

Foundations of Faith: Sanctification

Summary: *all church members should understand and agree with the following*

Purpose of Progressive Sanctification: God intends to grow and transform every believer to become ever more like Christ, like the image of God people were created to be.

Our Attitude: God commands every believer to engage in learning about him and how to live like a member of a holy people.

New Birth: Every believer has been spiritually born again with a new nature that desires to seek after God and his ways. As the believer does seek after God and his ways, the believer will experience a process of progressive transformation to become like Christ.

Dependence and Submission: This process of progressive transformation begins with an act of dependence on God, submission to Christ's leadership in life, and an attitude of being yielded to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will then guide the believer into growth steps leading to living out the promises of freedom from sin's control, confession with cleansing and healing, and willful obedience.

Spiritual Disciplines: The Holy Spirit also will lead the believer into spiritual disciplines which God has revealed as a means for his work in us, including participation in worship [with baptism and communion], prayer of all sorts, biblical community, study of scripture, and serving in the ways guided by scripture and spiritual giftedness.

Cycle of Growth: The sanctification process is a cycle: we submit to Christ and yield to the Holy Spirit, and thus we are blessed with cleansing, healing, and growth, which in turn leads us to submit further to Christ and yield more fully to the Holy Spirit, and thus increase the blessings, and on and on. Growth and victory are expected to be partial and growing over time, as God gracefully works in us.

Detail: all teachers and leaders should understand and agree with the following

The Purpose and Definition of Sanctification

To be sanctified is to be separated out for God, to be made holy. It has always been God's intention to make us like Christ [Romans 8.29]. As we become more like Christ, we will better reflect the image of God in which we were created [Gen 1.26]. This is the purpose behind our salvation, that we would become a people who truly reflect God's image [Titus 2.11-14].

† Titus 2.11-14 [NET]: *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. ¹² It trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ as we wait for the happy fulfillment of our hope in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good.”*

The Bible says this is God's work in us, yet we are to “work out” how to live out the salvation we have received [Philippians 2.12-13]. Thus, we are called to learn to live like Christ, like a holy people of God [Ephesians 4.1-3; 1 John 3.3]. We see that the process depends in part on our cooperation [2 Corinthians 7.1; Philippians 3.8-14].

† 2 Corinthians 7.1 [NET]: *“Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that could defile the body and the spirit, and thus accomplish holiness out of reverence for God.”*

When we accepted in faith Christ as our savior, and were thus born-again, part of that process was “positional” sanctification: we were at that moment separated out from the world and from sin to be people of God [1 Corinthians 1.30]. This positional sanctification is independent of our behavior: it was accomplished on the cross [Hebrews 10.10]. We were transformed in position from slave of sin to slave of righteousness [Romans 6.6-11, 22]. We were united with Christ, being allotted his righteousness [Romans 3.23-24].

† Hebrews 10.10 [NET]: *“By his will we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*

Because of our positional sanctification, we are called saints. This is true for all believers, called such in the Bible over sixty times. Even the Corinthians, who were weak in their faith and wayward in their walk, were called saints [1 Corinthians 1.2], because they had positional sanctification as believers [1 Corinthians 6.11].

† 1 Corinthians 6.11 [NET]: *“Some of you once lived this [evil] way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

There is a moral change in us, because we are washed in regeneration and renewal [Titus 3.5]. Thus, we begin the process with a new nature that seeks after God [Ephesians 4.22-24; Colossians 3.10].

† Titus 3.5-6 [NET]: *“He saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior.”*

During our lives, God sanctifies us in an experiential way [what is called “progressive sanctification”], so that we can learn to live up to the position we have as brothers and sisters of Christ [1 Thessalonians 5.23; John 17.16-17]. Again, this involves a real transformation in us [Romans 12.2; 2 Corinthians 3.18]. It is

to be expected that this process is unique for each believer, progressing at different rates and in different orders, but continuing for each throughout life.

† Romans 12.2 [NET]: *“Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God— what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.”*

While sanctification is a work of God, it is our responsibility to remain in dependence on and submission to him. As Chafer said, “In meeting the impossible issues of a true Christian life, are we consciously living upon a works-principle, or upon a faith-principle? The Bible emphatically declares the believer to be upon a faith-principle when he is really within the plan of God for his daily life... There is a wide difference between ‘fighting’ to do what God alone can do, and ‘fighting’ to maintain an attitude of dependence on Him to do what He alone can do.”¹ God stands ready to supply all that he demands of us.

At death, we will be set free of any remaining sin nature [Hebrews 12.23], since nothing of sin will enter into the presence of God [Revelation 21.27]. When Christ returns, our sanctification will be complete in what is called “glorification” as we receive resurrected bodies [Philippians 3.20-21] and are revealed fully purified [Colossians 3.2-4].

What to expect from progressive sanctification

Christ-likeness: One anticipated result of the sanctification process is that we come to resemble Christ, and thus better reflect the image of God in which we were created [Romans 8.29; 1 Corinthians 15.49; Colossians 3.10]. Becoming like Christ is not just to stop sinning, but to really live! to live like Christ. This process will reverse the effects of sin on our mind [Romans 12.2], emotions [Ephesians 4.31-32], and even desires [1 John 2.15-16]. Though we all become more like Christ, we retain our individual characteristics which God designed into us to be a blessing to the body of Christ [Ephesians 4.15-16; 1 Corinthians 12.4-27].

† Romans 8.29 [NET]: *“...those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”*

Maturity in faith: Another anticipated result of the sanctification process is that we become mature in our faith, sure in our knowledge of God and his ways, discerning in spiritual matters, strong in our faith and sure in our dependence on God, and experienced in our walk and service [Ephesians 4.11-16; Colossians 1.9-12; Hebrews 5.14; 2 Timothy 3.16-17; 2 Peter 3.18].

† Ephesians 4.11-16 [NASB]: *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”*

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967], 97.

The Greek word for “mature” in Ephesians 4.11-16 means “complete.” In some passages, it is translated “perfect,” [Matthew 5.48 in most translations; Philippians 3:15 in some; Colossians 4.12 in some] but its meaning is not that we are to be flawless, for we see no biblical heroes of faith who achieved a sinless state [see Hebrews 11]. In some passages, this perfection is in reference to our positional sanctification and justification [Philippians 3.15]. In other passages, it is clear that Jesus is showing us that God’s moral standard is absolute purity [Matthew 5.48]. While that is impossible for us to achieve in this life, we should pursue that standard, whole-heartedly seeking after the will of God, as did David, who – though he sinned grievously – was considered by God a man after his own heart [1 Samuel 13.14; Acts 13.22].

Fruit of the Spirit: The gift of the Holy Spirit to those who yield to him is the fruit of the Spirit, godly qualities of benefit to both the believer and those with whom he interacts [Galatians 5.22-23]. These Christ-like qualities are fruit of the Spirit, they cannot be developed in our own power; however, as we increasingly yield to the Holy Spirit as we mature, we shall see growth in these qualities in ourselves.

