

Sanctification: Jesus and the Believer

Since I have already published extensively on sanctification,¹ I will only say that in this article when I speak of ‘sanctification’ in connection with Christ, I mean separation or consecration, but when speaking of believers, I go on to include holiness.

Christ is the believer’s positional sanctification; the believer is positionally sanctified because he is united to Christ. Take Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, which he addressed to ‘the church of God that is in Corinth... those sanctified in Christ Jesus’. The apostle went on to explain:

Christ Jesus... became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption... 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 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11).

And what was true of the Corinthians – the Corinthians, of all people (not the most spiritual of people; see the first letter in full) – is true for every believer throughout this age.

As I say, the believer’s sanctification derives explicitly from Christ. Indeed, it derives directly from Christ’s own sanctification. As he himself declared, when praying for his people:

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth (John 17:17-19).

Christ made this statement in his great prayer just before his death. It is clear, therefore, that the ‘sanctification’ he had in mind was his work on the cross. In his prayer, he was sanctifying himself, devoting himself, separating himself to God to go to the cross to shed his blood to redeem his people by his

¹ See my *Fivefold; Positional*. In addition, see my *Christ; Sanctification in Jeremiah; Sanctification in Romans; Sanctification in Galatians; Sanctification in Philipians*.

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sacrifice. As a consequence, we can say that the believer is sanctified by Christ's atoning work at Calvary. Indeed, Paul plainly told us so:

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

Jesus Christ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession (Tit. 2:13-14).

And then we have these all-important passages from Hebrews:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said: "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book"'.¹

When he said above: 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' (these are offered according to the law), then he added: 'Behold, I have come to do your will'. He does away with the first in order to establish the second. *And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. *For by a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being*

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*sanctified.*² And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying: ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days’, declares the LORD, ‘I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds’, then he adds: ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more’. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin...

Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood (Heb. 10:1-18; 13:12 see also Heb. 10:29).³

So far, so good. Christ, by his work on the cross, sanctified his people. End of story? Far from it! Although Christ did speak of his sanctification – by himself, his own sanctification to the Father – in his great prayer in John 17, and although he was in that prayer referring to his impending death, even so John 17 was not the first time Christ spoke of his sanctification. In John 10, he had already spoken of his sanctification by the Father – the Father’s separation of him to the work to which he had been appointed by the Father from eternity past. Christ referred to himself as:

...him whom the Father consecrated [sanctified] and sent into the world (John 10:36).

So it is clear that Christ’s sanctification did not begin at the cross. But neither did it begin in John 10! As Christ declared in that passage, he was sanctified by the Father *before his incarnation*. Indeed, Christ’s incarnation was a vital aspect of his sanctification by the Father. Christ’s sanctification cannot be confined to his work at Calvary. In short, his sanctification originated in God’s decree in eternity past, and came into actual and active experience at his incarnation, and went on without a

² That is, the believer is not only positionally sanctified in Christ, but he inevitably goes on to be progressively sanctified. This is borne out by Heb. 12:14. See my ‘Progressive Sanctification: A Matter of Eternal Life or Death’.

³ At the appropriate time I will explain why I quote this passage in full. But so as to bring out the point I am now making, I have stressed the key words to show that it is by the atoning work of Christ on the cross that the believer is sanctified.

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break until and including the cross. All this is part and parcel of his 'sanctification'.

Moreover, the ground had been well and truly prepared, this truth having been laid out in Scripture long before. For a start, Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied the coming of the servant:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law (Isa. 42:1-4).

The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name... the LORD... formed me from the womb to be his servant (Isa. 49:1).

The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion – to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified (Isa. 61:1-3).⁴

There is no doubt as to whom these prophecies refer. Christ made it abundantly plain that he himself was their living embodiment:

[Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and

⁴ See also Isa. 11:1-10; 48:16.

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recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour'. And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them: 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:16-21).⁵

Clearly, before his incarnation Christ had been set apart as the Father's Servant, sanctified to the work appointed for him.

Then we have the glorious statement at the opening of Hebrews – that momentous book on the glories of the new covenant, and its superiority over the old:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say: 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'? Or again: 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son'? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says: 'Let all God's angels worship him'. Of the angels he says: 'He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire'. But of the Son he says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions'. And: 'You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end' (Heb. 1:1-12).⁶

Once again the point is made: the Father had appointed Christ to his work, sanctified him, long before his incarnation.

