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[Trevin Wax](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax)

IS SANCTIFICATION A PROCESS OR A POSITION?

August 19, 2014

28 Comments [296](#) [19](#)



[Is sanctification the “process” of being made holy?](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/files/2014/08/Sanctification.jpg)

Or is it a term that refers to our position as belonging to God?

That's the question at the heart of David Peterson's *Possessed by God*

[\(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0830826017/ref=as_li_tI?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0830826017&linkCode=as2&tag=redletters-20&linkId=Y44ELN2B4P655E3E\)](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0830826017/ref=as_li_tI?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0830826017&linkCode=as2&tag=redletters-20&linkId=Y44ELN2B4P655E3E), a book I [summarized yesterday](#)

[\(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/18/christians-are-holy-and-wholly-possessed-by-god/\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/18/christians-are-holy-and-wholly-possessed-by-god/). (Start there to get the gist of Peterson's proposal.)

Today, I want to follow up with some thoughts on how Peterson's book plays out in day-to-day ministry.

What Is Sanctification: A Process or Position?

Possessed by God [\(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0830826017/ref=as_li_tI?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0830826017&linkCode=as2&tag=redletters-20&linkId=Y44ELN2B4P655E3E\)](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0830826017/ref=as_li_tI?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0830826017&linkCode=as2&tag=redletters-20&linkId=Y44ELN2B4P655E3E)

is a good contribution to the ongoing discussion on the nature of sanctification and the pastoral wisdom of knowing where to put the emphasis when discipling believers.

Peterson admits that sanctification can be conceived of as a process, but he argues that the New Testament emphasis (building on Old Testament examples) is on sanctification as a position, a status bestowed on us at conversion. He warns against focusing more on the process than the position because such an approach can actually work against the

progress that a believer wants to experience.

In surveying the sanctification debates, it appears that some Christians focus on the motivations for growth in holiness and seek to measure the progress that takes place in this life, while other Christians believe one should focus more on the definitive aspect of our sanctification that comes with salvation, believing this emphasis will motivate us to live out the identity that has been bestowed upon us in Christ.

What Do You Emphasize?

When pressed, pastors and scholars on all sides of this conversation generally affirm the statements and teachings of others. The difference lies in where the accent should be placed and the potential consequences of getting the emphasis wrong. Peterson is squarely on the side of emphasizing the definite nature of our being consecrated, set apart for God as his people.

The strength of Peterson's work is his ability to engage various biblical texts without ever losing sight of their wider context. In fact, it is an appeal to context that leads him to disagree with J. C. Ryle's interpretation of [Hebrews 12:14](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hebrews%2012.14) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hebrews%2012.14>) (a verse that says "without holiness, no one will see the Lord"). Peterson and Ryle are not far from each other, but Peterson's approach sees holiness as an expression of our "once-for-all" sanctification and Ryle sees holiness more as "proof" of our salvation.

At the risk of oversimplification, we might put it this way: **Peterson believes stressing the positional aspect will lead to the expression of the progressive aspect, whereas Ryle believes stressing the progressive aspect will lead to evidence of the positional.**

Or to look at it from the other side: wrongly emphasizing the progressive will lead to an obscurity of the positional and to doubts of salvation (according to Peterson), whereas wrongly emphasizing the positional will lead to apathy and lack of incentive to faithfully pursue a holy life (according to Ryle).

In pitting Ryle and Peterson against each other, I do not want to give the impression that their differences are quite as stark as presented here; neither is it true that Peterson uses Ryle as his primary foil (he engages with a number of scholars, both living and dead). But I find it helpful to simplify the discussion as a way of facilitating further conversation among pastors and counselors who genuinely want to see people growing in holiness and yet disagree as to the best way to biblically motivate them to obedience.

Concluding Thoughts

The strength of Peterson's proposal is his reliance on eschatological categories and the doctrine of our union with Christ. It is refreshing to see the sanctification debate placed in the wider context of eschatological realities, a move that incorporates the outlook of various New Testament passages (including, but not limited to Romans 6-8) and also keeps us firmly in the soil of the biblical narrative and worldview, not in the miry debates between systematic theologians through the years.

Peterson's work is careful and nuanced, making him a needed voice in the conversation about how Christians grow in obedience.

Anyone interested in the ongoing (sometimes heated) discussions about sanctification should consult [Possessed by God](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0830826017/ref=as_li_tI?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0830826017&linkCode=as2&tag=redletters-20&linkId=Y44ELN2B4P655E3E) (http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0830826017/ref=as_li_tI?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0830826017&linkCode=as2&tag=redletters-20&linkId=Y44ELN2B4P655E3E). He ably incorporates biblical exegesis, systematic insights, and historical analysis into his study, such that the reader comes away with a greater appreciation for God's work in justifying and sanctifying us in the past, and a stronger desire to manifest God's work in our obedience in the present.

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7 Arrows for Bible Reading

COMMENTS:

28 THOUGHTS ON "IS SANCTIFICATION A PROCESS OR A POSITION?"

1. **Dan** (<http://www.juliansabroad.com>) says:

August 19, 2014 at 8:07 am (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position#comment-72958>)

Thank you for the helpful review! I'll be picking up a copy of Peterson's book soon, I think.

While this is anecdotal, and based entirely on my own experience, I find that Ryle's formulation leads me towards an introspective Christian life (not always positive), while Peterson's leads me to a Christospective Christian life.

With Ryle's approach (the approach I grew up with), I am always examining myself for evidence, exploring my heart, and finding exactly what I don't like. (This is a reality, that as we draw closer to God, we become more aware of our sinfulness. Not that we accept it, or that we grow in sinfulness, but that we are more aware of it.)

Additionally, as a missionary in Spain, what I've seen is that Ryle's approach (the most common approach here) causes many believers to over-emphasize the superficial. It's not uncommon to hear, "I know I'm saved because I quit smoking, drinking, and swearing." Which then leads to despair many who are sincerely pursuing Christ, but still struggling with the consequences of years of addictive behavior. This doesn't simply happen in Spain. I saw it in Indiana as well.

