

WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW, VOLUME II (#WCSK2), PART IX: THE CHRISTIAN WALK (SANCTIFICATION)

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The series What Christians Should Know Volume II (#WCSK2) boosts your understanding and shows you how to apply Biblical principles to everyday life. All Scriptures are taken from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. Biblical references are examples and are in no way intended to be exhaustive. Many of the ideas here build upon the series [What Christians Should Know, Volume I](#) (#WCSK), which provides education on core beliefs and doctrines in the Christian faith. All of the lessons are best used as a general guide as you engage in your own Bible study.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalms 119:105).

How this Biblical principle applies to your everyday life: Sanctification provides a practical guide for Christian living. Christians are not meant to be perfect but are meant to make incremental progress in their walk with God. Still, we vigorously strive for the high goal of holiness exemplified by Jesus. So, don't feel discouraged, because less-than-perfect performance is, in fact, quite normal.

Introduction

Tell me if this sounds familiar. You do something that you know is wrong and even tell yourself that you shouldn't be doing it while you're doing it. Yet, you do it anyway. When the event is over, you look at yourself and ask, “What's wrong with me?” You then begin to wonder if, in fact, you are truly saved and if someone who is supposed to know God can think and act like this. You get saddened and feel too ashamed to approach God, pray about it, or talk to someone else about it. You especially don't want to talk to another Christian about it, because they may judge you harshly.

Or, perhaps you look back on your day and realize that you said or did something that was very un-Christian. You're shocked because doing the un-Christian thing came so naturally, so you begin to wonder if your Bible reading and all the church you've attended was all a waste of time.

Or, maybe you just feel inadequate. Maybe you look at other Christians (or read about other Christians) and think, *They seem to have it all together and I don't. What am I doing wrong?*

Or, maybe someone told you that once you got saved, life would be easy. The problem is that that statement doesn't reflect your reality. Even more, whenever you do take a step closer to God, life always seems to get *more* difficult and frustrating. Wouldn't it just be easier to leave God alone?

The purpose of this chapter is to address these familiar and common questions of the everyday Christian experience. It is a lesson intended to illustrate the fact that as believers, we will always fall short of the Biblical ideal until the final day of glorification in God's kingdom. Because after all, if we did reach the ideal here on earth, there would be no reason to concern ourselves with anything else. This assertion is not meant to encourage sin, nor is it meant to dissuade anyone from continuously pressing on toward the ideal. The bar is set high so you know where to aim in *the process* of moving toward a goal. That process has a set destination, but you certainly will stumble and fall along the way toward that destination. Just ask the great apostle Peter, who fell into the water en route toward Jesus, who stood on the water.¹ The good news for us is that when we fall, God is there to help us back to our feet.

The Christian walk *is a walk* because it is a step-by-step, incremental process. It's not a Christian event, and the process of becoming more holy and like Christ is a lifelong endeavor. I've always admired the title of chapter twelve in Dr. Ed Murphy's *The Handbook of Spiritual Warfare*: "The Reality of Below Normal Performance." This simple title speaks volumes. Below normal performance is real. It's not a tale of mythical Christians. In fact, if you ever do meet a Christian who says that they have reached the ideal and are perfect, then shake their hand and say, "Thank you for showing me what pride looks like." "Below normal" will always be the case simply because "normal," or perfect holiness, is unobtainable. Performance means that we, as human beings, do actively participate and perform in the process. So yes, while sanctification is difficult, we are certainly responsible for what we do.

What is sanctification?

Sanctification means becoming more like Jesus, and our sanctification is God's will.² Doing God's will (obedience) pleases God,³ and the more we grow in our sanctification, the more we please God. Sanctification refers to the process of setting oneself apart from the world,⁴ and holiness results from that separation. The only One to perfectly obey God's will and to perfectly obtain God's righteousness,⁵ Jesus, is

¹ Matthew 14:22-33

² I Thessalonians 4:3

³ Matthew 3:17, 17:5; Mark 1:11, 9:7; Luke 3:22, 9:35

⁴ I Timothy 2:21; James 1:27

⁵ And the simplified definition of *righteousness* is to do what is *right* according to God. It does not mean, for example, doing what is right according to society at large. Righteousness is difficult because it entails being obedient to all of THE LORD'S instructions.

