

Men at Work: Every Believer's Part in Sanctification, Part 2

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We return this morning to the book of Philippians. We began two weeks ago to look at the reality of sanctification, and I want to continue our study there this morning. Last Sunday, we broke to look at the issue of baptism, but I want us to return to this whole matter of sanctification. You know, we have an amazing capacity as human beings to look at something every day, and yet not really see it. If my wife were up here, she'd tell you that's true when it comes to where things are in the kitchen. I know that you wives are often shocked that your husbands can live in a house for a year, five years, ten years, fifteen years, and still walk into the kitchen and say, "Honey, where are the glasses?"

This was brought home to me in a graphic way, however, by a seminar that I attended several years ago when I was still at *Grace To You* and was responsible for more of the administrative and management side of things there. I attended a seminar by a management expert, and he was driving home this reality that we can often see things, and yet not really see them. The room was filled with executives, people who led companies, and he asked us all to cover our watches, not to look at the face, but to cover them, and then answer a series of ten questions about the face of our watch. Now, most of us look at our watches dozens of times a day, and yet, as we tried to answer these rather simple questions about what we saw those dozens of times that we look at our watch each day, I think the average was well below 70% that we scored on that little test, because even though we see it constantly, we don't really look at it.

As I thought about coming back this week to the issue of sanctification, I was reminded of how important it is for that very reason. Often, it is those things that are most familiar to us that we tend to see the least, and so I think it's crucial that, as believers, we back up, and we take a look at what is really foundational to our lives as Christians, and that is this issue of sanctification. We introduced this issue as we approached Philippians 2:12 and 13. Let me read them for you. Remind you what started our study of this. You follow along as I read Philippians 2:12 and 13. Paul writes,

"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work, for *His* good pleasure."

Now these two verses introduced us to this entire issue of sanctification, and I started several, (now two weeks ago), to say to you, before we look at these two verses in detail, which we will

do, Lord willing, the next time I'm with you, we wanted to back up, and take a look at a sweeping overview of what the New Testament says about this issue of sanctification, that is, about the process through which each of us becomes more and more like Jesus Christ. To do that, we're answering a series of questions, asking and answering a series of questions. Let me remind you of the questions that we asked and answered last time.

The first is this: what does sanctification mean? We looked at the Greek word to sanctify. It's used in the New Testament in two senses. The first sense of that word means "to set something aside from common to sacred use, to consecrate something, to set apart for God's service". It was used of the Old Testament, of those temple and tabernacle vessels, those implements of worship that were set apart from the common, ordinary use into the sacred use of God's service, and we noted that, at the moment of salvation, when you became a Christian, at that moment, you were set apart for God's use, for His service. You were sanctified in that sense at one moment of time. Theologians call that positional sanctification – at the moment of salvation, God said you are forever Mine, for My use.

But there's a second use of this word "sanctify" in the New Testament, and the word, that it's the sense rather, that means to actually "make holy, to purify, to render clean in a moral sense, to actually make something holy". There's a sense in which at the moment of salvation, you were declared to be holy, that is, set apart for God's service, but our entire lives are a process whereby that positional reality becomes a reality in our day-to-day lives. And that is what the process of sanctification is all about, when what we have been declared to be positionally, set apart for God's use, holy, separated from the common, sinful, and ordinary, becomes true in our actual living. We defined sanctification this way: it is the work of God's free grace, by which His spirit continually delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him more and more to die to sin, and to live unto righteousness. To simplify that, we would say this: sanctification is that process by which the Spirit of God is at work in your life to decrease the pattern of your sin, and to increase the pattern of your righteousness. Now, that's what sanctification means.

The second question that we asked and answered last week, was what is the nature of this change called sanctification? What is the nature of the change? And I told you that, as I looked at all the New Testament, the sweep of New Testament revelation about sanctification, it seemed to me to reduce to nine basic propositions, and I am not going to go through them in detail, but just to set the stage for what we're going to look at today, and for those of you who weren't here then, let me mention them briefly.

