



# SANCTIFICATION: THE BELIEVER'S TRANSFORMATION PART 1

*"1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."*  
- Colossians 3:1-2

*"12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; 16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. 17 Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me."*

- Philippians 2:12-18

# **Sanctification: The Believer's Transformation**

## **Part 1**

There is a very simple principle, and it starts in chapter 3, verse 1. It starts in verse 1: “Therefore since you have been raised up with Christ,” and then it gives us a lot of imperatives. Since we are joined to Christ, since we are in Christ, Christ is in us. Since we have, verse 3, died to ourselves and our life is hidden with Christ in God, and Christ is now our life, there are some responses that are required. This is one of those passages very familiar to readers of the apostle Paul where he lays down a doctrinal premise and then speaks to the issue of the responsibility that issues from that premise.

Now this is familiar language. And let me remind you of a passage of Scripture that you're familiar with. It's Philippians 2, verses 12 and 13. I'll just quote it for you. Philippians 2:12 and 13 says, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” That really describes the dynamics, the pathology of spiritual life and sanctification. God has done a work in you. God has done a transforming work in you, and now it's your responsibility to let that inward work be manifest on the outside. Work out your salvation doesn't mean work for your salvation; it means to make manifest on the outside the salvation that God has wrought on the inside. God has done His will in you as a believer. God has done His work in you as a believer for His own good pleasure. You are regenerated. You are born again. You are transformed. Christianity is a total, complete transformation.

Now the responsibility that the believer has is to let the inward work be manifest on the outer work, and you do that with fear and trembling. Why? Because it's not easy, it's difficult work to do. It's hard to live a holy life. It's hard to live a godly life. It's hard to overcome the remaining flesh. But we have to remember that God is watching, and we do that with a sense of awe and a sense of trembling in the light of His chastening if we are disobedient. So, we as believers are called upon, having been given a new nature, having become new creations. Old things passed away and everything new, to so live to make that manifest.

Now obviously, no one earns their salvation by works, it is a gift of grace through faith. But we are not passive in salvation, we must believe. Nor are we passive in sanctification, we must obey. True believers are commanded to obey. And this is how we work the inward work of God to the outside and make it manifest both to God and to men.

There has always been this notion that God has done this monergistic work in you and He's done it all in you, and now sanctification is sort of in His hands, and there's the sort of quietist idea, "Let go and let God; just kick back, relax, sort of swim in grace and don't worry about anything. Don't let anybody impose law on you, imperatives, commands." Nothing could be further from the truth of Scripture.

The New Testament, as you well know, is loaded with commands, and they are commands for you based on the power that is now in you and the newness of the new creation that God has wrought in you, the new man, the new self. You are to work that to the outside so that it is manifest to all who see it. Second Corinthians, for example, 7:1, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." What an amazing statement. We are the ones who are called to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, and thus perfecting the work of holiness. That is a responsibility for the believer. We are called to pursue holiness, godliness, virtue, and sanctification.

In Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 1, we are called to walk worthy. We are to be worthy of the calling to which we are called. This is what the Christian life and sanctification is all about.

In the sixth chapter of Romans and verse 19, "I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification." There again a command to present your members, all your faculties, as instruments of righteousness. This is the primary pursuit of your life as a believer, the primary pursuit of your life.

Then again in Philippians 2:12, the verb is "work out, work out." That's *katergazomai*, a very strong verb. It's emphatic, it's intense, and it's reflexive. That is, it reflects back on you. "You be working out your salvation so that it's manifest on the outside that you have been changed on the inside." The verb could be translated labor, work, achieve, produce, bring

about for yourself. The revelation manifest on the outside of the transformation that God has wrought on the inside.

This call to godly virtue, this call to godly behavior is not easy because we're fighting against the flesh. And Paul even uses this same kind of language in Romans 7 when he says, "I'm trying to work it out, but the things that I want to do I'm not doing; the things I'm doing are the things I don't want to do. There's a wretchedness in me, there's another principle operative in me that hinders me from this progress in sanctification." It is a struggle; that is why we do it with fear and trembling.

