

A Biblical View of Sanctification

By Jim and Carolyn Murphy

Part II

November 2000

In Part I of this article we examined the concept of sanctification as used in the Old Testament. Then we saw that the New Testament brought us into the fully developed doctrine of the *process of sanctification* as a life-long work to conform us to the image of Christ.

How Does God Sanctify Us?

Let's look more closely into *how* God accomplishes sanctification in the believer's life. I have identified 4 means God uses.

1. God Uses Scripture

God uses Scriptures to sanctify us. In Jesus' high priestly prayer he prayed, "*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*" (Jn 17:17 NIV, emphasis added.)

Paul confirms the same concept.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the *washing with water through the word*, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Eph 5:25-27 NIV, emphasis added.)

In actual fact, the reading, teaching and preaching of the word of God sanctifies the hearers. This is why it is so important that Christians develop a life-style of Bible reading, attending Bible classes, and going to church services so that they are hearing God's word.

Paul gave us an example of how powerful a tool God's word is in the process of sanctification when he wrote, "I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'" (Rom 7:7)

2. God Uses the Holy Spirit

The Bible also tells us that the Holy Spirit is an agent God uses for our sanctification. Look at the following Scripture:

... to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, *sanctified by the Holy Spirit*. (Rom 15:16 NIV, emphasis added. See also 2 Thes 2:13, 1 Pet 1:2.)

Since the Holy Spirit indwells every believer, we literally have a built-in Sanctifier! That means every time we sin the Holy Spirit is there speaking to and convicting us of sin.

When a person writes a will he or she designates an executor. It is the job of the executor to carry out the terms of the will after the person dies. Jesus left His will in the form of the New Testament. After His death, the Holy Spirit came as Jesus' executor. He is here on earth to execute the will of Jesus in the hearts and lives of every believer.

Jesus gave more teaching on the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John than any place else in Scripture. Here are some of the things the Holy Spirit does for us as the church:

- Gives Life (6:63)
- Counsels (14:26)
- Testifies about Jesus (15:26)
- Guides in all truth and tells us what is to come (16:13)
- Take from Jesus and makes it known to us (16:15)

So, as Jesus' executor, the Holy Spirit not only convicts us of sin, but He creates the life of Jesus in us.

3. God Uses Our Brothers and Sisters

Many Christians may not like it, but God has ordained that we are to be corrected, instructed and admonished from time to time by our Christian brothers and sisters. Let's look at some Scriptures that speak about this.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you *teach and admonish one another* with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16 NIV, emphasis added.)

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and *who admonish you*. (1 Thes 5:12 NIV, emphasis added.)

We proclaim him, *admonishing and teaching everyone* with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. (Col 1:28 NIV, emphasis added.)

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and *competent to instruct one another*. (Rom 15:14 NIV, emphasis added.)

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, *you who are spiritual should restore him gently*. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Gal 6:1 NIV, emphasis added.)

If you are like me, you don't like to be corrected, especially by someone close. The Holy Spirit sometimes uses my wife to correct me and often I don't like it! But without any doubt, the Bible tells us that part of our function in the body of Christ is to admonish and correct one another as the need arises.

Rejecting the correction or counsel given by a brother (or a spouse!) is all too easy. Our flesh resents such correction, so much so that there is a strong tendency to negate or ignore it. As a result, there are those in the church who allow no one to speak correction to them. The Bible also tells us about these people.

He who heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray. (Pro 10:17 NIV)

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid. (Pro 12:1 NIV) [Don't blame me! The Bible said that!]

He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored. (Pro 13:18 NIV)

A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise. (Pro 15:12 NIV)

In view of all the above, I believe it is exceedingly wise for every one of us to have people in the body of Christ who have our permission to speak correction to us when the need arises. The members of the Board of Directors of Hundredfold Ministries have this authority over me. My pastor has this authority. My wife has this authority. In so doing, I have given God several people who can speak admonition and counsel to me.

Don't be like a young brother who came to me once asking me to speak correction to him should the need arise. He went off into error and I admonished him. When I admonished him he quickly left, ending our relationship. What a shame.

4. God Uses Circumstances of Life

There are times in the believer's life that God uses

unpleasant circumstances to effect change in his or her life. I want to make it clear that I don't believe God causes these circumstances. The Holy Spirit simply steps in, using them as a tool when He sees an opportunity to use the circumstance to correct or mature us.

