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**A Non-legalistic Doctrine of Sanctification:  
Christian Failure and Christian Growth**

Lucas Burenga Ndaro  
Lecturer and Academic Dean  
Nassa Theological College, Tanzania<sup>1</sup>

Introduction.....2  
I. Sanctification Is a Realm of the Holy One.....3  
    A. The Holy One of Israel .....3  
    B. The Holy One of God .....7  
    C. The Holy Spirit of God .....9  
II. Sanctification Is a Presence of the Holy One among the Saints .....13  
    A. I am the LORD who Makes you Holy .....14  
    B. The Incarnate *Presence* Sanctified the Disciples .....16  
        1. Sanctified from Guilt .....17  
        2. Sanctified from Religious Traditions .....18  
        3. Sanctified for God’s Mission in the World.....19  
    B. The Holy Spirit of God Sanctifies the Christian Tabernacle.....22  
III. The Anatomy of Christian Sanctification .....24  
    A. Material Sacrifices and the Sanctification of Saints .....25  
    B. A Broken and Contrite Spirit and the Sanctification of Saints.....26  
    C. Legalistic and Non-Legalistic Sanctification .....28  
        1. Legalistic Sanctification .....28  
        2. A Non-Legalistic Doctrine of Sanctification .....31  
Conclusion.....33

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<sup>1</sup> See [proflubunda@hotmail.com](mailto:proflubunda@hotmail.com) and [www.NassaTheologicalCollege.com](http://www.NassaTheologicalCollege.com).

## Introduction

This article proposes a non-legalistic doctrine of sanctification within the realm of divine and Christian holiness. In so doing, we begin by investigating the holiness of God as an inevitable *root* for the Christian doctrine of sanctification. It should be noted from the outset that being sanctified means being holy. However, the quality of holiness is not intrinsic to human nature; rather it is a derived nature from God. Christians are only holy being their God is holy. If one removes God from the picture, the story of Christian holiness fades in the background of sinfulness.

The apostle Paul puts it more succinctly when he metaphorically remarks in Romans 11:16, "... if the root is holy, so are the branches." Indeed, since the beginning of human redemption, sanctification has operated as a divine-human process. That is, both God and man contribute to the process of a believer being holy. However, the equation has never been equal in nature and weight. Always Yahweh's holiness has been the root of human holiness or sanctification, which means, Christian sanctification has always been derivative. From the outset of God's redemption of Israel, his people were known to be holy not because they were holy in themselves, but because the presence of the Holy One of Israel tented among them. Mutatis mutandis, Christians are never been regarded holy in themselves, but because of the presence of the Holy Spirit who indwells them. If the presence of the Holy One of Israel, of the Holy One of God, and of the Holy Spirit would be completely removed from the both communities, none of both Testaments' saints would be considered a saint. Instead, they would all be pagans; that is unholy. Therefore, the holiness of the Old and New Testaments' saints has been always relational. That is, it has functioned based on one's intimate relationship with the divine source of holiness—Yahweh, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit—by faith. Therefore, to develop more biblical and non-legalistic doctrine of sanctification, one must first understand the holiness of God and how it affects those who follow him by faith.

In the following discussion then we will investigate the holiness of God, in the context of the Holy One of Israel and how Yahweh's holiness sanctifies the community of Israel. Secondly, we will investigate the holiness of the Holy One of God, and Jesus Christ's

holiness sanctifies his followers. Thirdly, we will investigate the holiness of the Holy Spirit and how his holiness sanctifies those whom he indwells. Finally, we will conclude our investigation by synthesizing our findings by showing how a legalistic doctrine of sanctification has no biblical basis for Christian holiness and growth.

### **I. Sanctification Is a Realm of the Holy One**

The Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, repeatedly declares God as holy. Out of this confession, God's church in all cultures sings numerous songs that either declare God's holiness or ascribe holiness to God. However, as to what God's holiness means remains unanswered question. Here we will attempt to respond to this question based on the information available from biblical and extra-biblical sources.

#### **A. The Holy One of Israel**

The concept of holiness has been so commonly used in Christian morality that even God's holiness is easily understood in human connotations. This mental tendency blurs up the nature of God's holiness. No wonder when one reads God's command to the Israelites to destroy all the Canaanite tribes, during the conquest of the Promised Land, regardless of gender and ages, God is found guilty of murder. Indeed, looking at the incidence from a human stand point, this is how things look like, because in this view point God comes down to the level of human beings to be bound by human moral principles. In other words, God must be bound by the same commands he gave to the Israelites, "you shall not murder." If he commands his people to destroy his enemies, both he and the Israelites are considered murderers and legally liable to a court sentence. But this sense of holiness becomes natural *only* when God's holiness is understood as an ethical concept. Originally, however, the word holiness did not have ethical connotations.<sup>2</sup>

Methodologically, however, one should not begin with the morality of saints to understand the holiness of God; rather, one

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<sup>2</sup> So also Brunner, "originally, the word 'holy' had no ethical connotations; it did not mean what we think of when we hear a person described as 'holy.' Holiness is the Nature of God, that which distinguishes Him from everything else, the Transcendence of God in His every Nature, as the Wholly Other." See Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 158.

should begin with the holiness of God to understand the morality of saints. Holiness is not intrinsic to the nature of saints nor does the holiness of saints make God holy; contrary, holiness is intrinsic to God's nature, and it is that nature of divine holiness that breeds saints.

But what is God's holiness? Or what does it mean by the "Holy One of Israel"? To grasp the concept of God's holiness, one must not define it in ethical terminologies. In other words, the Holy One of Israel is not holy in terms of morality. In other words, the God of Israel is not holy because he keeps the Ten Commandments. Understanding God's holiness in this way leads us away from the real meaning of God being holy. If God is holy because keeps the Ten Commandments like the Israelites, then that means he accountable to another superior power, which we do not know. Contrary, the holiness of God must be understood in terms of transcendental uniqueness. That is, the God of Israel is not holy based on ethical principles of right and wrong; rather, his holiness is based on his unique nature. In other words, his uniqueness is his holiness. He is so unique that there is none like him in all the earth, and it is this uniqueness that distinguishes him from everything else, be it creation or gods of the earth. This is why the Bible proclaims his uniqueness so repeatedly,

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you-- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11)

Here the author of Exodus lists three characteristics of God's uniqueness. He is unique in holiness, in glory, and in wonders. In these areas, he is unique that there is no one like him. There is no creation or idol to compete with the Holy One of Israel in holiness, glory, and wonders.

The concept of God's uniqueness became a familiar creed in Israel history and historiography since the time of the exodus. Moses taught the Israelite the truth that their God was a *unique* one. There was no one among the gods of the other nations that was as unique as the Hebrew God. This concept of God's uniqueness also underlies the *shema* tradition in Deut 6:4, where Moses taught the Israelites to heed to this unique God that had redeemed them from Pharaoh's yoke of slavery. Moses said, "Hear O Israel the LORD our God, the LORD is one." While this verse is traditionally understood to emphasize Yahweh's monotheism, it should also be remembered that the Hebrew word *dx'(a*, commonly used and understood by many as a cardinal

number, also means *unique*, in the sense of being alone in his class. Alternatively, therefore, the *shema* emphasizes the uniqueness of the God of Israel. The God of Israel was *unique* in that he was transcendentally removed from his creation, or the common and the profane. There was no one among his creation or among the gods of other nations as transcendent as was the God of Israel. Thus, Israel is commanded to confess the *uniqueness* of the God of Israel among all the gods of the earth. That is, *this God alone is holy*—unique— in the sense that none of the gods of the earth was as unique as the God of Israel was in nature. The author of Revelation speaks to the same effect when he extols God in these words, “you alone are holy” (Rev 15:4), on which Revelation 4:8 expands in terms of God’s eternal being: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.” Brunner put it well,

Holiness is not a quality which God possesses in common with other beings; on the contrary, it is that which distinguishes Him clearly and absolutely from everything else. To be holy is the distinguishing mark peculiar to God alone: it is that which sets the Being of God apart from all other forms of being.<sup>3</sup>

This means none of the nature-gods of the other nations, who were imagined forces of nature, is that eternally unique, *who once was, is and is to come*. All the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Babylonian, and African gods that once became famous and widely worshipped have disappeared from their temples. But the *Unique One of Israel* continues to exercise his omnipresence in worship everywhere around the world, even in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Babylon, and Africa where he was once not and object of worshipped. Uniquely, he has taken over these places where once belonged to foreign, ancient gods.

