



Already Sanctified

A Theology of the
Christian Life in Light of God's
Completed Work

Don J. Payne

Already Sanctified

A Theology of the Christian Life
in Light of God's Completed Work

Don J. Payne



Baker Academic

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

Part One How We Got Where We Are

1. The Sanctification Mutiny 13
2. New Ventures in Sanctification 27

Part Two The Biblical Story Line Revisited

3. A Potent Backstory: Consecration in the Old Testament 41
4. A Shocking New Story: Sanctification in the New Testament 57
5. Unexpected Instances of Sanctification 73
6. Sanctification as Liberated Responsibilities and Compelling Promises 87
7. Transformation 107

Part Three The Doctrinal Profile Reanimated

- 8. Sanctification as God's Transforming Power 125
- 9. Sanctification and the Process of Transformation 137
- 10. Accomplished Sanctification in Action 147

Conclusion 155

Bibliography 159

Scripture Index 169

Subject Index 173

Introduction

For those who try to be serious about the Christian faith, the subject of sanctification can be inspiring, intimidating, intriguing, puzzling, frustrating, or guilt-inducing—or all of these on different days! Why another book on sanctification when so much has already been written about this doctrine?

For centuries the doctrine of sanctification has been a theological battleground. Interest in sanctification stretches across disciplinary lines, perhaps because it seems to have more immediate and practical bearing on every Christian's life, including the personal lives of the scholars who write about it. For at least that reason the doctrine of sanctification holds widespread interest for Christians of all traditions and in all places.

With or without the technical, scholarly vocabulary, our beliefs about sanctification affect how we live in response to God and others. They directly relate to the first and greatest commandment and the second commandment, as Jesus stated them: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37, 39). Those who take these words seriously face the lifelong task of working out the possibilities and practicalities of those words in both the interior and the exterior domains of life.

Since the language of sanctification or holiness often depicts the nature and pursuit of these goals, questions and challenges continue

to arise. What is a holy person and how do I (and we) become holy? What is my role and what is God's role? What do my failures, shortcomings, and ongoing struggles mean for my relationship with God? Where do I find the resources for faithfulness to God even through failure, discouragement, and seeming lack of progress? What should be my expectations for spiritual growth and transformation, especially in light of chronic struggles and areas of bondage? Christians routinely ask at least some of these questions in one form or another. These constitute, or at least illustrate, some of the challenges of sanctification—what it means to be holy.

Ambiguities, tensions, and challenges will never go away entirely until the Lord returns. However, some symptoms that commonly encumber the faith journey stem from inherited patterns of reading the biblical texts about sanctification. Those patterns include underattending to some aspects of sanctification while overdeveloping others. This has resulted in a sort of chronic disproportioning of the doctrine that, like some physical abnormalities, can seriously affect one's stride. Every bit as serious, this disproportioning has become so familiar that it seems not to be recognized as problematic.

The complex challenges involved in the doctrine of sanctification require patient reexamination of the biblical material, honest identification of assumptions that have been read into certain texts, and particular attention to the pattern of the doctrine as it unfolds and functions in Scripture. What we can find, I contend, is a doctrine of sanctification that is actually encouraging and empowering without being simplistic or formulaic.

Questions and controversies about what it means to be sanctified tend to fall into some general categories. Is it already completed and behind us? If so, how do we not become morally complacent? Is it primarily something out in front of us and out of reach within this lifetime? If so, how is it meaningfully to be pursued and can assurance ever realistically come our way? What role do other grand biblical themes such as grace and faith play in sanctification?

The dizzying array of opinions on the subject is matched only by the complexities and enigmas within our personal experiences. At the practical level, all Christians have a theology of sanctification that

undergirds the ways we actually try to live out our faith, or think we ought to do so. Our practical theologies of sanctification powerfully influence our lives, whatever language we use for it.

This book addresses the need for a constantly renewed theology of the Christian life. Like many significant subjects, this is as complex as the people involved. Thus, the definitive and “last word” on sanctification may never be written. That’s all the more reason to write another one: to keep probing and inching our way incrementally toward whatever clarity God will grant us on a subject that affects the core of our relationships with both God and others.

I know the need for this clarity first and foremost as a Christian for whom the subject of the Christian life has been central—always challenging and often problematic—as long as I have been a consciously committed Christian (at least forty-six years at the time of this writing). That’s a reasonably lengthy stretch of time in which to ponder what it means to live the Christian life—to be holy. Eight years of pastoral ministry and over twenty years on a seminary faculty have confirmed my experience as typical. For countless people the Christian life is alternately glorious and grinding, though the descriptions of that experience vary among different Christian traditions. However we express those experiences, everyone who claims to be a Christian—a follower of Jesus Christ—thinks about, or should think about, what it means to be holy.