With Peterson's approach, the temptation to focus on my own efforts/success as the only source of assurance is drastically reduced. My assurance is in Christ. Piper speaks of this in "When the Darkness Will Not Lift," as does Bunyan in "God's Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners." Hebrews tells us to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

John's first letter encourages us to look at our progress, but even then says, "When our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts." And also, "When we do sin, we have an advocate." So, while we must beware of making a false profession, we must never place our "in progress" over Christ's "it is finished."

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=72958#respond\)](#)

1. **Chase** says:

[August 19, 2014 at 1:41 pm](#) (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73160>)

Well said. It is only recently, like a few days recently I have been able to see position as an option. Thank you for your comments.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73160#respond\)](#)

2. **Dan** (<http://www.juliansabroad.com>) says:

[August 19, 2014 at 8:09 am](#) (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-72963>)

PS – Your Gospel Project curriculum on the Old Testament was very helpful in explaining this tension while I was serving in Indiana.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=72963#respond\)](#)

3. **Richard** (<http://GraceWaynesboro.com>) says:

[August 19, 2014 at 10:45 am](#) (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73049>)

Seems to me the element lacking from the conversation is whether our sanctification is merely a "position" we hold in the eyes of God...or a reality that is true of us based upon the imputed/imparted holiness of Christ within our New Covenant regenerated new creation.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73049#respond\)](#)

4. **Ralph Cunnngton** says:

[August 19, 2014 at 2:57 pm](#) (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73211>)

Thanks Trevin for this really helpful summary of Peterson's book.

Although you are right that most theologians affirm the statements and teachings of others in this debate, there are notable exceptions. In 2010, John Fesko wrote an article in the Evangelical Quarterly critiquing John Murray's seminal paper on the topic (which preceded Peterson's book) and denying the existence of definitive sanctification. He argues that definitive sanctification "confuses the forensic and transformative categories by taking a statement about

justification and moving it under the doctrine of sanctification.” I responded at length to Fesko’s argument in a later issue of EQ – available here

https://www.academia.edu/1831306/Definitive_Sanctification_a_response_to_John_Fesko
[\(https://www.academia.edu/1831306/Definitive_Sanctification_a_response_to_John_Fesko\)](https://www.academia.edu/1831306/Definitive_Sanctification_a_response_to_John_Fesko)

This debate actually takes place in the context of a broader debate about the relationship between union with Christ and justification. Those arguing for the priority and exclusivity of progressive sanctification (such as Fesko) see justification as the architectonic principle – those arguing for the priority of definitive sanctification although not denying progressive sanctification (such as Murray, Peterson, Gaffin) see union as foundational.

Although we might differ in the relative emphasis we place upon definitive and progressive sanctification, denial of definitive sanctification altogether is a serious matter for both pastoral and theological reasons. On the pastoral side, it removes the crucial foundation for holiness: we pursue holiness (progressive sanctification) because we already are holy in Christ ([1 Cor. 1:2 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor.%201.2\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor.%201.2) – definitive sanctification). On the theological side, as Murray noted, the definitive and decisive nature of sanctification is inextricably tied to the definitive and decisive nature of Christ’s own death and resurrection. We cannot deny the former without also undermining the latter and for that reason the stakes are incredibly high.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73211#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73211#respond)

5. ***Paul Wilkinson*** (<http://paulwilkinson.wordpress.com>) says:

[August 19, 2014 at 10:06 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73485\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73485)

I couldn’t help thinking of this dovetailing with J.D. Greear’s idea of repentance as a *posture*.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73485#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73485#respond)

6. ***Bereans All*** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 7:01 am \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73784\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73784)

When I read Paul’s epistles, I see both perspectives defended. The 1st half of his letters emphasize the positional realities that we have in Christ, while it is typical for him to use the 2nd half to emphasize the resultant responsibilities/responses. Mark Jones in his book “Antinomianism” rightly notes that this is not an either/or issue, but both/and. Maturity in the Christian life is to a great degree learning to live into both aspects, a sort of spiritual multi-tasking. Throughout each day we grow in our ability to understand when we need to focus on who we are, and when that reality leads us to focus on what we do. At the end of the day, sanctification is really about being able to live into [Phil 2:12 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.12\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.12) and [2:13 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.13\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.13) without having to debate which verse is correct.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73784#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73784#respond)

1. ***Natletowt*** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 4:53 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73986\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73986)

This is what I was going to and this is the correct response. There is no need to set up a false dichotomy here. We need both/and: progressive sanctification and reassurance (etc.) through our position in Christ.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73986#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73986#respond)

7. ***Kenton*** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 10:38 am \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73987\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73987)

[position/#comment-73863](#))

According to the scripture, holiness is primarily positional, beginning with God, who is set apart from and exalted above the heavens and the earth. Holiness, is not one attribute among many, but that which defines all of God's attributes in relation to the rest of His creation. For example, when holiness is defined with respect to sin, it becomes God's purity. In this case, God is holy in His purity.

This set-apartness or consecration, unlike our notion of perfection, cannot be graded on a scale, or on an act-by-act basis, just as the biblical idea of perfection — completeness/full maturity — cannot be measured by comparison. But the idea of progressive sanctification tends to lead to such a warped view of perfection, sanctification, obedience, and salvation.

So when the author of Hebrews states, "Strive... for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord," he doesn't mean, "Become more and more perfect in your actions." He means for us to pursue consecrated lives in every aspect, because only those that have been consecrated by God can enter His presence.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73863#respond\)](#)

8. **stuart** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 2:11 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73932\)](#)

I vote for process. According to [1 Tim 4:16 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Tim%204.16\)](#):

"Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you." NASB

One must continue or persevere in sanctification which leads to glorification/salvation.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73932#respond\)](#)

1. **Kenton** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 2:27 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73935\)](#)

Is that sanctification though? It's certainly obedience, faithfulness, and perseverance, but Paul mentions nothing about any sort of progressiveness here. Those places where he does mention progression pertain to *maturity*, which is not the same as progress in perfection of action. Maturity pertains to wisdom of action. When Paul does speak of sanctification/holiness, it is never progressive, but rather something that we must walk in and look to.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73935#respond\)](#)

9. **thirstingforknowledge** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 3:38 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73959\)](#)

Ryle is not the only one of the old greats that sees it this way. Actually Ryle like Spurgeon proposes that there is not an either or, but rather a positional Holiness that is imputed to us and a practical personal holiness we are called too.

