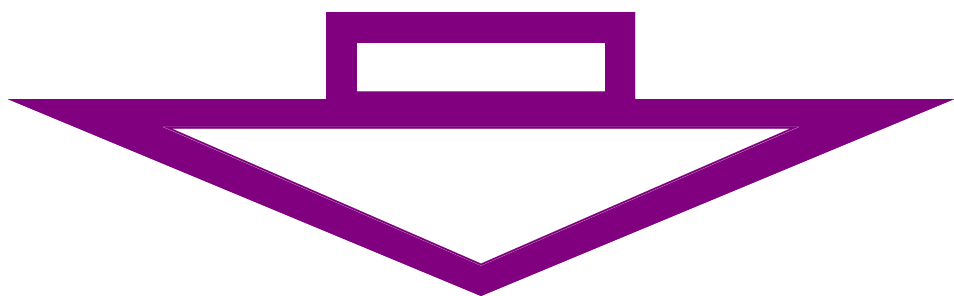


Sanctification



by
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Sanctification, like predestination, is one of those doctrines that theologians like to argue about. What is sanctification? When does it take place? Some say it takes place when you accept Jesus as your Savior. Some say you are not sanctified until you are filled with the Holy Spirit. Some say it's a one-time work. Others say it's on-going. There are others who say you can't really know whether you are saved until the work of sanctification is complete sometime in the future.

I'm glad that our faith is not dependent on man's wisdom to try to figure these things out. We have been given God's word and the Holy Spirit to teach us the clear purposes of God concerning our eternal salvation. As you consider this doctrine look to God's word and the Holy Spirit in an attitude of prayer and ask God to give you a clear understanding of the work of sanctification. This tract will be helpful to you only as it points you to the teaching of the Bible and to a dependence on and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

Provisional Sanctification

The Greek word translated in the Bible "sanctification," and the family of words that it is a part of, are translated several different ways in

English. Some of the English words used to translate the thought of sanctification are saint, holy, consecrate and hallowed. When Christians are referred to as saints or holy in the Bible, what does it mean? We will consider the literal meaning of the word “sanctification” a little further along in our study, but first let’s make sure that we understand the difference between the provisional standing of the believer in Jesus Christ and the practical state of the believer as our understanding of sanctification will be greatly limited and even distorted if we do not understand the difference between the standing and the state of the believer. Much doctrinal error comes from not discerning when the Bible is talking about the provisional aspects of our salvation and when it is speaking about the practical aspects. The Bible teaches us that there are two aspects to our sanctification. There is a provisional work of sanctification which takes place when we accept Jesus as our Savior and there is a practical work of sanctification which is on-going until we die or till Jesus comes. These two aspects of sanctification are like two sides to the same coin. They are inseparable and work together, but they each have their own distinct features and characteristics.

To help me illustrate the difference between the standing and the state of a believer I will use the following illustration. I want you to use your imagination and pretend that I’m the owner and founder of a large computer company. Also imagine that I’m a very rich, loving and generous man. (I will let those who know me decide which of those

adjectives stretch the imagination the most.) Now, I want you to imagine that you are out of work and in desperate need of employment or you will lose everything you have. For the sake of this illustration you have absolutely no computer skills or training, but I see your desperate situation and needs and I'm moved with compassion. Because of my compassion for you and because of my great wealth and resources I provide you with a job, a position, title, and a salary in my company with a full retirement plan. Your new title in my company is as a computer technician. I didn't provide that position for you because you were qualified or deserved it, but because I had compassion on you and because I could afford to do it. The security of your position, salary and retirement is not dependant on your ability to perform. Just because you are given the title of computer technician doesn't mean that you are now able to perform as a computer technician. Your job is secure based solely on my graciously providing the job for you and on you humbly accepting it. That is your provisional standing in my company. I provided those things for you and they are real and they are yours. When we use the terms provisional and practical we are not contrasting imaginary with real. In our illustration, the fact that your job is provisional doesn't mean that your job or its benefits are not real. Your position, title and salary are very real. They provide for you a secure future and hope.

However, there is more to the illustration. As a part of my provision of a job, title and salary, I have also made it possible for you to become a practical

computer technician. In other words, now that you are a part of my company, I would like for you to actually become a profitable part of my company and to contribute on a daily basis. The job is yours regardless, but the opportunity is there for you to actually become a competent computer technician. I even promise to give you additional bonuses along the way if you show yourself to be productive. I will pay for all of your education. I will personally tutor you. I will supply you with everything you need to be a successful computer technician, but for you to benefit from the fullness of my grace; you must do more now than just say you accept my favor. You must now show up every day and learn to be a computer technician. Your daily choices and decisions concerning learning to be a computer technician are your practical state in my company. You have the opportunity to make your practical state agree with your provisional standing in my company. Now, if you are truly grateful for my loving generosity toward you, you are going to faithfully take advantage of every provision I've offered in order to be the best computer technician in my company.