In the introduction to their book on sanctification, my friends Kent Eilers and Kyle Strobel offer the following keen observation: “‘The Christian life’ is theological shorthand for redeemed human existence in communion with the triune God through union with Christ in the Spirit. . . . To state it another way, to address ‘the Christian life’ is to speak about the character of reconciled and renewed human existence.”¹ That description covers a lot of theological ground, gives me hope, and helps frame what I want to explore in this book. The concept of sanctification may always mystify and challenge us, but it can also be life-giving and compelling. Especially if discussions of holiness have not generally been life-giving and compelling for you the reader, then I encourage you to keep reading.

1. Eilers and Strobel, *Sanctified by Grace*, 3.

Preliminaries

We must reexamine how sanctification actually functions in the Christian life, particularly with respect to growth and transformation. The scope of this reexamination is limited to a specific, often overlooked and underdeveloped aspect of sanctification: that which Scripture presents as already having taken place. Some call it “positional.” I prefer the descriptor “accomplished,” though with the important qualification that the term does not imply any particular experience, any sort of perfection in personal character, or an achieved level of spiritual maturity. I contend that the accomplished aspect of sanctification holds far more power than has often been acknowledged and defines how other aspects of sanctification should be understood.

Two consequences unfold from having overlooked and underdeveloped the accomplished aspect of the biblical sanctification portrait. One consequence is confusion about what “making holiness perfect” (2 Cor. 7:1) and “be holy” (1 Pet. 1:15–16) mean. Texts such as these are commonly assumed to depict the process of growth in godly character and maturity, often referred to as “progressive sanctification.” That assumption dominates many discussions of sanctification and frequently creates a crippling sense of spiritual inadequacy, fatigue, and fear.² This is especially the case in light of Hebrews 12:14, which speaks of “holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

A second consequence is inadequate grounding and resourcing for spiritual growth and transformation. I will argue that biblical imperatives for growth and transformation easily become moralistic and disheartening when not properly anchored in God’s accomplished, definitive sanctifying work and his upholding of that sanctification by grace through the Holy Spirit.³

Few debate that the New Testament portrays the Christian life as a life of growth into maturity, defined by transformation and conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. Growth involves change from

2. Some will contend that these negative effects stem from a misunderstanding of progressive sanctification or other factors that have contributed to such distortions. Yet the possibility of misunderstanding and distortion does not constitute either an adequate exegetical defense or grounds for dismissing such debilitating experiences.

3. Eilers and Strobel, *Sanctified by Grace*, 7–8.

what we are into what we not yet are but were created to be. Though I am not the first to do so, I question the notion that “progressive sanctification” best accounts for the combination of imperatives and yet-to-be-completed sanctification texts in the New Testament. Furthermore, I question whether sanctification is synonymous with the transformation and growth to which believers are clearly called. I contend that sanctification primarily takes place theologically “upstream,” with profound implications for Christian growth.

Misappropriation and underappropriation of the accomplished aspect of sanctification tragically cripple and in some cases even distort the process of growth and transformation. Our theology of growth and transformation, both conceptually and practically, will be only as good as our theology of accomplished sanctification. Thus, the church needs an ever-renewed theology of sanctification to resource the personal and pastoral impact that this doctrine has on the lives of all Christians. This doctrinal renewal includes “scrubbing” the terminology of distortions and generalizations that have accumulated over time and created confusion.

A clarified and robust theology of accomplished sanctification can reshape, renew, and resource efforts at “discipleship,” the language that has long been used for the process of Christian growth.⁴ Accomplished sanctification has just as many implications for “spiritual formation,” the language of choice for an increasing number of evangelicals who hunger for more depth, nuance, and texture to their faith development than what “discipleship” seems to provide.⁵ A healthy theology of accomplished sanctification can cut through many of the tangles regarding how growth should be pursued and experienced: whether growth is indeed a process or is something more instantaneous, and how conscious effort is involved in growth. This is not an attempt to correct or negate all other perspectives on sanctification, to resolve all the ambiguities and tensions within the

4. See, for example, Hull, *Complete Book of Discipleship*; Harrington and Patrick, *Disciple Maker's Handbook*.

5. See, for example, Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*; Demarest, *Seasons of the Soul*. See also Mulholland, *Deeper Journey*. Dallas Willard has provided influential leadership in merging the themes of discipleship and spiritual formation in *Renovation of the Heart* and *The Great Omission*.

doctrine, or eliminate the challenges of living a sanctified life. My central purpose is to provide some perspective on these questions because, despite previous efforts, we are still left with doctrines of sanctification—a “sanctification situation”—that both puzzles and burdens countless believers.⁶

This reexamination of sanctification will first place the doctrine in historical context. Though the doctrine did not originate with the Protestant Reformation, its importance was elevated by that movement. The earliest and most influential Protestant Reformers understood the doctrine of sanctification in somewhat different ways. Yet, each reacted to the particular manner in which late-medieval Roman Catholicism had fused justification and sanctification so as practically to make a person’s standing before God contingent on moral performance and progress.