What is the nature of this change called sanctification? It can be characterized this way: first of all, it is a gift of grace made possible by the work of Jesus Christ. Your sanctification is only possible because of what Christ accomplished on your behalf. It's never earned by obedience or effort. You don't earn your sanctification any more you earn your salvation. It is the gift of God's free grace.

Secondly, we said that sanctification is completely a work of God. That is, you and I cannot produce true, genuine, Biblical change to our hearts. You cannot reach inside your heart or anyone else's and change yourself into the image of Jesus Christ.

And yet, thirdly (while that's true) thirdly we said, sanctification still involves maximum human effort. The fact that you can't change yourself doesn't leave you off the hook. You have a responsibility. We are to expend the maximum effort in the pursuit of holiness, but our effort doesn't earn it, it doesn't achieve it. Instead, as we work, as we expend the effort, God changes us.

Number 4, we said that it's a process. It doesn't happen suddenly. It's not an experience by which you are somehow catapulted to a new and higher level. I wish that were true, I wish I could tell you that were true, that there's a switch somewhere on your back that I could flip, and suddenly you would be like Jesus Christ, but that's not the way God ordained it. It's a process. It's like being a spiritual infant, and then being a spiritual child, and then being a spiritual son, and eventually growing into a spiritual father, where you bear increasingly the resemblance of your Father.

Number 5, we said it's a constant war within. You will never be without conflict in this life. The new you, the new you that came about as a result of God implanting a new principle of life in you, the moment of salvation, will forever be struggling with what the Bible calls your flesh, that is, your unredeemed humanness that's still with you, and it will be a constant war until the moment you die.

And that brings us to number 6: sanctification is only complete when you die, or when Christ returns. There's no perfection in this life.

Number 7: sanctification, we said, is a renovation of the heart. It is not merely a change in your behavior. Listen, unbelievers can change their behavior. They can decide because of the threat they face or because of the difficulties of their sin, to make a change in their behavior, but an

unbeliever cannot renovate his heart. Sanctification is not a change in behavior, sanctification is a change of your heart that results in a change in your external behavior.

Number 8: we said sanctification is a means to an end. It's a means to an end. It's not the final goal. Sanctification only allows you to reach the final goal, which is fellowship with God. That's the real goal. That's why Peter says, "Be holy, for I am holy. Be like your Father, so you can fellowship with your Father."

And number 9: finally, we said that the nature of this change is sanctification is guaranteed. It's the goal of our salvation. It's what God set out to do. We looked at Romans 8, where God says, when I foreknew you, I predestined you to what? To be conformed to the image of my Son. That's what I set out to do. It's going to happen. If you're in Christ, you will be like Jesus Christ some day.

So, those nine propositions summarize the nature of the change that's involved in sanctification. This morning, I want us to answer another question, and the question is this: Who experiences that kind of transformation? Who will be sanctified? Who will be sanctified? Will every believer be progressively more like Jesus Christ? Well, we know that it's frequently commanded; for example, here in Philippians 2, we're told to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Work out refers to sanctification, and it's a command, as we'll see next time. This is a command to do something, to work toward your own sanctification, so we're told we're to work at it. Individual believers, if you're in Christ, this is a command from Christ to you.

And we know that this is Christ's goal for everyone of us. You remember 1 Thessalonians 4:3. You know, so many Christians spend their time trying to pursue the will of God. What's the will of God for me? Well, Paul says here it is. This is the will of God for you, even your sanctification, what God wants for every believer. And yet, at the same time that we understand it's a command, that we understand that it's Christ's goal, we also have to admit that every Christian still battles with sin and continues to sin throughout our lifetime. Each of us does. Sometimes we sin horribly. Sometimes we sin, we sin horribly, and we refuse to repent for a long time after we sin. David's a perfect example. He committed adultery with Bathsheba for at least the nine months that Bathsheba was pregnant until the birth of the child, David lived in unrepentant sin. Only then did Nathan come and confront him with his sin, and David repented.

