

# Herald

ANTIPAS

"Antipas, My faithful witness" (Rev 2:13)

No 10

---

## SANCTIFICATION: WATERMARK OF GENUINE CHRISTIANITY

*Part 1 : Its inception and perfection*

*Nico van der Walt*

---

Sanctification is the process whereby God transforms His elect from their natural, sin-depraved condition into conformity with the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ.

In both Old and New Testaments the concept *holy* bears the idea of *separation* - to be, or to be placed, on one side for special use or privilege. From this flows the further idea of *moral purity*.

### INITIAL OR DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION

□ Traditionally, Christian teaching has rightly emphasized the life-long and progressive character of sanctification. But an equally important aspect of it is often neglected. This becomes evident when the New Testament's use of the concept is studied.

Sanctification is often referred to as something which occurred *finally and unrepeatably in the past*. This aspect of sanctification is emphasized in the Scripture at least as much as the progressive aspect.

In Acts 20:32; 26:18; Rm 15:16; 1 Cor 1:2 and Hb 10:10, believers are called *sanctified* (perfect passive participle; cf. NIV). The verbs are *passive* (indicating something done *to* the believers – by the Holy Spirit, according to Rm 15:16), and the perfect tense indicates an action in the *past* which brings about a present state of being.

In 1 Cor 6:11 the apostle says that the believers were *sanctified* (NIV, KJV), and he uses an ordinary *past*

tense. The verb is again *passive*, with the Spirit as the agent. It is doubtful whether too much weight should be given to the order in which the concepts are arranged; and even if the order is intentional, opinions diverge as to its meaning.

The noun (holiness, sanctification) may also refer to this event, as becomes clear from the contexts of 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2.

It is in consequence of this sanctification that New Testament believers are called *saints*<sup>1</sup> (plural adjective in Greek; see Ro 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 3:12 - cf. different translations).

□ Theologians differ as to precisely what this initial sanctification means. All accept that it has at least a *positional* sense, and it is best to leave it at that.

Initial sanctification, then, refers to the work of the Holy Spirit when He lays claim to a person and sets him or her apart – or *puts him on one side* for God's special grace and service. This happens when He takes a person *out of Adam* and unites him with Christ, the Last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), in order to make him part of God's new humanity.

Initial sanctification is thus almost synonymous with other expressions that refer to the same event ("I was

---

<sup>1</sup>In Greek, the verb for 'sanctify' (*hagiazō*), the noun for 'sanctification' (*hagiasmos*), and the adjective translated 'saint' (*hagios*) all have the same root, with holiness as the central concept.

saved in 1973"; "He was converted from Islam"), but underlines the aspect of separation, of setting aside – and especially the associated *privileges, responsibilities and practical implications*. It is thus an *umbrella term* which draws together all the elements of the order of salvation that are involved when a person becomes a Christian (calling, new birth, faith, repentance, justification and adoption).

When the Word therefore says to believers that they are already sanctified, and are therefore saints, it seeks to emphasize that, when they became Christians, the Triune God separated them from a sinful world under His wrath and set them apart for Himself – and thus for inexpressible privileges, exalted service and a blessed future. It seeks, therefore, to establish in them an inner stability, to cause their worship to spring up and overflow, to deposit within them a weighty sense of responsibility, and to elicit from them a life of permanent thankfulness.

□ It is extremely important that Christians properly integrate the truth of initial, completed sanctification into their thinking. Its large-scale neglect leaves believers poorer. Regardless of the fact that certain key statements of Scripture cannot be understood apart from it, this truth is fundamental to the apostles' appeal to a holy life. Compare, e.g., the fourfold "if" of Phil 2:1(NIV, KJV; equivalent to 'seeing that' in the Greek) and the appeal that follows. Colossians 3:1-17 is also insightful, especially the "since" with

which v.1 begins, and the "therefore" with which v.5 continues.

The New Testament lays stress on the truth that it is unthinkable for people who have been sanctified (with all that this implies), simply to continue in sin. Apart from the fact that such a thing is impossible because of their living union with Christ and the new heart which is coupled to that union, such wanton sin would amount to despicable thanklessness, screaming inconsistency and a shocking lack of integrity.

Romans 6 is probably the most detailed explanation of this fundamental Biblical motivation for a holy life.

□ The wonderful truth of initial, completed sanctification forms the firm foundation of the doctrine and pursuit of progressive sanctification – which will be considered in the next Herald. This, more than anything else, gives to the believer the knowledge that he engages in the battle from a position of strength and victory. He is even more than the overwhelming favourite; he is the certain winner.

