



This document, describing the sanctification element of our gospel-centered ministry, should be read after reading “*Gospel-Centered Ministry – Justification*.” Important foundational material is covered in that document that undergirds this one, so please take the time to read it first.

## **The Life of the Gospel for the Child of God** ***Progressive Sanctification – Living the Gospel***

The gospel is “good news” because it declares the kindness of God to meet the need of sinful men and women by declaring them righteous in and through the work of Jesus Christ. But it is important to remember that the “good news” of the gospel is not simply a past event for a believer. The gospel is an ongoing display of God’s grace that repeatedly meets our deficiency and depravity with His sufficiency and righteousness. The Christian life does not start with the gospel of grace and then progress with personal determination. Paul questioned the churches of Galatia about this same type of distortion of the gospel, asking “*Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*” (Galatians 3:3) Gospel grace is made known through the work of Jesus Christ as our living Savior and Lord and it is in this gospel grace believers consistently stand, grow and produce fruit.

Romans 5:1-2 <sup>1</sup> *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* <sup>2</sup> ***Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.***  
Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And **the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

The following graphics are meant to help visualize and aid the understanding of the gospel as it relates to sanctification. Sanctification is the process of becoming more consecrated to God as the Holy Spirit empowers the child of God to be increasingly transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

## All Believers Produce Bad and Good Fruit

At any given time every believer is producing both bad fruit and good fruit

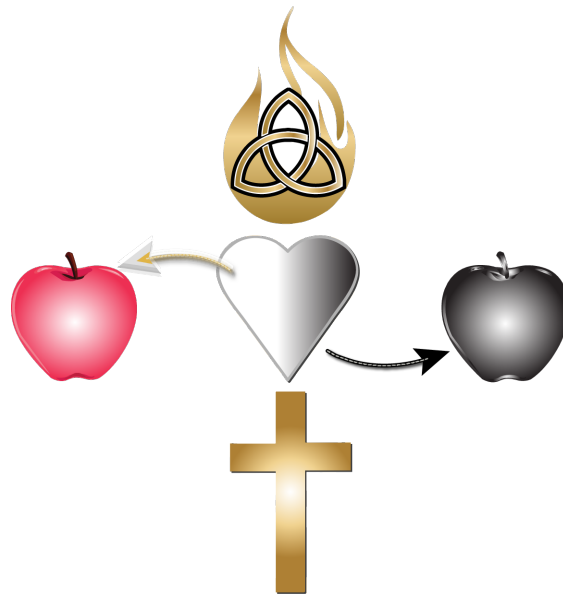


Figure 1

The direction of the life of the child of God has been changed from the hollow pursuit of sinful selfishness to the joyful pursuit of God's glory through the fruit of Christ-likeness. Children of God find victory over many sins and display fruitfulness in many areas of life. Yet their continued life on this earth is not lived in sinless perfection. Although they are no longer enslaved by the realm of sin, but have been set free to serve and produce good fruit in the realm of righteousness (Cf. Romans 6), followers of Jesus experience an ongoing battle with the world, the devil, and the desires of sinful selfishness and arrogance (Cf. Romans 7:7-25; Galatians 5).

Romans 7:4 *"Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God."*

The earthly life of a Christian is an unending struggle against sin, weakness and selfishness. This does not mean followers of Jesus are living in persistent defiance of God and truth through unmitigated practices of sin. If this were the case it would confirm that they are not true born again children of God.

1 John 3:4–10 *"<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."*

Every Christian's life has been delivered from the controlling power of sin. Because of salvation, the people of God are not what they used to be. They have been permanently

marked by the transforming grace of God and their direction in life has changed from sinful selfishness to a path of God-centeredness which yields clear evidence that life as a believer in Christ is gloriously different. But, even though the believer is not what he or she used to be, he or she is not yet all they should be. Satan, sin and selfishness are not the controlling forces in life, but they still have their influence. As the people of God mature in Christ, and produce good fruit that honors God, they still fight the weaknesses of the flesh and the power of sin.

