

# CHIEF MINISTRIES

April 2016

Let's take a look at one of the most important – and controversial – issues; are we already totally sanctified, are we in the process of being totally sanctified, or is total sanctification still future (sanctification and holiness are virtually synonymous).

The Scriptures clearly teach three things about sanctification:

1. The moment we were born again, we were set apart as holy to the Lord.
2. From that moment until our dying day, we are called by God to grow in holiness, with His help and empowerment.
3. When we are resurrected, we will be made perfectly holy forever.

In theological terms, we have been sanctified, we are being sanctified, and we will be totally sanctified. Put another way, sanctification is progressive.

There are those (modern grace teachers) who reject this in the strongest of terms. I heard someone the other day in a class say, “The moment you decide to do something to be holy, you have trusted in yourself, instead of Christ, for salvation.” And some of the same people will go along with progressive sanctification, but when you talk about growing in holiness or that we must pursue holiness they'll say that “you can't do anything to be more holy.” And in the words of Joseph Prince, “Colossians 2 tells us we are already made perfect in Christ. We don't work towards perfection. Christ has made us perfect from the cross. The minute you believe, you are made perfect in Christ. You work from your perfection not to it.” And “God has taken us out of a prison called ‘sin’ and has transferred us to a prison called ‘righteousness’. Is there anything you can do to take yourself from the prison of ‘sin’ to the prison called ‘righteousness’? If the answer is ‘no’; what makes you think anything you did can now put you back into the prison called ‘sin’?” More emphatically still, “The moment you accepted Jesus, God gave you and eternal A+’ for your right standing with Him.” Note: Colossians 2:10 is commonly misunderstood in hyper grace circles. A more accurate translation would be, “*you have been filled in Him*” (ESV). As for those translations that use “complete” (NAS, KJV), the intended meaning is that we have everything we need in Jesus as being opposed to being - perfect already.

I agree that the moment we were born again, we were justified (meaning pronounced “righteous” and “not guilty” in God's sight, and this was by faith and not good works. I also agree that the moment we were saved, we were set apart to God as holy (“sanctified”), also by faith and not our good works. That's why we are addressed as “saints” (holy ones) in the New Testament, even when our conduct is not particularly saintly. Where I disagree is the claim that once we're saved, we are made perfectly, totally and forever holy in God's sight regardless of what we do or how we live!

What then do these teachers do with the verses that call us to “pursue holiness,” or to “be holy” or to “be perfect” (complete, whole) or that speak of us as “being sanctified”?

Some of the greatest grace preachers like John Bunyan, author of Pilgrim's Progress, and Charles Spurgeon, the reformers Luther and Calvin all believed in progressive sanctification in one form or another, meaning that once we are saved and set apart to God is holy, we grow in holiness for the rest of our lives.

Now, I want to point out that I have no problem with Luther, Calvin, Bunyan or Spurgeon being wrong in some of their doctrines. Those of you new in the faith or have not long been a student of the word will find out as you continue to study that even these men had differences among them, and certainly none of them were infallible, and I certainly have some different perspectives than they do. It's just important that we understand the implications of what modern grace teachers are saying: "virtually every major grace teacher in the past got this very crucial - even foundational - point wrong, while only they have it right."

More than 60 years ago Arthur Pink sounded a strong alarm in his "The Gospel of Satan" he addressed a teaching current in his day that claimed believers had no obligation to live as disciples once they were "saved", since Jesus did all the work on the cross. After all, if Jesus announced "it is finished" right before He died then there's nothing left for us to do other than believe. As Mickey Mooney wrote in his book "Look! The Finished Work of Jesus"; "We only need to believe upon Jesus for who He truly is and our works obligation is perfectly fulfilled." Joseph Prince puts the idea this way, "Live life knowing that there is nothing for you to do - only believe! It is finished!" Paul wrote that *we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10). That certainly sounds like an obligation! Note also that Paul wrote this in a context extolling salvation by grace through faith and not by works; (see Ephesians 2:8-9) and Jacob [James] minced no words, emphasizing that "as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (Jacob [James] 2: 26).

