

The Cross and Christian Community

The Cross and Christian Sanctification

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November 10, 2013



THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN SANCTIFICATION 2 Corinthians 3:18

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to 2 Corinthians 3. One of the doctrines in Scripture that we talk a lot about is the doctrine of justification: What it means to be justified before God. It's a doctrine that has been confused and misunderstood throughout all of Christian history. It's the doctrine that brought about the Protestant Reformation centuries ago, when men like Martin Luther stood before the Catholic Church and said, "We are not justified by what we do for God, but by what God has done for us in Christ."

Justification is the crux of the gospel, and for every non-Christian who is here today, this is the good news that we hope you will hear in your ears as you listen to singing and praying and preaching today. We pray that this good news will make its way into your heart: The good news that God loves you and has made a way for you to be saved from the penalty of all your sin against Him. And the good news that this way is not dependent on anything you can do for God.

We had the opportunity to share the gospel yesterday with a man whose entire belief system is based on what he can do to earn his way to God, and we shared with him the good news of the God who has made the way to us. God has come to us in the person of Christ, and God Himself has graciously paid the price for our sins in our place. Jesus has died on a cross for our sins, and in so doing has done all the work that is necessary for us to be saved from our sins.

And all that is left is for us – for you and for me – is to trust in His love for us and His lordship over us. And we invite you, today, to trust in His love. You say, "That's all I have to do? Trust? I only have to put my faith in Jesus?" And the answer to that question is yes. Turn from your sin and yourself, and your every attempt to earn your way to God and trust in the way He has made for you. This is the good news of the gospel, and it is literally the best news in the history of the world: You can be saved from all your sins against God today, not by your own work, but by Christ's work on your behalf. Solely because of His grace, you can be declared, "Not Guilty," before God today and forever. This is what it means to be justified before God.

Now, this doctrine of justification then leads directly into the doctrine of sanctification. So what happens once you've been declared, "Not Guilty," before God? What changes once you've turned from your sin and yourself and you've trusted in Jesus as your Savior and Lord? And the answer is, "Everything changes." The Bible teaches that at the moment of justification, God not only forgives you of your sin, but He frees you from sin. He fills you with His Spirit, and as a result, your life takes off on an entirely new trajectory. And that trajectory is what is meant by the doctrine of sanctification.

So for every Christian in this room and for every non-Christian in this room who may become a Christian today or one day, this doctrine is extremely important, because this doctrine basically summarizes the Christian life. And when our pastors/elders went away on

our annual retreat a few months ago, and were praying, this is one of the topics/truths that came up as being something we need to constantly revisit: Sanctification - what it means to grow in Christ.

So today, I want to show you a picture of sanctification in the book of 2 Corinthians. Sanctification is one of the major themes of this book, so what I've done is I've organized these notes basically to walk you through a definition of sanctification, so that together we might think through practically what it means to be sanctified in our lives.

Sanctification is the process ...

Justification occurs at a point in time; sanctification is a process over time.

You say, "What does that mean to be sanctified?" Here's what it means: Sanctification is the process. And that's a key word that distinguishes sanctification from justification. Justification occurs at a point in time; whereas sanctification is a process over time. We read about this in passages like Romans 3:21-26, 1 Corinthians 1:18 and Hebrews 10:14. So there's a point when you trust in Christ to forgive you of your sins, and that point then begins a process.

Think about it like birth, which is one of the images the Bible uses to describe justification. Being justified before God is like being born again, and once you're born, that triggers a process in which you grow. Almost exactly one year ago, a baby named Isaiah was born into our family. All he could do was lie down, eat, sleep, and cry. Now, the kid is all over the place. You let little Isaiah alone in the house, crawling around, and within an hour, the house will be a wreck. He's grown, and he's active in ways he wasn't when he was born. Because he was born at a point in time, but he's growing in a process over time.

And this is the Christian life. This is why sometimes Scripture talks about how we were saved by God. Romans 3:21, there in parentheses: By grace through faith you are justified before God. Ephesians 2:8, "*It is by grace you have been saved through faith.*" But then Scripture also talks about how we are being saved. 1 Corinthians 1:18 says, "*to us who are being saved*" and Hebrews 10:14 says, "*those who are being sanctified.*" So justification occurs at a point in time; sanctification is a process over time.

