

## Character Formation- Growing Into Christ Likeness

*“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Romans 8:29*

*“As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” 1Cor.15:48-49*

*“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you”  
Galatians 4:19*

*“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” Romans 6:14*

**Introduction:** At the beginning of our Christian lives, we become adopted into God’s family and have right legal standing before a holy God. This is known as “Justification.” (Just as if I never sinned) We are declared just before Him. This is an instantaneous reality. Sanctification, which comes after justification, is the process by which in grace, we grow into the likeness and character of Christ. This transformative process is progressive throughout our lives and is accomplished through grace with our cooperation.

### I. Differences Between Justification and Sanctification

The following table specifies several differences between justification and sanctification:

<b>Justification</b>	<b>Sanctification</b>
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

As this chart indicates, sanctification is something that continues throughout our Christian life. The ordinary course of a Christian’s life will involve continual growth in sanctification, and it is something that the New Testament encourages us to give effort and attention to.

## II. Sanctification Affects the Whole Person

- A. Mind and Intellect-- The sanctification of our intellects will involve growth in wisdom and knowledge as we increasingly “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5) and find that our thoughts are more and more the thoughts that God himself imparts to us in his Word.  
Supporting verses: Rms.12:2; Col.1:10; 2Cor.10:5; Phil.1:9
- B. Emotions-- We will see increasingly in our lives emotions such as “love, joy, peace, patience” (Gal. 5:22).  
Supporting verses: 1Pet.2:11; 1Jn.2:15; Rms.6:17; Eph.4:31
- C. Will-- Sanctification will have an effect on our *will* our decision-making faculty, because God is at work in us, “to *will* and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).
- D. Spirit-- Sanctification will also affect our *spirit* the nonphysical part of our beings. We are to “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and *spirit* and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1) (see also 1Cor.7:34)
- E. Physical Bodies-- Paul encourages the Corinthians, “Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of *body* and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God”-2Cor.7:1  
Supporting verses: Rms.6:12; 1Thes.5:23; 1Cor.6:19-20

## III. 3 Stages of Sanctification

- A. Sanctification has a Definite Beginning at Regeneration.-- This initial step in sanctification involves a definite break from the ruling power and love of sin, so that the believer is no longer ruled or dominated by sin and no longer loves to sin. Paul says, “So you also must *consider yourselves dead to sin* and alive to God in Christ Jesus.... For *sin will have no dominion over you*” (Rom. 6:11, 14)
  - 1. This initial break with sin, then, involves a reorientation of our desires so that we no longer have a dominant love for sin in our lives.
  - 2. This change of one’s primary love and primary desires occurs at the beginning of sanctification.
  - 3. Supporting verses: Titus 3:5; 1Jn.3:9; Rms.6:11-18; 1Cor.6:11
- B. Sanctification Increases Throughout Life-- Even though the New Testament speaks about a definite beginning to sanctification, it also sees it as a process that continues throughout our Christian lives.
  - 1. Paul says that throughout the Christian life “we all... are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18). We are progressively becoming more and more like Christ as we go on in the Christian life. Therefore he says, “Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to

what lies ahead, *I press on* toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14)—this is in the context of saying that he is not already perfect but he presses on to achieve all of the purposes for which Christ has saved him (vv. 9-12)

2. Other supporting verses: Col.3:10; Heb.12:1,14; James 1:22; 1Pet.1:15

C. Sanctification Is Completed at Death (for Our Souls) and When the Lord Returns (for Our Bodies)-- when we appreciate that sanctification involves the whole person, including our bodies (see 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 5:23), then we realize that sanctification will not be entirely completed until the Lord returns and we receive new resurrection bodies. We await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, and he “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21)