The Lord has purchased with His blood, and He expects much from us: "*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit with in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body*" (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:19-20). And even though it is Jesus working in us, God requires our participation, calling us to "*work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (Philippians 2:12-13).

What Jesus accomplished on the cross is magnificent and comprehensive and it is easy to overstate the effects of His "finished work". And it's easy to see how some would argue that if Jesus did it all and if the work of salvation is completely "finished" there is nothing for us to add to it. In fact you can easily make the claim that if you have add anything to what Jesus did - including your faith - then the work is not really finished, a line of thinking that I believe leads to even more serious error in interpreting Scripture, but I won't get into that just yet.

How can we sort this out? Actually it's not all that complicated. Modern grace teachers focus all their attention on the Scriptures that speak of our past sanctification while overlooking (or misinterpreting) the Scriptures that speak of our ongoing, progressive sanctification as well as our final sanctification. All we need to do is take in the whole counsel of God here and things will become very clear.

As born-again followers of Jesus; we are called "saints" in the New Testament ("holy ones") rather than "sinners," and that is how we should identify ourselves rather than saying, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace," each of us who know the Lord should say "I was a sinner but now I'm a saint, forgiven by grace and empowered by grace!"

This is what Paul expressed in 1 Corinthians 1:2; "*to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*" (the words sanctified and saints come from the same Greek root) so: according to Scripture, "sinners" are the enemies of God where as His people are called "saints". In other words, it is one thing to sin and repent, even as a believer, it is another thing to be a sinner. It is one thing to do something bad and then correct it, it is another thing to be bad. It is one thing to think an adulterous thought and turn from it immediately; it is another thing to be an adulterer. I was a drug user, I was a rebellious snob, I was a filthy sinner. Now I'm a saint - imperfect, but nonetheless radically transformed and wonderfully changed. Sin is no longer the rule of my life, it's the exception to the rule. My habit now is to live for God, whereas before I knew him, my habit was to sin.

I agree with the modern grace teachers when they emphasize who we are in Jesus, when they encourage us to live according to our new nature, and when they remind us that we have died to sin and cannot live in it any longer. That is the transforming power of the gospel and of grace. The problem arises when these sincere teachers build their theology on one set of verses while ignoring, rejecting or wrongly interpreting many other verses, thereby drawing theological conclusions that are contrary to the word.

They also seem to be unaware of the New Testament idea of already/not yet. Failure to grasp the biblical tension of already/not yet is a failure to grasp the book of grace and Jesus himself. The kingdom is now; the kingdom is not yet. I am saved; I am being saved. The hour has come; the hour is yet future. I am sanctified; I am being sanctified. I am a new creation; I await resurrection. I am a child of God; I am exhorted - sometimes warned - to endure to the end. So grace is both the virtue that saved me as a free gift and that governs me throughout the process of ongoing sanctification. But it never erases my free will or the call to be a faithful steward.

So, we are already redeemed (Ephesians 1:7) and we already have the Spirit, but at present the Spirit “*is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession*” (v. 14). *We are already seated in heavenly places with Jesus (Ephesians 2:6), but at present we are living in earthly bodies, because of which we groan (2 Corinthians 5:2) “so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (v 4). We are already adopted as sons (Romans 8:15) but for now, we “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons the retention of our bodies” (Verse 23). We have already died to sin and cannot live in it any longer (Romans 6:1-7) yet we must consider ourselves dead to sin and not let it rule in our lives (vs 11-19) we have already put off the old self and put on the new self. (Ephesians 4:22-24). Yet we are instructed to “put to death” and “put off” that which pertains to our earthly nature and “put on” that which pertains to our new self (Colossians 3:1-14).* This is what is meant by “already and not yet”.

