

The Doctrine of Soteriology

“We were sanctified, we are being sanctified, and we will be sanctified.”

- I. **Sanctification** is the gracious work of God by which He makes us more like Christ.
 - A. Hagiasmos literally means to make holy or set apart.
 - B. God sanctifies while believers responsibly participate. ([John 17:17](#); [Rom 12:1-2](#); [I Cor 1:2, 26-30](#); [2 Cor 3:18, 7:1, 6:16](#); [Eph 5:25-27](#); [Phil 2:12-13](#); [I Thess 5:23](#); [II Thess 2:13](#); [Titus 2:14](#); [Heb 12:10, 14](#); [I Pet 1:2](#)).
 1. “The accomplishment of this our perfection then does not hang on our weak endeavours. It does not hang even on Paul’s strong prayer. It hangs only on God’s almighty and unfailing faithfulness.”¹
 2. “God’s working in us [in sanctification] is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work.”²
 3. Packer sums it up as “regeneration is birth, sanctification is growth.”³ Although a human being can be involved in his growth through proper diet and exercise, he cannot change his divinely granted genetic code. His eyes will be blue, his hair brown, and his feet a size 10.
 - C. Since it is not a human activity but a divine gift, sanctification is a stable condition that originates with God and not with the believer’s will or piety.
 - D. The purpose of sanctification is to help us live lives that glorify God. We are saved and sanctified not *by* works, but *for* works ([Eph 2:10](#)).
- II. Sanctification definitively begins at salvation, progresses through the Christian’s life, and culminates in complete union with Christ.
 - A. **Total Depravity.** All human beings are totally unable to save themselves.
 1. The Westminster Confession describes total depravity as “man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”
 2. Louis Berkof pictures the unregenerate person’s total depravity as systemic infection.
 - a) “The contagion of his sin at once spread through the entire man, leaving no part of his nature untouched, but vitiating every power and faculty of body and soul. This utter corruption of man is clearly taught in Scripture, [Gen. 6:5](#); [Ps. 14:3](#); [Rom. 7:18](#). Total depravity here does not mean that human nature was at once as thoroughly depraved as it could possibly become. In the will this depravity manifested itself as spiritual inability.”⁴
 3. The notion of Total Depravity persists throughout historic Protestantism.
 - a) It is Scriptural ([Gen 6:5](#); [Psalms 51:5](#); [Ecc 7:20](#); [9:3](#); [Jer 17:9](#); [13:23](#); [Mark 7:21-23](#); [John 3:19, 6:44, 6:64-65, 8:34](#); [Rom 3:10-11](#); [8:7-8](#); [1 Cor 2:14](#); [Eph](#)

¹ B. B. Warfield, “Entire Sanctification,” <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/bbwentire.htm>.

² John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 149.

³ J. I. Packer, “Sanctification: The Christian Grows in Grace.” http://www.fivesolas.com/ct_sanc.htm

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996) 225.

[2:1-3; Titus 3:3](#)).

- b) Augustine argued that the gospel depends both on the notion of total depravity and God's grace. Each supports the other in the salvation of God's children.
- (1) "But if God regards a man with solicitude so that he then believes in God's help in fulfilling His commands, and if a man begins to be led by the Spirit of God, then the mightier power of love struggles against the power of the flesh. And although there is still in man a power that fights against him—his infirmity being not yet fully healed—yet he [the righteous man] lives by faith and lives righteously in so far as he does not yield to evil desires, conquering them by his love of righteousness. This is the third stage of the man of good hope."⁵
- c) [The Heidelberg Catechism](#) describes Total Depravity as a comfort since it only highlights God's work.
- (1) "2. Q. What do you need to know in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort?
- (2) "A. First, how great my sins and misery are;⁶ second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery;⁷ third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance."⁸

B. **Definitive Sanctification.** At conversion, God makes the believer a *genuinely* new (though not a *totally* new) creature. ([Acts 20:28, 32, 26:18; Rom 6; I Cor 1:2, 6:11; II Cor 3:18; 5:17; Eph 2:4-6, Col 3:1, Heb 10:10](#))

1. Believers are genuinely new creatures. More often the Scripture refers to sanctification as a definitive, one-time act than as a process.⁹
- a) [Westminster Confession](#):
- (1) "They who are 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."
- b) [The Heidelberg Catechism](#):
- (1) "43. Q. What further benefit do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?
- (2) "A. Through Christ's death our old nature is crucified, put to death, and buried with Him,¹⁰ so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer reign in us,¹¹ but that we may offer ourselves to Him as a sacrifice of

⁵ Augustine, *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love* <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/enchiridion.doc>.

⁶ [Rom. 3:9, 10; I John 1:10](#).

⁷ [John 17:3; Acts 4:12; 10:43](#).

⁸ [Matt. 5:16; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 5:8-10; I Pet. 2:9, 10](#).

⁹ John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth) 2:227.

¹⁰ [Rom 6:5-11; Col 2:11, 12](#).