described as having a zeal for His Father’s house that consumed Him,⁶ and His food was to do the will of His Father.⁷ Consequently, the separation of sanctification is grounded in the truth of God’s Word.⁸ Sanctification is a progressive work⁹ that is ongoing throughout our lives, and this is a cooperative work between God and us that makes us more like Christ and therefore free from sin.¹⁰ So, whenever you think about growth in your walk with God—whether it be, for example, the growth of deep internal markers like peace, joy, and self-control or external markers like love of your neighbor and obedience—then what you are thinking about is sanctification. Notice, too, that external changes always result *from* the deep, inward change. And what is another practical example of what those external changes look like? The prophet Micah succinctly tells us what is “good”:

He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your
God? (Micah 6:8)

Regeneration, or being born again, is an event that happens at the start of our Christian life. Sanctification is a result of regeneration and continues throughout our walk with God. Christians are “all those who are sanctified.”¹¹ The Christian life is therefore characterized by continual growth, increasing holiness, and becoming more and more like Jesus. In many ways, the “normal” Christian experience is *not* characterized by where you are now but by where you are destined to go. This way, different people will take different routes and go through different peaks and valleys, but everyone has their compass set on the same location.

In a similar light, sanctification points to the fact that the Christian life is to be characterized by productivity, and that productivity will tend to be unique from person to person.¹² For example, one person may be an effective Bible teacher but is a poor administrator. They will be the most productive in teaching. Another person may render service through music but wouldn’t know what to do if asked to preach. They would be the most productive with a choir, band, or sheet music.

Even before the fall of humankind, it was always God’s intent for us to “cultivate” and “keep”¹³ what had been given to us. These English words are respectively translated from Hebrew words that mean to “labor, work, or serve” and to “guard, observe, and protect.” The pursuit of holiness, then, is not limited to the individual or to exclusively “religious” affairs; it encroaches upon, for example, interpersonal relationships and one’s vocation. In a contemporary sense, “cultivating” and “keeping” is analogous to planting good seeds (e.g., raising children) that will bear fruit, which will

⁶ John 2:17

⁷ John 4:34

⁸ John 17:17

⁹ Philippians 1:6; II Peter 1:2-4

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 746; c.f. Romans 6:6; II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; I Thessalonians 5:23

¹¹ Acts 20:32

¹² See Romans 12:6-8; I Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11; I Peter 4:11

¹³ Genesis 2:15

then bear an even greater amount of fruit (e.g., training evangelists or co-workers at your job), and safeguarding the gifts given to you (e.g., responsible use of money and time and cherishing one's spouse). Slothfulness is anathema to sanctification, as is incessant "busyness" without actual production of real value.¹⁴

The last point to make in defining sanctification is to detail what it is not. The pursuit of holiness is just that: a *pursuit*. Sanctification is not characterized by pure carnality. A life consumed, then, by consistent and overwhelming sin *without* the pursuit of holiness and *without* the gradual manifestation of fruits of the Spirit¹⁵ is not a Christian life. Of course, many people will say that they are Christians,¹⁶ but that proclamation without resultant works is a void proclamation.¹⁷

The three stages of sanctification

Because sanctification is a process, it has a definite beginning, middle, and end. We are all born figuratively blind and in a state of spiritual darkness,¹⁸ unable to see the things of the kingdom of God.¹⁹ Hence, the beginning of sanctification happens at regeneration, where we are washed²⁰ and renewed²¹ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This initiates a change that turns us away from a habitual pattern of sin and toward Jesus.²² Just as Jesus interacted with the blind man,²³ once God touches us, we go from a state of spiritual blindness, to cloudy vision, and, ultimately, to a state where we see things clearly. Of course, this change is only made possible by the blood sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.²⁴ So, when Paul writes to the Corinthian church in I Corinthians 6:11, he says, "You were washed, but *you were sanctified*, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (emphasis added). This phrase in Greek (*tois hēgiasmenois*) denotes an activity that was completed in the past (were sanctified) *and that continues to have present results*.²⁵ A similar grammatical expression also appears in Hebrews 10:10.²⁶ Moreover, II Thessalonians 2:13 highlights the continuity of the process of sanctification (emphasis added):

¹⁴ II Thessalonians 3:10-11

¹⁵ Galatians 5:22-23

¹⁶ Matthew 15:8

¹⁷ James 2:14, 17

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:2-3

¹⁹ John 3:3; I Corinthians 2:14

²⁰ I Corinthians 6:11

²¹ Titus 3:5

²² Romans 6:11-14; I John 3:9

²³ Mark 8:22-26

²⁴ Hebrews 10:14, 13:12

²⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 747.

