

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Salvation, Session 17, Sanctification, Part 3, Systematic Formulations, Preservation and Perseverance

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on Salvation. This is session 17, Sanctification, Part 3, Systematic Formulations, Preservation and Perseverance.

We continue our study of the Doctrine of Salvation, or Soteriology, with Sanctification.

After surveying five views of the Christian life and evaluating them, at least in a cursory fashion, we move to Systematic Formulations of Sanctification. First of all, Sanctification and the Trinity. The three Trinitarian Persons play roles in Sanctification.

God the Father treats true believers as his sons by disciplining them. Why? Hebrews 12:9, and 10. The Father of Spirits disciplines us for our benefit so that we can share his holiness.

Hebrews 12:9, and 10. The Father disciplines us so that we may share in his holiness. The Son of God, quote, loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, Ephesians 5:25 and 26.

Furthermore, Christ will accomplish his goal of sanctifying his church, quoting verse 27 of Ephesians 5. He did this because to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless, Ephesians 5, 27. The Father sanctifies the church, the people of God. The Son does the same.

The Holy Spirit, too, takes a part. Paul explains why he, Silvanus, and Timothy gave thanks to God for the Thessalonian believers in 2 Thessalonians 2:13. "But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth."

2 Thessalonians 2:13. God's means of bringing people to salvation include the Spirit's sanctifying them, his setting them apart from sin to holiness, and also it includes faith in the Gospel. The whole Trinity, therefore, Father, Son, and Spirit, works to make God's people holy.

Sanctification and union with Christ. Each aspect of the application of salvation takes place in union with Christ, including sanctification. After listing the fruit of the Spirit, Paul speaks frankly.

Quote in Galatians 5:24. Now, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:24.

Co-crucifixion, union with Christ in his death, is the remedy to sinful living. Paul expands this theme in Romans 6. He's appalled when detractors claim his doctrine of free justification breeds license. They ask, quote, should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply, may abound? Romans 6:1. Paul's answer is, absolutely not.

How can we who died to sin still live in it? Romans 6:2. Paul explains that baptism signifies union with Christ in his death and resurrection, which fuel a new life of holiness. Believers died with Christ. Quote, for we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin.

Romans 6:6. Union with Christ in his death frees us from sin's tyranny. Believers were raised with Christ. Quoting verse 4, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:4. Union with Christ in his mighty resurrection empowers believers to live for God as never before. Paul applies his teaching that union with Christ drives sanctification. Quote, so you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires. Romans 6:11 and 12. Sanctification is thus a subordinate doctrine to union with Christ as every other aspect of salvation is.

When God the Father joins us to his Son by the Holy Spirit's operation, we get every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 3. Sanctification and our role. God the Holy Spirit although all three Trinitarian persons play a part, God the Holy Spirit is the prime mover in sanctification.

He sets us apart from the realm of sin to God's realm of holiness in initial or definitive sanctification. He will confirm us in final and entire sanctification at Christ's return. He will confirm us in salvation.

He is a major player in progressive sanctification as well. But he's not the only player. When God regenerates us, he liberates our will previously bound in sin and enables us to love, serve, and obey God.

Part of that is our responsible participation in progressive sanctification under the Spirit's direction and power. When Jesus told his disciples, that they must remain or abide in him in order to produce fruit, John 15:4, he treated them as participants in their growth in practical holiness. After underlining God's sovereign grace in justification, sanctification and election, Paul writes, therefore brothers, Romans 12:1 and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

That is your true worship, Romans 12:1. Repeatedly, New Testament writers urge their readers to grow in holiness. James 2:1, my brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus. James 2:1. Hebrews 3:12, watch out brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Hebrews 3:12. 2 Peter 3:10 and 11, since the heavens and earth are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of persons you should be in holy conduct and godliness. 2 Peter 3:10 and 11. Dear friend, 3 John 11, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.

I dare say you might have never heard that verse before. It's not one of my favorites, but it's in the scriptures. 3 John 11.

As is the case with 2 John, there's only one chapter of 3 John, of course. The time, Revelation 22:10 and 11, the time is near. Let the unrighteous go on in unrighteousness.

Let the filthy still be filthy. Let the righteous go on in righteousness. Let the holy still be holy.

Revelation 22:10 and 11. Both God and Christians are active in the Christian life. Paul commands the Philippians, in Philippians 2:12. Therefore, my dear friends, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Philippians 2:12. In the same sentence, Paul gives the reason for this command. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, and then verse 13, for it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose. Philippians 2:13. Believers are to strive for holiness in the Christian life, knowing that God works within them to give them both incentive and power to live for him.

