

GROW 201 – What We Teach

Lesson 5

RG² and the CHRISTIAN LIFE

KEY VERSE:

³⁰“But by His doing you are **in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption**” (1 Cor. 1:30).

THE BIG PICTURE - THE *Story*:

As noted in our last lesson, “The Cross,” the person and work of Jesus produces the Christian life. As the above key verse indicates, **we lack nothing in our relationship with God.** There is no fruit if there is no root. Again, as we begin, let us not forget to constantly work from and drive back to the gospel, for Jesus is the gospel.

The *Story* God told/tells is one of progression and movement. It begins with God in the Garden and moves toward the end where all

things created will glorify Him in the final Garden. The Christian Life, broadly speaking, is the unfolding of the *Story* from its beginning with creation, rejection, redemption, re-creation, and toward its fullest expression in worship. This chapter notes the progression of the *Story* within the individual’s story. Just like the larger *Story*, so also the smaller story within the individual. God is moving each of us from creation, through fall, to worship.

INITIAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER:

It is important to see the link between THE CROSS (Cf. Lesson 4) and THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. The Christian Life grows out of the Gospel. They are not two different things, but two sides of one coin.

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON:

In light of who we are in Christ, what does this look like in our daily lives? The answer lies in the area of, “Sanctification.” Sanctification is the theological word for what we call the *Christian*

BASIC IDEAS:

1. **The Christian Life from start to finish and everything in between is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.**
2. **Resting in the Finished Work of Christ is the means producing our sanctification.**
3. **The Christian Life is Christ’s Life.**
4. **The Christian cannot stop God from completing what He began (1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).**
5. **What God gives to us [i.e. His life], He works in us and through us to those around us. Thus, Christians live righteous lives.**

GROW 201 – What We Teach

Life. **It is the experiential side of the Christian.** For many of us, the idea or word “sanctification” appears foreign to our vocabulary. Yet it is a biblical word that needs explanation.

Before embarking on the study, we must remind ourselves never to lose sight of Him. First Corinthians 1:30 tells us that Jesus Christ is our sanctification.

²⁶“for consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰**But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,** ³¹so that, just as it is written, ‘LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD’” (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

Because this is true, the sanctified can never boast in themselves. Sanctification as an action is God working Himself in us and through us to those around us. **Sanctification as such is not about us, but Him.** It is essential that we never lose sight of this truth.

With this in mind, let us begin our study.

TODAY’S LESSON:

I. What is Biblical Sanctification?

Sanctification is one of those thousand dollar theological words that many use and few understand. This has led to ask the question, “What is sanctification?” However, before we can answer the question we need to provide some background material so the question can be asked in its proper theological context.

Salvation as an idea is broad, inclusive, and generic. We use it to describe what happens to an individual who trusts the finished work of Christ for his or her deliverance from sin’s penalty and inauguration/adoption into the family of God. However, the umbrella term “salvation” has under it several very exact and definite ideas such as redemption, forgiveness, propitiation, justification, sanctification, etc.

Biblical sanctification recognizes the fullness of God’s work in behalf of His people as constant and unchanging. It speaks of who they are in Christ because of what He did in their behalf. **There is nothing done by them to secure for them what only He could do.** Moreover, nothing they do can change what He did. **The New Testament describes sanctification (salvation) with three tenses: past, present, and future.**¹

- **Past Sanctification** (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Heb. 10:10, 14, 29 [justification {delivered from the penalty of sin}])

GROW 201 – What We Teach

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, **to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus**, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours” (1 Cor. 1:2).

- **Present Sanctification** (Rom. 6:19; 12:1-2 [sanctification {being delivered from the power of sin}])

“I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, **so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification**” (Rom. 6:19).

- **Perfect Sanctification** (Eph. 5:26-27 [glorification {will be delivered from the presence of sin}]).

²⁶ “so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that **He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless**” (Eph. 5:26, 27).

