

BASIC DISCIPLESHIP

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR PURPOSE

PROGRESSIVE  
SANCTIFICATION

Matthew Black



# Understanding Your Purpose: Progressive Sanctification

By Matthew Black

We've all seen the bumper sticker: "Please be patient with me; God is not finished with me yet." There's a song the children sing that is so true: "God's still workin' on me, to make me what I ought to be." How true it is! And this comforting truth is better known as the biblical teaching of sanctification.

Now that you are a Christian God has saved you. What does that mean? He saved you from the penalty of sin when he forgave you of your sin and erased your condemnation. He is saving you right now from the power of sin by making you more and more like Christ by his indwelling Spirit and the word of God. He will save you eternally when you die or he comes again, and he will give you a new body. You will live with him forever on the new earth when heaven and earth become one. You have one exciting purpose: to grow and change into the image of Jesus. That means every day, as you apply God's word to your life, your heart and character will become more like Christ.

## **The Principle of Sanctification**

Sanctification is being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Are you a sanctified man or woman? Making you holy is God's entire purpose in your life right now.

In order to understand salvation, we need to ask what it means to be saved. What are you saved from? You are saved from the power, penalty, and one day even the presence of sin.

Jesus did not come simply to gain forgiveness for the penalty of our sins, but to save us from the power of sin. If you are saved, then you are being sanctified. Christ came to die that sin would not have dominion over us or be our slave master. His name shall be called “Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). When Christ comes again, the very presence of sin will be entirely eradicated from you. If I could put it on a chart it would look like this.

<b>PAST</b>	<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>FUTURE</b>
<p><b><i>Election</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Calling</i></b> (drawing, conviction)</p> <p><b><i>Regeneration - Conversion</i></b> (Faith / Repentance)</p> <p><b><i>Justification</i></b> (declared righteous)</p> <p><b><i>Adoption</i></b> (given all the rights and privileges of a true child)</p>	<p><b><i>Sanctification</i></b> (Being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ)</p> <p>In sanctification you continue repenting and believing...</p>	<p><b><i>Glorification</i></b> (Resurrected in a new, sinless body with Christ)</p>

As you can see, our entire present life is devoted to being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

## **The Promise of Sanctification**

If you are saved, then your whole life is now devoted to being sanctified and holy and pure and being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. God promises to do it!

## *A Prophesied Change*

No lasting and meaningful change is possible without a new heart. Theologians call this “regeneration.” Christians can change because they are regenerated, or as Peter says, “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). Peter is not teaching new doctrine here. If it is new, it is probably not true. The apostle Peter is referring to what the prophet Ezekiel taught six hundred years earlier.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** | And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Ezekiel has described the new birth. What marks born again people as belonging to God is that they walk in God’s statutes and keep his rules and do them.

## *A Promised Change*

Those whom free grace chooses, free grace cleanses. We are not chosen because we are holy, but chosen to be holy: and being chosen, the purpose is no dead letter, but we are made to seek after holiness.<sup>1</sup>

With these words Charles Haddon Spurgeon trumpeted the Scriptures’ promise of progressive sanctification for every believer. What a joy that every believer is predestined for this promise of conformity to Christ

**Romans 8:28-29** | And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon. *Exploring the Mind and Heart of the Prince of Preachers* (Oswego, IL: Fox River Press, 2005), 228.

## God promises to sanctify us entirely!

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 | 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. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Paul tells us that every good work and every situation of the Christian's life is "prepared" before we were ever born.

Ephesians 2:10 | For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

It's like God puts his footprints in front of us to walk in every day of our lives. They are "prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." He guides us like a father holds their toddler's hands in order to help them walk.

At our justification, we are declared righteous in Christ, and are counted absolutely perfect because of what Christ did on the cross. In sanctification, our heart is changed and growing in Christlike character more and more. This chart may help visualize it better.