Remember Colossians 1:29. My goal, Paul says, is to present every person mature in Christ, laboring, struggling with all his energy that works so powerfully in me. There it is. It's hard to get a perfect metaphor for this.

We're a part of the same law firm, and God is the lead attorney. I don't know how to do it right. We're on the ball team, and God's the manager, and the Holy Spirit's the manager. I don't know how to do it. But we are involved under God is the point.

Salvation and the church. Sanctification is both an individual and communal matter. God makes each of his people holy. He's concerned for every member of the Thessalonian church.

Quote in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. For this is God's will, your sanctification, that you keep away from sexual immorality, that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passions like the Gentiles who don't know God. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. Each of you, he singles out. Yes, he's concerned about the church.

That's the entity he writes to. But he's also concerned about each individual in the church. Two verses later, Paul addresses the church corporately.

1 Thessalonians 4:7. For God has not called us to impurity, but to live in holiness. God wants his people to be holy as individual persons and as his church corporately. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts his individual readers.

Hebrews 12:14-15. Pursue peace with everyone and holiness. Without it, no one will see the Lord. Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God.

Hebrews 12:14-15. Shortly thereafter, the author reminds the Hebrews that they are to show mutual care for fellow believers, individuals, and corporations together. Hebrews 10:24-25. I believe I have a bad reference. Sorry.

No, I don't have a bad reference, but my prose is, therefore, wrong. My words are wrong. Not shortly thereafter.

Shortly before, two chapters before, the author reminds individuals that they are to show mutual care for fellow believers. Hebrews 10.24-25. The reference is right. And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works.

Not neglecting to gather together, but encouraging each other and all the more as you see the day approaching. 10.24-25. Sorry about that hiatus. Earlier in the letter, the writer to the Hebrews follows the same pattern of addressing individuals and the whole church in a single passage.

This is chapter four. He twice warns individual persons. 4:1. Therefore, since the promise to enter God's rest remains, his spiritual rest by believing in Christ, let us beware that none of you be found to have fallen short of entering God's rest by believing in Christ.

Hebrews 4:1. Verse 11. Let us then make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience. Hebrews 4:11. Then he points the church as a whole to God's mercy and power that enables believers to heed the warnings and to live for him.

Hebrews 4:16. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. Salvation and time. Although it is common for sanctification and salvation to reduce to its present progressive aspect, sanctification also pertains to the past and the future.

It does pertain to the present. The Bible does teach progressive sanctification. And so when David Peterson, a wonderful scholar, writes a book on holiness for D. A. Carson's series, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, and teaches correctly that there is an initial or definitive sanctification, he's right.

When he minimizes progressive sanctification in the same good book, he's wrong. Sanctification, as we'll see right now, is initial, progressive, and final. It pertains to the present, the past, and the future.

Sanctification is past. In initial or definitive sanctification, the Holy Spirit moves us once and for all from the sphere of sin to the sphere of holiness. And we become saints of God.

We become saints of God. Sanctification is present as the Spirit builds practical holiness into God's saints in progressive sanctification. Sanctification is also the future.

Only at Christ's second coming will God confirm his saints in perfect holiness, that is, final sanctification. Surprisingly, Paul calls the struggling Corinthians, quote, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called as saints, 1 Corinthians 1:2. The apostle distinguishes between true and false believers.

He instructs the church at Corinth not to accept as believers, quote, anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Whew, I'm not sure the evangelical church follows that to the letter. 1 Corinthians 5:11.

Paul singles out a church member who is sleeping with his father's wife, verse 1. Nevertheless, Paul regards most of the Corinthians as true Christians who need to grow. After listing lifestyles of lost persons, he writes, and some of you used to be like this, this is in 6:11, 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, 1 Corinthians 6:11. The verbs washed, sanctified and justified are all in the past tense.

Initial sanctification is past, as is justification. God's sanctification of his people, of course, is also past. The past is also present.

God wants his saints daily to seek his will and pursue godliness, including in their sexuality, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7. The Holy Spirit works holiness in the saints, enabling them to put off, as one takes off old clothes or dirty clothes, ungodly practices, and to put on new godly ones, Ephesians 4:20-32. This is progressive sanctification without the word, and it is a major biblical theme, treated by Jesus in Matthew 7, Paul in Galatians 5 and 6, Peter in 1 Peter 1 and 2, John in 1 John 1 and 2, and the author of Hebrews in chapters 3 and 4, to name only five examples.