Our past sanctification speaks of our present perfect standing before the Father as we are in His Son. Our perfect future sanctification is what we will be **experientially** after the removal of our old nature. Our present sanctification is the outworking of what we currently are in the context of our dual nature (i.e., old and new [Cf. Lesson 3]).

This movement from our past to our future happens in and through our present. **This present is progressing, it is growing, and it is being transformed.**

II. What Exactly Does the Word “Transformed” Mean (Rom. 12:2)?

The word *transformed* is our English word *metamorphosis*. It is used four times in the New Testament. Twice it is used with reference to our Lord’s transfiguration on Mt. Hermon (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). In addition, twice it is used of the believer being transformed or changed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). It means, “To change into another form.”

“And was **transfigured** before them: and his face shone as the sun, and his garments became as white as light” (Matt. 17:2).

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may **prove** what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

The word *prove* means to test, examine, scrutinize, and to recognize.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

The change that took place in our Lord was not a change of essence but one of appearance. The transfiguration simply showed to others what was inside, what was already true. It was a reversal of the incarnation. The veil of flesh lifted and they saw what He was like in His pre-incarnate state. So also is our sanctification. It is a change in appearance. It is not a change of

GROW 201 – What We Teach

essence. **In regeneration, there is not a changing of the old, but a giving of the new.** Moreover, it is this new seen through our earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:6-12).

At the resurrection, the believer's transformation will be complete. He will exchange the perishable for the imperishable (1 Cor. 15:50-54). The old vanishes and the new is manifested unhindered. At that moment "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). In light of this, let us go back to the idea of sanctification.

III. Revisiting the Idea of Sanctification

As noted earlier, salvation as a whole cannot be dichotomized and separated. Each part must be examined in light of the whole. When considering the area of justification, it must also include sanctification. The two, though distinct, are inseparably linked. This is equally true concerning the idea of progressive sanctification and perseverance. The sanctifying work of God in and through His people looks like the perseverance of the saints. The whole action rests in the immutable activity of God. Thus, those whom God preserves persevere.

If one dissects a frog into individual parts, the frog is no longer recognizable. If one pulls apart a rose to study the individual pedals, the beauty of the rose becomes unrecognizable. The same is true of salvation. We cannot see the big picture if we dissect justification, sanctification, and glorification from each other.

Sanctification is the present outworking in and through our dual natures of what is true as to who we are in Him. The Bible makes sanctification a work of God in and through His people. If, however, sanctification is the work of God, then what do we do?

IV. What Part Do we Play in Our Sanctification?

The issue here is whether the idea of progressive sanctification is a monergistic act (i.e. work of one) or a synergistic act (i.e. to work with, the work of two). Before attempting to define the two ideas, let us preface our thoughts by saying God's work of sanctifying His people does not bypass their intellect, their volition or will, or their emotions or affections. God works in the individual in order that the individual is fully working toward the divinely established goal of complete glorification. With this thought in mind, let us consider the two ideas of monergism and synergism.

- Monergism defined:

Monergism is a compound word literally meaning "one work." A monergistic work is the work of one. Evangelicals believe initial salvation (i.e. our justification) is the singular work of God. God works alone.

Even though initial salvation is considered a monergistic work, it still includes an expressed faith on the part of the individual as the agent or means of securing God's provision. Yet, many within evangelicalism see the expressed faith as being sourced in God and energized by Him.

GROW 201 – What We Teach

In justification, neither the intellect, will, nor affection of the individual are overlooked or bypassed by the Holy Spirit. The response of man to God is real and necessary.

- Synergism defined:

Synergism means “work with.” A synergistic work is the work of two. Unlike initial justification, most evangelicals view progressive sanctification as a synergistic work whereby the believer *cooperates* with God and God works through the obedience of the individual for his sanctification.