Below is a quote and a link from an article by Spurgeon. I Highly recommend you read it. I am currently reading J.C. Ryle's book Holiness and again he affirms both types of holiness are present in a believers life. Heres the quote from Spurgeon Concerning [Hebrews 12:14 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hebrews%2012.14\)](#). "There has been a desperate attempt made by certain Antinomians to get rid of the injunction which the Holy Spirit here means to enforce. They have said that this is the imputed holiness of Christ. Do they not know, when they so speak, that, by an open perversion, they utter that which is false? I do not suppose that any man in his senses can apply that interpretation to the context, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness." Now, the holiness meant is evidently one that can be followed like peace; and it must be transparent to any ingenuous man that it is something which is the act and duty of the person who follows it. We are to follow peace; this is practical peace, not the peace made for us, but "the fruit of righteousness which is sown in peace of them that make peace." We are to follow holiness,—this must be practical

holiness; the opposite of impurity, as it is written, "God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." The holiness of Christ is not a thing to follow; I mean, if we look at it imputatively. That we have at once; it is given to us the moment we believe. The righteousness of Christ is not to be followed; it is bestowed upon the soul in the instant when it lays hold of Christ Jesus. This is another kind of holiness. It is, in fact, as every one can see who chooses to read the connection, practical, vital holiness which is the purport of this admonition. It is conformity to the will of God, and obedience to the Lord's command. It is, in fine, the Spirit's work in the soul, by which a man is made like God, and becomes a partaker of the divine nature, being delivered from the corruption which is in the world through lust. No straining, no hacking at the text can alter it. There it stands, whether men like it or not."

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2902.htm> (<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2902.htm>)

Reply (<http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73959#respond>)

10. **thirstingforknowledge** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 3:59 pm](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73965) (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73965>)

Spurgeon's point in the sermon above is "Heart-work, carried out afterwards into life-work,—this is what the Lord wants". Basically it is this. If the spirit of God is in you it won't be still. Nor will it live side by side with willful, unconfessed and unrepentant sin. We have been set free not only from the eternal consequences of sin, but also from the dominion of sin in our lives. We have been set free to be Holy. The error comes when we look to our own abilities to wage war against sin in our lives. We must go to the Lord in prayer with those things we feel convicted about and lean on Him to change us. Outward restrictions only change behavior. We need a heart change. If you are a born again believer then you have the spirit of Almighty God living inside of you. If you say that you can't live a Holy life then you are putting your faith in yourself instead of God. It's not about what you can do, it's about what God can do in you. You don't strive for Holiness based on your own feeble abilities, you do it based on God's limitless power. Holiness isn't sinless perfection. It's not reaching the mark, it's reaching for the mark. Its about surrendering to God and allowing Him to align your will with His will. Its about a change of nature. Putting on the new self. A nature that may still fall into sin, but is grieved by sin. With sanctification we should more so look at what direction we are headed rather than how far we have come. We know God has promised that those He justifies, He sanctifies. Justification and Sanctification though distinctly different, are never separate in the life of the believer. You can't have one without the other. One more great sermon is from John Wesley. <http://endtimepilgrim.org/holiness.htm> (<http://endtimepilgrim.org/holiness.htm>)

Lastley I'll leave you with the word's of the apostle Paul. Nothing in these verses sounds optional.

Ephesians Ch 4:

7 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Putting on our new self that is created to be like God is talking about regeneration. Nothing in those verses could be twisted to say that it is the imputed Holiness of Christ Paul is talking about. I firmly believe that in the life of the believer there will be both types of holiness. Imputed and personal practical holiness.

Reply (<http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73965#respond>)

11. **thirstingforknowledge** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 4:23 pm](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73971) (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73971>)

I wanted to clarify what I meant by the difference in the two types of Holiness. We have our positional Holiness which is imputed to us the moment we truly believe in Christ. This is part of our Justification before God. Then we have our personal practical Holiness. This is what God has Called us to, what we have been set free to be. This is what the Holy Ghost will be moving you towards if He is Indwelling you. Like J.C. Ryle says, "Where there is no Holy living, there is no Holy Ghost." Christ didn't set us free from sin so we could continue to live in it's bondage. I have noticed a lot of people like to quote Romans Ch 7 in order to justify not pursuing Holiness. What they fail to see is that Paul was not making excuses. You were seeing in Paul a tenacious fight against sin. Humility, and pain from his sin. Why? It's because of his pursuit of Holiness. Because his new nature was grieved by sin, and he knew he would never be totally free from his fleshly corruption until death separated him from it. That's the thing you will notice about anyone like Paul who had a close walk with the Savior. Humility. The closer you get to Christ, the more you realize your nothingness and your complete dependence on Him.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73971#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax.com/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73971#respond)

1. **stuart** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 7:10 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-74031\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-74031)

I essentially agree with you but allow me to take it a step further and pose a pertinent question which is: Do we still possess positional holiness if we fail to practice practical holiness?

I maintain that we do not – according to [Rom 8:12-13 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.12-13\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.12-13): "Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation-but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For IF you live according to the flesh, YOU WILL DIE; but IF by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, YOU WILL LIVE."

Paul's warning is a somber one as these verses describe the potential death of born-again believers, referred to as the brethren in v. 12. If this death were not a real possibility, the warning would be nonsensical. We also know that this warning pertains to spiritual death – not physical death – because everyone dies physically irrespective of how we live our lives. Moreover, one must have spiritual life in order to be in danger of spiritual death. You cannot threaten a spiritually dead person with spiritual death. Such a person is already dead. Therefore, it must be concluded that these are regenerate brethren who are being warned of dying. Also note that this verse is conditional – not unconditional – as indicated by the word "if." IF believers walk according to the flesh = they will die. IF believers walk according to the Spirit = they will live.