	<b>Justification</b>	<b>Progressive Sanctification</b>
Quality	Instantly declared righteous	Gradually made righteous
	Objective, judicial (non-experiential): legal, forensic position	Subjective, experiential: daily experience
	External: outside the believer	Internal: inside the believer
	Christ's righteousness imputed, received judicially	Christ's righteousness imparted, worked out experientially
	Instantly removes sin's guilt and penalty	Gradually removes sin's pollution and power

## *A Nature Change*

When we are born again, there is such a change that the world does not recognize us. Theologians call this nature change “regeneration.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 | Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Why must the old sinful life go and the new holy life take its place?—Because we are Christ’s new creation. Just as God spoke the worlds into existence, and so there was light and life, so God has set us on a path of light and life through the new nature. The new heart (new nature) produces a new way of living. New and godly and God-pleasing fruit are coming out of the Christian’s life if he is born again—guaranteed by the eternal decree of God from before the foundation of the world.

If the nature is changed, the fruit of the life will change. The apostles received this teaching from the Lord: “every healthy tree bears good fruit” (Mt 7:17). Regeneration always has verifiable evidence. “Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” was our Lord’s promise (Mt 7:20).

Sanctification is possible because it is preceded by the power of God in regeneration. Sanctification is the result of regeneration. When we plant a seed, the fruit of the seed is borne, and it gives forth fruit. So it is with regeneration. The action of God in regeneration produces the fruit of sanctification. God puts holiness into your very heart and nature, and as a result, you will begin to live a holy life.

My first car was a 1989 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme. It was a diesel. I didn’t own it very long. I knew the engine was gone when nothing, but pure white smoke was coming out of the tailpipe. It was dead. Good for nothing. A friend of mine bought the car from me for a few hundred bucks. In a few weeks he had put a new

engine in it, and it ran like new. Regeneration is like getting a new engine. We were dead, but God puts life into us! And with that new engine comes many miles and travel.

In the same way when God puts a new nature in us, we are going to get many miles of holiness and conformity to Jesus Christ. When God puts a new heart in us and unites his Spirit with ours, we will have the power and person of Christ working holiness out of us.

Sanctification begins and comes out of regeneration where we partake of God's holiness first and foremost. We become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). Our nature is united with the nature of the Holy Spirit. "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor 6:17). Our present holiness comes out of our union with Christ. In John 17, Christ prayed for this before he went to the cross:

**John 17:11** | And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

God promises to "keep" us in his name, walking in holiness, and he does so by the new nature within us. We are told to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18) based on the new "divine nature" we now have (2 Pet 1:4). We need God's powerful grace to keep us from sinning.

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

We are no longer trying to keep the law in the power of our flesh. A holy life is possible because we are now under grace working from within by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. We are now the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).

## *A Final Change*

There is coming a day either at death or the second coming of our Lord, that we will sin no more. God will wipe away all our tears, and we will be finally sinless. At the second coming, we will receive a new body that is incapable of sinning. We will not only be from the penalty and the power of sin, but the very presence of sin will finally be eradicated (1 Cor 15:51-53; 1 Jn 3:1-3).

## **The Process of Sanctification**

Regeneration is instantaneous, but sanctification is a lifelong process. We find this process throughout the Scriptures.

## *The Agent of Sanctification*

The Holy Spirit is not only the agent of regeneration, but also of sanctification. The Holy Spirit is the divine agent of our sanctification. We cooperate with Him in our progressive sanctification, but we do not sanctify ourselves (Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2; 1 Cor 6:11).

One of the greatest glories in the Christian life is our sanctification. We have been sanctified; we are being sanctified; and we shall be sanctified. We have been set apart to God, and we are progressively cleansed from the defilement of sin and more and more “transformed” after the image of Christ.

**2 Corinthians 3:18** | And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus Christ (through the Spirit) is not only the “Author” of the Christian’s faith, but he is also the “Finisher.”



**Philippians 1:6** | He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Christ conquered death to make us holy like himself. This pursuit of holiness is the fruit of the new heart, guided and superintended by God himself. We are all growing toward Christlikeness. We are going to progress. God promises that we will progress.

**Jude 1:24-25, KJV** | Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, <sup>25</sup>To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

The Holy Spirit is the controlling and directing agent in every regenerate person. The believer's sanctification is the "will of God," and the Holy Spirit uses various means to sanctify us (1 Thess 4:3; 1 Pet 1:2). We are sanctified by our vital union with Christ. Indeed, we are "sanctified in Christ" and Christ is our sanctification (1 Cor 1:2, 30). The Holy Spirit uses the word of God (Jn 17:17; 1 Tim 4:5), by the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb 9:13; 13:12).

