

# THE NATURE OF SANCTIFICATION

by John C. Ryle

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*A theological work identifying the visible marks of genuine sanctification in believers, including habitual obedience to Christ's precepts and the active practice of Christian virtues.*

4 Chapters

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## **\_1 The Nature of Sanctification**

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### The Nature of Sanctification

By John C. Ryle The Doctrine of Sanctification - Part 1 of 4

John Charles Ryle was born in 1816 in Macclesfield, England. The son of a wealthy banker, he was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford. He was spiritually awakened in 1838 on hearing Ephesians 2:1-22 read in church. He was appointed bishop of Liverpool at Disraeli's recommendation in 1880. C. H. Spurgeon called him "the best man in the Church of England." He upheld the Reformation doctrine of grace, as found in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church, and he recommended the English Reformers, Puritans, and eighteenth-century evangelicals as models for both doctrine and devotion. More than 12 million of his tracts were sold in over a dozen languages during his lifetime. Their influence on popular Christianity, like that of Spurgeon's sermons, was incalculable. He died in 1900. This series is adapted from Ryle's book entitled simply, *Holiness*, first published in 1879.

What Does the Bible Mean When It Speaks of a "Sanctified" Man?

Sanctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Spirit, when He calls him to be a true believer. He not only washes him from his sins in His own blood but He also separates him from his natural love of sin and the world. The instrument by which the Spirit effects this work is generally the Word of God, though He sometimes uses afflictions and providential visitations "without the Word" (1 Peter 3:1). The subject of this work of Christ by His Spirit is called in Scripture a "sanctified" man.

The subject of sanctification is of such vast importance that it requires marking out on every side. To clear away the confusion between doctrines and doctrines, I shall therefore not hesitate to lay before my readers a series of connected propositions or statements, drawn from Scripture, which I think will be found useful in defining the exact nature of sanctification.

1. Sanctification is the invariable result of that vital union with Christ which true faith gives to a Christian. "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (John 15:5). The union with Christ which produces no effect on heart and life is a mere formal union, which is worthless before God. The faith which has not a sanctifying influence on the character is no better than the faith of devils (James 2:19). True faith works by love. It constrains a man to live unto the Lord from a deep sense of gratitude for redemption.

2. Sanctification is the outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration. He that is born again and made a new creature receives a new nature and a new principle, and always lives a new life. In a word, where there is no sanctification there is no regeneration, and where there is no holy life there is no new birth. It is written plainly that he who is born of God is one whose "seed remaineth in him...." (1 John 3:9).

3. Sanctification is the only certain evidence of that indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is essential to salvation. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Romans 8:9). The Spirit never lies dormant and idle within the soul. He always make His presence known by the fruit He causes to be borne in heart, character, and life. "The fruit of the Spirit," says Paul, "is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, and such like" (Galatians 5:22). The Spirit cannot be seen by our bodily eyes, but just as we know there is a wind by the effect it produces on waves and trees and smoke, so we may know the Spirit is in a man by the effects He produces in the man's conduct. It is nonsense to suppose that we have the Spirit if we do not also "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

4. Sanctification, again, is the only sure mark of God's election. The names and number of the elect are a secret thing, which God, no doubt wisely, has not revealed to man. It is not given to us in this world to study the pages of the Book of Life and see if our names are there. But if there is one thing clearly and plainly laid down about election it is this: that elect men and women may be distinguished by holy lives. It is expressly written that they are "elect...through sanctification" (1 Peter 1:2), "chosen...to salvation through sanctification"(2 Thessalonians 2:13), "predestinate[d] to be conformed to the image of God's Son" (Romans 8:29), and "chosen in [Christ] before the foundation of the world that they should be holy" (Ephesians 1:4). He that boasts of being one of God's elect, while he is willfully and habitually living in sin, is only deceiving himself.

5. Sanctification is a thing that will always be seen. Like the great Head of the church, from whom it springs, it cannot be hid. "Every tree is known by his own fruit" (Luke 6:44). A truly sanctified person may be so clothed with humility that he can see in himself nothing but infirmity and defects. Like the righteous in the parable of the sheep and the goats, he may not see that he has done anything worthy of his Master's notice and commendation (cf. Matthew 25:37). But whether he sees it himself or not, others will always see in him a tone and taste and habit of life unlike that of other men. Life may be very feeble, but if the pulse only beats a little, it will be felt.

