

ADULT FELLOWSHIP GROUP

BIBLICAL COUNSELING FOUNDATIONS

WEEK 4: SANCTIFICATION: GOAL AND CONTENT OF COUNSELING

- February 22: Psychology, Christian Psychology/Integration, and Biblical Counseling at a Glance
- March 1: Theological Foundation – View of Man
- March 8: *Missionary Share – Daniel Herceg*
- March 15: Theological Foundation – View of Sin & Applying Theology to Counseling Issues
- March 22: Sanctification: The Goal and Content of Biblical Counseling
- March 29: Preparing Our Hearts to Counsel One Another
- April 5: *No AFG – Resurrection Sunday*
- April 12: The Process of Counseling: Teaching, Conviction, Correction, and Training
- April 19: Navigating Specific Counseling Issues

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- What do you think of when you hear the term *counseling*? What are the qualifications to counsel someone? What is the ultimate goal/aim? What does the process look like? What tools are needed to counsel someone?
- Counseling is the opportunity to give advice to someone who asks for it. What makes counseling different for Christians is that *our advice is centered on God's wisdom, and not our own*.
- For believers, the common vernacular used today is that of *Biblical Counseling*.
- The concept of biblical counseling is coming alongside one another with a biblical worldview that views God's word as the sufficient means of counseling, believers as competent to (and commanded to) counsel, and heart change as the ultimate goal of counseling.
- This biblical counseling class is a foundational 7-week series geared towards two main goals:
 - That each person would have an understanding of what biblical counseling is, and
 - That each person would understand the practical implications and outworkings within the church as it pertains to practicing biblical counseling.

THE ROLE OF SANCTIFICATION IN THE LIFE OF A BELIEVER

A Biblical Understanding of Sanctification

- Before observing this in the context of biblical counseling, we should take a moment to define our terms to understand what the Bible means by sanctification.
- Often, in the realm of counseling, much of the struggles that believers can have come from a misunderstanding of their *justification* and their *sanctification*.
- This confusion and misunderstanding can come from not knowing the distinctions between the different ways that God’s word uses the term ‘sanctification’.
 - This term that, generally, means ‘*separation*’ or ‘*set apart from sin unto God*’.
 - The use of the term “sanctification” in Scripture can refer to both God’s work in salvation and the believer’s progressive sanctification.
- With that, it would be helpful to bring some clarity into how the term “sanctification” is used biblically, so that we can better understand how, and to what extent, believers are set apart from sin unto God:
 - **Positional (Past/Objective/Initial) Sanctification**
 - The work of God in saving believers results in their sanctification, in that they are set aside as God’s own possession and declared holy by faith in Christ’s justifying work:
 - It is a past and permanent work of God
 - This happens instantaneously at the time of salvation (1 Cor 6:11)
 - It is unconditional and irrevocable (Heb 10:10-14)
 - It is monergistic, meaning a one-sided work of God alone (1 Cor 1:2)
 - It is a status conferred to the believer
 - This is an objective reality for every believer, where they are declared holy by Christ’s atoning work (i.e. justification)
 - Believers are called saints [lit. “sanctified ones”] (Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1)
 - It results in separation from sin in the form of freedom from bondage to sin
 - Though sin is still present, it’s enslaving power over a believer is broken, and they now have the capacity to reject sin, killing it, and not allowing it to reign in them (Rom 6:6, 11-12, 14)
 - It results in the believer being set apart to God
 - Paired with the breaking of the bondage of sin is a transferring from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God’s Son (Col 1:13)
 - Believers are no longer slaves to sin, but rather, are now slaves to righteousness. (Rom 6:18)

○ **Progressive (Current) Sanctification**

- When speaking of sanctification, this is overwhelmingly the most common meaning.
- “Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of the believer, making him or her actually holy. By ‘holy’ here is meant ‘bearing an actual likeness to God’. Sanctification is a process by which one’s moral condition is brought into conformity with one’s legal status before God. It is a continuation of what was begun in regeneration, when a newness of life was conferred upon and instilled with the believer.”¹

