

## **Principles for Spiritual Growth and Maturity**

The following material seeks to create a conceptual model for how a believer grows in faith and maturity. It is important for us to understand the spiritual dynamics of the Christian faith so that we can live as God intended. We must be aware of both God's role in the process and ours. For if we fail to do our part or if we attempt to do God's part, we will ultimately fail.

### **Theology of Sanctification**

This side of heaven, there are two phases to salvation. These two phases can be compared to a marriage. As with all marriages, there is a wedding day and then there is a married life together. In the same way, salvation has a beginning which then continues with a life. Theologians usually describe these two phases as justification and sanctification. Justification, like a wedding, is a one time event that begins our relationship with God. Sanctification, like a marriage is the continued living out of our salvation relationship.

Justification may be described as positional holiness. To be justified, is to be declared innocent and righteous by God. As we place our faith in Christ's saving work for us on the cross, we are declared righteous by God's grace. We can do nothing to earn this position except to gladly receive it in faith.

Sanctification may be described as practical holiness. Having received positional righteousness, we then seek to live holy lives. We become in practice, what we have received in principle. As Philippians 3:16 says "Only let us live up to what we have already attained."

Sanctification may also be described as spiritual growth, holiness, spiritual maturity, living out God's will or the process of becoming more like Christ.

Colossians 1:28

We proclaim him [Christ], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

## **Principles of Sanctification**

### One Cannot Ultimately Separate Sanctification and Justification

Just as it is meaningless to have a wedding that does not result in married life, it is meaningless to be justified without also entering into sanctification. In fact where conversion has no effect on a person's life, it is doubtful that the person has been saved. When one come to faith in Christ, that faith is not exercised for a moment, but is lived out daily.

James 2:14-19

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? *15* Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. *16* If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? *17* In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. *18* But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. *19* You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

Romans 1:5

Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles *to the obedience that comes from faith.*

On the other hand, just as one cannot live a married life without getting married, it is impossible to be sanctified without first being justified. One may attempt to live a good life without first committing to a relationship with God, but this cannot work. The good things we do apart from faith in God and a motivation to glorify him are not pleasing to God.

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Sanctification is only possible for believers and will naturally follow saving faith. Although we can distinguish justification and sanctification, we cannot separate them.

### Sanctification Finds its Motivation in Love and Gratitude

Sanctification is based on the foundation of justification. Therefore, our progress in godliness is not a method to earn favor with God, rather it is the living out of a relationship that is given freely by God's grace and received by faith. Obedience does not seek to earn love, but rather is the response to God's love freely given. Our salvation

is based entirely on God's grace, which is received by faith resulting in God works. Good works are motivated by gratitude towards God, not as a way to curry favor.

Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— *9* not by works, so that no one can boast. *10* For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

2 Corinthians 7:1

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

God's grace always comes first. Our relationship is dependent on God's free grace and not our ability to be good. We must never confuse obedience and sanctification with works righteousness.

### Sanctification is Produced by God

God's grace and power is always primary. God is the deciding factor in our transformation. It is He who actually produces the change in us. Scripture teaches that sanctification is a work of God. The basis of our ability to live a holy life, is the indwelling Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit enables us and initiates any work of holiness in our lives.

Romans 8:3-4

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, *4* in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

### Sanctification Takes Effort

Although sanctification finds its basis in the indwelling Holy Spirit, the process of sanctification takes struggle and effort. We cannot sit around and expect to attain maturity. We must do our part to ensure that we grow. This is consistently evidenced in the fact that scripture often commands the Christian to pursue holiness. Furthermore, because of the persistence of our sin nature, there is an ongoing battle in our lives between sin and righteousness. The Holy Spirit enables holiness, but we must lay hold of the Spirit's power by continuing in faith.

Hebrews 12:14

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Romans 6:11-13

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

### Sanctification Requires Cooperation

Given the fact that sanctification is produced by God, but requires our effort, we must conclude that sanctification is achieved through our cooperation with God's transforming work. Through faith, we open ourselves up to God's work in our lives. We must exercise effort prayerfully acknowledging our dependence on God. Our efforts are responsive to God's initiative and are effective through His strength.