Justification refers to how we stand before God; sanctification refers to how we live before God.

Maybe another way to put that: Justification refers to how we stand before God; sanctification refers to how we live before God. That can be seen in Romans 5:1-8:39 and Galatians 2:15-21. Romans 5:1 says, "*Since we have been justified before God by faith, we now have peace with God.*" So we stand with peace before God, forgiven of our sins and justified before Him.

But then after that, in Romans 6-8, the Bible talks about the result of that: Since we've been justified before God, we now live following God. Romans 6:11 – By grace through faith, you are now dead to your sin and yourself and alive to righteousness and God. So do not let sin remain in your body, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life, and live in Him. Romans 8 – The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is now living in you, and so you live for Him.

Galatians 2 is another great example of this. There the Bible talks about how we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone in the first few verses, and then you get to verse 20,

and Paul says, *"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."* Basically, Paul says, "I was saved by faith, and now I live by faith."

And it's this life before God that then brings us to the main verse I want to show you today – kind of the verse that everything is going to revolve around – and it's 2 Corinthians 3:18. Read along with me as I read aloud, for there Paul says, *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."* So here Paul describes the Christian life as a process of transformation, and the language he uses is *"from one degree of glory to another,"* which is another way of saying exactly what we've already said: Once we trust in Jesus, we begin a process of becoming more and more like Jesus.

Justification knows no degrees; sanctification progresses in degrees.

So yet again we see this contrast: Justification knows no degrees. In other words, you're not kind of justified, or partly justified, or somewhat justified before God. You're either justified before God or you're not; you've either trusted in the work of Christ on your behalf or you've not; it's one or the other. Justification knows no degrees, but sanctification progresses in degrees, and we see that 2 Corinthians 3:18. And this whole picture – this process – of the Christian life is a progression in degree of likeness to Christ – the goal of the Christian life, in this sense, is to look more and more like Christ, to look more like Jesus today than we did last week. We desire to look more like Jesus today than we did last month or last year at this time.

Just pause there for a moment and think about that. Does your life look more like Jesus? Does it reflect Jesus more today than it did this day a year ago? What about a month ago? What about a week ago? Is your goal this week to look more like Jesus next Sunday than you do this Sunday? This is God's goal for you. His desire for you is to be transformed from one degree of glory to another, from one degree of Christlikeness to another. And when this happens over time, it doesn't mean we're being justified over and over again.

This is so key. I think sometimes as we grow in Christ, we come to new realizations in our Christian lives. And when we come to that new realization, it's almost like these blinders come off our eyes, and we think, "I've never realized this before. How did I miss this?"

And it's in those moments that sometimes people conclude, "This was so obvious. I don't know how I could have missed it. Maybe I wasn't even a Christian before." For example, some people (professing Christians) will come to a point where they realize in a deeper way what it means to be surrendered to Christ, which is great. But then they'll start to think, "Well, I guess I wasn't surrendered to Christ like this before. Maybe that means I wasn't even a Christian." Or a Christian might come to a new understanding of a spiritual discipline like prayer, and prayer will move from being this rote, routine activity to really being life-giving time that you look forward to and long for, and it's almost like that Christian will start to think, "I don't even know if I've ever really even prayed before this. I have missed the entire point." And then they may start to conclude, "Well, maybe I wasn't even a Christian before."

And this is where I want to encourage us to be careful. And we're going to talk about this in a minute. There are many people who call themselves Christians who are not actually Christians (I'm guessing some people in this room), and they/you may need to come to the realization that you've never actually trusted in Christ alone to save you from your sins and

put your faith in Him as Lord over your life. And if that's the case, then I want to urge you to do that.

