**Biblical Foundations – Sanctification (Growth in likeness to Christ)**

**How do we grow in Christian maturity? What are the blessings of Christian growth?**

Previously we have discussed several acts of God that occur at the beginning of our Christian lives: the **gospel call** (which God addresses to us), **regeneration** (by which God imparts new life to us), **justification** ( by which God gives us right legal standing before him), and **adoption** (in which God makes us members of his family). These events all occur at the beginning of our Christian lives.

But now we come to a part of the application of redemption that is a progressive work throughout our earthly lives. It is also a work in which God and believers cooperate, each playing distinct roles. This part of application of redemption is called **sanctification**: ***sanctification is a progressive work of God and believers that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.***

**Differences Between Justification and Sanctification**

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| --- | --- |
| **Justification** | **Sanctification** |
| Legal standing | Internal condition  |
| Once for and for all | Continuous throughout life |
| Entirely God’s work | We cooperate and participate |
| Perfect in this life | Imperfect but improving |
| Same in all Christians | Varying degrees among Christians |

As this chart indicates, sanctification is something that continues throughout our Christian life and will ordinarily involve continual growth with proper effort and attention.

**Three Stages Of Sanctification**- (A) ***Sanctification Has a Definite Beginning at Regeneration***. A definite moral change occurs in our lives at the point of regeneration. (Titus 3:5) Once we have been born again we cannot continue to sin as a habit or a pattern of life because the power of new spiritual life within us keeps us from yielding to a life of sin. (1 John 3:9) This initial moral change is the first stage in sanctification and as such provides some overlap between regeneration and sanctification. This initial step in sanctification involves a definite break from the ruling power and love of sin, so that the believer is no longer ruled or dominated by sin. (Romans 6:11,14) In this context, to be dead from sin or to be set free from sin involves the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome acts or patterns of sinful behavior. (Romans 6:12-13) In practical terms, this means we must affirm two things to be true- **(1)** we will never be completely free from sin, **(2)** this sin just gets the best of me and that’s just the way I am. ***(B) Sanctification Increases Throughout Life.*** Even though the New Testament speaks about a definite beginning to sanctification, it also sees it as a process that continues throughout our Christian lives. Although Paul says that his readers have been set free from sin (Romans 6:18), he recognizes that sin remains in their lives, so he cautions them not to allow it to reign in their lives or not to yield to it. (Romans 6:12-13) Throughout the Christian life, we are all being transformed and progressively becoming more and more like Christ as we advance in the Christian life. (2 Corinthians 3:18) (Philippians 3:13-14) ***(C) Sanctification is Completed at Death (for our souls) and When the Lord Returns (for our bodies).*** Because there is sin that remains in our hearts even though we have become Christians, our sanctification will never be completed in this life. But once we die and go to be with the Lord, then our sanctification is complete in one sense, for our souls are set free from indwelling sin and are made perfect. (Hebrews 12:23) This is only appropriate because it is in anticipation that nothing unclean can ever enter the presence of God. (Revelation 21:27) However, when we appreciate that sanctification involves the whole person, including our bodies, then we realize that sanctification will not be entirely complete until the Lord returns and we receive new resurrection bodies. (Philippians 3:21) (1 Corinthians 15:23)