Hence, holiness in this *unique* sense only belongs to God. No one else is holy. This idea of God’s unique separation of his nature from creation is clearly expressed in Hosea 11:9, where God’s holiness is distinguished from being human:

I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.

Therefore, we may argue that God’s holiness comprises his unique nature, which separate him from everything else on earth.

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<sup>3</sup> Brunner, Christian Doctrine of God, 158

Another aspect of God's uniqueness is the concept of God's glory. In the Bible, God's glory and holiness are inseparable. The concepts are so intimately connected that to deform one is to hurt the other. God's desire is to see that his name is acknowledged in all the earth and that his glory fills the earth. For example, in Ps 72:19, the psalmist expresses that divine desire in these words, "Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen." Elsewhere, God desires that the whole earth be filled with his knowledge of his glory. In Habakkuk 2:14, for example, we read, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (see also Isa 11:9).

So the glory of God and the holy name of God are inseparable, as they presuppose each other. These characteristics put him above everything else. No creature is equal God. As Brunner once put it,

Man is not equal to God; he is indeed a creature, not the Creator; he is a dependent, not an independent personality. Therefore, one cannot stand on a level with God and have fellowship with Him as if He were just one of ourselves [us].<sup>4</sup>

As unique as God is, he cannot share his glory with idols. In Isaiah 42:8, God emphatically argues in these lines.

I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.

See also Isaiah 48:11

For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed?  
I will not yield my glory to another

So, indeed, God's glory and holiness presuppose each other as aspects of the same unique nature of God. Brunner and Boice<sup>5</sup> understand this category of God's glory in the sense of divine jealousy. They say, God is jealous of his glory that he cannot share it with another creature.

Their point is well taken, and what this means is that what God hates most is idolatry. He will not let another being, be it heavenly or

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<sup>4</sup> See Christian Doctrine of God, 162-63.

<sup>5</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1986), 127.

earthly, usurp his unique position in the world. To do so is to deform God's unique nature, and to downplay his transcendence over all creation and nature-gods. This is why he desires that the earth be filled with his knowledge and glory, because the *uniqueness* of God is expressed through his glory and holiness; in other words, glory and holiness are manifestations of God's uniqueness; so to temper with his uniqueness, either through personal imitation or graven images, is essentially to temper with the root of God's glory and holiness. God's glory can *only* be shared derivatively not forcefully. As Brunner remarks,

Holiness is that *majestas* which belongs to God alone, which can be ascribed to another only in so far as God Himself 'hallows' it, or them, since He makes them vessels and instruments of His will.... Thus the Divine holiness is inseparably connected with that character of absolute intolerance which distinguishes the Biblical idea of God, and differentiates it from all other ideas of God. God will not tolerate the recognitions of any other; He opposes those who do not admit His uniqueness, the fact that He alone is the True God.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, we can so far conclude that the Holy One of Israel signifies the *Unique One* of Israel. This Unique One of Israel, however, became incarnate through the Holy One of God whose theology is clearly taught in the New Testament. The question is whether the Holy One of God was as unique in holiness as the Holy One of Israel was. So, our next discussion will concern this particular question.

### **B. The Holy One of God**

In what sense is Jesus Christ Holy? The holiness of Jesus Christ is set forth from the beginning of his life. The prophecy regarding his birth concerned the birth of a holy person. To ease Mary's angst in Luke 1:34, the angel Gabriel stated the following words in Luke 1:35, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.' If this were the only text available on the holiness of Jesus Christ, how would we (the church) understand Jesus' holiness? Does this text provide any clues to help the reader construct any theology on Jesus' holiness? Undoubtedly, the text bears some fundamental truths, which if read together correctly will help the reader to know the nature of Jesus' holiness.

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<sup>6</sup> Brunner, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 158, 160.

First, the involvement of the Holy Spirit and of God the Father is clearly stated. The Holy Spirit comes to the front as the cause for Mary's pregnancy. The birth of Jesus will not involve human insemination. It will all come from the Holy Spirit of God. Secondly, the power of God is directly involved, as an agent for overshadowing Mary. Whether this power of the Most High could read as synonymous with the Holy Spirit remains an open discussion. However, the angel makes his point clear that both the Holy Spirit and God the Father are fully involved in the birth of Jesus' Christ. Third, the result of these divine involvements also is made clear. That is, the one to be born will be holy and called the Son of God. It is this result that becomes the focal point of our discussion. Now, is to be holy and to be the Son of God synonymous or different? In other words, is Gabriel using analogical, equivocal, or univocal language to describe the nature of Jesus Christ? It seems biblically logical that to be holy and to be the Son of God means the same. In that sense, Gabriel uses a univocal language to show the unique nature of Jesus Christ. He who is holy is the Son of God. So, the holiness of Jesus Christ is determined by his being the Son of God. If he ceases to be the Son of God, his holiness disappears naturally, and it is his sonship to the Father that stamps his uniqueness among all the creation of God.

The author to the Hebrews knew this full well. Arguing for the uniqueness of Jesus Christ among all the creation of God, both in heaven and on earth, he emphasized that Jesus was superior to the heavenly angels (1:5-2:18), to Moses (3:1-4:13), to Aaron and his entire priestly and sacrificial system (4:14-7:28). Additionally, other New Testament writers show that Jesus had unique authority over the powers of darkness. For example, both Mark (1:24) and Luke (4:34) tell a story about a demon crying out in despair after encountering Jesus' presence in the temple, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

What was it that terrified this demon? It was not just a presence of another human being in the temple. The presence of other Jewish religious dignitaries was always in the temple; yet, the demon was comfortable with them. The presence of Jesus, however, made it very uncomfortable for the demon to continue in the temple. Jesus' presence was threatening to the demon because it knew that it was the

presence of the Holy Son of God, who was unique among all attendees of the Jewish worship.

Understood this way, one gets the sense that Jesus' holiness was not comprised of doing right and wrong, but of his unique nature, as the Son of God. Indeed, we read that due to his human nature, he was tempted just like us, but without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Yet, his holiness was not based on his keeping the Ten Commandments correctly and faithfully. Rather, it was based on his unique oneness or essence with the Father (John 10:30). Some Jews, however, tried to understand Jesus' holiness in terms of his observance of some religious rules and regulations. Matthews' stories of Jesus letting his disciples pick some heads of grains and his healing of a man with a shriveled hand speak to the effect of this mentality (see Matt 12:1-14). The Pharisaic disbelief in the unique nature of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, drove them to think of his holiness in the categories of doing right and wrong. For the Jews, picking grains or healing on the Sabbath was unlawful (12:2); so, it was taken for granted that the same law governed Jesus' holiness. So, their understanding was that if Jesus had, indeed, come from God, he would have kept that law blamelessly, otherwise his holiness would be question.