† Galatians 5.22-23 [NASB]: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*

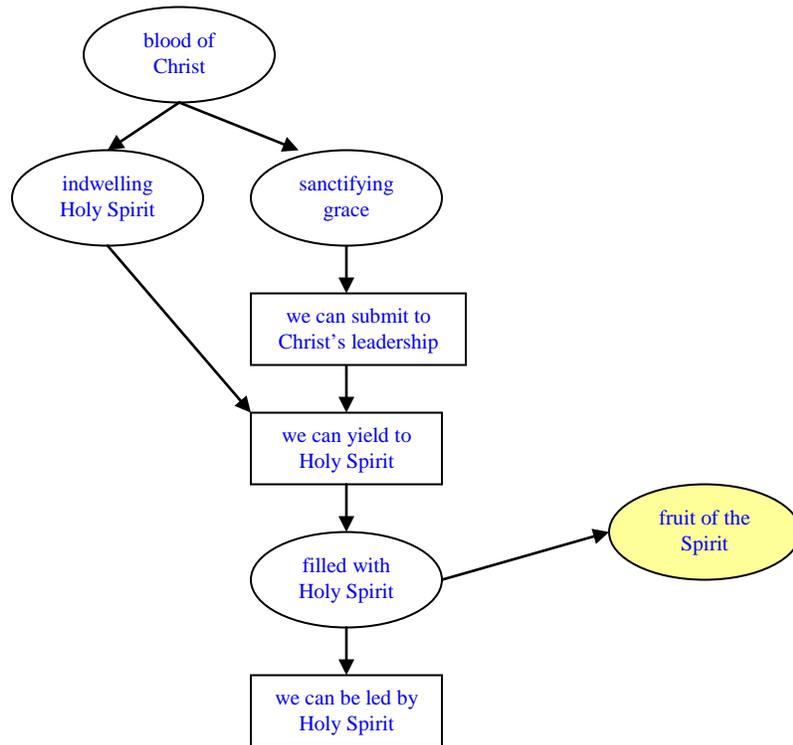
Healing and freedom from bondage to sin: In a previous lesson, we saw that we have been saved from the penalty of sin. Now we say we have been saved from the power of sin [Romans 6.5-7]. Because we are believers, sin no longer rules over us, so we can have moment to moment victory in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit [Galatians 5.16-25]. Despite being regenerated when we accepted Christ as our savior, and thus having this victory, we will continue to struggle against sin in our lives because we are not yet made perfect [James 3.2; 1 John 1.8]. We also are immersed in a sinful world against which we must resist conformity [Romans 12.2; 1 John 2.15], and face an active adversary who will try to bring us down [Ephesians 6.12]. Still, God promises us the provision to be victorious over temptation [1 Corinthians 10.13]. Jesus said if we were true disciples of him and of his Word, then we would know the truth and the truth would set us free from the power of sin [John 8.31-36; James 4.7].

† Romans 6.5-7 [NASB]: *“For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”*

Intimacy with God: God calls us into fellowship with Christ [1 Corinthians 1.9], and we can have intimacy with God, under his specified conditions, including confession and obedience [1 John 1.3-9].

† 1 John 1.3-9 [NET]: *“What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ).⁴ Thus we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.⁵ Now this is the gospel message we have heard from him and announce to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth.⁷ But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.⁸ If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.⁹ But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.”*

Grace and Faith as the keys to Ongoing Sanctification



In all the charts in this paper, ovals represent acts of God's grace and rectangles represent decision points for the believer.

Blue text represents the material covered in this section of the paper and yellow shading represents sanctification goals.

Blood of Christ: It is through the blood of Christ that we are offered sanctification, and only by accepting Christ as our savior can we have both the indwelling Holy Spirit [Romans 8.9; 1 Corinthians 3.16; 6.19] and sanctifying grace [Hebrews 9.13-14; Titus 2.11-14] as gifts from God. Thus the first step for anyone seeking to be made whole is to accept in faith what Christ did for him/her on the cross.

† Hebrews 9.13-14 [NASB]: *“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”*

Indwelling of the Holy Spirit: Believers are the temple of the Holy Spirit, because he indwells us [1 Corinthians 3.16; 6.19]. Being indwelt by the Holy Spirit makes possible our choice to yield to the Holy Spirit's guidance in our daily decisions [Romans 8.14] and the use of spiritual gifts for service [1 Corinthians 12.7].

† 1 Corinthians 3.16 [NASB]: *“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”*

Sanctifying grace: The sanctifying grace that began with our regeneration makes possible our willingness to submit to Christ's leadership in our lives [Hebrews 13.20-21; Philippians 2.13; 2 Peter 1:3-8]. The means God uses to sanctify us might include God's intervention in our lives or allowance of events to provide us with sanctifying experiences, which might include chastening or suffering [Hebrews 12.5-11; 1 Corinthians 11.30-32].

† Philippians 2:13 [NET]: “...for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God.”

Submission to Christ’s leadership: The more we submit to Christ’s leadership in our lives, the more we will be able to yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit on a moment by moment basis. This is evident from Jesus’ teaching about the Spirit as rivers of living water [John 7.37-39], which shows a need to thirst for it, which means to desire it, and the need to go to Christ and drink it in, which means to trust in Christ. Thus, when we submit to Christ in trust and obedience, we then can yield to and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

† John 7.37-39 [NET]: “On the last day of the feast, the greatest day, Jesus stood up and shouted out, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and³⁸ let the one who believes in me drink. Just as the scripture says, “From within him will flow rivers of living water.”’³⁹ (Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were going to receive, for the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.)”

This submission to Christ, to trust and obey, is our own declaration of sanctification, that we will be different, holy, for God [2 Timothy 2.21-22]. It is also our first cooperative step as believers in the sanctification process: we must have faith in Christ to lead us in this life.

† 2 Timothy 2.21-22 [NET]: “So if someone cleanses himself of such behavior, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart, useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.²² But keep away from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love, and peace, in company with others who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

If we walk with Christ, we submit to the known will of the Lord, willing to do whatever he wants us to do [Romans 6.19; 12.1-2]. This willing attitude is often beyond us, yet we can submit to be made willing, as Chafer said: “We make no promise that we will not sin or violate the will of God when we yield to Him. We do not promise to change our own desires. The exact human attitude has been expressed in the words: ‘I am willing to be made willing to do His will.’”²

† Romans 12.1-2 [NET]: “Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service.² Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.”

This submission is a commitment to follow Christ, which is required of every believer [1 John 2.4-6; 1 Corinthians 11.1]. An ongoing theme throughout the Bible is that God desires 100% of our devotion and 100% of our dependence. We live for Christ [Galatians 2.20]. Devotion is more than just obedience, however: it is a passion for Christ [1 John 5.2].

† 1 John 2:4-6 [NASB]: “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

² Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, 92.