Matthew 7, Galatians 5 and 6, 1 Peter 1 and 2, 1 John 1 and 2, chapters 1 and 2, Hebrews chapters 3 and 4. Sanctification is also future. I should have said, we call it initial or definitive sanctification, because it defines who we are. We are the saints of God.

Now, we follow the most common biblical expression for Christians, and we call one another brother and sister, at least in the churches I've been involved in. But really, we should call each other Saint Van and Saint Mary and Saint Martha and Saint Harry, like that, and Saint Jack, I mean, all these names we should use, because we are. Perhaps Rome's usage makes us nervous, but it is true, brother is the most common way of addressing Christians, speaking of Christians in the New Testament.

But sanctification, the spirit setting us apart from sin to holiness, once and for all, constituting us as the saints of God, defines who we are. Among other things, we are the saints of the living God. Sanctification is past, and it is present and ongoing.

Thankfully, it's also future and entire. The spirit of God sets us apart to holiness in definitive or entire sanctification. He causes us to grow in applied holiness, day by day, in progressive sanctification.

The spirit's work is not done, however, until we are, quote, conformed to the image of God's Son, Romans 8:29, in final, entire, future sanctification. God, John's same message, quote, 1 John 3:2, we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we will see him as he is, 1 John 3:2. At Christ's return, he will, quote, present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless, Ephesians 5:27. In fact, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "the God of peace himself will sanctify you completely. Your whole spirit, soul, and body will be kept blameless, will be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Thessalonians 5:23. And in case we had any doubts about this, Paul adds, he who called you is faithful, he will do it, verse 24. Viewing sanctification as definitive, initial, progressive, and final has advantages. It glorifies God, who performs the work

of sanctification, who performs the work of salvation, in this case, sanctification, from first to last.

We are already holy; we grow in holiness, and one day, God will make us entirely holy. Can you imagine never thinking of another sinful thought, never having another sinful word escape your lips, or never committing another sinful act? I'm sad to tell you I cannot personally imagine it, but that doesn't matter. My imagination is not my canon; the Word of God is.

He is faithful, and he will do it. As said earlier, God's sovereignty in salvation does not minimize our responsibility to live for God but undergirds it. As Paul said, I labor to present everyone mature in Christ, quote, striving with his strength, that works powerfully in me, Colossians 1:29. In addition, taking into account sanctification's three tenses of past, present and future can bring hope to struggling Christians.

When tempted to give up, believers can look back, I call it, to their becoming saints by God's grace. We groan, Romans 8:23, because we have the Holy Spirit, who made us saints in the first place and works within us. When overwhelmed with discouragement, we can also not only look back to our original sainthood but look forward to our final and entire sanctification.

Though present circumstances can cause us to doubt, we can be confident that God will sanctify us entirely as he promised. 1 Thessalonians 5:24, Philippians 1:6. Thus, I don't believe my own discouragement ultimately, I don't hide it, pretend I'm something I'm not, but God's word trumps my own feelings, attitudes, and failures. There are tensions involved with sanctification.

I don't have time to pursue all of them, but just one. Sanctification involves victory and struggles. In salvation, grace collides with sin, and as a result, the Christian life contains not only victories and freedom but also battles and bondage.

Paul cries out in frustration at his inability to overcome sin, Romans 7:24. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Romans 7:24. The same Paul, after asking, quote, who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword, Romans 8:35, answers two verses later exuberantly, no, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, Romans 8.37. Victory and defeat, struggle, and freedom go hand in hand. We cannot perfectly solve this conundrum, but we note two important points. First, God knows how to humble his people, and he does so in progressive sanctification.

Our failures deflate our pride and overconfidence. Those failures drive us to God's grace. We are saved by grace through faith, and we live the Christian life in the same way, by grace through faith.

We're saved by, just said that, Paul writes of initial salvation in Ephesians 2:8 and 9, for you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves. It is God's gift, not from works, so that no one can boast, Ephesians 2:8 and 9. After Paul experienced many highs and lows living for Christ, God assures him, 2 Corinthians 12:9, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness. The tensions are daily realities for all Christians.

We bow before God's sovereignty, and we fight to avoid blaming our sins on it. We strive to fulfill our responsibility, but then to easily forget our dependence on the Lord. We tend to either overemphasize rejecting the negative or forgetting about it in our zeal for the positive.

