

# SANCTIFICATION

## INTRODUCTION

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- As believers, we love the doctrine of justification...the teaching that sinners are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone
- That truth is precious to us...it is a key Reformation truth...it lies at the heart of the Gospel of God's grace
- It reminds us that our only hope is to be declared righteous on the ground of the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to us
- As believers, we also love the doctrine of glorification...we look forward to the day when our struggle with sin will be over...when our faith will be sight
- We anticipate the day when we will finally see our Lord and Savior face to face...when we finally discover what it means to have unhindered fellowship and communion with Christ
- Glorification is the radical transformation of both the body and the soul of believers, perfecting them in holiness, and thereby fitting them for eternal life on the new earth in perfect communion with the triune God
- But sometimes the doctrine of sanctification doesn't fill us with the same sense of wonder and appreciation
- This may be due to the fact that sanctification is a slow process...or that it requires hard work and effort...or that it reminds us that we have not arrived yet
- Still others are confused about the process of sanctification...they don't know how to fight sin and overcome temptation and grow in holiness
- Sadly, many Christians are simply confused about how to live the Christian life...and how to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil
- But this is not a doctrine that we can afford to be confused about because this is where we all live...between our justification and our glorification
- We live in the present...where we are to be pursuing Christ-like holiness...so, we need to get this right!
- Sanctification involves being set apart from sin to holiness not only in position but in practice
- Holiness embodies the very essence of Christianity...holiness ought to define who we are since God has saved sinners to be a holy people
- As believers, we ought to increasingly become in practice what we are in position
- "Holiness is not something we are called upon to do in order that we may become something; it is something we are to do because of what we already are."<sup>1</sup>
- "What does the Bible mean when it speaks of a 'sanctified' man? Sanctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Ghost, when He calls him to be a true believer. He not only washes him from his sins in His own blood, but He also separates him from his natural love of sin and the world, puts a new principle in his heart, and makes him practically godly in life."<sup>2</sup>
- The Old Testament uses the term "sanctification" in the way of setting something apart:

**Genesis 2:3** ~ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

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<sup>1</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones

<sup>2</sup> J.C. Ryle

**Leviticus 22:32** ~ You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel; I am the Lord who sanctifies you,

**Joel 2:16** ~ Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and the nursing infants. Let the bridegroom come out of his room And the bride out of her bridal chamber.

- The New Testament frequently speaks of believers as those whom God has set apart from sin to holiness and who must therefore pursue holiness

**Ephesians 1:4** ~ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

**Hebrews 12:14** ~ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

**1 Peter 1:14-16** ~ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

**1 Peter 2:9** ~ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

- This is why one of the most common terms used to refer to a believer in the New Testament is "saint" which simply means "saved and set apart"

**Romans 1:7** ~ to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace...

**2 Corinthians 1:1** ~ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia:

**Ephesians 1:1** ~ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful...

**Philippians 1:1** ~ Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi

**Colossians 1:2** ~ To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

- Believers are those who, by God's gracious salvation, have been set apart to him and to holiness
- There are three stages of sanctification:



- Stage 1 – Positional Sanctification: occurs at the moment of justification, the moment a believer is separated from the penalty of sin

- Stage 2 – Progressive Sanctification: occurs between regeneration and glorification and results in believers being separated from the power of sin
- This refers to the outworking of our positional sanctification...the on-going transformation of becoming that which we already are (holy)
- It is the process of becoming increasingly conformed to the image of Christ...the process of growth and spiritual maturity...the activity of gaining victory over sin and becoming more like Jesus in godliness
- Even though we have made a real, constitutional break from the power and dominion of sin, we are not completely conformed to the image of Christ yet
- Even though the penalty of sin is paid for and the power of sin has been broken, the presence of sin remains in our flesh
- So, we must be continually putting sin to death throughout our life...a gap exists between our position and practice...progressive sanctification is concerned with closing that gap
- Stage 3 – Perfect Sanctification: occurs when the believer is freed from the presence of sin
- This final stage refers to that moment when our sanctification is complete, when we go to be with the Lord and the presence of sin is removed entirely...an event that is still future