- This is the current and ongoing work of God and man (synergistic)
 - **Philippians 2:12-13** - *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, 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.*
 - This does not happen in a moment, but rather, throughout the whole life of the believer, and it involves the believer coming under and conforming to the word of God through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.
- This is not a status, but a pursuit of further separation from sin and conformity into Christlikeness
 - **Philippians 3:12** - *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*
 - Because this work of dying to sin and pursuing Christlikeness is ongoing, it is not a declared state, but a command. We are to be holy as our heavenly Father is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16).
 - Believers are at different stages of this process, and it will not be completed until we are with Christ in glory (Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2)

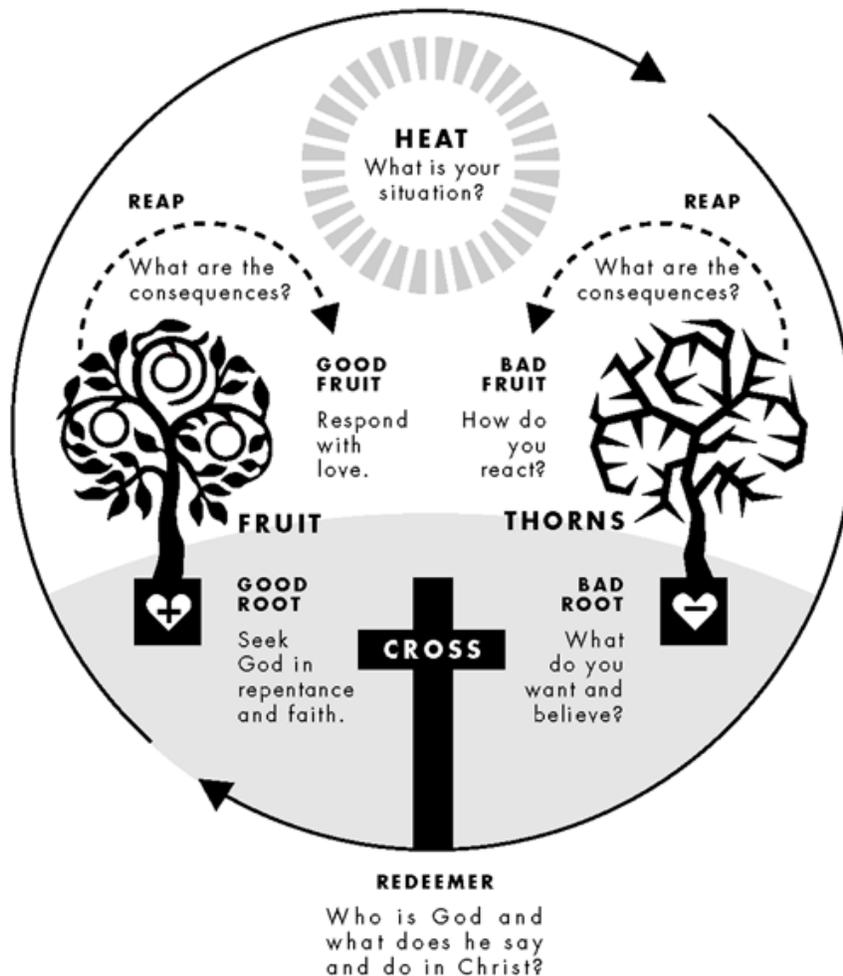
Justification	Progressive Sanctification
Legal Standing	Internal Condition
Once for all time	Continuous throughout life
Entirely God’s Work	We cooperate
Perfect in this life	Not perfect in this life
The same in all Christians	Greater in some than in others

(Chart from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 747).

¹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 980.

How Do People Change?

- With this idea of Biblical, progressive sanctification in mind, we need to think through how the Lord is changing and growing people through this process of progressive sanctification.
- Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane, in examining Jeremiah 17:5-10, illustrate this well and use the terminology of Heat-Thorns-Cross-Fruit to think through progressive sanctification:
 - **Heat.** This is the person's situation in daily life, with difficulties, blessings, and temptations.
 - **Thorns.** This is the person's ungodly response to the situation. It includes behavior, the heart driving the behavior, and the consequences that result.
 - **Cross.** This focuses on the presence of God in his redemptive glory and love. Through Christ, he brings comfort, cleansing, and the power to change.
 - **Fruit.** This is the person's new godly response to the situation resulting from God's power at work in the heart. It includes behavior, the heart renewed by grace, and the harvest of consequences that follow.²



² Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 91.