## *The Application of Sanctification*

We need to learn to meditate, ruminate, study, and apply God's word. If you want to be holy, you are going to need a radical application of the word of God to your mind!

**John 17:17** | Sanctify them through your truth: your word is truth.

The process of application of God's word is laid out in Ephesians 4. We are to "put off" the old way of thinking by "putting on" the new life. This occurs by the renewing of the mind by the word of God.

James says, "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas 1:21). As Psalm 1 says, the blessed

man meditates in the word “day and night” (Psa 1:2). When God’s word is applied and digested, it brings deep satisfaction to the life.

**John 4:13-14** | Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,<sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

There is a danger of just superficially applying God’s word, where you learn it intellectually but do not apply it to your life or actually learn to walk in the word.

**James 1:22-25** | But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.<sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.<sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.<sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

## *The Aim of Sanctification*

Manifestation of Christlikeness is the aim and goal of sanctification. We are told to “put on the new man” and “be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” We are to do all things reflecting God’s glory.

**1 Corinthians 10:31** | Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

We are all Christ’s ongoing masterpiece. He’s working on us (Eph 2:10). But let’s remember that Jesus does not make cookie cutter Christians. We are all sanctified on different paths and at different rates. Let us learn to help one another. We must never have the self-righteous attitude that someone else is not as good a

Christian as us because they struggle in an area where you don't struggle. It is a process!

## **The Practice of Sanctification**

There is a war going on! God has given you a new mind and a new heart, but Paul says in Galatians 5:17 says, "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

### *The Practice of Perseverance*

Sanctification is your will in cooperation with God's will. We are to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he leads and guides us into Christlikeness.

Philippians 2:12-13 | Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Sanctification is something you have to strive for, but not in your own power. It is God who works in you! We've not arrived to perfection yet, but we must strive for it! You can never take a vacation from fighting against sin! You must constantly press on and press forward! Never think for a minute that the war against sin is over in this life. There isn't even a cease-fire!

Many generals have been surprised because they were careless after a victory. They took a holiday! The Day after Christmas Washington attacked the British troops during the Revolutionary War. They were on vacation! Peter tells us the vital importance of growing in perseverance. If we don't grow in perseverance, adding to our faith, we will become shortsighted, forgetting the work that God has done in us.

**2 Peter 1:5-9, NKJV** | Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,<sup>6</sup> to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,<sup>7</sup> to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.<sup>8</sup> For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

A Christian is not sinless, but we should be sinning less. As a Christian you now have the power *not* to sin. You didn't have that before. God always has a way of escape for you.

**1 Corinthians 10:13** | No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

There is never a moment when you have to sin. God always gives us a way of escape. One way we end up in despair, giving up, is we think that our sins are unique to the human race. No one else must struggle like this. But that is a lie. All your temptations and struggles with sin are common to man. Yet God provides the way of escape. Now we are going to look at exactly how you can escape.

## *The Practice of Putting Off*

We are called to put off the old life by putting on the new life and a new way of thinking. We must do this by the renewing of our mind with the word of God.

**Ephesians 4:22-24** | Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,<sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,<sup>24</sup> and to

put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

**This new way of thinking is a daily battle. Paul expresses it in Romans 7.**

**Romans 7:18-19** | For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

**Paul goes on to lament this struggle.**

**Romans 7:24-25a** | Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

**We cannot please God in the flesh, so there is only one solution: victory in Jesus Christ. We have to crucify the flesh. Jesus talks of radical amputation and appropriating him. We are to reject the self-life and be satisfied with Christ alone. Christ described it in Matthew 5:29-30 as a radical amputation of sin from our lives.**

**Matthew 5:29-30** | If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup>And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

**Paul describes this crucified life again in Romans. We are to consider ourselves “dead” to the desires of the old life by putting on the new life stirring up the new life as instruments in service to him.**

**Romans 6:11-14** | So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup>Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup>Do not present your

members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

## *The Practice of Putting On*

We are called to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. This means we put off bad ways of thinking and behaving by putting on the word of God into our thoughts and affections and walk in the word by applying it to our lives. We are to put off the old life by putting on the new life, walking in the word.