This submission could be fully realized at the time of salvation, it could develop gradually in response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, or it could require a moment of post-salvation crisis. In any case, everyone who is not fully submitted will experience God's work to bring about this submission, even including severe afflictions, as God attempts to bring them fully into his intimacy [Hebrews 12.5-6].

† Hebrews 12.5-6 [NET]: *“And have you forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as sons? ‘My son, do not scorn the Lord's discipline or give up when he corrects you. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts.’”*

Submission includes acceptance of God's sovereignty in our circumstances. We must accept what challenges and limitations we face, and be willing to sacrifice and suffer [1 Peter 2.20-21; Matthew 16.24]. In submitting even to suffering, we follow the example of Christ [Hebrews 5.8-9]. If we do suffer in submission, this will aid us in becoming more like Christ [James 1.2-4].

† James 1.2-4 [NET]: *“My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything.”*

Yielding to and Being Filled by the Holy Spirit: Though we are always indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we are commanded to continue being filled by the Holy Spirit [Ephesians 5.18]. The present tense verb indicates we should literally, “keep being filled,” though it rarely is translated that way. We see this continuous need in the early disciples, who were filled at Pentecost [Acts 2.4], but then needed filling again for subsequently speaking with the Spirit's empowerment, on behalf of the disciples to the rulers, elders, and scribes [Acts 4.8] and to non-believers [Acts 4.31]. Being filled by the Spirit means to allow the Spirit to control and influence you, to fill you with the fullness of God.³ This is evident from the verbs used for filling of the Spirit [Luke 1.67; Ephesians 5.18] and how they are used elsewhere to mean being controlled or influenced by your anger [Luke 4.28], sorrow [John 16.6], and deceit [Acts 13.10 in adjective form]. Thus, when yielding, you do not get more of the Holy Spirit, rather you allow the Holy Spirit to influence you more.

† Ephesians 5.18 [NET]: *“And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit...”*

This filling is a natural outcome for the indwelt believer, if he is yielded to the Holy Spirit. Yielding is not a matter of resolve to do right, but rather a willingness to let the Holy Spirit do as he pleases in us. This is an act of faith similar to the decision to submit to Christ's leadership. Scripture warns us of how failing to yield can prevent being filled. We can quench the Holy Spirit [1 Thessalonians 5.19], which means either to ignore the Holy Spirit or to hinder his work in us. We also can grieve the Holy Spirit with an attitude of disobedience, a lack of submission or an unwillingness to yield [Ephesians 4.30]. This comes from putting our own will before God's in our daily life decisions.

† Ephesians 4.30-32 [NET]: *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ You must put away every kind of bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and evil, slanderous talk. ³² Instead, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.”*

³ Putting together Ephesians 3.19; 4.10; and 5.18, Wallace says, “Believers are to be filled by Christ by means of the Spirit with the content of the fullness of God.” See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 375.

Yielding to the Holy Spirit empowers us to experience the Spirit's leading through illumination of the Word of God [1 Corinthians 2.12-15] and promptings of the Spirit [e.g. as Paul experienced in Acts 16.6-10], to which we must be willing to yield. As Chafer said, "...the child of God, facing an impossible responsibility of a heavenly walk and service, is directed to the Spirit as the source of all sufficiency."⁴

† 1 Corinthians 2.12-15 [NET]: *"Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things that are freely given to us by God."¹³ And we speak about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom, but with those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.¹⁴ The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.¹⁵ The one who is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is understood by no one."*

Being filled with the Spirit leads to experiencing the fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5.22-25]. As the believer becomes more intimate with God, more yielded to the Holy Spirit, he/she will realize a greater experience of these fruit in him/her. These fruit in themselves are one manifestation of sanctification. This filling will also manifest itself in our singing to God and in recognizing God's sovereignty and thus being always thankful for all things [Ephesians 5.18-21].

† Galatians 5.22-25 [NASB]: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."*

Leading of the Holy Spirit: If one is yielded to the Holy Spirit, and thus filled with the Holy Spirit, it can be assumed that one will be led by the Spirit. If we were not willing to be led, then we would by definition not be yielded, and we can trust that the Holy Spirit will make his leading available to us if we are yielded [Romans 8.14]. Being led by the Holy Spirit allows us to appropriate the blessings of our new nature, particularly through his assurance of our acceptance by God [Romans 8.16; Ephesians 1.13-14], and leads us to confessing our sins and healing [1 John 1.6-9], which together will lead to greater obedience [Galatians 5.16; Romans 8.3-9]. Being led by the Holy Spirit will also bring about more intimate worship [Ephesians 5.18-21], more fervent prayer [Ephesians 6.18], deeper participation in biblical community [Romans 12.10], more reading and understanding of the Word [1 Corinthians 2.9-3:2], and greater interest in serving others [1 Corinthians 12.4-11].

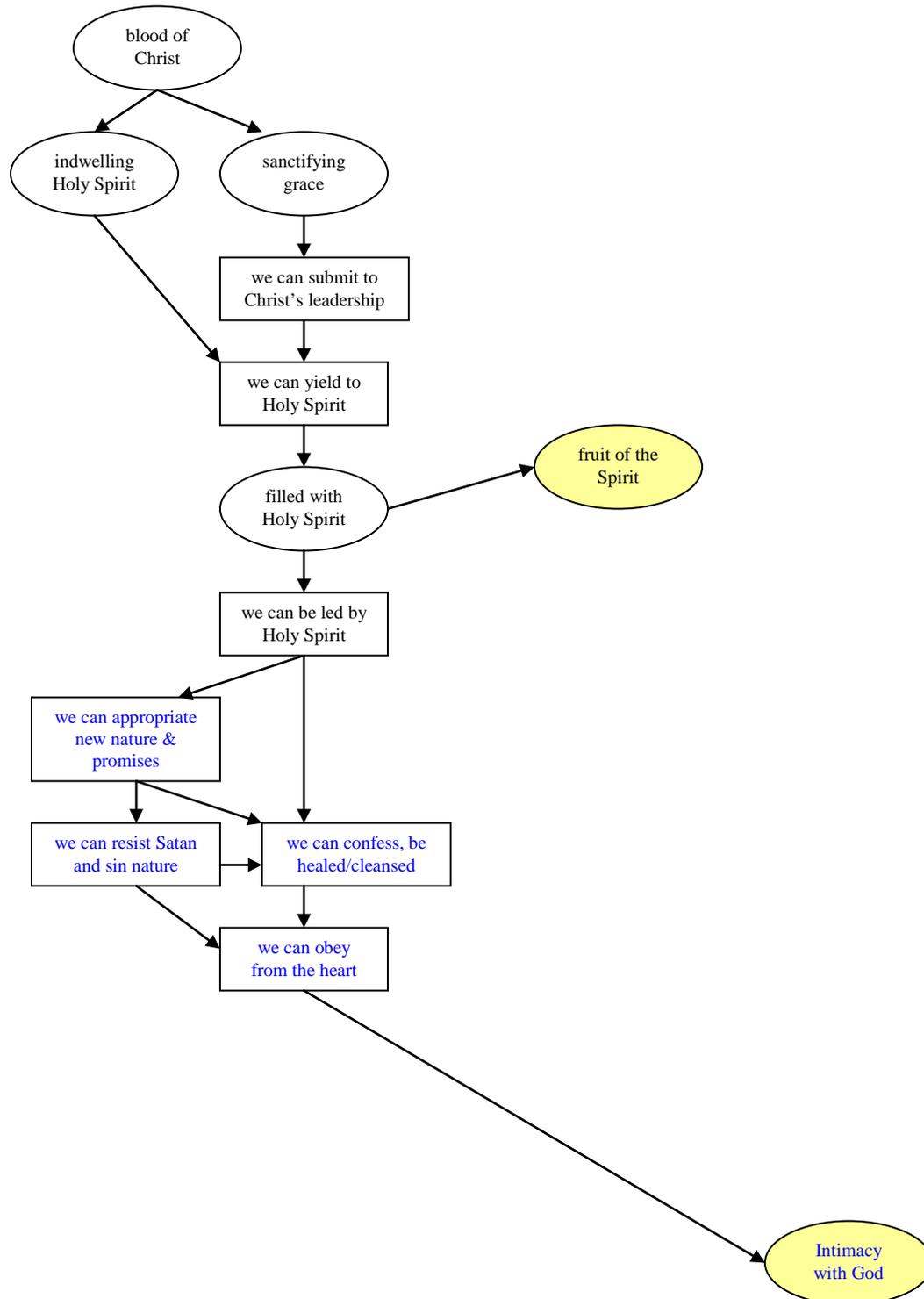
† Galatians 5.16 [NASB]: *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."*