Keep this illustration in mind as we study the many different passages in the Bible that speak of our sanctification.

Now, let's look at the literal meaning of the word "sanctification." The first thing that usually pops into the head of an individual when they think of saintliness or holiness is moral purity, free from evil and everything that is impure. Though our

sanctification will come to bear on our moral purity and therefore is a part of the understanding of sanctification, and though in certain contexts the emphasis is good moral character, moral purity is not the primary Biblical understanding of our sanctification and moral purity is not the principal meaning of the word. The sanctification that we receive by faith is not based on our moral character any more than my giving you a job, in my illustration, as a computer technician, is based on your computer skills because you had none. In the Old Testament inanimate objects like garments, bowls and cups were declared to be "holy" and used in the worship of Jehovah. (*Exodus 28:2*) Those inanimate objects, of course, had no moral character, good or bad, either before or after having been declared holy.

I will let the reader check his or her own trusted Hebrew and Greek authorities for detailed and expanded definitions of the words in Hebrew and Greek that are translated holy, holiness, saint, sanctify and sanctification, but I will give here the basic and simple definition of those words derived from my own study of the writings of the experts of the original languages. In both the Old and New Testaments, the primary thought behind the words used to speak of sanctification is “separation from that which is common to be used for a special purpose.” Though one of the words used in the Old Testament that is translated “holy” does carry the thought of being clean or pure, it is not necessarily a reference to moral purity, but rather of being prepared for a special use. To be sanctified is to be set apart,

dedicated, consecrated and prepared for a special purpose.

God Himself is declared to be holy. Certainly, God is pure and free from any and all impurities of sin, but His holiness encompasses more than that. It declares His uniqueness and separateness from all other beings real or imagined. *“Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” NKJV Exodus 15:11* God’s freedom from the corruption of sin and unrighteousness is part of His uniqueness and part of His eternal nature. God does not need, nor has He ever needed, nor will He ever need to be cleansed from sin in order to be made holy. He is holy. He is uniquely God and set apart from everyone and everything else.

Man, however, does need to be cleansed from the stain of the guilt of sin in order to be made useful to God. Man, because of Adam’s sin, is separated from God and destined to eternal condemnation. Upon being cleansed of sin’s stain through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, sent to die in our place, to pay the debt of our sin, we are set apart from sin and unto God for His glory. *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 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. NKJV 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul told the Corinthian believers, “you were washed, sanctified and justified. The verbs in this passage are in the past tense. The provisional aspect of our sanctification takes place upon accepting Jesus as our Savior and it is a finished and complete work. God in His grace, on the merit of the sacrifice of Christ, forgives us our sin and cleanses us from its stain that had separated us from God and we are now set apart unto God to be used for His glory. This is the provisional aspect of our sanctification. Our being cleansed and made fit to be accepted in the presence of the Holy God was provided for us by God’s mercy and compassion. None of these works mentioned in *1 Corinthians 6:9-11* (washed, sanctified, justified) declare that our moral character is immediately and forever free from the contamination of the practice of sin in our life. We are not said to always do and say the right thing without fail and are therefore declared to be holy. The provision of our sanctification is the declaration of the truth that upon trusting Christ as our Savior we have been separated from lost humanity and separated unto God to be used for His purpose of glorifying His grace that saves us from the wrath of God. That separation is the result of God choosing us and cleansing us and has nothing to do with our actual merit or moral character.

Vessels used in the temple worship in the Old Testament were anointed and washed and declared holy. Those vessels didn’t wash and anoint themselves. They simply received the washing and

the anointing and were declared sanctified, set apart. We have been cleansed from the guilty stain of sin once and for all by the blood of Jesus Christ, wholly apart from our own morality or worthiness.

The provision of sanctification to those who believe in Jesus is a change in our usefulness to God. Before an individual is saved, Paul describes them in this way in **Romans 3:12** *“They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”* NKJV The Greek word translated “unprofitable” means “useless.” The word was used by the Greeks to describe rotten, spoiled fruit. That was our condition before God before we were saved, before we were sanctified. The gift of sanctification is received only by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. *“I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”* NKJV **Acts 26:17-18** Sanctification is not attained by a process of personal moral purification. It is a gift received by faith, wherein we are changed from being defiled, profane and useless to God, to being holy and useful to Him. We are changed from being separated from God to being separated from sin and death and unto God’s eternal purpose of redemption.

