[11 : 54] The first stage has to do with a man's spirit and his body. When death occurs, these two are separated from one another.

We've all been to funerals of believers. The spirit's soul is not in there. Body's there. The spirit of the soul of a believer enters into the presence of the Lord, fully sanctified.

2 Corinthians 5.8. We're of good courage, and we'd rather be away from the body, because then we'll be at home with the Lord. There's Paul again.

Paul knew that at death his body would remain here on earth, but he desires to be with the Lord in his spirit. He knew he would enter into the presence of the Lord and talks about it in his letter to the Philippians.

I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to part and be with Christ, for that is far better. The body goes to the grave.

[13 : 02] It awaits that time when the Lord Jesus Christ summons it at the rapture. And we all know, you know, there's going to be the trump of God, the voice of the archangel.

We've studied those. We know about the rapture. The author of Hebrews speaks of glorified citizens of heaven as spirits of the righteous made perfect.

Great passage, Hebrews 12.23. In heaven, believers are suddenly and completely made righteous, meaning we're totally sanctified. Now, to make sure we understand, it is their spirits that experience this completeness because their bodies undergo corruption in the grave, and that is part of the fallen curse.

It's tied to sin and death. All of sin, therefore all die. It is for this reason that the Apostle Paul says, we eagerly await Christ's return from heaven when he will transform our lowly body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

There is a transformation that takes place at the rapture. Believers who have died are raised from the dead. They're raised first.

[14 : 30] They've got six feet further to go. So they are raised first. I don't know if that's the reason or not. And they rise to meet Jesus in the air. Now, I've got to tell you, I think about this a lot.

I hope that's really fast because I have a problem with heights. I mean, I don't want this thing, you know, we're going up and I'm out in the open here and I just hope it's fast.

Yeah, I mean, I guess you could close your eyes. I think I might as well be on Jesus. Those who are alive when that happens, the dead rise first. They will rise also to meet the Lord.

But something amazing happens. We're going up. And whether we're dead in Christ or still alive, our weak, perishable, inglorious, physical body will undergo a transformation on the trip up into an imperishable, glorious, and powerful spiritual body.

Isn't that amazing? That's probably what I'll do. I'll be looking around at everybody getting their new bodies. Wow. 1 Corinthians 15. So it is with the resurrection of the dead.

[15 : 51] What is sown is perishable. What is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body.

I mean, here we are, this natural body going up and we become a spiritual body. Why does the Lord do that? We have to be fit for eternity. He's getting us ready for eternity.

And this process is referred to in Scripture as glorification. And that's what we will be studying last in our series, Salvation God's Way.

We're going to spend a week or two to talk about glorification, our life in heaven. Now, when we speak of perfected sanctification, there is the reform view and there are other views.

[17 : 02] When I speak of the other view, singular, I'm thinking primarily of John Wesley and to a lesser extent, Charles G. Finney.

I personally have no doubt that John Wesley is in glory today. I remember when Whitefield, who used to preach with Wesley, and they had polar opposite views theologically.

They would even share a hotel room. Great story. This is an aside to an aside. But there's a great story where they shared this hotel room, not the same bed, but they shared the hotel room and they said, let's pray.

So Whitefield said, thank you for the souls that were saved today, Lord. We pray for a harvest tomorrow. Amen. And Wesley said, Mr. Whitefield, is that where your Calvinism has brought you in your prayer life?

Well, Whitefield, he went to bed, started snoring. Wesley started praying. At two o'clock that morning, Whitefield woke up and Wesley's over there still kneeling by his bed, snoring. And Whitefield shakes him.

[18:08] He says, Mr. Wesley, is this where your Arminianism has brought you? You go to sleep while you're talking to the king of the universe? But a staunch Calvinist told Whitefield, he said, you think we'll see John Wesley in heaven?

He was hoping. Whitefield said, no, he can't be a believer. Whitefield said, no, we won't see him. We won't see him. You and I will be so far back in the bleachers and John Wesley will be wrapped in the Shekinah glory of Christ.