We forget we are not yet what we will be, and become discouraged at our lack of progress in the Christian life. We sometimes imagine that we have already arrived, only to have our bubble burst by a trustworthy friend. We dwell on the imperative God's commands, His exhortations to live for Him, the neglect of the indicatives, God's recital of what He has done for us already in Christ, and veer toward legalism.

We dwell on the indicative to neglect the imperative and our theology seems too theoretical. We get too high over the victories and too low over repeated struggles and failures. These tensions highlight Luther's famous dictum, which you ought to know by heart by now that a Christian is a person who is at the same time righteous and a sinner.

In Christ, we are justified by a holy God and accepted by Him as His sons or daughters. In ourselves, we see too much of the flesh in self-righteousness, jealousy, pride, inconsistency, lack of faith, sinful desires, evil speaking, and sloth. Unfortunately, there is no simple remedy, no easy way out.

We must face the tensions head-on, admit our weakness, and repeatedly rely on God's enabling grace, His strength, and His spirit. We need the church and our brothers and sisters in Christ. We need personal time in His word and prayer daily.

We need to serve God and others. We realize that, in one sense, we have attained, for God has forgiven us in Christ and given us eternal life. Hallelujah! But in another sense, the longer we walk with God, the more we realize our absolute dependence on Him for the wisdom, perseverance, and power to live for Him with our whole hearts.

Thank God He has given us grace for the journey. Our next topic is preservation, and I need to grab some notes. Preservation is God's work of keeping His people saved.

It's commonly called eternal security, and that's okay, although it sounds to me like money in the bank. I like preservation because it is more of a dynamic idea. God keeps us saved by working in us constantly.

I'd like to explore, as a matter of fact, four doctrines in their interrelation. Preservation, perseverance, assurance, and apostasy. Brief definitions are in order.

Preservation is God's keeping His people saved to the end. Perseverance is the people of God keeping on, keeping on to the end. Assurance is confidence of final salvation, and apostasy is defense from a faith once professed.

Preservation: God keeps us. Perseverance, we keep believing the gospel, living for the Lord, and loving others. Assurance, confidence now of final salvation someday.

Apostasy, abandoning a faith that was previously professed. Preservation: I want to present theological arguments for preservation, the truth that God keeps to the end the people whom He has saved. I want to look at the Trinity's roles, the roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit, God's attributes or qualities, and Christ's work.

All of these are reasons why we should believe in God's keeping us saved. The Trinity's roles. Scripture teaches that each of the Trinitarian persons is active in preserving the people of God for final salvation.

The Father plays a significant role in preservation. We see this in John's gospel. Jesus, in the bread of life discourse, teaches that every person whom the Father has chosen will believe in Jesus, and He'll keep them saved.

Jesus then explains the Father's will, John 6, 38 through 40. For I've come down from heaven, not to do my own will, Jesus said, but the will of Him who sent me. This is the will of Him who sent me that I should lose none of those He has given me, but raise them up on the last day.

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I will raise Him up on the last day, John 6, 38 through 40. I have written on these themes in a volume called *Our Secure Salvation, Preservation and Apostasy*, 2009. Speaking as the good shepherd who loves his sheep and dies for them, Jesus explains that eternal life is His gift for them.

He says they will not experience God's wrath, for they are safe in Jesus' hand, John 10:28 and 29. He then adds in John 10, 29, my Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand, close quote.

The Father is greater than the incarnate Son, and believers are safe in the Father's powerful hand, His working to preserve them. By the way, the expression I give them

eternal life, and they will never perish is the strongest way to present a negative in the Greek language of the first century. According to the Greek scholar Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, page 464, the strongest way to negate something in Greek.

Jesus says, I give my sheep eternal life, and He categorically states they will never perish. Paul also says that eternal life presents the Father as keeping the saints saved. Paul begins Romans 8 with such a text, Therefore there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, Romans 8.1. The Father, along with the Son, is the judge on the last day, but He will not condemn those united to the Son.

To the contrary, the Father will justify them before humans and angels at the last judgment. The judgments on believers because of abuses at the Last Supper are commonly misunderstood. Paul says that unworthy partaking of the Supper, those who partake unworthily are guilty, and that partakers, therefore, should examine themselves.

1 Corinthians 11:27-28. Anyone who partakes without recognizing the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. Paul tells us what is involved in this judgment. That is why many are sick and ill among you, and some have fallen asleep.