At the same time, I want to encourage many of you who are indeed Christians, who have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord over you, and you know Christ, that when you come to new realizations about who Christ is and what it means to follow Him, this is not you being justified all over again. Remember, you were justified when you first repented and believed, and when you trusted in Christ for salvation. And now, you are growing in Christ, progressing in degree of likeness to Christ, and this is a process that will involve new realizations all along the way – every step of the way. And as you grow, it's not that you're being justified over and over again, which means you need to doubt or question your salvation over and over again. No, this is the process of sanctification where God is gradually bringing us to a deeper and deeper understanding of what it means to follow Him as Lord and to be loved by Him as Father.

So all of that to say, this is God's goal for you, to be sanctified, to grow more and more into the likeness of Christ. And God is committed to making this a reality in your life.

By Which God

Sanctification is the process by which God ... Now we're going to see in a minute how our work factors into all of this, but I don't want us to forget (because the Bible doesn't let us forget) that this point in time when we're saved (our justification), and this process over time in which we're being saved (our sanctification) is all of God. God is working in it all. It's His initiative, His power, His mercy, and His grace at work in every single bit of this. It's not that we're saved by Christ's work, and now it's time to put our work on the table to even things out. No, we have been saved by Christ's work, and we are being saved by Christ's work, because even what we're about to talk about in terms of the work we do in the Christian life, it is really God's work in us. Salvation is all of God. Sanctification comes from God.

This is most clear in the beginning of 2 Corinthians. Turn back there to the first chapter, Chapter 1, verse 21. Paul is talking here about his desire to be more like Christ, and listen to what he says in verse 21. *"And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."*

Now that is a loaded verse, but I want you to see that word "anointed" there. It literally means to be set apart by God, which is what the reality of sanctification is all about. We are set apart to become like Christ, and listen to who is doing this: *"It is God who establishes us...and God who has anointed us."*

We are sanctified by God the Father.

So, we are sanctified by God the Father. This is found in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 and 16:14. And just as a side note, I put 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 and then 2 Corinthians 16:14 in parentheses there, but I have no idea what I was thinking when I put 16:14 in your notes. There's no such thing as 2 Corinthians 16:14. There are only 13 chapters in the book. Usually I'll put the outline together, turn that in, and then write a manuscript, and when I went back to write the manuscript, I could not for the life of me figure out why I put 16:14 there. I thought maybe 1 Corinthians 16:14, but I looked at that verse, and it didn't really make sense. So maybe I thought I meant 6:14 or 4:16, but those verses didn't really work

either. I looked all over 2 Corinthians trying to make sense of this, and I've got nothing. I have no idea what I was thinking here, so if you figure out what I was thinking, I'd love to know. Otherwise, just kind of scratch that out in your notes.

The only thing I could think of is maybe I was thinking 2 Corinthians 13:14, which is the last verse in the book, because there is a Trinitarian picture there with God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. I don't know. But regardless of whether I was thinking that, that is what I want to show you here: How all three persons of the Trinity are committed to and involved in our sanctification. We are sanctified by God the Father.

We are sanctified in God the Son.

Second, we are sanctified in God the Son. I have the passages Exodus 34:29-35 and 2 Cor. 3:16-18. Paul says, "*God establishes us with you in Christ,*" and that's really the whole emphasis back in the passage we read a moment ago in 2 Corinthians 3.

Turn back there with me, because I want you to see this. I want to show you the context that leads up to this verse about being transformed into the image of Christ. Start reading with me in 2 Corinthians 3:7, and this may be a bit confusing at first glance, but hang with me because there's incredible treasure to be discovered here.

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Now the background here is Exodus 34:29-35, which I put in parentheses, and which is in your Bible, by the way – that is a real passage – and that passage talks about how Moses met with God on Mount Sinai in the Old Testament and received God's law, and when Moses came down from the mountain, his face was shining; he was literally reflecting the glory of the Lord. And so what Paul does here is he uses that illustration to make a point.

And the point is here in your notes: We become like what we behold. In Exodus 34, Moses went upon a mountain and met with God, and he beheld the glory of God. He was exposed to the glory of God. So when he came down the mountain, his face was expressing what he had been exposed to. It makes sense.

