

**"The Doctrine of Sanctification"
(2 Peter 1:3-11)
Pastor Peter Yi
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(2 Peter 1:3-11 NIV11-GK)

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

⁵ 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. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For the past five weeks we looked at the wonderful, joy-inspiring, God-glorifying Doctrines of Grace. It begins with the eternal plans and decrees of God, is made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then becomes a reality when we are called and we respond to the gospel invitation, and then finally, it'll succeed in bringing us home to heaven. As we leave the subject for now, what needs to be addressed is how we are to live our lives from the moment we were first saved to the moment we leave this world and enter the next. What is it that we are to do and how do we go about it? These questions are just as important as the things we talked about the past five weeks. We need to know, now that we are saved, how should I live? What now is my purpose?

Let me bring your attention back to the first statement of the Westminster Shorter Catechism for the answer. It asks, "What is the chief end of man?" and then answers, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

That's our purpose while we live now and for all eternity. Now, the means by which we glorify God and enjoy him in this life is by being sanctified. That is the high priority of Christian life and that is our subject for today. We're talking about the doctrine of sanctification.

From the word 'sanctification' we get the word 'saint', and both of these words are from the word group that means 'holy.' A saint is a holy person, which is how sinful Christians are addressed in the bible. That is what we are. We are holy or saints in two ways. The first is that we are positionally holy in God's sight, which is the doctrine of justification, where God declares us not guilty, and the righteousness and perfection of Christ gets imputed to us, we are in a very real sense holy already, even though all of us will still fall into sin time and time again.

But, we are also considered to be saints because we are in the process of becoming more holy in our experience and in our being. That's called sanctification. Here's a more comprehensive definition. "Sanctification is the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, involving our responsible participation, by which he delivers us from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to him." (Hoekema)

Let me pick that apart further:

First, it's a work that involves both the Holy Spirit and us. So apart from both the Spirit working and us working, sanctification will not happen. This is important to know because some Christians are waiting for the magic bullet to come and kill sin once and for all. We might hope that God would just immediately and instantaneously remove our struggle with lust or anger and so on. But most of the time it is not like that. God has so designed the process of sanctification that it incorporates both the work of the Holy Spirit and also our great effort. There is no other way.

Second, this definition tells us that it is the process of being delivered from the pollution of sin. Here's what I mean by that. When air is polluted or water is polluted, we mean that a contaminant has gotten into it. Garbage or chemicals enter water, or exhaust from cars or factories have entered the air. You and I have become polluted by inheriting a sin nature, which in turns pollutes us further when we continue to commit sins. Sanctification is the process by which that pollution is being removed from our sinful nature and by doing so allows us to live a life that pleases God.

Sanctification is a work of grace. Christians begin their lives by grace and we finish our lives by that same grace. And every moment in between we live...how?...by grace. When we experience the killing of sin in our lives, when we experience deeper longings and hungers for God and holiness; when we want to do his will more and more, these are all because of God's grace.

Let's take a closer look at today's passage. It's one of the best passages in the bible that addresses the subject of sanctification.

³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

The first thing this passage tells us is that everything we need to be successful in sanctification has been provided for us. *It's like when you buy Ikea furniture. Everything you need to assemble that piece of furniture and make it functional is contained in that box. You bring home that flat box and wonder how this will become a dresser or a bed or a bookshelf. You open it up and there you find the planks of fake wood, the plasticky veneer, the chintzy hardware, the instructions that are meant for a five year old and the wonder tool, the S-shaped Allen key. Some of you are like, This is a horrible example because I can't assemble Ikea furniture...Well you get the point: Everything is provided for you.* In the same way God has provided for us everything we need to live a godly life. Isn't that good to know?

So, what are the tools that God has provided for our success in sanctification?

First, the things that he has given us are of a divine sort. Peter tells us that he's given us 'divine power' which again tells us that anything less than that would be insufficient to conquer sin and be victorious over the Devil and to die to our sinful selves. Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood so we don't bring the tools of the flesh for this, we bring spiritual tools. It's like that famous line in the movie the Untouchables. You don't bring a knife to a gunfight.

