

Sanctification: A Growing Need

John 17:17

Our series is about the importance of God's Word. **Psalm 119:105** says that God's Word "is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path." Follow it and there are rewards. Otherwise, there are consequences for disobeying it. If we are going to obey God's Word, we need to understand why. To understand why we should obey it, we considered the importance of the inerrancy and inspiration of God's Word. The Bible is the very Word of God, not just in concepts, not just some parts of it more than other parts of it, or some part of it but not other parts of it. All of it is God-breathed or God breathing out His Word so that we have His very words to us superintended by the work of the Holy Spirit who directed the authors to say what God wanted said but using their unique personalities. Wednesday night we learned that it is just as true to say that God wrote the book of Romans as it is to say that Paul wrote the book of Romans. God's Word is authoritative because it comes from Him.

Last week we considered how the Word of God saves. Now it's not the Word's of the Bible directly, otherwise all we would have to do is read the Bible. Instead, the Bible provides us with an understanding of our need to be saved and then details for us how we can be saved. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ who died in our place for our sin and we will be given eternal life.

But the Bible doesn't just end with teaching us about salvation. As we just read from **Psalm 119:105**, it guides us in everyday living. It is the manual for daily living – what we should do and what we should not do, all in an effort to please God and bring Him glory. The Bible doesn't just get us into the door, it is the road map to follow through life on any given topic. There is more to the Christian life than just being saved or just being content with getting us through the heavenly gate.

Our starting point today is in **John 17:17** where we will consider that God's Word sanctifies us. Read the verse with me. "**Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth.**"

The Phillips translation: "**make them holy by the truth; for your word is the truth.**"

The Amplified: "**Sanctify them [purify, consecrate, separate them for Yourself, make them holy] by Truth; Your Word is Truth.**"

Our verse provides us with an exclamation about sanctification.

I. AN EXCLAMATION ABOUT SANCTIFICATION

Notice first, the appeal for sanctification.

A. The Appeal For Sanctification

"**Sanctify them by the truth.**"

Jesus is in the middle of praying to the Father. He has just enjoyed the Passover meal with them and given them some additional instructions that begins back in **chapter 13**. In **chapter 17** He prays for them and really prays for all us. In **verse 15**, Jesus prays that the Father would protect them from the evil one. He explained to them about His departure, but told them He would send the Spirit to comfort and guide them (**14:26; 16:13-14**). The Spirit would give them peace, comfort and strength in the things they would face and He would be their teacher. But Jesus not only prays for their protection, in **vs. 17** He also prays for their purity, asking the Father to sanctify them.

The appeal for sanctification is something that is woven throughout the entire Bible either directly or indirectly. We'll talk more in a moment about what it means, but suffice it say right now that it means to set apart as holy. That appeal for holiness is evident when God gave Adam the command to populate the earth, tend the garden and not eat the forbidden fruit. We might say that sanctification comes through our obedience. By the time we reach **Genesis 6** we see that man has grossly violated God's call to holiness and his wickedness is evil all the time. For their disobedience He brought judgment. God still called humanity to a standard of holiness. He chose Israel to be a light that would point others to Him. He gave them commandments and laws intended to keep man's

heart in obedience to His holy standard.

Knowing man's nature bent to sin, Jesus prays that God would set apart His followers for holy living. He appeals to the Father on behalf of believers that they might be sanctified. **But how is this accomplished? What then is the authority for sanctification?** Jesus prays they be sanctified by the truth and then describes where truth comes from.

B. The Authority For Sanctification

“Your Word is truth.”

Truth is the quality or state of being true, what is fact or reality. Truth is how things actually are. It is absolute and unchanging. Since truth comes from God, we can say that truth is not only unchanging, it is also authoritative. Truth is not merely a bunch of suggestions, or any number of options to consider. Truth, God's truth, carries the authority to command us. Truth is binding and demands a response from us. The Word carries the authority of the Word giver and it gives us an unchanging standard to live by. Just because we may not like what it says doesn't alter the truth of it. Just because it is in disagreement with cultural norms doesn't change the truth of it. It is the last word, the definitive word by which we should govern our lives. It is THE source of truth.

There may be truth in mathematics.

There may be truth in logic.

There may be truth in philosophy.

There may be truth in religion.

