

Sanctification and Justification

We must learn to embrace Christian terminology and not be afraid of the words. Holiness, righteousness, edification, glorification, sanctification, justification, ecclesiology, missiology, theology, trinity.

Question: "What is justification? What does it mean to be justified?"

Answer: Simply put, to justify is to declare righteous, to make one right with God. Justification is God's declaring those who receive Christ to be righteous, based on Christ's righteousness being imputed to the accounts of those who receive Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Though justification as a principle is found throughout Scripture, the main passage describing justification in relation to believers is Romans 3:21-26: "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

We are justified, declared righteous, at the moment of our salvation. Justification does not make us righteous, but rather pronounces us righteous. Our righteousness comes from placing our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice covers our sin, allowing God to see us as perfect and unblemished. Because as believers we are in Christ, God sees Christ's own righteousness when He looks at us. This meets God's demands for perfection; thus, He declares us righteous—He justifies us.

INTRODUCTION

Sanctification comprises the entirety of the Christian life, from the moment of our spiritual birth to our entrance into glory. There is a past, present, and future aspect to our sanctification: past (positional sanctification); present (progressive sanctification); future (perfect sanctification).

How do these aspects of sanctification relate to one another? In short, positional sanctification is foundational, with progressive sanctification building on or flowing from positional sanctification and looking forward to perfect sanctification. Further, perfect sanctification is simply the final realization of positional sanctification, and the prospect of perfect sanctification motivates progressive sanctification. This relationship will become clearer as we make our way through the study.

What is the basic meaning of sanctification? The basic meaning of sanctification is to be set

apart. This basic meaning is true of all three aspects of sanctification, but has different reference points according to the aspect being considered. The reference points are bound up in the respective adjectives – positional, progressive, and perfect. In other words, there is a sense in which we are positionally set apart, progressively set apart, and perfectly set apart.

Another term frequently used in Scripture that is synonymous with sanctification is holy or holiness. Holy basically means to be set apart; consecrated; sacred.

There is a very important term in Scripture used of Christians that specifically has this positional aspect of sanctification or holiness in mind – saint. The term literally means “holy one,” and it does not refer to a select few within the church, who happen to live extraordinary lives, but to every single believer of the gospel. Paul often addressed his letters to “the saints” (Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2), which simply emphasizes the believer’s holy standing (i.e. positional sanctification) in Christ through faith. If you are in Christ, then you are a saint – holy one.

POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION

This aspect of our sanctification speaks to our being set apart from the world unto God. This is an instantaneous act of God’s saving grace, which takes place at the moment of our conversion. At that very moment we are sanctified – set apart unto God for His use.

1 Peter 2:9-10 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

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PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

Whereas positional sanctification emphasizes God’s work, progressive sanctification emphasizes our work or obedience, yet this is not without God’s grace. Progressive sanctification is the process whereby we daily become more and more like Jesus Christ, through the killing of sin in our lives as we endeavor to live according to God’s grace in the gospel.

While we have been set apart to God in a positional way, we must now live accordingly, growing or maturing in it.

Philippians 2:12-13 “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

How may we progress or grow in our sanctification/holiness? There are many things we can, and should, do (e.g. pray, fellowship with other believers); however, let me focus in on a central

discipline of the Christian life that will carry us along in our sanctification. We ought to daily read and memorize the Scriptures (the word of God).

PERFECT SANCTIFICATION

As mentioned earlier, perfect sanctification is simply positional sanctification realized, consummated, brought to completion, or perfected. In other words, while we are positionally sanctified or holy in Christ, we do not at this time experience the full realization of this sanctification. Why? Because we are yet in our mortal bodies, still affected by temptation, and therefore we still sin. Of course, we do not sin as we once did. We are no longer enslaved to it, held under the full weight of its power; nor do we make a practice of sinning, but now experience conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit, knowing that we have displeased and dishonored God when we do sin, and therefore repent of it. This daily struggle with temptation and sin falls under progressive sanctification, but it causes us to remember our positional sanctification (what we are in Christ) and look all the more to our perfect sanctification (forever separated from sin and temptation).

Perfect sanctification speaks to the perfected state of the believer through glorification. At Christ's return all things will be made new, and we will be like Him, for we will see Him as he is.

1 John 3:2-3 "Beloved, now we are children of God [i.e. positional sanctification]; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him [i.e. perfect sanctification], for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself [i.e. progressive sanctification], just as He is pure."