¹¹ [Rom. 6:12-14](#).

thankfulness.”¹²

- c) William Combs describes the new life believers enjoy.
 - (1) “Sanctification also affects our very nature. This is not a change of substance but a change in direction, a change in disposition. Whereas the unbeliever has only one direction, one disposition—toward sin and away from God—the believer is now a ‘new creature’ (2 Cor 5:17) with a new direction, a new disposition—toward God and holiness. All of this means that for the first time we are enabled to live lives that are pleasing to God. At the moment of justification a sinner is regenerated and his transformation begins: ‘But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord’ (2 Cor 3:18). There is no such thing as justification that does not issue in sanctification.”¹³
- 2. Believers are not, however, *totally* new. We still struggle with sin.
 - a) “The concept is not of sin being totally eradicated (that is to claim too much) or merely counteracted (that is to say too little), but of a divinely wrought character change freeing us from sinful habits and forming in us Christlike affections, dispositions, and virtues.”¹⁴
- 3. Therefore:
 - a) Justification and sanctification are a single, unified act of God.¹⁵
 - (1) Justification removes the guilt of our sin.
 - (2) Sanctification (gradually) removes the pollution of our sin.
 - (3) Both occur at salvation.
 - b) Since justification and sanctification are a singular act of God, no such “third” class of human being exists (i.e., the “carnal” Christian).
 - (1) Some views of sanctification rely on a second crisis moment or decision of dedication or claiming of Christ’s “Lordship;” this second crisis creates a third kind of “person.”
 - (2) Yet Scripture describes only two “classes” of human beings: believing and unbelieving as Combs clearly proves.¹⁶
 - (a) “So we conclude that in 1 Cor 2:14–3:4 Paul has only two categories in view: natural and spiritual. The carnal Christian is simply a genuine Christian (Spirit-man) temporarily gone astray.... Although a Christian can be called carnal, his whole spiritual life cannot be categorized as such; he cannot be put into the category of carnal Christian because there is no such category. Every single Christian can be called a carnal Christian because every single Christian is carnal to some degree, but

¹² Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:1, 2.

¹³ William W. Combs, “The Disjunction Between Justification and Sanctification in Contemporary Evangelical Theology,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 6 (Fall 2001): 43, <http://dbts.edu/journals/2001/Combs.pdf>.

¹⁴ J. I. Packer, “Foreward and Introduction” to John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Pub), 1996.

¹⁵ Combs 33-38.

¹⁶ Combs 38-42.

there is no distinct category of carnal Christian.”¹⁷

- (3) “The remainders of the flesh in the Christian do not constitute his characteristic. He is in the Spirit and is walking, with however halting steps, by the Spirit, and it is to all Christians, not to some, that the great promise is given, ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you,’ and the great assurance is added, ‘Because ye are not under the law but under grace.’ He who believes in Jesus Christ is under grace, and his whole course, in its process and in its issue alike, is determined by grace, and therefore, having been predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, he is surely being conformed to that image, God Himself seeing to it that he is not only called and justified but also glorified. You may find Christians at every stage of this process, for it is a process through which all must pass; but you will find none who will not in God’s own good time and way pass through every stage of it. There are not two kinds of Christians, although there are Christians at every conceivable stage of advancement towards the one goal to which all are bound and at which all shall arrive.”¹⁸

C. **Progressive Sanctification.** God inevitably sanctifies the believer through union with Christ. ([Rom 8:13](#); [12:1-2](#); [I Cor 6:11, 19-20, 7:1](#); [II Cor 3:18](#); [Eph 4:22-24](#); [Col 3:9-10](#); [I Thess 5:23](#); [II Thess 2:13](#); [Heb 13:20-21](#); [II Peter 3:18](#); [I John 3:3](#))

1. [Westminster Confession](#):

- a) “This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life: there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.
- b) “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.”

2. Combs describes sanctification as certain though not natural.

- a) “Sanctification is not automatic in the life of the believer, but it is inevitable since ‘although the remaining corruption for a time may greatly prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part overcomes.’”¹⁹

3. The *sinful* nature still exists, but genuine victory over sin is possible.

- a) Heidelberg Catechism carefully uses the term “*sinful* nature.”²⁰ This is an

¹⁷ Combs 41-42.

¹⁸ B. B. Warfield, “A Review of Lewis Sperry Chafer’s *He That Is Spiritual*,” <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/bbwchafer.htm>.

¹⁹ Combs 18.

²⁰ “56. Q. What do you believe concerning the forgiveness of sins? A. I believe that God, because of Christ’s satisfaction, will no more remember my sins ([Psalm 103:3, 4, 10, 12](#); [Micah 7:18, 19](#); [II Cor 5:18-21](#); [I John 1:7, 2:2](#)), nor my sinful nature, against which I have to struggle all my life ([Rom 7:21-25](#)), but He will graciously grant me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never come into condemnation ([John 3:17, 18](#); [5:24](#); [Rom 8:1, 2](#)). . . . 115. Q. If in this life no one can keep the ten commandments perfectly, why does God have them preached so strictly? A. First, that throughout our life we may more and more become aware of our sinful nature, and therefore seek more eagerly the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ ([Psalm 32:5](#); [Rom 3:19-26](#); [7:7, 24, 25](#); [I John 1:9](#)). Second, that we may be zealous for good deeds and constantly pray to God for the grace of the Holy

important distinction from the term “sin nature.”