A well-known illustration comes from the Second World War. The Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy in the middle of 1944 (D-day). At that time, every war strategist knew who would win the war, because the German forces had been placed irreversibly on the back foot. Nevertheless, the war lasted another eleven months, and some of its bloodiest battles still had to be fought before Berlin fell (V-day). But – and

this is the point – the Allies were in a position of strength during this demanding period, and there was only one way for them: forward! How important it is for Christians to work out their own salvation, yes, with fear and trembling, but on the front foot – knowing that God Himself is at work in them to will as well as to do according to His good pleasure (Phil 2:13, KJV)!

## REGENERATION OR THE NEW BIRTH

□ *Sanctification grows in the soil of the new birth*, which is the creation of Christ's nature in a person and is therefore the prerequisite for the formation of His image in a sinner.

□ The Old Testament frequently looks forward to the new birth. Two passages of Scripture in particular are important for us: Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:24-28.

The latter passage is one of the clearest Old Testament chapters on the nature and wealth of the New Covenant, especially the new birth. In v.25, God promises that He will wash His people from their sins with water, and in v.27 He promises the Holy Spirit. When Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about the new birth, He refers specifically to these two elements in Jn 3:5: water and Spirit.

Between the two promises in Ezekiel 36 is a verse which is of the utmost importance to our subject. Verse 26 promises a "new heart" – one of flesh which replaces the old heart of stone. The Biblical concept of "heart" refers to the centre of a

person's personality. It is thus the *control room* which determines his whole life (Prov 4:23). A fact which stands firm is that every person lives under the constraint of his own heart. What happens in his heart determines what he is.

An illustration of this can be found in the behaviour of migratory birds. Why do they fly north in the autumn and return every spring? The answer lies in their inborn nature. To this genetic migratory instinct they must be obedient; they can do no other. In the same way, every person is inescapably obedient to his own heart.

Thus a change of heart will unavoidably bring with it a change in behaviour. In this way the Lord will "move" us to live according to His decrees (v.27). In Jeremiah 31 another image is used to convey the same promise: He will write His laws on people's hearts (v.33).

The old heart of Ezekiel 36 is one of stone. It is dead to the Lord and His affairs. It is cold and hard, and therefore has no interest in God, no feeling for Him, His honour, His will or His kingdom. The new heart, on the other hand, is one of flesh. It is alive to the Lord and His things. It is warm and soft; it is therefore zealous, and can be moulded in relation to God, His honour and His kingdom.

This change of heart, which the New Testament calls a birth from God, or the new birth, thus brings a new principle of life, a new disposition, a new inclination, a new focus. It brings new priorities, new ambitions, new aspirations, new

passions. Therefore it brings a completely new life – a life which is driven by the desire to know the Triune God, to be like Him, and to bear much fruit to the honour of His Name.

This is precisely what the Apostle Paul understood from practical experience: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17, NIV).

□ The first letter of John gives much attention to the consequences, and thus the signs, of the new birth. One verse is particularly instructive for our purposes: 1 John 3:9. Note the structure (cf. NIV, KJV which follow the Greek fairly closely):

*born of God  
does not sin  
because God's seed  
remains in him  
does not sin  
born of God*

Without discussing the issue in detail at this point, it must be mentioned that John is not talking here of sinlessness (cf. e.g. 1:8-10). What he probably means (the form of the verb indicates this), is that the person in view no longer continues in sin as a way of life. And what is the secret? God's seed has been planted in him! The Lord has thus created in him a new principle of life through the new birth – a principle which wants to be done with sin and which desires nothing more than pleasing God.

□ In the light of everything which has been said above, it is crystal clear that

the new birth is of the utmost importance for sanctification. It is the start of a moral change in a person, and as such is the spring from which sanctification flows.

*The new birth is a sovereign, radical, life-giving work of God through His Holy Spirit, by which a person is transformed out of a condition of spiritual death – and a resultant God-avoiding state of heart – to a condition of spiritual life – and a resultant God-seeking state of heart.*

### GLORIFICATION

□ If the new birth is the inception, glorification is the completion, rounding-off, perfection of the process in which Christ's perfect, glorified human nature is formed in God's children. This is the end towards which all of God's redemptive work in their lives is directed. He chose them and predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brothers (and, naturally, also sisters; Ro 8:28-30). And believers have the glorious assurance that God Himself will carry the process to completion: "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6).

□ In both the Old and the New Testaments, glorification is at the heart of the believer's blessed hope (Ps 17:15; 73:24-25; Rm 8:18; 2 Cor 4:16-18; Phil 3:7-14; Tit 2:13; 1 Pet 5:1,4). The apostles looked past

death and the grave – and fastened their eyes on glorification.

□ This perfection occurs in two instantaneous steps. First, when body and spirit are separated from each other at physical death. Finally, when the two are again united as the body is raised from the dead at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Normally it is the final step which is actually called glorification, but this is a slight reduction of the concept.