There may be other sources of truth. We may even be able to glean some elements from them that can guide our lives. But there is only one truth by which Jesus says we can be sanctified and these and any other fields of study that offer truth fall far short. They will never set us apart to God – only the truth of God's Word can sanctify us. That is the only real source of truth. His Word guides our daily lives and guards our hearts so that we can live a holy life.

Nothing else will do that. **John 17:17** gives us an exclamation about sanctification.

Let's turn our attention then to an explanation of sanctification.

II. AN EXPLANATION OF SANCTIFICATION

In **I Thessalonians 4:1-3** Paul reminds the believers about the instructions he gave them on how to live in such a way that they would please God. He urges them to obey God more and more and then states that it is God's will they be sanctified. Let's consider then a definition of sanctification.

A. A Definition Of Sanctification

A simple definition, as we said, is to set apart for special or sacred use, to set apart as holy. It can mean to consecrate. Depending on the context, the Greek word used for sanctification is translated in the New Testament with words like hallowed (the Lord's prayer), holy, consecrated.

In **Exodus 19:23** Mt. Sinai is said to be set apart as holy.

Exodus 20:8 refers to the Sabbath as being holy. God's name is holy.

Israel is said to be holy (**Leviticus 20:7-8**) as are Christians (**Ephesians 5:26**).

Aaron and his sons were set apart to God to minister before Him in the Tabernacle. They went through a special ceremony where they and the clothes made for them were dedicated to God. A bull was sacrificed as a sin offering. A ram was sacrificed as a burnt offering for worship and another ram was offered as a sacrifice for ordination setting them apart as those dedicated as representatives for the people to stand before God on their behalf. They were now set apart.

Likewise, the furniture and utensils in the Tabernacle were also set apart to God. You couldn't use just any common bowl or common candelabra. Everything in the Tabernacle went through a purification process that set it apart for the purpose of worshipping a holy God. They had to be made holy. So in **Daniel 5** when King Belshazzar took the gold cups that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple when he raided Jerusalem and used them in his party, you can well understand why God took offense when Belshazzar treated what was holy as common.

This helps us understand why Paul would urge the believer to honor God in his body because our body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Through the sacrifice of Jesus He has made it so that we could be set apart for God.

I Corinthians 6:19-20 “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

The blood of Christ has set us apart from what is profane or sinful. That’s why Paul will tell us not to let sin reign in our bodies. More on that in a moment because we need to see a differentiation about sanctification.

B. A Differentiation About Sanctification

By that we need to understand the difference between justification and sanctification.

Justification is God declaring us righteous.

Sanctification is being set apart to God.

Justification has to do with our position.

Sanctification has to do with our practice.

In justification we are holy. In sanctification, we are becoming holy.

Wayne Grudem provides some helpful insight.

Where justification gives us legal standing with God, sanctification is an internal condition.

Where justification is a once for all time act, sanctification continues throughout life.

Where justification is entirely the work of God, sanctification is a cooperative effort between God and the believer.

Where justification makes us so that God sees us as perfect, in sanctification we are not perfect because of the sin nature that still plagues us.

Where justification is the same for all Christians, sanctification is greater in some than it is in others.

The process of sanctification is evident as we continue to mature in our walk with Christ.

Sanctification can then be seen in three stages in the life of a believer. We’ll call this a division within sanctification.

C. A Division Within Sanctification

First, it commences at salvation.

1. It commences at salvation

Sanctification begins the moment you trust Christ as Savior. At that moment a moral change takes place in us that is called regeneration. In **Titus 3:5** Paul talks about it as the “washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” To the Corinthians (**II Corinthians 5:17**) he refers to it as being made a new creation resulting in old things passing away which refers to our old sin nature or our old way of desiring to sin. John says that when we are born again, we will not continue in sin because, as Wayne Grudem puts it, “the power of the new spiritual life within us keeps us from yielding to a life of sin.” Now, that doesn’t mean we won’t sin anymore, but instead won’t continue the habit of sinning. Warren Wiersbe puts it this way: “Sanctification is getting to the place where we sin less, because God’s Word has taken hold of us and so we love God more.”

Romans 6:1-2 “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

When we are saved, the rule of sin in our lives is broken and our desire is to sin less as we sing:

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,

He sets the prisoner free;

His blood can make the foulest clean;

His blood availed for me.