So, does that mean that there are Christians who make no progress toward sanctification in this life? Is it possible to be a Christian and to live your whole life, and see absolutely no sign of

spiritual growth and development? No! Scripture is absolutely clear. Every believer will be in the process of being sanctified. I want you to see this profoundly from the mouth of our Lord. Turn to John 17, John 17, one of my favorite chapters. I come here so often because there's so much rich theology and doctrine here. This is the last hours before our Lord's crucifixion. This is His high priestly prayer to the Father, and he prays an interesting thing in verse 17. He's talking to his Father, and he says this: Father, sanctify them in the truth. Your Word is truth.

Now, is Christ merely praying for the eleven? He is praying for the eleven. That's clear from the previous verses. I've given them Your Word. That would be the apostles, the eleven that remain with Him. Judas has now left already to go betray Christ. So, he's praying for the eleven apostles, but he's not just praying for the eleven apostles. Notice verse 20. He says I do not ask on behalf of these eleven alone, but also for those who believe in me through their word. He says, Father, I'm praying that you would sanctify these eleven, but I'm not just praying for these eleven. I'm praying for all of those who will hear their words and as a result of their words, believe. Who is that? That's you. That's me. You have responded to the words of the apostles that are written on the pages of the New Testament. You've heard their words, and you've believed. That's every New Testament believer. And Christ prays for us. Christ prayed for you, and what was His prayer for you? Here it is. This is His prayer for you.

Sanctify them in the truth. Let them be progressively, the tense of the verb is ongoing. It's a present tense, the idea is this is something I want you to be continually working in them, Father. Be sanctifying them in the truth. You know why I love that? Because John 11:42 tells us Christ says to the Father, he says Father, You always listen to me. When Christ said, Father, sanctify those believers, sanctify those people who listen to the apostles and believe on behalf of their word. Sanctify them. Be sanctifying them. I know God heard, and I know He'll answer that prayer. It's going to happen.

I know for another reason that every believer will be in the process of being sanctified, because this was God's original intention. Turn to Ephesians 2, Ephesians 2. We love these verses. This is one of my favorite chapters, but you get down to verse 8, those familiar words, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one would boast." There are two kinds of works in this passage. The first kind of work that's in this passage is the kind of work that people want to do to somehow earn a right standing before God. They want God to look at their good works and accept them on the basis of what they've accomplished. Paul says, it's not going to happen. He says you are saved by grace through faith. Salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone, because of the grace of God,

and there's no way that any of your works will ever enter in to God's accepting you. He accepts you only because of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, notice how he continues in verse 10, right after he absolutely dismisses that kind of work. Notice what he says in verse 10. For we, that is, we who are believers, we who've been saved, are His literally masterpiece, and we were created in Christ Jesus as His masterpiece unto good works which God prepared beforehand so that we should walk in them. Here's the right kind of good works. Not the kind that are done to somehow earn God's favor and to relinquish his wrath against us, but rather the kind of works that are done by believers after they have come in faith alone to Christ alone for salvation, and now they work in expression of love and gratitude and obedience to their Father. We were created for that. That's what God made us to do. He prepared us beforehand to walk in good works. It's going to happen.

You say, well, OK, I understand Christ's prayer, I understand the fact that here you have this sort of promise, because this is what we were made for, but what about those who make a profession of faith in Christ, but never seem to grow in their faith? What about those who linger in a pattern of unrepentant sin? What should they think? How should they respond? Well, the Bible is crystal clear on this: the professing believer, if you're sitting here this morning, and you claim to be in Christ, but you are in a pattern of unrepentant sin – you just live your life pursuing your own desires, your own cravings, what you want, and there's no obedience in your life, there's no decreasing pattern of sin, and increasing pattern of righteousness, then the Scripture is clear – here's what you need to do. Second Corinthians 13:5. You need to do serious, hard examination. Test yourselves to see if you're in the faith. Examine yourself.