⁵ See also Isa. 35 with Matt. 11:5; Luke 7:22.

⁶ See my series of sermons 'Watershed of the Ages'.

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What God said to Jeremiah could also be said of Christ, but with a much greater significance:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5).

In Christ's case, he was the fulfilment of Moses' prophecy:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him (Deut. 18:15-19).

And then we have the episode with Simeon in the temple:

There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the LORD's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 'LORD, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel'. And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother: 'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed' (Luke 2:25-34).

Anna, too, joined in and 'began to give thanks to God and to speak of [Jesus] to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2:38).⁷

⁷ See my series of sermons 'Watershed of the Ages'. See also Matt. 21:11; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 1:21,25; 4:19; Acts 7:37.

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Of John the Baptist it was said:

He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15).

John was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb, filled with the Spirit to do the work to which had been appointed by God. In other words, John was 'sanctified' from the womb. How much more so in the case of Christ.

And Paul could speak of it for himself:

He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16).

In other words, Paul had been 'set apart' – sanctified, in this sense – to his life's work. As the Lord said to him:

I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:15-18).

All this was true of Christ himself: he had been appointed – sanctified – by the Father to his great work as Mediator.

In a general – but far lesser – sense, every child of God can say this sort of thing:

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them (Ps. 139:15-16).

Yes, but all this is true of Christ in the highest possible sense of the words. Christ had been sanctified by the Father from eternity past.

Let me underline this. Christ's sanctification – the sanctification we are talking about in connection with the

believer – did not begin at the cross. It began in eternity; more especially, it came into effect in his incarnation in Mary’s womb. Consequently, we may with confidence say that Christ was sanctified by the Father in the manger, sanctified in the carpenter’s shop, sanctified in his baptism, sanctified in his itinerant preaching, sanctified in his miracle working, all this culminating in his sanctification to the work the Father had for him to do on the cross. Throughout his life he was always the Holy One of God, always dedicated or sanctified to his Father’s work. As he said as a lad in the temple: ‘Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ Or: ‘Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?’ (Luke 2:49). There never was a time when Christ was not doing his ‘Father’s business’.⁸

This is the very point that had been revealed to Peter. How clearly we see this in his reply to Christ, who had challenged his disciples about joining the crowd and forsaking him:

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and *we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God* (John 6:68-69).⁹

And we have this:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples: ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said: ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets’. He said to them: ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’. And Jesus answered him: ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven (Matt. 16:13-17).

Peter put the matter beyond doubt when he told the Jews of:

...Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Moses said: ‘The LORD God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen

⁸ See also John 4:34; 5:36, which I will quote below.

⁹ See also Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; Acts 3:14.

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to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people' (Acts 3:20-23).

Nor must we forget that all this had been securely rooted in the principles of the old covenant given to Israel through Moses at Sinai, clearly set out (for those with eyes to see) in Scripture in the law and prophets. I have already referred to Deuteronomy, and to Isaiah and his extensive prophecies. As Christ told the disciples on the road to Emmaus:

'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

Later that same evening, addressing the fearful disciples gathered in secret in Jerusalem, Christ declared:

'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled'. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).

The point needs to be broadened. To state the obvious (but, alas, not always remembered) fact, the New Testament did not start from scratch. God, from the beginning of time, had been revealing his master-plan of redemption, revealing it in history through a series of covenants, unveiling it progressively from stage to stage according to his eternal decree, bringing each stage to its appointed end or fulfilment. As soon as man fell, God had issued his glorious promise of redemption. In cursing Satan, in ringing tones God had set out his promise to send the Redeemer to accomplish redemption for his people. Addressing the serpent, God solemnly but triumphantly declared:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

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And throughout the rest of the Old Testament, God progressively set this out again and again in types and shadows, increasingly revealing to men the glorious work that the sanctified Redeemer would come and do for his people. Take Abraham with Isaac on Moriah. When Isaac questioned his father concerning the sacrifice they were about to offer:

Abraham said: 'God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son'.

And this led to the glorious culmination that day:

Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place: 'The LORD will provide' (Gen. 22:8,13-14).

Nowhere was all this more fully set out than in the covenant God gave to Israel through Moses at Sinai. Of the scores and scores of illustrations to make the point, consider the way the old covenant typified or foreshowed this concept of Christ's consecration to the priesthood, his separation to the work decreed for him by the Father:

You... shall anoint them [Aaron your brother... his sons with him] and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests... This is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests... (Ex. 28:41; 29:1).