1. Supporting verses: Rms.6:12-13; 1Jn.1:8; 2Cor.7:1; 1Thes.5:23

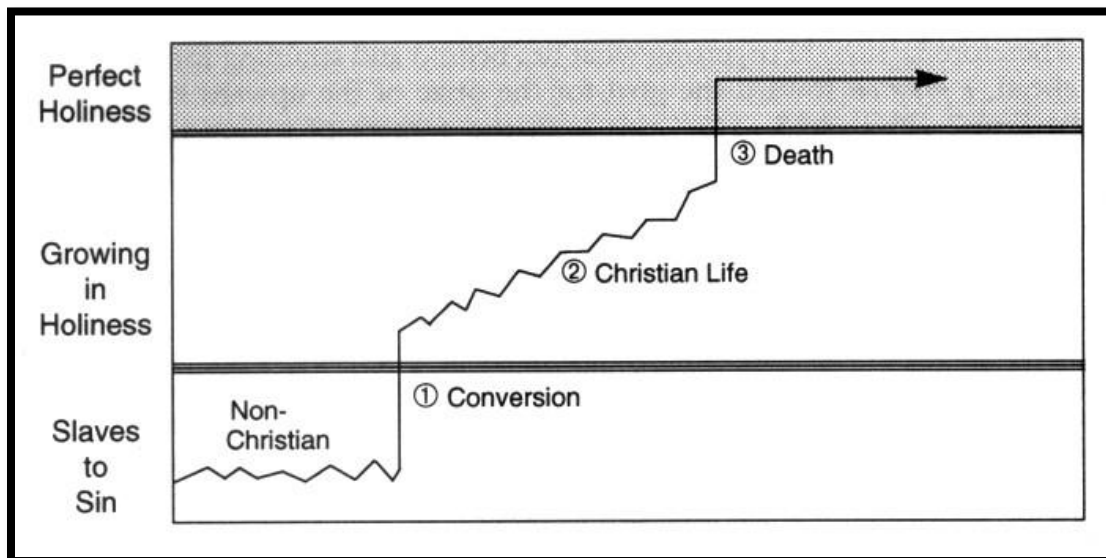


Fig. 38.1

Above in figure 38.1, showing that we are slaves to sin prior to conversion, (1) that there is a definite beginning to sanctification at the point of conversion, (2) that sanctification should increase throughout the Christian life, and (3) that sanctification is made perfect at death. (The completion of sanctification when we receive resurrection bodies is omitted from this chart for the sake of simplicity.)The progress of sanctification as a jagged line on this chart, indicating that growth in sanctification is not always one-directional in this life, but that progress in sanctification occurs at some times, while at other times we realize that we are regressing somewhat. In the extreme case, a believer who makes very little use of the means of sanctification, but rather has bad teaching, lacks good Christian fellowship, and pays little attention to God’s Word and prayer, may actually go for many years with very little progress in sanctification at all—but this is certainly not the normal or expected pattern of the Christian life. It is in fact highly abnormal.—Grudem's Systematic Theology, ch.38.

#### IV. God and Man Cooperate in Sanctification.

- A. God's Role in Sanctification-- Paul tells the Philippians, "*God is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" –Phil.2:13
1. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit!
  2. The Holy Spirit produces in us the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23)
  3. Supporting verses: Heb.13:20-21; 1Cor.1:30; 2Thes.2:13; 1Pet.1:2; Gal.5:16-18; Rms.8:14
- B. Our Role in Sanctification-- That active role which we are to play is indicated by Romans 8:13, where Paul says, "If by the Spirit *you* put to death the deeds of the body you will live." Here Paul acknowledges that it is "by the Spirit" that we are able to do this.
1. We are to "*Strive... for the holiness* without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14)
  2. We are to "*abstain from immorality*" and so obey the will of God, which is our "sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3)
  3. "Let us *cleanse ourselves* from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).
  4. "*make every effort*" to grow in character traits that accord with godliness (2 Peter 1:5)
  5. Additional supporting verses: Rom. 12:1-13:14; Eph. 4:17-6:20; Phil. 4:4-9; Col. 3:5-4:6; 1 Peter 2:11-5:11

#### V. Questions for Personal Application:

1. Do you really believe that you are even now dead to the ruling power and love of sin in your life?
2. As you look back over the last few years of your Christian life, can you see a pattern of definite growth in sanctification? What are some things that you used to delight in which no longer interest you?
3. In living the Christian life, have you maintained a balance between your passive role and your active role in sanctification, or have you tended to emphasize one aspect over the other, and why? What might you do to correct this imbalance, if there is one in your life?
4. What areas of your intellect still need quite a bit of growth in sanctification? With regard to your emotions, in what areas do you know that God still needs to work to bring about greater sanctification? Are there areas or aspects of sanctification that need to be improved with respect to your physical body and its obedience to God's purposes?

\*The framework for this outline came from Wayne Grudem's "Systematic Theology,"