Inside of a synergistic mindset, without obedience or the fruit of the Spirit, the individual would never be progressively sanctified. This raises the question as to whether or not obedience is optional or necessary. I will examine this idea thoroughly under the New Testament Commands (Cf. Lesson 7), but initially I would state that **although obedience is not automatic, it is inevitable**. By saying it is not automatic, it is implied that God’s sanctifying activity does not bypass the intellect, will, or affections of the individual. “Believers are thus both passive and active in their sanctification.”²³ A concern we have with a synergistic sanctification is the division created between our justification and our sanctification. If “our” faith was not a synergistic work in our justification, why would “our” faith/obedience be a synergistic work in our sanctification? In sanctification, neither the intellect, nor the will, nor affection of the individual are overlooked or bypassed by the Holy Spirit. The response of man to God is real and necessary.

Regardless as to whether or not one uses the word monergism or synergism for either justification or sanctification, the issue is on whom the emphasis is placed.

Thus in justification and in sanctification neither the intellect, will, nor affection of the individual are overlooked or bypassed by the Holy Spirit. The response of man to God is real and necessary, yet it is God who works both to will and to do according to His good pleasure and nothing man does or can do can stop God from finishing what He has begun.

²³ “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

V. The Means of Sanctification

Often we view the New Testament imperative/command as the means of achieving sanctification or measuring sanctification (Cf. Lesson 7). This, however, is a misunderstanding of the imperative. Consider the following Biblical descriptions.

- Sanctification is said to be by God (1 Thess. 5:23, 24)
- Sanctification comes from union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:2)
- Sanctification comes by the Word of God (John 17:17)
- Sanctification comes through the death of Christ and the shedding of His blood (Heb. 10:10; 13:12)

GROW 201 – What We Teach

- Sanctification comes through faith (Acts 26:18)
- Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit, whether or not we “feel” it (2 Cor. 5:17)
- Sanctification cannot be overridden by our actions (1 Thess. 5:23, 24)

The New Testament command is the outworking of something that is already true. The believer does not work for his sanctification; he is working from his sanctification (1 Cor. 5:7).

“Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, **just as you are in fact unleavened.** For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

For the people of God, their justification, sanctification, and glorification are a sure work. God has rendered certain what He alone determines (Rom. 8). **God has never wasted one moment, event, decision, or expenditure of energy. . . EVER!** This is a hard truth to accept at times, especially during times of failure due to our own sin.

CONCLUSION:

God is working in us and through us, His perfect will. Every aspect of our lives is a reflection of a wise, gracious, and loving master artisan. Let us live our lives believing that He is finishing what He has completed. Let us see our obedience as a consequence of what is already true. Moreover, as always, let us continue to dance in the reign of grace!

BASIC APPLICATION

1. What did you find helpful from today’s lesson?	7. Can sanctification [the Christian life] be separated from justification?
2. What did you find confusing from today’s lesson?	8. Is it possible for believers to stop or increase their sanctification [the Christian life]? Please explain your answer.
3. How does this lesson help you in thinking through the gospel?	9. Are the commands of the New Testament describing the Christian life or producing the Christian life? Another way of asking the question is this, “Does our obedience cause our relationship with God or is our obedience a consequence of our relationship with God?”
4. How does this lesson help you in how you view yourself?	
5. What was your “aha” moment?	
6. How might this text challenge you in your daily activity?	

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 6:19; Eph. 5:26, 27

¹ <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/3-tenses-gospel/> “John Stott has argued that when Paul reasoned with Governor Felix about “righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” (Acts 24:25), he was pointing out the three tenses of salvation. The moment we drift away from the gospel, we perish. At every stage—justification, sanctification, glorification— we come with empty hands, seeking mercy from our heavenly Father. Even at the point of our obedience as Christians—we are to “work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12)— we do so only because God works “in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (v. 13). And when we enter the Pearly Gates of heaven, wisdom will dictate that we show our empty hands and say with Edward Mote: On Christ the solid Rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.”

² *New Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Sanctification,” by K. Bockmuehl, 614.