

10. Growing in Holiness

Opening question

Over your time as a Christian, can you look back and see positive changes that God has brought about in your life? Share 2-3 of these around the group.

Read the following passage out loud:

- **1 John 3:2-3**

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Question

These verses tell us what will happen to us when Jesus comes again. What do they describe?

- *Our identity is already confirmed: we are children of God. But our future transformation is linked to Jesus coming again and our hope in him.*
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What does that transformation include? Transformation includes the fullness of who we are.

Read the following passage out loud:

- **Philippians 3:21**

Jesus, "who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body"

Question

What changes do you think will happen to our physical bodies?

Read the following passage out loud:

- **1 Thessalonians 5:23**

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- The point of this verse is to tell us that the fullness of who we are (personality, mind, will, emotions, body, etc.) will be transformed to become fully like Jesus.

Question

What does it mean to you that the negative elements of your body, mind, will and emotions will be transformed? Is this something that excites you or worries you? Why?

Fact-check: justification vs. sanctification

To go deeper into the subject we must first be reminded of the two gifts of righteousness that God gives to us.

Justification: “Imputed” righteousness. Imputed means “assigned”. When you become a Christian, you are instantly declared fully “righteous” in Christ. Jesus exchanges your sinfulness for his robe of righteousness. God the Father sees you with the same attributes of perfection as Jesus himself. This is a gift from God, fully his work and freely given and received. Wow!

Sanctification.: “Imparted” Righteousness. Imparted means “shared with, given to”. When you become a Christian God puts his Spirit in you and begins the work of transformation of your mind, will and emotions to make you more and more like Jesus. We work in partnership with God’s Spirit, cooperating allowing him to change us into his image. This is a process that takes a lifetime. Wow!

FUN QUIZ!

(Perhaps give everyone paddle boards or pieces of paper to hold up with a ‘J’ for Justification and an ‘S’ for Sanctification)

Is *justification* (instant, imputed righteousness) or *sanctification* (a life-long process) being described by these phrases?

- Once for all time. (J)
- Entirely God’s work. (J)
- Continuous through this life (S)
- Perfect in God’s sight (J)
- Our legal standing before God (J)
- Our internal condition (S)
- Greater in some Christians than others (S)
- Same for all Christians (J)
- An ongoing struggle (S)
- A finished work (J)

Ask the group if anyone knows any verses that describe justification or sanctification. Here are two good examples you can share:

- **JUSTIFICATION:** 2 Corinthians 5:21
He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
- **SANCTIFICATION:** 2 Corinthians 3:18
And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Both/And

When Paul addressed the Corinthian church (2 Cor 1:1), he called them “saints” (holy people). He then went on to teach them about how to live the Christian life. Our identity is to be enjoyed, even while our character grows.

Fact-check: growing in holiness

God accepts us as we are (grace), but he doesn’t leave us that way! He invites us to change into his likeness.

Let’s look at God’s part and our part in the process of *sanctification*.

GOD'S PART:

Question

How does the Holy Spirit help us grow in Christlikeness?

(ask people for answers and then share the passages below as people reference those points)

1. Changes our desires

2 Corinthians 1:22

He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

“The more of heaven there is in our lives, the less of earth we shall covet” (Charles Spurgeon)

The Spirit puts in us a longing to love Jesus and please him.

2. Gives us power to resist temptation

Gal 5:16-17

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.

3. Makes us holy

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

Causes good fruit to grow in us in place of the default fruits of our sinful nature.

4. Disciplines us for our good

Hebrews 12:11

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

5. Points us to Jesus as our greatest example of Spirit-filled humanity

1 John 2:6

Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

6. Uses other people

All the New Testament letters are written to communities of believers where the assumption is they work out sanctification together, helping one another.

7. Never gives up on us

Philippians 1:6

being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

God is 100% committed to our growth into his likeness!

OUR PART:

Question

What is our role in growing in Christlikeness?

(ask people for answers and then share the passages below as people reference those points)

1. Yield yourself to God

Rom 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God

But it's not simply "let god and let God"!

2. Obedience (do what God says), Perseverance (continue to work it out) and Confidence

Phil 2:12-13

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

As you persevere in obedience, you can have confidence that God will change you. Don't give up! God is at work in you.

3. Take radical action with sinful behaviours

Romans 8:13

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

4. Make every effort

2 Peter 1:5-7

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

5. Make good choices

"Strive" (Heb 12:14), "abstain" (1 Thess 4:3), "shun" (1 Cor 6:18), avoid partnerships with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14), cleanse yourself (2 Cor 7:1).

"The New Testament doesn't suggest any short-cuts by which we can grow in sanctification, but simply encourages us repeatedly to give ourselves to the old-fashioned, time-honoured means of Bible-reading and meditation (Psalm 1:2), Prayer (Eph 6:18), Witnessing (Matt 28:19-20), Christian fellowship (Heb 10:24-25), and self-discipline or self-control (Gal 5:23)."

(Wayne Grudem, 'Systematic Theology,' p 755)

Fact-check: the joy of sanctification

True joy awaits us when we make choices to be like Jesus.

"It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an

ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”
(CS Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory')

Response

Spend time praying alone and/or in groups and then say this hymn/prayer all together:

*Breathe on me, breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God,
Blend all my soul with Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity.*