Being led by the Holy Spirit is living in dependence on God. The Holy Spirit will comfort us [Matthew 5.4] and help us to develop the love of Christ in our hearts [Romans 5.5]. He will help us to take our thoughts captive [2 Corinthians 10.5] and focus on the things of God [Romans 8.5]. We need to have this moment by moment dependence on the Holy Spirit, because our enemies are stronger than us [Ephesians 6.12] and ready to attack [1 Peter 5.8], and we are tempted to identify with the world in its sinful ways [James 4.4; Romans 7.18]. The passages that call on us to resist temptation and evil stress faith and dependence on God for deliverance [1 Peter 5.6-10; James 4.6-8].

† Romans 8.5 [NASB]: *"For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."*

⁴ Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, 43.

Cleansing, Healing, Obedience, and Intimacy with God



Appropriating our new nature and God's promises: The choice to sin can lead to physical addictions, mental habituations, or other spiritual bondages, which have characteristics of disease. The sin nature can lead to a predisposition of vulnerability to a specific bondage, resulting in characteristics like an inherited

disease and a lifelong weakness in this area. Recall that the negative effects of our inherited sin nature include blinded intellect, foolishness from a corrupted mind, evil and idolatrous heart, defiled emotions, passions, behavior, and character, and an enslaved will [Romans 1.21-31; 7.20]. The mitigation for such bondage issues is to realize that God will heal us and has already begun the process through Christ [1 Peter 2.24]. As we learned in a previous lesson, believers are regenerated, reconciled with God, and redeemed. Before accepting Christ as our Savior, we were captive to many claims on us, including sin [Romans 6.20], death [Romans 5.17], evil [2 Timothy 2.26], and the Law [Romans 7.4]. But Christ paid the price with his blood for our freedom from these things [Ephesians 1.7; 1 Peter 1.17-19].

† 1 Peter 2.24 [NET]: *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we may cease from sinning and live for righteousness. By his wounds you were healed.”*

While there are aspects of disease in our problem, the root of the problem is sin and the cure for that is the blood of Christ [the benefits of which we must appropriate] and the work of the Holy Spirit [to whom we must yield]. Because of the inherited sin aspects, this might be a lifelong vulnerability for some [and we all have a tendency to sin], but for all there must be a moment by moment appropriation of the work of Christ and a moment by moment yielding to the Holy Spirit. As Chafer said, “We are never wonderful saints of whom God may justly be proud: we are His little children, immature and filled with foolishness, with whom He is endlessly patient and on whom He has been pleased to set all His infinite heart of love.”⁵ Appropriating the work of Christ means fully believing and grasping that we are forgiven, that in that moment of coming to salvation, God regenerated us in a new spiritual birth [1 Peter 1.3; John 3.3-7], made us spiritually alive [Ephesians 2.5-7], gave us resurrected life [Colossians 2.12], and made us a new creation [2 Corinthians 5.17].

† 2 Corinthians 5.17 [NET]: *“So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away— look, what is new has come!”*

We have a new identity in Christ. We are called to be saints [1 Corinthians 1.2; Romans 1.7]; we are called brothers and sisters of Christ [Romans 8.29]; we are called sons and daughters of the Father [2 Corinthians 6.18]; we are called fellow heirs with Christ [Romans 8.16-17]; we are called citizens of Heaven [Philippians 3.20]; we are called children of the light [1 Thessalonians 5.5]; we are called a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God [1 Peter 2.9-10]. We must prayerfully reflect on these things every day until we have absorbed them into our consciousness.

† 1 Thessalonians 5.5 [NET]: *“For you all are sons of the light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness.”*

While we retain our old nature, which has a tendency to sin, in our new birth we are given a new nature, which desires to please God [Ephesians 4.22-24; Colossians 3.9-10]. The internal struggle between these natures is to be expected [Romans 7.14-23], which can leave you feeling wretched! [Romans 7.24]. Only God can set us free from this struggle [Romans 7.24-25]. Appropriating what the Bible says about what Christ has accomplished in you and what God wants to do in you is part of this process: We must realize that we can put aside our old nature and cling to the new [Colossians 3.9-10; Ephesians 4.22-24].

† Eph 4.22-24 [NET]: *“You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires,²³ to be renewed in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and to put on the new man who has been created in God's image—in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.”*

⁵ Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, 142.

In our salvation, we died with Christ [Galatians 2.20-21; Romans 6.3-4] and were resurrected to new life with Christ [Colossians 3.1-2; Romans 6.4-5], so now the love of Christ can control us if we will let it [2 Corinthians 5.14-15], and we can live for Christ instead of in our sinful nature [2 Corinthians 5.14-15]. We must learn about and believe this, and choose to lay aside the old self and put on the new self [Colossians 3.9-10; Ephesians 4.22-24], which will result in greater victory and righteousness in our lives. We can escape the corruption of our lusts and partake of the divine nature, but we must trust in God's promises and obey his commands [2 Peter 1.2-9], we must live this life in faith [Galatians 2.20-21].