You know what Paul is saying? He's saying it's very possible that you aren't in the faith at all. Examine your heart. This is throughout the New Testament. Turn to Galatians 5, just a few pages back from where we were there in Ephesians. Galatians 5. He says in verse 19: now the acts or deeds of the flesh are evident. Here they are. Here's how the flesh behaves: immorality, impurity, sensuality, all having to do with sexual expression, idolatry, that is putting anything else before God, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, that's all kinds of sort of profligate living. But he says, and things like these. It's not limited to this list. Things like these, of which I forewarned you, verse 21 says, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things, that means those whose lives are characterized by these things, doesn't mean that Christians can't occasionally do these things, it means if your life is characterized by these things, then you will not inherit the Kingdom of God. You're not a believer. You're not in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul goes through a list of terrible sins, and he says “listen, this is what some of you were, but you were justified, you were sanctified, you were set apart for God through salvation”. You should examine your heart. If you find yourself to be professing Christ but you’re living in a pattern of unrepentant sin, then you need to seriously examine your own heart, and those of us who know people like that, we’re supposed to follow Matthew 18. We’re supposed to lovingly, graciously go to them, and urge them to leave the pattern of sin that they’ve involved themselves in and return to a life of obedience if they’re in Christ.

You see, a person who professes Christ, but is living in sin, there are two possibilities. One possibility is that they are simply not a believer. They’re not in Christ. James 2:26 says just as the body, without the Spirit is dead (there’s a graphic image). The body without the Spirit is dead. You walk in, you look at a corpse, it’s obvious that the person is gone. It’s just the tent they lived in. The body is dead. So also, faith without works is dead. That doesn’t mean, as we saw in Ephesians 2, that doesn’t mean works has anything to do with salvation. It means that works are the evidence of spiritual life. You see, where there’s life, there are always signs of life.

In the Old West, you’ve read the stories, as I have, that before they had the modern technology, they weren’t able sometimes to detect those signs of life, and as the stories go, they would bury someone who was in some sort of coma-like state, and later they would dig up the body, only to discover, you know, wood beneath the fingernails, and scratch marks on the top of the coffin. Now we understand, where there’s life, there are certain vital signs, there are certain brain waves, there are certain things still going on if there’s life there. Yes, they may be near death, but there are still signs of life. Compare that to a corpse. I told you before, I worked in a funeral home when I was in seminary. A dead body is, obviously, a dead body. There’s no life. There are no signs of life because there is no life. That’s what James is saying.

So, it’s possible that a person who’s living in a pattern of unrepentant sin isn’t in Christ. It’s also possible that they are in Christ, but let me tell you, if they are in Christ, one of three things will happen. I can absolutely guarantee it on the basis of Scripture. Either, number 1, they will repent, and begin again to pursue holiness, or number 2, if they won’t repent, they will suffer under God’s discipline. Hebrews 12 says if you’re a son, then you’ll be disciplined, and if you’re not disciplined, then you ought to start asking if you’re really a son. And if you suffer under discipline, but you don’t respond and you still don’t repent, then eventually God will take you home.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians that there were some Corinthians who were dead, because they wouldn't repent of their sin. You know, I was thinking this week of that passage in Deuteronomy, where those children in the Old Testament Law, a rebellious son who would not and could not be corrected, who lived in rebellion to his parents, was to be stoned to death. The population would drop a little bit today if that were practiced. But it's not supposed to be practiced today. It's only for the theocracy, Old Testament Israel, but here's the point: that's how our Father views rebellious children. And eventually those who refuse to respond to His discipline, He will take them to Himself. You see, Christ is determined that every one of us who claim Him should have a decreasing pattern of sin, and an increasing pattern of righteousness. If not, he'll discipline us, and if that doesn't get our attention, eventually, He'll take us to Himself. But he will not let us sully the family name.

Who will be sanctified? The answer's clear. Every believer is in the process of being sanctified. So, we've seen what sanctification means. We've seen the nature of the change. We've seen who will be sanctified. That brings us to the crucial question of *how*. How does God produce sanctification? How does God produce this radical change in who we really are? How does He renovate our character? The short answer is this: God uses means. I'm going to tell you later what means, but this is an important point to make. God uses means. You see, there are common, unbiblical views of sanctification that deny God uses means. Instead, they teach that God acts directly on the soul without any human effort, that God just zaps you one day, and boom! You're holy. You're like Christ. I wish that were true, as I said, I wish there were a switch on your back and mine, but that's not the way God works.