John Stoll in his book “The Biblical Principles For Christian Maturity” lists the 3 elements of sanctification: Sanctification or holiness of life has 8 threefold aspect:

1. Positional, which is passed, through the work of Christ in our redemption, and confers upon the Christian a perfect position, as a child of God (Hebrew 10:10)
2. Progressive, which is the present work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, bringing one’s character development into conformity with his position in Christ, and this is experiential throughout one’s lifetime (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Colossians 1:28, 2 Peter 3:18).
3. Perfection, which is future and will be completed when the Christian arrives in heaven, and then his character behaviors will be as perfect as his position is in Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, Philippians 1:16, 1 John 3:2-3).

To repeat, I agree with modern grace teachers when they state that we have already been sanctified, but that is only part of the story. The word states plainly that we are also being sanctified (a process in which we participate actively) and one day we will be ultimately sanctified. In other words, what these modern grace teachers understand to be the end of the story is actually the beginning of the story. In short, because we have been set apart as holy by the Lord and designated as holy by the Lord (“saints”) and because Jesus has become our sanctification and our righteousness and our redemption, we are now called to live this out progressively in every area of our lives - to be holy in all our conduct and to pursue holiness. And we do this in Him, empowered by His grace.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 Paul writes, “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification - that you abstain from sexual immorality.*” Notice this is something they are called to live out. God wants our sanctification - their holiness - and so Paul gives them specific instructions in terms of what this means = it is God’s will that you be holy and that you stay away from sexual sin.

A Thessalonians scholar C. A. Warramaker, “Paul understood God to be the holy God of the Old Testament who was set apart from every form of sin and impurity and who demanded similar holiness from the people of

Israel through separation (Leviticus 11:44, 19:2, and 21:8). God had not changed, so the same requirement was laid on the new people of God, the Christians.” He also explains that “separation from sinful existence, that is sanctification, was a fundamental part of Paul’s understanding of Christian existence (Romans 6:19, 22). According to Romans 6:22 the goal of sanctification is nothing less than eternal life. This explains why Paul can say it is the will of God for the Thessalonians.”

Paul is speaking here of a lifestyle that requires action and obedience. And so sanctification here is progressive, and the Thessalonian believers were commanded to participate in that process. As noted by F. F. Bruce, perhaps the top New Testament scholar of the last generation and one of the greatest authorities on Paul in particular, the Greek word used for sanctification is “haglasmas”, which means “the process of making holy.”

Paul continues: “*That each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of like the Gentiles who do not know God.*” (1 Thessalonians 4:4-5). This is the exact opposite of what I quoted someone saying at the beginning of this letter: “the moment you decide to do something to be holy, you have trusted in yourself instead of Christ for your salvation.” Not so! As those who trust Christ and who have been consecrated to the Lord, we are called to do certain things in order to live out that consecration - to be holy.

1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul’s prayer was “*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.*” Why would Paul pray for their complete sanctification if they were completely sanctified? Because it’s a process! Romans 6:19 says the same about it being a process and again in verse 21-22.

How do we reconcile this with Hebrews 10:10 where we learned that “*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*” To begin with, the words “once for all” apply first to the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah and then to our sanctification, and based on that ‘once for all act’, there has been a “once for all” sanctification on our behalf. So you see, Hebrews 10:14 - just four verses after verse 10 - states that “*by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*” So even though the verb in Hebrews 10:10 refers to “a completed state,” the verb in Hebrews 10:14 refers to “a process here”. And Hebrews 10:26-29 warns about severe judgment that will come on believers who were sanctified by the blood of Jesus but who turned away from the cross.

To recap things briefly, at the beginning I explained that we have been sanctified by the death of Jesus and the work of the Spirit, and we are being sanctified by the application of what Jesus has done with the help of the Spirit. Hebrews 10:10 and 10:14 say this very thing: “*We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*” This verb quite definitely means “those who are in the process of sanctification.”