† 2 Corinthians 5.14-15 [NET]: *“For the love of Christ controls us, since we have concluded this, that Christ died for all; therefore all have died.¹⁵ And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised.”*

We now can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in union with Christ [Romans 7.4-6]. We now have the power to conquer our flesh [Galatians 5.24]. We now have the power to resist sin [1 Corinthians 10.13], for we are no longer slaves to it [Romans 6.6-7; 1 Peter 2.24] and have been purified from our former acts of sin [2 Peter 1.9]. We also should feel no shame about our past or our continued struggles [Romans 8.1-2]. To appropriate these truths, beyond believing in them we must choose to live them out, resisting sin and choosing to act righteously [Romans 6.11-14, 17-19; 13.12-14]. We must set our mind on the things of God [Colossians 3.1-3; Philippians 4.8], taking every thought captive in the name of Christ [2 Corinthians 10.3-5], and clinging only to that which is good [Romans 12:9].

† Romans 6.6-7 [NET]: *“We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.⁷ (For someone who has died has been freed from sin.)”*

To be victorious, we also must realize that our battle is not only within ourselves, but it is a spiritual battle, in which we have the power of God on our side [2 Corinthians 10.3-5], as we fight against the influence of Satan and his evil [Ephesians 6.10-12]. We must appropriate this power of God, through absorbing the truth in Scripture, knowing and believing in the gospel, accepting our imputed righteousness and seeking to live it out, strengthening our faith in God and trusting in his promises [especially those that are part of our salvation], and being diligent in prayer [Ephesians 6.10-18]. We can overcome, because greater is our God than any other power [1 John 4.4]! We must learn to remain walking with Christ [1 John 2.28], to be built up and rooted in Christ [Colossians 2.6-7] and to be guided by the Spirit in all things. Christ is in us and we are in him, and as long as we remain connected to him, we will bear fruit [John 15].

† 1 John 4.4 [NASB]: *“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them [evil, worldly, spirits]; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”*

Resistance of evil: When we understand the promises inherent in what Christ accomplished for us on the cross, we can effectively begin to resist the influence of evil in our lives, including the attacks of our enemy, the seduction of the world, and the urges of the flesh. Resisting temptation especially [Romans 13.14], but also distraction [Luke 10.40-42], deception [1 Corinthians 15.33], and accusation [negative or wrong thoughts; John 13.2], will allow us to be obedient and to live the Christian life of victory. As mentioned earlier, we must take every thought captive [2 Corinthians 10.5]. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we must resist all evil in our lives [Colossians 3.5; 2 Corinthians 7.1]. We must resist with all our might [Hebrews 12.4]!

† 2 Corinthians 7.1 [NET]: *“Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that could defile the body and the spirit, and thus accomplish holiness out of reverence for God.”*

We must resist anything from the world which holds us back [1 John 2.15-17; Hebrews 12.1-2; James 1.27; 4.4], knowing that our spiritual enemy rules the world [John 12.31; 14.30; 16.11; 1 John 5.19] but that we can have victory [1 John 5:4-5]. We must resist the impulses of our flesh [Romans 8.4; Galatians 5.16-17]. We must resist all actions of our spiritual enemy [Ephesians 6.10-12; 1 Peter 5.8-9; James 4.7], which must be done in Christ’s strength [John 15.5; Philippians 4.13; 1 John 4.4; Ephesians 6.10-12; 1 Peter 5.8-9; James 4.7]. We can have victory [1 Corinthians 10.13]!

1 John 2.15-17 [NET]: *“ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him,¹⁶ because all that is in the world (the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the arrogance produced by material possessions) is not from the Father, but is from the world.¹⁷ And the world is passing away with all its desires, but the person who does the will of God remains forever.”*

Confession leading to cleansing and healing: Many pathways lead us to confession of our sins and failings in the Christian life, including the prompting of the Holy Spirit, our efforts to resist temptation, our accountability in Christian community, what we learn in God’s Word, and our growing appreciation of our new nature in Christ. This is good, for confession plays a vital role in our sanctification. First, confession to God brings the cleansing from sin [1 John 1.9].

† 1 John 1.9 [NASB]: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Appropriating the promises of Christ’s sacrifice, we know that Christ paid the penalty for our sin, so there is no need in God’s economy or justice system for us to be punished again. Instead, when we confess and repent, the promise of God is that he will cleanse us instantly. Consider the parable of the prodigal son [Luke 15.1-32]: our relationship with God, our covenant with him, exists regardless of how badly we screw up, but while we are sinning we lose some of the blessings of that relationship; when we return repentant, our relationship with God is restored. There is no condemnation in Christ [Romans 8.1]: we should sense a conviction to change, but lasting guilt is a trick of our enemy.

† 2 Corinthians 7.10 [NASB]: *“For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.”*

Confession to another person with mutual supportive prayer, essential parts of Christian community, will bring healing [James 5.16]. Often, much of our struggle is from keeping things inside, which creates emotional obstacles to good health and prevents us from getting the love, acceptance, prayer support, encouragement, and accountability offered in Christian community. The cleansing and healing that come from confession will help us in obedience.

† James 5.16 [NASB]: *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”*

Obedience: God expects our obedience, for through obedience we express our love to God [John 14.15, 21; 1 John 5.3], but when we sin we grieve the Holy Spirit [Ephesians 4.30]. The Holy Spirit will lead us into obedience [Galatians 5.17] through strengthening us to resist temptation and convicting our hearts sufficiently that we confess and repent of our sins. With our new nature, we will want to seek the things

of Christ [Colossians 3.1] and put to death the sinful things in their lives [Romans 6.1-2; 8.13]. Increasing obedience is one evidence of our relationship with Christ [1 John 2.3-5].

† 1 John 5.3 [NASB]: *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”*

There are further motivations for obedience, in that there are repercussions for sins today, even for believers. When we are obedient we can be the willing vessel for Christ’s ministry [2 Timothy 2.21] and be Christ’s witnesses [1 Peter 3.15-16]. When we sin, we fail to delight in what is right [Philippians 4.8], suffer in conscience [Romans 13.5; 1 Timothy 1.5, 19], miss out on earthly blessings [1 Peter 3.8-12; James 1.25], and open ourselves up to divine discipline, through the church [1 Timothy 5.20] and directly [Hebrews 12.5-6]. When we sin, we also lose out on heavenly rewards [Matthew 6.19-21; 1 Corinthians 3.12-15; 2 Corinthians 5.9-10].

† 2 Timothy 2:21 [NASB]: *“Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.”*

One who is sinning is not yielding to the Holy Spirit, so there is a loss of peace, joy, and the other fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5.19-25]. When we sin, we lose out on having a deeper walk with God [John 14.21; 1 John 1.6; 3.21-22; Philippians 4.9]. Thus, obedience – which leads to greater intimacy with God – is a necessary part of sanctification.