Those who disagree maintain that there is no condemnation for those in Christ citing [Rom 8:1 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.1\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.1). However in its proper context, v.1 is conditioned by the clause in v.4 which states: "who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Thus, "no condemnation" is only promised to those believers who walk by the Spirit which is coherent with the warning given in verses 12-13.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=74031#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax.com/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=74031#respond)

12. **stuart** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 4:40 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73981\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73981)

Sanctification involves aspects such as obedience, faithfulness, obedience, etc. To "pursue" or "continue" in one's walk and doctrine certainly implies action and linear progression. Paul's reference to salvation in the latter clause of the verse is conditional; not unconditional and is dependent on the first clause which specifically references a believer's conduct and belief.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73981#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax.com/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73981#respond)

13. **Thirstingforknowledge** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 5:31 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73997\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-73997)

Kenton,

Here are some passages of scripture to ponder,

First lets look at Hebrews 12 in context with the verses that surround it. I think there can be no denying that the holiness spoken of here is personal practical holiness we as believers must pursue.

Hebrews 12:7-17 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hebrews%2012.7-17>)

7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we had [e]arthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of [f]spirits, and live?

10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

12 Therefore, [g]strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,

13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thessalonians%204.3>)

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

1 Thessalonians 4:7 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thessalonians%204.7>)

7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

1 Peter 1:15-16 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Peter%201.15-16>)

15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

2 Corinthians 13:5 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Corinthians%2013.5>)

5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

Romans 8:10 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%208.10>)

10 And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Ephesians 5:25-26 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians%205.25-26>)

25 Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

Titus 2:14 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus%202.14>)

14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

1 Peter 1:2 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Peter%201.2>)

2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73997#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=73997#respond)

1. **Kenton** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 8:04 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-74054\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-74054)

1) I don't deny that there is a practical holiness, but in none of those verses is that regarded as progressive (in the sense of becoming better and better at being holy, or becoming holier by degrees). To suggest this is like saying we become more justified. Peter simply says, "Be holy [not be increasingly holy] in all your conduct", and Paul, "...your sanctification: that you abstain from [immorality]." These are cut and dry: either one is set apart (the meaning of the word) or he is not.

2) The emphasis of the passages is that the holy God has sanctified us to Himself, and we are therefore to pursue, and walk in, that holiness. God has brought you into His house, therefore live as members of the house.

3) The passages that speak of transformation – "conformed" in Romans 8, "maturity" in Philippians 3, "complete" in James 1 – ARE progressive, but they should be viewed as maturity, not moving up a grading scale. It is as Peter states:

"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5-8 ESV).

This is progressive, but not in the way that we think (i.e., from less perfect to more perfect). Rather, this progressive *godliness* sees an increase in godly traits as applied to our lives.

4) Hebrews 12 does not present a progressive holiness, because there are no degrees of holiness (God is greater than the angels in holiness only because He himself is greater and is the one to whom they — and we — are set apart). To share His holiness is to be set apart fully to Him, which is manifest in our conduct. To adopt your interpretation would also seem to imply that after redemption, we must still attain to a certain level of perfection before we can enter the kingdom. Such undermines the gospel.

Technically, there is no practical holiness. An unholy act(?) however could only be an act that profanes the holiness of God's presence, or an act that is not in line with one's set apart status, which is precisely what Paul means in 1 Thessalonians 4. Holiness means "set-apartness", and this term does not have progressive qualities. It can be pursued, but one cannot "do" holiness.

5) Holiness does not equal moral perfection. It simply describes God's set-apartness in relation to His creation (with respect to His divine nature and power).

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=74054#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=74054#respond)

14. **Bereans All** says:

[August 20, 2014 at 10:28 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-74128\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-74128)

No one argues that the progressive sanctification Paul urges in [Phil 2:12 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.12\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.12) is about "moving up in the grading scale." That seems deliberately pejorative and a needless straw man. That is what happens when you conflate justification with sanctification and the error that is so prevalent in the so called "modern

grace movement.” Sanctification has both a positional or ontological aspect (who we are) or the realm of the indicatives, as well as a teleological or ethical aspect or the realm of the imperatives.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replaytocom=74128#respond\)](http://blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replaytocom=74128#respond)

15. **thirstingforknowledge** says:

August 21, 2014 at 3:13 pm (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-74567>)

Kenton,

I feel like you’re missing the point. Read the sermon’s I linked by Spurgeon and Wesley. Holiness is the Spirit’s work inside of you. It is very progressive. It’s not about what you can do, but what God can do in and through you. In Romans 8:29 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%208.29>) it says that “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son”. That conforming happens the minute you are born again, and it is progressive. It is a life long journey and it is God’s will for your life. If His spirit is in you, It will be moving you towards Holiness. Here is another part of the sermon from Spurgeon that is so true.

“But,” I hear someone say, “it is impossible; I have tried it, and I have broken down; I did try to get better, but I did not succeed; it is of no use, it cannot be done.” You are right, my dear friend, and you are wrong. You are right, it is of no use going about it as you did; if you went in your own strength, holiness is a thing you cannot get, it is beyond you. The depth says, “It is not in me;” and the height saith, “It is not in me.” You can no more make yourself holy than you could create a world. But you are wrong to despair, for Christ can do it; he can do it for you, and he can do it now.

Believe on him, and that believing will be the proof that he is working in you. Trust him, and he that has suffered for thy sins, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, shall come in, and put to rout the lion of the pit. He will bruise Satan under thy feet shortly. There is no corruption too strong for him to overcome, there is no habit too firm for him to break. He can turn a lion to a lamb, and a raven to a dove. Trust him to save thee, and he will do it, whosoever thou mayest be, and whatsoever thy past life may have been. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;”—that is, he shall be saved from his sins, and delivered from his evil practices; he shall be made a new man in Christ Jesus by the power of the Spirit, received through the medium of his faith. Believe, poor soul, that Christ is able to save thee, and he will do it. He will be as good as thy faith, and as good as his own word. May he now add his own blessing to the word I have spoken, and to the people who have heard it, for his own sake! Amen.”

