

# Justification & Sanctification

---

by Daniel O. Jensen, September, 2004

**Objective:** Understand the progressive change from repentance to justification to sanctification to perfection.  
Understand what we can do individually to further ourselves along this path.

**Theme:** We are justified when we are living in harmony with the will of God. This does not mean we are perfect, but that we are on the path toward perfection.  
We are sanctified once we are justified and we ask for forgiveness. Then, we receive a remission of our sins and feel the joy of sanctification.  
Sanctification is a life-long road toward perfection.

## Introduction

---

*Moses 6:60 For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified;*

The doctrines of justification and sanctification have deep doctrinal significance that affects each one of us profoundly.

What do justification and sanctification really mean?

How does one become "justified"?

How does one become "sanctified"?

Is it possible for us to become sanctified in this life?

Understanding the doctrines of Justification and Sanctification will help each of us reach our eternal destination in the same kingdom as our Father.

## Justification

---

What does *justification* mean? How can we obtain it individually?

A fundamental law of the gospel – a law which is unbreakable – is that no unclean thing can dwell in the presence of God. This law affects us as much as the law of gravity. Preceding the verse we just read, God commanded Moses:

*Moses 6:57 Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence*

The Lord proclaimed this truth to the Nephites:

*3 Nephi 27:19 And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.*

When the day comes that we stand before our maker, it is our greatest hope to have claim upon the atonement that our sins may be remitted, that Christ would pay the price for us. If this were not true, then none of us would be here, today. We want and need the Savior to be our Advocate with the Father:

*D&C 45:4-5* Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; 5 Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.

To qualify for this priceless gift, the scriptures teach that we must be justified before God. In other words, we must *qualify* to have the atonement apply to us. **Justified before God simply means to be qualified to have the atonement applied to us individually.**

Paul taught this in the New Testament. He taught that those who believed in Christ are justified. *Acts 13:39* And by him all that believe are justified from all things...

Whenever Paul speaks in his writings of "those that believe", he refers to those that are true followers, and *doers* of the Gospel, those that have made sacred covenants with God in the waters of baptism, not just merely professing a casual belief in Christ. The Lord, Himself, said in this regard:

*Matthew 7:21:* Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Hence, we can conclude, that the believer, he who makes the covenant of faith, he that "doeth the will of the Father", reaches a state of justification before God. It is *he* who is qualified, or justified, before God.

### **What does it mean to “do the will of the Father”?**

Now, what does it mean to "do the will of the Father"? Does it mean to be perfect, making justification beyond the reach of all of us? No! It does not.

To help us gain justification, Heavenly Father has given us covenants and ordinances. From the dawn of time, the Lord's people have always made covenants with God – they have always been called a "Covenant People". Covenants signify our willingness change our hearts, to follow His ways of truth and righteousness. The Gospel is full of these covenants, each one attached to a Priesthood ordinance, that points the way to the celestial kingdom and a celestial way of life.

By living these covenants to the best of our ability, and following the Holy Ghost who gives us "line upon line, precept upon precept", we are doing the will of the Father and exercising faith in Him.

*DC 98:11* And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, that ye shall live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God. *12* For he will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept; and I will try you and prove you herewith.

I am grateful that in the wisdom of God, we are not shown everything all at once that we must do to do the will of the Father. Instead, if we seek it, we are given guidance and inspiration and desires to work on the things which are most important to us *at this time in our lives*. This is how we progress. This is how we do the will of the Father. But we must seek it! Doing the will of the Father does not give us room to be casual and lazy in how we keep our covenants. He promised to "prove [us] herewith", or in other words, see if we would be faithful each day to the light that He gives us, line upon line, precept upon precept. Only when we truly show our Father that He can trust us in keeping our covenants in all conditions, at all hazards, under all temptations, can He bless us to the fullest level possible. To the saints in 1831, He declared:

*D&C 58:3-4 Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter, and the glory which shall follow after much tribulation. 4 For after much tribulation come the blessings.*

### **Once is not enough**

Simply making covenants once and participating in the ordinances of the Gospel, however, is not enough. What would happen if a person was unworthily baptized? Would they be justified in the eyes of God solely because they once made an oath and covenant and were baptized? The plan of salvation has an important provision that makes it just and fair to all:

*DC 132:7: And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, ...are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead...*

As Elder Bruce R. McKonkie put it,

*To seal is to ratify, to justify, or to approve. Thus an act which is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise is one which is ratified by the Holy Ghost; it is one which is approved by the Lord; and the person who has taken the obligation upon himself is justified by the Spirit in the thing he has done. (Mormon Doctrine, Justification)*