† John 14.21 [NASB]: *“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”*

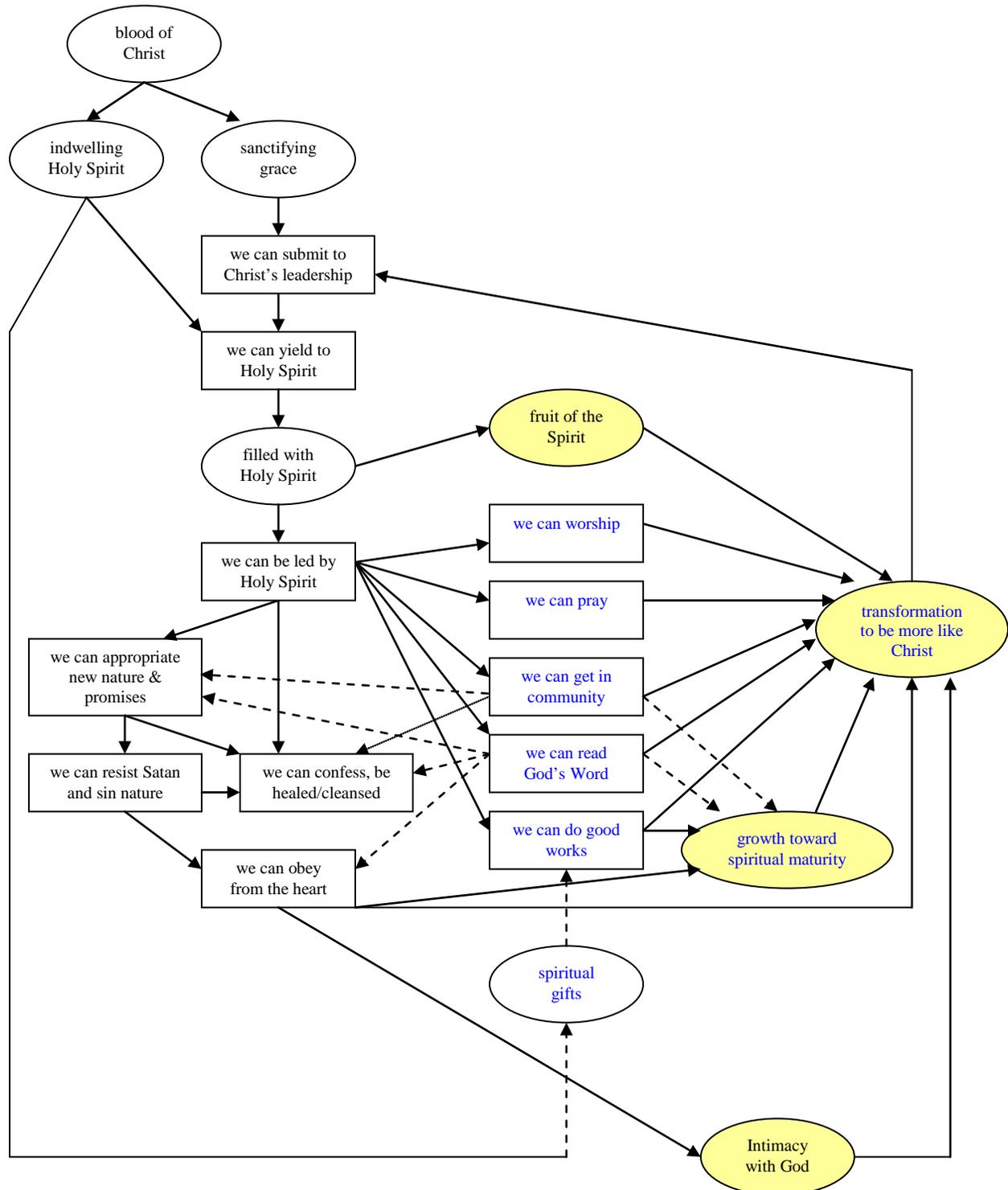
The Christian must avoid an attitude of license, or tolerance of sin [Romans 6.15], but also must avoid an attitude of legalism [Galatians 5.1], which includes imposition of moral codes on others and adherence to a works-righteousness theology for oneself. Each individual believer should be progressing in the sanctification process at a unique pace, on a unique path, in cooperation with God, bathed in grace. The church community’s responsibility is to provide encouragement and teaching on biblical principles of obedience while maintaining an environment safe for individual choice, expression, and growth. Accountability is a necessary part of Christian community, but it has to be on a voluntary basis.

† Galatians 5.1 [NASB]: *“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery [to the Law].”*

While all of scripture is useful as revelation of God’s nature and desires for mankind [2 Timothy 3.16], the modern day believer is under the “New Covenant” with God [Luke 22.20; 1 Corinthians 11.25; 2 Corinthians 3.6; Hebrews 9.15]. Obedience in this New Covenant is to the teachings and example of Jesus and his apostles, as portrayed in the New Testament. This new “Law” is called the Law of Christ [1 Corinthians 9.21], the Law of the Spirit [Romans 8.2], the Royal Law [James 2.8], and the Law of Liberty [James 1.25]. The Mosaic Law of the Old Testament, while still useful as revelation, is no longer a binding covenant [Hebrews 8.13; Galatians 3.23-26].

† Luke 22.20 [NASB]: *“And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.’”*

Christian Disciplines As Both Effects of Sanctification and Further Causes of It



Worship: Honest worship is in spirit and truth [John 4.23-24], which means that we must genuinely proclaim praises to God from a heart and mind that is aware of his glorious character and actions through knowledge of Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit [Philippians 3.3]. Such worship is the response

of the believer to God as creator and redeemer, as the believer acts in response to the new life given to him or her. Worship should be a part of daily life [see the example in Acts 2.42-47]. Daily obedience is an act of worship, but believers should take time to purposefully praise and thank God too.

† John 4.23-24 [NET]: *“But a time is coming—and now is here— when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. ²⁴ God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

The Holy Spirit will lead us into intentional praise and worship of God, which takes many forms, including [among others] singing songs to God [Colossians 3.16; Ephesians 5.18-20], acknowledging his sovereignty [Ephesians 5.18-20], praying [1 Timothy 2.1-2], praising [James 5.13; Romans 14.11], giving [2 Corinthians 9.7], taking communion [1 Corinthians 11.28], and baptism [Matthew 28.19-20].

† Ephesians 5.18-20 [NET]: *“And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for each other in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”*

This intentional worship is not transformational in the act itself, but because of what is happening inside us when we genuinely give our all to God. For example, baptism is a symbol of what Christ did for us, a public statement of the salvation and baptism into the body of Christ that has already occurred within; as such, it is not transformational in itself, but if our heart is pure then the act of baptism is one of repentance for our previous lack of faith [Luke 3.3]. Similarly, taking communion is not transformational in the act, but rather in that we approach it in humble remembrance of what Christ has done for us [1 Corinthians 11.20-28]. All of these disciplines are simply the means God has revealed through which he chooses to work to make us more like Christ, more like the image of God we were created to be.