Jesus' response, however, shocked them: "the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath" (12:8). Jesus' response was tantamount to this significance: I am not in the same class with you. You are humans, and that is all. As for me, however, I am in the same class with the Father. That is, in addition to being human, I am the Holy One of God. Specifically, I am unique because, like Father like Son, I share the same essence with the Father, who gave you the Sabbath commandment—and that is my holiness. Jesus' holiness did not spring from his keeping of the law. That is a responsibility of fallen humanity. Conversely, the holiness of Jesus sprang from his Sonship to the Father, a unique divine relationship that he shared with no one else, and that self-separation from the common or profane was his holiness.

### **C. The Holy Spirit of God**

What makes the Holy Spirit holy? And in what sense the Holy Spirit is holy? What can be said of the Holy one of God, *mutatis mutandis*, can be said of the Holy Spirit of God. The holiness of the Holy Spirit originates from his divine origin. He originates from the

Holy One of Israel. This possessive case does not signify ownership, but origin. He originates from the same divine nature of the Holy One of God.

The Holy of God, by his divine sonship from the Father, is separate from the common or profane, which makes him unique among all the creation of God. Likewise, the Holy Spirit of God, by his divine origin from the Holy One of Israel, is separate from the common or profane, which makes him unique among all the creation of God.

Therefore, biblically, it can be safely argued that the Holy Spirit is God, especially because God is Spirit (John 4:24).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, various passages referring to God also make the same reference to the Holy Spirit. For example, in Acts to lie to God (5:4) is to lie to the Spirit of God (5:9). Hence, in Peter's mind lying to God and lying to the Spirit of God was synonymous. Likewise, in 1 Cor 3:16-17, to be God's temple and to be indwelt by God's Spirit are used interchangeably. During the baptism of Jesus Christ, God the Father and the Holy Spirit are linked together. After his baptism, Jesus saw the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus and a voice from the Father saying, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:16-17). Finally, the Holy Spirit like God is eternal (Hebrews 9:14) and God alone is eternal (Heb 1:10-12). Finally, the Holy Spirit bears the same weight as God the Father and God the Son in God's plan of redemption for the world (see his place in the Great Commission, Matt 28:19).

Hence, the divinity of the Holy Spirit functions at least in three ways, which help us understand and appreciate his holiness. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of *creation*, *incarnation* and *regeneration*.

First, as a Spirit of *creation*, the Holy Spirit was an agent of God's manifold works of creation. This concept develops mainly from Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4, and Psalm 104:30. Beginning with Job 33:4, we hear Job testifying to the fact that it was the Spirit of God (ynIt.f\_[ ' laeî-x:Wr)) who made him and that the breath of the Almighty (yD:äv; tm;Pv.nI) gives him life, literally animates him.

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<sup>7</sup> Translations differ on whether spirit should be capitalized to signify "Holy Spirit" (e.g., NKJ and NLT) or use low case to signify substance (e.g., NIV, NJB, RSV). But compare Paul understanding in of this verse in Philp. 3:3. He indicates that those who have the Spirit of God are the one who worship by the Spirit of God.

The concept of the Spirit of God involved in creation finds more supporting evidence from Psalm 104:30. Here, the psalmist says, “When you send your Spirit (!Wa+rEB'yI ^x]Wrâ xL;äv;T.), they<sup>8</sup> are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (hm'(d"a] ynEâP. vDE<sup>a</sup>x;t.W÷). It might help to understand that Psalm 104 is an innerbiblical interpretation of the creation narrative in Genesis 1, obviously with some peculiar interests of the author. For example, the author tells about God’s work in the celestial realm (vv. 2-4), how God made the earth realm secure (vv. 5-9), how the earth works as a flourishing garden of life (vv. 10-18), the cycles of life on the earth (vv. 19-23), and finally how the entire creation depends of God for its continued survival (vv. 24-30).

The last section, and especially v. 30, is extremely significant to our discussion, because Verse 30 coupled with v. 29 shows that it is the Spirit of God who determines the life of God’s creation. If God withdraws his Spirit from his creation everything dies, but when he sends it back they are animated; simultaneously, the face of the earth is renewed. This idea of renewal aligns with Job’s idea of being revived (33:4). The use of tm;Pv.nI in Job 33:4 (cf. Gen 1:2:7) and vDE<sup>a</sup>x;t. in Psalm 104:30 carry the same sense, as both speak to the effect of creation. One gives life to mankind (Job 33:4) while the other gives life to the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30).

Hence the effect of Psalm 104:30 is that the Spirit of God created the different kinds of celestial bodies and earthly species, which renewed the face of the earth. On the other hand, Job shows that Spirit of God made mankind, Job in this case, and in so doing, man is animated (cf. Gen 2:7). So *the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of creation*.

Secondly, as a Spirit of *incarnation*, the Holy Spirit was the divine agent of Jesus Christ’s conception. The manifold involvement of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus is traceable throughout Jesus’ life and ministry on earth. This means the Holy Spirit was not God’s one-time agent to make Jesus’ birth possible, but a permanent agent in life of Jesus’ messianic ministry. For example, he participated in

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<sup>8</sup> This pronoun refers to all the different created things already listed in vv. 5-29.

Jesus' birth, baptism, sacrificial death (Heb 9:14)<sup>9</sup> and resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4; 8:11).

According to Luke 1:35, it was the Holy Spirit whom God sent to impregnate Mary.

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

As such, because the agent was holy, the babe would also be holy. In some cases, the Holy Spirit is also known as the Spirit of Christ. For examples, Galatians 4:6 says, "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." In effect, then, the Spirit of God is simultaneously the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, as a Spirit of *regeneration*, the Holy Spirit is the *sole* agent of one's conversion from idolatry to the Christiana faith. In this ministry, he is the cause of one's spiritual rebirth (John 3:5-8). This expanded in Paul's letter to Titus (3:5), where he declares, God our father saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Additionally, the same Spirit will raise the saint (Rom 8:11) as he raised Christ.

These pneumatological clues shed great light on Jesus' stern warning against blaspheming the Holy Spirit. In Matt 12:31-32, Jesus said,

And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Taken in its context, Jesus shows how impossible repentance and forgiveness is without the work of the Holy Spirit. The reason for this impracticality can also be found in the context itself. Jesus had just finished healing a demon possessed man, who had been blind and mute (12:22). The eye witnesses were astonished, "Could this be the

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<sup>9</sup> "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God."

Son of David?” (12:23). Upon hearing what Jesus had done, however, the Pharisees reaction was utterly different, ‘It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.’

A close look reveals that the Pharisees’ reaction to Jesus exorcism was a blasphemy for one major reason; *they attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to demons*. Jesus’ warning indicates that his exorcism was done by the power of the Holy Spirit, and so to ascribe that work to demons was defiantly to dethrone the Holy Spirit from his unique level to the level of the profane or the unholy. Demons are in no way at the level of the Holy Spirit, because, as we have shown above, the Holy Spirit is God, who creates, incarnates, and regenerates—works that can only be done by God, through God, and for God. Therefore, the Pharisees snubbed the *unique nature* of the Holy Spirit, which shares *only* with the Holy One of Israel and the Holy One of God. None of these is at the level of demons, in any way, and so is the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, to answer our introductory questions to this discuss of the Holy Spirit, “What makes the Holy Spirit holy?” and in what sense the Holy Spirit is holy?”, we can say, the Holy Spirit is holy because of the same divine nature he shares *only* with the Holy One of Israel and the Holy One of God. Furthermore, he is holy in the same sense of the Holy One of Israel and the Holy One of God in that his holiness signifies his unique separation from the common or profane, such as demons or anything else that is not divine on earth or in heaven.