Now essentially, what I just showed you in Philippians 2:12 and 13 is what Paul is talking about here. We have a new creation, we are a new creation, our life is hidden with Christ in God. We have been transformed, regenerated, born again. From the very bottom of our being, we have been changed. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation"; – 2 Corinthians 5:17 – "old things have passed away, new things have come." We are new creatures.

But that does not mean we live without a struggle. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, "I beat my body into submission." Very strong language, "I beat my body into submission." This is a tremendous lifelong challenge; and that is exactly what Paul is calling us to here. You have been raised with Christ, which means you died with Christ, your old life died. You have been raised in a new life. You are united with Christ, hidden with Christ in God. That leads to one imperative after another, after another, after another, that defines our spiritual responsibility: keep seeking, set your mind, consider your body, put them all aside. All those kinds of commands fill the section that I read.

Now some of the commands are negative. Verse 5, "Consider the members of your earthly body as dead." Consider yourself to have died to that old life. And therefore, you are dead, or should be dead, to the elements of that old life. So, these are the things that you eliminate: "immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, which amounts to idolatry." Down in verse 8, "You put aside anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech from your mouth, and do not lie to one another." Those are the negative things, and we talked about that.

But as we come this morning to verse 9, we shift to the positive side, to the positive side. In verse 9 we read, "Since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the

new self, there are going to be some behaviors that you need to do that are not negative, but positive.” Verse 12, “As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving one another,” et cetera. “Put on love, put on peace, be thankful, worship; do all to the glory of God.”

So, this is just a summation of Christian sanctification. Negative things to be put off, positive things to be put on. You are a new creature, now you need to dress in new garments. Put off the old garments that were connected to your flesh, that were connected to your previous fallen nature in Adam and put on garments consistent with your new life in Christ.

Now let me back up a little bit to get the big picture. One of the great early church fathers was John Chrysostom and he was a great scholar and preacher. Chrysostom made an interesting statement. In one of his writings he said, “All the animals went into the ark and came out exactly the same. When they left at the end of the flood, they were exactly the same animals they were when they went in. A fox was a fox. A crow was a crow.” And he even talks about a porcupine being a porcupine. But he says there was absolutely no change. They went in, they were not changed; they came out exactly the same. But he says, “All who enter the ark of salvation in Christ, all who enter the ark of salvation in Christ, in the midst of the flood of God’s judgment are transformed.” We go in one way and we come out completely different, completely transformed. Sinners who enter the ark of Christ in one form are completely recreated in another form.

Another insight into that was given by A. J. Gordon, and I think it might be helpful for you to understand this dynamic a little bit. A. J. Gordon wrote, “I have seen in the autumn when the trees have shed their leaves that some leaves stick fast to the branches, and they hang on even through the storms of winter.” We’ve seen those, barren trees with a leaf or two hanging on. A. J. Gordon said, “But when the spring comes and the sap begins to rise, the leaves disappear because they’re pushed off by the power of new life.” That’s very analogous to what it is to be sanctified. You have become a new creation. You have died, you have new life; you have some vestiges of the old life still attached that will be pushed off by the power of the new life. This is sanctification.

God makes us new creations in Christ. Now listen to this. As a new creation, you are changed, you are not who you were. You are not who you were. You are now righteous, not just declared righteous, but you have been recreated in righteousness. You have been recreated in a more godlike way. There were ways in which you were created in the image of God in your unregenerate form, but there are ways in which you are now recreated in the image of God in your spiritual form. You are called saints. You are declared to be sanctified. You are converted. You were a slave of sin, Romans 6, and now you're a slave of righteousness. In your slavery to sin, it was just ever-increasing manifestations of sin. Now as a slave of righteousness, Romans 6 says, it's ever-increasing evidence of righteousness. And this is the whole point of Colossians chapter 3 to command us to live on the outside what God has made us on the inside. We are new, we need to live in a way consistent with that newness.