These are temporal judgments of weakness, illness, or premature death. If God's people properly judged themselves, God would spare them those judgments. But even if they fail, they experience temporal judgments rather than eternal judgment.

But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned by the world. Ironically, then, Corinthian abuses at the Lord's table lead to Paul writing a preservation passage, teaching the Father spares His children eternal punishment even when He visits them with temporal punishments, even when that temporal punishment is loss of life now. The Father preserves us.

The Son also plays a prominent role in preserving God's people, as we saw in John 6. There, Jesus pledges never to cast out any of the Father's children and gives them to Him. Three times, Jesus says He will raise them up on the last day. Along with the Father, the Son actively preserves the sheep.

Jesus gives His people the gift of eternal life, states they will never perish categorically, and says no one can take them from His and the Father's strong arms. In fact, when Jesus says, I and the Father are one, verse 30, He means one in preserving the sheep for final salvation, a divine work. Three times Jesus affirms His preservation of the people of God in His high priestly prayer in John 17.

First, Jesus, returning to the Heavenly Father, asked Him to personally protect and unify those the Father gave Him out of the world, John 17, 9 and 11. While I was with

them, I was protecting them by Your name that You have given Me. I guarded them, and not one of them is lost, except the Son of Destruction, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, John 17:12.

Jesus preserved all that the Father gave Him, and this excludes Judas who was not a true believer. Second, shortly thereafter, Jesus prays to the Father, John 17:15. I'm not praying that You take them out of the world, but that You protect them from the evil one, John 17:15.

Jesus, who kept God's people saved on earth, commits them to the Father's care when Jesus returns to Him. Third, in verse 24 of John 17, Jesus asked the Father to take the elect to heaven so they can be with Jesus and see His glory. Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, so that they will see My glory, which You have given Me because You loved Me before the world's foundation, John 17:24.

Although John's eschatology is primarily realized, primarily fulfilled now, his gospel does contain futuristic elements, compared John 5:28, 29, and 14:2 and 3. And here is one. Father, I want those whom You have given Me to be with Me where I am. Carson is right.

This is an unambiguous reference to verse 5, where Jesus prays to be renewed to the glory He had with the Father before the world began. The glory that His followers will see is His glory as God, the glory He enjoyed before His mission, because of the Father's love for Him. Presumably, those who share with the Son the delight of being loved by the Father, verse 23, share also the glory to which the Son is restored in consequence of His triumphant death and exaltation.

The Holy Spirit, too, plays an important role in preservation. What we're showing is the Trinity preserves us, the Father, the Son, and now the Spirit. Paul speaks three times of God's sealing of believers in Ephesians 1:13, in Ephesians 4:30, and in 2 Corinthians 1:22. In the last passage, Paul indicates by distinguishing God from Christ and the Spirit that the Father is the one who performs the sealing.

He's the sealer. In the first passage, Ephesians 1:13, the Father, indicated by the divine passive, seals believers in Him, that is, in Christ. God seals us in union with Christ, indicating the permanence of union with Christ.

In all three texts, the Holy Spirit is mentioned. Let us look at them, Ephesians 1:13 and 14. In Christ, you were also sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.

The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of the possession to the praise of His glory, Ephesians 1:13 and 14. And don't grieve the

Holy Spirit of God. You were sealed by Him for the day of redemption, Ephesians 4:30. The only place the Bible uses that long hand, the Holy Spirit of God.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22, now it is God, it would be the Father, who strengthens us together with you in Christ, and who has anointed us. He has also put His seal on us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a down payment, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22. In all three passages, the seal is the Holy Spirit. The second text is better translated: you were sealed with Him, not by Him.

For we were sealed by the Father, not the Spirit. The Father seals us with the Spirit, who is God's seal on believers. In this role, the Spirit functions in two ways.

He marks us as God's son, God's own, and more importantly, preserves us for salvation on the last day. Paul is explicit, Ephesians 4:30. The Father sealed us for the day of redemption. The first and last text above call the Spirit the down payment of our inheritance.

This is another reference to the Spirit's role in keeping us saved. These designations for the Spirit reflect Paul's already-not-yet theology. Already, the Spirit, as God's seal, marks us as God's own people and points to the day of redemption when we will enjoy salvation in its fullness.

Already, God has given believers a down payment, which, as Stephen Baugh explains in his commentary on Ephesians, that down payment will be consummated in the future. This inheritance centers on his people's resurrection in the new creation. In our next lecture, we'll continue the teaching on God's preserving his people, the doctrine of preservation. This time, looking at God's attributes.

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