



King's Cross Talks

CL202: How Spiritual Growth Happens



Here is a question posed by Christians everywhere: How do I live the Christian life? We suspect that every week, day, and hour presents us with opportunities to mature as a Christian person, but we wonder how. This is a talk about practices offered to us as powerful, promise-associated tools for personal growth, day-to-day.

A. A careful surgery

1. **Sanctification, or spiritual formation, is the process of spiritual growth in the Present Age.**
(WSC 35) “The work of God’s free grace in which we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”
2. **Sanctification fits within a Golden Chain.¹**
Election, effectual call, regeneration, saving faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, assurance, perseverance, glorification.
Rom. 8.29-30: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” And 1 Cor. 6.1: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”
3. **With two awkward results**
 - a. Sanctification is both *definitive* (Ac. 20.32; 1 Cor. 1.2; 1 Cor. 6.11; Rom. 6.11), and *progressive* (1 Pet. 1.15-16; 2 Cor. 3.18; 2 Pet. 1.5; Phil. 2.12-13; Phil. 1.6; Mt. 6.12; 1 John 3.6).
 - b. Sanctification is different from justification.

B. The Principles

1. Sanctification is transformational
2. Sanctification is rooted in the gospel
3. Sanctification flows from justification
4. Sanctification’s agent is the Holy Spirit.
5. Sanctification is physical, not merely intellectual.
6. Sanctification is conflictual.
7. Sanctification is guided by the word.

¹ The phrase comes from Puritan, William Perkins. Both Perkins and John Bunyan attempted to capture this visually: www.challies.com/visual-theology/sinclair-ferguson-evaluates-two-pieces-of-visual-theology/

8. Sanctification is expressed in love.
9. Sanctification is completed by God.

C. The seven imposters to biblical sanctification.²

1. Self-renewal. *Method plus will-power equals improvement.*
2. Imitation of Christ. Deep introspection with ethical goals.
3. Sacerdotalism. Grace prescribed medication. *Sacerdos=priest.*
4. Legalism. Scrupulous obedience *merits* something.
5. Antinomianism. The law means nothing to a Christian.
6. Asceticism. Denial of all physical and material pleasures. *Asketēs=monk*
7. Perfectionism. Sinlessness can happen before glorification.

D. The spiritual disciplines.

“Those Bible-prescribed activities that are explicitly said to increase our sanctification, our conformity to Christ Jesus, our spiritual maturation.”³

1. Teaching of the Word
2. The sacraments
3. Prayer for one another
4. Worship

Paul and Barnabas are set aside during worship because the people trusted the presence of God in worship (Acts 13.2; 2 Chron. 5.13–14). Things happen during worship: God delivers His people (2 Chron. 20.18–23), insight is received (Ps. 73:17). It is when we draw near to God that He will draw near to us (James 4.8).

5. Church discipline

Conviction of sin produces repentance without regret (2 Cor. 7.10). Discipline is understood to be done in the presence of the Lord (1 Cor. 5:4; cf. 4:19–20) with assurance connected to it (Matt. 16:19; 18:18–20). It is also a good public means for growth (1 Tim. 5:20).

6. Giving

When we give ourselves to God (2 Cor. 8:5), we see more clearly that Jesus gave Himself for us (2 Cor. 8.9), and we are able to give to others abundantly (2 Cor. 8.14; 9.6), cheerfully (2 Cor. 9.7). There is also blessing to give that is connected with giving (2 Cor. 9:8–11). Helping others in this way is also a thanksgiving to God (2 Cor. 9.12).

7. Spiritual gifts

We receive our varied, diverse gifts to use for one another (1 Peter 4.10; 1 Cor. 14:12; Eph. 4:11–16). God gives gifts to every Christian (1 Cor. 12.7, 11; 1 Peter 4.10).

8. Fellowship

² These come from J. V. Fesko, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to Growing in Holiness*.

³ This comes from D. A. Carson, “Spiritual Disciplines” ([Themelios 36.3](#)).

The people of the church deliberately spent time together (Acts 2:42), working hard not to neglect this time together (Heb. 10:24–25), perhaps daily (Acts 2:46–47). They loved one another (John 15:12) and took on each others burdens (Gal. 6:2, see below).

9. Evangelism

Part of the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of a Christian is proclaiming the good news, as at Pentecost (Acts 2:4 and 14–36), in the defense of the church (Acts 4:8), in equipping with boldness to evangelize (Acts 4:31), in conversion (Paul, 9:17, 20), in confronting unbelief (Acts 13:9, 52).

10. Personal ministry to individuals

There is a special kind of one-on-one ministry in which we share wisdom (Col. 3:16) and grace to each other (Eph. 4:29). We bring back sinners (James 5:20). We stir-up each other to do good works (Heb. 10:24–25). We provide each others needs (James 2:16; 1 John 3:17; Acts 4:34; Gal. 2:10). We pray (and lay hands) for specific needs, particularly health (James 5:14; Acts 28:8). We signify certain gifts and appointments through the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6; 13:3).

Resources

Doctrine	Sinclair Ferguson, <i>Devoted to God: Blueprints for Sanctification</i> J. V. Fesko, <i>A Christian's Pocket Guide to Growing in Holiness</i> Kevin De Young, <i>The Hole in Our Holiness</i> Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, <i>How People Change</i>
Spiritual disciplines	David Mathis, <i>Habits of Grace</i> Justin Whitmel Earley, <i>The Common Rule</i>