And we all know this principle to be true. Children are probably the clearest example of this. I look at all four of my kids, and I see reflections of me in them – sometimes for better, and

sometimes for worse. They act like me, they react like me, and they talk like me. Even Isaiah, even in the noises he makes, he mimics me and Heather. We'll say something with a certain inflection, and he'll say something back with the same inflection. Because he's around us all the time – because we all live under one roof – because, for better or worse, they're constantly around me, beholding me, they are becoming like me.

I remember a buddy of mine growing up who loved Michael Jordan. He studied Michael Jordan. He watched Michael Jordan carefully. And when he played basketball, he played like Michael Jordan. He wasn't as good, obviously, but he wore those Jordan shoes and Jordan shorts and Jordan shirts. And he ran and shot – his form looked like Michael Jordan – the ball just didn't go in all the time. Or you look at Facebook on a Saturday like yesterday. All of the sudden, team colors come out in full force, and everyone's talking about this game or that game that their team is playing. What our mind is focused on is clear in what our lives look like.

Now, take this principle, this reality, and apply it to our lives in Christ. The more we look to Christ, the more we look like Christ. And this is the point that Paul is making here. Now it's interesting because this veil that Paul mentions here, again, goes back to Exodus 34, because Moses would put a veil over his face until the glory on his face faded away. And he uses this imagery of the veil to talk about how many Jewish people in his day were still reading the Bible with a veil over their hearts, and they couldn't see. They hadn't realized how all of these things that are written in the Old Testament are intended to point us to Christ.

But then Paul says in verse 16, *"But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed."* And the reference here to "the Lord" is a reference to Christ, which is a bit confusing because in the next verse he says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit," and we're going to talk about the Spirit in a moment. But even the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and Paul later makes clear in Chapter 4, verse 5, that the way we behold the glory of God is in the face of Christ.

So when one turns to the Lord, to Christ, the veil is removed. When you turn to Christ, you behold the glory of God. And Paul says in verse 18, *"with unveiled faces, we are beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ, and we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."* Do you see it? We become like what we behold. The more we look to Christ, the more we become like Christ.

And again, it makes sense. If we fix our attention and our affection on football, then we'll think and talk and dress and whatever around football. If we fix our attention on money, then we'll reflect a passion for money. If we fix our attention and affection on this or that, then we'll begin to look like this or that. And yet, if we fix our attention and our affection on Christ, then we'll begin to look like Christ. When we rise in the morning, and we look to the Lord, when we go into our prayer closet and we pray before Him, and we open up His Word, then this gazing upon the glory of God in Christ in the morning then sets the stage the entire day for fixing your mind's attention and your heart's affection on Christ on what honors Him, on what brings most glory to Him. Then at the end of day, you're going to look more like Christ than you did when you woke up. We are sanctified in Christ more and more into the image of Christ.

We are sanctified through God the Spirit.

And it's the Spirit who is actually doing this work. We are sanctified through God the Spirit. We see this in 2 Corinthians 3:1-18, Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Ezekiel 36:26-27. See how many times he mentions the Spirit here in Chapter 3. Verse 3, *"And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God,*

not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.” Verse 5, “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Verse 7, “Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?” And then you get to the end of the chapter, and he says in verse 17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” End of the verse, last phrase of the chapter, “For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Now what Paul’s doing here is he’s making a contrast between the Old Testament and the New Testament, specifically what God did through His law in the Old Testament and what God is now doing through His Spirit in the New Testament. And understanding this is huge. God had promised in Jeremiah 31 that he was going to make a new covenant with His people, and in that covenant, He wasn’t just going to write His law on stone as He did in the Old Testament, but He was going to write His law on the hearts of His people; He was going to put His law within them. He says in Ezekiel 36, “I am going to give my people a new heart, and I am going to put a new spirit (my Spirit) in them.” Ezekiel 36:27, “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my commands.”

So I want you to see the contrast here between Spiritless Christianity and Spirit-filled Christianity. And even using those terms, I want to be careful. I’m not saying that the Holy Spirit wasn’t active in the Old Testament. He was. But the Holy Spirit did not dwell in the people of God like we see in the New Testament.

