

The Gift of Salvation: SANCTIFICATION

I Thessalonians 5:23

As we open to First Thessalonians 5:23 we are going to read the plan God gave to Paul to start a recovery program in a rough, tough, vice-filled, seaport city named Thessalonica.

In AD 50 or 51, the Gospel had arrived in this thriving commercial transportation hub where intercontinental caravans met at the docks of a huge seaport. In less than three weeks, a group of drunkards, sex-addicts, greedy and dishonest business people, as well as normal well-adjusted lost pagans and Jews had come to Christ.

God's Recovery Program is Sanctification

Now the sanctification work had begun. God's Recovery program is sanctification. Listen to this in-depth description of the process God uses to make us useful and fruitful to Him:

"Sanctification is a process of becoming more like Christ, of growing in holiness. This process begins the instant you are converted and will not end until you meet Jesus face-to-face.

Through the work of His Spirit, through the power of His Word and fellowship with other believers, God peels away our desires for sin, renews our minds, and changes our lives.

Sanctification is about our own choices and behavior.

It involves work. Empowered by God's Spirit, we strive.

We fight sin.

We study Scripture and pray, even when we don't feel like it.

We flee temptation.

We press on; we run hard in the pursuit of holiness¹.

What did God tell Paul to do? Teach the new saints the truth of Sanctification.

¹ C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002, p. 31-34.

First Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Be careful what you read or listen to, especially as a teenager! I was given several books during High School which were biographies of the lives of Hudson Taylor, C.T. Studd, and George Mueller—and they have become life-long heroes in my life.

I have often shared with you the fruitful ministry of the pioneering, church planting evangelist by the name of CT Studd. Today I'd like to use his story again only emphasize the work of sanctification in those he reached with the Gospel—especially what happened after CT Studd's death in 1931.

Missionary: C.T. Studd

CT Studd was born in 1858 to an incredible successful English family with vast real estate and business interests all over the British Colonial Empire. Saved while in college, C.T. was discipled in the truth of crucified (or sanctified) living. This truth impacted him deeply to the point of profound choices.

When his father died in the 1880's, he inherited a substantial amount of money—several hundred thousand British Pounds in his day, tens of millions of dollars in ours. On January 13th, 1887, he wrote nine checks and gave away his fortune.

For the next 44 years he served the Lord, with his final 21 years of ministry being in the darkest jungles of Africa. C.T.'s end came in the hot, steamy summer days of July 1931. Around his hut where he died in his sleep sat hundreds of those he led to Christ. With faces turned heavenward they sing of the sweet by and by and that beautiful shore they will someday see.

Now their oiled bodies, formerly the habitation of dark, foul fiends from the pit are temples of the Living God. Once naked and grossly immoral lovers of darkness, now not only clothed in Christ but also modestly clothed in banana leaves.

Did the incredible life changes go on in those jungles? What was the long term effect of those simple Bible Truths he taught, believed and discipled those thousands of savages to believe? To find out, I read the volume this week that chronicles the next 20 years of ministry carried on with those very people C.T. won to Christ. The lesson—they stayed true, kept growing and sent out hundreds of missionaries, evangelists, pastors and teachers in those two decades from 1931-1951.

God's Recovery Program Works

Though none of us are pygmies, cannibals, or jungle savages—each of us also have areas in our lives that God wants changed. Just as in Thessalonica with Paul, or in Africa with C.T. Studd, God wants to change us and make us useful and fruitful. His recovery program is sanctification, and that program works.

Today join me in Colossians 3, as we see the action we must take to live the life of killing our flesh, mortifying our flesh—and living the crucified with Christ life!

As we were saved only by the accomplishment of Christ's sacrifice on the cross—so we live each day 'by faith' (the same faith by which we were saved). We are always dependent upon Christ's gracious death upon the cross that saves and keeps us! Remember:

"Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Christ... as God peels away our desires for sin, renews our minds, and changes our lives. Sanctification is about our own choices and behavior . It involves work...as we run hard in the pursuit of holiness².

