

# Explaining Christianity

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## Part 6: Explaining Sanctification

### A. INTRODUCTION



Many Christians love God sincerely yet end up exhausted, discouraged, or spiritually dry because they are trying to live the Christian life in their own strength.

Research shows this is widespread: many believers report spiritual fatigue, guilt, and discouragement. Much of this comes from a subtle but destructive mindset...“try-harder Christianity.”

Try-harder Christianity says, “*If I just work harder, do more, pray more, serve more, God will be pleased with me.*” It creates

pressure, perfectionism, and burnout—an endless spiritual treadmill where joy fades and faith becomes heavy.

### B. DEFINITION

“Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more **free from sin** and **like Christ** in our actual lives.” (Grudem).

### C. INTRODUCTION

Sanctification is the lifelong process by which God sets His people apart and shapes them to become more like Jesus. Unlike justification—which is a one-time declaration of righteousness, sanctification is a daily transformation empowered by the Holy Spirit. It involves our cooperation with God as we yield our will, desires, and behaviors to His truth. Through Scripture, circumstances, spiritual disciplines, and the Spirit’s inner work, God gradually forms Christlike character in us. Sanctification is not about self-improvement—it is about Spirit-led transformation that results in a holy life, growing obedience, and deeper intimacy with God.



### D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do the following verses tell you about a “try harder” Christianity: Galatians 3:3, Matthew 11:28-30; John 15:4-5.
2. What part does the Holy Spirit play in sanctification? (Galatians 5:22–23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; John 16:13).
3. Please read the article “Burnout and God’s Invitation to Rest” at *Reclaim Today* ([https://reclaimtoday.org/burnout-and-gods-invitation-to-rest/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://reclaimtoday.org/burnout-and-gods-invitation-to-rest/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)). What does this article say about “limits.”
4. What part do you play in sanctification? (Philippians 2:12–13; Romans 12:1–2; 1 Peter 1:15–16).
5. Why do some Christians grow slower spiritually than others? (Hebrews 5:11–14; 1 Corinthians 3:1–3; Matthew 13:22).

## E. FOUR MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT SANCTIFICATION

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- **Misunderstanding: “Sanctification is trying harder to be a better Christian.”**  
Response: Not true. Sanctification is not self-powered improvement but Spirit-empowered transformation (Romans 8:4; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:13).
- **Misunderstanding: “Sanctification happens automatically.”**  
Response: Sanctification is God’s work, but it requires intentional obedience (2 Peter 1:5)
- **Misunderstanding: “If I fail or struggle, it means I’m not growing.”**  
Response: Struggles often indicate that growth is happening (Galatians 5:17).
- **Misunderstanding: “Sanctification means not committing sins intentionally.”<sup>1</sup>**  
Response: In this life we will never reach a point where we no longer sin (Romans 7:14-25; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 1:8-10; 3:2; Ecclesiastes 7:20).

## F. FOUR AMAZING FACTS ABOUT SANCTIFICATION

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- It is God’s will for every believer to be sanctified.
- Sanctification began the moment you were saved.
- Sanctification is both God’s work and our responsibility.
- Sanctification will one day be perfectly complete at glorification.

## G. HOW TO APPLY THIS LESSON

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<sup>1</sup> This is sometimes called “entire sanctification.”

- **Identify one area where the Holy Spirit is prompting change.** Ask: “Lord, where are You inviting me to grow?” Write it down.
- **Practice yielding to the Holy Spirit daily.** Pray: “Holy Spirit, fill me and guide me today.” (Ephesians 5:18)
- **Celebrate progress—not perfection.** Look for evidence of God’s work: e.g., more wholesome desires, better decision making, a compassionate heart, quicker repentance when sin creeps in. Celebrate by thanking Him for such steps of progress.

## **H. SUMMARY**

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Sanctification is God’s beautiful, lifelong process of making His children more like Jesus. It is neither instant perfection nor self-powered effort, but a Spirit-guided transformation that touches every part of life. Though we still struggle with sin, God faithfully shapes us through His Word, the Holy Spirit, and the experiences He allows. As we yield ourselves to Him each day, we are gradually renewed into Christ’s image. The goal is not perfection in this life, but consistent growth, deepening obedience, and increasing Christlikeness until the day our transformation is complete in His presence.