It's very popular today to say you believe in Jesus and you trust Jesus. You might be a homosexual politician and say Jesus is your Savior. You find this everywhere. You might be a pastor who says Jesus is your Savior, and then people find out you've been living in adultery multiple times, and you register that to God's grace and mercy on your behalf. You can almost live any kind of life today. You can almost live any kind of life, and if you say you believe in Jesus, that will qualify you as a Christian.

True Christians are transformed people. They are transformed people. They are made righteous, and they manifest that righteousness and are commanded to continually manifest more of that righteousness. You have love, you need more love. You have virtue, you need more virtue, and so forth. So, fundamentally, we find out in this chapter the pattern of sanctification that is commanded of us.

So, let me just at least introduce a couple of – about seven points that I want to make. The first one is about the premise of sanctification, the premise, the foundation of it; and that comes right there in verse 9.

Verse 9 says, “Since you laid aside the old self with its evil practice,” – and then verse 10 – “and have put on the new self,” that is very, very important language. Past tense, done deal, over with, completed: “You have laid aside the old self or the old man, with its practices,” which the italics indicates, of course, are evil. You're no longer in Adam, to borrow the

language of Romans 5. Since you have a new identity, a new condition, this is the premise of your sanctification. You are not who you used to be.

Ephesians 4:22 says, “The old self, the old man is corrupt.” It’s in Adam, it’s natural, it’s sinful, it’s godless, it’s unrighteous, it’s depraved. The new self is completely different. Romans 6:6 says, “The old has been crucified,” it’s dead. You are now a new person. I want to drive this home because I think this is the premise on which you must understand your sanctification.

Listen to Romans 5:18 and 19, “So then as through one transgression” – that one is Adam – “through one” – Adam and his transgression – “there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness” – that is the act of Christ – “there resulted justification of life to all men,” – all who believe. And then this, verse 19, “As through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.” Now mark that: “Through the obedience of Adam many were made sinners.” They weren’t just counted sinners, they weren’t just forensically identified as sinners, they were made sinners. “So, through the obedience of the One, Christ, the many will be made righteous.” As the sin of Adam made us all sinners, the righteousness of Christ made us righteous.

The truest thing about you is that you are righteous. Sin is alien to you, it is an intrusion, it is an enemy. You have been transformed. You are not two people. You are not an old man and a new man living side by side. You’re not two natures; that’s a grave error. You’re not two natures fighting each other. You’re not both in Adam and in Christ. You were in Adam, you’re now in Christ. You were a slave to sin, you’re now a slave of righteousness. You are a new creation; the old has passed away. It has been crucified; it is dead. This is your identity, and this is the premise of sanctification. You are a new person. It’s not two people in you both fighting with equal power. You are one whole new creature. You were born again. Let me tell you how explicit this is.

First Corinthians chapter 6, Paul makes statements here that make this truth inescapable. First Corinthians chapter 6, verse 9: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do you not know” – it should be obvious – “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” You’re not going to heaven if you’re unrighteous. You’re not going to heaven if you’re living an unrighteous life.

“Do not be deceived.” Whatever you may say about Jesus and your relation to Him, “Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.” Heaven is not for unrighteous people. That couldn’t be clearer.

Then verse 11: “Such were some of you”; – you were in one of those categories, all of you were in one of those categories or another – “but you were washed, and you were sanctified, and you were justified.” Yes, you were justified, declared forensically righteous. The righteousness of God imputed to you. But not just justified, sanctified, which means made holy; washed, which means made clean.

We want to talk a lot about the doctrine of justification, we need to make sure we’re talking about the doctrine of regeneration as well, and conversion, and transformation. The old self is dead. The old loves and longings are dead, killed, crucified. You’re in Christ and Christ is in you. The old man is not converted. It can’t be converted; it can only be killed. The old man is not renewed. It can’t be renewed; it can only be killed. It can only be replaced by the new man, by the creative act of God and nothing less. Salvation is a complete, new creation.