And I wonder sometimes how much of contemporary Christianity, including many, many Christians in this room, have totally missed the beauty of what has happened in the new covenant. Here’s the contrast. First, Spiritless Christianity relies on external regulations. These are regulations written on stone that the people of God were to obey. The only problem is, the history of the Old Testament makes one thing clear: Those people didn’t have the power in and of themselves to obey those regulations. Before Moses even gets down from the mountain with the law, they’ve already broken that law. And in the rest of the Old Testament, we see them over and over again rebelling against the law of God.

They could never measure up to it, which leads to the second facet of Spiritless Christianity here: It revolves around our performance for God. Over and over again, they were trying to obey the law, but lacking the power to do so. And this is the whole picture we see in the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in the New Testament, thinking that they could be made right before God if only they obeyed the law.

And that kind of thinking, Paul says, results in condemnation and death. Because the law demands that you follow it perfectly, so if you can’t keep all the demands of the law (which no one could), then the result of the law is condemnation. It sentences you to death. That’s why Paul says in 3:7, this is “*the ministry that brought death*.” In verse 9, it’s the “*ministry that condemns men*.” They couldn’t follow it, they couldn’t keep the covenant commands, and as a result, the law only condemned them.

Now let me pause for a minute because I’m convinced this is how so many professing Christians are living today. We’ve created a whole religious system and church culture that revolves around performing for God. Do this, do that, do this, pray this prayer, go to church, pray, read your Bible, be a decent Christian and don’t sin, and this is what

Christianity is all about. This is what sanctification is about. Muster up what you can to follow these rules, and God will be pleased.

But this is not New Testament Christianity. It misses the whole point of New Testament Christianity. See the difference when you realize the role that the Holy Spirit plays in all of this. Spirit-filled Christianity relies, not on external regulations, but relies on internal transformation. This is the beauty of what Jeremiah and Ezekiel were promising. God is going to give us a new heart and a new spirit.

This is our problem. We have hearts that are set in rebellion against God, and we need new ones. And God has given us new ones through His Spirit. He has put His Spirit inside of us, to transform us from the inside out. Not just to tell us what to do, but to give us the want to do that and the ability to do that. Ezekiel 36:27, *"I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you walk in be statutes."* This is incredible, and this is what makes the new covenant so much more glorious, according to Paul in 2 Corinthians 3, because when we trust in the work of Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, to live in us and to enable us to obey His commands.

This means – follow this – Christianity no longer revolves around your performance for God, but Christianity revolves around God's performance in us. It depends on God working in us through His Spirit. Now just the law written on stone telling you what to do, and leaving you on your own to try to do it. But the law written on your heart, and the Spirit living in you, are enabling you to obey it. God said in Ezekiel, *"I will be in you, and I will cause you to obey!"* This is the startling, amazing, breath-taking picture of NT Christianity – the Spirit of Christ working in you!

And the result of this is not condemnation and death, but the result is salvation and life. Second Corinthians 3:9, *"For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory."* Exceeded in glory, and exceeded in freedom, down to verse 17, *"where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."* What does that mean? It means freedom to do whatever God commands you to do. Freedom to walk with God, to enjoy God, to glorify God, to obey God in ways you could never do in your flesh, but now you have freedom to do in the Spirit. Romans 8:1, *"There is now no condemnation..."*

Oh, ladies and gentlemen, without the Spirit of God, we are destined to live tired, defeated, dutiful, superficial Christian lives. And by Christian, I mean the culturally acceptable Christian life that in so many ways operates on an Old Testament understanding of the law. "Well, I need to do this, I have to do that in order to appease God and save my skin in eternity." This is not biblical, New Testament Christianity. Biblical, New Testament Christianity revolves around the Spirit of God, and yes, we obey God, and yes, we gather with the church, and yes, we pray and we read the Bible, and yes, we make disciples, but not because we have to, but because we want to. We do it because the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, moving us to obey God and transforming us from the inside out.

Transforms Our Lives

See the battle for transformation.