²⁶ "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The author of Hebrews also uses the word sanctify (e.g., 9:13) in the sense of ceremonial purity that allows a person access to God.

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation *through sanctification* by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

This brief passage also clarifies that those who are sanctified are sanctified as a result of the sovereign choice of God, and this choice is actualized by the Holy Spirit²⁷ and merited by Jesus.²⁸ Jesus is also the perfect example we look to as the goal of our sanctification.²⁹ Hence, I Peter 1:2 says:

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

The middle of sanctification is essentially the lifelong process in our Christian lives here on earth. Sanctification ends at glorification, the final stage in the chain of salvation. Glorification will not happen in this life, and we wait for heaven for this to occur. What this means for our present reality is two things: (1) A Christian is unable to say, “I have defeated sin,” and therefore obtain sinless perfection in their natural lives, and (2) a Christian is unable to say, “Sin has defeated me.” This is so because the process will not be completed in the present, and God refuses to leave His elect alone. So, at times, we may feel as if we’ve lost, or we may want to stay put or even go back to what we were doing. Yet, just like Peter went back to fishing³⁰ after he denied Jesus three times, Jesus found him where he was and did not allow him to regress. Hence, Christ tells Peter:

When you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go (John 21:18).

We are “made perfect” in the assembly of God.³¹ So, when Paul writes in Romans that believers have been set free from sin³² and are dead to sin and alive to God,³³ this assertion is made against the backdrop that sin still exists and is something that believers should not yield to.³⁴ Hence, Peter writes in the future tense that we are to *become* partakers of a divine nature;³⁵ Paul writes about pressing on³⁶ and being renewed;³⁷

²⁷ Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:16-1, 22-23; II Thessalonians 2:13; I Peter 1:2

²⁸ I Corinthians 1:30

²⁹ I Peter 2:21; I John 2:6; Hebrews 12:2

³⁰ See John 21

³¹ Hebrews 12:23

³² Romans 6:18

³³ Romans 6:11

³⁴ Romans 6:12-13

³⁵ II Peter 1:4

³⁶ Philippians 3:13-14

Hebrews talks about striving;³⁸ and James writes about doing.³⁹ In the end, effort is crucial, and purposeful resolve is essential. This resolve is dependant on God's grace,⁴⁰ and this grace empowers us to forget what was and to press on for what will be. The defeat of the past may discourage us, but the steadfast promises of God are what inspire us to march ahead.

Granted, there are several verses⁴¹ and a command by Jesus Himself⁴² that essentially tell believers to be perfect. By implication, some say that this suggests that being perfect is therefore possible and sinless perfection is obtainable in this life. Yet, when we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, we realize that God commands us to do things all the time that we repeatedly disobey (e.g., love your neighbor as yourself⁴³). This paradigm began in the Garden of Eden and has continued ever since. In fact, the entire Bible is a testimony to the utter inability of normal humans to obey God's commands. Hence, the command for perfection sets our destination, or the bar that we are to aim for. The wisest man in the entire Bible (Solomon) wrote, "There is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins."⁴⁴ This also helps to clarify how I John can tell us that "no one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him," (3:6) yet can also tell us that "if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1:8).⁴⁵ The idea that a person can achieve perfection here on earth leads to one of the most toxic and destructive sins imaginable: spiritual pride. This pride simultaneously elevates one's performance to divine standards and annuls the requirements of God's Law. If sanctification does anything, it reveals how imperfect we really are.

Active not passive

I mentioned previously that sanctification is cooperative, meaning that neither does God do all the work while we sit back and watch nor do we labor while THE LORD supervises. The cooperative part of sanctification means that after God enables and empowers us to respond to Him in faith by regeneration, we then play an active role in our pursuit of holiness. This helps to explain why Jesus can command us to "seek first" the kingdom of God in Matthew 6:33. Seeking, of course, involves individual action, just like the example of the woman who eagerly seeks to find a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). In fact, when Jesus commands us to seek *first* the kingdom and righteousness in Matthew 6:33, the word *first* does not merely imply ordering of sequential activity but rather carries a force of priority as in "seek, *above all else*."⁴⁶

³⁷ Colossians 3:10

³⁸ Hebrews 12:14

³⁹ James 1:22

⁴⁰ John 15:5

⁴¹ For example II Corinthians 7:1; I Thessalonians 5:23; I John 3:6, 9

⁴² Matthew 5:48

⁴³ Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31

⁴⁴ Ecclesiastes 7:20

⁴⁵ See also I Kings 8:46, Proverbs 20:9, James 3:2

⁴⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Pleasing God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 24.