Paul says in Galatians 2:20, “I,” – egō – “I am crucified with Christ”: – that is to say I died, I was killed – “nevertheless I live. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” It’s still I, but it’s not the old I, it’s the new I inseparably linked to the life of Christ who is in me.

You are one person, one new creation. You have been sanctified and washed, as well as justified. You have been made new: the old has gone, the new has come. This is the premise of sanctification that you are a new person, and that the realities of righteous behavior and conduct and thought and word are all within the capacity of your new nature. In fact, this is the truest and purest expression of who you are, so that no one truly regenerate would say, “I am a saved adulterer. I am a saved fornicator. I am a saved coveter. I’m a saved thief. God doesn’t care about my immorality.”



That is not possible. The only way you'll ever enter the kingdom of heaven is if whatever you were, you are no longer. "Such were some of you." The church is full of people who are all those things, but no longer are. Now it doesn't mean that you're not having battles, because you're still – this new creature is still incarcerated in unredeemed flesh. We haven't got our new bodies yet.

So, we have vestiges of the fallen nature in our minds and in our faculties. And that's why this is such a struggle, and that's why we do it with fear and trembling. But understand this: as a believer, you are a new creation, with new longings, new aspirations, new desires, new loves. That's the premise of sanctification. And if those aren't there, then you're not a new creature.

Let me talk to you a little bit about not the premise of sanctification, but the progress of it. Point two, the progress of it. Look at verse 10. Verse 9 said, "You laid aside the old with its evil practices," – the fact – "you put on the new," – that's a fact. And then this, "The new self" – who you are – "is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." Now we've just stepped into the realm of spiritual growth, into the realm of progress in sanctification. Now that you are a new creation, you are being renewed, you are being renewed constantly. The verb is "constantly being renewed." And by the way, there are a lot of ways to express renewal. This is renewed not, say, in time or superficially, but renewed in quality. In other words, you are qualitatively being made better. New in quality. This is going on constantly and this is what sanctification is: being renewed, being made new. Now let me give you an illustration that may help with this.

You have a baby. A baby is fully a baby: all the parts are there, all the organs are there, all the elements are there, all the faculties are there, everything is there. The child, however, needs to be fed so the child can grow, and the body needs to be renewed, continually renewed with new cellular development growth, and eventually the child grows and grows and grows. That's natural to life. That should be natural to spiritual life as well.

You may have a little baby and you're looking at the baby and you're saying, "Hey, it looks like his father." Well, maybe he does look like his father, poor kid. It'd be better if he looked like his mother, we all know that. But he doesn't act like his father. He screams and cries and makes messes. He looks like his father, but he doesn't act like his father. The only way he'll

grow up to act like his father is if his father invests in him truth and wisdom and knowledge. And then he'll not only look like his father, but he'll also act like his father.

And that is exactly what spiritual progress is. It is regeneration; and we have new birth, and we have a new life, and we can look and say, "Yes, that looks like his Father. He looks like the Lord who created him." There are loves and longings and desires and features and elements, but he doesn't fully act like the one who created him, because that's a process of spiritual renewal going on all the time, all the time. The new nature is complete. The whole spiritual person is there, and it has a capacity for growth and spiritual cellular development; and that's exactly what needs to happen. The new birth is a recreation in God's image which was lost in the fall. And the subsequent life is just a development of that image so that that child looks more and more and more and more like his Father, becoming more like Christ. Paul says, 2 Corinthians 4:16, "The inner man is being renewed day by day. The inner man is being renewed day by day."

You know, the Holy Spirit dwells in us, right? We're the temple of the Holy Spirit. You don't think He's just there sitting around, He's at work. It's the Spirit of God who is at work in you. It is God who is at work in you. It is Christ who is at work in you. And what is the work of the Trinity in the believer? It is to develop stronger spiritual muscles; stronger, clearer, spiritual thoughts.