This leads to the next part of our definition of sanctification here. Sanctification is the process by which God transforms our lives. Now, even in pointing out how huge the Holy Spirit is in our lives, in transforming us, I don't want to give the impression that this process

of transformation is easy. Instead – and it's there in your notes – I want you to see the battle for transformation. You can read that 2 Corinthians 2:11, 10:3 and 11:13-15.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 10. On a few different occasions in 2 Corinthians, Paul references the spiritual battle that is going on in sanctification. In Chapter 2, verse 11, he talks about not being outwitted by Satan and not being ignorant of the fact that Satan, our adversary, is working against our sanctification. In Chapter 11, verse 14, he talks about how Satan often disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive us, and to pull us away from Christ.

And then I want you to hear Paul's language in Chapter 10, verse 3, where he says...

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Do you see the battle here, the war? Follow this: Becoming more and more like Christ every day is a battle; it's a war. It's a war in which God transforms our minds. You can see that in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 and 11:3-6.

This is what the beginning of Chapter 10 here is all about. The weapons of our warfare are divine truths that destroy arguments and opinions raised up against the knowledge of God – the Bible tells us, "*Take every thought captive to obey Christ.*" What imagery! Sanctification is the process of taking every thought captive to obey Christ, working by the power of the Spirit of God in us to think like Christ.

Also, the Spirit is working in us to feel like Christ. God transforms our affections. It says this in 2 Cor. 7:10. You turn back a couple of pages to 2 Corinthians 7, and he's talking about repentance, turning from sin, and he says in 2 Corinthians 7:10, "*Godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*"

Oh, this is so huge, and it goes back to all we were talking about just a minute ago. When we sin and we get caught, are we simply sorry that we got caught? Or are we deeply sorry, sorrowful, grieving because we've disobeyed God? The more we grow in Christ, the more we hate sin and the more we love righteousness. We want God, we want to walk with God, we want to obey God, and we repent whenever we don't obey God, not because we got caught, but because we're grieved before God. Is this the way you feel when you sin? Do you experience godly grief that leads you to turn away from sin, to repent?

God transforms our minds, He transforms our affections, and God transforms our actions. That is what 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 and 12:19-21. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul talks obeying with action in such a way that we will be ready to stand before the judgment seat of Christ one day. In Chapter 12, he calls them away from quarreling and jealousy and anger and hostility and slander and gossip, and conceit and disorder. The more we grow in Christ, the less these things will be evident in us.

And the more we grow in Christ, the more Christ will be evident through us. God transforms our relationships. Oh, just reading through the whole book of 2 Corinthians this week, thinking about sanctification, I couldn't help but to notice Paul's love for people in this church, and his exhortations for them to love one another.

The more we grow in Christ, the more we show the love of Christ to each other in the church. You can read this in Corinthians 2:4, 5:14, 6:11-13, 7:2-4, 11:2 and 11, 12:14-15 and 19. You've got to see this. Turn back to Chapter 2, verse 4, and just real quickly, I want you to get a glimpse of the love here that Paul has for this church, and his longing to show them that love. In Chapter 2, verse 4, Paul says, *"For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you."* Paul's writing with anguish, with tears, out of abundant love. In Chapter 5, verse 14, he says, *"For the love of Christ..."* What a statement! I don't live for myself anymore. I'm controlled by the love of Christ.

In the next chapter, Chapter 6, verse 11, it says, *"We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also."* He's pleading for them to open up their hearts to others, including him. Also, look at Chapter 7, verse 2. It says, *"Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together."*

Turn over to Chapter 11, verse 2. Keep in mind that there was tension between Paul and the church at Corinth, and he says some pretty tough things in his letter to them, but he's showing them the heart behind these things. He says in 11:2, *"For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ."* Then down in verse 11, *"And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!"* God knows I love you!

Then, next chapter, Chapter 12, verse 14 and 15,

Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

He's talking to them like their family. And down in verse 19, he says, *"Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved."* Oh, I read this, and I'm going to get sappy for a minute, but I think about you. I think about us, this church. I love this church - you - this people called The Church at Brook Hills. I want to lead this church well because I love this church deeply.