6. Sanctification is a thing for which every believer is responsible. I maintain that believers are eminently and peculiarly responsible, and under a special obligation to live holy lives. They are not as others, dead and blind and unrenewed; they are alive unto God, and have light and knowledge, and a new principle within them. If the Savior of sinners gives us renewing grace and calls us by His Spirit, we may be sure that He expects us to use our grace and not to go to sleep. It is forgetfulness of this which causes many believers to "grieve the Holy Spirit," and makes them very useless and uncomfortable Christians.

7. Sanctification, again, admits of growth and degrees. A man may climb from one step to another in holiness. More pardoned and more justified than he is when he first believes he cannot be. But more sanctified he certainly may be. If there is any point on which God's holiest saints agree it is this: they see more and know more and feel more and do more and repent more and believe more as they get on in spiritual life, and in proportion to the closeness of their walk with God. In short, they "grow in grace," as Peter exhorts believers to do (2 Peter 3:18).

8. Sanctification is also a thing which depends greatly on a diligent use of scriptural means: Bible reading, private prayer, regular attendance on public worship, regular hearing of God's Word, and regular reception of the Lord's Supper. They are appointed channels through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul, and strengthens the work which He has begun in the

inward man. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them.

9. Sanctification, again, does not prevent a man from having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict. By conflict I mean a struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, the flesh and the spirit, which are to be found together in every believer (Galatians 5:17). A deep sense of that struggle, and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it, does not prove that a man is not sanctified. Nay, rather, I believe they are healthy symptoms of our condition, and prove that we are not dead, but alive. A true Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience but war within. The heart of the best Christian, even at his best, is a field occupied by two rival camps.

10. Sanctification, further, cannot justify a man, yet it pleases God. The holiest actions of the holiest saint that ever lived are all more or less full of defects and imperfections. To suppose that such actions can stand the severity of God's judgment, atone for sin, and merit heaven is simply absurd. "We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:20-28). Nevertheless, the Bible distinctly teaches that the holy actions of a sanctified man, although imperfect, are pleasing in the sight of God. "With such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). "We...do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

11. Sanctification, again, will be found absolutely necessary as a witness to our character in the great Day of Judgment. It will be utterly useless to plead that we believed in Christ, unless our faith has had some sanctifying effect in our lives. Without some evidence that our faith in Christ was real and genuine, we shall only rise again to be condemned. The question will not be how we talked and what we professed, but how we lived and what we did. If anything is certain about judgment, it is certain that men's works and doings will be considered and examined (John 5:29; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:13).

12. Sanctification, finally, is absolutely necessary to train and prepare us for heaven. Heaven is essentially a holy place; its inhabitants are all holy; its occupations are all holy. To be really happy in heaven, it is clear that we must be somewhat trained and made ready for heaven while we are on earth. What could an unsanctified man do in heaven, if by chance he got there? No man can possibly be happy where he is not in his element.

## 2 The Visible Evidences of Sanctification

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### The Visible Evidences of Sanctification

By J. C. Ryle The Doctrine of Sanctification-Part 2 of 4 What Are the Visible Marks of a Sanctified Man?

1. True sanctification does not consist in talk about religion. People have heard so much of gospel truth that they contract an unholy familiarity with its words and phrases and sometimes talk so fluently about its doctrines that you might think them true Christians.

In fact, it is sickening and disgusting to hear the cool and flippant language which many pour out about "conversion," "the Savior," "the gospel," "free grace" and the like, while they are notoriously serving sin or living for the world. Can we doubt that such talk is abominable in God's sight?

2. True sanctification does not consist in temporary religious feelings. Wherever wheat is sown, the devil is sure to sow tares. Many appear moved and touched and roused under the preaching of the gospel, while in reality their hearts are not changed at all. Their wounds are only skin deep, and the peace they profess to feel is skin deep also. Like the stony-ground hearers, they receive the Word with joy (Matthew 13:20), but after a little they fall away, go back to the world, and are harder and worse than before.

Let us beware of healing wounds slightly, and crying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. Let us urge on everyone who exhibits new interest in religion to be content with nothing short of the deep, solid, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

3. True sanctification does not consist in outward formalism and external devoutness. This is an enormous delusion, but unhappily a very common one. Thousands appear to imagine that true holiness is to be seen in constant attendance on church services, reception of the Lord's Supper, etc. I am afraid that in many cases this external religiousness is made a substitute for inward holiness.