## **II. Sanctification Is a Presence of the Holy One among the Saints**

If the root is holy, so are the branches —Romans 11:16.

Our foregoing discussion has evolved around the holiness of God. This discussion was a necessary prerequisite for the discussion of sanctification, especially as sanctification operates within the locale of God’s holiness. So, as we discuss the doctrine of sanctification, we must ask one fundamentally leading question: how does our preceding argument for God’s holiness help us understand and construct a non-legalistic doctrine of sanctification? To this question we now turn. If the doctrine has to be non-legalistic, then such doctrine must emerge naturally from the holiness of God himself, and not from some religious acts of the saints. This assumes that saints do not make themselves; rather, God makes them holy through his holiness. We

will respond to this question by looking at three biblical motifs that seem to support this presupposition.

**A. I am the LORD who Makes you Holy**

Sanctification begins with God’s own work in the lives of the saints. But how does this happen? Methodologically, God sanctifies through the indwelling *presence* of his holiness in the midst of his people. To understand this sanctifying *presence*, we must understand the significance of the tabernacle in the midst of the people of Israel. The tabernacle was a sure sign that the Holy One of Israel was living among his people. The effect of that indwelling *presence* of the Holy One of Israel was the sanctification of the Israelite community. Israel was a sanctified nation not because of the performance of her own religious rituals or merits, but rather because of the sanctifying *presence* of the Holy One of Israel in their community. This means, taking the tabernacle away from the community of Israel would have been an outright indication that Israel had become another pagan nation, just like the Philistines or Egyptians. What made the Philistines and Egyptians pagan was not a lack of gods, since they had multiple deities; rather, unlike the Israelites, they did not have the *only* unique God, as their God. They worshiped idols and images that had emerged from nature, which the Holy One of Israel had created for his glory.

For example, in Amos 5:8, God reminds the Israelites that he had made Pleiades and Orion, celestial bodies that Israel, like pagan nations, had made her objects of worship.

So, as long as the presence of the Holy One of Israel continued in the midst of the Israelites, they were sanctified. This reminds us of the name *Immanuel* (i.e., God with us) in Isaiah 7:14. Understandably, this name is mostly reserved for the Messiah; so we hardly consider or refer to the Holy One of Israel as Immanuel. However, the God of Israel was the people’s Immanuel. As Immanuel, he fulfilled many other responsibilities for the nation, like providing food, security, etc. Beyond these needs, however, his presence in the tabernacle sanctified the nation. That is, his presence was undeniable stamp that Israel was a unique nation owned by a unique God. As God himself once said to the Israelites “You will be for me a kingdom of priest and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). What this means is that God’s presence will endure in the community of Israel, and as long as this continues,

Israel will continue as a unique nation; that is, it will remain a nation sanctified by a unique God.

This concept of divine ownership of Israel has tremendous implications. First, it signifies that Israel is accepted by God not because she is naturally holy, but because her obedience to the uniqueness of God counts heavily than her natural moral flaws. Secondly, it signifies that God is the only one to declare Israel either holy or unholy, because he is the only one who sets the standard for Israel's holiness. In God's eyes, no nation on earth was holy except Israel, because they had all failed to acknowledge the God of Israel as *Unique*, i.e., as separate from the *common* and the *profane*. Israel alone had taken that step of obedience. So, the only one to judge Israel either holy or unholy was the Holy One of Israel. He alone knew what it meant to be holy. Pagan nations and gods did not know what holiness, indeed, meant and entailed since neither the people of these nations nor their gods were unique in the sense of being separate from the common and the profane; in fact, *they were the common and the profane themselves*, since they were all from nature, which the Holy One of Israel had created. Hence, Immanuel did not just mean God with us, as if without any effect on the people; rather, it signified a sanctifying *presence* among the Israelites.

All the injunctions God gave to the Israelites evolved around this notion. For example, a divine motif like "I am the LORD, who makes you holy" is repeated several times in the OT (Exod 31:13; Leviticus 20:8; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:16, 32; Ezekiel 20:12). In all these texts, the significance of the sanctifying presence of the Holy One of Israel is undeniable. In Exodus 31:12-18, keeping the Sabbaths is presented to the Israelites as a sheer sign and condition that God had sanctified them, as a unique nation of God. In Leviticus 20:1-8, God bans Molech worship, including its practice of child sacrifice. Offering children to Molech, or rather worshiping Molech, defiled not only the Israelites, but also profaned the unique name of God. And the unique name of God is "I am the LORD." This is the name he declares to the Israelites in Amos 9:6, "He who builds his lofty palace in the heavens and sets its foundation on the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land-- the LORD is his name." It is a name of sovereignty, another language for being set apart from the common and profane. So, Molech worship was a way of profaning

this unique name of the sovereign God, putting him in the same class with natural deities.

To grantee the sanctifying presence of God in their midst, the Israelites were not to worship Molech, and if anyone did the rest of the community were responsible to put him to death as an acknowledgement that the Holy One of Israel was in their midst so that every profane must removed from the community. Note that in Leviticus 20:8, God does not threaten to leave the community of Israel; instead, he insists that the people must “keep his decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.” Likewise, giving instructions to priest in Leviticus 21:5-8, God insists, “They must be holy to their God and must not profane the name of their God,” either by shaving their heads, shaving the edges of their beards, cutting their bodies, marrying prostitutes, or marrying divorced women” (vv. 6-7). That would defile the name of their *unique* God (21:6). Rather, they should conduct their lives uniquely and be considered consecrated to serve a unique God, apart from the common and the profane. They could not be both *unique* and *common* or *profane*. Hence, their consecration became their sanctification, since they were in the presence of the Holy One of Israel daily, offering the food of their God (21:8). For this reason, a priest would only marry a virgin from his own people, to avoid defiling his offspring among his people (21:13-15).

#### **B. The Incarnate *Presence* Sanctified the Disciples**

Our investigation in Jesus Christ’s sanctification must begin with the incarnation as the *conditio sine quo non* on the subject. This is significant because the incarnation of Jesus Christ continues our sanctifying *presence* theory. The OT tabernacle was made out of animal skin and clothes and housed the presence of the sanctifying Holy One of Israel among the Israelite community. Contrary, the incarnation of Jesus Christ gave the animal skin tabernacle a metaphorical meaning. In the NT, Jesus is the tabernacle among his people. So, John 1:18 read, *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* But how does Jesus’ incarnation or tabernacle sanctify his disciples? Here will see that the incarnate Christ sanctified his disciples from guilt, from religious traditions, and for God’s mission in the world.

### 1. Sanctified from Guilt

One of the few examples that apply to this effect comes from Matt 12:1-14. Here, Jesus had a huge debate with the Pharisees. One day, in their traveling, Jesus and his disciples went through some grain fields on the Sabbath. Because Jesus' disciples were hungry, they started plucking heads of grain. This offended the Pharisees. So, they accused Jesus and his disciples of breaking the Sabbath commandment: "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath" (12:2). Jesus' response to the Pharisees was shocking and pregnant with significant implications apropos sanctification. He started by showing the Pharisees the rights OT priests had in the temple. He said,

Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Here, Jesus uses familiar examples to communicate some *internal* meanings of the Sabbath Commandment to the Pharisees. First, he reminds them the case of King David and his companions found in 1 Sam 21:1-9. Secondly, he educates the Pharisees on the fact that the priests break the Sabbath commandment every Sabbath and, yet they go on accused of breaking the Sabbath. If my disciples are accused of breaking the Sabbath by plucking heads of grains on the Sabbath, what about the priests who work in the temple every Sabbath and are considered innocent? What keeps the priests out of guilt? It is the temple. As long as they work in the temple, no matter on what day, they are innocent. So, in a sense, the temple sanctifies them, because it is greater than the Sabbath. Well, "I tell you that one greater than the temple is here" (12:6). Jesus' authoritative *presence* is greater than the presence of the temple, which sanctifies the priests from guilty of breaking the law of the Sabbath.