And sometimes that means saying tough things, and sometimes that means us saying tough things to each other, but it's all because the love of Christ controls us. And the more we grow in Christ, the more we will show the love of Christ to each other in the church, and the more we will spread the love of Christ to others in the world. We're going to talk about this more next week when we think about our role as Christians in the world, but I want to point out two things in particular this week along these lines.

How do we spread the love of Christ to others in the world, according to 2 Corinthians? We do this in two primary ways. One, we do this through a clear reflection of God's holiness. We read this in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. Turn back with me to 2 Corinthians 6:14, where Paul talks about living holy lives in this world. And specifically, when it comes to our relationships, he says not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. This is one of those passages that makes clear why a follower of Christ would not date, for example, or marry

someone who is not a follower of Christ, and I want you to follow the reasoning here. It says,

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Do you see the picture here? God dwells in us; we are His temple. In the Old Testament, you had a place that was set apart – the temple – that depicted and demonstrated the holiness of God. The temple was kept pure and holy because people would see in the temple a reflection of the character of God. Well, today, there are no holy places like this. The building we're in now is not a temple. This is not God's house; this is not a holy place. Once you get to the New Testament, there are no holy places, but only holy people. And our lives are intended to be the depiction, the demonstration before others of the holiness of God.

Think about it: In the Old Testament, where would people go to see the holiness of God on display? They'd go to the temple. Well today, where do people go to see the holiness of God on display? They go to you and to me. This is how we show the world the love of God, through a clear reflection of His character in our lives.

Now if we stopped there, we'd think, "Okay then, I just need to go isolate myself from the world, not interact with the world at all and become a monk and live in a monastery, holy and separate from the world." But that's not all here. We spread the love of Christ to others in the world, not just through a clear reflection of God's holiness in the world, but also through the urgent proclamation of God's gospel. We read that in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

Turn back to 2 Corinthians 4. I want you to put all this together with what we saw in 2 Corinthians 3. In 2 Corinthians 3, we saw that the more we behold Christ, the more we become like Christ. The more we look to Christ, the more we look like Christ.

Now I want you to see the effect of this. The effect of this, to use the imagery of Moses' shining face in 2 Corinthians 3, is that we go into the world radiating the glory of Christ. The more we look like Christ, the more Christ is going to be evident in us to the world around us, and see where this leads. 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 says,

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

There is a real battle raging for real souls of men, women, little boys, and little girls around the world. And the stakes in this battle are high – higher than any war or battle that will ever be fought physically in this world. From the very beginning tonight, I want you to feel the weight of this text. There is a battle waging between the god - little “g” god - of this world who is blinding the minds of unbelievers and the true God - big “G” God - that is shining light into hearts.

Feel this. There is a God over heaven and earth who desires people to be eternally saved and delivered from sin. And there is god in this world who desires people to die in their sin burn in everlasting hell. And we are right in the middle of it, preaching Christ. We are not preaching ourselves, not preaching our sports, not preaching about the weather, not preaching about our hobbies, and not preaching about our political opinions. No, when we realize that eternity is on the line, we are focused on preaching one reality: Christ, and we preach Him with urgency.

Are you doing this? Or maybe a better question to ask is, “Is this transformation that we’re seeing here taking place in your life?” Is your mind becoming more and more like Christ? Are your affections being driven more and more by Christ? Do your actions more and more reflect the person of Christ? And do your relationships more and more reflect the love of Christ in the church and in the world around you? This is what sanctification is all about, growing in all of these ways. And it’s a battle, it’s a war.

See your need for examination.

See the battle for transformation, and then also see your need for examination. You can read this in Corinthians 13:5-10. This is the last place we’ll turn in 2 Corinthians – Chapter 13, verse 5. Paul gets to the end of this letter where he has called out the church at Corinth on a number of different levels, and he gives them this exhortation:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Paul says, “Examine yourself. Test yourself to see if you are in the faith.” And the exhortation the Bible gives to them then is the same one the Bible gives to every single person in this room now: Examine yourselves.