Prayer: We are to rejoice, pray unceasingly, and always give thanks [1 Thessalonians 5.16-18]. We are not to be anxious, but to pray our requests along with our thanksgiving [Philippians 4.6]. We are to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us in prayer at all times [Ephesians 6.18; Jude 1.20]. We should pray not only for ourselves, but also for other believers and those in ministry [see the example in Ephesians 6.19-20]. Following Christ’s example, our prayers can include praise, devotion, submission, requests, obedience, and expressions of dependence [Matthew 6.9-13].

† 1 Thessalonians 5.16-18 [NET]: *“Always rejoice, ¹⁷ constantly pray, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks. For this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

The action of praying is not transformational in itself, so rote repetition of prayer is meaningless [Matthew 6.7-8]. However, heart-felt, passionate prayer can result in transformation by involving a declaration of faith [e.g. trusting, praising, thanking, depending] or by God’s response to our prayer of a change in our heart or revelation of his will [see example in Nehemiah 1:1-2:8].

Community: The Holy Spirit will lead us into biblical community, as is described and required in scripture. We are baptized into the body of Christ [1 Corinthians 12.12-27], which is the church [Ephesians 5.23]. Thus we are connected and belong to one another [Romans 12.5]. We are to become one unified entity, working for Christ as a holy priesthood [1 Peter 2.5-9] and unified with Christ [1 John 1.3]. Notice that the fruit of the Spirit help build the church community [Galatians 5.22-23] and works of the flesh destroy such community [Galatians 5.15-21]. Also, the gifts of the Spirit focus on building the body, either through evangelism or through edification [Romans 12.6-8; Ephesians 4:7-13; 1 Corinthians 12.4-11, 27-31; 14.26; 1 Peter 4.10-11]. God’s plan is not only to sanctify the individual, but to sanctify

the church of which the individual is a vital part [Ephesians 4.11-16; Colossians 2.19]. This process includes the work of the church's pastors and lay leaders [Ephesians 4.11-16].

† Ephesians 4.11-16 [NET]: *“It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God— a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature.¹⁴ So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.¹⁵ But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head.¹⁶ From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love.”*

The sanctification of the individual is expected to occur in biblical community, for it is there that we can confess to each other, pray for each other, and be healed [James 5.16]. It is also through the body of Christ that we are blessed to realize a physical manifestation of God's grace and ministry through his people, as we minister to each other in the following ways:

- encouraging and exhorting [1 Thessalonians 5.11; Hebrews 3.13; 10.24-25],
- serving and helping [John 13.14; Galatians 5.13; 6.2; 1 Peter 4.10],
- loving [John 13:34; 15:12, 17; 1 Peter 1.22; 4.8; 1 John 3.11, 23; 4.7, 11; 2 John 1.5],
- showing devotion [Romans 12.10],
- edifying [Romans 14.19; 1 Thessalonians 5.11],
- accepting [Romans 12.16; 15.7; James 4.11; 5.9],
- admonishing, instructing [depending on translation; Romans 15.14],
- enthusiastically greeting [Romans 16.16; 1 Corinthians 16.20; 2 Corinthians 13.12; 1 Peter 5.14],
- caring [1 Corinthians 12.25],
- being patient [Ephesians 4.2],
- showing kindness [Ephesians 4.32],
- forgiving [Ephesians 4.32; Colossians 3.13],
- honoring [Philippians 2.3],
- comforting [1 Thessalonians 4.18],
- seeking good [1 Thessalonians 5.15],
- inspiring [Hebrews 10.24],
- working to restore [Galatians 6.1-2], and
- praying [James 5.16].

† Hebrews 10.24-25 [NET]: *“And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works,²⁵ not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near.”*

These relational activities lead us to emotional and relational healing, further our ability to appropriate our new nature and the promises of God, and encourage our obedience, and thus sanctification happens in the community as God works through his people. We are healed by our association with Christ, but that association is in the context of being in the body of Christ. This is why the Bible gives extensive instructions on how to live in community with other believers, because this healing and growth process depends on God working through us to help each other. Thus, we can attest that there is value in support groups, if they provide biblical accountability, encouragement, prayer support, love, acceptance, and the other things the Bible says characterize the body of Christ. The power in the body is from God, through the indwelling Holy Spirit and in that Christ gathers with us when we are together [Matthew 18.20]. Being in biblical community leads to us to maturity as we learn how to minister to needs and relationally heal. Being in biblical community leads to life change as we learn to love like God does, and thus experience God working in our hearts and through us to bless others.

† Matthew 18.20 [NASB]: *“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”*

Scripture: The Holy Spirit will lead us to read scripture, as recommended in the Word itself [Psalm 1.1-3; see also God’s command to Joshua in Joshua 1.8] and illuminate it for us, revealing to us the deep things of God [1 Corinthians 2.11-16]. Reading scripture can lead us to conviction and confession [Hebrews 4.12], and enlightenment about life [Matthew 4.4; Psalm 119.105], and thus to obedience [Psalm 119.11; Deuteronomy 17.18-20]. Reading scripture can help us ward off the influence of evil in our lives [Ephesians 6.17] and set us free of the influence of sin over us [John 8.31-32]. As we have seen, these things can lead to sanctification.

† Hebrews 4.12 [NET]: *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing even to the point of dividing soul from spirit, and joints from marrow; it is able to judge the desires and thoughts of the heart.”*

With the Holy Spirit’s illumination, reading scripture can be transformational through the renewing of our minds [John 17.16-17; Romans 12.2]. Reading scripture will lead to greater spiritual maturity through the gain of knowledge of God and his ways [2 Timothy 3.16-17; 1 Peter 2.2], if we appropriate and apply what we read [James 1.22-25]. Besides understanding singular aspects of Christian thought, reading the Bible consistently leads to an understanding of the general values and philosophies God wants us to develop. In other words, instead of trying to apply single scriptures to our circumstances, we can develop the pattern of thought and reasoning of Christ, and then we can handle any situation, even if we don’t know a specific biblical command that is relevant. We can then effortlessly improve our intimacy with God, because our thoughts and the Holy Spirit’s prompts will be in agreement. Just contemplating the love of Christ can lead us to experience the fullness of God [Ephesians 3.16-19].

† Romans 12.2 [NET]: *“Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God— what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.”*

Spiritual gifts and service: The indwelling Holy Spirit equips each believer with at least one spiritual gift, which is how the Holy Spirit wishes to work through that person in a supernatural way, as we do our part to carry out the church’s ministry [1 Corinthians 12.7]. We use our gifts to bring glory to God and serve others, not for ourselves [1 Peter 4.10-11]. The Holy Spirit will lead us to serve in these gifts and in other ways, as scripture dictates.

† 1 Corinthians 12.7 [NET]: *“To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all.”*

Each of us is a necessary part of Christ’s body, the church [1 Corinthians 12]. Therefore, we must all seek to participate in the church’s ministry, doing the good works God has in mind for us [Ephesians 2.10], using our spiritual gifts when prompted by the Holy Spirit [1 Timothy 4.14]. In the Bible, people are not able to choose when to exercise their gifts; these are not natural abilities or talents that we can control, we can only be obedient when the Holy Spirit prompts us to action.