The emphasis of Jesus' argument amounts to one fact: the presence of Jesus Christ among his disciples protected them from

being guilty of breaking the Sabbath law because his authority was superior to that of the OT priests and of the temple. So, the presence of the Holy One of God amongst his disciples sanctified them from guilt. In his superb commentary on Matthew, D. A. Carson remarks cogently about Jesus' argument,

Jesus' argument ... provides an instance from the law itself in which the Sabbath restrictions were superseded by the priests because their cultic responsibilities took precedence. The temple, as it were, was greater than the Sabbath. But now, Jesus claims, 'something' greater than the temple is here. And that, too, takes precedence over the Sabbath. This solution is entirely consistent with what we have perceived to be Jesus' attitude to the law in this gospel. The law points to him and finds its fulfillment in him (see on 5:17-48). Not only, then, have the Pharisees mishandled the Law by their Halakah (vv. 3-4), but they have failed to perceive who Jesus is. The authority of temple laws shielded the priests from guilty; the authority of Jesus shields his disciples from guilt. It is not a matter of comparing Jesus' action with the action of the priests, nor is it likely that Jesus is suggesting that all his disciples are priests. 'Rather, it is a question of contrasting ... His authority with the authority of priests'<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Sanctified from Religious Traditions

Matthew (9:14-17) records an appointed question from John the Baptist's disciples to Jesus. The question concerns fasting, and is familiar to Mark (cf. 2:18-22) and Luke as well (Luke 5:33-39). Fasting seems to have been a well known religious tradition practiced by the Pharisees<sup>11</sup> and John's followers. In the OT fasting was only a requirement on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32), but as centuries went by, new traditions grew around it giving it a legalistic form of practice. The question raised by John's disciples, then, is not just a question of the Day of Atonement requirement, but a legalistic question. And it went, 'How is it that we and the Pharisees

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<sup>10</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Mathew Chapters 1-12*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 280

<sup>11</sup> Mark 2:18 refers specifically to "the disciples of the Pharisees" who according to Michael J. Wilkins, were "most likely those in training to become full initiates to their brotherhood. They have been immersed in the oral law and rigorous practice of their traditions." See Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 368

fast, but your disciples do not fast?’ The question indicates that “fasting” was a common religious tradition, as it was practiced by two distinct religious groups. Often religious traditions hatch legalism.

Certainly, Jesus’ response was disturbing to legalistic religious groups simultaneously sanctifying to his disciples. In Matt 12:1-14, Jesus’ disciples were accused of breaking the Sabbath law. His response was “I am the Lord of the Sabbath.” Here Jesus’ disciples are accused of not fasting. In his response to this accusation, Jesus said, he was the “bridegroom” while his disciples were his “guests,” literally his “sons.” But how does the “bridegroom” sanctify his “guests” or “sons”? Inherent in Jesus’ response is the *truth* that the presence of the bridegroom sanctifies his guests. Providing the bridegroom remains with his disciples, fasting is inappropriate tradition. It will only be necessary in his absence.

In this pericope, Jesus emphasizes the joy the disciples experienced with him than the old religious traditions of the Pharisees and of John’s disciples. Jesus shows that his coming had ushered in a new epoch, one that superseded the previous age characterized by old religious traditions. Jesus props his metaphor of the “bridegroom” with two commonsense parables. First, he argues, a new patch and an old garment do not amalgamate, because naturally the newer would destroy the older. Secondly, old wineskins cannot contain new wine, because naturally the new wine would destroy the old wineskin, causing the wine to flow out.

The effect of these two examples lies in the fact that Jesus and his disciples belonged to a new age, one that could not be patched on an old cloth or tradition, carried out through legalism, nor be contained in old religious containers. Indeed, Jesus proves that he and his disciples were *set apart* for a special age and purposes.

### **3. Sanctified for God’s Mission in the World**

Jesus, however, did not only sanctify his disciples from guilt and legalistic traditions; he also sanctified them for God’s mission in the world. In John 17, Jesus uttered words that are too important to ignore apropos sanctification. In this chapter, he shows that sanctification and faith in Jesus Christ are always together. For example, in verse 8 Jesus emphasizes the fact that his disciples had believed that Jesus had come from the Father, something to which most Jews did not commit their minds. Then in v. 15, he asks his Father, “My prayer is

not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.” Jesus words to his Father here show the nature sanctification he provided to his disciples. According to Jesus words, his disciples were sanctified through their faith in him. As long as they remained in the Messianic faith, they were sanctified.

Then in vv. 17, 19, he continues his prayer to his Father, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.... For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” Note that in v. 15, he asks his Father to protect his disciples from the “evil one.” This “evil one” is the archenemy of Christ and of those he sanctifies. If the disciples change their allegiance to this enemy, then v. 8 loses its significance, as they become part of the profane, rather than being set apart of the Holy One of God.

Let us look at these verses more closely. To show that the disciples were safe, Jesus Christ sets his sanctification unshakable ground for the sanctification of his disciples. So, he said, “For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” But what type of sanctification is Jesus asking his Father to perform on the disciples (v. 17)? And in what sense is Jesus sanctifying himself for his disciples (v. 19)?

First, Jesus asks his Father to sanctify the disciples by the *truth*. In this gospel, *truth* is a word of great significance. It is a revelatory word, intimately connected with the doctrine of *incarnation*. In fact, Jesus himself clarifies further as to what he means by truth. In the same verse, Jesus says, “your word is truth.” So, sanctifying them by the truth and sanctifying them by God’s word becomes synonymous. If so, then, the question is what is the word of God to which Jesus refers in this context? The truth, which is the word of God, finds full expression in vv. 6-8. Here, Jesus tells his Father:

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me come from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. *They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.*

The command of these verses lies in the nature of Jesus Christ. According to these words, the truth of God is that *Jesus Christ is the*

*Son of God*. This is the truth or the Word in which everyone must believe. Most Jews failed to believe this truth, but here Jesus reports to his Father that his disciples, who were also Jews, had come to know with certainty that Jesus had come from the Father, and that the Father had sent him for a special mission in the world. So, the effect of Jesus' prayer that his Father sanctifies the disciples with the truth is that God will set them apart for a special mission in the world. In one sense, then, sanctifying them by the truth means to mark or set them apart as people of God; in another sense, sanctifying them by the truth means consecrating them apart for the spread of that *truth* in the world. So, as Jesus was sanctified and sent into the world, he too, sends them in the world. In v. 18, Jesus said, "As you sent me in the world, so I have sent them in the world." So, being sanctified by the truth signifies being set apart for God's mission in the world to tell the world that Jesus is the Son of God. Carson observes, "In John's Gospel, such sanctification is always for mission."<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, Jesus sanctifies himself, so that the disciples can be truly sanctified. The text remains silent on this one; here, however, it seems that Jesus refers to his own death. Jesus sets himself apart for the redemptive purposes of God to be accomplished through his atoning death, which will truly sanctify his disciples. In this sense, the concept of sanctification takes on a different nuance of the death rather than mission. Hence, Jesus' self *sanctification* becomes synonymous with being set apart for the sacrificial death of an OT animal (Deut 15:19-21). Just as an OT animal was set apart to the LORD for the forgiveness of sin of Israel, Jesus set himself apart to God for the forgiveness of the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29). In this sense, both an OT animal and Jesus Christ were sanctified for the sacrificial purposes of God.