To be justified, therefore, we must have the Holy Spirit of Promise seal or ratify our covenants and ordinances that we have made. This can only occur when we are worthy and nobody can lie to the Holy Ghost. By being worthy, the covenant is recognized in the eyes of God because it is sealed by the Holy Ghost. But having an ordinance and covenant sealed by the Holy Ghost is *not* a permanent condition. What if the person later turns away from the truth? The seal is broken through unrighteousness just as it is made again through worthiness and obedience. Thus, an ordinance done for a *worthy* person who later becomes *unworthy* has no effect until he fully repents. Conversely, an ordinance done for an unworthy person who later repents, takes full effect and is sealed by the Holy Spirit once the person gains his full forgiveness from the Father. This is the beauty and fairness of God. The sealing of the ordinance is either removed or established always according to the worthiness of the person, day by day, year by year. Can you see why the Lord has commanded us to renew our covenants each week as we partake of the Sacrament so we can “always have His Spirit to be with us”? Without the companionship of the Holy Ghost, the Third Member of the Godhead, we are not justified before the Father. We are not qualified for the blessings of the Atonement and our sacred and precious ordinances are, in essence, put on hold until we repent and regain the presence of the Spirit once again.

So how can we have the Holy Spirit of Promise seal our covenants and ordinances? It's simple. We live them to the best of our ability every day. Do we need to be perfect? No. Otherwise, nobody would merit justification. Do we need to do our best? Absolutely. This is what Nephi taught when he wrote:

*2 Nephi 25:23: For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.*

In other words, if we do our very best to obey God's laws, it is all we can do, and it will be enough to merit the grace of God, to qualify for the atonement, to be justified before Him who is our Father.

How do we know if the Holy Spirit of Promise has sealed our covenants and ordinances? The Lord has provided a way for us to know. **It is when the Holy Ghost testifies to us that we are on the right path.** Listen to the words of Nephi:

*2 Nephi 31:13,15: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism--yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost...  
15 "And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.*

In summary, then, justification means that we are qualified to merit the atoning blood of the Lamb. That we have entered into covenants and ordinances to do the will of the Father and that we exercise faith unto salvation. It does *not* mean we are perfect. It means we are trying our best. It means we are willing.

How do we know when we are justified? It is when we have the Holy Ghost as our companion. He will testify to us that we are on the right course. Then are we sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise. Then, we are on the way toward sanctification. This must be our daily goal, to have the Holy Ghost with us. This is why it is so important to renew our covenants every Sunday.

## **Sanctification**

---

Sanctification is our ultimate goal and aspiration as children of the Covenant.

*DC 133:62 And unto him that repenteth and sanctifieth himself before the Lord shall be given eternal life.*

Thus we are taught that eternal life is given to those who are sanctified.

What does it mean to be sanctified?

Elder Bruce R. McConkie explains,

*"To be sanctified is to become clean, pure, and spotless; to be free from the blood and sins of the world; to become a new creature of the Holy Ghost, one whose body has been renewed by the rebirth of the Spirit. Sanctification is a state of saintliness..."*

Sanctification comes by changing our hearts or our nature:

### **A desire to sin no more**

After King Benjamin delivered one of the greatest discourses of all time, his people had a mighty change in their hearts. Listen carefully to their words:

*Mosiah 5:1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them.  
2 And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.*

This change in their disposition to do good continually, to despise sin or wickedness, to develop their personal purity from the inside out, is essential also for us. Some years after King Benjamin, Alma taught of those who received the Holy Priesthood also having a similar change in their hearts:

*Alma 13:11 Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.  
12 Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.*

We see, therefore, that a characteristic of sanctification is to have no more desire to sin or do evil, but to have a desire to do good continually. But equally important, we should take note of the order in which this process occurs:

1. They were sanctified “through the blood of the Lamb” – in other words, they qualified to have the atonement wash them clean.
2. They were sanctified by the Holy Ghost and thereafter could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence.
3. We should especially take note that there were “exceedingly great many” who were made pure and were sanctified by the power of the atonement – not a small handful. It wasn’t only their Bishops and Stake Presidents – it was EVERYBODY who lost their desire to sin and sought to do good continually.

### **Many just give up**

Many of us give up in our quest for sanctification because we judge ourselves as incapable of being made holy and without spot. We may find it much easier to love others than to love ourselves. Indeed, we are often our toughest critics, our hardest judges. There are many among us who are challenged by feelings of self-doubt, poor self-esteem, and lack of love for themselves. These feelings can come as a result of childhood experiences, broken homes, contention, and sometimes even abuse by other loved ones. More times than not, however, our failure to love ourselves comes from a lack of vision, a lack of seeing ourselves the way God sees us, which is reality. We look at ourselves in the mirror and see the wart on our nose, the pimples on our face, and the extra weight we wish we didn’t have.

We find ourselves doubting our ability to be what God wants us to be, somehow falling short of some imaginary bar or measure that we mistakenly believe God has set for us. With our natural eyes, we envision ourselves failing to measure up and conclude that God sees us the same way, with disappointment and sadness.