## ORDO SALUTIS



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## POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION

- Positional sanctification describes what God did to us when he saved us, at the time of our conversion
- At the point of salvation (once and for all time), God causes true believers to experience a relational change, a completely new position which they enjoy with Jesus
- At the new birth, the true believer is permanently separated from sin and set apart for God Himself
- In this sense, believers are dead to the ruling power of sin – the penalty and power of sin are removed with a promise that the presence of sin will also once day be removed

**Acts 20:32** ~ And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

**1 Corinthians 1:2** ~ To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.slideserve.com/veta/soteriology-powerpoint-ppt-presentation#google\\_vignette](https://www.slideserve.com/veta/soteriology-powerpoint-ppt-presentation#google_vignette)

**1 Corinthians 6:11** ~ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

**Hebrews 10:14** ~ For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

**Romans 6 (especially vv. 6-7, 11-14, 17-18)**

- When a person becomes a Christian, they are put on the other side of a gulf that separates them from God, no longer on the side of sin, but now on God's side, the side of holiness
- He actually considers believers holy and perfect in position
- But God even went beyond that...not only are believers set apart from sin to God, God implants in believers desires that were not there before: A desire to please God in all things
- Believers possess a new heart that wants to live separate from sin, gain control over sin, and eliminate sin
- Thus, positional sanctification is a divinely wrought character change freeing believers from sinful habits and forming in them Christ-like affections and character
- It involves a change in our standing before God and an internal change in our heart and its desires
- Thus, as believers, we have the ability (with the help of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ) to overcome sin

## **PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**

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- Progressive sanctification refers to the outworking of the believer's positional sanctification...it is the process of becoming holy throughout the Christian life
- It refers to the on-going transformation of becoming (practically holy) that which we already are (positionally holy)
- This isn't a change in position but a change in behavior...the process of spiritual growth...the activity of gaining victory over sin and becoming more like Jesus

### **Faulty Approaches to Progressive Sanctification**

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#### *Pietism*

- This view emphasizes the believer's role to the exclusion of God's role
- It places a strong emphasis on Bible study, holy living, self-discipline, much of which is good; however, the danger of this extreme is that it stresses self-effort to the exclusion of God's power working in them
- It puts the results of sanctification primarily in the lap of the believer
- It tends to lead to legalism...to self-righteousness...to moralism...to human performance
- It can lead to a works-based Christianity and man-made religious practices...which often result in pride and hypocrisy
- "Though we all ought to wholeheartedly embrace and emphasize the importance of Christian piety, we must remember that piety is built on doctrine. Once doctrinal beliefs disappear, piety is emptied of the gospel and it becomes a form without content. So, we must distinguish between Piety and Pietism: The former is the result, consequence, outworking of one's union with the Lord Jesus Christ. The latter is usually used as a pretense of righteousness, erroneously thinking our work might earn merit before a holy God...Pietism is a movement within Christianity that attempts to be inwardly focused on individual holiness and a consistent Christian life, sometimes at the expense of focusing on what Christ has done for us."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.monergism.com/topics/bad-theology/pietism>