Reformation leaders offered various reconfigurations of the relationship between justification and sanctification. Yet, each insisted on some type of distinction that would preserve the vital biblical notions of salvation *sola gratia* (grace alone) and *sola fidei* (faith alone). Thus, the theological conundrum in the doctrine of sanctification has long revolved, in some fashion, around the question of monergism versus synergism. While justification has been more consistently understood as a monergistic act of God that places a person in a new relationship with God,⁷ sanctification has been a far more embattled doctrine among children of the Reformation.⁸

Those historical theological developments significantly influenced readings of the biblical material regarding sanctification and will

6. I have pastored, taught, and counseled these Christians for decades, sharing their befuddlement and discouragement even when I thought I had better answers than I really did.

7. This is the case regardless of where one leans with respect to recent debates over the nature of justification, represented most publicly by N. T. Wright and John Piper. For Wright’s view, see *Justification*; for Piper’s perspective, see *The Future of Justification*.

8. A pacesetter example of this disagreement occurred in the 1950s when J. I. Packer took issue with the understanding of sanctification popularized by the Keswick movement. See Packer, “‘Keswick’ and the Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification.” Packer argues that sanctification is synergistic contra the monergistic interpretation put forward in Barabas, *So Great Salvation*.

serve as the backdrop for reexamining key texts. The biblical prominence of sanctification is evident from the word groups used for it in Scripture and the frequency with which they occur. Its complexity is demonstrated not so much in ambiguity about the meaning of the words as in the variety of senses in which they are used, how they relate to one another, how they relate to other biblical concepts such as justification and transformation, and how sanctification relates to the varieties of personal experience. Entire sanctification traditions have been defined in part by how they address these matters.

Sanctification can be seen in three general respects, similar to the way Paul presents salvation overall: past or accomplished (e.g., Eph. 2:5, 8: “have been saved”); present (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15: “are being saved”); and future (e.g., Rom. 5:9: “will be saved”). In this book I argue that accomplished sanctification serves as the dominant and defining sanctification motif in the biblical profile, not to the exclusion or neglect of the other aspects, but that the present and future aspects can be properly understood only in light of what has already been accomplished.

The accomplished nature of sanctification is neither a formal standing nor an acquired level of godly maturity, but rather a definitive and empowering reality that the Holy Spirit has already created in the lives of believers. Quantitatively, the overwhelming majority of New Testament texts related to sanctification refer to it in this manner. Qualitatively, these texts function in a far more straightforward and integrative manner than do the texts that either contain imperatives related to holiness or speak of sanctification as something yet to be realized. Among theological treatments of sanctification that have influenced the broad spectrum of evangelicalism, accomplished (“positional”) sanctification has received marginal attention compared to sanctification as something to be pursued and yet to be realized, whether that realization is considered progressive or instantaneous.⁹

9. See, for example, Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:195. Lewis and Demarest devote twenty-five pages overall to the biblical doctrine of sanctification. Of these twenty-five pages, one long paragraph connects positional sanctification with regeneration and Spirit-baptism. In a second reference to positional sanctification they relegate it by saying, “Although the [New Testament] literature teaches positional sanctification (Heb. 10:10, 29), it focuses more on the process of growth

Thankfully, the doctrine of sanctification has recently enjoyed renewed attention,¹⁰ much of which has expanded and strengthened its exegetical and theological platform. Little that I offer will be novel or groundbreaking to those whose scholarship precedes and exceeds my own. I simply hope to clarify and work out implications of this key—accomplished—feature in the doctrine of sanctification. The consequences are profound. Just as physical malnutrition can cause various developmental delays, underdevelopment of accomplished sanctification can constrict engagement with the spiritual nutrients necessary for healthy growth in Christlike maturity. This spiritual anemia occurs because the accomplished nature of sanctification represents far more than a positional reality. It is a dynamic act in which God creates everything related to holiness and makes possible everything related to transformation.