- (1) Using the term “sin nature” incorrectly implies a “Gnostic dualism”²¹ within the believer.
 - (a) The good angel and the bad angel are duking it out for control of the Christian.
 - (b) Or a black dog and white dog at each other’s throats, and whoever wins is the one you feed.
 - (c) Or Satan and Christ battling for dominion over the soul of the believer with only the believer’s will separating these two equal combatants.
- (2) Although the Christian’s singular human nature is full of sin, as pointed out earlier, sin no longer has dominion over the Christian ([Rom 6](#)).
 - (a) To re-cast that popular illustration, the black dog is dead, so we need to quit feeding the dead black dog.
 - (b) Christ battles, yes, but He battles *for* us, not with us, so that we can be more than conquerors ([Rom 8:37-39](#))
- b) Sin will *not* be eradicated in this lifetime. ([I Kings 8:46](#); [Psalm 19:12](#); [Psalm 143:12](#); [Proverbs 20:9](#); [Isaiah 64:6](#); [Rom 3:22-23](#); [James 3:2](#); [I John 1:8](#))
- c) But genuine victory over sin is possible ([Rom 6](#); [8:13, 30](#); [I Cor 1:30](#); [II Cor 3:18](#); [Gal 5:17](#); [Eph 4:13](#); [Phil 2:12-13](#)).
 - (1) “There is real victory over sin for all justified persons. It begins, as Rom 6 teaches, with the victory over the dominion of sin, which rules the unbeliever. But though it is a real and genuine (actual) victory, it is a qualified victory. . . . Unless sin has been completely eradicated, sin still indwells the believer. . . . Since sin is not eradicated it will always produce conflict within the believer. The filling of the Holy Spirit does not lessen this conflict; on the contrary, he produces the conflict.”²²

D. **Complete Sanctification.** God completes the sanctification process when He makes the believer *totally* new at Christ’s Second Coming ([I Thess 5:23-24](#)).

1. “What is thus fairly implied here is openly taught elsewhere. Men here are not *comprehensores* but *viatores*; we are fighting the good fight; we are running the race. The prize is yonder. And not until the body of this death is laid aside shall the soul be fitted to enter naked into the presence of its Lord, there expecting until the body shall be restored to it—no longer a body of death but of glory. Meanwhile the gradual process of sanctification goes on in soul and body—until the crisis comes when the ‘*Spiritus Creator*’ shall powerfully intervene with the final acts of renewal.”²³
2. Eradication or perfectionism is unbiblical.²⁴
 - a) It enfeebles the definition of sin by calling it a deliberate and intentional disobeying of God’s law.

Spirit, that He may more and more renew us after God’s image, until after this life we reach the goal of perfection ([I Cor 9:24](#); [Phil 3:12-14](#); [I John 3:1-3](#)).”

²¹ Mark Noll, “The Evangelical Mind Today,” *First Things: The Journal of Religion, Culture, and Public Life*, (October 2004), http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=385.

²² Combs 43.

²³ Warfield.

²⁴ Anthony Hoekema, “The Reformed View,” *Five Views on Sanctification*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans) 82-85.

- b) In changing the definition of sin, it actually creates a sort of “imperfect perfection.”
- c) It depends upon a second working of grace or “second blessing,” separate from justification.
- d) [I John 1:8](#) clearly says that living without sin is an impossibility.
- e) Perfectionism makes the Christian life a precarious walk on a moral tight-rope.

III. Conclusions

- A. To illustrate, at salvation,
 - 1. Christ kicks out Satan who ruled the unregenerate’s soul keeping him dead in his trespasses and sins ([Rom 6](#)).
 - a) It’s *not* that Christ simply moves in while Satan stays.
 - b) Instead Christ is Lord of that person at salvation. Sin no longer has dominion.
 - 2. Christ gradually removes the sin within the Christian.
 - 3. So when a believer sins, he’s betraying the work that Christ is performing on his behalf.
 - a) To assume that all that stands between spiritual success or failure is willpower alone is to misunderstand Christ’s empowering work of sanctification.
 - b) When the believer sins it’s actually something *worse* since we are acting completely out of character for the Spirit that indwells us.
- B. Therefore, we must cultivate the salvation that God has already given us. “As a consequence of regeneration, justification and union with Christ believers do have the slavery or power of sin broken in their lives. May God enable us to live a life consistent with this great truth of redemption.”²⁵
- C. This cultivation has the “negative” side of the mortification of sin as John Owen describes. But the positive, vivification side must not be ignored.²⁶
- D. According to J. I. Packer, rather than worrying whether he has emptied himself of himself, the Christian should simply “trust God and get going”²⁷ ([Rom 8](#), [I Cor 15:57-58](#)).

²⁵ Brian Schwertley, "The Necessity of Sanctification: A Brief Refutation of the Carnal Christian Heresy," 2001, <http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/articles/full.asp?id=33|37|90>

²⁶ John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Pub), 1996.

²⁷ J. I. Packer, *Keeping in Step With the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1984) 52-53.