Our eyes won't be able to penetrate. We'll just be back there looking at the glory. We won't see John Wesley. He'll be right next to Jesus. Pretty great compliment. I have no doubt Wesley's in glory.

I have serious doubts about Charles G. Finney. I mean, you read some of his stuff. And ironically, a lot of seminaries teach him. Well, I mean, you can't graduate without learning about him.

But he was steeped in aberrant theology. That's why it's dangerous for a lawyer to suddenly one day say, I think I'm now a theologian. It's a very dangerous thing.

[19:21] Well, one thing both of these guys bought into was the doctrine of perfectionism. And the doctrine of perfectionism holds that it is not only possible but necessary for a person in this present life to attain to attain a level of moral perfection.

Sinless perfection. Many of the men who held to perfectionism even to this day, there are some. Some of the leading charismatic guys are perfectionists.

When their lives are examined under the microscope, they're wrecks. They fail miserably to have attained perfection.

I am told that on or near his deathbed, even John Wesley admitted, said, I never achieved it. I never achieved a perfect state. The truth is that sanctification cannot and is not completed in this life.

It's a continuing action until we go to be with the Lord. No one in the Bible other than the God-man, Jesus Christ, was perfect.

[20:42] Paul was far from it, describing himself as the chief of sinners. I mean, read Romans 7. Oh my gosh. And you know, they tried to excuse that.

That was before Paul was saved. No, that's Paul saved. Before he was saved, he was Saul killing Christians. He was far from it.

And he said, I'm the chief of sinners. Peter thought he'd lost his salvation for denying the Lord three times when push came to shove. John, of course, when he saw the glorified Christ, he fell at his feet as if dead.

The guys on the Mount of Transfiguration, God spared their life by putting them in a coma so they wouldn't look upon the full glory of Christ. And then when Jesus had his assembled followers just before the crucifixion and they were having the supper in the upper room, Jesus told them, he said, one of you will betray me.

And the scriptures say that every man at that table inquired, am I the betrayer? Every one of them. All saw within themselves the capacity to be the betrayer.

[22:09] And I can assure you if I had been there, I would have looked at Jesus and said, is it I? I would have asked him that. And I imagine everybody in here would have done the same thing.

Now, we should never confuse the Bible's use of the phrase spiritually mature with that of perfect or perfected. Spurgeon was in his study one day and he was just had the door closed all there alone, books, and you could go up to your alma mater at Kansas City and see his library.

And he's sitting in there all alone, door closed, and he's just reflecting on how things are going. And things were going really pretty well right then. He didn't realize at the time there was fixing to be a storm come on him and he was going to be put out of his church.

But right then, things were good in life. he was preaching a dozen times a week or more. Masses of people were flocking to hear him.

Those in political power sought an audience with him. They wanted to be seen with him. They wanted to talk with him. So he's sitting there in his study and he's reflecting on all this and he said,

later he wrote about it, he said, I just opened up in prayer.

[23 : 30] And Spurgeon said something like this, I thank you God that I'm not like other men. I have really made something of myself to serve your kingdom.

And all of a sudden, Spurgeon was gripped in abject fear and began to shake because his mind went immediately to a parable in the gospel of Luke.

Let me read it. Chapter 18, two men went up to the temple to pray. One a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee standing by himself prayed thus, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes, of all that I get. But the tax collector standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

By the way, that's the closest you'll come to the sinner's prayer anywhere in Scripture. That's it. I tell you, Jesus says, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

[24 : 53] for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. That's the very passage that Spurgeon thought of.

And the story goes that Spurgeon threw himself onto his office floor and with tears began to cry out in prayers of repentance for having exalted himself.

He later said at that moment he knew he was as far from the Savior as he ever had been in his Christian walk. I heard Spurgeon one time say that he said, I get down on my knees to ask forgiveness for a particular sin and I commit 1,500 of them while I'm down there.