Now through his self-sanctification, the disciples would become truly sanctified. How would this happen? One possible response to this question lies in the salvation of Jesus' disciples. Jesus' death on the cross would sanctify them salvation, resulting in service.

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<sup>12</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 566.

## B. The Holy Spirit of God Sanctifies the Christian Tabernacle

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. —1 Cor 3:16-17

The Holy One of Israel as *Immanuel* and the Holy One of God as *Immanuel* culminates in the church as the indwelling Spirit of God among the New Testament saints. The image of the tabernacle in the OT, which found its true expression in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, now its meaning is extended to the New Testament saint. Once God lived in the tabernacle to sanctify the Israelites, then He became flesh in Jesus Christ (cf. John 2:18-22) to sanctify his disciples; now he lives and expresses himself in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to sanctify the church. The presence of the Holy One of Israel that once sanctified the nation of Israel and the presence of the Holy One of God that sanctified his disciples is the presence of the Holy Spirit that sanctifies the church of Christ.

Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (cf. 1 Cor 6:19-20). In these verses, Paul reminds the Corinthians, who seem to be ignorant of the sacredness of their bodies in relation to the presence of the Holy Spirit, two theological points.

First, he reminds them that they are the temple of God. This is so because God lives in them through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, he reminds them that “God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” The verse seems to indicate that the saints in Corinth were sacred both individually and corporately. But what makes this temple sacred, is it the absence of sin in and among them or is it the presence of the Holy Spirit in them and among them? Paul's statement seems to suggest the latter than the former. These Corinthian saints were sacred temples not because an absence of sin in them and among them, but because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in them and among them.

As a matter of fact, it is sin that pushes Paul to remind them who they are. For example, an individual in the Corinthian church is entangled in sexual immorality, “of the kind that does not occur even among pagans” (1 Cor 5:1). Corporately, the church is sunk in divisions, lawsuits among themselves, impropriety at the Lord's Supper, mishandling of spiritual gifts, and erroneous ideas regarding the resurrection of the dead. How can a church like this be sacred?

Believe it or not Paul tells them, “God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” Paul sees it sacred not because the church is individually and corporately sacred but because the Holy Spirit is in the church, both individually and corporately. It is the *presence* of the Holy Spirit, and not the *absence* of sin the saints, that makes the church sacred. If the Holy Spirit would abandon the individual saints or the church, every so called pious would be profane.

The fact that the Holy Spirit has remained in the individual saints and in the corporate church that means his indwelling presence in the saints does not depend on the absence of sin in the individual or church. If that were the case, he would have left few minutes after he came from the Father. But the fact that he is still in the saints, regardless of their sinfulness, that means it is his presence that sanctifies the saints and not otherwise.

If this reasoning is correct, then it provides the context within which we can understand other texts that speak about the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the individual saints and in the church in general. For example New Testament authors use particular metaphors to describe the status and work of the Holy Spirit in the saint.

First, John uses metaphors of *baptism* and *being born* again to describe the status of the one who believes in Jesus Christ. According to John the Baptist, Jesus baptized individuals with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33; see also Acts 1:5) while in John 3:5, Jesus told Nicodemus, “no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” Exegetically, therefore, we may suggest that both metaphors refer to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the one baptized by faith in Jesus Christ and the one born again by faith in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, analogous to *baptism* and *being born* again is Paul’s concept of Christian *sonship*. According to Romans 8 verses 9 and 16, it is only those who are indwelt by the Spirit who are the children of God, or those who *cry Abba* Father. Again this language of sonship is implicitly loaded with nuance of sanctification in that those born of the Spirit are *set apart* for God’s *present* and *future* glory (cf. Romans 8:17). So, baptism and sonship are not just metaphors for faith, but also for being *set apart* for God’s kingdom. And this is accomplished

through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the individual and corporate saints.

Thirdly, John and Paul spoke of the Spirit giving life to individuals. In John 6:63, Jesus told the multitude who went around looking for him because the day before he had given them plenty of food. In response, Jesus told them that instead of working so hard for food that temporary food, they should eat his flesh and live forever (6:25-59). On hearing this, many deserted him (6:60-61), and being aware of their mindset, he said, “The Spirit gives life, but the flesh counts nothing” (6:63). Similarly, in 2 Cor 3:6, Paul made the same remarks to the Corinthians, “... for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.” There seems to be a good theological connection between life from the Spirit and the sanctification of the Spirit. Through close investigation, we find this connection lying in the Holy Spirit’s purpose to please God. According to Paul, giving life to mortal bodies presupposes giving them a new reason or purpose for living. In Romans 8:1-4, Paul the “Spirit of life” teaches the revived person to live “not according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit” (vv. 2, 4). Note the distinction made here between the “sinful nature” and the “Spirit of life.” In Paul’s teaching, the former is “hostile to God” (8:7; cf. James 4:4) while the latter is friendly with God (8:4). So, if the of the Spirit gives one a new direction in life, seeking to please God, then this means such a person is set apart to serve the will of God, as opposed to the one led by the sinful nature which “does not submit to God’s law nor can it do so [because] Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God” (8:8). In short, the life of the Spirit sanctifies one to serve the interests of the Spirit and not of the sinful nature. This concept continues in the next section to which we now turn.

### **III. The Anatomy of Christian Sanctification**

Our preceding discussion has largely emphasized the Holy One of Israel, the Holy One of God, and the Holy Spirit of God as the sole players for the sanctification of saints. In all this the role of the saints has remained in the backgrounds. But is there any role that a saint plays, which has been minimized in this discussion of sanctification that needs to be emphatically highlighted in our forthcoming discussion? This question is too significant to overlook. Indeed, as we have accentuated so far, saints are not intrinsically sanctified apart

from God's holy presence among them. However, in no way does this mean that a saint has no role to play in the process of his own sanctification. A saint plays a significant role in the process *only* that the role is contingent to God's role. The role of the saint is to acknowledge God's *uniqueness* among the common and the profane. In the process of sanctification, a saint only needs to live in a lifestyle that acknowledges the *unique presence* of God in one's life or community. That acknowledgment then guards him to worship the living God alone, *without syncretism or idolatry*.

This was the message God gave to the nation of Israel in Commandment number one and two of the Decalogue (Exod 20:1-6). Now, this obedience was expressed in at least two ways, in a form of *material sacrifices* and a *broken and contrite spirit*. Yet, all of them depended on one's *obedience* to the living God, and that *obedience* accorded one great favor from God, who was and remains the bona fide quintessence of holiness.

#### **A. Material Sacrifices and the Sanctification of Saints**

Material sacrifices open the earliest cases of religion and murder in the fourth chapter of Genesis. Here, Adam's sons, Cain and Abel are reportedly professional and religious individuals. Professionally, Cain was an agriculturalist while Abel was a herdsman while religiously their worship comprised sacrificing to their God, each according to his own professional yields (Gen 4:2-7). Evidently this phenomena show that sacrificing to God is as old as religion itself. With the exception of the periods before the Fall and shortly after the Fall and expelled from the Garden, religion and sacrifice are inseparable. Apart from Cain and Abel, we read of Noah, Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and eventually the entire nation of Israel sacrificing to Yahweh, as their mode of worship and sanctification. So, since the beginning of the post-Fall world sacrificing to God became a way of worship, but more importantly a mode of sanctification.