Now what are these common, unbiblical views of sanctification? There are three of them. One of them is, I'll call the Keswick theology, that's K-e-s-w-i-c-k, pronounced "Kessick". The Keswick theology. The second is Pentecostal theology, and the third is Wesleyan theology.

Let's look at those three quickly. Because much of our thinking has been undermined by these unbiblical views of sanctification. First of all, Keswick theology. Here's what Keswick theology teaches: Keswick theology says if you're struggling with your sin, if you just can't seem to, quote unquote, get victory in an area or in your life, then the real issue is that you're trying to do it. If you would just stop trying, and let God do it, then you would see true results. The sort of mantra the Keswick movement, or the deeper life movement, as it's often known, is let go, and let God. Let go, and let God.

You see, they teach that the first major step in sanctification is a sort of total surrender to God, a total abandonment to God. I must come to a point in my life, a moment of crisis when I recognize my own inability, and stop trying to change myself, and in the simple act of faith, receive spiritual victory from God just like I received salvation. And if I do that, then at that moment, I am catapulted to a new and higher level of spirituality. They would tell you something like this: they would say, you were walking along with two coins in your pocket, and one day, you realize those coins were there, and you took one of those coins out, and it was the coin of salvation, and you said, I can have salvation. I'm going to cash this coin in, and you give it to God, and, in an act of faith, God saves you, just like that.

And then, you go along wallowing as a Christian in your sin, and in defeat and despair, and then one day you're sitting in the corner in sackcloth and ashes, and you realize, "I've got another coin in my pocket. And you pull it out, and it's the coin of sanctification, and you say, God I'm willing to cash this coin in, whatever it costs, and you give it to God, and God zaps you again, and wow! Just like you received salvation, you now receive sanctification, in a moment in time. It's a gift, not perfection necessarily, but a new, higher level of spirituality. This is insidious. You know, it was a trap that I fell into as a young Christian. I was saved as a senior in high school, and I went away to college, and some folks gave me, well-meaning people gave me some books that had this kind of theology in it. And it frankly waylaid me as a Christian for several years. I got stuck in the mire and trap in this kind of thinking, that this is how to pursue sanctification. It's wrong, and we'll look at it in a moment.

A second flawed view of sanctification that doesn't believe God uses means is Pentecostal theology. Pentecostal theology teaches that there's this moment of crisis when you are baptized with the Holy Spirit. You see, they misunderstand 1 Corinthians 12:13 that says that at the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit baptizes every believer into the body of Jesus Christ. They misunderstand that, and they see the baptism of the Holy Spirit as some second work of grace down the line in your life. They actually think of it as a second blessing. Usually in Pentecostal theology, it's accompanied by speaking in tongues. So again, there's this crisis moment in which you come to a place where you're suddenly baptized by the Holy Spirit, you speak in tongues, and it results in being spiritually catapulted to a new spiritual level. At that point, you gain victory over your indwelling sin.

The third flawed view of sanctification that doesn't believe in means is Wesleyan theology. Now the Wesley brothers were wonderful and contributed a lot to our faith. We sing some of their hymns. I love them as you do. But, in their view of sanctification, they were flawed. They

believed and taught this, that subsequent to salvation, that is, after you're saved, there is normally, and that's the key word, almost, this is true of almost every Christian, they would say, after salvation, later there is an act of the will in which individuals surrender their lives to the will of God. In Baptist circles, it's usually called re-dedication or something like that. But there's this crisis moment, and as a result of that surrender and that moment of spiritual crisis, God suddenly and radically delivers me either from all my tendencies to sin, again not perfection, but I catapult to a new higher level, or God removes from me one dominating sin, something that controls me, that enslaves me. Wesley taught that this was a second work of God's grace, just as salvation was the first and primary work of God's grace. This was a second work of God's grace.

Now, what's the problem with those flawed views? They all share several things in common, several problems. First of all, they teach that sanctification is something that God does directly without any means, without any human effort.