Since this conversation originated around Hebrews 12, I want you to go back and look at what kind of Holiness is being spoken of here. I will use the ESV for this discussion since it is pretty common and is a literal translation.

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

So in verse 1 laying aside sin and running the race with endurance that is set before us. This is directed at believers and certainly isn’t talking about anything that is imputed to us.

2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

In verse 2 we are told where to look for our strength and example.

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

In these verses we are being told to consider what Christ went through as we struggle against sin. Nothing whatsoever implies anything imputed or that happens instantaneously.

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather

than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Here is where your argument fails completely. We are told we are being disciplined so that we can partake in the peaceful fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained in it. Again this is totally progressive. God isn't disciplining us so that He can impute righteousness to us, nor is He implying something that discipline will give us all at once. He is transforming us or rather conforming us into the image of His Son.

12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. 14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; 16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

In these verses we can clearly see that the Holiness being spoken of is something to strive for. It is void of sin, and takes the supernatural act of God working in you. Nothing in these verses of scripture imply that this Holiness is imputed or instantaneous.

The only reason that I am even going through the trouble to point this out to you is this. If you don't yet understand this concept then you are missing out on what God wants for your life. Intimacy with God requires a proper understanding of personal practical Holiness in your life. It's not about trying to earn God's love or Favor. That would make it a selfish motive. It's about putting your faith in Jesus Christ and looking to Him for your strength. God is no respecter of persons. He loves us all the same. The only difference between any of us is the amount of faith we are willing to put in Him. I'll leave you with a quote from the Sermon I linked from John Wesley.

"No one who is not saved from sin here can be saved from hell hereafter. No one can see the kingdom of God above, unless the kingdom of God be in him below. Whoever will reign with Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth. And yet as sure as this is, and as clearly as it is taught in every part of the Holy Scripture, among all the truths of God, there is probably none which is less received by men."

I only quote Wesley, Spurgeon and Ryle not because I think they are authoritative or prophetic, but because I think they are so Biblically sound. Soundness that I rarely see in our day and age. They understood the true message of the Gospel. One that has been lost in our day. Jesus Christ came to rescue us completely from the power of sin. How silly it is for some who think that Christ died for us, yet we can still serve satan by willfully allowing sin to remain in our life. Repentance doesn't stop at conversion. Sin that isn't confessed in prayer to God and repented of, is sin that you have Justified committing. It is legal territory in your life that you have given over to Satan.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=74567#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax.com/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=74567#respond)

1. **Kenton** says:

[August 21, 2014 at 9:20 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-74742\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-74742)

I understand what you are saying, but understand what I am saying. Yes, sanctification has a practical consequence, just like justification. But to present sanctification as the process following justification that leads to glorification is, in my estimation, to go beyond Scripture. This is what I mean, using justification as the reference:

Suppose we were to say, using Hebrews 12, that righteousness is given by God, but there is a progressive dimension to it. That is, as the verse says, we aim in our discipline, to yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness: in other words, we aim to be increasingly righteous in our conduct. Such a statement would not be wrong. After all, Paul speaks of the new self, created "in righteousness and holiness." However, the same measure by which we judge righteousness to be primarily something given by God should be the same measure by which we judge holiness – namely the Scriptures. And as [1 Corinthians 6:11 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Corinthians%206.11\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Corinthians%206.11) indicates, sanctification (the act of making holy) is something first done by God, along with justification. I go back to the definition of "holy", which is to be "set apart", and then, when applied to sin, it means to be pure.

Again, I acknowledge wholeheartedly that we are to strive for holiness, keeping ourselves unspotted from the world, as well as righteousness, doing those things approved by God. These things are necessary and proper, and God will judge His house on these things. But to say that sanctification (holiness), as used biblically, is primarily

something we do by the Spirit's enabling, is no different than saying justification (righteousness) is primarily something we do by the Spirit's power.

Finally, to define sanctification, primarily, in such a way is to actually miss the scope of redemption, by reducing God's reconciling act to just a forensic declaration, when in fact God does more than just declare us righteous – He sets us apart from the world and to Himself by uniting us to Christ, and by uniting us to Christ, He makes us His sons and daughters in Christ. That is, sanctification is first and foremost the decisive act of God in making us His, as is justification and adoption. All of these comprise God's act of bringing us to Himself in Jesus, through the Spirit. What follows from these is the righteousness, holiness, and love that are proper for the people chosen by God.

Yes, having become the children of God, we are to mature in the image of Christ, who is the Son of God, in holiness, righteousness, and love. But this is only because God has first united us to His holy, righteous, and beloved Son, and has declared us to be righteous, set apart for Himself, and loved by Him. We live and walk in this election.

[Reply \(/blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=74742#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax.com/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=74742#respond)

1. **thirstingforknowledge** says:

[August 22, 2014 at 8:11 am \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-75123\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-75123)

Kenton,

I sincerely want to understand what you are trying to say. However I am having a hard time because you are stating your position, then putting up an argument that doesn't even support your position. Lets do this. The point of the blog article was regarding a book that disagrees with the position that J.C. Ryle holds on Holiness. I have read a lot of Ryle's writings, so allow me to give you his position, and then you can show me biblically where he is in error. We will start with Hebrews 12. Ryle along with Spurgeon, Wesley, Calvin and Tozer maintain that the holiness spoken of in verse 14 is referring to personal practical holiness in the life of the believer. In verse 10 we read that "He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness". God is not disciplining us so that we can be set apart for Holiness. We have already been set apart when we were born again. This is holiness present in the life of the believer and it is progressive. Then we are told in verse 14 to strive for this Holiness, without which no one can see the Lord. I don't see any validity to your argument that this holiness spoken of in Hebrews ch 12 is anything other than personal practical holiness in the life of the believer.

