

HOW WE GROW IN CHRIST

What, Why, When, and How?

Text: 2 Peter 3:18, 1 Thessalonians 4:3

INTRODUCTION: Many of us want change in our lives.

- The surest way to make a bundle today is to market a method for people to get happier, thinner, healthier, richer, smarter, or more successful than they presently are.
- The greater the promise of change and the lower the personal cost, the more successful the marketing will be.
 - There are lotions to instantly remove wrinkles.
 - There are pills made of only natural ingredients, that are found in a remote jungle, that take away all your aches and pains,
 - And there is advice, that if you will pay \$79.99 in the next thirty minutes for, will turn you into a millionaire in a week.

But with all the attention upon the latest trick or gimmick to change our lives for the better, there is precious little attention to the means of genuine lasting change that God makes available to all His children who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. In fact, He calls it growing in Christ.

2 Peter 3:18 NKJV ... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ....

The concept of godly change is addressed throughout the Scriptures.

This means of change is called sanctification.

I. WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

- Sanctification means "to make holy or to be set aside for special use by God."

In the Old Testament, both the priests and the implements in the temple were sanctified.

- In the New Testament, Jesus prayed for the sanctification of those who trusted Him.

John 17:17-19 NKJV "**Sanctify** them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

- The Father answered that prayer, and this has become a chief purpose of God for every follower of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:3a NKJV For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

- What does this mean?
 - It is God's desire to change us from what we were before we came to Christ into that which is set apart in holiness, as is Christ Himself!
 - This means that we do not need to look for clever ways to change ourselves into what we would rather be, but God has provided the means by which to change us into all that He has purposed us to be.

II. WHY? WHAT IS THE GOAL OF SANCTIFICATION?

Romans 8:28-29 NKJV 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be **conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

- For us believers to be conformed to the image of the Son of God.
- To cause us to become like Jesus.
- In His character
- In His attitudes
- In His lifestyle
- In His practices
- In His speech
- In His desires

III. WHEN DOES SANCTIFICATION TAKE PLACE?

- It begins at salvation.

Hebrews 10:10 NKJV By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Jesus began sanctification by washing away our sin.

- **It continues the rest of our lives.**

Hebrews 10:14 NKJV For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being **sanctified**.

- **It is completed at your resurrection.**

1 John 3:2 NKJV Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that **when He is revealed, we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is.

IV. HOW DOES SANCTIFICATION TAKE PLACE? HOW DO WE GROW IN CHRIST?

1 Peter 2:2 NKJV as newborn babes, **desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow** thereby,

- **We are sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit.**
- **Sanctification is for believers only.**

Acts 26:17-18 NKJV 'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are **sanctified by faith in Me.**'

This is why those who are not saved cannot accomplish permanent, significant change in their lives and make themselves holy. Sanctification is a consequence of salvation. No one is sanctified until they first are saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

- **Sanctification is something that is done to us; we cannot sanctify ourselves.**
 - The Greek verb to sanctify appears in the NT about 26 times. The only time a person sanctifies himself is Christ. There is no other example.
 - Rather, it is a work that is done in us by God. Even the Christian cannot sanctify himself. We can cooperate with the sanctifying work of God in our lives, but we cannot accomplish it on our own.

1 Corinthians 6:11 NKJV And such were some of you. But you were washed, but **you were sanctified**, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and **by the Spirit of our God**.

- **Specifically, the transformation that occurs in a born again believer's life takes place by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.**

Romans 15:16 NKJV that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, **sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**

Even the apostle Paul could not sanctify himself. He testified to the Romans that he was sanctified by the Spirit of God.

V. HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO THIS WORK IN US?

- We are sanctified through the sufficiency of the Word of God.

John 17:17,19b NKJV "**Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.... that they also may be sanctified by the truth.**"

- Not only is the Bible the inerrant Word of God, it is also the sufficient Word of God for all matters pertaining to the spirit and soul.

The Bible is not given as a medical instruction guide. God's primary goal for us is not healthiness, but holiness.

Sufficiency means that it is enough. If the Bible is sufficient for all matters pertaining to the spirit and the soul, then we do not have to add other methodologies or philosophies to its instructions to live full and complete lives in harmony with God's purposes for us. If the Bible is truly sufficient, it should answer these questions:

- **How can we have our life cleansed of destructive patterns?**

Psalm 119:9 NKJV How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed **according to Your word.**

- **Where can we receive trustworthy counsel that we know will be right?**

Psalm 119:24 NKJV **Your testimonies** also are my delight And my counselors.