Overview

The approach consists of three major parts. Part 1 surveys the contemporary “sanctification situation” to place this study in historical

toward Christlikeness (2 Peter 3:18; cf. Heb. 10:14; 1 Peter 2:2)” (3:203). Notice that of the three texts cited in support of sanctification as the “process of growth,” only Heb. 10:14 employs the ἅγιος word group. F. F. Bruce observes that the present passive participle used there should be understood to depict the believer’s “being brought into the perfect relation to God which is involved in the new covenant” (*Epistle to the Hebrews*, 241). Wayne Grudem claims that this beginning stage of sanctification is “roughly equivalent to ‘justified’ in Paul’s vocabulary.” Interestingly, Grudem acknowledges much of what I will argue below when he states, “In Hebrews [9:13; 10:10; 13:12] the term *sanctify* . . . is related more to the Old Testament background of ceremonial purity or holiness as necessary for access to God’s presence” (*Systematic Theology*, 748n3 [emphasis original]). Yet, he considers this access to God as the “beginning of the Christian life” with the “process that continues throughout our Christian lives” as the “primary sense in which sanctification is used in systematic theology and in Christian conversation generally today” (748). Grudem’s treatment of sanctification, while clear about the different senses in which the terminology is used, reflects the common and weakly substantiated assumptions that I wish to challenge regarding which sense dominates, the basis for that dominance, and the implications of that dominance.

10. For examples, see Allen, *Sanctification*; Eilers and Strobel, *Sanctified by Grace*; Kapic, *Sanctification*; Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*; G. Smith, *Called to Be Saints*; Van De Walle, *Rethinking Holiness*; Webster, *Holiness*.

and theological context. The first chapter examines the initial moves made by Martin Luther and John Calvin to clarify the doctrine of sanctification. The second chapter covers some key, post-Reformation, Protestant developments in the doctrine of sanctification and the residual effects of these developments.

Part 2 examines key biblical texts related to the Old Testament practice of consecration (chapter 3) and the New Testament presentation of sanctification. The examination of the New Testament evidence involves particular attention to the *accomplished*, *imperative*, and *futuristic* aspects of sanctification, looking closely for what these texts do and do not say,¹¹ and how they function together with the accomplished aspect as the dominant, controlling one. Part 2 also takes into consideration some often overlooked texts and how they contribute to an integrated biblical profile of sanctification. The subject of transformation is considered in light of sanctification as well. A central argument throughout this section is that sanctification and transformation are linked but are not identical; transformation depends on sanctification but should not be confused with it.

Part 3 explores the theological character of sanctification—particularly with the accomplished aspect of sanctification as dominant—and what that implies for personal growth and transformation. This includes connecting accomplished sanctification with other biblical motifs (e.g., union with Christ) to show its animating force.¹²

11. This step will take into account Michael Allen's observation and warning: "Too often, exegetical reasoning can be limited to offering literary and/or theological reflection upon those instances of Holy Scripture that speak directly to a particular theme or topic. Far too frequently, then, a doctrine of sanctification can be bound by those passages and portions of the Bible that employ the idioms of holiness and sanctification alone" (*Sanctification*, 28). With grateful acknowledgment, I will build on David Peterson's exegetical work in *Possessed by God* to develop further some key points and their implications. Though Michael Allen's previously noted observation is in reference to Peterson's work, Peterson is not quite as exegetically myopic as Allen suggests. Peterson admits, "When Paul talks about dying together with Christ and being raised together with him (Rom. 6:1–11), he expresses the notion of sanctification we have seen elsewhere in his writings, without specifically using the terminology" (*Possessed by God*, 113 [emphasis original]).

12. Eilers and Strobel reinforce this point and organize the essays in their edited volume accordingly. They note, "The doctrine of the Christian life is informed and illumined by a whole series of theological claims about God, such as his relation

I wish that revisiting and recalibrating the doctrine of sanctification were all it would take to whisk away the relentless challenges of the Christian life: the missteps and dead ends, the setbacks, the dashed expectations, the dark and disorienting days. Yet, that would ignore the wild relational dynamics of this journey that also allow us such joys and delights as come our way. An ever-clarified doctrine of sanctification does not reduce sanctification and transformation to simplistic formulas.

A clarified doctrine of sanctification—defined, sustained, and propelled by accomplished sanctification—does not eliminate struggle, provide shortcuts in the process of spiritual maturation, or induce a supercharged spiritual experience. It does, however, help us better trust the power of what God has already done in and through being present with us in particular ways (not “mere” omnipresence), especially on those occasions when the costs of faithful obedience seem larger than the rewards. It points out the resources and practices that actually contribute to spiritual growth when we are tantalized and then disillusioned by a glitzy menu of seemingly easier tactics.

to created reality, his reconciling works and the human activities which arise from them” (*Sanctified by Grace*, 3).



PART
ONE

How We Got Where We Are

1

The Sanctification Mutiny

What happened with the doctrine of sanctification to get us where we are today? Without rehearsing the full and complex history of the doctrine, we need to understand some key, trajectory-setting moves that shaped the contemporary conversation—and the struggles. Part of that work will be to understand how the “sanctification situation,” as we currently experience it, came to be. “Context is everything,” as the saying goes.

