

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 8 – Sanctification

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Introduction

The world we live in can be very resistant to change, and most people prefer some level of consistency in their lives. A comical example of this observation is a common phrase written in students' year books: "never change." The reality is that everyone changes whether they want to or not. The question is, in what direction does that change occur? People either change in such a way that draws them closer to God or pushes them farther away from him. This study is meant to expose what the Bible says about changing in a direction that will draw us closer to God.

There exists an excessive amount of literature in so-called "Christianity" on this topic. Typically these books come under the category of "self-help." As we will see, biblical change is not self-help. However, it is also not a "let go and let God" process either. These two approaches demonstrate the spectrum of what Christians believe about the critical process of sanctification. Based on the amount of information regarding this topic, it is clear that most Christians do in fact want to live righteous lives. The problem is that many get discouraged in their fight against sin and come to the conclusion that they cannot win. The Bible rejects this thinking and attitude because it is God's work and he is all-powerful. There are others who think they do not need to change and this is equally, if not more, unbiblical.

Review: Last time we addressed the sufficiency of the scriptures, and this study will build on those concepts. No change is possible apart from the ministry and power of the word of God. The topic before that focused on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is also equally necessary for affecting change in a believer's life.

Objectives: Understand the meaning of sanctification, its role in the believer's life, and how God's word says we accomplish it. The goal of understanding what the Bible says about sanctification is so that we can glorify God more with our lives and help others to do as well.

Definition and Meaning of Sanctification

The process of being made holy resulting in a changed life-style for the believer.

[Sanctification] is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus; of walking in a manner worthy of our calling; of matching up more and more of our Christian walk with who we are in Christ.¹

The generic meaning of sanctification is 'the state of proper functioning.' To sanctify someone or something is to set that person or thing apart for the use intended by its designer [e.g., God's followers are to be holy for he is holy]. A pen is 'sanctified' when used to write. Eyeglasses are 'sanctified' when used to improve sight. In the theological sense, things are sanctified when they are

¹ "Spiritual Growth: Why Grow?", VBC Adult Education Series, <http://valleybible.net/AdultEducation/ClassNotes/SpiritualGrowth/WhyGrow.pdf> (accessed 4/23/14).

used for the purpose God intends. A human being is sanctified, therefore, when he or she lives according to God's design and purpose.²

Three stages in a believer's life:

1. *Initial Sanctification* occurs simultaneously with justification (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 10:10, 14)
2. *Progressive Sanctification* occurs from justification until the day we die or are raptured
3. *Permanent Sanctification* occurs when we are free from our flesh in the presence of God (i.e., glorification)

The primary focus of this study is on *progressive sanctification* and/or *biblical change*.

Romans 6 – The Need for Change

Romans chapter six explains the believer's responsibility and need for change. Just because we have been declared sanctified at the moment of our justification does not mean we can sin at will.

What shall we say then? **Are we to continue in sin** so that grace may increase? **May it never be!** How shall we who died to sin still live in it? (Rom. 6:1-2)

Paul expands on this thought in the verses to follow in Romans six. He writes that believers *know* three things in verses three, six, and nine:

1. We have been baptized into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3).
2. Our old self and our body of sin were crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6). This is due to our union with him.
3. Christ died to sin once and forevermore (Rom. 6:9). This means that we are free from the dominion of sin, and no longer slaves to it.

In light of these three things we know Paul concludes that we are to *consider* ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ in Rom. 6:11, and "therefore" we are not to allow sin to control us.

Therefore **do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts...** For **sin shall not be master over you**, for you are not under law but under grace. (Rom. 6:12, 14)

We have died with Christ to sin. Therefore we should no longer live in it. This is a command we are responsible to follow. In a more technical sense, the grammar of the phrase in Romans 6:7 ("for he who has died is freed from sin") is in the perfect tense. This means that it is a past action with continuing effect or force. Our death with Christ to sin should have a lasting impact for the rest of our lives.

The Means of Change

So it is clear that we are commanded to change in a Godward direction. In addition, the Bible is abundantly clear that it is God who causes change in a believer's life.

² Walter A. Elwell, "Entry for 'Sanctification'", *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1997.

I planted, Apollos watered, **but God was causing the growth**. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but **God who causes the growth**. (1 Cor. 3:6-7)

For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6)

This thought should produce humility in us: “The more holy a man is, the more humble, self-renouncing, self-abhorring, and the more sensitive to every sin he becomes, and the more closely he clings to Christ... And it has been notoriously the fact that the best Christians have been those who have been the least prone to claim the attainment of perfection for themselves.”³

Even though God causes the growth, we still have a responsibility to "work, press on, pursue, excel still more, be diligent, long for, earnestly desire"...etc. spiritual growth (cf. Phil. 3:12-15; Heb. 6:1; 1 Thess. 4:1, 10; 2 Pet. 3:14; 2 Tim. 2:15).

In order to examine what the Bible says about *how* a believer is to change in a direction that honors and pleases God, we will examine two passages: Ephesians 4:17-24 and II Timothy 3:14-17.

Ephesians 4:17-24 – Three Steps of Change Centered on the Mind

In Paul's letters to the believers in Rome and Ephesus, he began with doctrinal truth in the first part of the letter and then transitioned to the practical outworking of that truth. Ephesians chapter four not only serves as that point of transition from doctrinal to practical, but it also initiates the thought that believers are to walk worthy of our calling.

Therefore I, a prisoner of the Lord, implore you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called**... (Eph. 4:1)

After addressing what this should look like in the church, Paul continues this thought in verse seventeen.