† Ephesians 2.10 [NET]: *“For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.”*

We also are called to make disciples, regardless of our gifts. Jesus told his disciples to go make disciples, which included both baptism, indicating evangelism, and teaching, indicating edification [Matthew 28.19-

20]. If the new disciples followed all Christ's teachings, then they too would go make disciples, and that cycle continues to us today. Thus, we are all called to share the gospel with non-believers and to help in the education of fellow believers.

† Matthew 28.19-20 [NET]: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

The act of serving in itself is not sanctifying. However, if the believer obediently and passionately serves in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, then he will experience the supernatural work of God through his efforts and experience the work of God in his heart as he learns to love those whom he helps. Both of these experiences can be transformational. For example, if we participate in evangelism, all we can do is accurately share the gospel message and enthusiastically witness for its truth, for it is God who must instill saving faith through his grace [Ephesians 2.5, 8; 2 Timothy 1.9], but when God does lead someone to salvation through our efforts, we get the faith-inspiring thrill of experiencing that supernatural work of God through us, a greater maturity from the experience, and a greater abundance of love instilled in us for our new brother or sister in Christ.

The Cyclical Nature of Sanctification

The sanctification process is a cycle: we submit to Christ and yield to the Holy Spirit, and thus we are blessed with cleansing, healing, and growth, which in turn leads us to submit further to Christ and yield more fully to the Holy Spirit, and thus increase the blessings, and on and on. Growth and victory are expected to be partial and growing over time, as God gracefully works in us. This cyclical relationship, along with the others described in this document, is represented on the charts, on which ovals are free gifts beyond our control and boxes are points where God's grace demands our cooperation.

Break Down Points

On this flow chart, there are many places where the process can break down – really, any of the boxes, which represent decision points, can be a blockage point – but there are three main steps that cause the sanctification process to become obstructed.

First, a person might not submit to Christ's leadership in his life. It is particularly important for the new believer to receive spiritual guidance in a relationship with a mentor or small group leader, so that the new believer can be taught, not only about assurance of salvation no matter what he does, but also about being saved for a purpose, and submission to Christ as the leader of the church, as anointed king, as future judge, as master of this slave that has been granted freedom from spiritual bondage. Unless the new believer comes to an attitude of submission to Christ, his spiritual growth will be inadequate.

For every believer, if he comes to a consecrating moment in which he completely submits to Christ's leadership in all things – i.e. is willing to submit to Christ even in the things about which he does not know yet, things he will learn in Scripture later – then he will experience accelerated evidence of the growth process. Even when not fully committed to following Christ, the believer will be growing, but the fruit will not be as evident, because the work of the Holy Spirit will be focused on bringing the person to a consecrating moment. Obviously, it is best if this happens at the moment of salvation, which is why immediate follow up is so essential. But even for the seasoned Christian there is a need for this consecration if it has not yet happened, and there might be a need for pastoral help to realize the need for full commitment and to nurture the attitude of repentance.

Even a mature believer who is fully committed to following Christ can discover specific issues in life about which he has not fully submitted, as the Holy Spirit roots around in the dark recesses of his heart to expose things that need cleansing or as new issues come to light through Bible study. Confession and repentance are the keys to getting past this, but sometimes it takes a while for the Holy Spirit to bring the person to awareness and repentance.

Second, a person might not know how to appropriate his new nature and the promises for believers in Scripture. A person is far less likely to succeed in resisting temptation or overcoming spiritual bondage issues if he does not know the promises of Scripture that he is free from the power of sin and Satan, that he has been given this new nature that comes with rebirth, that the indwelling Holy Spirit will guide him, strengthen him, and help him endure. For this reason, there must be consistently good teaching on this subject in the church, not only in specialized groups for overcoming addictions, but also from the pulpit and in the other small groups or classes of the church. Victory over life issues comes as we understand our identity in Christ: how God now sees us as justified, how the Holy Spirit empowers us, how Christ cleanses us.

Third, a person might not engage sufficiently in the spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer, community, Bible study, and service. Too often, even the person who is fully submitted to Christ and walking relatively free from spiritual bondage issues becomes complacent about spiritual disciplines and thus hits a plateau of growth that should not occur. The church must cast the vision that growth should be evident in any given six month period, that we should never stop growing, that the cyclical process of sanctification never stops in this lifetime. And the church must teach the need for consistent exploitation of the spiritual disciplines as a necessary means to continue that process. Many times, people will only do the disciplines they like [i.e. the disciplines that don't require much discipline!], so the church needs to encourage the use of all the disciplines as a coordinated mechanism, far less effective if taken in pieces.

The Role of God's Revelation in the Process

As we laid out this flow chart of the sanctification process, we did not discuss adequately the role of God's revelation in the Bible for this process. We did note the need for Bible study as a spiritual discipline, which brings about many benefits. We must also note, however, that God's revelation plays a role in every box on the flow chart, in every decision for the believer to take another step of growth.

We will not submit to Christ's authority in our lives and to his teachings in the Bible unless we do know from scripture that this is God's revealed will, that it is absolutely necessary as a part of the Christian life. We will not yield to the Holy Spirit moment by moment unless we understand from scripture that this is the way a believer walks through the day and stays in the light, unless we understand that each decision must be submitted to God's will and acted out in God's character as best we can with the Spirit's help. We will not be able to be led by the Holy Spirit unless we learn from scripture that this is possible and how to discern the Spirit's voice among the many influences in our minds.

We cannot appropriate our new nature and live in the freedom and victory scripture promises, unless we learn from scripture about this new nature, our victory in Christ, our freedom from temptation's power, and the fullness of what it means to be in God's love, in his family, in his kingdom. We will not be able to resist evil in our lives and our own sin nature, unless we learn from scripture about the Spirit's empowerment, our victory over sin and thus our freedom from its grasp, and how to discern deceptions and accusations in our minds. We will not confess of specific sins unless we learn from scripture that we must do so and that confession carries great benefits. We will not obey unless we understand from scripture what God has commanded us to do and not to do.

We will not worship properly or sufficiently unless we learn from scripture what God demands in the way of praise. We will not pray sufficiently and in the many ways open to us unless we learn from scripture how to do it properly. We will not live in the type of community described in scripture, with its immense benefits, unless we learn from scripture what the integral components of this community are and how necessary it is for our well being. We will not serve adequately unless we learn from scripture what it means to love in the way Christ loved us and how to detect the ways that God has equipped us uniquely for his planned good works. We even will not learn from scripture adequately, unless we learn from scripture itself the need and techniques of receiving instruction, reading and studying, memorizing, and reflecting on scripture.

Thus, it would be a disservice to leave a believer thinking that this process is fully automated. God plays the decisive role: without his sanctifying grace – his gift of growing us into his image – we would not change at all. Still, God has revealed his means of effecting this growth, and in every step of our cooperation in this process – at every decision about our attitudes and actions – God’s revealed Word in the Bible plays an essential role.