Proper understanding and assessment of a complex phenomenon demand some knowledge of the backstory, specifically, the factors that contributed to the phenomenon. This holds true for our attempts to make sense of theologies that govern the life of faith. In this case, those key moves were made by the two most recognizable Magisterial Reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin, whose reactions against the Roman Catholic Church’s handling of the doctrine of sanctification set the stage for four hundred years of Protestant engagement of the doctrine.

The Reformation and Sanctification

The Reformers’ insistence on *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) significantly altered the doctrinal history of sanctification by returning

to the biblical text as the authoritative source for the doctrine. Admittedly, the formulations of sanctification that influence the lives of Protestant Christians¹ are also shaped by other factors such as tradition, reason, and experience, functioning underneath Scripture as the controlling source.²

The Reformers protested how tradition had upstaged biblical authority in the Roman Catholicism of their day. Yet, even in subservience to Scripture, tradition and other factors still have been at work in the way different understandings of sanctification unfolded in the Reformation legacy. Each of the varied understandings of sanctification within Protestantism reflects the legacy of reaction against late-medieval Roman Catholic theology.³ Leaders of the Magisterial Reformation were concerned about official church teaching and how that teaching affected people's lives as they understood it and

1. I have in view primarily the world of evangelical Protestantism, whether or not everyone would embrace the term "evangelical." The term is used with some ambivalence due to the unfortunate ways it has come to represent sociopolitical stances and, just as sadly, acquired a certain ethnic association. Still, I choose to use the term because it reflects the historic commitment to the *euangelion* (gospel, good news) and the essential tenets of historic orthodoxy that support that message, all the while acknowledging the current state of conflict and ambiguity surrounding the term. Though some, understandably, have chosen to abandon the term, I have to this point chosen to retain it and hope for its redemption. A well-reasoned case for its preservation and redemption is made by Young, "Recapturing Evangelical Identity and Mission." An appreciative, thorough, and comparative history of prominent traditions within Protestantism is offered by Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions*. Members of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions may see how their tradition could better contribute to or correct this conversation as it circulates within Protestantism. I can speak only from and to the Christian tradition(s) that I know best.

2. Albert Outler's "Quadrilateral," originally intended as a description of John Wesley's theological method, has been used diagnostically far beyond the Wesleyan tradition. See Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral." The Quadrilateral is not presented here as a definitive methodological framework, though it enjoys wide recognition and use. Even from within the Wesleyan tradition T. A. Noble points out that the Quadrilateral "is not exclusively Wesleyan and is not a quadrilateral!" Noble updates Outler's paradigm by suggesting four axioms that better reflect the basis for faithful theological reflection: Scripture, tradition, rational spiritual experience, and the "Trinitarian, Christocentric shape of Christian theology" (*Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 6–20).

3. This is not to ignore disputations about the nature of grace in the late Middle Ages—for example, the *via media* (middle way) and *via moderna* (modern way). Thanks to Andrew Hay for reminding me of this.

attempted to follow it.⁴ From those reactions—those protestations—has come the dizzying panoply of teachings about sanctification that warrant ongoing examination.

A primary theological concern of the Reformers was the doctrine of justification, which Roman Catholic teaching had formulated so as to make justification essentially dependent on the exercise of free will and on some type of moral engagement as preparation to receive God’s grace of justification. Thus, the exercise of free will was considered cooperative with God’s grace, even though it resulted from God’s infused and prevenient grace.⁵ Sharing the key assumption that sanctification involves moral change, the Reformers saw an inappropriate connection between sanctification and justification—a connection that imposed impossible moral demands on people and compromised radical dependence on God’s grace for salvation. The practical result “in the pew” was a debilitating moralism, relentless insecurity about one’s status before God, and a dangerous presumption both about the extent of one’s need for God’s grace and about one’s capacity to put oneself in a place to receive God’s grace.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther took the lead in this protest. As an Augustinian monk he had been immersed in Augustinian theology as it had been

4. A caveat is in order here. The “official” theology or doctrinal position of any ecclesiastical body on almost any topic seems never to be identical with how such positions are understood and practiced by those “in the pew.” Thus, it could easily be argued that every ecclesiastical body or tradition has at least two theologies: an official or confessional theology, which is more or less codified, protected, and debated with sometimes excruciating nuance by the tradition’s clergy and academics; and a functional or tacit theology, which is reflected in how those outside the clerical and academic ranks understand, process, and practice that doctrine in the complex, convoluted realities of their lives. This observation is intended to be more descriptive than critical. It is important because analysis of a tradition’s functional, tacit theology may not align at every point with what the tradition’s clergy and scholars affirm—and vice versa. Yet these formal, official theologies have tremendous impact as they are understood (or misunderstood) and shaped by innumerable other influences and find expression in the lives of a tradition’s adherents. My analysis will focus on official doctrinal expressions, with sensitivity to the wider understanding, practice, and impact of those positions.

