

Dear Graham

Having now read your book and looked at the scriptures a bit more thoroughly, I believe my initial comments were pretty much on the money. In my view the problem is that the NT writers are using the Greek word ἁγιάζω (to make holy) - usually rendered as “sanctify” in our modern Bibles - in two different senses.

To start I think we need to go back to the OT. Here the AV translated the Hebrew ‘qados’ or ‘qaddes’ as ‘sanctify’ or ‘sanctified’ whereas almost all modern translations (including the NIV) render it (more correctly I think) as ‘consecrate’ or ‘consecrated’ – or on a few occasions as ‘made it Holy’ (e.g. Exodus 19:14, 29:43; Genesis 2:3). This consecration was generally as a result of a particular act or acts and can be seen as happening immediately (or virtually so). On the other hand, at least *some* sanctification in the NT is progressive. Thus we already see how a confusion of meaning was introduced into the word sanctify in the AV. This has now been eliminated from the OT in modern translations, but not unfortunately from the NT.

Now it is clear that when we are ‘justified’ (in the classic evangelical meaning of this word) by accepting Christ as our Lord and Master and believing in Him we instantaneously become a part of God’s redeemed people and are thus immediately “set apart” and “made Holy” in the strictly limited and legalistic sense of being put in a right standing with God. This (as I hope we both agree) does not instantaneously make the new Christian “really” righteous or holy (that’s not the sort of Christians I see around me, including myself). Rather this new Christian has just been given a legalistically righteous standing with God by his justification. This is not to say that God is ‘fooling himself’ (as it were), the problem is that we usually think of righteousness as a purely ethical quality whereas actually it is clearly a quality of ‘right standing’ with God which is capable of being credited or imputed to us, irrespective of our actual objective moral state.

Confusion arises in that the NT writers sometimes use the Greek word noted at the beginning usually translated ‘sanctified in this sense’<sup>1</sup> and sometimes in the sense of “growing in holiness and becoming actually Christlike”<sup>2</sup>. Both of these are correct concepts, but it’s confusing to use the same word for two different things – at least I contend they are two different things in spite of your book’s attempt to bring them together (I would say muddle them). I think it would make much more sense to use a different word (perhaps consecrate) for the first meaning above and retain the term sanctify for the second meaning.

John Stott largely agrees with my position<sup>3</sup>, although he wants to use the word justification for the legal immediate righteousness bestowed on the believer. I think this is also confusing and would prefer to use a third word. Other writers such as R A Torrey recognize the different concepts attaching to salvation but without suggesting a need for a new word. Your book acknowledges the different kinds of ‘sanctification’ in the NT, but instead of acknowledging that they are different, seems to want to muddle them. Actually the concept there that I most liked was sanctification as equipping for mission (which you also starred).

In conclusion I contend that it’s incredibly confusing to use the same word for (i) the imputing of purely legal (and not actual) righteousness and (ii) the process of gradually

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; Hebrews 10:29; 13:12

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Romans 6:19; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7; 5:23; Hebrews 12:14

<sup>3</sup> John Stott *The Cross of Christ* IVP 1989 at p186

becoming actually objectively holy and Christlike through the work of the Holy Spirit. This latter is not primarily a works based effort on our behalf, although I do believe that we can (as it were) assist in the process by co-operating with this work of the Spirit. The former is, of course, purely the action of God's grace. Finally then, I would prefer to use a word such as 'consecrate' for (i) and reserve the word 'sanctify for (ii).