What is involved in exercising a sanctifying faith? *“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He*

has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — NKJV Colossians 1:21-22

Through Christ's death, the Holy One, dying for the unholy, God has made us holy, fit to be not only in God's presence, but to be used for His glory. We have this position of usefulness to God based on the provision of His own grace. His grace afforded me the perfect sacrifice for my sins that separated me from Himself. Now, His Grace has separated me from the guilt of my sin and has drawn me unto Himself. “*Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.*” NKJV **Hebrews 13:12** “*By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*” NKJV **Hebrews 10:10**

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was sufficient to make us fit to stand before a Holy God. God receives us into His presence by the merit of Jesus Christ. It doesn't say that we are sanctified when we clean ourselves up and always do what is right. It says we have been sanctified by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ once for all. Sanctification is wholly and fully God's work not ours. “*Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ:*” NKJV **Jude 1:1**

God makes us worthy on the merit of Christ's work. No one can make themselves worthy of God's presence and blessings with any amount of good works of their own effort. God's holiness, majesty and separation from all that is impure is far above anything that

sinful man could ever attain to by self-effort. It is in the holiness of Christ that God the Father sees us. The ugly stain of sin is purged from us in Christ. To try to pretend that you can make yourself holy and presentable to God so that you would merit His grace and make yourself fit for His glorious use is to despise the holiness of the Son of God and its sufficiency to sanctify you in the presence of God.

“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, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” NKJV 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 We are chosen by God and called by Him to glory. Provisional sanctification that separates us from the lost and makes us fit to allow God to fulfill His purposes in us has nothing to do with our own moral character but on our faith in God's choice of us in Christ.

As we will find out later in our study of the practical aspect of our sanctification, provisional sanctification will come to bear and have an effect on our moral character. The greater our understanding of God's sanctification of us, the greater an influence it will have on our moral character. Nevertheless, even the most carnal believer has been eternally set apart from the lost and condemned rejecters of Christ. *“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be* (the words “to be” are not in the Greek manuscript) *saints,*

with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.” NKJV 1 Corinthians 1:2 Many in the Corinthian congregation were carnal. Their moral character was corrupt and sinful, yet Paul calls them “saints.” He acknowledges that they had been sanctified, made holy in Christ Jesus.

How will even carnal Christians bring glory to the grace of God? Let’s let God’s word answer that question. *“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” NKJV Ephesians 2:1-10*

One day all creation will see what God’s grace has accomplished for all who believe in Jesus Christ

and His work of redemption on the cross. No one will be able to boast in anything or in anyone else. For the glory that will be revealed in the glorified saints of God on that future day in eternity only God's grace will be praised. Sainthood affords us honor and privilege that we did not merit, but that magnifies the grace and wealth of Jesus Christ. "Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." NKJV **Colossians 1:12-14**

I'm a saint. I've been made holy by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The guilty stain of my sin has been separated from me once and for all and I have been translated from the kingdom of death and darkness and I have been set apart to bring glory to God's saving grace. God, by His own mercy, grace and wealth, has separated me unto Himself and promised me an eternal inheritance. I know I will have a home in heaven and enjoy the glories of heaven, not because I deserve them, but because God sanctified me and made me fit, qualified, to receive an eternal inheritance.

Practical Sanctification

Now, we want to look at the practical side of sanctification. Having been set apart for the glory of God the believer is now called upon to live like what

God has made us, saints, holy ones. Provisional sanctification that separates us from the lost and makes us fit to allow God to fulfill His purposes in us has nothing to do with our own moral character, but rather is based on faith in God's choice of us in Christ. However, the greater our revelation of God's sanctification, the greater an influence it will have on our moral character and cause our practical state to agree with our provisional standing.

“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” NKJV Hebrews 10:14 In this verse we have both aspects of sanctification stated for us. He has already perfected us, past tense. We lack nothing to be accepted in His presence as holy ones, those that have been set aside for His glory. Yet the perfected ones are “being sanctified.” There is an aspect of sanctification that is on-going. This is practical sanctification.

In my introduction at the beginning of this tract I used the illustration of me giving you a job in my company as a computer technician. I gave you a position, title and salary, not based on your skills, but based solely on my generosity and wealth. However, as a part of the offer, I told you that I would train you to be a computer technician in order that you could have the opportunity to be a profitable part of the company. In appreciation for my generosity, you want to dedicate yourself to developing the skills necessary to be useful to me in a very practical way. The same is true of the believer in Jesus Christ who understands the love and generosity of God that has separated us from the lost and condemned and that

has made us His own special people. That revelation will not make you want to live a life of sin and selfishness. It will cause you to want to honor that One who loved you with such an infinite love. *“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.””* NKJV **1 Peter 1:13-16** Those who have already been declared to be holy are now told to be holy just as God is holy. There is no mistake here that the thought of holiness in this passage has to do with moral purity and daily conduct. This is the practical side of our sanctification. Because of the provisional sanctification that we have already received by faith in Jesus Christ, we are now called upon to demonstrate holiness in our daily life.