5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II.113.7.

shaped by the Aristotelian constructs of the Scholastics. Luther's biographer James Mackinnon notes Peter Lombard, William of Ockham, and John Duns Scotus as Luther's "early mentors in the scholastic theology."⁶ These figures, more Pelagian in their theological tendencies,⁷ contributed to what Luther later described as his "torture of conscience,"⁸ at the root of which was the question of the basis on which God is gracious to sinners.

Reflecting Thomas Aquinas's Aristotelian modes of thought, the Roman Catholic Church taught justification in a highly nuanced manner, which included the notion of infused grace along with intricate distinctions about the relation of infused grace to the activation of human free will.⁹ Luther rejected the notion of infusion in his famous contention that justification is a single act of God to impute Christ's righteousness.

In the Counter-Reformation, the Council of Trent (1545–63) later solidified the church's stance in response to the Reformers' protests.

Chapter VII In What the Justification of the Sinner Consists, and What Are Its Causes

This disposition or preparation is followed by justification itself, which is not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just and from being an enemy becomes a friend, that he may be an heir according to hope of life everlasting.¹⁰

Canon 11 If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins,

6. Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 1:67.

7. That is, rejecting the notion of original sin or at least demurring with respect to the crippling effect of sin on the human will and thus attributing some capacity to the unredeemed human will to respond obediently to God.

8. Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation*, 1:78.

9. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II.113.7–10. Mackinnon points out that Luther had little direct acquaintance with Thomas and "wrongly . . . included Thomas Aquinas among the Pelagians of the Nominalist school who led him astray" (*Luther and the Reformation*, 1:78).

10. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 33.

to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema.¹¹

Trent's inclusion of the internal affections of grace and charity in the doctrine of justification represented what Luther and other Reformers considered the inappropriate and dangerous incorporation of sanctification into justification.

William Placher offers the following summary observations and comparison of Luther and Trent. For Luther, he says, "We are justified, though we remain sinners because God *imputes* Christ's righteousness to us. To be sure, in our lives as Christians we may turn gradually away from sin (this involves 'sanctification' and 'regeneration'), but that comes later and does not contribute to our justification, which derives not at all from our efforts."¹² For Trent, however,

Grace comes first, an awakening and assisting grace that begins the process of justification, but people must consent to and cooperate with that grace. Justification, in turn, "is not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just and from being an enemy becomes a friend." Luther had focused on an instant of justification, in which God saved sinners by pure grace but left them sinners—they were justified only because Christ's righteousness was imputed to them. Trent pictured justification as a process in which divine grace and human efforts cooperate at every step and not only lead God to count us as justified but also begin to transform us so that we more nearly deserve that status.¹³

For Luther, to subsume sanctification under justification in this particular manner and to attach justifying significance in any manner to personal transformation was seen as undermining the radical nature of God's grace for salvation.

11. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 43.

12. Placher, *History of Christian Theology*, 195 (emphasis original).

13. Placher, *History of Christian Theology*, 204.

Still, for Luther, “justification and ‘sanctification’ are extremely closely united,”¹⁴ reflected perhaps in his insistence on *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously righteous and sinner), yet not in the same sense as he observed in Roman Catholic teaching. The key difference for Luther was that in justification Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer and sanctification does not factor into that new standing before God. With that boundary in place, Luther went on to make sanctification part of what God does in the believer through faith. Commenting on Romans 6:19, he stated, “For through the terms ‘sanctification’ and ‘cleanness’ he [Paul] is trying to convey the same concept, namely, that the body should be pure, but not with just any kind of purity, but with that which comes from within, from the spirit of sanctifying faith. . . . Because through faith first the soul must be cleansed, so that in this way a holy soul can make the body clean for the sake of God; otherwise it would be a worthless chastity.”¹⁵ It is worth noting in his remark that he connected sanctification to cleansing but not necessarily to moral transformation. He offered a forthright description of sanctification in the third article of his *Small Catechism*:

“I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.”

What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life.¹⁶

Later he elaborated:

14. Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 54.

15. Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 321.

16. Luther, *Small Catechism*, 11.

Q163. What is the work of the Holy Ghost? The Holy Ghost sanctifies me, that is, He *makes me holy*, by bringing me to faith in Christ and by imparting to me the blessings of redemption. (Sanctification in the wider sense includes everything that the Holy Ghost does in me.)¹⁷

Q169. What else has the Holy Ghost wrought in you by the Gospel? The Holy Ghost has *sanctified me in the true faith*, so that I can now overcome sin and *do good works*. (Sanctification in the narrower sense.)¹⁸

Notice in these statements how Luther connected sanctification to faith and saw it as the source for moral response. These features characterize subsequent Lutheran treatments of sanctification. Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde relentlessly insists that any approach to sanctification veers into fruitless, if not dangerous, territory if it goes beyond deepening one's faith in the accomplished work of Christ.¹⁹ Similarly, Helmut Thielicke states, "Sanctification is the process in which faith takes over all areas of life and sees its relevance for them."²⁰