This divine power resides in every Christian by the Holy Spirit. When a person becomes a Christian, at that very moment, the Holy Spirit enters you never again to leave you. And while in you, he empowers and enables you to live a life of growing degrees of sanctification.

Through the presence of the Holy Spirit in us we also experience true union with Christ. This union or oneness with Christ is the foundation, the continual means and guaranteed final completion of our journey of sanctification. So God has given us divine power through Jesus and through the Holy Spirit.

There's something else God has provided for our sanctification. His very great and precious promises. The key to sanctification is found in the promises of God. Where are those promises found? Only in his Word.

And that's exactly what the second question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism addresses.

Q2: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him?

A2: The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.

The means by which we glorify and enjoy God is by being sanctified. How are we sanctified? Through God's promises. Where are those promises found? In His Holy Word.

Let's pause a moment and draw out an important implication. Can a person be sanctified apart from the regular intake and interaction with the Word of God? No, we cannot. We need to be regularly consuming and studying and listening and reading the Word to be growing in sanctification. I'm proud of so many of you who've been so faithful with your bible reading this year. I know that for some of you it's your first time to have ever read the bible all the way through. Congratulations. And I know that for some of you who have struggled with bible reading your whole life, this was the first year you finally gained some consistency. I congratulate you too. To help all of us keep at it...next year, we're going to do another plan, but still do it together, every one of us. We've decided to break it up into 2 years. Next year we will only read the Old Testament and the following year we'll tackle the New Testament. We'll say more about that next month.

Now, how do these promises help in our sanctification? Well, let's think of this way. There are dozens if not hundreds of promises in the Bible that God gives to us, right? Here are a few of my favorites that I say to myself all the time:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6.

Here's one from the New Testament. "I am the vine you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5.

Or what about the one we looked at last week. "Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:20.

Why are those and all the other promises of the bible there? They are there to generate within God's people, faith. Faith to believe the God of the promise, and faith to believe the actual promise. But also faith to do the promise, to live out the promise. The bible tells us that without faith, it is impossible to please the Lord. Pleasing the Lord, Enjoying the Lord, Glorifying the Lord requires faith. These promises are God telling us, asking us, inviting us, "Take me up on this promise." "Come and see what kind of God I am." "Prove to yourself that I am a faithful God to you."

It's just like it says in the hymn, "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus."

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to take Him at His word;
Just to rest upon His promise;
Just to know, Thus saith the Lord.

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him,
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er,
Jesus, Jesus, Precious Jesus!
O for grace to trust Him more.

That's what we are to do. To prove to ourselves over and over and over that Jesus is trustworthy.

Let's get even more basic. Take the promise from John 15. "I am the vine you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Here's how you would trust in this promise.

As you come across this promise, you pause and read and re-read this promise, making sure you understand what it is saying. You confess, "Lord, I believe your words are true. Help me now to believe them more, help me to act upon them." You might pray something like this, "Lord there is no better place for me, than to be a part of the vine, a part of you. From you I receive my life, my energy, my purpose, my joy, my strength, my everything. If I were to be cut off, I would not be able to do anything. Help me my Lord, to remain, to abide, to stay with you."

And then you might say,

"Lord, I haven't been very fruit-bearing at work or at school, or in the family. It must be that I am not remaining in you. Forgive me. Now help me to remain in you while I'm at work. Lord, I trust that by remaining in you, I will for certain bear fruit. Thank you for this promise. Amen."

Now, do you think you would be more likely to live out this promise at work tomorrow if you did this little exercise? Of course you would. In fact, that'd be the only way you could. How else would you know this promise, if you didn't read it? How would you grow in your sanctification if you didn't commit it to God in prayer and then go to work or school with this very promise in mind? Now the Holy Spirit will recall the promise later that day, and he'll help you to begin the slow and steady process of living that out. That's how spiritual growth or sanctification is meant to work.

Look, here's how we grow...

Learn biblical truth.

Consider biblical truth – crisis of faith.

Decide to obey biblical truth.

Ask God for help to obey biblical truth.