This is an unending progress. The inner man is being renewed day by day. Paul says that in the context of suffering. Doesn't matter how hard life gets. William Hendriksen explained it this way: "When you become a believer you step into the waters of salvation maybe ankle-deep at first. But as you progress, it's knee-deep; and as you progress, it's waist deep. And pretty soon as you request, you find yourself swimming in the depths of the waters of salvation." They're your environment, they're your atmosphere. You all of a sudden live and breathe in the waters of salvation; you grow from the ankles to the knees, to the waist, to being engulfed.

How does this happen? Well, it tells us right there in verse 10, "who is being renewed" – eis – "into a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." It's connected to your knowledge of the One who created you, the Lord. This kind of growth is directly

connected to spiritual knowledge. The word for knowledge here is *epignōsis*, compound word, strong word, and it means deep knowledge, deep knowledge.

He doesn't say you're renewed by good works. He doesn't say your old life was marked by bad works, your new life is marked by good works, and it's those good works that produce the growth. It's not the good works that produce the growth, it is the knowledge that produces the growth that produces the good works. If it were just the good works that produced the growth, that would be legalism. He doesn't say you're renewed by good works. You're renewed by deep knowledge.

Go back to chapter 1 and I'll show you how he explains it even more clearly in the first chapter, Colossians 1:9. Catch Paul's prayer here; this is a very important prayer. Colossians 1:9, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask" – what are you asking Paul for us? – "that you may be filled with the *epignōsis*, the deep knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." That's the issue.

So, your progress, your spiritual cell development is directly connected to the increase of your spiritual knowledge. Paul prays that "you would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding," – then, verse 10, "so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord." Good works are the product of the deep knowledge. That's when verse 10 says, "You bear fruit in every good work." When you're increasing in the knowledge of God that's when you become strong, verse 11. That's when you become steadfast and patient. That's when you become joyful. That's when you live in thanksgiving.

So, knowledge is the key, as he says there in chapter 1 – deep, thorough, complete knowledge. You may wonder, why do I get in front of you every Sunday and talk to you for an hour? Why do I write books? Why do we listen to preaching, read good literature? Why is it that we almost feel like we can never get enough? Why do we hunger for more? Because we know that our spiritual growth is directly connected to the depth of our knowledge of God and His will. We know that. I don't even have to tell you that, because you hunger for His word.

"As the deer pants for the water, so pants my soul after You, O God." You can never get enough. Look, I've been at this a long time; I can never get enough – ever, never get enough.

Every day of my life I'm picking up another book on some aspect of divine truth and I'm reading it and reading it and reading it. I never get enough because my hungers never satisfied; and I'm not yet what I need to be, so I need to grow. Second Timothy 3 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable to the man of God to be complete, fully equipped."

We're not there yet, but that's the whole issue in spiritual growth and sanctification. It's absolutely unbiblical, it's heretical to think that you could say, "Jesus is my Savior," and live any way you want to live. Unless there's a transformed life where there are appetites for things that are righteous and pure and holy and just and good, you don't have a new nature, you don't have a new nature.

Salvation is visible. It shows up on the outside when God has done a work on the inside. And progressively, through the intake of the Word, the Lord leads us to be conformed to the image of the One who created us. That's sanctification. Divine knowledge is the means, the fuel for our spiritual growth. "As babes desire milk, you need to desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby," Peter says.

So, this is a good start for us in understanding sanctification. The premise of sanctification is you are a new creature. The progress of sanctification is you're in a growth mode; and as you grow, you can look at it as a child growing. You could look at it as someone getting deeper and deeper into the waters of salvation. You can look at it as, as you grow, the vestiges of the leaves of the past life that have clung to the branches are pushed off in the power of that new life. But no matter what your analogy or your illustration is, progress toward Christlikeness marks true believers. That progress is connected to two things. One, exposure to the deep truth of God; and two, obedience, obedience.