Our discussion in this section majors on some of the implications of sacrificing to God as modes of sanctification. Hence, we will not heavily major on the types and details of every sacrifice. So our major focus here is twofold. First, we intend to investigate the implications of sacrificing to God as a way of sanctification. Second, we intend to show the most important message behind animal sacrifices, particularly the *sin and guilt offerings*.

First, we propose that the main implication of the sin and reparation offerings was to sanctify human sinfulness. For example, in Leviticus 5:15, “one was obligated to offer an guilt offering after “a violation and sins unintentionally in regard to any of the LORD’S holy things....” This was an instance of mishandling of holy things, as Everbeck puts it, by “treating them as if they were common rather than holy [separate from the common].”<sup>13</sup> In so doing, the guilty was *sanctified*, that is, considered blameless before God. Hence, the sin and quilt offerings were given for the sanctification of the saints and was the primary offering in the sanctuary system of ancient Israel. Everbeck gives a good summary of the sin offerings found in Leviticus 16:29-34.

Leviticus 16:29-34 is a summary of the intended effect of the three sin offerings on the Day of Atonement: the scapegoat sin offering cleansed the *people* [saints] from their sins (vv. 29-31), and the slaughtered sin offerings for the priests and the people cleansed the *tabernacle* from impurity of their sins (vv. 32-33).

The unavoidable implication of this sacrificial obligation in Leviticus is that the OT saints were still perfect; Regardless of their covenant of redemption with Yahweh, OT saints would still mix the common and the holy in their handling of things set apart only for God’s use. Crossing such a boundary would be an profanity and would render them guilt only to be sanctified before God through sin and guilt offerings.

Secondly, sin and guilt offerings foretold the coming of the perfect atonement of sin and guilt by Jesus Christ. That the two sacrificial systems were not on equal footing is broadly stated in the book of Hebrews, which leads us to another crucial point in this study—the *sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit*.

### **B. A Broken and Contrite Spirit and the Sanctification of Saints**

Hebrews 9:1-10:15 contrasts the two sacrificial systems and the differences hinge on the following points.

1. The OT sacrifices were “external regulations” and inept to “clear (NIV) the conscience of the worshiper” (Heb 9:8-9b). The Greek word rendered “clear” here is *teleiw/sai*, which

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Everbeck, “Offerings and Sacrifices,” in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1996), 577

literally means “to fulfill or to make perfect.” The point made is that animal sacrifices could not *perfect* the “conscience” of the worshiper. This signifies that OT system of sin and guilt offerings were merely temporally designed only to help the worshiper “until the time of the new order” (Heb 9:12). So, “the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean” (Heb 9:13). They, indeed, sanctified the worshiper as God had intended it to be done, but only “outwardly” without *perfecting* the “conscience” of the worshiper.

2. The OT sacrifices were metaphors for a better sacrifice of a “broken and contrite spirit.” For example, God expressed his desire for such a sacrifice during King Saul’s disobedience. After his disobedience, God sent a stern message that would dethrone Saul. But Saul argued in 1 Sam 15:20-21,

‘But I have obeyed the LORD,’ Saul said. ‘I went and on the mission and destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.’

Saul’s argument, however, was not convincing to Samuel because he had missed the most important sacrifice that God desired. So Samuel responded in vv. 22-23,

‘Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in *obeying the voice of the LORD*? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.’

In this passage King Saul evidently anchored his defense on the *power* of animal sacrifice rather than on the *strength* of obedience, a synonym for “a broken and contrite spirit.” God rejected Saul’s defense, because it was unfounded, since animal sacrifices were not the foundation of sanctification. God desired for one’s obedience and not animal fat, because animal sacrifice drew its value from the worshiper’s *obedience* to God. Contrary to King Saul, King David had a different approach to his sin. After sinning, instead of rushing to God with animal sacrifices, the Bible does not say whether he sacrificed for his sin or not, he uttered these words, “The sacrifice of

God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite spirit, O God, you will not despise” (Ps 51:17). David knew God was not after animal fat, but human heart. Animal sacrifice was just an expression of a “broken and contrite spirit” and not vice versa. When unanchored on a “broken and contrite spirit,” animal sacrifice was considered a mere abomination to God. God speaks to this effect through Isaiah,

‘This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig’s blood. And whoever burns memorial incense, like one who worships an idol. They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations (Isa 66:2b-3).

With these strong statements gleaned from the OT we can safely argue that without obedience, i.e., a broken and contrite spirit, animal sacrifice becomes a mere fanatic commitment to religious legalism. A true sanctification, therefore, grounds itself in a “broken and contrite spirit,” one that constantly trembles wholeheartedly at the *unique presence* of the Holy One of Israel who lives among them, and not at the idolatry of nature.

### **C. Legalistic and Non-Legalistic Sanctification**

Amid all these preceding ideas, how does one structure a doctrine of non-legalistic sanctification? Several approaches to this question are at one’s disposal. Ours begins with the definitions of legalism before we attempt to construct a non-legalistic doctrine of sanctification. This is absolutely important because “legalism” is an elusive term; so, until we narrow down its meaning we cannot make any statement about its opposite denotation and doctrine.

#### **1. Legalistic Sanctification**

##### **Lexical Definitions**

*New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language.* Close attention to, and precise obedience to, the stated requirements of the law, without regard to their intention (i.e., attention to the letter rather than to the spirit of the law) // (*theol.*) the doctrine of strict adherence to the Law; a political and philosophical doctrine of China (4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cc. B.C.) supporting government based on fixed legislation.

*Oxford English Dictionary*: The principles of those who hold a theological position of adherence to the Law as opposed to the Gospel; the doctrine of Justification by Works, or teaching which savours of that doctrine.

Different people define “legalism” differently. The above lexical definitions witness to this fact. These two dictionaries present at least three different definitions of legalism, secular, religious, and political. For example, the *New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus* presents a general definition of legalism. It makes a distinction between one’s adherence to the *letter* rather than to the *spirit*. Conversely, the *Oxford English Dictionary* presents a religious definition by making a distinction between a religious law and gospel. Furthermore, the *New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus* presents an additional meaning of legalism, which is political. In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, China practiced a political and philosophical doctrine of legalism, which supported a government based on fixed legislation. So, there is legalism as seen from the discipline of law, the discipline of religion, and the discipline of politics.

This study focuses on legalism in the context of religion, particularly in the area of Christian sanctification or holiness. Religious legalism holds strictly the legal observance of God’s laws and commands. It is a practice of the *external* interpretation of God’s revelation rather than the *internal* interpretation of God revelation. While the external interpretation understands literally the cultural form of divine revelation, the internal interpretation considers seriously the divine intent underlying God’s revelation. For example, most OT laws were given in *external* or cultural *forms* of animal and grain offerings, but God’s internal *intent* for these laws was to teach the Israelites the subject of obedience. In fact, this has been God’s plan from the beginning of God’s creation of mankind.

When God commanded Adam to eat from the trees, and not to eat from the tree of knowing good and evil, his internal intention was to see Adam’s obedience. The external form of God’s measure was the forbidden tree. Adam’s failure to listen to God’s voice, then, signified disobedience to God’s voice (Gen 3:17). Hence, legalism is a mistaken interpretation of God’s revelation, anchoring one’s religious commitment at the external form of that revelation. Such misguided interpretation of God’s revelation misses the internal *intentions* of the

divine revelation. This could result as a failure to see beyond the external forms of culture in which God's revelation occurs or a failure to distinguish between cultural forms and the internal intentions of God's revelation.