Playing an active role, or becoming sanctified, can begin with one simple task: reading the [Bible](#) and meditating on the Word of God.⁴⁷ Why? Because if we want to be like Christ, then we have to know who He is and what He desires of us. Subsequently, the Holy Spirit inspires us through Scripture, illuminates the Word to us, and then applies that truth to our lives.⁴⁸ Of course, the central character of the Bible is Jesus, and the book is filled with God's mandates on how to live (e.g., the Ten Commandments⁴⁹), His moral prescriptions (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount⁵⁰), and how to praise Him (the Psalms). If we go back to the [Tabernacle](#), sanctification is analogous to the continual, repeated process of washing in the waters of the bronze laver that not only cleanses us but also forces us to look at ourselves in the reflective washbasin. The Word of God is a mirror⁵¹ and the objective standard that we use to gauge ourselves. So, in the Tabernacle, after the priest washes in the laver, what comes next? He would walk into the tent, a place of fellowship, praise and worship, and illumination by the light of the Spirit. By practical extension, our sanctification begins with the Word, and that incremental, day-by-day familiarity with Christ extends into, for example, prayer,⁵² worship,⁵³ witnessing,⁵⁴ fellowship with other believers,⁵⁵ self-regulation,⁵⁶ submission to God,⁵⁷ sacrifice,⁵⁸ godliness and holiness,⁵⁹ abstinence from immorality,⁶⁰ shunning immorality,⁶¹ purification,⁶² and obedience.⁶³ The Bible makes it clear that sanctification involves a renewed mind⁶⁴ and a renewed heart.⁶⁵

It must be mentioned that as we grow in Jesus, we will be convicted of the truth and therefore begin to change how we think and behave. But, if we begin to value the external rules that we obey at the expense of other people, then we have missed the point. Caring for rules without caring for people is Phariseeism, an erroneous and flawed type of righteousness that can be equated to hypocrisy. Explicitly, Jesus warned us all to

⁴⁷ Joshua 1:8-9; Psalm 1:2, 19:7-11, 119:105, 111; Matthew 4:4; John 17:17; Romans 10:17; II Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12

⁴⁸ I Corinthians 2:10-11

⁴⁹ Exodus 20:1-17

⁵⁰ Matthew 5-7

⁵¹ James 1:23

⁵² John 15:17; Romans 8:26; Ephesians 6:8; Philippians 4:6; I Thessalonians 5:17

⁵³ Psalm 95:6; Isaiah 12:5; John 4:24; Ephesians 5:18-20

⁵⁴ Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 4:1

⁵⁵ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; I Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24-25; I Peter 2:5, 9

⁵⁶ Galatians 5:23; Titus 1:8

⁵⁷ Luke 22:42; Romans 6:13; Ephesians 5:21; James 4:7; Hebrews 13:17

⁵⁸ Romans 8:13, 12:1

⁵⁹ Romans 12:1-13:14; Ephesians 4:17-6:20; Philippians 4:4-9; Colossians 3:5-4:6

⁶⁰ I Thessalonians 4:3

⁶¹ I Corinthians 6:18

⁶² II Corinthians 7:1; II Peter 1:5

⁶³ John 14:15; I Peter 1:14; I John 5:3

⁶⁴ Romans 12:2; II Corinthians 10:5; Colossians 1:10, 3:10; Philippians 1:9, 2:13

⁶⁵ Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:31; I Peter 2:11; I John 2:15

beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.⁶⁶ Sanctification means striving above and beyond Phariseeism.⁶⁷ The biggest danger of Phariseeism is spiritual pride: One can obey so many external rules that they begin to say, “Look what I can do!” and look down on those who can’t “do” as much. Such a dynamic may have even fooled the Pharisees. Of course, this misses the point that external behavior not grounded in a deep, inward change is not a marker of a Christ-centered life. You don’t even need God to follow a bunch of rules. You just need willpower.