Philippians 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 according to his good purpose.

Colossians 1:28-29

28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

### Sanctification is an Ongoing Process of Dying and Living.

The Bible describes the workings of sanctification as a process of dying and rising or putting off and putting on. Sanctification includes dying to sin/self and living unto God. It includes putting off the old self/life and putting on the new self/life. This is not a one time action, but a continual process.

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Ephesians 4:22-24

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Mark 8:34

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

We are encouraged to make choices that are consistent with our spiritual reality in Christ. Because we have been renewed and have received the Holy Spirit, we are called to continually offer ourselves to God and consider ourselves done with sin. This dying to sin and following God is made possible by the Holy Spirit, but requires determined effort as well.

In summary, the process of sanctification is where, in reverence to God, we grow in godliness as we cooperate with the indwelling Spirit who enables us to continually turn from sin and follow God's will.

## **The Filling of the Holy Spirit.**

Another way to approach the whole concept of sanctification is by examining the concept of being filled by the Holy Spirit. As we have already affirmed, the spiritual life, is only possible because of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. As such, the Bible often describes spirituality in terms of being filled by the Holy Spirit. In this section we will look at what it means to be filled by the Holy Spirit and how it is that a person can be filled by the Spirit.

Unfortunately there has been much confusion around the idea of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Some have taught that Christians must attain a special second blessing whereby the power of the Holy Spirit is decisively released into a person's life. Others have equated the idea of Spirit filling and speaking in tongues. Still others connect the filling of the Spirit with emotional and ecstatic experiences. It will be our task to look at what the Bible teaches about these things.

## **Second Blessing?**

Some Pentecostal and Charismatic theologies teach that the Christian life has two stages of initiation. The first stage being conversion through faith in Jesus Christ and the second being a special anointing from the Holy Spirit. This second blessing is often referred to as being baptized in the Holy Spirit. It is then argued that only those who are baptized in the Spirit are capable of being filled by the Spirit.

The Bible however, does not teach a two stage initiation. In fact, the concept of baptism in the Holy Spirit is used only seven times in scripture and six of them refer to baptism which John the Baptist promised that Jesus would baptize with. (Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, Matthew 3:11, John 1:33, Acts 1:5 and Acts 11:16) In all these cases the baptism of the Holy Spirit comes from Christ as an initiation into the new covenant. In other words baptism in the Holy Spirit is equivalent to conversion. This is made even more plain in the seventh reference:

1 Corinthians 12:13

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

In this passage, Paul teaches that all are baptized by the Spirit into the body [church]. Therefore Spirit baptism is a picture of conversion.

Although some will point to instances where the Holy Spirit was received after conversion, these instances are not considered normative. In Acts 2, the disciples received the Holy Spirit after conversion, but this was the first time the Spirit had come to anyone. Therefore it is not considered to be an example of what will happen for every Christian. Furthermore, in Acts 19, where Paul meets some supposed Christians who have not received the Spirit it turns out that in fact they were not really Christian, but only followers of John the Baptist. Finally in Acts 8, where the Samaritan converts receive the Spirit by the laying on of hands. This incident is perhaps the most difficult to account for, but the best explanation is that this occurred in order to enhance the unity between Jewish and Samaritan believers and to emphasize to the Jewish believers that the Spirit was available to all. It would be a mistake to take this one historical incident as the pattern for all believers.

The clear teaching of scripture is that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is equivalent to conversion, for at conversion all believers receive the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:38

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:9

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not a second stage of initiation. There is no second blessing to receive the Holy Spirit. All Christians are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ and all Christians receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

### **What is Spirit Filling?**

Having shown that all Christians receive the Holy Spirit upon conversion, we must now consider what it means to be filled by the Spirit.

In scripture we see that particular individuals are described as being full of the Spirit. For instance Jesus (Luke 4:1), the seven deacons (Acts 6), Stephen (Acts 7:55) and Barnabas (Acts 11:24) These instances seem to refer to people who are generally governed and controlled by the Holy Spirit. It describes the character of their life.