Look at your life. Is there any evidence of this process of transformation in your life? Are you thinking, feeling, acting, loving more and more like Christ? Is there evidence of this process of sanctification in your life? And if there’s not, then maybe it’s because there’s never been that point of justification in your life. Maybe you’ve never turned from your sin and yourself, trusted in Christ as your Savior and Lord. And if that’s the case, then I invite you to do that today. I urge you to do that today. Even now, in your heart, or maybe that point of justification has occurred, but today you’ve been convicted about ways this process of sanctification has not played out in your life. I’m pretty confident that for every Christian in this room, there are numerous areas of our thoughts, our affections, our actions, and our

relationships where we need to grow more into the image of Christ. And it's good, it's healthy for us regularly, if not daily, to pause and examine ourselves, and to say, "In what ways do I need to become more like Christ?" And to realize that God is working in you to make that a reality, to make you more into the image of Christ.

Into the Image of Christ

For this is the goal of sanctification: Sanctification is the process by which God transforms our lives into the image of Christ. To look more and more and more like him. Now here's the deal – and I put this in particular in your notes because it came to my attention recently that there's false teaching spreading in different ways here in Birmingham, particularly on college campuses, that says we can get to the point where we are fully transformed into the image of Christ in this world. In other words, we can get to the point where we never sin any more in this world. False teaching like this is nothing new. There's no new heresy, just revised heresy throughout the ages that deceives and pulls people away from God's Word. For as much as I long for that day when sin will be no more in my life, the Bible clearly teaches that this will not happen this side of heaven.

Our sanctification will not be complete in this world.

Our sanctification will not be complete in this world. We can read about that in Romans 7:18-19 and 1 John 1:8-10. This is evident in places like Paul's clear battle with sin in Romans 7. Or even 1 John, a book that proponents of this heresy often go to, yet the book opens by saying in 1 John 1:8, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* Anyone who says they have reached sinless and holy perfection clearly does not know God.

You might think, "Well, maybe, as you grow in your relationship with God, you might get to a point where you don't see sin in your life." But listen to this wonderful quote from John Murray, where he points out that the exact opposite is true. Murray says:

Indeed, 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?

In other words, the closer you get to God, the more cognizant you become of even the smallest sins in our lives that separate us from God. So this process of sanctification will always be progressing in this world.

Now, this is not an excuse for spiritual laziness. We read that in 1 John 2:1-6 and 3:4-10. 1 John makes that clear. The Bible says in 1 John 2:1, *"My dear children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin,"* and then we're exhorted to walk in obedience to Christ. 1 John 3, which is often used as a proof text for sinless perfection, is actually a clear exhortation to turn from sin day after day after day in this world.

So some people, I guess could say, "Well, if I'm not going to become perfectly sinless like Christ on earth anyway, then it's okay to sin every once in a while." But a Christian would

never say that. Someone who has been justified before God, saved from hell, forgiven for their sin, freed from their sin, and filled with the Spirit of God would never be casual with sin or comfortable with sin.

No, this is not an excuse for spiritual laziness this is an exhortation to spiritual perseverance. We read that in Hebrews 12:1-3. It's why the author of Hebrews 12 says, *"Let's throw off, then, every hindrance and the sin that so easily entangles, and let's run with perseverance the race marked out for us – let's fight this battle around us – let's fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."* Oh, what a great phrase. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith.

Our sanctification will be complete in the world to come.

So mark it down: He will perfect our faith. But it just won't happen in this world. Our sanctification will never be complete in this world, but our sanctification will be complete in the world to come. We can understand that from 1 John 3:2-3. There is a verse that ties all of this together. 2 Corinthians 3:18, *"We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to another."* As we behold Christ, we become like Christ. The more we look to Christ, the more we look like Christ.

And this flows right into what the Spirit of God says in the Word of God in 1 John 3, where we read, *"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."* Do you see it? When we finally behold him, we will finally be like Him. This is why sanctification won't be complete in this world, because it can't be complete until we see Christ. When we behold Him, we will become like Him, look like Him, and one day we will see Him, and we will be like Him. So the Bible says, *"And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."*

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