Moses took some of the anointing oil and of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his garments, and also on his sons and his sons' garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments, and his sons and his sons' garments with him (Lev. 8:30).

And so on, and on.

We must never forget that the Old Testament (the old covenant, in particular) permeates the New Testament (the new covenant). We shall never fully understand the latter unless this fundamental fact is taken into account. Take the Sermon on the Mount. Whatever else may be said about that discourse, it depends absolutely on the old covenant.

Coming closer to the issue in hand, consider ‘righteousness’ in Romans. I raise this because, when thinking about the believer, righteousness and sanctification are intimately linked. ‘Righteousness’ (with its family members) appears scores of times in Romans. Trying to come to an understanding of Paul’s use of ‘righteousness’ in Romans, without bearing in mind the principles of the old covenant, is bound to lead to disaster. The number of references to the Old Testament throughout the book, on its own, is enough to knock that scheme on the head. Moreover, the apostle’s detailed arguments based on the Old Testament – see Romans 3, 4, 9 and 10, for instance, but throughout the book – put the point beyond doubt. Coming at it from the other direction, when reading Romans, it is essential to wear the same spectacles (or hearing aid) as the first readers (hearers) of the letter. What did the believers at Rome hear when Paul’s letter was read to them? What did they bring to what was being said? What were their presuppositions? There is no doubt as to the answers to those questions. Paul could say with confidence: ‘I am speaking to those who know the law’ (Rom. 7:1).¹⁰ Working on that fact, he could develop his argument – as he did (Rom. 7:1-6) – assured in the knowledge that his readers would be following him all the way.

And that is how we must read Romans (or any other portion of Scripture). We forget this elementary principle at our peril.¹¹ And as for ‘righteousness’ in this regard, see Romans 9:30 – 10:5.¹² This passage, on its own, tells us what Paul meant by ‘righteousness’ in Romans. Paul was certainly not limiting ‘righteousness’ to pardon! God’s revealed mind in the old covenant – the principle, God’s demand, being carried over into the new – would never allow that! God is unchanging and unchangeable: ‘I the LORD do not change’ (Mal. 3:6; see Rom.

¹⁰ For more on this point, see my *Christ*.

¹¹ See my ‘Asking the Wrong Question’.

¹² See my *Peter Masters’ Muddle*.

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11:29). He demanded perfection in the old covenant; he obtained it in Christ in the new.¹³

Pulling all this together, we see that God's eternal decree separated Christ ('Christ' means 'anointed') to his life-long work as Mediator. As Peter told Cornelius and the crowd that had gathered in his home:

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:38-43; see also Isa. 32:1; 61:1; Dan. 9:25-26; Matt. 26:6-13; Luke 7:37-50, and so on).

God foreshadowed this through the history of redemption set out in a series of covenants – specially the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic.¹⁴ In the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4), God sent his Son into the world born of a woman under the law in order to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17-18; Heb. 8:13). God sent his Son! Do not miss the way in which John stressed this very point:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16-17).

¹³ See my 'Into the Lions' Den: Christ's Active Obedience Re-Visited'; 'Observations on a Colloquy'; 'Points to Ponder on Christ's Active Obedience'; 'Asking the Wrong Question'.

¹⁴ See my *Redemption*.

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On him [that is, Christ] God the Father has set his seal... This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent... The living Father sent me (John 6:27-29,57).

I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me (John 7:28-29).

I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me (John 8:42).

...him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world (John 10:36).

Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me' (John 11:41-42).

This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me... As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me... O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me (John 17:3-8,18-21,25).

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you (John 20:21).¹⁵

¹⁵ This list does not exhaust the point in John's Gospel – see below.

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In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins... And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:9-14).

So Christ's sanctification – which, I remind you, leads directly to the believer's sanctification – must not be confined to the cross. Right from his incarnation, Christ's entire life was spent doing the will of God. Take one example. Christ's baptism. The Lord's response to John's unwillingness to baptise him was no makeweight; it set the tone for his entire life and ministry:

Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15).