Take for example the issue of Christian sanctification or holiness in Judaism. Most Jews understood sanctification in terms of sacrifices and good works. Providing they sacrificed to God or did some good for other people, in their religious mindset, the mission of holiness or sanctification was considered accomplished. What they did not know was that God looked beyond their sacrifices and good works. In fact, God considered their good works like "filthy rags" (Isa 64:6). Boice puts it well,

The Bible's teaching that by God's standards there is no good in people is true of Christians as much as of unbelievers. Human beings can do good things if we measure them by human standards.... But no one can do good when measured by God's standards, for all that we do is corrupted by our touch.<sup>14</sup>

As far as the Jews are concerned, this case not simply because they had committed horrendous abominations of idolatry before God, but even if they had surrendered to idolatry, sacrificing to God without a true devotion to his God's internal intents for them, would still be considered legalism, irreverence, and unsanctified. This is true because one form of legalism is the performance of religious duties without a real knowledge or commitment to the real intentions of God in one's life.

This reasoning does not render the law and regulations of God given in the Scriptures irreligious. Indeed, the Sabbath and circumcision laws were given to show the true way of holiness. The Jews, however, understood and made these laws their means of justification and sanctification. The Jewish ignorance was that the law could neither justify nor sanctify a sinner. The best help the law could offer one was to show his sinfulness, but it was inept to sanctify his sins. So, as Paul insisted, the only way of attaining sanctification or holiness was and still is through Jesus Christ and not through the fallen flesh (Rom 7:21-25).

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<sup>14</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1981), 344.

## 2. A Non-Legalistic Doctrine of Sanctification

A non-legalistic doctrine of sanctification must consider the necessary key polarities of holiness, namely, the *indwelling presence* of God in the saint and the *broken and contrite spirit* of a saint. One side alone is not enough for religiosity without a *broken and contrite spirit* is an appalling legalism.

It should be noted, however, that Christianity does not subscribe to antinomianism. Christian life operates under the governance of Christ's laws and rules. It is theologically naïve and erroneous then to think that a non-legalistic doctrine of sanctification has no code of conduct, or laws and rules of faith and practice. The Bible frequently commands believers to live in a certain way that pleases God. For example, a simple command, like, "love each other" is already a law to be obeyed (cf. John 14:21; 15:10; 1 Cor 7:19; 1 John 2:3, 4; 3:22, 24; 5:2-3; 2 John 6). Indeed, there is no Christian form of life that has no *code of conduct*, and any *code of conduct* comprises laws and bylaws of life. Likewise, sanctification has its *code of conduct* without which Christian life becomes chaotic, aimless, and irreligious. Conversely, Christian sanctification is a realm of Christian growth and failure. In Christian life, the two poles are unavoidably tied together. Sanctification is a realm of Christian growth in that through the indwelling Spirit of God the saint strives to obey the voice of God regularly. Yet, it is a realm of Christian failure in that the saint is still in a constant war with the sinful nature to which he sometimes succumbs. This is the great theological divide Paul tells us in the book of Romans. Paul speaks of the two laws, the law of the Spirit and the law of sin, and he exhorts the believers to submit to the law of the Spirit daily because sin is no longer the believer's master; rather, Christ is his master (Rom 7:7-25).

Furthermore, regardless of the Christian war and failure, God desires to see a "broken and contrite spirit." As God fulfills his part through his indwelling presence in the believer, the saint must as well play his part of *repentance*. This was a quality characterizing King David. David committed horrible sins in his life, such as adultery and murder. Yet, David had one great reputation before God; he was a man after God's own heart (cf. 1 Sam 13:14). He was a man with repentant heart (cf. Ps 32, 51). To cultivate a "broken and contrite spirit," however, one must dedicate himself to the power of the Holy

Spirit, to the study of the Word of God, to the fellowship of believers, and to the worship of the living God. The outcome of all this is the renewal of the mind, i.e., in the attitude of one's mind (cf. Rom 12:1-2; Eph 4:23; Col 3:1-4), into the image and likeness of Christ (cf. Col 3:10), by taking off the "old self" with its *dirty* practices (Col 3:5-11) and putting on the "new self" with its *clean* practices (cf. Col 3:12-17; Rom 12:9-21; Gal 3:27), which is created to be like God in true *righteousness and holiness*" (cf. Eph 3:24). In this process, the Holy Spirit remains the principal agent for change.

Therefore, contra the Wesleyan view of sanctification, God has neither *sinless* saints nor saints who *sin less*. According to the Wesleyan view, "Through Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit, the 'bent to sinning' could be cleansed from the repentant, believing heart, and a 'bent to loving obedience' could become the mainspring of one's life."<sup>15</sup> In the Wesleyan tradition, this doctrine is also known as "entire sanctification." According to the Wesleyan tradition, at the moment of conversion, one experiences an "entire sanctification from intentional sins," which offers the hope that he can then live a sinless life here on earth.

We do not subscribe to this view. The Bible indicates repeatedly that saints still struggle with sin. Even the apostle Paul wrestled with the war within between sinful nature and the Spirit of God (Rom 7). We believe the only saints God has are forgiven sinners. Hoekema calls them "justified sinners."<sup>16</sup> These are the ones called to heaven. They are forgiven through their faith in Christ. Consequently, they live their entire life here on earth through faith and repentance. These are the non-legalistic saints, and their doctrine of sanctification must mirror and consider the roles played between God and the saint:

How, then, should we describe the relationship between God's working and our working? Should we say, as some have done, that sanctification is a work of God in which believers cooperate? This way of stating the doctrine, however, wrongly implies that God and we each do part of the work of sanctification. According to John Murray, 'God's working in us is not because we work, nor our

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<sup>15</sup> Melvin E. Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective," in *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 21

<sup>16</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Reformed Perspective," in *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 61.

working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did his part and we did ours.... God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work.<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion

This study began by exploring the nature of sanctification and found that sanctification originates from the holiness of God. We saw that the Holy One of Israel, the Holy One of God, and the Holy Spirit of God are unique in nature. None among the gods of the earth is like this God in his three persons. He is not only the sole Creator of the heaven and the earth, and everything in them, but he is also the sanctifier of saints. The presence of the Holy One of Israel in the tabernacle set among the Israelites sanctified the entire community; that is, the entire nation of Israel was set apart as a kingdom of priests for the will and purpose of this unique God. As such, they, too, were a nation of unique people in the world. Similarly, the presence of the Holy One of God among his disciples sanctified them from guilt, because he was the Lord of the Sabbath, and for the mission of God in the world. The tabernacle that housed the presence of God in the midst of the Israelite community was now embodied in the incarnate person of Jesus Christ. Finally, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of God in the saints is a tremendous witness to the divine sanctification of the saints in the New Testament. In this dispensation of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, the saint is holy because of that indwelling Spirit.

Sanctification, however, is a binary experience. Saints are not only sanctified because of the presence of the living God, in his three persons, among or in them, but also the saint responds to that divine sanctification through a *broken and contrite spirit*. This response is the role the saint plays in sanctification. In his response, the saint remains vigilantly repentant because of the incurable work of the sinful nature. Those who trust in the sanctifying presence of God and in their broken and contrite spirit experience a non-legalistic, apart from a legalistic one. They know that God is interested more in a changed heart than in an animal fat. This kind of sanctification

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<sup>17</sup> Hoekema, 71-72.

recognizes that Christian failure is guaranteed by the sinful nature while Christian growth is extraordinarily granted by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and the genuine repentant lifestyle of the saint. Hence, we propose this study as the structure of a non-legalistic doctrine of sanctification.



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