Ryles point is this. If you claim to be justified, saved, born again and under no condemnation because you are in Christ, then there should be evidence of this in your life. If you are walking in the spirit, then you should be bearing the fruits of the spirit. He was targeting people who think they are in Christ, yet live just as the world lives. His point was that if you have really been born again, if the spirit of God is actually in you, then your life will be changed. Once you are in Christ, you are no longer able to abide in sin and not be grieved. It goes against your new nature. You will inevitable feel moved towards holiness, and you will strive for this not based on your own feeble abilities, but based on who you are in Christ. I don't mean to imply here that it won't take effort on your part. What I am saying is that through self effort and self discipline alone you will only change behavior. You will never get to the root of the sin problem which lives in the heart. You must understand that we do not produce the fruit of the spirit. He is the true vine, we merely bear fruits once we have been grafted in. Next to being complacent about sin in our life, the worst thing a believer can do is wage war against sin in their life based on their own abilities. Satan will crush you. It's a heart change we need. Our actions and fruits must flow from a changed heart. Only Christ can change our heart. Jesus Christ is who our trust and dependence must be in. You can't claim to trust and follow Christ, yet serve satan by allowing unrepentant will full win to remain in your life. Here is a quote from Ryle that sums it up pretty good.

"Sanctification, again, 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." (Rom. viii. 9.) The Spirit never lies dormant and idle within the soul: He always makes His presence known by the fruit He causes to be borne in heart, character, and life. "The fruit of the Spirit," says St. Paul, "is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," and such like. (Gal. v. 22.) Where these things are to be found, there is the Spirit: where these things are wanting, men are dead before God. The Spirit is compared to the wind, and, like the wind, He 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." (Gal. v. 25.) We may depend on it as a positive certainty, that where there is no holy living there is no Holy Ghost. The seal that the Spirit stamps on Christ's people is sanctification. As many as are actually "led by the Spirit of God, they," and they only, "are the sons of God." (Rom. viii. 14.)" J.C. Ryle

You mentioned redemption, but I think you are missing the totality of redemption. God didn't just redeem us from the eternal consequences of sin, He freed us from the bondage of sin here on this earth as well. If a person is still living in the bondage of willful, unrepentant sin then they really haven't been freed yet. They are not in Christ. If you want to claim that you fall under no condemnation because you are in Christ, then your life should show evidence of walking in the spirit. If you're still walking in the flesh then you are still under the condemnation of the flesh. Lastly I want to clarify that we are not talking about being able to achieve sinless perfection. When we talk about holiness, we are not talking about the perfect holiness of God being present in the believers life. We're not talking about trying to live up to a standard, legalism, or moralism. Holiness and sanctification are the works of the spirit in a believer. Listen to what Ryle says about this Holiness.

"Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgment, hating what He hates, loving what He loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word."

— J.C. Ryle, Holiness

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=75123#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replytocom=75123#respond)

1. **Kenton** says:

[August 22, 2014 at 6:58 pm \(http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-75451\)](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-75451)

A) I apologize for the confusion. My basic point is that holiness is NOT "the habit of being of one mind with God", but the status of being set apart to God. From that comes the practice of setting ourselves apart from the world in mind, word, and deed, for God's use and according to God's will. My point about righteousness was that just as we do not place practical righteousness before imputed righteousness (though both must be preached, see Acts 26:20), so we should not place practical holiness before God's act of setting us apart for Himself, which is the biblical emphasis, as I read the Scriptures.

B) Addressing Ryle's position on [Hebrews 12:14 \(http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hebrews%2012.14\)](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hebrews%2012.14), I agree that the verse pertains to practice in holiness. My issue is, "What is holiness?" and then, "What does it mean to share His holiness and to pursue His holiness?" I do not see that it means simply growth in being more like God in our behavior. Rather, since the word itself means to be set apart, I see the author as calling Christians to pursue the discipline of being set apart, in our thoughts, words, actions, and above all associations, to God as His sons, which in the context of the passage, refers to enduring suffering by identifying with the people of Jesus. For the author says, "7 It is for discipline that you have to endure" and, "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant."

To demonstrate this point, the author says in chapter 13, "12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. 13 Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. 14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come." The context is not about being purified from our sins, though he mentions that, nor is it about our daily struggle against temptations to malice, pride, lust, etc. The context is about God's sanctifying act in setting us apart as His people, people who must therefore endure the same reproach that Christ first suffered for our cleansing and salvation.

Why must we endure suffering? It produces discipline. Discipline in doing what? Pursuing holiness, for the aim of sharing His holiness as His sons. What does that mean? Being God's set apart people, in conduct and association. As Jesus says, "If you were of the world, the world would love you." So the discipline that suffering brings trains us in identifying with Christ as his holy people who belong to God and not to the world.

This is the holiness we must pursue, by keeping ourselves unstained from the world, as James says (notice the emphasis on the world, not just on personal sins), and by being conformed to and transformed according to God's will as opposed to the world's, as Paul says.

C) A final word. I agree with all that Spurgeon says, except his position that sanctification is the holy living that provides evidence for the fact that God has sealed us with His Spirit. Holy living certainly is the evidence that God has sealed us with His Spirit, but holy living is not itself sanctification. Our sanctification IS our being sealed with the Holy Spirit, and I believe the Scriptures support that. And, to risk going off-topic, God sanctified us with His Spirit as the seal when He declared us to be righteous and made us His sons in Christ. For the Spirit is also the proof of our adoption ([Ro. 8:14-16](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ro.%208.14-16) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ro.%208.14-16>), [Gal. 4:6-7](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%204.6-7) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%204.6-7>)), our membership in the new covenant ([Jer 31:33](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2031.33) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer%2031.33>), [Ez. 36:27-8](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ez.%2036.27-8) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ez.%2036.27-8>)), our justification ([Ro. 8:1-2](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ro.%208.1-2) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ro.%208.1-2>)), and our future inheritance/glory ([Ro. 8:17](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ro.%208.17) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ro.%208.17>), [Gal. 5:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%205.5) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal.%205.5>)), [Eph. 1:14](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201.14) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph.%201.14>)).