The content of what Paul taught in Thessalonica and many other churches is recorded in a letter that Paul wrote to a church he had never visited. Since he had not explained in person the process of sanctification, Paul wrote it out for the Colossians.

Colossians 3:1-15 is an explanation of sanctification that is built around a series of imperative commands.

¹ If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. ⁵ Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. ⁸ But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰ and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹ where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all. ¹² Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender

² C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002, p. 31-34.

mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. ¹⁴ But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. ¹⁵ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Understanding Sanctification

Remember that God never commands me to do what He hasn't already given me the grace to accomplish by faith through His Spirit! Listen again to the theological description of this powerful doctrine:

*"Our participation in the process of **sanctification** comes only after we've been totally accepted and made right before God through faith in Jesus.*

So yes, we work hard at obeying God's word. We read our Bibles. We pray. We meditate on Scripture. We memorize Scripture. We share the gospel. We serve in our church. We fast.

God commands us in His Word to do many things, and our obedience is both pleasing to Him and brings His blessing to our lives. But not one adds to our justification, our standing before God, our eternal life.

*Only grace sustains lasting change and **sanctification**. Through the cross we overcome not only the guilt of sin, but the power of sin as well³.*

Sanctification Involves My Action Prompted by Christ's Work

Let's walk back through this chapter, see what Paul relates to us from the Lord, and then pause and ASK the Lord to unleash these powerful spiritual qualities in our lives today.

Colossians 3:1-4 **If then you were raised with Christ** (justified), **Seek** those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your mind** on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Action One:

³] C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002, p. 31-34.

Stripping Off the Old Me

Colossians 3:5-9 Therefore **put to death your members** which are on the earth: **fornication** (NIV sexual immorality), **uncleanness** (NIV impurity), **passion** (NIV lust), **evil desire**, and **covetousness** (NIV greed), which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. 8 But now you yourselves are to **put off all these: anger, wrath** (NIV rage), **malice, blasphemy** (NIV slander), **filthy language** out of your mouth:

Paul first explains sanctification as each believer **stripping off the old ways** that are so familiar to us we wear them like clothes. This command was actually mirrored in the early church as they practiced baptism. The converts stripped off their outer garments, and went down into the waters of baptism. When they came up out of the water they were given a white robe to wear. This pictured the putting off of the old ways and the putting on of a whole new way of life in Christ.

Application: Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, "Lord Jesus right now I ask you to strip away the old familiar ways I so often act. Strip away my impure desires. Strip away my greed. Strip away my anger, my slander, my filthy language. I want these old ways to perish and the new person you made me to grow each day."

Action Two: Wearing the New Me Daily

Colossians 3:9-11 **Do not lie to one another**, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all:

Sanctification is secondly seen as each believer **living or putting on the truth of the new me daily**. This involves God bringing about a complete change in our personality. Just as the baptized one stripped off the old and was clothed in the new—so we each day by God's grace strip off any old ways and renew our walk with Christ.

In this list of people categories (Greek, Jew, etc.) there are two deeply descriptive terms: barbarian and Scythian. All non-Greek speaking peoples were considered barbarians in Paul's day, but the worst of the barbarians were Scythians.

The most barbaric, cruel, fierce, and blood thirsty culture were the peoples north of the Black Sea region, from the Caucasus Mountains. In fact for many of you that check the box that says "Caucasian" on census forms, that is a designation of these peoples that

invaded Western Europe and settled there. As they invaded and conquered they would take their first victim and use his skull as a cup to drink his blood as a sign of their power. Many of us who have white skin have them as our ancestors. We are called Caucasians after the area where these barbarians lived.