Separation is still the primary emphasis of the meaning of this aspect of holiness. Just as we have already been separated from the defilement of the penalty and guilt of sin, now we are to be separated from sin’s influence on our daily life and our daily choices. Our lifestyle, heart attitude, words and behavior are to progressively become distanced from those of the lost world as we draw closer in fellowship to the Holy God. *“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. NKJV **Romans 12:1-2*** Our daily conduct is to be transformed. The Greek word translated “transformed” is the word from which our word in English, “metamorphosis,” is derived. The word metamorphose means to go through a process that results in a complete and marked change in appearance, character or condition. A dramatic change in our behavior is to be manifested in our life. There is to be a visible change in how we allow this body to be used.

“Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 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.”
NKJV 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7

We are to possess our vessel, our body, in sanctification. It is God's will that we now live like who He has declared us to be: holy, saints. To understand how this is possible we must briefly look

at another aspect of our salvation: regeneration. *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, NKJV **Titus 3:5** “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” NKJV **1 Peter 1:22-23** “By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. NKJV **2 Peter 1:4***

We have been given a nature that is holy. We have been given the very nature of God, the sinless life of Jesus Christ. When we are saved it is not a metamorphosis that takes place within us, but rather we are instantly given a new nature. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. NKJV **2 Corinthians 5:17*** The believer in Jesus Christ possesses two natures in one body. We receive the sinful nature of Adam when we are born in the natural and then we receive the sinless nature of God when we are born again spiritually through faith in Jesus Christ. The two natures struggle for control of how the believer’s body will be used. The process of change in our daily conduct takes place as we learn to give control of our mind and body to the New Nature. As we surrender to the power of the New Nature, we

become more and more separated from the world and the flesh and we conduct ourselves more and more like our Holy Father. This is the metamorphosis in our conduct that we are to allow the Holy Spirit to perform in our lives. This is the practical sanctification that God desires for us to allow to take place in our lives.

“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful (easily used) for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. NKJV 2 Timothy 2:20-22 Every saint will one day bring God glory, but we have the opportunity to be used right now, in this life, for the glory of God. The closer we draw to Him in this life, the closer we will be to Him in eternity. The more useful we are to God in this life, the greater the glory that we will share with Jesus Christ in eternity. To draw close to God in this life means to flee the lust of the flesh in our daily life. To walk with God is to walk in holiness. It is to flee everything that is tainted with the sin and selfish rebellion of the flesh and to pursue the will of God for every area of your life.

“Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” NKJV Matthew 15:11 “So Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet

*understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” NKJV **Matthew 15:16-20*** True holiness does not begin with what you wear or eat or how you eat it, but true holiness begins with a heart that is surrendered to the will of God. When our heart is full of the love of God, it will cause us to dress modestly so as not to stir the lust of the flesh in others and to give place to our own lust. It will cause you not to eat or drink certain things that may offend or cause your brother to stumble. It will change your behavior and activities, but all of this is a byproduct of a heart that has been purged and given over to God to be easily used for His glory.

The life of Christ, the New Nature within us, is the source of our practical sanctification, but what is the instrument used to promote this practical sanctification? *“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. NKJV **John 17:16-19** “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” NKJV **Acts 20:32** God uses His word,*

the Bible, to influence our heart through an understanding of His will. The more we know and understand the teaching and instruction found in the God's word and the more we apply it to our lives, the more we will be set apart from carnal and sinful choices and decisions and be fit to be used for the glory of God. The greater our surrender to the will of God in this life, the greater our inheritance will be in eternity. Our practical sanctification has everything to do with our daily obedience to the word of God.

*“See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” NKJV **1 Thessalonians 5:15-24***

God is able to finish the work of the moral purity of practical sanctification. This aspect of sanctification is a lifelong process. As long as you are still breathing, God is continuing to separate you even further from the world and closer to Himself. But one day we will be brought to sinless perfection at the coming of Jesus Christ. Meanwhile we can enjoy the benefits of holy living if we will submit our will to God's.

Even though our obedience and surrender are key in the practical aspect of our sanctification it is still God's work. Our daily obedience is still the result of the grace of God working in us and for us. *“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.” NKJV **Philippians 2:12-13*** Our part is to desire to be holy and to submit to His working. God will do the work of making our practical state match up to our provisional standing in sanctification.

*“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 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.” NKJV **1 John 3:1-3***

“Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God

*Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!” NKJV
Revelation 4:6-8*

Those who will occupy the closest place to Christ in Heaven will be those who have had a real, personal revelation of the Holiness of God and who have lived by faith with a desire to be holy just as He is Holy. May we truly desire and allow the grace of God to do the work of making our practical state properly reflect our provisional standing in sanctification.

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