Romans 6:11-14

Wayne Grudem writes “To be dead to the ruling power of sin means that we as Christians, by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit and the resurrection life of Christ working within us, have power to overcome the temptations and enticements of sin. Sin will no longer be our master, as once it was before we became Christians.”

At salvation, the power sin had over us is broken and we are set free. We are no longer bound to its habit in our life. As Paul wrote to the Romans, we

must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ. Sin is no longer our master. It has no more dominion or rule over us. To deny that reality is like me being traded to play baseball for the Detroit Tigers, but still continuing to show up and play for the team that traded me. That team is no longer my owner. Sin is no longer my owner.

But where sanctification has its commencement at salvation, a definite beginning point in my life, we also see it continues through life.

2. It continues through life

Understand that sanctification is a process. Some call it progressive sanctification.

I John 3:2-3 “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

Howieism: “I’m not what I was, and neither am I yet what I’m going to be.”

Sanctification is becoming more like Christ in character every day. God may see me as perfect in my position, but my practice is far from it.

Sanctification is looking back over our life from the point we became a Christian and see a definite change in behavior and attitude. People should see a difference in our lives because of Christ. When I look back and see what I was and how God has changed that’s progress toward godliness. But when I look at God’s holiness I realize I still have a ways to go. That’s where the truth of God’s Word comes in. The more we read it and desire to live it and grow by it, the less we want to sin.

If I go out and work all day in the yard and then go inside to get cleaned up, but don’t turn the light on in the bathroom, I won’t see all the dirt. Turning on the light reveals how much I need to get cleaned up and where the cleaning needs to take place.

It’s the same with Scripture. If I spend little time in the Word of God, it’s light won’t reveal where I need to change. The more I spend in it, the more is

revealed about what needs to be changed to conform to God’s standard of holiness.

Psalm 139:23-24 could be read as follows: “**Search me through Your Word, O God, and know my heart; test me through Your Word and know my anxious thoughts. Through Your Word see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting through Your Word.**”

The lifelong process of sanctification involves a separation from our participation in what is sinful on the one hand, and growing in holiness in our attitudes and actions and thoughts on the other hand. Only the truth of God’s Word can help accomplish that in our lives. God’s Word doesn’t just conform to some other standard, because it is Truth, it is the standard by which we are called to live. It is the compass that guides our daily lives in helping us make right decisions that will enable us to live godly. We must obey its truth. We sin when we ignore it.

This past week Robyn made me some peanut butter cookies. She didn’t leaf through the cookbook and mix ingredients from different recipes. She followed only one source for mouthwatering, melt in your mouth peanut butter cookies.

There is only one source for sanctification in the life of the believer. It is the truth found in God’s Word. And as you know, sanctification is not only a daily process, it is a daily battle. While Paul tells us in **Romans 6** that we are dead to sin, he also says that sin remains in us, but he continues by telling us not to let it reign there. Don’t give it a foothold. In **chapter 12** he tells us not to be conformed to the world, squeezed into its mold, but instead we are to transform our minds by the Word of God.

Paul also says in **II Corinthians 3:18** that while we reflect the Lord’s glory, we are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory through the Holy Spirit. To both the Ephesians and the Colossians Paul speaks about the process and progress we make in becoming more like Christ in character as we put off certain characteristics while putting on others. **Hebrews 12:1** tells us to strip off the sin that trips us up in our walk of faith.

As I said earlier, where justification is the same for every believer, sanctification looks different for each Christian because we all have different things we need to either put off or put on to reflect the image of Christ. Scripture gives clear guidance on what we should do to mature in our faith.

I Peter 2:1-2

Compare that to what Paul wrote to the Corinthians.
I Corinthians 3:1-3

Are we making progress in our walk with Christ, so that we look like Him more today than we did last week or last month or last year?

So while sanctification continues through life, we also see its challenges throughout life.

3. Its challenges throughout life

It happens every day and its part of the process of sanctification. One day you feel like you are really making some great strides in a particular area of your life with Christ, only to blow it the next day. Expect it, but don't be discouraged by it. It can feel like you take two steps forward and one step back.