4. Sanctification does not consist in retirement from our place in life and the renunciation of our social duties. In every age it has been a snare with many to take up this line in the pursuit of holiness. Hundreds of hermits have buried themselves in some wilderness, and thousands of men and women have shut themselves up within the walls of monasteries and convents, under the vain idea that by so doing they would escape sin and become eminently holy. They have forgotten that no bolts and bars can keep out the devil and that, wherever we go, we carry that root of great evil, our own hearts. True holiness does not make a Christian evade difficulties, but face and overcome them.

5. Sanctification does not consist in the occasional performance of right actions. It is the habitual working of a new heavenly principle within, which runs through all a man's daily conduct, both in great things and in small. Its seat is in the heart and, like the heart in the body, it has a regular influence on every part of the character. It is like a perpetual fountain, from which a stream is ever

flowing spontaneously and naturally. (Even Herod, when he heard John the Baptist, "did many things," while his heart was utterly wrong in the sight of God (Mark 6:20). A true saint, like Hezekiah, will be whole-hearted. He will count God's commandments concerning all things to be right, and "hate every false way" (2 Chronicles 31:21; Psalms 119:104).

6. Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual respect to God's law, and habitual effort to live in obedience to it as the rule of life. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that a Christian has nothing to do with the law and the Ten Commandments, because he cannot be justified by keeping them. The same Holy Spirit who convinces the believer of sin by the law, and leads him to Christ for justification, will always lead him to a spiritual use of the law, as a friendly guide, in the pursuit of sanctification. As Paul said in Romans 7:22: "I delight in the law of God after the inward man."

7. Genuine sanctification will show itself in a habitual endeavor to do Christ's will, and to live by His practical precepts. These precepts are to be found scattered everywhere throughout the four Gospels, and especially in the Sermon on the Mount. He that supposes they were spoken without the intention of promoting holiness, and that a Christian need not attend to them in daily life, is really little better than a lunatic. To hear some men talk, and read some men's writings, one might imagine that our blessed Lord, when He was on earth, never taught anything but doctrine, and left practical duties to be taught by others! This is a complete mistake.

8. Genuine sanctification will show itself in a habitual desire to live up to the standard which St. Paul sets before the churches in his writings. That standard is to be found in the closing chapters of nearly all his epistles. These directions were written down by inspiration of God for the perpetual guidance of professing Christians. He who does not attend to them may possibly pass muster as a member of a church, but he certainly is not what the Bible calls a "sanctified man."

9. Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual attention to the active graces which our Lord so beautifully exemplified, and especially to the grace of charity (John 13:34-35). A sanctified man will try to do good in the world and to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him. He will aim to be like his Master. Saving faith and real converting grace will always produce some conformity to the image of Jesus (Colossians 3:10).

10. Genuine sanctification, finally, will show itself in habitual attention to the passive graces-those graces which are especially shown in submission to the will of God, and in bearing and forbearing one another. Few people, perhaps, unless they have examined the point, have an idea how much is said about these graces in the New Testament. For example, this is the special point Peter dwells upon in commending our Lord Jesus Christ's example: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps...who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not...." (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Such are the visible marks of a sanctified man. I will never shrink from saying that genuine sanctification is a thing that can be seen, and that the marks I have endeavored to sketch out are more or less the marks of a sanctified man.

## **\_3 Distinguishing Between**

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### Distinguishing Between Justification and Sanctification

By J. C. Ryle The Doctrine of Sanctification-Part 3 In What Are Justification and Sanctification Alike?

- 1 Both proceed originally from the free grace of God. It is of His gift alone that believers are justified or sanctified at all.
2. Both are part of that great work of salvation which Christ, in the eternal covenant, has undertaken on behalf of His people. Christ is the fountain of life, from which pardon (justification) and holiness (sanctification) both flow. The root of each is Christ.
3. Both are to be found in the same persons. Those who are justified are always sanctified, and those who are sanctified are always justified. God has joined them together, and they cannot be put asunder.
4. Both begin at the same time. The moment a person begins to be a justified person, he also begins to be a sanctified person. He may not feel it, but it is a fact.
5. Both are alike necessary to salvation. No one ever reached heaven without a renewed heart as well as forgiveness, without the Spirit's grace as well as the blood of Christ, without a fitness for eternal glory as well as a title. The one is just as necessary as the other is.