Secondly, they teach that sanctification is something that happens suddenly. In a moment of crisis, I go from spiritual defeat to victory.

And thirdly, these views all assume that my real problem, and your real problem, is a lack of what? Lack of power. Our problem is we don't have power to overcome our sin. We need power to gain victory. That isn't what Paul says. Turn to Ephesians 1, Ephesians 1. In this great prayer in verse 18, he says, you know I pray that the eyes of your heart will be enlightened so that you will know. Know what? Verse 19, that you will know about the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, and notice *these are* is in italics, literally the sentence continues this way. It's the surpassing greatness of His power in accordance with the very same power by which He raised Jesus from the dead. You know what Paul is saying? He's saying, listen, your problem isn't power. You already have a power working in you that you cannot even imagine. It's the very same power that God used to raise Jesus Christ from the dead. Our problem isn't power. Our problem is our relationship to the truth, our knowledge and our appropriation of the truth.

Listen to J. C. Ryle. J. C. Ryle wrote a wonderful book I would highly recommend to you called *Holiness*. It's a classic on this issue. Listen to what he wrote:

Many admire growth of, excuse me, many admire growth in grace in others, and wish that they themselves were like them, but they seem to suppose that those

who grow are what they are by some special gift or grant from God, and that, as this gift was not bestowed on them, they must be content to sit still. Growth in grace, he says, on the other hand, growth in grace is bound up in the use of means within the reach of all believers, and as a general rule, growing souls are what they are because they use these means.

Sanctification isn't about some work of God separate from human effort. It is a work of God, as we will see when we get to verse 13 of Philippians 2. It's all of God, but it involves maximum human effort. God uses means.

You know, God does, on rare occasions, act in our world, apart from means, what theologians would say immediately, that is without a mediator, He works directly. We see this occasionally in a healing. Someone has a terrible disease, the doctors have given up, and then dramatically, in a way that leaves the doctors shrugging their shoulders and raising their hands, the person is healed. God works directly and miraculously. Really those are miracles when God does that. C. S. Lewis used to describe it as God normally works with His hand in a glove. You can't see His hand. He's at work through providence. He's at work using the mechanisms that he's put in place in the world, but sometimes God takes His hand out of the glove, and He works in a way where you can actually see His hand. That's a miracle. But God ordinarily works through means.

For example, can God heal dramatically, directly without the use of means? Absolutely. But how does God normally heal? Through doctors, through medicine, and more importantly, through the healing process that's He's made a part of the human body. That's how God normally works, through the use of those means.

Take growing a crop, for example. Some of you have gardens in your back yard. Could God, if He chose, skip the process? Could you plant the seed today and have a harvest tomorrow? Of course, God could do that. He's behind the whole process. He's the one that makes the thing grow to begin with. But God as an ordinary course uses means. He uses your work to till the soil, your planting of the seed. He uses the sun and the rain and the time, and you have a harvest. That's how God ordinarily works. Even in spiritual matters, God ordinarily uses means. For example, your salvation. What does Peter say in 1 Peter? He says you were born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, even of the living and enduring Word of God. God brought salvation to you through the use of means, that is, through his Word. That His word was the means.

This is dramatically borne out in Romans 10. Turn to Romans 10. You're familiar with that verse, in verse 13, whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. But Paul rolls out of that in verse 14, to say this: How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how will they believe in Him whom they've not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? You see what Paul is saying? He's saying ordinarily, even in salvation, God uses means. He uses both His Word, Peter says, and he uses somebody to proclaim that Word, to bring that Word to people. Could God announce the message of salvation from Heaven? Well, of course He could. But is that how God ordinarily chooses to work? He will work that way during the period of the Tribulation, but is that how He works now? No! He works through the use of means. The same is true in our sanctification.

Now, so sanctification is accomplished through the use of means. There's one other problem I have to address before we get to what the biblical means of sanctification is, and that is this: there are others who agree, yes, I believe sanctification is accomplished through means, but they're misled about what those means are. Let me give you two, or three rather, that have arisen in the life of the church.