For example, I observed one brother some years ago who had a real streak of self-sufficient pride in him. He would not allow anyone to help him with anything. One day he got sick. He was unable to even take care of his house. As the illness continued, he lost his job. Before long he grudgingly began to allow various Christians to help around his house, even providing food for him. This was an awful circumstance. But by the time he overcame the sickness, all that self-sufficient pride was gone! The result was genuine humility and God loves the humble!

So, when we find ourselves beset by circumstances, bring the situation before the Lord and ask His guidance. Remember, No temptation [circumstance] has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted [tested] beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Cor 10:13 NIV)

And let's not forget, sometimes the devil is behind our circumstances. He is simply doing his job: to rob, kill and destroy! (See John 10:10.) But the Holy Spirit is still there to step in, redeem the circumstances, and mature us in the process.

How Can We Know How Far We Have Progressed?

If you are anything like me, you like to view yourself as pretty close to the likeness of Jesus . . . maybe just below the Apostles in the process of sanctification. Remember Figure 1? Remember everything below the "0" line represents our sin life. Everything above the line represents our sanctified life. If you are like me, you are probably somewhere just above the "0" line in Figure 1! But we like to think of ourselves as much more sanctified than we really are. Don't little children like to see themselves as more grown up than they are? I'm afraid we are no different.

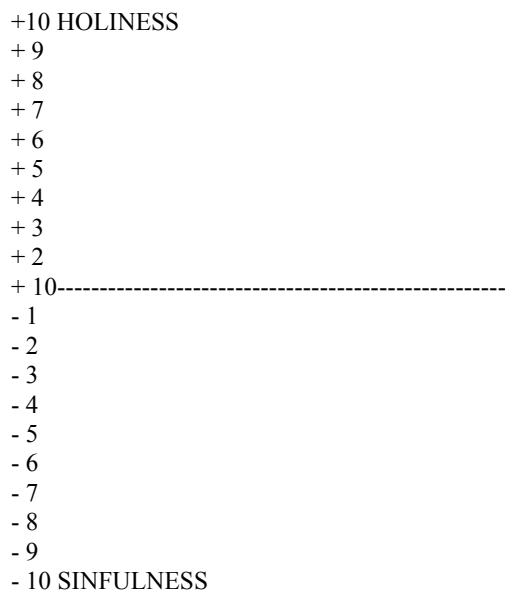


Figure 1

John's Three Stages of the Process

The Apostle John shows us that there are three stages of

the process of becoming conformed to the image of Jesus.

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (1Jo 2:12-14 NIV)

1. Children

Obviously, John's little children are the new babes in Christ. They are those who have just asked Jesus into their hearts. These are the ones whose sins have just been forgiven. Because of their former life-styles, they are still very much self-centered. They have little or no Bible knowledge. They haven't a clue what lies ahead of them! These are the ones who especially need to understand the doctrine of justification while they are learning Scripture. (See Part I.)

2. Young Men

We see that John attributes three characteristics to the young man.

a. Strong

The young man is strong. Natural strength is the by-product of a healthy diet and plenty of exercise. If a young Christian becomes an active student of Scripture and puts what he or she is learning into practice, he is going to become spiritually strong.

b. The Word of God Lives in You

How does the word of God get into the Christian in the young man or young woman stage? They must become students of the Bible. They must memorize Scripture. They must meditate on the word. They must put what they are learning into practice. In short, the Bible becomes their guidebook to life.

c. They Overcome the Evil One - Spiritual Warfare

The young man or woman in Christ is to do spiritual battle with the enemy. The first thing this means is that he or she must learn to identify the enemy. By doing battle with demonic forces, they learn experientially about their authority in Christ and how to use it. And it means that they learn to defeat the enemy!

When the young man or young woman in Christ grows from the little child stage to the young man stage, God removes the protective hedge from around him, allowing the devil to attack him. This doesn't mean that the Father loves him less than he loved him as a little child. No, it simply means that the relationship is maturing. It's time for him to learn to fight. It's time for him to learn that he has authority and how to use it.

The devil is going to begin attacking him at every vulnerable spot. He may attack his finances, his health, his relationships with others, his emotional being, his property . . . in short, the devil attacks everything he can get his dirty little hands on.

The devil is a bully. He will run over any Christian who is fearful, unwilling to fight, or is unaware of his or her authority in Christ. Unless and until the believer rises up in the authority Jesus has given him he will live a substandard life under the dominance of

the devil. Unfortunately, there are far too many Christians in this category today.