This is false doctrine. It is wrong. It is a tool of Satan to hold us back from walking the straight and narrow path of sanctification. Have you ever wondered why one-third of the children of Heavenly Father followed Satan when the Father and the Son offered to them the greatest dream possible – to be as they are and inherit all that they have. All their power, all their attributes, all their virtues, all their blessings, all their knowledge... everything! Why did one-third choose Satan’s plan which most assuredly could never promise us a divine nature or anything like it? Perhaps Satan convinced them that they would never measure up, that they would fail, that there was no way they could ever be as pure as the Father and the Son.

Who do YOU believe? Do you believe Christ or Satan?

Do you see yourself as God sees you? “Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” (Alma 5:14) Do you realize who you really are? That you are literally, completely, eternally, a son or daughter of a God? Do you really believe that? If you do, then how does He see you? Does He see your weakness, which he gave you by coming into mortality (Ether 12:27; 3:2), or does He see you as you were in the premortal eons of time, before you were born, “exercising exceedingly great faith” (Alma 13:3)? Does not God, who knows all things, who sees the future as if it were today, see you as an immortal, glorified, resurrected, perfected, exalted man or woman? In the blink of an eye, you will be that person who God sees, for “*all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men*” (Alma 40:8). Can you not love the person you will become? Can you not find hope and patience, then, for the mortal person you are now? You are but a child in the eternal measure of things. And Jesus always loved the children.

How can you not, therefore, walk the path of sanctification hand in hand with Jesus Christ as your loving guide?

Thus, the first characteristic of those who walk the path of sanctification is to lose the desire to sin, to gain the desire for pureness in mind, body, and spirit. Indeed, this is why we meet each week to partake of the Sacrament – to sanctify ourselves before the Lord and to put aside all desire to do evil. To be pure and clean..

### **A desire for individual perfection, of doing the will of the Lord**

*Helmn 3:35 Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.*

We read, here, of other saints who sought to perfect themselves just as we do. They yielded their hearts to God, willing to do His will no matter what. They sought each day for forgiveness, for purification.

It’s not just good enough to do the right thing. It also requires us to do the right thing for the right reason. Our motives are at the very core of “yielding our hearts unto God” which is one of the keys to becoming sanctified.

*Matthew 6:19-23 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. 22 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. 23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!*

To often as we read this scripture, we conclude that the Lord is simply asking us to not be worldly. But the doctrine goes much deeper than that. The Lord is trying to teach us that our heart is the key to living the gospel in its fullness. Our motives must be pure. It’s not just a matter of worldliness. It’s a matter of yielding our hearts, all of our hearts, unto God. As we do so, we engage ourselves in a quest for individual perfection, of doing the will of the Lord in all things, not just when it’s convenient or easy.

## **A desire to serve God at all costs**

*DC 20:31 And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their might, mind, and strength.*

Now this scripture does not refer to serving only when it is convenient, or when we aren't busy, or when the service is fun. It says with all our might, mind, and strength. A total commitment. This is the essence of the law of consecration which covenant is found in the Holy Temple.

More than a year before the church was organized, in one of the first recorded revelations in our dispensation, the Lord speaks to this very directly:

*D&C 4:2 Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day.*

If we are to stand blameless before God at the last day, it will be because we were first justified and then walked the path of sanctification, seeking to serve Him at all costs with pure motives.

## **Summary**

Sanctification, then, is the process of becoming pure and holy. It is a life-long process, not a sudden occurrence, or the arrival at a specific state of being. It is brought about by a change in heart resulting from a remission of our sins through the atoning blood of the Lamb.

There are at least three concepts that contribute to our own personal sanctification:

- A desire to sin no more
- A desire for individual perfection, of doing the will of the Lord
- A desire to serve God at all costs

Can we reach a state of sanctification during our life? On our own, we cannot. Through the atonement, we can. Can we retain it continually? Yes, by developing a desire to sin no more and self mastery. We can start by working hard to achieve it at our spiritual high points in life, by continually renewing our covenants with God, by going to His holy Temple, and by serving our fellow. When should we start? Now, of course. If not now, then when?

## **Conclusion**

---

We reach a state of justification when we worthily enter into covenants and ordinances which bind us to do the will of God and exercise faith in Him. As we are not perfect, this state of justification comes through the atonement, through the grace offered to us, after all we can do on our own.

Once we are justified, we have claim on the blessings of the atonement to receive a continual remission of our sins. This remission will cause a change in our hearts so we have no more desire to do evil or sin. Instead, we will have a desire to serve, to love and forgive each other, even those who are mean to us. Even those who have terribly hurt us in the past.

With this change in our hearts, we are on the road of sanctification, to become clean and pure and holy, not by our own merits, but by the power of the atonement of Jesus Christ, the same as the “exceedingly great many” Alma writes about in Alma 13. This is a life-long road. According to the scriptures, however, as long as we stay on this road, enduring to the end, we are promised eternal life.

Listen to the words of Moroni teaching this marvelous doctrine as he closes the Book of Mormon:

*Moroni 10:32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.*

*33 And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.*