Barriers to sanctification

The fact is that the normal Christian experience is one of struggle. The reason why is because of a continual assault resulting from the battle inside (the flesh), the battle outside (the world), and the supernatural battle (the devil). All of these opponents are formidable, and the process of sanctification involves increasing triumphs over these foes. This is much easier said than done, because we are not engaged in a fair fight at all. Our fleshy or carnal nature is a component of a fallen world, the prince of which is the devil.⁶⁸

The flesh. Biblically speaking, flesh means more than our physical flesh but also includes our fallen, sinful nature. In Galatians 5:16-21, Paul describes an ongoing battle between our flesh and the Spirit. Hence, there is a conflict between what the Spirit desires (sanctification) and what our fallen corruption desires (sin). So, while the Scriptures tell Christians that they are a new creation⁶⁹ and that their old nature is crucified with Christ,⁷⁰ they are still in a perpetual state of war with themselves. The inner self, which is in agreement with God’s Law, battles against the flesh, which attacks your mind in an attempt to enslave you to sin.⁷¹ The good news is that a Spirit-filled life empowers us to be victorious over our old nature,⁷² and as R.C. Sproul has written, “while the old nature may be declared dead, we are not altogether free of it. We still carry around that old nature of wretchedness with us. It is as though that corpse does not know that it has died.”⁷³

The world. The world wants us to be one with it, but the Bible calls on us to not conform to the world.⁷⁴ Hence, what is “fashionable” with the world is often not fashionable with God. To gain the world and its approval means absolutely nothing, because that temporal gain has no eternal value.⁷⁵ Just like in the Tabernacle, we are *in* the world but not *of* it. While in the world, we adhere not to secular standards, but Biblical standards of holiness. This is why sanctification equates to separation and thus distinction. Notice, too, that separation does not mean withdrawal. The fact that Jesus

⁶⁶ Luke 12:1

⁶⁷ Matthew 5:20

⁶⁸ John 12:31, 14:30; Ephesians 2:2

⁶⁹ II Corinthians 5:17

⁷⁰ Romans 6:11; Galatians 2:20

⁷¹ Romans 7:22-25

⁷² Galatians 5:16

⁷³ R.C. Sproul, *Pleasing God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 128.

⁷⁴ Romans 12:2

⁷⁵ Matthew 6:20; 16:26

Incarnated *into* our reality yet was perfectly holy testifies to this actuality. Furthermore, a person who has a strong Biblical foundation and knows the truth is in many ways *less* threatened by the lures of the world. This is a person who could thus be mindful of philosophy⁷⁶ yet see the fraudulent nature of that philosophy and then allow the light of truth to shine brightly in a world shrouded in obscurity.⁷⁷

The devil. Getting in depth here essentially entails speaking about spiritual warfare. To make matters simple, I will say that the key take-home point is that our battles are not fought against flesh and blood⁷⁸ but against a very subtle, crafty,⁷⁹ deceptive enemy who can often appear as an angel of light,⁸⁰ yet who is also a roaring lion.⁸¹ Lucifer primarily uses temptation and accusation to respectively entice us to sin and hinder us from seeking God. As was discussed in the chapter on repentance, the devil accuses us so that we are burdened by guilt and emotionally paralyzed. So, the only legitimate cure for [guilt](#) is the forgiveness of God. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin so that we may genuinely repent and obtain forgiveness from THE LORD.

It is crucial neither to dismiss the devil as insignificant nor to think he's in charge, because he is not. The spiritual realm is not dualistic. There is no yin and yang. There is no dark side that is in balance with the light. The devil is subordinate to God. So, where God's Spirit is, there is liberty.⁸² What this means for the sanctified life of a Christian is simple: You are no match for the devil, but the devil is no match for Jesus.

The flesh, the world, and the devil all have a common goal: sin, which leads to death. Living the sanctified life never means accommodating sin or encouraging it. The sanctified life means resisting temptation and sin. Incrementally, it means becoming more confident in God's acceptance of us, not because of our own merit but because of Christ's righteousness. What makes the forgiveness of God so powerful is that while He doesn't forget, He forgets. That is, because God is omniscient (all-knowing), His memory of our sin never actually disappears into thin air. So, He doesn't forget. Yet, in spite of what we have done wrong, He doesn't hold that against us in a relational sense when we confess and ask for forgiveness. Hence, He forgets. This is a beautiful realization and can only be possible because of genuine love.

