

The Three Stages of Salvation

By James Moriello, Firm Foundation Christian Church, Woonsocket, RI, 2016

(All Scriptures NKJV)

There are three terms which are used to theologically define the salvation of the Christian. “Justification is a divine act whereby an infinite Holy God judicially declares a believing sinner to be righteous and acceptable before Him because Christ has borne the sinner’s sin on the cross” (Unger’s Bible Dictionary). Sanctification is “separation from the secular and sinful and setting apart for a sacred purpose” (ibid). Glorification is the final work of God in which sinners are ultimately made perfect in God’s sight. We can think of salvation as being past, present, and future. For the Christian, justification occurred in the past at point of salvation, sanctification is the continual work of God in the life of the believer which is experienced in the present, and glorification is the future end of that salvation. There is overlap of these terms in some Scripture passages, since God exists apart from time and sees the end from the beginning. This is especially true of sanctification, and has led many to error as to its meaning. Sanctification passages, therefore, can be further divided into three categories. The first is positional, or instant, and it accompanies salvation (Hebrews 6:9). The second is progressive sanctification, and that is the present work of God in which the believer becomes more like Jesus. The third is final sanctification, which is essentially the same as glorification. Our outline will be as follows:

1. Justification (past)
2. Sanctification
 - a. Positional (past)
 - b. Progressive (present)
 - c. Final (future)
3. Glorification (future)

First, we will look at those Scriptures which deal with justification. The believer is declared just because the Savior, Jesus Christ, has died in his/her place. Because Jesus has already paid the penalty (His own death) for sin, satisfying God’s wrath against sin, the believer is found not guilty in the ‘Divine Court of Law and Grace’.

1. John 3:18: “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”
2. Romans 8:1-4: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”
3. John 5:24: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”
4. Ephesians 1:13-14: “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”
5. Acts 13:39: “and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”
6. Romans 3:24-26: “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”
7. Romans 4:2-5: “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”
8. Romans 4:25: “who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”

9. Romans 5:1: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”
10. Zechariah 3:1-5: “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” And to him He said, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.” And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.”

Second, we will look at those Scriptures which deal with positional sanctification. Positional sanctification is the way in which God sees us the moment we first believe. God, existing apart from time, sees believers as holy, as if the work is already complete. Positional sanctification is closely related to the biblical doctrines of election and predestination. This accompanies salvation, in time, for the believer.

1. Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”
2. 1 Corinthians 6:11: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”
3. Hebrews 10:10: “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”
4. Hebrews 13:12: “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”
5. 2 Thessalonians 2:13: “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth”

Third, we will look at those Scriptures which deal with progressive sanctification. Progressive sanctification is the ongoing work of God through which we become more Christ-like. This divine work is effective to the degree that we cooperate with it. This occurs from the moment we are justified until the moment in time that we are

glorified. It is an ongoing work, and cannot be otherwise, since we retain the sin nature for the duration of our lives, even though we have been redeemed and justified (1 John 1:8). We reject “instantaneous sanctification” as an unscriptural doctrine, since it teaches that the Christian can be free from willful sin and that the process can be completed prior to death. This violates the doctrines of original sin and the universal depravity of man (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 5:12, 7:7-25).

1. John 17:15-19: “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.”
2. Romans 12:1-2: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”
3. Ephesians 5:15-18: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”
4. Philippians 2:12-13: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”
5. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”
6. 2 Timothy 2:21: “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”

7. Hebrews 2:11: “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren”

Fourth, we will look at Scriptures which deal with final sanctification and/or glorification, in which God sees us as holy at a point in the future, our salvation having been completed. We will be holy in our condition as well as our position.

1. Romans 8:16-17: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”
2. Romans 8:30: “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”
3. 1 Corinthians 1:8: “who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”
4. 1 Corinthians 15:43-44: “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”
5. 1 Thessalonians 2:12: “that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory”
6. 1 John 3:2-3: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”
7. Jude 1:24-25: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.”

Significant References Regarding Old Testament Believers (In addition to Zechariah 3:1-5 and Jeremiah 1:5): Genesis 15:6; Job 19:25-27; James 2:25; Deuteronomy 30:6; Isaiah 57:15; Ezekiel 36:25-26; Daniel 12:2; Luke 16:22-23