Thus, Luther's reaction against Roman Catholic teaching on justification congealed into a theology of sanctification that prioritized faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying (purifying, making holy) through that faith. Luther certainly emphasized moral responsibility and action as a result of justification, though he did not appear to emphasize moral transformation in quite the same manner as what he perceived to be problematic in Roman Catholic doctrine. Though arguments from silence can be weak, the nuance of Luther's emphasis and lack of emphasis is crucial to understanding his contribution to the sanctification situation. It also sits in contrast to later, often Calvinistic, developments in the doctrine of sanctification that placed significant emphasis on moral progress or transformation as the progressive aspect of sanctification.

In his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (on 12:1–2), Luther emphasized the "living sacrifice" of our lives as "'holy,' that is, separated, detached, kept away from what is unclean, as something

17. Luther, *Small Catechism*, 125–26 (emphasis original).

18. Luther, *Small Catechism*, 129 (emphasis original).

19. Forde, "The Lutheran View."

20. Thielicke, *Evangelical Faith*, 1:107.

that is taken from some other use and set apart only for a use worthy of God. . . . Above all, it signifies the purity which we owe to God.”²¹ He went on to discuss the transformation and renewal that should result from this sacrifice and purity, but he did not directly equate transformation and renewal with holiness. Rather, in his view, the faith-generated sacrifice of our lives leads to holiness, which then leads to transformation and renewal.

Likewise, when he discussed the same text in *Lectures on Romans*, he never treated sanctification as synonymous with transformation but instead appeared to make transformation the result of the holy (sanctified) sacrifice of our lives to God.²² This feature contrasts significantly with numerous later Protestant traditions for which Romans 12:1–2 became a hallmark text in support of progressive sanctification. For Luther, sanctification is not synonymous with transformation but rather leads to transformation.

Luther’s understanding of sanctification can be summarized in the following points:

1. Sanctification results from faith, just as justification does.
2. Sanctification relates to personal cleansing from sin, while justification formally imputes Christ’s righteousness to the believer.
3. Sanctification involves all that God does through the Holy Spirit to work out the fruit of redemption in a believer’s life.
4. Sanctification applies to the church as well as to individual believers.

John Calvin

John Calvin’s concerns about the content and effects of Roman Catholic soteriology resembled Luther’s, with the nature and the relationship of justification and sanctification as prominent concerns. Specifically, Calvin took issue with the notions of works as preparatory for the reception of justifying grace (contra Duns Scotus) and works of

21. Luther, *Epistle to the Romans*, 151.

22. Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 435–36.

supererogation as compensation for deficiencies in our works (contra Bonaventura).²³ He contested Aquinas's emphasis that even though God's grace is the "principal cause" of our good works, our free will nonetheless serves as the meritorious instrument or means of good works.²⁴

Though he affirmed Augustine in numerous respects, Calvin found problematic Augustine's subordination of grace to sanctification, because such a move implicitly places works ahead of grace.²⁵ Thus, he crystallized his view of justification: "Therefore, we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness."²⁶ Of particular note here is Calvin's somewhat tacit association of sanctification with works, to which we will return.

Like Luther, Calvin's view of the interface between justification and sanctification was shaped in part by his opposition to the teaching of Andreas Osiander (1498–1552), who resisted what he perceived to be overly legal connotations of justification understood as imputed righteousness. Calvin understood Osiander to argue instead that justification equated to actual, personal possession of Christ's righteousness—that is, righteousness within the believer's life and character. Calvin contended that this effectively "nullifies the certainty of salvation," insisting that, "because it is very well known by experience that the traces of sin always remain in the righteous, their justification must be very different from reformation into newness of life" (cf. Rom. 6:4).²⁷ Theologically, Calvin saw this move as an improper confusion of justification and regeneration.²⁸

23. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.14.12.

24. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.15.7.

25. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11.15.

26. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11.2.

27. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11.11. Ironically, Calvin goes on to insist that assurance of God's acceptance equates to a vigorous experience of faith, making assurance still seem elusive, though for different reasons than Osiander posited. Calvin states, "Scripture shows that God's promises are not established unless they are grasped with the full assurance of conscience. Wherever there is doubt or uncertainty, it pronounces them void" (3.13.4).

28. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.13.4; see editor's note 22.

Thus, Osiander provided a foil against which Calvin expressed his views on justification and sanctification. Each theme, for Calvin, was crucial in God’s overall work of salvation, though each deals with a specific and distinct type of righteousness. Two statements distill his thinking on this point.