It is urgent that we train Christians in spiritual warfare as they enter the young man stage. Jesus overcame the devil. We, too, must overcome him. Jesus defeated every demon He confronted. So must we. We will never become fully conformed to the image of Jesus unless we do.

The Fight Intensifies

Let's look at what happens to the Christian who, at some point in his walk, becomes deeply involved in sin as a life-style. I have drawn Figure 2 to assist us.

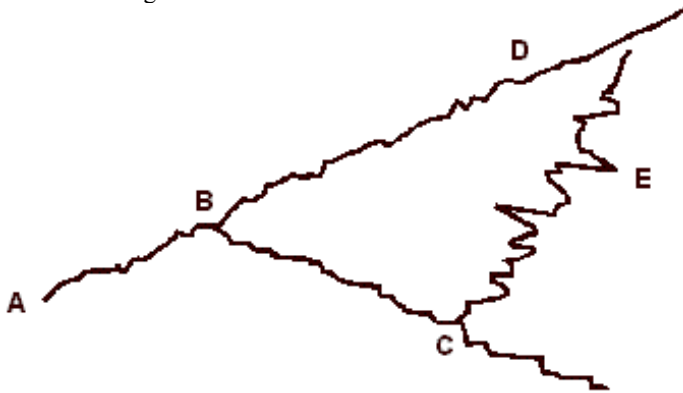


Figure 2

Point A is when the person becomes born again. That person then begins to move up along the D line. This line represents every Christian's struggle with the cycle of sin and repentance. D represents a Christian who is trying to become sanctified. For example, he may go to a movie he should not see on Friday night and repent of it on Saturday. The D line has its ups and downs, but its direction is steadily upward along the path of sanctification.

Now let's look at another man. He also is born again at point A. But at point B he decides this Christian walk is just too hard and he chooses to begin to involve himself in a serious sin. I will use pornography as an example. This man begins to go to movies and read magazines that are pornographic. It becomes a life-style with no real repentance. Oh, he knows its a sin, but he won't give it up. Then, after a couple of years, he just can't take the sin in his life anymore and he truly repents and vows to get it out of his life. The act of repentance is represented at point C. Remember, he is still saved, but look where he is and look where he must get to up on line D to continue on the walk of sanctification!

So he begins his climb out of the pit of the sin of pornography. Now, what happens to all those images from the movies and magazines he has taken into his head? They are still there, aren't they? There are instances in which the Lord will sovereignly remove such images when someone repents. But usually the Lord allows them to remain in the person's mind. Then the battle really begins. This battle is indicated by the E line. The fight is between the demons who have been given free access to his mind through his sin, and the Holy Spirit who is helping the man to fight them. Notice that the man still has to fight. The Holy Spirit won't do it all for him. He is in the young man stage of learning to overcome the evil one.

But look at how much better off that man would have been if he had never made a decision to involve himself in the sin of pornography! Look at the battle he has to fight. Look at the E space

he has to conquer before he can get back up to D. How much better off this man would have been if he had stayed on the D line!

Testing Our Reaction

I have identified some Scriptures that will help us truly to know where we are in the sanctification process. "For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." (Mt 12:34 NIV) To learn where we are all we have to do is to listen to our own words.

Let us assume you just suffered a terrible injustice. It's bad! One of four immediate reactions will follow. The reaction that flows from you will tell you how Christ-like or sanctified you are. Here are the reactions:

1. Anger! "They can't do this to me! That's a lie! I didn't do that . . ." and so forth. This reaction is quite indicative of the spiritual little child. Self is the center. They have insulted self. Self has been hurt--so self responds defensively.
2. The "Why Me?" response! "God, why did this happen to me? I don't deserve this. This is not fair" and so forth. Still, we are hearing the voice of the little child, or perhaps the beginning of the young man stage. Self is still the primary consideration.
3. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom 2:28 NIV) Glory to God! You are beginning to learn. God is in control. There is measurable growth taking place!
4. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Phil 1:21 NIV) Glory! If this is your response, I assure you that you have reached the spiritual father stage. You are no longer blown about by the circumstances of life. You are living the victorious Christian life. You have attained a high degree of sanctification.

3. The Spiritual Fathers and Mothers

The third stage of spiritual growth John wrote about was that of a spiritual father. (1Jo 2:13,14) It is God's will for the believer to become a spiritual father or mother, thus becoming conformed to the image of Jesus. Look at Paul's statements:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and *become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* (Eph 4:11-13 NIV, emphasis added.)

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, *which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* (Col 3:9-10 NIV, emphasis added.)