Expect that in the Christian life. There will be times when we feel we're going backwards instead of forward. John tells us to confess our sin so we can then move forward in our walk with Christ. One of the things I appreciate about Scripture is that it never sugar coats or whitewashes the saints. It also gives us their imperfections. If the Bible sanitized their lives and left out all the bad stuff they did, I would become disheartened thinking the Christian life is impossible to live. But I'm glad they showed Abraham's lack of faith. I'm glad they showed the times David failed, the one who was called a man after God's own heart. I'm glad they showed that Moses got angry, the man who talked with God face to face. All of them show us that failure isn't the end in the Christian life, that God's patient love picks us up and keeps us going. It gives me hope that when I fail, God doesn't throw His hands in the air and wash His hands of me.

Romans 6 doesn't tell us we will not sin, it tells us not to let sin dominate us. Confess it and get back

on track. Next week we will see from **II Timothy 3:16-17** how the Word of God matures us. For now, just remember that the Word of God sanctifies us so that the more time we spend in it, the more we see how much needs to be done to be like Christ. So don't be discouraged.

Scottish born theologian John Murray once stated: "the more sanctified the person is, the more conformed he is to the image of his Savior, the more he must recoil against every lack of conformity to the holiness of God. The deeper his apprehension of the majesty of God, the greater the intensity of his love to God, the more persistent his yearning for the attainment of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, the more conscious will he be of the gravity of the sin that remains and the more poignant will be his detestation of it... Was this not the effect in all the people of God as they came into closer proximity to the revelation of God's holiness?"

Simply put, the more we read the Word of God, the closer we are to God, the greater our love for God, the greater ability we will have to see our sin and be repulsed by it and want to confess it as we come into the presence of a holy God.

Where sanctification has a beginning point the moment we are saved and continues with challenges throughout the remainder of our lives, it also has a culmination, an end point that happens at death.

4. It culminates at death – I John 3:2-3

Sanctification is a lifetime process and while we will not reach complete holiness in this life, nevertheless we strive toward that goal, until one day when either we meet Christ through death or through the rapture, we will be made completely like Him in character. John reminds us that when Christ appears we will be like Him. And so we sing:
O to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer.
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee,

Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art!
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep in my heart.

Philippians 3:20-21 “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly (vile) bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.”

Sanctification commences at salvation, it continues day by day throughout our life changing us with the challenges we face, and it culminates at death. At that point, sanctification will be complete and we call that glorification. We shall be like Christ in character, because we will see Him as He is.

Let me come to my final point. We saw first an exclamation about sanctification through the appeal Jesus makes regarding our sanctification through the authority in the truth of the Word of God. We then considered an explanation about sanctification. I would like to close with a few thoughts about an expectation in sanctification.

III. AN EXPECTATION IN SANCTIFICATION

Let me just say here that there is a cooperative effort between God and the believer in the process of sanctification. On the one hand it is God’s power at work in us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. We can’t make an effectual change to become like Christ through our own will or desire. It must be through our yielding to His Spirit so that He does the work in us.

Galatians 5:16-26

I Thessalonians 5:23 “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly.”

Philippians 2:13 “God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

These verses speak of God causing us to want to do His will and then giving us the power to do it. The Holy Spirit is the power by which the sanctifying work of the Word of God brings about change. But that said, we also have a role in the process of

sanctification. One is passive in that we allow the transforming work of God’s Spirit to have His way in us as we yield to His will in conforming us to the likeness of Christ in character, but we also have an active role in which we endeavor to obey God taking the necessary steps toward godliness and that involves our will. We choose to put on, we choose to put off. **Hebrews 12:14** says we are to strive for holiness. **I John 3:3** says we are to purify ourselves as He is pure. And **II Corinthians 7:1** exhorts us to cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God. While it is through the truth of God’s powerful Word as His Spirit works in us, we have a role as well. It comes through our obedience as we desire to live a godly life. It is through the truth of God’s Word that we are sanctified, enabled to become like Christ in our attitudes, actions and thoughts.

I am weak but Thou art strong;
Jesus keep me from all wrong.
I’ll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.

Just a closer walk with Thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea.
Daily walking close to Thee,
Let it be dear Lord, let it be.

All we need to be sanctified is found in the truth of the Bible.

II Peter 1:3-4 “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”—

Sanctification is a growing need accomplished through the Truth of God’s Word. Let’s get growing