Now, the Greek verbal system is very precise, and when the same author uses such specific and exacting terminology in the space of just a few verses (Hebrews 10:10 and 10:14) it’s important that we understand exactly what he is saying. “Through the once for all sacrifice of Jesus, you have been set apart as holy, and now, by that same sacrifice, having been made fit for complete and perfect access into God’s presence, you are being made holy in your daily lives.”

This is reinforced in Hebrews 12:14, which says, “*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*”

So, we are called to pursue holiness.

How do we explain the first part of Hebrews 10:14, which stated “*by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified?*” Obviously, the author is not contradicting himself within the same verse, telling us that we are already totally perfect and at the same time we are in the process of being made

holy. So it's clear that "perfected" must have another beginning, and it's easy to discuss what that meaning is by looking at the verb "make perfect" (teleo) in the Greek in Hebrews.

But first, let's look at Paul's words in Philippians 3:12, where he writes, "*Not that I have already obtained this [speaking of his ultimate spiritual goals] or I am already perfect.*" Well, if Paul was not already perfect, it's obvious that we ourselves are not "already perfect."

Turning to Hebrews we see that the verb "be, become perfect, perfected" occurs frequently. When referring to Jesus being made "perfect", the verse means "made perfect for His role." (See Hebrews 2:10;5:9;7:28). So by suffering as He did, Jesus became our perfect leader and high priest.

As far as the law and sacrificial system were concerned, they would not make people (or things) "perfect," meaning, giving the worshipers "immediate and permanent access to God." (See Hebrews 7:19, 9:9, 10:1) as for Hebrews 11:40, the meaning there is that believers before the cross could not experience the fullness of redemption without us, while Hebrews 12:23 speaks of the heavenly scene at the throne of God, where the spirit of believers have reached their full goal - hence, been made perfect.

With this in mind, remembering in particular what we learned in the verses about the law, let's look again at Hebrews 10:14: "*For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*" What does this mean? The text is saying that rather than the worshipers having to bring offerings again and again, year after year, without being fully and completely right with God, Jesus brought one single offering, making us righteous in God's sight once and for all and giving us complete and unhindered access to God's presence. And it is on that basis that we participate in the process of sanctification.

To sum it up, Jesus the Messiah, in His one, single, glorious sacrifice, did everything necessary to present us to God, washing our sins away and paying our debt in full, making us children of the Father the moment we were saved. Yes, from the first second we were born again, before we were conscious of the many ways we needed to change, we had access to the holiest place in the universe, the very throne of God - and that was through the power of the cross of Christ. What a Savior!

But, there is more to the story: if we reject this once for all sacrifice, if we decide that we can continue in willful, unrepentant sin because we have been set apart to God, or if, as a first century Jewish believer in Jesus might have been tempted to do, we forsake the sacrifice of Jesus and seek out other means of atonement, there is a stern and fearful warning for us:

*For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>v27</sup> but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. <sup>v28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>v29</sup> How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29 ESV)*

Please take a moment to look at these verses carefully. This is a warning to believers! And notice how it ends:

*For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." <sup>v31</sup> It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:30-31 ESV)*

The author of Hebrews is speaking here of those who have received the knowledge of the truth and have been sanctified by the Messiah's blood. But by deliberately continuing to sin - not a momentary lapse or an ongoing struggle with temptation, but rather a determined, willful, turning away from the Lord - we spurn the Son of God, we profane the blood of the covenant, and we outrage the Spirit of grace. (Yes, the Spirit of grace can be outraged) And the author of Hebrews writes this after declaring in verse 10 of this chapter that we have been

sanctified once and for all by Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice and stating in verse 14 that we have been perfected for all time.

This is the finished work of the cross I mentioned earlier.