Let's look again at Figure 1. I believe that the more we can get and stay above the line, the more sanctified we become. As the years go by, we should be more and more free of sin. But that is only part of it. We should be moving more and more into being conformed to the image of Christ. In other words, we are becoming spiritual fathers and mothers in the kingdom.

Fruit of the Spirit

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal 5:22a NIV)

One of the surest ways I know for us to check our progress in this work of sanctification is to take inventory of how many of the fruits of the Spirit are at work in us. A mature believer is continually manifesting these fruits, although some may be stronger than others. Of course I am not saying that we are ever completely done with sin. But a mature believer should be manifesting the maturing fruits of the spirit much more often than the occasional sin that is still to be rooted out. Remember, fruit is grown. It is the Holy Spirit's work to sanctify us but we must cooperate to get the work completed. I believe this phase of sanctification, learning to conform to Jesus' image, begins near the end of the young man stage.

Father Pleasers

Jesus is and always has been centered on His Father. He always did the will of His Father while he lived on earth. Mature spiritual fathers in the church are also Father centered. Their hearts' desire is to please their heavenly Father. Little children are self-centered. In the young man stage a shift begins from self to God. Spiritual fathers and mothers are much more interested in others than in themselves. They appear to be in constant communion with the Father. I have known spiritual fathers and mothers in the body of Christ who are so heavenly minded they seem to be part way to heaven already!

Since God loves man in general and His church in particular, He is always looking for vessels through whom He can express Himself. He is looking for eyes that see, ears that hear, hands that reach out, and feet that travel to those in the world who need Father's loving care. His Son, Jesus, was always doing what He saw the Father do. (See Jn 5:19.) As we grow into the spiritual father stage, we, too, will begin doing the same. Spiritual fathers and mothers see the needs, hear the cries, touch the hurts, and go to those who have placed their trust in the heavenly Father.

As the maturing believer begins to practice these things, in the very process, he or she is being conformed to the image of Jesus. Knowledge alone will never conform us. Bible classes, Bible school, seminary, nor all the learning in the world will conform us to Jesus' image. We must, by cooperating with the Spirit of Jesus in us, develop a life-style of doing the will of the Father.

Sadly I believe that there are Christians who will never really become sanctified. They want salvation and the benefits of a Christian community. But they do not want Jesus to be Lord of their lives. These people just kind of bump along between about a -2 and a +1 or +2 in Figure 1. They manage to rid themselves of most sin but never really produce much fruit of the Spirit. There are people like this in our churches. I cannot help but wonder what they will hear when they stand before the Lord on that Day. It *is* God's will that we be sanctified, conformed to the image of Jesus.

The choice is ours. We must will to do it, not just occasionally, but as a life-style. I know a spiritual father over 80 years old. In all the years I have known him, his consuming desire has been prayer, worship and serving others. He owns very little of this world's goods, yet he possesses riches beyond this world's measure!

Let me conclude with another quote from Harris Franklin Rall. "For Christian faith is the moral surrender of our life to Him in whom truth and right come to us with authority to command. The meaning of that surrender is ethical; it is opening the life to definite moral realities and powers, to love, meekness, gentleness, humility, reverence, purity, the passion for righteousness, to that which words cannot analyze but which we know as the Spirit of Christ."⁽¹⁾ To live in this kind of intimate, Father pleasing fellowship, conforming to the image of Christ, is the highest calling and achievement on earth!

1. Much of the information in this teaching has been taken from the late Harris Franklin Rall, a contributing writer for *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, in his excellent article on Sanctification. Vol. IV, pages 2681 - 2685. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI. Page 2684.

HUNDREDFOLD MINISTRIES, INTERNATIONAL

P. O. Box 625
Blue Jay, CA 92317

Telephone 909/336-9701

E-mail: jim.murphy@hundredfold.org Web site: www.hundredfold.org

Rev. Jim Murphy and his wife, Carolyn, of Blue Jay, California, United States, head Hundredfold Ministries, International. They write Christian teaching literature and travel to the Developing Nations of the world teaching Christian leaders. Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l is a cross-denominational Christian ministry dedicated to strengthening the church in the Developing Nations of the world.

Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l provides in-country Bible school courses and leadership training seminars. The classes and seminars are taught by seasoned, anointed teachers. The subject matter is directed towards the development and maturing of Christian leaders. The goal of the Ministry is to produce leaders who will be better equipped to lead and direct national churches.

All of Hundredfold Ministries training material is available from our web site listed above. Pastors in the Developing Nations may receive this material free of charge by going on our web site and requesting it.