Obey the biblical truth.

Grow

Rinse and repeat.

That's why Peter says that the promises of God are very great and precious. There is no greater power than divine power in the presence of the Holy Spirit, in Union with Christ, and with the sharp sword of the Word of God that can help us in our sanctification.

Let's look at the next section of this passage.

⁵ 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. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let me to draw out a few points.

First, Our dedicated effort is needed to grow in sanctification. Look at how Peter says it. It's as if he's building a spiritual skyscraper, a massive edifice, a spiritual giant, that we all should be. We start with faith. This is where everyone begins. This is the very foundation. Faith in Christ is the starting point for our sanctification. But after we are saved, after we become Christians, things need to be added to our faith.

Another way to look at it is that these are the fruits or results of our faith in Christ. Every Christian is supposed to display these things in increasing measure.

So, specifically he says, Add to faith goodness. Add to goodness knowledge. Then, self-control. Perseverance, Godliness, then mutual affection, then love. Some of these virtues are inward, addressing our inner character. Some of them are outward, impacting the people around us, all of them are God-ward.

Second, We are to possess these qualities in increasing measure.

This implies that it's going to be a long, slow, steady, life-long journey of growth. Sure there may be seasons where we grow quicker than other times, and there may be seasons where we hardly notice any growth, but when we look at our life-long trajectory, we need to be able to see ourselves growing in these virtues.

Third, he tells us that apart from this our lives will be ineffective and unproductive.

The word unproductive here means unfruitful. What I think this phrase is telling us is that when Christians are growing rightly, they are bearing fruit—the virtues that were listed. And the very presence of these fruits is an indicator that their lives are not fruitless lives. Their lives are fruitful. A fruitless tree is an ineffective tree. A flat tire is an ineffective tire. A fruitless Christian is an ineffective Christian. But a true Christian by definition is one that bears fruit, or one that is being sanctified.

Now, follow me...this is really important. Peter writes that if a Christian bears fruit, then he will not be ineffective or unfruitful in our knowledge of Christ? What does that mean? Scholars say that it means one of two things. 1) It means that our knowledge of Christ grows, our experience of Christ deepens. OR 2) It means that our initial knowledge of Christ, that is our salvation, will prove to be effective and fruitful. So, if we don't bear fruit then our experience with Christ will stop growing or If we don't bear fruit then it shows that we were never saved to begin with.

I think it has to mean #2. Why? Well because of the following verses.

9 But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Verse 9 is saying, if you don't have fruitfulness, then, you are blind. Being blind in the bible is never a good thing. It means we don't have knowledge of God. It means we are not yet in a relationship with him. So that seems to imply they are not Christian. And they have forgotten having been cleansed from their sins. Think of it like this. Does a Christian ever forget that their sins have been forgiven? Never. It's like asking, does a person ever forget their birthday? Do they ever forget the day of the accident, when they should have died, but they didn't? Does the married person forget they're married? Of course not. The one who's forgotten the most important and precious moment of their lives, that is having their sins forgiven, cannot possibly be a Christian.

What about verse 10?

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter gives us a very interesting command. Make every effort to confirm you calling and election. What does that mean? It can't mean that we gotta do our part to earn and secure our salvation. That's already been done for us in Christ. What it's focusing on is our daily experience. He's telling us that the person who is truly Christian, is the one who has the evidences of their conversion. The person who was made able to bear fruit, loves and labors to bear fruit. Let's say we were like trees that were sick and dying. We couldn't produce a single fruit. And then the gardener comes and literally breathes new life into us and brings us back to life. If you continued as a sick, fruitless tree, what would that say about you? It would mean that the gardener didn't do his work in you, but if you are bountiful then it proves that the once sick tree is now healthy. This is how we know we are true Christians.

Conclusion:

We all know that we have around 50-70 years to live as Christians, give or take; and while we are living, what is it we are to do? We are to be sanctified. How? By divine power—the presence of the Holy Spirit, Union with Christ, and being deeply imbedded in God’s word. We are to grow and bear fruit in increasing measure all the days of our lives.