Now, I think he was exaggerating a little bit, but it's easy for your mind to wander into areas you shouldn't go even when you're talking to the Lord. So, here's the question.

This is on the final, by the way. Is the sanctification process dependent upon God or is it dependent upon us?

[26 : 09] Now, we're weeks from the final, but I'm going to give you the answer. Yes. That's as good as I can do.

Yes. And I don't know if this inspired quote from the apostle Paul helps or hurts our understanding of this basic truth, but if I can turn the page, I'm going to give it to you.

Philippians chapter 2, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Well, it sounds like Paul has come down on the side of it's up to us, right? But then there's a comma, and Paul says this, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So the pendulum swung again. by inspiration, Paul says here that we work on our sanctification and God works on our sanctification.

[27 : 21] And we must say, and I do say this, ultimately, our sanctification is dependent upon God. And it is his supernatural work, and he does it within the inner nature of the elect, more specifically the identity of the person, that's with a capital P, that sanctifies as the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.

Now, obviously, the Father and Son are participants in that process as well. Scriptures are clear on that. I just picked out one verse, Jude, and it's easy to remember, it's the first verse in Jude.

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James to them that are sanctified, past tense, by God the Father and preserved in that sanctification in Jesus Christ and are called.

So there you have it right there. There you have it right there. And remember, Paul talks here about this word transform. Very important. It is a Greek word from which we get the English word metamorphous.

The concept is easy for us to understand when we read that word in English. It describes a fundamental interchange that occurs in us during sanctification.

[28 : 53] We are transformed. We are metamorphized. Paul also prays that we be strengthened in the sanctification process by the spirit of holiness.

He also prays that our minds would be renewed during sanctification. The renewing of your mind. That's the motto for R.C. Sproul's work at Ligonier.

R.C. of course has now been renewed and sanctified because he's with the Lord. Dr. Charles Hodge in his systematic theology describes sanctification this way.

Sanctification does not consist exclusively in a series of a new kind of act. It is the making the tree good in order that the fruit may be good.

It involves an essential change of character. Just as regeneration is a new birth, a new creation, a quickening or a communicating a new life, life.

[29 : 58] So sanctification in its essential nature is not holy acts, but such a change in the state of the soul that sinful acts become more infrequent and holy acts become more and more habitual and controlling.

Great statement. Sanctification is a transformation, a metamorphosis. it is as miraculous a metamorphic action as a caterpillar turning into a butterfly.

In commenting on the quote from Dr. Hodge, one theologian said this, it is not taking fruit and stapling it to the tree branch.

Now he's thinking in terms of John 15, abiding in Christ, the branch and the vine. We don't take fruit and staple it to a tree branch but it is rather rooting the branch in the vine.

That's to be sanctified and the vine's Christ so that the fruit is born by virtue of the believer's vital union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 11] You know in the story there of the branch and the vines branches never produce fruit. They grow in the branch but it's produced in the vine and goes down the branch and whether it's an orange an apple or whatever the branch doesn't produce that.

It's produced in the vine. That's for you horticultural guys. So the fruit is born by virtue of the believer's union with the Lord Jesus. While the holy person certainly does what God commands, he does so because he loves God and he loves what God loves.

Sanctification is the spiritual transformation of the mind and the affections that in turn redirect the will and the actions of the person being sanctified.

Sanctification is a work of God in the life of a saved man or a saved woman. more specifically it is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit but because God works to accomplish our sanctification does not release us one bit from the scriptural command that we work out our sanctification in cooperation with God.

We're not released from that. And there used to be a saying let go and let God you know that was famous back in the 70s or whenever forget it.

[32 : 47] Here's a final quote from Dr. John Murray we've talked about him before God's working in us is not suspended because we work nor our working suspended because God works neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did his part and then he has to stand by and we then have to do ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produce the required result God works in us and we also work but the relation is that because God works now listen to this because God works in us we work that's the catalyst to get us to work God's working in our life the sanctified are not passive in the process we don't we're not saved nor do we grow through osmosis you know we don't just absorb it we work at it but we won't but