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you **walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk**, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside the old self**, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**, and **put on the new self**, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Eph. 4:17-24)

Many Christians think that their faith is simply an addition to their pre-Christian lifestyle. This could not be further from the truth. Christianity is a complete transformation of that pre-Christian lifestyle. In this passage we see that we have only one nature once we place our faith in Christ, yet we still live in the flesh. We need to begin to throw that old flesh off like it is an old dirty coat. This passage

³ M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Third Edition, published by Thomas Nelson, 1897. Public Domain.

is about how to get rid of that old coat and put on the new one of righteousness. While this may seem like a two-step process, there are actually three steps involved: put off, renew the mind, and put on.

1. *Put Off or Lay Aside*

- Lay your old manner of life to the side, throw it away. We do not just put a new "God coat" over our old dirty, sinful one.
- The Greek construction is that this has already happened. This is what sanctification is, that we live more and more in accordance to the spiritual reality of our lives. We do not always live according to reality. For example, many Christians who are married know their role in that marriage, yet they do not live in accordance to that role. Husbands know they are to lead, but many of them abdicate that leadership for the sake of perceived "peace" in the marriage.
- Charles C. Ryrie makes the grammatical observation that "laying aside" and "putting on" were viewed as facts they had already learned, but the "renewing" is done continually. There is tremendous insight to be taken from this observation.

2. *Renew the Mind*

- As was said, this is to be done continually.
- We were brought out of darkness and into the light when we opened our mind and heart to the leading and power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:18). Before that happened we had a pagan mind that Paul describes in verses 17-19.
- *The Pagan Mind* (vv. 17-19)⁴
 - Futility of their mind = useless thoughts
 - Darkened in their understanding = ignorant of the truth
 - Callousness = shamelessness over sin
 - Give themselves over to their sin = shameless living
 - The pagan mind is cultivated when people choose sin over and over again. The opposite is true in order to walk in the newness of the spirit (Rom. 7:6). This will occur when we renew our mind.
- The whole process of sanctification in this passage hinges upon the mind. That is why it is vitally important to soak our minds and hearts in the word of God and to remove as much worldly influence as possible.
- Colossians 3 addresses progressive sanctification with the mind as the starting point. Paul dealt with these same elements of biblical change when writing to them.

Set your **mind** on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Col. 3:2)

Therefore **consider** the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (Col. 3:5)

⁴ John MacArthur, "Off with the Old, On with the New: Part I" <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/1928/off-with-the-old-on-with-the-new-part-1>, Sept 10, 1978, accessed 4/11/2014.

But now you also, **put them all aside**: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have **put on the new self** who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him... (Col. 3:8-10)

3. *Put On*

- ενδύω endyo – Paul continues his metaphor of clothing here. The idea is "sinking into a garment"
- Essentially it is the opposite of "put off".

The practical application of this process follows in the rest of the book of Ephesians.

II Timothy 3:14-17 – Four Steps of Change Centered on the Word⁵

Jay Adams in his book *How to Help People Change* expounds II Timothy 3:14-17 in order to show a four-step process leading to true biblical change.

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:14-17)

1. *Teaching*

- a. From the word of God.
- b. Applies to ourselves and others. We should be taught and we should teach.
- c. Avoid personal opinions since God's word is the only thing that can legitimately change people.
- d. This leads to conviction.

2. *Conviction*

- a. By "conviction" Adams means the juristic sense of the word involving a convincing and effective conviction of wrongdoing. This is the meaning of the word in the original Greek.
- b. ἐλέγχω – *elegcho* – "To show someone his sin and to summon him to repentance." (reproof) This word was used in courts to show someone's wrongdoing.
- c. Jay Adams says that "reproof" and "rebuke" are lesser translations because they may or may not produce change and may or may not be true.
- d. Teaching and conviction can occur simultaneously, since conviction cannot come apart from God's word.

3. *Correction*

- a. Conviction would lead to despair if there was no correction.
- b. ἐπανόρθωσις – *epanorthosis*; to stand something up that has fallen
- c. Involves repentance (changing of the mind) and first steps in righteous behavior replacing the sin at hand

⁵ From Jay Adams' book *How to Help People Change: The Four Step Biblical Process*.

4. *Training in righteousness*

- a. παιδεία – *paideia*: “the classical Greek system of education and training, which came to include gymnastics, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, music, mathematics, geography, natural history, astronomy and the physical sciences, history of society and ethics, and philosophy—the complete pedagogical course of study necessary to produce a well-rounded, fully educated citizen.”⁶
- b. Strongly related to the correction involved (Heb. 12:5-11, “*discipline*” of the Lord“)
- c. Adams: better translated “*disciplined* training in righteousness” since it implies hard work
- d. This is the follow through in the change process

Conclusion

As we seek to be like Christ every day we must remember that it is God's work in which we are taking part. In Romans 6 we see the necessity for change, in Ephesians 4 we see a three-step process revolving around the mind, and in 2 Timothy 3 we see a four-step processes that begins with truth from God's word. These passages combine with many others to give us an incredible amount of direction and guidance as we labor in God's strength and as we seek to assist others in the process of sanctification.

⁶ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 29-30.

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 8 - Sanctification - Additional Study

1. Look up the following verses and write down what reason each gives for why you should be sanctified.

- Phil. 1:9-11

- John 15:8

- 2 Pet. 3:18

- 1 Tim. 6:9-10

- John 15:11

3. How are you doing in the following areas of spiritual growth? Keep in mind, these are practices that cultivate sanctification.

- Personal bible study

- Memorizing scripture

- Faithful attendance in a bible preaching church

- Service in the body of Christ

- Purposed prayer

- Practicing the one-another's

- Praising God

- Being disciplined by a more mature believer

- Discipling a less mature believer

- Sharing the gospel with non-believers