Hebrews also states clearly that if we scorn God's grace and turn away from the cross and go back into sin, we forfeit everything He has done for us. That's why the book is filled with so many warnings, including this one:

*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. v15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; v16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. v17 For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. (Hebrews 12:14-17 ESV)*

This may not jibe with what your local church or spiritual program is teaching but it is clearly what the New Testament teaches.

Yes, there is a future grace that we still await, a grace that will complete our sanctification as John expressed: *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is v3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3 ESV)*. Paul continues: *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, v15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, v16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:14-16 ESV)*. And notice how Peter quotes Leviticus 19 here without having to apologize for the quote - as in, "I know this is from the law and the law doesn't really apply to us anymore" - just as the writer of Hebrews quoted Deuteronomy 4:24 in chapter 12:29 without having to apologize. "And," Peter writes, *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, v18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, v19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:17-19 ESV)*. And how did Peter begin his letter? *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, v2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Peter 1:1-2 ESV)*

He is writing to believers who have been set apart to God as holy by the Spirit "for obedience and for sprinkling with Jesus Christ blood." (Note that "obedience" and the blood of Jesus go hand-in-hand)

And so, often we are saved by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, we are then called to live sanctified lives with the help of the Holy Spirit, and on that final day, by God's grace, we will "stand, rejoicing, without blemish before his glorious presence" (*Judah [Jude] 24NET*). This is exactly what Paul wrote to the Colossians; *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, v22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, v23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:21-23 ESV)*

Has this helped make the sanctification process fall into place for you now? Was it worth digging into the Scriptures to get a clear understanding? In theological terms we have been sanctified, we are being sanctified and we will be totally sanctified. Sanctification is progressive. It has nothing to do with earning our salvation or holding to salvation by works. It has to do with living out our calling to be saints, with walking out the realities of what Jesus has already done for us and in us.

Turning back to Peter, we see that his letter is filled with exhortations to holy conduct: he calls us to love one another deeply (1 Peter 1:22) to “*put away all malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander*” (1 Peter 2:1); “*to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against our soul*” (v11) - and to do as a chosen people and royal priesthood, as the people of God (v 9,10), keeping our conduct honorable before the world (v 12): to be submissive to authority and to follow the examples of Jesus in not retaliating (v 13-23); for wives and husbands to conduct themselves in purity (1 Peter 3:1-7); to “*have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love and a tender heart, and a humble mind*” (v 8); to do good to others and to bless those who curse us (vs 9-17); and to “*live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is passed suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry*” (1 Peter 4:2-3)

He urges us to “*be self-controlled and sober minded*” (v 7). He reminds us of our calling to *love one another earnestly* (v 8) to *show hospitality without grumbling* (v 9) to *use our gifts for the good of others* (v 10-11) and to *suffer joyfully for the gospel* (v 12-16), even stating that “*it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*” (v 17). Then he urges his fellow elders to be *true shepherds and godly examples* (1 Peter 5:1-4) *exhorting the younger man to humble themselves* (v 5-6) and *urging all to be sober and vigilant against the onslaughts of the devil* (v 8-9) reminding his readers that “*after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you*” (v 10). For Peter, this is what it means to “*be holy in all your conduct*” (1 Peter 1:15).

To be sure, with a letter like this (which is actually very much like Paul’s letters), Peter would be branded a legalist in many grace or “OSAS” camps today, which makes this last verse all the more remarkable as Peter sums up his book: “*by Sylvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it*” (1 Peter 5:12 ESV)

How incredible! Yes, this - this calling to live holy lives, empowered by the Spirit, because of the extraordinary gift of salvation through Jesus - “this is the true grace of God. Stand firm and it!” Will you?

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. v12 It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, v13 as we wait for the happy fulfillment of our hope in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. v14 He gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good (Titus 2:11-14 NET)*

This is grace.....Live it!

## **Chief**

***If you want to know more about CHIEF Ministries or would like to be a part of this, please go to [www.chiefministries.com](http://www.chiefministries.com) and [www.chiefshouse.org](http://www.chiefshouse.org)***

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