Ironically, in some cases, some Christians can serve as a barrier to the sanctification of others. Allow me to explain. We know that the devil uses the model of "accusation-separation." That is, he accuses people of sin in order to separate them from God and ultimately lead them to destruction. The Holy Spirit uses the model of "conviction-reconciliation." That is, God convicts people of sin in order to reconcile a broken relationship and ultimately lead them to salvation. So, when "religious" people—who may act stereotypically judgmental—accuse others and do so *without* a genuine intent to bring the accused closer to God, whose strategy are they imitating? Certainly, the objective standards of God never change, but in modernity, a fitting question that all

⁷⁶ Colossians 2:8

⁷⁷ Philippians 2:14-16

⁷⁸ Ephesians 6:12

⁷⁹ Genesis 3:1

⁸⁰ II Corinthians 11:14

⁸¹ I Peter 5:8; Revelation 5:5

⁸² II Corinthians 3:17

believers ought to ask when it comes to helping others be productive in their sanctification is, “How will what I do bring them *closer* to Jesus?” Accusation for accusation’s sake may indeed expose what is wrong, but it won’t show someone else how to deal with the problem. So, in my humble opinion, whether we’re talking about issues in the social arena, the political arena, or the church, I will never advocate changing God’s Law to accommodate people. What I always advocate is changing the approach to people so that they can get to know Jesus.

Different people will receive the conviction of the Holy Spirit in many different ways and at many different times. Accordingly, sanctification is never competitive, because God is not scarce and His [grace](#) is overflowing and everlasting. Hence, we should cooperate with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, cognizant that the bar we aim for is never someone else who is less than ideal. The bar is always Jesus, who is the ideal.

What this all means

Sanctification reveals to us that there is indeed a bridge between what we believe (orthodoxy) and what we do (orthopraxy). Both are equally important. Many may know what God desires of them but fail to execute. This is what happens, for example, when a person knows that cutting down on sugar is what will enable weight loss. Yet, this knowledge remains dormant as they chug down a one-liter bottle of soda. Ideally, awareness (mind) begets action and firmly held beliefs (heart). These convictions resultantly animate behaviors, enabling the person to truly take ownership and value their knowledge. Once an idea gets settled in our hearts, it becomes the fuel we need to keep us motivated and pressing forward. So, in order to live a life pleasing to God and progress in sanctification, we have to have a solid foundation of truth to stand on. By first knowing what God requires, we can then act on that knowledge. There is never a substitute for sound doctrine.

Sanctification means much more than a quick spiritual experience and entails the often mundane, uncelebrated parts of day-to-day life. It entails struggles against a host of obstacles, temptations, darkness, and perils. In this journey, there is no guarantee of riches. There is no guarantee of overwhelming success. There is no guarantee of a mega-church. There is no guarantee that you will always be smiling and floating on cloud nine. The journey will look different for each person, and the *only* guarantee that we have is that Christ is by our side, and He promises to deliver us to eternal life by grace through faith. Essentially, God *always* finishes what He starts, and He will never abandon us in the midst of the process. As I have said before, God refuses to leave creation alone, and you are no exception.

Ultimately, what makes sanctification possible is the grace of God. God does not have to approve of all the evil we do to negate His love for us. This is why even when my son does wrong, he is still my son, and I am still his father, and I stand by him. This is why even when the prodigal son⁸³ abandoned his father, his father remained committed to him and rejoiced when his son returned home. Sin will always be sin, and God will

⁸³ See Luke 15:11-32

always be just, but God will also always be our loving Father who freely gave to us so that we would not perish.⁸⁴

I will conclude with the words of the apostle Paul, who writes to the believers in Rome and informs them what the marks of a true Christian are. Back then, the believers lived in a very dominant culture that touched all aspects of life, and it was very hard to separate from the “Roman way” and follow “God’s way.” Similarly, Western culture in the 21st century permeates all aspects of life, and often it can be difficult to see how culture has transposed itself on God’s counsel. Paul’s words remind us to figuratively wash in, reflect upon, and cleanse ourselves in the truth of God’s timeless Word. Romans 12:9-19 says:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Amen to that.

Dr. C. H. E. Sadaphal

⁸⁴ John 3:16