And a couple of them are actually seeing comebacks today, believe it or not. One of them is asceticism. Asceticism. That simply means to deprive yourself of God's good gifts, or to inflict pain or discomfort on yourself for the purpose of achieving holiness. In its extreme form, it was flagellation, self-flagellation. Somehow that was going to restrict and restrain my body so that I could be more holy. There are men through the ages who were so enslaved to lust that they literally, physically plucked out their eyes, thinking that would remedy their situation.

Others, and this is even becoming a more modern remedy for sex offenders, would castrate themselves in hope of achieving victory over that dominating sin, only to discover that the real heart and root of their sin was buried in their heart, a place a knife could never reach. Asceticism will not gain holiness. A more common form of this asceticism with Christians is people who just say, you know what, Christians really should not enjoy life. They should deprive themselves of some of God's good gifts.

You may not know this, but in the early history of American Christianity, there was a group who believed that it was pandering to the flesh to take hot baths. That's what the body wanted and so you should deprive the body of that, and so those who were taking hot baths were seen as unholy and pandering to the flesh, and there were those who said, no we're the cold-water brethren.

More power to them. Listen, self-discipline and self-control are important tools for bringing our body under control, but asceticism will never produce holiness.

Look at Colossians 2. Paul couldn't be clearer. Colossians 2, the Colossians were involved in a philosophy that taught this kind of asceticism. Verse 21, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. And he says these are in accordance, verse 22, with the commandments and teachings of men. Verse 23, these are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value against fleshly indulgence. Asceticism is not going to produce sanctification.

Another form of unbiblical means of sanctification, not only asceticism, but also isolation. The extreme form of this is monasticism. People who said look, I want to be holy, and so the real problem is all those external influences that are fighting at me, and so I'm going to withdraw into a monastery. I mean, how much trouble can you get into in a monastery? What they discovered is you can express your sinfulness, just in different ways. The more common Christian form of isolation is those believers who say, you know the real problem I'm experiencing is all these unbelievers, so I'm just going to isolate myself from my unbelieving neighbors and my unbelieving co-workers, and I'm just going to live in my own little world separate from everyone else. That's not God's solution either. That's not God's way to holiness. John 17, Christ says Father I don't pray that you take them out of the world.

In fact, notice 1 Corinthians. Paul makes this point extremely clear. First Corinthians 5. Paul had written a previous letter to the Corinthians which we don't have anymore, it was lost by God's providence, and he says, verse 9, I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people. They had misunderstood that. He said, now, but wait a minute. I did not mean with the immoral people of this world, in other words, with unbelievers or with the covetous or swindlers or idolaters, for then you'd have to go out of the world. He says obviously you're not going to do that. You're going to continue to associate with unbelievers who practice these things. But actually, verse 11, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he's practicing these things. In other words, this is recognizing the fact of church discipline. You need to deal with somebody who says he's a brother, and he's living in these patterns of sin. So, isolation from the world is not a legitimate means of sanctification.

A final false form or means of sanctification I would give to you is osmosis. Now a lot of Christians believe in this one. They believe if they come and sit in a church service like this one, by osmosis, that is, just by being here, that they're going to be suddenly sanctified. And if

they're here, week after week, and that's all they do, they show up, they listen, they go and eat their lunch, then God's going to sanctify them. Those are all illegitimate means of sanctification.

So, if those aren't the means, what is the means of sanctification? The primary means God uses is the truth. The truth. John 8:31-32, Christ says if you're going to be my disciples, then you're going to obey my Word, and my Word will what? Set you free.

First Peter 1, in fact, let's turn there briefly. First Peter 1. Peter writes this in verse 22: Listen to this. This is a fascinating statement. Since you have an obedience to the truth, purify your souls. As you obey the truth, your souls are purified. The truth is at work, and the truth is the implement, it's the means God uses to sanctify. He goes on in verse 2 of Chapter 2. It's the pure milk of the Word that you grow in respect to salvation. But we already looked at John 17:17. Let me remind you of what Christ said there in His prayer to the Father. Father, sanctify them, and do it by means of, literally (this translation of the Greek preposition there) do it by means of the truth. Sanctify them, be making them progressively more like Jesus Christ by means of the truth. Now what does He mean by the truth?