Now Let Us See Wherein They Differ:

1. Justification is the reckoning and counting a man to be righteous for the sake of another, even Jesus Christ the Lord. Sanctification is the actual making a man inwardly righteous, though it may be in a very feeble degree.
2. The righteousness we have by our justification is not our own, but the everlasting perfect righteousness of our great Mediator Christ, imputed to us and made our own by faith. The righteousness we have by sanctification is our own righteousness, imparted, inherent, and wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, but mingled with much infirmity and imperfection.
3. In justification, our own works have no place at all; simple faith in Christ is the one thing needful. In sanctification, our own works are of vast importance, and God bids us fight and watch and pray and strive and take pains and labor.
4. Justification is a finished and complete work, and a man is perfectly justified the moment he believes. Sanctification is an imperfect (unfinished) work, comparatively, and will never be perfected until we reach heaven.
5. Justification admits of no growth or increase: a man is as much justified the hour he first comes to Christ by faith, as he will be to all eternity. Sanctification is eminently a progressive work, and

admits of continual growth and enlargement, so long as a man lives.

6. Justification has special reference to our persons, our standing in God's sight, and our deliverance from guilt. Sanctification has special reference to our natures and the moral renewal of our hearts.

7. Justification gives us our title to heaven, and boldness to enter in. Sanctification gives us our fitness for heaven and prepares us to enjoy it when we dwell there.

8. Justification is the act of God about us, and is not easily discerned by others. Sanctification is the work of God within us, and cannot be hid in its outward manifestation from the eyes of men.

I commend these distinctions to the attention of all my readers, and I ask them to ponder them well. I am persuaded that one great cause of the darkness and uncomfortable feelings of many well-meaning people is their habit of confounding justification and sanctification. It can never be too strongly impressed on our minds that they are two separate things. Never should the distinction between them be forgotten.

## **\_4 Practical Applications**

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### Practical Applications of the Doctrine of Sanctification

By J. C. Ryle The Doctrine of Sanctification - Part 4, conclusion

1. First of all, let us all awake to a sense of the perilous state of many professing Christians. "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Then what an enormous amount of so-called religion there is which is perfectly useless! What an immense proportion of church-goers are in the broad road that leads to destruction! The thought is awful, overwhelming. Oh, that preachers and teachers would open their eyes and realize the condition of souls around them! Oh, that men could be persuaded to "flee from the wrath to come"! If unsanctified souls can be saved and go to heaven, the Bible is not true. Yet the Bible is true, and cannot lie! What must the end be!

2. Let us make sure work of our own condition, and never rest till we feel and know that we are sanctified ourselves. What are our tastes and choices and likings and inclinations? This is the great testing question. It matters little what we wish, and what we hope, and what we desire to be before we die. What are we now? What are we doing? Are we sanctified or not? If not, the fault is all our own.

3. If we would be sanctified, our course is clear and plain: we must begin with Christ. We must go to Him as sinners, with no plea but that of utter need, and cast our souls on Him by faith, for peace and reconciliation with God. We must place ourselves in His hands, as in the hands of a good physician, and cry to Him for mercy and grace. We must wait for nothing to bring with us as a recommendation. The very first step towards sanctification, no less than justification, is to come with faith to Christ. We must first live, and then work.

4. If we would grow in holiness and become more sanctified, we must continually go on as we began, and be ever making fresh applications to Christ. He is the Head from which every member must be supplied (Ephesians 4:16). To live the life of daily faith in the Son of God, and to be daily drawing out of His fullness the promised grace and strength which he has laid up for His people—this is the grand secret of progressive sanctification. Believers who seem at a standstill are generally neglecting close communion with Jesus, and so grieving the Spirit. He that prayed, "Sanctify them," the last night before His crucifixion, is infinitely willing to help everyone who by faith applies to Him for help and desires to be made more holy.

5. Let us not expect too much from our own hearts here below. At our best, we shall find in ourselves daily cause for humiliation, and discover that we are needy debtors to mercy and grace every hour. The more light we have, the more we shall see our own imperfection. Sinners we were when we began, and sinners we shall find ourselves as we go on: renewed, pardoned, justified, yet sinners to the very last. Our absolute perfection is yet to come, and the expectation of it is one reason why we should long for heaven.

6. Finally, let us never be ashamed of making much of sanctification, and contending for a high standard of holiness. While some are satisfied with a miserably low degree of attainment, and others are not ashamed to live on without any holiness at all, let us stand fast in the old paths, follow after eminent holiness ourselves, and recommend it boldly to others. This is the only way to be really happy.

As a general rule, in the long run of life, it will be found true that “sanctified” people are the happiest people on earth. They have solid comforts which the world can neither give nor take away. It is written, “Great peace have they that love thy law” (Psalms 119:165); and again: “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). But it is also written, “There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked” (Is. 48:22).

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