- **Jeremiah 17:5-10** - *Thus says the LORD, “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the LORD. “For he will be like a bush in the desert And will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. “For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit. “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.*
- So then, in thinking through the process of progressive sanctification:
 - *It is a continuing change worked by God in us, freeing us from sinful habits and forming in us Christlike affections, dispositions, and virtues. It does not mean that sin is instantly eradicated, but it is also more than a counteraction, in which sin is merely restrained or repressed without being progressively destroyed. Sanctification is a real transformation, not just the appearance of one.³*
 - Key terms to remember in this: ***continuing change, worked by God, habits, transformation***

SANCTIFICATION WITHIN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Sanctification is the Goal of Counseling

- Like anything else, we should have some goals before we start to counsel anyone, whether formally or informally.
- This is not to say that we counsel everyone the same way, but that we set forth some guidelines and specific areas that we intend to talk about.
- ***In Biblical counseling, the top priority is the sanctification of the believer.***⁴
 - We should hope and expect to see real change in the life of believers that we are counseling.
 - There should be a progressive movement from sinful habits and desires to a life which is characterized by Christ.
 - The Christian life is all about change. When you are born again, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, you are changed. When this happens, your thoughts, desires, likes, dislikes, etc. all change. Though your justification is a once off change from death to life, your sanctification is a lifelong process of change from the old man into the man of God.
- Is this your goal for those you are interacting with?
 - Do you simply seek to ease the pain of someone so they can go through this life with no cares or worries?
 - OR
 - Do you desire to see lasting change that will lead to a fruitful and joyful life in Christ?

³ <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-sanctification/>

⁴ For counseling the nonbeliever, it is paramount to start with (and stay with) the gospel until they are born again. Biblical principles will simply not make sense to the unsaved person. (1 Cor 2:14)

- If sanctification is our ultimate priority and we want to see people grow in holiness, we are going to exhort them in that way.
 - **Colossians 1:28** - *We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.*
 - Sanctification, then, has everything to do with Biblical counseling. We are encouraging people not to look for the easy way out but to stay the course, pointing them to Christ, and praying that the Lord would work in their lives.

How Do We Accomplish This Goal?

- In thinking through how we approach this, I want to bring out some principles from a few key passages that speak to sanctification as implications for biblical counseling.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 - *We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

- This is a key passage in how we think through coming alongside others who are struggling, and a key thing to consider is that *not every issue/struggle is the same* and, therefore, requires more nuanced care.
- While we would certainly agree that there is constancy in counseling, in that we are grounded in the word, we are pointing them to Christ, and the goal is their sanctification, we need to be careful to approach each situation appropriately.
 - We don't admonish the faintheart, just as we don't encourage the unruly.
 - If there are those who are willfully and continually choosing sin, we must give that firm, corrective instruction.
 - However, it is important to remember that not every issue that someone has is undergirded by some specific personal sin.
 - We know that all calamities have sin at their root because of the fall.
 - But the fact that someone is sick or had a death in the family or lost their job does not mean they must have some particular sin causing it.
 - However, in all of those things, God is using them in our lives to sanctify us and bring us into a closer relationship with Him.
 - Our goal, then, is to encourage the fainthearted in Christ, reminding them of the sovereignty and love of God, so that the joy of the Lord would be their strength.
 - In this, we are not fixing the circumstance, but helping them to think through their response to the circumstance.
 - Are they keeping their eyes fixed on Christ or themselves?
 - Are they taking thoughts captive or allowing them to run free and control them?
- These highlight the various categories of struggle that we may encounter in counseling, but something that is truly helpful to note is the last phrase
 - **Be patient with all**
 - *It is okay to struggle!*
 - Often, in counseling, the process can begin with the counselee being ashamed they struggle with their sin.