**Psalm 1:1-2** | Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; <sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

In the same way, James shows us how to put off the old life by putting on the new life.

**James 1:21-22** | Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

The only way to truly grow and change in Jesus is to be a doer of the word. It's not enough to know it intellectually, but you have to incorporate it into your thinking and into the very practice of your life.

We are called to this walk of holiness in a very personal way, keeping in step with the Spirit.

**Galatians 5:25** | If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

But how do we practically “walk in the Spirit”? The key to putting off the old life and its deceit is the practice of mind renewal.

2 Corinthians 10:5, KJV | Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Let’s do some exercises in sanctification on the next page. Consider the following chart as a beginning example.

There are hundreds and perhaps thousands of put off by putting on exercises. Put off anger by putting on forgiveness and meekness. Put off lying by putting on the truth. Put off foolishness and escape by putting on wisdom and satisfaction in Christ.

### *Conclusion*

A true Christian is a growing and a changing Christian. We never stop growing until we are perfected. A good heart, a regenerated heart wants nothing less than Christlike perfection. If you are saved being holy will be the main pursuit of your life. Jonathan Edwards called our sanctification the “main business of the Christian life.”

<b>Sinful Thoughts and/or Attitudes</b> <b>Eph 4:22</b> <b>PUT OFF</b>	<b>Godly Replacements</b> <b>Eph. 4:23,24</b> <b>PUT ON</b>
<p>1. <b>Unbelief</b> in God's character, commands and promises; doubt, loss of hope in God</p> <p><b>Rom. 1:25; Jas. 1:3-16</b></p>	<p>1. <b>Faith</b> and hope in God, His character, commands and promises</p> <p><b>Ps. 62:5-8; Rom. 4:20,21</b></p>
<p>2. <b>Pride</b>, selfishness (putting self first)</p> <p><b>Prov. 8:13; 21:24; Jas. 3:16</b></p>	<p>2. <b>Humility</b> (putting God and others before self)</p> <p><b>Phil. 2:4; Col. 3:12; Prov. 11:2; 29:23</b></p>
<p>3. <b>Unforgiveness</b>, sinful anger, bitterness, resentment, hatred, revenge</p> <p><b>Eph. 4:31</b></p>	<p>3. <b>Forgiveness</b>, love, compassion</p> <p><b>Rom. 12:17-21; Eph. 4:32; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Luke 6:27,28</b></p>
<p>4. <b>Discontentment</b>, greed, envy, jealousy, covetousness</p> <p><b>Ex. 20:17</b></p>	<p>4. <b>Contentment</b></p> <p><b>Phil. 4:11-13; 1 Tim. 6:6-8</b></p>
<p>5. <b>Fear</b>, worry, anxiety</p> <p><b>Matt. 6:34; Josh. 1:9; Deut. 31:8</b></p>	<p>5. <b>Trust</b> in the Lord and His promises; love</p> <p><b>Prov. 3:5; 1 John 4:18</b></p>
<p>6. <b>Self-pity</b>, ungratefulness, complaining, grumbling</p> <p><b>Phil. 2:14; Num. 11:4-6</b></p>	<p>6. <b>Thanksgiving</b>, praise</p> <p><b>1 Thess. 5:18; Ps. 50:14; Heb. 13:15; Col. 3:15</b></p>
<p>7. <b>Sexual lust</b></p> <p><b>Rom. 13:13; 1 John 2:15-17</b></p>	<p>7. <b>Purity</b></p> <p><b>Rom. 13:14; 1 Thess. 4:1-8</b></p>
<p>8. <b>Fantasy</b>, denial (lying to self)</p> <p><b>Ps. 32:2</b></p>	<p>8. <b>Truth</b>, facing reality biblically</p> <p><b>John 17:17; 3 John</b></p>
<p>9. <b>Apathy</b>, laziness, slothfulness</p> <p><b>Prov. 13:4; 21:25</b></p>	<p>9. <b>Diligence</b>, having a servant's heart and purpose</p> <p><b>Prov. 10:4; 21:26</b></p>

**LIVING** **HOPE**  
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