

# New Testament Sanctification: *Part 1, Initial Sanctification*

Gregory A. Smith

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## Introduction

*Holy cow. Holy Joe. Holy mackerel. Holy Moses. Holy smoke. Holy Willie.* We encounter these and other references to “holiness” (some much more profane) in common language. Holiness and sanctification are not taken seriously in our society today. Even among Christians there is not always an understanding of and appreciation for the Bible’s teaching on the subject.

How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing, it is irresistible.--C. S. Lewis, Letters to an American Lady

This lesson will investigate the meaning and implications of the New Testament’s teaching on sanctification, which refers to the process of becoming holy. As we examine the Scriptures we will do well to recognize that *holy, holiness, hallow, saint, sanctify, sanctification, and sanctuary* are all related.

## Who or what can be described as holy?<sup>1</sup>

God (106)

*Father (9)*

*Son (7)*

*Spirit (92)*

People: New Testament (77)

*Believers (71)*

*Church [temple, priesthood, nation] (4)*

*Apostles and prophets (2)*

People: Old Testament (9)

*Believers (4)*

*Prophets (4)*

*Firstborn male Israelites (1)*

Places (11)

*Jerusalem (3)*

*Temple (3)*

*New Jerusalem (3)*

*Burning bush (1)*

*Mount of Transfiguration (1)*

Revelation (5)

*Old Testament [law, covenant, commandments] (4)*

*Christian faith (1)*

Angels (4)

Christian greeting [kissing] (4)

Christian lifestyle [calling, conversation] (2)

Things in general (1)

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<sup>1</sup> This list summarizes the use of the Greek word *hagios* (“holy”) in the New Testament. Five references were not classed: Rom. 11:16; Heb. 3:1; Jude 14; Rev. 11:18; 22:6.

## What is holiness (and, by extension, sanctification)?

When applied to people, places, and things, holiness incorporates several ideas:

- God's presence
- Consecration to God
- Separation from sin

However, since holiness is ultimately a divine quality, it seems difficult to define it strictly in function of these principles. In the Scriptures holiness is clearly linked to all three persons of the Godhead:

- Father (John 17:17; Eph. 1:3-4; 1 Thess. 4:3, 7; 5:23; Heb. 10:10; 12:10; Jude 1)
- Son (John 17:19; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1:30; 6:11; Eph. 2:20-22; 5:25-27; Col. 1:21-22; 1 Thess. 3:12-13; Heb. 2:11; 9:13-14; 10:10, 14; 13:12)
- Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2)

God's holiness has to do with the fact that he is first in his own affections; he is unswervingly devoted to his own pleasure. His character is definitely righteous, and he delights supremely in himself.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of this definition, a person is holy when he or she delights supremely in God's character. A thing is holy when it fulfills God's creative design, thus bringing him glory.

We take the word sanctification much too lightly. Are we prepared to pay the cost of sanctification? The cost will be a deep restriction of all our earthly concerns, and an extensive cultivation of all our godly concerns. Sanctification means to be intensely focused on God's point of view. It means to secure and to keep all the strength of our body, soul, and spirit for God's purpose alone. . . . Sanctification means being made one with Jesus so that the nature that controlled Him will control us. Are we really prepared for what that will cost? It will cost absolutely everything in us which is not of God.--Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, devotional for Feb. 8<sup>3</sup>

Holiness does not consist in mystic speculations, enthusiastic fervours, or uncommanded austerities; it consists in thinking as God thinks, and willing as God wills.--John Brown, nineteenth-century Scottish theologian, quoted in Jerry Bridges, The Pursuit of Holiness (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978), 51

## When does sanctification take place?

In the past	At salvation	Initial sanctification	Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-26; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 9:13-14; 10:10; Jude 1
In the present	Throughout the Christian's life	Progressive sanctification	Rom. 6:19; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 2:20-22; 4:11-12; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; 2 Tim. 2:21; Heb. 12:10

<sup>2</sup> See John Piper, Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist (Portland, Or.: Multnomah Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Available at <<http://www.gospelcom.net/rbc/utmost/devo/02-08.shtml>>.

In the future      At Christ's second coming      Final sanctification      Eph. 5:25-27; Col. 1:21-22;  
1 Thess. 3:12-13; 5:23

### **In what sense are we sanctified at salvation?**

Initial sanctification does not eradicate sin from our lives. We will continue to struggle with sin until we are perfected in God's presence. However, initial sanctification is still significant.

- It is conveyed to us in the person of Jesus Christ (Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2).
- Jesus secured it through his death on the cross (Eph. 5:25-26; Heb. 9:13-14; 10:10); we appropriate it through faith in his name (1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13).
- The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to us. He sanctifies; we believe (Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13).
- It can be viewed in a corporate sense: Christ's church is sanctified as a body (Eph. 5:25-26).
- Unlike its Old Testament precedent, it is spiritual, not ceremonial (Heb. 9:13-14).
- It assures of a future inheritance, final sanctification (Acts 20:32; 26:18; Eph. 5:25-27; Jude 1).

### **Sanctified at salvation--so what?**

Initial sanctification has a number of implications:

- *Faith*: We must appropriate the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work.
- *Gratitude*: Sanctification confers on us a privileged position. Since we could never achieve holiness on our own, we must recognize it as a gift of grace.
- *Joy*: Through sanctification we enter into a relationship where God can communicate his holiness to us. Let us rejoice!
- *Discipline*: We should strive to live like the saints that we are in God's sight. Initial sanctification is the basis for progressive sanctification.
- *Hope*: Initial sanctification is the starting point for a process culminating in sinless perfection. We look forward to final sanctification.

### **Bibliography**

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