So look at what Paul is saying: *Because of Christ's death on the cross—He can now make me live the truth.*

Application: Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, “Lord Jesus right now live through me so that I do not live a lie, by talking the talk, but not living the truth.” Because of Christ's death on the cross—He can now make me wear the truth. Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, **Lord Jesus right now clothe me with your personality—and echo Christ's desires for each of us in v. 12-**

- v. 12 **Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on (NIV clothe yourselves with) Tender mercies (NIV compassion):** *Because of Christ's death on the cross—He can now make me feel His compassion. Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, **Lord Jesus right now clothe me with your compassion.***
- **Kindness:** *Because of Christ's death on the cross—He can now make me have His kindness. Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, **Lord Jesus right now I want Your kindness in my life.***
- **Humility:** *Because of Christ's death on the cross—He can now make me humble. Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, **Lord Jesus right now I humble myself in your sight. Clothe me with humility.***
- **Meekness (NIV gentleness):** *Because of Christ's death on the cross—He can now control me. Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, **Lord Jesus right now I ask for Your meekness and gentleness to be mine.***
- **Longsuffering (NIV patience):** *Because of Christ's death on the cross—He can now make me patient. Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, **Lord Jesus right now I ask for Your patience.***
- v. 13 **bearing with one another: and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.** *Because of Christ's death on the cross—He can now make me put on Christ's love. Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, **Lord Jesus right now I ask for Your love to be mine so that I treat others as You treat me.***

- v. 15 **And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.** *Because of Christ's death on the cross— He can now make me peaceful. Close your eyes, look up at the Lord and say, **Lord Jesus right now I ask for Your peace to rule my heart—not anxiety, not fear, not turmoil, but peace.***

The Gift Of Salvation

Have you received the one and only gift that you (and everyone else) really needs?

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS—CRITICAL NEED #1

Because of our sin—we are all debtors to God's Righteousness; so we need forgiveness.

So Christmas is all about Jesus coming to live and then die the substitutionary death to take the hopeless debt we owe to God and pay with His own life our eternal death sin has caused us to be responsible to pay--**that's forgiveness. A Sinner stands before God as a debtor and that debt is forgotten by His payment.**

*Psalm 32:1-2 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.
2 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit. NKJV*

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace NKJV

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. NKJV

Forgiveness means that we can offer people the "remission of sins" in Jesus' name (Luke 24:47) which brings "life through His name" (John 20:31). We can then come asking our Father for help in Jesus' name as we pray (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-26). Because we've been forgiven, when we ask the Father "in the name of Jesus Christ," it is as though Jesus Himself were asking it. If we remember this, it will help to keep us from asking for things unworthy of His name.

Have you **experienced the relief of knowing that all your sins, everyone of them—past, present, and future, are GONE?** Your sins are paid for, and your eternal life is purchased—and you have the receipt in your hand, written in the very blood of the One who paid the price. Christ's record of that payment is forever settled in this book the Bible!

That is the first part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION—CRITICAL NEED #2

Because of our sin—we are all guilty convicts in God's sight; so we need justification.

So Christ died to take guilty convicts and destroy any record that that ever committed a crime and takes their place in the punishment—**that's justification!** **A Sinner stands before God as accused and is declared righteous by His imputed righteousness.**

*Psalm 51:3-4 For **I** acknowledge **my** transgressions, And **my sin** is always before me. 4 Against You, You only, **have I sinned**, And done this evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. NKJV*

*Isaiah 53:6 **All we** like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, **every one**, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. NKJV*

*Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ, NKJV*

But justification is only for those who confess their crimes (sins) to the judge (God) and ask for His pardon and forgiveness. All of those who refuse to believe they are a guilty, hopelessly sinful convict in Christ's eyes are denied any relief from the penalty of their sins—both now and forever.

Have you experienced **the peace of justification, all guilt removed, all punishment forever taken away from God's sight?**

That is the second part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF REGENERATION—CRITICAL NEED #3

Because of our sin—we are all dead in our trespasses and sin; so we need regeneration.

So Christ died to take dead and rotting spiritual corpses and make them vibrant, full of endless life and brand new—**that's regeneration!**

Ephesians 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, NKJV

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. NKJV

Hebrews 7:16b ...but according to the power of an endless life. NKJV;

Have you **experienced the power of an endless life**, and every day partaking of the powerful presence within of the very Lord God Almighty?