The truth is not some wonderful secret teaching that you suddenly discover. It's not some key truth that transports you as soon as you learn it from a lower to a higher level. It's not the Star Trek approach to sanctification, you know, "Beam me up, Scotty." In a moment of time, you're sort of beamed up to a higher level. It's not some famous Christian spiritual secret. Christ defines it in John 17:17, what does he say? Sanctify them by means of the truth. Your Word is truth. It's God's Word. It's the entirety of God's Word, the whole truth, the entire teaching of Scripture. That's the means God uses to sanctify you.

Now folks, we're going to talk next time about the process, exactly how you use the Word, but let me just give you the short story, because some of you won't be here for that. You have a responsibility. Your responsibility is to take in the truth, in other words, to put yourself in a place where you can hear it, to read it, so you take in the truth.

Secondly, you make sure you understand it. You work to comprehend it. You use your mind just like you would anything else you read. You ask God's direction to help you understand the truth.

Thirdly, you seek to determine how that truth applies to you. How should this change my thinking? How should this change my behavior? What changes should I make as a result of what I've learned?

And then finally, you take active steps to make those changes. That's your responsibility, and that's my responsibility. But it's the Word God uses. It's the truth, the entire truth of Scripture. You say, well, doesn't God use trials to make us holy? Yes, trials have a sanctifying effect. Hebrews 12 tells us that. But trials are only effective if they're rightly mingled with the Word. There are people who endure trials every day, and those trials make them angry and bitter and terrible people. The key difference is interpreting the experience through the Word of God.

That's why R. L. Dabney wrote this: "The Word is the means after all, in all other means. Where the Word is not, there is no holiness." The Word is not the cause of our holiness, it is the means of our holiness. You see, truth by itself has no more power to change your heart than the light of the sun has the power to make a blind person see. That's why verse 13 of Philippians 2 says God is at work in you. He uses the truth to change you.

Let me give you some specific steps to put in place this week, as a result of what we studied this morning. First of all, determine to spend, if you aren't already, determine right now to spend 15 to 30 minutes every day in God's Word this week. You say, well, you know, you don't understand my life. How can I fit that in? Let me encourage you to take David's approach. David said, I have esteemed the words of your mouth more than my necessary food. Don't feed your body until you feed your soul. Let me give you a little secret: you'll find time to do it.

As you read, as you take the time to read, let me encourage you to keep two lists. First list is what does that passage tell you about God? You always ought to be looking in the Scripture to see who God is, what He's declared Himself to be. What does that passage tell you about God? List everything that, every way God is described, every action God makes. List that truth on your sheet of paper. In the other column, list the changes that you ought to make as a result of what you've learned in that passage, either in your thinking, in your attitudes, in your behavior, in your speech, whatever. The changes you ought to make.

And then, finally, make a list of specific steps you can take that week, that day, to put those changes into practice in your life. That's your responsibility. James 1 says, don't just be a hearer of the Word. Be a doer. How do you become a doer of the Word? You take steps to make the changes that the Word's urging you to make. The Bible is not a magic book. You

can't just pass your eyes over the page and expect God to change you. You have to do something. And as you expend the effort, God will change you. Christ said, Father, sanctify them in the truth. Sanctify them by means of the truth. Your Word is truth.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word, thank You for the fact that You use it in our lives to make us more like Jesus Christ.

Forgive us for our laziness. Lord, forgive us for falling back on You as if the problem with our indwelling sin, the problem with our struggle with righteousness was because of You, that it was somehow Your fault.

Lord, help us to work hard. Help us to expend the effort to understand, to be in Your Word, to understand Your Word, to take specific steps to apply Your Word to our lives. And then, Lord, as we expend that effort, we acknowledge that we can't change ourselves.

But we ask You, as we obey and expend the effort, we ask You to do a miraculous thing in our hearts, and that is to change us into the image of Jesus Christ.

In His name we pray. Amen.