At other points in scripture we see individuals who are described as filled with the Spirit in specific instances. Examples include:

1. The disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) are filled with the Spirit resulting in them speaking in tongues, praising God and boldly testifying about Jesus.
2. Peter before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8) is filled by the Spirit to make bold testimony
3. The church (Acts 4:31) again with the result of bold testimony.
4. Saul at his conversion (Acts 9:17) again leading to courageous testimony
5. Paul (Acts 13:9) as he confronts a sorcerer.

One might also consider Galatians 5:22-23, which describes the fruit of the Spirit, which are character qualities produced in our lives by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Looking at the examples of the new testament, we see that being filled with the Spirit should be a life pattern, but we can also look for special fillings in special instances, especially as we bear witness to Jesus. Although speaking in tongues and other miracles may accompany Spirit filling, they should never be considered the marks of Spirit filling. The filling of the Spirit basically means a life surrendered to the control of the Spirit.

Spirit filling is not a one time event, but should be a continual reality in the life of a believer. In fact, Ephesians 5:18 commands us to be filled with the Spirit. "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." In fact the verb would be better translated "continue to be filled by the Spirit" The Filling of the Spirit is to continually surrender your life to the control of the Holy Spirit.

## **How is one Filled by the Spirit?**

As a command, it is something we should aspire to and as a command there must be something we can do to be filled by the Spirit.

Believers are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith as they surrender control of their lives to God. Scripture shows us that disobedience and sin frustrates the work of the Holy Spirit and prevents us from being filled. Notice how stubbornness and disobedience are described as resisting the Spirit in these passages

Acts 7:51

“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

Ephesians 4:30-32

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Furthermore after promising to send the Holy Spirit in John 14, Jesus makes it clear that fruitful living requires that we remain in Christ and his teaching. John chapter 15

John 15:5

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Knowing that fruit is produced by the Holy Spirit, we must conclude that in order to be filled by the Spirit we must continue to place our faith in Jesus and remain in him.

Therefore, to be filled by the Spirit we must continue in faith and confess all known disobedience. As we maintain a fresh relationship with Jesus Christ we are filled by the Spirit and produce fruit.

It is also not wrong to pray that God would fill you with his Spirit. As we pray, we affirm our faith and dependence on God.

So the filling of the Holy Spirit is another way to describe sanctification. It is a wonderful picture that emphasizes our utter dependence on God to produce godly fruit in our lives. The Holy Spirit fills us as we surrender control to him and open ourselves to him working through us.

## The Role of Spiritual Disciplines

The Spiritual Disciplines are tools that we may use to open ourselves up to receive God's transforming work in our lives. One might also call them spiritual exercises. As we pursue physical exercise, in order to strengthen our bodies we pursue spiritual exercises in order to strengthen our spirituality. The spiritual disciplines are not ends in and of themselves. They are tools that we use to strengthen faith and dependence on God and weaken our sinful desires and pride. Because sanctification is only produced by the Spirit, we must never think that spiritual disciplines are ways that we can change ourselves. We must always see the disciplines as ways to open us up to God's grace. They do not change us, but rather put us in a position to be changed by God.

Some of the more common spiritual disciplines include:

Prayer	Scripture Study	Scripture Meditation
Service	Fasting	Worship
Giving	Simplicity	Self Examination / Confession
Friendship	Contemplation	Journaling

For example scripture.

The Bible is not merely human reflections on God, but rather it is God's inspired message to humanity. As such, it is the primary method of our transformation. By supplying us with knowledge of God, it is indispensable in the life of a Christian.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

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

However, we must note that the disciplines of scripture do not produce righteousness and renewal apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Like all disciplines, scripture is cooperative. We must immerse ourselves in it, but God must illuminate it in our hearts and minds in order for it to transform us.

God uses scripture in many ways:

1. By focusing on scripture, we focus on God and his will for us. Our minds become conformed to God's thoughts. (Rom 12:2 ; Psalm 119:9-11)
2. We see examples of faith which encourages us to have faith. (Heb 12:1-2)
3. We are confronted with God and the power of his love for us. (1 John 4:19)
4. We gain a knowledge of sin so that we can avoid it. (Rom 7:7)

As we expend the effort and discipline to engage scripture, God's spirit uses it to transform us.