## Quietism

- This view swings the pendulum in the other direction...it views believers as passive in their sanctification
- It is known as higher life theology with its common mantra of “Let go and let God”
- It says: be completely surrendered to and dependent on God and let him make you what he wants you
- It presupposes that trying to strive against sin or to discipline yourself for the sake of holiness is futile, unspiritual, and counterproductive
- “Quietism is a system of religious mysticism with its roots in Hinduism and Buddhism but which has also been promoted at times by individuals within the Roman Catholic Church. Quietism teaches that spiritual peace and even perfection can be achieved through the contemplation of God and things divine. The practitioner of quietism seeks to subdue the will and become totally passive, spiritually...Quietism turns one’s spirituality inward, favoring silent contemplation, stillness, and passiveness over positive action...The aim of quietism is to ‘quiet’ the soul so that it can become one with God and eventually achieve a sinless state.”<sup>5</sup>
- This movement began with Wesleyan Perfectionism and the Holiness movement under John Wesley (1703-1791) who taught that there is a separation between the time a person is saved and the time sanctification begins
- He taught Christian perfectionism...the belief that Christians can (as a result of some second work of grace via the baptism of the HS) reach the point of sinlessness in this life
- By that he didn’t mean that a believer could become entirely free of sin, but that they could reach a point of never sinning intentionally
- Wesley’s Christian perfectionism taught that you could arrive at a state of perfectly loving God with your whole being and perfectly loving fellow humans
- This paved the way for the higher life movement...or the Victorious Life movement...which culminated in the early Keswick movement (1875-1920)
- At the heart of this movement, was the belief that justification was separated from sanctification in that a person would become saved and then, at some later point in their life, would get serious
- The way to “get serious” was to “let go and let God”...namely, to play a passive role in your spiritual development and rely upon God who will do all that is necessary for sanctification
- Step 1 is “letting go” which involves giving yourself completely to Jesus and surrendering to God every habit, ambition, hope, loved one, and possession
- “Any victory over the power of any sin whatsoever in your life that you have to get by working for it is counterfeit. Any victory that you have to get by trying for it is counterfeit. If you have to work for your victory, it is not the real thing; it is not the things that God offers you. It is not by straining and struggling that this blessed condition is brought about; it comes by a very real dedication of ourselves to God for this very purpose, and with this as the special end and aim in view. Just lie quietly before Him. Open all the avenues of your being, and let Him come in and take possession of every chamber. Especially give Him your heart – the very seat of your desires, the throne of your affections. Yield all up to Him, and the Lord will enter, bringing with Him all the riches of His grace and glory, turning your life of duty into a life of liberty and love.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/quietism.html>

<sup>6</sup> Evan Hopkins, quoted in Andy Naselli, *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It’s Harmful*, 39-40.

- Step 2 is “letting God” which involves simply believing that Jesus has done it all...victory comes by a simple act of faith...and victory is maintained in the Christian life by the attitude of faith
- The key to holiness is resting (not struggling) and trusting (not trying)
- “If any of you are making the mistake of trying to live the victorious life, you are cheating yourself out of it, for the victory you get by trying for it is a counterfeit victory. You must substitute another word; not try, but trust, and you cannot try and trust at the same time. Trying is what we do, and trusting is what we let the Lord do...The counterfeit victory means a struggle; whatever we do, we do by our efforts...In real victory, He does it all. We do not dare to help. We realize that the battle is His.”<sup>7</sup>
- A contemporary version of this approach to sanctification was the “Gospel-Centered” movement
- It is also known as monergistic sanctification or the grace model of sanctification by its supporters
- Some of their emphases have been good reminders: the Christian life isn’t mere moralism...dangers of legalism...nothing we can do to increase God’s love for us
- However, it has largely dismissed efforts to obey God, seeing them as counterproductive and futile
- It focuses attention almost exclusively on the finished work of Christ and virtually eliminates active efforts to grow in holiness
- It majors on the indicatives (what Christ has done) and ignores or minimizes the imperatives (what we are commanded to do)
- We are told to cease our struggle to obey commands and simply to cling to grace alone as we contemplate the Gospel
- “Many Christians have simply given up on sanctification. I frequently hear from believers who doubt that holiness is even possible...The pursuit of holiness is just bound to make us feel guilty. So we figure all we can really do is cling to Christ. We are loved because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, but personal obedience that pleases God is simply not possible. The truly super-spiritual do not ‘pursue holiness;’ they celebrate their failures as opportunities to magnify the grace of God.”<sup>8</sup>
- “Among conservative Christians there is sometimes the mistaken notion that if we are truly gospel-centered we won’t talk about rules or imperatives or moral exertion. We are so eager not to confuse indicatives (what God has done) and imperatives (what we should do) that we get leery of letting biblical commands lead uncomfortably to conviction of sin. We’re scared of words like diligence, effort and duty.”<sup>9</sup>

## **A Correct Understanding of Progressive Sanctification**

**2 Corinthians 3:18** ~ we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

- More than any other single verse, this one describes the foundational dynamics of sanctification as it reveals how God works in us
- It comes down to being transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christ’s likeness as we behold his glory
- Our sanctification is a transformation into the image of the glory of Christ
- Spiritual sight that beholds the glory of Christ is the foundational means of sanctification
- It is when we behold the glory of Christ that we are transformed into his image
- Looking to Jesus is the grounds of both our justification and our sanctification