I hope this is clearer, but if not, I apologize again.

tl;dr -Sanctification, like justification, is what God does in Christ and by the Spirit in making us His own. The practical consequence of being sanctified IS to mature in living sanctified, holy lives, just as the practical consequence of being justified is to mature in living justified, righteous lives. But this is not the same as sanctification, as the latter is not the same as justification. Hebrews 12-13 is about embracing being set apart as God's people (and living demonstrably as such), and enduring the suffering that comes with being marked as God's set apart people in Christ, while resisting sin.

[Reply \(/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replaytocom=75451#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replaytocom=75451#respond)

16.

Bereans All says:

[August 22, 2014 at 8:19 am](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-75126) (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-75126>)

There is no doubt that we are called to a process, an aspect of the doctrine of sanctification. The question is how it is defined. Certainly our standing, adoption, and ultimate glorification does not change, but our character and walk certainly do.

Classically, a clear distinction is made between the doctrines of justification and sanctification – and for good reason – justification being related to our forensic standing and sanctification being related to conduct and ethical process. However, what we have not emphasized enough are the categorical distinctives within sanctification. The categories I use are: (1) positional sanctification – or the realm of the sacred or holy, and (2) progressive sanctification, what I refer to as representational or reflective sanctification – the realm of ethics.

The realm of the sacred or holy is positional or “definitive,” as some authors refer to it. It involves standing and identity, a category referred to by Paul in [1Cor 6:11](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%206.11) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%206.11>), “but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” It is grounded in our justification but defined or characterized by God’s presence. This is the realm of the indicatives – who God is, what He has done, and who we are in Christ. It is a state of being, or what I refer to as the ontological aspect.

The second category is the realm of ethics and the imperatives, the teleological aspect. And while it is a process that effects a change in our character, its purpose is primarily reflective or representational – pointing to the attributes and work of Christ. A good example is [2Cor 7:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%207.1) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%207.1>), “Since we have these promises (the indicatives), beloved (standing and identity), let us (the imperatives) cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” In his salutation to the believers in Thessalonica ([1 Thess 5:23](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess%205.23) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess%205.23>)), Paul prays for the culmination of that process, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely,” or “through and through,” a compound word from *holos* and *telo* (end) meaning “through to completion.” We are not ‘progressing’ in our standing, identity, or,

acceptance in Christ, but we should be and are ‘progressing’ in our ‘set-apartness’ from the world. We are becoming more Christ-like and less like the world, and in that sense we are becoming “progressively sanctified” and are called to be active in that process, “walking in the Spirit” by being obedient to the Word of God and faithful in prayer and commitment to God’s people.

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1. **thirstingforknowledge** says:

August 22, 2014 at 10:20 am (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-75187>)

Bereans All,

I love how you explained that. I hope through what I shared that it didn’t seem that I was implying that our personal Holiness changes our standing with God. That’s not my position, nor is it Ryles position. If earning favor with God is our motivation for sanctification, then it is about us instead of God. It becomes selfish. Ryles main point is that the same spirit that convicts you of sin, the same spirit that works in you faith unto justification, is the same spirit that moves you towards sanctification. Justification will always result in a changed life, and if it doesn’t then you haven’t truly been justified. Sanctification is the inevitable result of Justification. They are distinctly different, yet never separate in the life of the believer. I think the biggest indicator to a person about whether they are in Christ or not should be conviction from the Holy Ghost about sin. You may still make some of the same mistakes you made before you knew Christ, but does sin grieve you? Can you commit sin and easily justify it, or does the Holy Ghost hit you like a knife to the heart when you sin? Does sin grieve you? Does it go against your new nature? Is Gods law written on your heart? The best way I know to describe it is like the last verse in Hebrews 12 verse 29 for our “God is a consuming fire.” That’s what He has been in my life. My goals, my desires, my wants, my everything changed once I understood spiritually what Christ did for me. I was changed. My old self died. The Holy Ghost doesn’t convict us of sin to condemn us, He does it to free us from it. Justified unrepentant sin in the life of a believer destroys your communion with God. Sin puts us into bondage.

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1. **stuart** says:

August 22, 2014 at 12:41 pm (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-75249>)

thirstingforknowledge – a question for you if I may. Based on your last sentence in your last post you stated that unrepentant sin destroys communion with God and puts us in bondage. Do you not also think that it eventually separates us from God and results in our spiritual death if we continue in unrepentance and walk according to the flesh per [Rom 8:12-13](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.12-13) (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.12-13>)?

[Reply \(/blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replaytocom=75249#respond\)](http://blogs.trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/?replaytocom=75249#respond)

1. **thirstingforknowledge** says:

August 23, 2014 at 10:12 pm (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-76179>)

Stuart,

I think I know where you are trying to go here. I feel that the problem we see too often today is professed Christians who really haven’t been born again. I feel that those who have been born again, been truly changed, and have put on the new nature could never stand to live with unrepentant sin. The conviction of the Holy Ghost would be too great. God in His love would discipline them with trials that would bring them back to Him. I once struggled with the Doctrine of eternal security based on the sinful lives I saw so many Christians living. I eventually realized that most were not truly saved. The work of regeneration in the heart of a believer is incomprehensible. It is powerful and life changing. It has a noticeable affect on a person. One that others will notice as well. I think the whole point that I have been trying to make that seems hard for some to grasp is this. Faith that isn’t strong enough to result in a changed life is not saving faith.