And what Paul declared of David (who was a dim foreshadow of Christ – see Ps. 2:6; Is. 11:10; Matt. 2:2; 27:11,29,37; Luke 1:32; John 12:15; 19:19; Acts 2:30; Rom. 11:26; Rev. 5:5; 22:16), could well be said of Christ:

[God] raised up David to be their [Israel's] king, of whom he testified and said: 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will' (Acts 13:22; see 1 Sam. 15:22; Acts 7:46).

The point is, Saul had been rejected because he had not kept God's commandment, whereas David would. As God could declare to Saul:

Your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you (1 Sam. 13:14).

And David's words in Psalm 18 are surely Messianic:

The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his rules [just decrees] were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me. I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt. So the

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LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight (Ps. 18:20-24).

And this is precisely why I quoted Hebrews 10:1-18 in full. Yes, the cross is the climax of that passage, but it is the culmination of a section of massive significance setting out Christ's obedience to the Father's will and commandment throughout his entire life on earth. This life-long sanctification of Christ must not be brushed aside as a mere preparation for the cross.¹⁶

As Christ said, time and again throughout his life on earth (and he was not confining his remarks to the cross, please note):

My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work (John 4:34).

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me...The testimony that I have is greater than that of John [the Baptist]. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me (John 5:30,36-37).

I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:38-40).

He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him (John 8:29).

Addressing his Father, Christ declared:

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do (John 17:4).

Jesus, knowing that all was now finished... he said: 'It is finished' (John 19:28-30).

¹⁶ See my 'Observations on a Colloquy'.

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So where is this going? What is my concern in going into all this? It all points to one conclusion. Which is? The entire life of Christ plays a vital part in his work of redemption for his people. Yes, Christ on the cross accomplished redemption, but Christ's life, his doing of his Father's will, his completing the work he had been given, culminating in his glorious *tetelestai* – 'It is finished' (John 19:30) – all this is the fulfilment of the old covenant's foreshadowing of his separation or consecration to his Father's will. Christ was sanctified by the Father; Christ sanctified himself; and all that he might sanctify his people. And all is fulfilled in Christ's complete life from the moment of his incarnation. His active obedience before the cross was not just a preparation for the cross. Rather, that entire obedience was an integral part of his sanctification which is imputed to the sinner as he trusts Christ for salvation. In his believing, the sinner is united to Christ, and receives the imputation of Christ's perfect sanctification, so that he himself is immediately positionally sanctified in Christ, perfected for ever (Heb. 10:10,14).

In short, it is not simply what is known as the passive obedience of Christ (his death) that is imputed to the believing sinner. No! Imputed righteousness and sanctification comes from the whole Christ, his entire, life-long, obedience to the Father in his sanctification from eternity as Mediator, culminating in his death and resurrection. This was Christ's sanctification. And it is every believer's sanctification.

Comments by others

First, the general point.

John Calvin in his *Institutes*:

Christ was sanctified from earliest infancy, that he might sanctify his elect in himself... For as he, in order to wipe away the guilt of disobedience which had been committed in our flesh, assumed that very flesh, that in it he might, on our account, and in our stead, perform a perfect obedience, so he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, that, completely pervaded

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with his holiness in the flesh which he had assumed, he might transfuse¹⁷ it into us.

Then John 17:19, taking it as Christ's sanctification in the sense of his work on the cross.

Charles J. Ellicott:

The consecration here thought of is that to the work which was immediately before [Christ] – the offering [of] himself as a sacrifice. The word was in frequent use in the special sense of an offering or sacrifice set apart to God. As a New Testament example of this, compare Romans 15:16. By this consecration of himself... he will, as both priest and sacrifice, enter into the Holy of Holies of the heavenly temple, and will send the Holy Ghost, who will consecrate [those for whom he was praying].

Matthew Poole:

I sanctify myself, here, is no more than, I set myself apart, as a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing in the sight of God: and