- I would assert that it is the struggle that shows you are not giving into it. It is the struggle that shows the Holy Spirit is actively working in your life to keep you away from that sin. It is also the struggle with sin that makes our hearts long for the day that it is over.
- So much of our culture and attitude today is that we do not want to struggle but want everything to come quick and easy. So when we see that taking place in someone else's life, we want to alleviate their pain as well.
 - It is through that pain and suffering that God is working. As the writer of Hebrews says, after the discipline has trained us, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.
 - **Hebrews 12:11** - *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*
- How many trials and hard times can you look back on and see what God has taught you? How many of those lessons would you have missed out on had you tried to skip out on the trial or sanctification process?
- So, then, as we're coming alongside others, we can't be tempted to "expedite" this process.
 - Remember the terms we highlighted before: **continual, habits, transformation**, which, in progressive sanctification, is a life-long process.
 - We patiently, graciously, gently, and yet progressively, point them to Christ.

Ephesians 4:22-24 - *that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

- When we address things in the lives of others, and as we seek to help them in their sanctification, it's imperative that we teach them the process laid out in Scripture to do this effectively.
- In biblical counseling, it is called **putting off** and **putting on**.
- This is the principle that Paul is communicating: **you cannot just stop doing something but must replace it with something good**. We are to stop the old way, but not just stop sinning, we are to replace the old sinful ways with a God-honoring new life.
- This is because the Christian life cannot exist in a vacuum. We are always pursuing something!
- How, then, does this change?
 - **Put off** – recognize, confess, and kill sin in our life
 - **Renew our mind** – we come to Scripture and fill our mind with truth, conforming our will to God's revealed will
 - **Put on** – we pursue Christlikeness in our thoughts, speech, actions in accordance with the word of God.
- Particularly as it pertains to our thought life, this is a critical exercise. The Lord, through Paul, reminds us that we are to be *taking our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ* (2 Cor 10:5)

1 Corinthians 10:13 - *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*

- This passage shows us that we are not alone. We are not the first person to face this trial and we will not be the last.
- This is a vital truth to communicate to your counselee. No matter what they may be facing, thousands before and after will go through their struggles.
- Paul also says that **God is faithful**. It is important to remind those in hard times that God is faithful.
 - God's faithfulness is not based upon our faithfulness (2 Tim. 2:13), but on the fact that He is God. Remind them of this fact.
 - This is one of the greatest means of hope – which is a key part early in the counseling process!
- God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can handle.
 - This is an interesting phrase when practically played out, and often misunderstood.
 - This does not mean that God will only give us what we can handle in our **own** strength, but we don't really possess strength in ourselves (2 Cor. 12:9).
 - It's highlighting the fact that because God is faithful, He will give sufficient grace for all that comes upon us.
- God is faithful to provide a way out.
 - Remember, though, that there are no shortcuts to sanctification. The way that God provides may be right through the hardest of times.
 - We mustn't sin or give in to despair, but instead, we do what is right in the sight of God.
- Lastly, the whole point of this is that you will be able to endure it. Staying on the path that God has provided will ensure that you have the grace that He gives.
 - God's grace will sustain us as we go through trials, but we must remain faithful to Him and His word, continually empowered by His grace to make His choices our only choice.
 - God may never remove the burden in your life, but He will always give you the grace to endure it.

Philippians 2:12-13 - *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, 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.*

- This passage is to remind us, and those we counsel, that though there are commands for us as believers, we must remember that God is at work in us in our sanctification.
 - As the Holy Spirit, through the word of God, is leading and working, the counselee must be the one working out their salvation.
 - We cannot be the Holy Spirit for them!
- Part of counseling is ensuring that we are not trying to usurp the role of the Spirit. We are not the one that the counselee should be ultimately dependent on, nor should we desire that.
- We are simply conduits of the truth and signposts pointing them to Christ! (Col 1:28)
- **The result?** The counselee is abiding in Christ, we are not pressured to think that we are the ultimate cause of their sanctification, and God receives the glory that He is due!