That is the third part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION—CRITICAL NEED #4

Because of our sin—we are all enemies of God; so we need reconciliation.

So Christ died to take enemies and make them friends—**that's reconciliation!** **A Sinner stands before God as an enemy and is made a friend by His peace.**

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. NKJV

*Romans 5:10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, **having been reconciled**, we shall be saved by His life. NKJV; John 15:14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. NKJV*

Have you experienced **the wonder of friendship with God?**

That is the fourth part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF ADOPTION—CRITICAL NEED #5

Because of our sin—we are all strangers to God; so we need adoption.

So Christ died to take strangers and make them part of the family—**that's adoption!** **A Sinner stands before God as a stranger and is called a Son by His choice.**

Ephesians 2:12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. NASB

*Galatians 4:4-6 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, **that we might receive the adoption as sons.** 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" NKJV*

Adoption is not our entrance into God's family, the way a homeless child would enter an adoptive family in our society. Rather, our only hope of getting into God's family is by *regeneration* or "the new birth" (John 3:3). In New Testament language, the word used by God for *adoption* means "placed into a family as an adult son." This denotes our *standing* in God's family of God: we enter God's family not as little children but we enter as adult sons with all the privileges. **Entrance** into God's family is by regeneration, but **enjoyment** of God's family is through adoption.

Have you experienced **the joy of being adopted into Christ's family?**

That is the fifth part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF REDEMPTION—CRITICAL NEED #6

Because of our sin—we are all slaves to unrighteousness; so we need redemption.

So Christ died to take slaves and make them freed forever—that's redemption! A Sinner stands before God as a slave and is granted freedom by His ransom.

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. NASB

*John 8:36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, **you shall be free indeed.** NKJV*

Have you experienced **the thrill of being liberated, set free, rescued by God forever?**

That is the sixth part of the only gift everyone really needs this Christmas.

THE GIFT OF SANCTIFICATION—CRITICAL NEED #7

Because of our sin—we are all defiled; so we need sanctification.

So Christ died to take our soiled and spotted lives that always get wasted and make them clean, focused and fruitful—**that's sanctification!**

Just before we read Romans 6:13b, may I again remind you of the two sides of the coin of salvation. To best understand what God has done, let me contrast and explain justification and sanctification. Because we are saved (justified) this is how we should live (sanctified).

- **Justification** is what Christ did for me on the cross--**sanctification** is what Christ is doing in me because of the cross.
- **Justification** is immediate and was completely finished in me the instant I was saved—**sanctification** is an ongoing process never completed on earth until I meet Jesus face to face at death or His coming.
- **Justification** is activated the moment I trust in the Person of Christ Jesus and His finished sacrifice of the cross—**sanctification** grows with each obedient choice I make empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- **Justification** is my position declared right in God's sight—**sanctification** is my practice made right by becoming more conformed to His image.

Salvation's Mighty Work

Through seven divine works of God, guilty sinners are made ready for dwelling in the Presence of God forever; and their bodies formerly slaves to sin instantly become the very dwelling place, and temple of God.

How does God do all that? He does it through the seven elements that make up the Gift of Salvation. Remember with me what God does in each of us who believe:

1. In FORGIVENESS: **God removes my debts.** Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the **forgiveness of sins**, according to the riches of His grace
2. In JUSTIFICATION: **God changes my State.** Romans 5:1 Therefore, *having **been justified by faith, we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
3. In REGENERATION: **God transforms my Heart.** Ezekiel 36:26-27 *I will give **you a new heart** and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.*
4. In RECONCILIATION: **God becomes my Friend.** Romans 5:10-11 *For if when we were enemies **we were reconciled** to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*
5. In ADOPTION: **God Changes my Family.** Romans 8:14-15 *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but **you received the Spirit of adoption** by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."*
6. In REDEMPTION: **God changes my ownership.** I Corinthians 6:19-20 *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20For you were **bought at a price**; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*
7. In SANCTIFICATION: **God Changes my Behavior.** Hebrews 10:14 *For by one offering He has perfected forever those **who are being sanctified.***