¹⁷ I allow the word to stand. 'Transfuse' can mean 'transfer' or 'transmit'. In other words, Calvin might have been speaking of imputed or imparted holiness. Both are scriptural. Here, by his use of 'into', I take it that he meant 'imparted'. Rome confuses the two, but Scripture is clear. 'What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son... that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us' (Rom. 8:3-4); that is, believers. Echoes here of Gal. 4:4-5. By Christ's work, "the righteous requirement of the law" is "fulfilled in us". "Fulfilled", "fulfilled in us"! Clearly, this is something which God in Christ has done *for* and *in* believers, not something to be done *by* believers trying to keep the law. Paul here *describes* believers; he does not tell them to fulfil the law. God, by his Son, Christ Jesus, accomplished the fulfilment of the righteous requirement of the law, and it is this perfect obedience of Christ, his righteousness, which is imputed and imparted to believers. Thus Christ fulfilled the law, and believers have fulfilled it in him. Christ's work imputed to them by the Spirit accomplishes their justification [and positional sanctification]. Christ's work being imparted to them by the Spirit accomplishes their [progressive] sanctification. And it is this [progressive] sanctification which is the evidence and fruit of the fulfilment of the righteous requirement of the law in believers in and by Christ' (quoted from my *Christ* pp174-175).

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indeed sanctifying, in the ancient notion of it under the law, did ordinarily signify the setting of persons and things apart to the special service of God; which was done legally by certain ritual performances and ceremonies, and is still done inwardly and spiritually by regeneration, and renewing of the hearts of men and women by the efficacious working of the Holy Ghost. Christ says that for his disciples' sake he sanctified himself, being both the priest and the sacrifice. Christ set apart himself as a sacrifice for his people.

John Gill:

This may be meant of his [Christ's] being separated, and set apart for his office as Mediator, which, though done by the Father, and is ascribed unto him (John 10:36), yet may also be attributed to himself, since he voluntarily devoted himself to this work, and cheerfully accepted of it: though it seems best to understand it of his offering himself a sacrifice for, and in the room and stead of his people, in allusion to the offerings under the law, the sacrificing of which is expressed by sanctifying (Ex. 13:2); and because his sacrifice was an holy one, what he sanctified or offered was himself... his body and his soul; and these as in union with his divine person; which gives his sacrifice the preference to all others, and is the true reason of its virtue and efficacy; and this is expressive of his great love. He himself is also the sanctifier or offerer, which shows him to be a priest, and that he had a power over his own life, and that he sacrificed it voluntarily; and this he is said to do at that present time, because the time was very near that he was to be offered up, and his present prayer and intercession were a part of his priestly office.

Take John 10:36, Christ's sanctification speaking of more than his work on the cross.

John Calvin:

This refers strictly to the person of Christ, so far as he is manifested in the flesh. Accordingly, these two things are joined, that he has been sanctified and sent into the world.

In his *Institutes*, Calvin (alas, too gently) drew attention to a vital distinction about the 'righteousness' that is imputed to the

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believer; namely, that it is Christ's life-long obedience under the law, not his intrinsic righteousness:

Although righteousness comes to us from the secret fountain of the Godhead, it does not follow that Christ, who sanctified himself in the flesh on our account, is our righteousness in respect of his divine nature (John 17:19).

Charles J. Ellicott:

The tense refers to the time of [Christ's] consecration to his Messianic work, and to the incarnation, which was the commencement of it.

John Gill:

Sanctification here designs... and respects the eternal separation of [Christ] to his office, as Mediator, in the counsel, purposes, and decrees of God... being pre-ordained thereunto before the foundation of the world... and sent into the world in human nature, to obtain eternal redemption and [the] salvation [of] his people: to save them from sin, Satan, the world, law, hell and death, which none but God could do.

Albert Barnes:

God has consecrated or appointed his Son to be his Messenger or Messiah to mankind.

M.R. Vincent:

Consecrated. The fundamental idea of the word is separation and consecration to the service of Deity.

John Trapp:

Sanctified, that is, anointed, and that in both his natures, as whole Christ. For his anointing imported, 1. His consecration or ordination to the office of a Mediator, and so the Godhead also was anointed. 2. Qualification or effusion of fullness of graces; as the holy oil was compounded of [various] spices, so the manhood, and that without measure, as far as a finite nature was capable of.

C.H. Spurgeon on Hebrews 10:10:

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We shall, *first*, speak of the eternal will. *Secondly* of the effectual sacrifice by which that will has been carried out. And *thirdly*, of the everlasting result accomplished by that will through the sacrifice of the body of Christ. May the Holy Spirit who has revealed the grand doctrine of justification now enable us to understand it and to feel its comforting power.

First, then, the eternal will – ‘By the which will we are sanctified’. This will must, first of all, be viewed as the will ordained of old by the Father – the eternal decree of the infinite Jehovah that a people whom he chose should be sanctified and set apart unto himself...