<sup>7</sup> Charles Trumbull, quoted in Naselli, *No Quick Fix*, 40-41.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

- How does the spiritual sight of Christ supernaturally cause us to increase in holiness? → it shows us the beauty of his glory...it captures our affections...it causes us to admire him in such a way that we are satisfied by him
- Thus, we don't seek satisfaction in lesser, sinful pleasures of this world...we hate what he hates...we love what he loves
- Continual gazing upon the glory of Christ informs our minds and enflames our hearts, such that we are drawn to him
- As this happens, we move from one stage of glory to the next...God moves us further and further along in our levels of holiness
- Although at times it seems painfully slow, we are being moved to ever-higher levels of glory...ever closer to the likeness of Christ
- "Let us live in the constant contemplation of the glory of Christ, and virtue will proceed from Him to repair all our decays, to renew a right spirit within us, and to cause us to abound in all duties of obedience...It will fix the soul unto that object which is suited to give it delight, complacency, and satisfaction...When the mind is filled with thoughts of Christ and his glory, when the soul thereon cleaves unto him with intense affections, they will cast out, or not give admittance unto, those causes of spiritual weakness and indisposition...And nothing will so much excite and encourage our souls hereunto as a constant view of Christ and His glory."<sup>10</sup>
- Notice that this sanctification is "from the Lord, the Spirit"
- But, we are not passive in this process...we don't just relax and hope to be magically catapulted to holiness
- We don't just yield and surrender to God and expect Him to do something to make us holy
- Rather, the Holy Spirit affects his sanctifying transformation in us through the use of means that must be appropriated
- To put another way, we must put ourselves in the way of the means through which the Spirit works
- These "means" include the spiritual disciplines which the Spirit uses to show us the glory of Christ (Word, prayer, fellowship, obedience, etc.)
- This is why there are many NT instructions which exhort believers to walk in holiness

#### **Romans 6**

#### **Ephesians 4:17-6:20**

#### **Colossians 3:1-4:6**

#### **Romans 12-16**

**1 Peter 1:15-16** ~ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

**2 Timothy 2:20-21** ~ Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work

- Progressive sanctification involves a turning from sin and a turning to righteousness

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<sup>10</sup> John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 1:460–61.

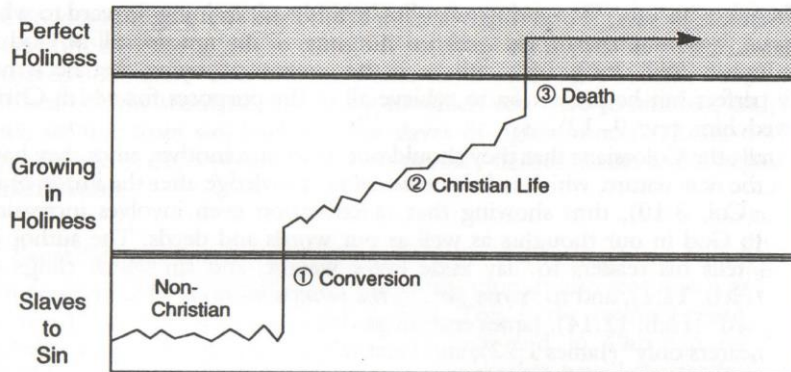
- There is always a negative and a positive element to sanctification...that’s why many of the commands in the NT contain both negative and positive sides:

**Colossians 3:8, 12** ~ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth...So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

**1 Timothy 6:11** ~ But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

**2 Timothy 2:22** ~ Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace

- Sanctification includes both battling against sin and pursuing godliness



THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

### Progressive Sanctification Always Follows Positional Sanctification

- Where there is justification and positional sanctification, there will be progressive sanctification
- All those whom God justifies, he also sanctifies...there is no such thing as a person who has been justified who will not also be sanctified
- Justification never occurs alone in God’s plan...it is always accompanied by sanctification
- “If Christ justifies you, He will sanctify you! He will not save you and leave you in your sins.”<sup>12</sup>
- Although justification and sanctification are closely connected, they are vastly different<sup>13</sup>

JUSTIFICATION	SANCTIFICATION
Legal standing	Internal condition
Once for all time	Continuous throughout life
Entirely God’s work	We cooperate
Perfect in this life	Not perfect in this life
The same in all Christians	Greater in some than in others

**1 Corinthians 1:30** ~ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 750.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Murray M’Cheyne

<sup>13</sup> Chart adapted from Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 746.