1. **stuart** says:

August 24, 2014 at 6:27 am (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/08/19/is-sanctification-a-process-or-a-position/#comment-76358>)

Hi thirstingforknowledge – no doubt there are those who were never saved to begin with; however, that fact in and of itself does not preclude the possibility that habitual unrepentant sin in the life of a believer can result not only in bondage and loss of communion with God but eternal separation from God as well. That is why I was interested in how you manage to interpret Rom 8:12-13 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.12-13>) in light of your comment. Though you refrained from doing so, in my opinion Paul's warning is a somber one as these verses describe the potential death of born-again believers, referred to as the brethren in v. 12. If this death were not a real possibility, the warning would be nonsensical. We also know that this warning pertains to spiritual death – not physical death – because everyone dies physically irrespective of how we live our lives. Moreover, one must have spiritual life in order to be in danger of spiritual death. You cannot threaten a spiritually dead person with spiritual death. Such a person is already dead. Therefore, it must be concluded that these are regenerate brethren who are being warned of dying. Also note that this verse is conditional – not unconditional – as indicated by the word "if." IF believers walk according to the flesh = they will die. IF believers walk according to the Spirit = they will live.

Those who hold to eternal security often point out that there is no condemnation for those in Christ citing Rom 8:1 (<http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.1>). However in its proper context, v.1 is conditioned by the clause in v.4 which states: "who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Thus, "no condemnation" is only promised to those walk by the Spirit which again is coherent with verses 12-13.

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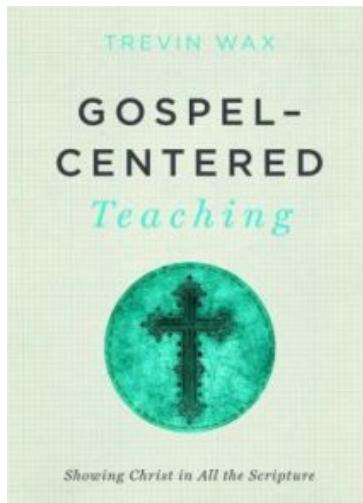


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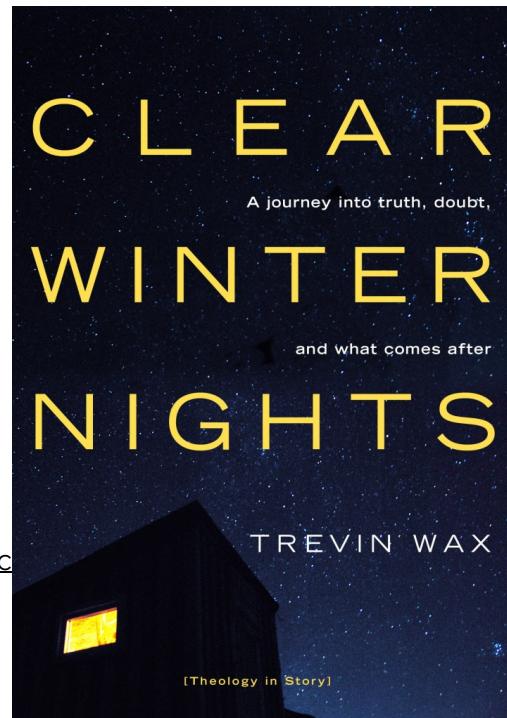
Trevin Wax is managing editor of [The Gospel Project](http://www.gospelproject.com) (<http://www.gospelproject.com>) at LifeWay Christian Resources, husband to Corina, father to Timothy, Julia, and David. You can [follow him on Twitter](https://twitter.com/TrevinWax) (<https://twitter.com/TrevinWax>). [Click here](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/about-trevin-wax/) (<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/about-trevin-wax/>) for Trevin's full bio.

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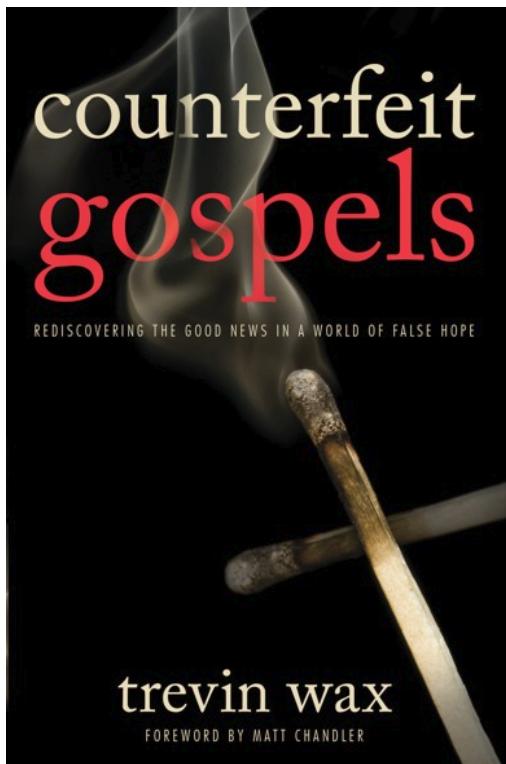
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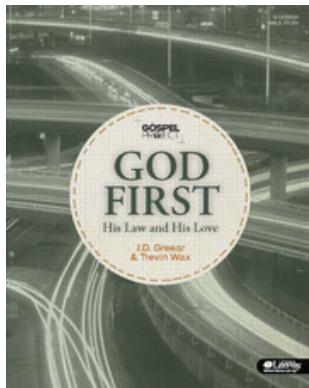
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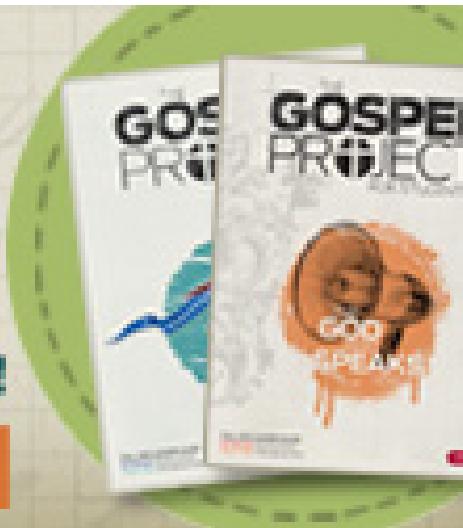
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