His will is the Alpha and the Omega of all things. It was according to this eternal, invincible will of God that he chose, created, and set apart a people that should show forth the glory and riches of his grace – a people that would bear the image of his only-begotten Son, a people that should joyfully and willingly serve him in his courts forever and ever – a people who should be his own sons and daughters, to whom he would say: ‘I will dwell in them and walk in them and they shall be my people and I will be their God’. Thus stood the eternal will of old. ‘For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren’.

But, of course, by nature the elect are dead in sins, utterly polluted:

But the people concerning whom this will was made were dead in sin, defiled with evil, polluted by transgression. The old serpent’s venom was in their veins. They were fit to be set apart for the curse, but not to be set apart for the service of the thrice holy God. And the question was, how then should the will of the Immutable Invincible ever be carried out? How shall these rebels become absolved? How shall these fountains of filth become clear as crystal, pouring forth floods of living water and divine praise? How shall these unsanctified and defiled ones become sanctified unto the service of God? It must be – but how shall it be?

Spurgeon turned to the old covenant, the priests and the sacrifices. But the Mosaic covenant, though instituted by God, provided no effectual salvation, never effectively sanctified any sinner:

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[God's] will was not fulfilled in them. It was not his will that they [that is, the old-covenant priests and their sacrifices] should sanctify the people. They were inefficacious to such an end for, as the Holy Spirit has said, it was 'not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins'. And so, if these offerings had been all, centuries of the house of Aaron and of the priests of the tribe of Levi might have come and gone, and yet the will decreed by the eternal Father would not have been an accomplished fact.

Even so, God had always planned it thus; he always planned to sanctify – separate – his Son, and send him into the world, under the old covenant, in order to fulfil it and render perfect obedience to the law, and so establish the new, superior, better, effective covenant in Christ.

Spurgeon:

Thus we are landed at our *second* point, which is, that this will by which we are sanctified was performed by the ever-blessed Son. It was the will of God the Father, but it was carried out by the divine Son when he came into the world. A body was prepared for him and into that body, in a mysterious manner which we will not attempt even to conceive of, he entered and there he was – the incarnate God. This incarnate God, by offering his own blood, by laying down his own life, by bearing in his own body the curse, and in his own spirit enduring the wrath was able to effect the purpose of the everlasting Father in the purging of his people, in the setting of his chosen apart, and making them henceforth holiness unto the LORD. Do you not see what the will of the Father was – that he should have a people that should be sanctified unto himself? But that will could not be carried out by the blood of bulls and of goats. It must be achieved by the offering up of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Our Lord Jesus Christ has done whatever that will of the Father required for its perfect achievement. This is our satisfaction.

Spurgeon spoke of the essential work of the Spirit in applying Christ's work:

Thus it is by the will of the Father, carried out by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit that the church of God is regarded as sanctified before God and is acceptable unto him.

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Spurgeon then addressed:

...the effectual sacrifice of Christ by which the will of God with regard to the sanctity of his people has been carried out: 'By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ'.

Spurgeon:

This implies, first, his incarnation, which of course includes his eternal deity... The gospel of his incarnation is not a spiritual idea, nor a metaphor, nor a myth. In very deed and truth, the God that made heaven and earth came down to earth and hung upon a woman's breast as an infant. That child, as he grew in stature and wisdom, was as certainly God as he is at this moment in glory. He was as surely God when he was here hungry and suffering, sleeping, eating, drinking as he was God when he hung up the morning stars and kindled the lamps of night, or as he shall be when sun and moon shall dim at the brightness of his coming. Jesus Christ, very God of very God, did certainly stoop to become such as we are and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. It is a truth you all know, but I want you to grasp it and realise it. It will help you to trust Christ if you clearly perceive that, divine as he is, he is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh – your kinsman, though the Son of God.

Spurgeon tackled a vital nuance in all this:

All this is implied in the text, because it speaks of the offering of the body of Christ. But why does it specially speak of the body? I think [it is] to show us the reality of that offering – his soul suffered and his soul's sufferings were the soul of his sufferings, but still, to make it palpable to us, to record it as a sure historical fact, the Holy Spirit mentions that there was an offering of the body of Christ.