- To be “in Christ” is also to be being sanctified

**Hebrews 12:14** ~ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord

- No sanctification means no salvation

**Titus 2:11-12, 14** ~ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age... 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

- God’s grace not only brings salvation, it also produces sanctification and godliness because Christ redeemed us for the purpose of purifying us

## **This Process is Never Complete in This Life**

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- Sanctification does not mean sin is totally eradicated in this life...this is obvious from Paul’s own experience

**Romans 7**

**Philippians 3:12-14** ~ Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 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.

- At the same time, the fact that we do not achieve perfection in this life should not serve as an excuse to not pursue holiness and righteousness

## **Sanctification Involves God’s Work and Our Effort**

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- God is the One who brings about our sanctification, but we also must work for it
- It is both a sovereign work of God and something we are exhorted to pursue
- We cannot over-emphasize or under-emphasize either of these twin pillars
- “One the one hand, if we over-emphasize God’s role to work in us and under-emphasize what we are supposed to work out, we flirt with a kind of complacency and apathy that the Apostles knew nothing about. On the other hand, if we emphasize the command for us to work out our salvation such that we under-emphasize or downplay the reality that it is God who works in us, we flirt with the kind of moralistic externalism and willpower religion that Jesus and the Apostles condemned.”<sup>14</sup>

**Philippians 2:12-13** ~ So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

- Thus, sanctification is synergistic...we work out because God works in
- No spiritual transformation is possible without the supernatural work of God...yet we are called personally to work out our salvation, indicating that spiritual progress also depends on our Spirit-empowered efforts
- Both are necessary...it takes diligent effort and divine energy
- Progressive sanctification then is the Christian’s pursuit of God-given holiness

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<sup>14</sup> <http://thecripplegate.com/sanctification-monergistic-or-synergistic/>

- “Our sanctification is like an airplane. It takes both wings to fly. On one wing you have discipline. On the other wing you have dependence on God. Airplanes are designed to fly on one engine, but airplanes are not designed to fly on one wing. Both are wings are absolutely necessary.”<sup>15</sup>
- This is where the spiritual disciplines come in
- “Sanctification, again, is a thing which depends greatly on a diligent use of Scriptural means. When I speak of ‘means, I have in view Bible-reading, private prayer, regular attendance on public worship, regular hearing of God’s Word, and regular reception of the Lord’s Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact that no one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of any eminent saint who ever neglected them. They are the appointed channels through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul, and strengthens the work which He has begun in the inward man. Let men call this legal doctrine if they please, but I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no ‘spiritual gains without pains.’ I should as soon expect a farmer to prosper in business who contented himself with sowing his fields and never looking at them till harvest, as expect a believer to attain much holiness who was not diligent about his Bible-reading, his prayers, and the use of his Sundays. Our God is a God who works by means, and he will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them.”<sup>16</sup>

- The failure to intensely pursue sanctification explains why some believers do not mature much in holiness:

**1 Corinthians 3:1-3** ~ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly

**1 Corinthians 3:15** ~ If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire

**Hebrews 5:12-14** ~ For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

## PERFECT SANCTIFICATION

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- Our sanctification is complete when we die and go to be with the Lord...when the presence of sin is removed entirely

**1 Corinthians 15:49** ~ Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

**Philippians 3:21** ~ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

**1 John 3:2** ~ Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

- Thus, we look forward with great anticipation to the glorification that awaits us, the redemption of our bodies

**Romans 8:23** ~ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

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<sup>15</sup> Jerry Bridges

<sup>16</sup> J.C. Ryle