- **How can we grow wise in dealing with life's problems and issues?**

Psalm 119:98-100 NKJV 98 You, **through Your commandments**, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For **Your testimonies** are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts.

- **How can we penetrate the surface and get to the heart of the problems and issues we face in life?**

Hebrews 4:12 NKJV For **the word of God** is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and

spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

- **How can I receive complete counsel to grow to be all God wants me to be?**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV 16 **All Scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The answer to every question is “The Word of God.” That is because the Bible is sufficient!

- **The addition of other philosophies, practices, or wisdom beyond Scripture are not only unnecessary, but often counterproductive.**

1 Corinthians 3:19 NKJV **For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. ...**

- **Resources beyond the Scriptures are helpful only insofar as they can be used of the Holy Spirit to illumine the Scriptures to the mind of the believer.**

- This is true in my sermons and teaching.

My preaching and teaching is only helpful to the extent that I encourage you to believe, act upon, and put in practice what God says in His Word. I have nothing of benefit to add. If I go beyond it or in the slightest way contradict it, my word does harm and not good.

- This is true of every teacher or counselor.

THE SUFFICIENT, EXHAUSTIVE, CONCLUSIVE, FINAL, COMPLETE TREASURY OF WISDOM CONCERNING THE SPIRIT AND SOUL IS THE WORD OF GOD.

Although we are sanctified through the sufficiency of God’s Word, just having a Bible, carrying a Bible, saying we believe the Bible is not enough.

- **We are sanctified by means of the discipline of applying the Word.**

We must apply the truths of the Scripture to our lives. Let me revisit the same questions and the same answers in the Scripture we just examined to see another dimension. Notice what we must do with the inerrant, all sufficient Word of God.

- **How can we have our life cleansed of destructive patterns?**

Psalm 119:9 NKJV **How can a young man cleanse his way? **By taking heed according to Your word.****

In other words, we must do what God's Word tells us to do. James says for us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers of the Word. A person cannot cleanse his way of life without the instruction of the Word of God, but just hearing the instruction is not enough. We must hear and do. We must heed the Word!

- **Where can we receive trustworthy counsel that we know will be right?**

Psalm 119:24 NKJV Your testimonies also are **my delight** And **my counselors**.

The Word of God has the counsel we need. But it will only help us as we delight in its counsel and do it.

- **How can we grow wise in dealing with life's problems and issues?**

Psalm 119:98-100 NKJV You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For **they are ever with me**. I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are **my meditation**. I understand more than the ancients, Because **I keep Your precepts**.

- **How can we penetrate the surface and get to the heart of the problems and issues we face in life?**

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The Word of God will offer the answer that goes to the heart of the problem, but we must do something with it. Go back up one verse to

Hebrews 4:11 NKJV Let us therefore **be diligent** to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of **disobedience**.

To get to the heart of the problem we must be diligent about obeying the instruction of the Lord.

- **How can I receive complete counsel to grow to be all God wants me to be?**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be **complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work**.

Again go up to the verses preceding this one to

2 Timothy 3:14 NKJV But **you must continue in the things which you have learned** and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

- **We are sanctified with the aid of accountability and encouragement.**

Colossians 3:16 NKJV Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

This is why we don't just do church by ourselves. "I just watch on TV." Getting the truth out by media is great, but it's not enough. God desires that we should encourage and help one another. But how do we best encourage and help one another? By the Word of God. By sharing the Bible's wisdom and teaching and the Word of God contained in our praise songs and hymns. And then look at

Hebrews 10:24-25 NKJV 24 And let us consider **one another** in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting **one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

This is one of the reasons we need to be a member of a local church, and be in small groups. Not for salvation... for sanctification, to grow in Christ.

CONCLUSION: How much have you grown in Christ?

Do you faithfully study the Scriptures and then intentionally put them into practice in your life?

Or, have you been desiring to find a shortcut to change and use the methodologies of the world to make improvements the best you can?

God has provided a way that we can become all that He designed each of us to be. Are you making the most of it?