□ Those who have died in Christ (in both the OT and in the NT), the disembodied saints, are now in the presence of the Lord (Phil 1:23). Although the resurrection has not yet taken place, the Scripture calls them "the spirits of righteous men made perfect" (Heb 12:23, NIV). They are free from the limitations of earthly existence, free from "this body of death" (Rm 7:24, NIV), free from sin, free from suffering – and they are with the Lord. This is indeed a state of glory – yet it is still a provisional state.

□ Ultimate glorification has different facets. It will be our final acceptance as children of God, and the redemption of our bodies (Rm 8:23). By it we will take possession of our full, eternal inheritance in Christ (Eph 1:13-14; 1 Pet 1:3-5). It will be the formal, public ratification of our justification and, as such, redemption from God's wrath, which will, immediately thereafter, be poured out upon an old and corrupt creation (Mt 25:31-46; Rm 5:9-10; 8:33-34; 1 Thess 1:10).

Final glorification will bring spotless moral perfection for the individual (1 Cor 1:8; Eph 1:4; Phil 1:9-11; Col 1:22; Jude 24). It will also bring fullness of knowledge (1 Cor 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2).

The redeemed saint, who existed spiritually in the intermediate state, will receive a perfect, glorified body with his ultimate glorification (1 Cor 15:35-50; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Phil 3:20-21). 1 Corinthians 15 describes the contrast between the present body and the glorified one in graphic terms. Now the body is perishable (thus subject to sickness, ageing and death); but one day it will be imperishable (42). Now my body is weak and insignificant; but it will be raised in power and glory (43). Now it is a natural body; but then a spiritual one (perfectly equipped for fellowship with God; 44).

This act of being clothed with the imperishable and immortal, this swallowing up of death in victory, will happen in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:51-54).

Not only will the individual be glorified, but so will his environment and dwelling-place. The creation, which was distorted as a result of the Fall (Gen 3:14-19), will be liberated from its futility and its bondage to decay, and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rm 8:19-22). In Revelation 21:1-2 this is called the "new heaven" and the "new earth".

Before the Fall, man had a glorious dwelling-place, the Garden of Eden. Without doubt, a yet more glorious dwelling-place – prepared by the Heavenly Bridegroom for His bride (Jn

14:1-3) – will make an essential contribution to the new humanity's eternally blessed state.

□ It is now clear that the formation of Christ's perfected human nature in the elect occurs in three stages.

Firstly, "God's seed", the embryo of His nature and glory, is implanted through the new birth. Without this, sanctification would be out of the question.

After this follows sanctification – the growth of this new principle of life – during the believer's life on earth. This is not a process which reaches completion – nowhere near. That requires a further dramatic intervention from God.

Lastly, there is glorification, which ultimately brings the essential condition of God's elect into agreement with the judicial status which they have had in God's books since their justification (when they believed for the first time)! On the one hand, this finally redeems them from the "body of death" and from sin, and, on the other hand, makes them, throughout the entire spectrum of their humanity, conformed to the glorified humanity of "the man, Christ Jesus" (1Tim 2:5) – the Head of God's new creation.

*Sanctification is therefore a process between two crises – two dramatic interventions from God: new birth, the seed-bed, the spring, the embryo of the process, and glorification, its perfection and completion.*



The purpose of **Antipas Herald** is to make available, free of charge and as widely

as possible, Scriptural teaching in the form of brief, intelligible studies, aimed at promoting understanding of and faith in the God-centred principles of the Bible.

These vital truths are succinctly and excellently formulated in the great confessions of faith and trumpet calls of the 16th century Reformation:  
**Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Christ Alone, Faith Alone, Glory to God Alone.**

Should you wish to receive future issues of the Herald free of charge, please forward your name and postal address to our distribution and editorial office:

**Antipas Herald, P.O. Box 12371, Queenswood, 0121, South Africa**

**Tel & Fax: +27 (0)12 329 3012**

All our literature, as well as other information, is available on our web site

**<http://www.reformed.org.za>**

#### **PUBLISHERS**

##### **Antipas Literature**

P.O. Box 263435, Three Rivers, 1935, South Africa

Tel: +27 (0)16 423 3639 or +27 (0)16 423 3391

Fax: +27 (0)16 429 3033

Nico van der Walt is a congregational pastor and teacher in Pretoria. He subscribes to the historically respected and internationally recognized 1689 Baptist Confession – like most Reformed Baptists worldwide.

Anyone is at liberty to use material from this Antipas Herald with or without recognition. In preparing it the author has himself received help from many sources. He believes its content to be a true statement of Scripture teaching, and his desire is to further, not to restrict, its use.

We would like to develop as wide a readership as possible for the Herald. If you have found the contents of benefit, you could help us by introducing the Herald to others and encouraging them to subscribe. Names are only added to our mailing list at the specific request of the individuals concerned.