But this is not all. And here Spurgeon came close to the point I have been trying to make in this article:

I take it, however, that the word means the whole of Christ – that there was an offering made of all of Christ, the body of him or that of which he was constituted... I look upon our Lord Jesus as in his very Godhead stooping down to bear the weight of human sin and human misery, sustaining it because he was

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divine and able to bear what else had been too great a load. Thus the whole of Christ was made a sacrifice for sin. It was the offering, not of the spirit of Christ, but of the very body of Christ – the essence, subsistence, and most manifest reality and personality of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High.

He probed deeper:

And this was wholly offered. I do not know how to bring out my own thoughts here, but to accomplish the will of God in sanctifying all his people, Christ must be the offering and he must be wholly offered... as our sin-offering, making expiation for guilt, our blessed Lord and Master gave himself wholly for us as an atoning sacrifice and offering for sin – and that ‘himself’, sums up all you can conceive it to be in and of the Christ of God, and the pangs and griefs which, like a fire went through him, did consume him, even to the uttermost of all that was in him. He bore all that could be borne, stooped to the lowest to which humility could come, descended to the utmost abyss to which a descent of self-denial could be made. He made himself of no reputation. He emptied himself of all honour and glory. He gave up himself without reserve. He saved others, himself he could not save – he spares us in our chastisements, but himself he spared not. He says of himself in the twenty-second psalm: ‘I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men and despised of the people’. You do not know, you cannot imagine how fully the sacrifice was made by Christ. It was not only a sacrifice of all of himself, but a complete sacrifice of every part of himself for us. The blaze of eternal wrath for human sin was focused upon his head! The anguish that must have been endured by him who stood in the place of millions of sinners to be judged of God and smitten in their stead is altogether inconceivable. Though himself perfectly innocent, yet in his own person to offer up such a sacrifice as could honour the divine justice on account of myriads of sins of myriads of the sons of men was a work far beyond all human realisation. You may give loose to your reason and your imagination and rise into the seventh heaven of sublime conception as with eagle wing, but you can never reach the utmost height. Here is the sum of the matter – ‘Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift’, for unspeakable, inconceivable it certainly is when we view the Lord Jesus as a sacrifice for the sins of men...

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Spurgeon, having spoken of expiation and reconciliation, moved on:

Moreover, they [that is, believers] are not only accepted and reconciled, but they are purified – the taint that was upon them is taken away. In God's sight they are regarded no more as unclean. They are no longer shut outside the camp – they may come to the throne of the heavenly grace whenever they will. God can have communion with them. He regards them as fit to stand in his courts and to be his servants, for they are purified, reconciled, expiated through the one offering of Christ. Their admission into the closest intimacy with God could never be allowed if he did not regard them as purged from all uncleanness and this has been effected not at all by themselves, but only by the great sacrifice:

*Your blood, not mine, O Christ,
Your blood so freely spilt,
Has blanched my blackest stains,
And purged away my guilt.
Your righteousness, O Christ,
Alone does cover me.
No righteousness avails
Save that which is in thee.*

Spurgeon contrasted, on the one hand, the sanctification or consecration (in shadow) of the Levites and the priests under the old covenant, with, on the other hand, the reality of the sanctification or consecration of believers in Christ. In the new covenant, under Christ, in Christ, every believer is positionally sanctified, and from the moment of his conversion should be assured,¹⁸ and so begin to live a life of progressive sanctification:

You and I are not typically, but truly and really, his people. Through Jesus Christ's offering of himself once and for all, we are really set apart to be the LORD's people henceforth and forever and he says of us – I mean, of course, not of us all, but of as many as have believed in Jesus and to whom the Holy Spirit has revealed his finished work – 'I will be their God and they shall be my people'. You, believers, are sanctified in this

¹⁸ See my *Assurance*.

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sense, that you are now the set-apart ones unto God and you belong wholly to him. Will you think that over? 'I am now not my own. I do not belong now to the common order of men, as all the rest of men do. I am set apart. I am called out. I am taken aside. I am one of the LORD's own. I am his treasure and his portion. He has through Jesus Christ's death made me one of those of whom he says: 'They shall dwell alone, they shall not be numbered among the people'. I want you to feel it so that you may live under the power of that fact, that you may feel: 'My Lord has cleansed me. My Lord has made expiation for me. My Lord has reconciled me unto God and I am God's man, I am God's woman. I cannot live as others do. I cannot be one among you. I must come out. I must be separate. I cannot find my pleasure where you find yours. I cannot find my treasure where you find yours. I am God's, and God is mine. That wondrous transaction on the cross of which our minister has tried to speak, but of which he could not speak as he ought – that wondrous unspeakable deed upon the cross – that wonderful life and death of Jesus, has made me one of God's people, set apart unto him and as such I must live'.