For Paul’s statement is not redundant: that Christ was given to us for our righteousness and sanctification [I Cor. 1:30]. And whenever he reasons—from the salvation purchased for us, from God’s fatherly love, and from Christ’s grace—that we are called to holiness and cleanness, he clearly indicates that to be justified means something different from being made new creatures.²⁹

In short, whoever wraps up two kinds of righteousness in order that miserable souls may not repose wholly in God’s mere mercy, crowns Christ in mockery with a wreath of thorns [Mark 15:17, etc.].³⁰

Calvin insisted that justification before God comes as a free act of God’s grace, accepted only and entirely by faith. As such it does not change a person’s character. Yet, by virtue of establishing a relationship with God, justification effects through the Holy Spirit a real union with Christ that sets in motion a lifelong process of growth and change. Thus, Calvin’s view of sanctification emerges.

For Calvin, justification and sanctification are still integrally linked, though in a delicately nuanced manner. Those nuances deserve careful attention, since he spoke of the “beginning” and “progress” of justification,³¹ which can sound strangely similar to aspects of the Roman Catholic teaching that he so fiercely rejected. The following extended passage captures his understanding of that integration.

Why, then, are we justified by faith? Because by faith we grasp Christ’s righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you could not grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also. For he “is given unto us for righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption” [I Cor. 1:30]. Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he

29. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11.6 (brackets original).

30. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11.12 (brackets original).

31. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.14.1.

does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illumines by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he redeems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies.

But, since the question concerns only righteousness and sanctification, let us dwell upon these. Although we may distinguish them, Christ contains both of them inseparably in himself. Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces [I Cor. 1:13]. Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other. Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.³²

Thus, Calvin relocated sanctification and justification from the believer (as spiritual possessions or features) to Christ, who indwells the believer and with whom the believer is united through faith. Only through this faith-based indwelling do good works appear, and through this indwelling they will necessarily and inevitably appear.

Calvin's understanding of sanctification can be summarized in the following points:

1. Justification involves sanctification as the experiential outworking of Christ's righteousness bestowed (imputed) in justification.
2. Sanctification is rooted in communion with Christ that, while instrumentally resulting from faith, essentially comes through the agency of the Holy Spirit.
3. Sanctification produces the fruit of life intrinsic to the righteousness of Christ bestowed (imputed) through faith.
4. Sanctification demands and involves purity of life, the mortification of the flesh and its lusts, and the formation of the heart to obey God's law.³³

32. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.16.1 (brackets original).

33. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.14.9.

5. Sanctification by the Spirit empowers and leads to the cultivation of this purity of life.³⁴

The fourth and fifth points provide the basis for suggesting that even though Calvin did associate sanctification with transformation, he also saw sanctification as the basis for transformation. That basis, which constitutes the focus of this book, played a far more influential role in Calvin's understanding of sanctification than it has in many subsequent Calvinistic framings of the doctrine through the years. Calvin saw the accomplished aspect of sanctification as tightly linked to union with Christ through the Holy Spirit and as absolutely central to everything else about sanctification. He states, "Faith rests upon the knowledge of Christ. And Christ cannot be known apart from the sanctification of his Spirit."³⁵ His emphases set up our next set of considerations because the careful nuances of his position have not always been well preserved.

Conclusion

We can hardly overestimate the formative influence of Luther and Calvin on the current doctrine(s) of sanctification that frame and direct the lives of contemporary Christians who live somewhere in the legacy of the Reformation. These two Reformers sought to correct what they saw as seriously problematic formulations of sanctification in the medieval Roman Catholic Church. In part, they did this by insisting that sanctification and other biblical doctrines be both properly distinguished and properly related. In doing so, they brought to the surface key themes such as faith, the role of the Spirit, and union with Christ that had been ignored, obscured, or simply undeveloped in relation to sanctification. For this we are in their debt.

Their work, of course, was not perfect and did not close the conversation for all time. Theological reflection on God's revelation does

34. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11.1. This is the second part of Calvin's famous *duplex gratia* (double grace), the first part relating to justification: "being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father."

35. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.8.

not work that way. It must be noted that, despite the protests they put forward, they assumed to varying extents the moral understanding of sanctification that they inherited from late-medieval Roman Catholicism, the significance of which must not be overlooked. Theological positions are always and profoundly shaped by that to which they react. Yet, thankfully, they moved the line of scrimmage forward significantly. Subsequent years saw their emphases modified, codified, and circulated. In some cases codifications became calcifications. In other cases modifications became improvisations. Consistently, however, the initial and subsequent expressions of the doctrine of sanctification have been placed in dialogue with the realities of the faith journey in the lives of real people who for a wide array of reasons have not uniformly experienced those doctrinal expressions as healthy or helpful. Our exploration of how we got to where we are must now turn to some of the more influential ventures—the modifications—in that doctrinal history.