When you realise that you are God's people, the next thing is to reflect that God, in sanctifying a people set them apart for his service, he made them fit for his service. You, beloved, through Christ's one great offering of his body for you, are permitted now to be the servants of God... In fact, he bought for us a sanctification which has made us the LORD's people and has enabled us to engage in his service. Do we not rejoice in this?

Next to that we have this privilege that what we do can now be accepted. Because Jesus Christ, by the offering of his body once has perfected the Father's will and has sanctified us, therefore what we do is now accepted with God...

And now we are privileged to the highest degree, being sanctified – that is to say, made into God's people, God's servants, and God's accepted servants. Every privilege which we could have had, if we had never sinned, is now ours and we are in him as his children...

'Trust in the LORD and do good; so shall you dwell in the land and certainly you shall be fed', till he comes to catch you away where you shall see what Jesus did for you when he made his body once for all a sacrifice that he might fulfil the will of the eternal Father and sanctify you and all his people unto God

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forever and ever. May the best of blessings rest upon all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

But I have omitted a vital portion from Spurgeon's sermon, because I wish to close with it. Spurgeon, in his usual pithy way, here states what I have been trying to say:

We will not enter at this time into a detailed account of our Lord's active and passive obedience by which he magnified the law and set apart his people. I pray you, however, never fall into the error of dividing the work of Christ as some do and saying: 'Here he made atonement for sin and there he did not'. In these modern times, certain brethren have invented refinements of statement of so trivial a character that they are not even worth the trouble of thinking over and yet, like babes with a new rattle, they make a noise with them all day long. It is amusing how these wise professors make grave points out of mere hair-splitting distinctions and if we do not agree with them they give themselves mighty airs, pitying our ignorance, and esteeming themselves as superior persons who have an insight into things which ordinary Christians cannot see. God save us from having eyes which are so sharp that we are able to spy out new occasions for difference and fresh reasons for making men offenders for mere words. I believe in the life of Christ as well as in his death, and I believe that he stood for me before God as much when he walked the acres of Palestine as when he hung on the cross at Jerusalem. You cannot divide and split him in sunder and say: 'He is so far an example and so far an atonement', but you must take the entire Christ and look at him from the very first as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. 'Oh, but', they say, 'he made no atonement except in his death', which is, let me tell you, an absurdity in language. Listen a minute. When does a man die? I cannot tell you. There is the minute in which the soul separates from the body, but all the time that a man may be described as dying he is alive, is he not? A man does not suffer when actually dead. What we call the pangs of death are truly and accurately pangs of life. Death does not suffer – it is the end of suffering. A man is in life while he suffers and if they say: 'It is Christ's death that makes an atonement and not his life', I reply that death, alone and by itself, makes no atonement. Death in its natural sense and not in this modern non-natural severance from life, does make atonement – but it cannot be viewed apart from life by any unsophisticated mind. If they must have

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distinctions, we could make distinctions enough to worry them of such an unprofitable business, but we have nobler work to do. To us our Lord's death seems to be the consummation of his life, the finishing stroke of a work which his Father had given him to do among the sons of men. We view him as having come in a body prepared for him to do the will of God once – and that 'once' lasted throughout his one life on earth. We will not, however, dwell on any moot point, but unfeignedly rejoice that whatever was wanted to make God's people wholly sanctified unto God, Christ has worked out. 'By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once'. It is finished. Does the divine law require for our acceptance perfect submission to the will of the LORD? He has rendered it. Does it ask complete obedience to its precepts? He has presented the same. Does the fulfilled will of the LORD call for abject suffering, a sweat of blood, pangs unknown, and death, itself? Christ has presented it all, whatever that 'all' may be. As when God created, his word effected all his will, so when God redeemed, his blessed and incarnate Word has done all his will. In every point, as God looked on each day's work and said: 'It is good', so, as he looks upon each part of the work of his dear Son, he can say of it: 'It is good'. The Father joins in the verdict of his Son that it is finished – all the will of God for the sanctification of his people is accomplished.¹⁹

I have not quoted C.H.Spurgeon to prove my point, of course, but I am heartily glad to have his support.

¹⁹ Spurgeon sermon 1527.