## God Convicts Believers of Sin

God - the workman in justification and the workman in sanctification

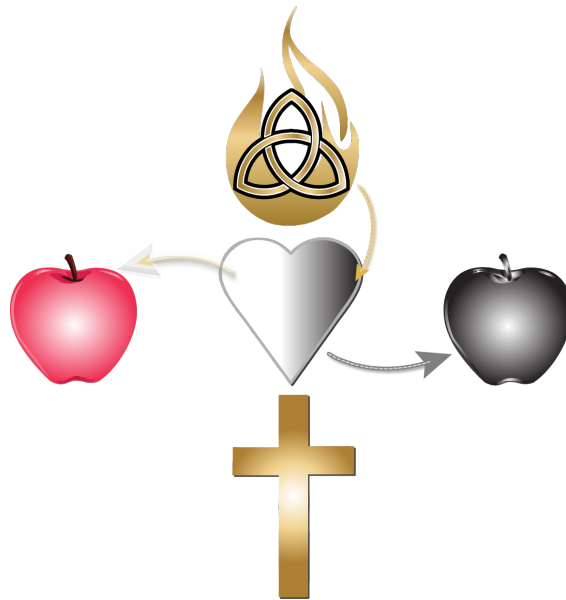


Figure 2

### The Arrows Of God's Influence

What does God use to bring about change in the hearts and lives of His redeemed people? God uses many of the same things to impress the hearts of His people that He used to get their attention when they were initially saved. Believers are the worshipers of the God of creation and God still uses general revelation to speak to His people (Romans 8:19-23). God uses the circumstances of life (both blessing and hardship) to work in the hearts of His people (2 Corinthians 1:8-9; 4:16-18). God grips the conscience of His children (Romans 7:21-23). God uses people and the church to give believers guidance, illumination and accountability (Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 3:12-17). God always uses His word in the Bible, books, pamphlets, song, and verbal communication (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). God is the glorious and primary mover behind all these things as He effectually and lovingly presses upon His people, moving them in accordance to His sanctifying purpose. The gold arrows from God on these graphics are used to help illustrate the gospel of sanctification and depict God's influence as described above.

### Positionally Righteous, Practically Not

All born again believers stand in **positional** righteousness in Christ before God. But no living born again believer stands in **practical** righteousness before God. Post justification life for the child of God is very different because this takes all of life and moves it in a God-centered direction. But the Christian life still has its battles and sinful failures so that confession, forgiveness and cleansing play an important part in the believer's maturing process. In this sense, all living believers are simultaneously saints and sinners and the need of ongoing practical cleansing is something the Scripture makes clear.

John 13:10–11 <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, **but is completely clean**. And you are clean, but not every one of

you.”<sup>11</sup> *For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”*

1 Corinthians 5:7 *“Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, **as you really are unleavened.** For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”*

Followers of Jesus embrace the life-long pursuit to practically become what they are positionally.

### **Christian Churches Must Deal With Christian Sinners**

The need of dealing with ongoing manifestations of sin is also seen in passages that instruct the church on how to confront and restore the people of God who have fallen into sin. Local churches must be concerned about the real battle all believers have with sin. There is no benefit from living in denial. Loving accountability and confrontation should be part of the normal life of any local church. This does not call for a haughty spirit of self-righteous condemnation. It calls for fellow members of the body of Christ, who are characterized by loving and humble hearts, to help one another and stir one another up toward love and good deeds. We are to be people who hunger and thirst for righteousness and help others who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness find satisfaction in the sanctifying grace of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 18:15–17 <sup>15</sup> *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”* <sup>16</sup> *But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.* <sup>17</sup> *If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

Galatians 6:1–2 <sup>1</sup> *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”* <sup>2</sup> *Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*

James 5:16 *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”*

1 John 1:8–10 <sup>8</sup> *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”* <sup>9</sup> *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* <sup>10</sup> *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”*

To help fellow believers face their sin and seek forgiveness is not always an easy thing to do, but it is a necessary and loving thing to do. Those who are overtaken in faults have usually developed a degree of callousedness and may not be responsive to the initial attempts of restoration. This should not shock people in the church, but with loving and prayerful diligence, fellow church member need to be prepared to help in the restoration of those who have fallen prey to sin. Such diligence does not come naturally, but supernaturally as the Spirit of God produces love and persistence in our hearts.

## God Moves Sinful Believers to Jesus

God moves His people to the cross to seek forgiveness and cleansing for sin

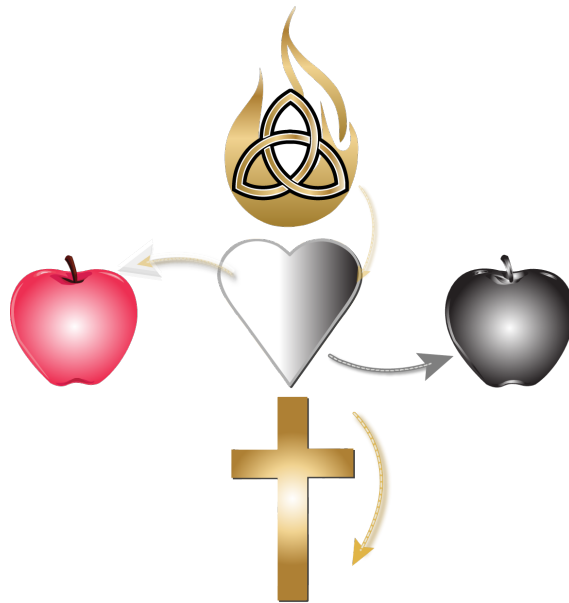


Figure 3

### As It Began, So It Continues

Man-centered religion attempts to meet God's standards with personal performance. This is the natural tendency of all human beings and this desire is what can make religion dangerous. God's favor cannot be earned! Yet every prompting of the flesh wants to try. The true gospel, the one we live in and stand in every moment of every day, is focused on what God does for us rather than on what we do for God. This is particularly true when it comes to dealing with our sin as believers.

Just as the gospel of justification points the sinner to the cross work of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of forgiveness and cleansing, so does the gospel of sanctification. We are not capable of paying for our sins as believers anymore than we could pay for our sins as unbelievers. We cannot earn God's favor and forgiveness as believers anymore than we could earn God's favor and forgiveness as unbelievers. The way our salvation began is the way it continues.

Galatians 3:1–3 “<sup>1</sup> O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup> Let me ask you only this: **Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?** <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? **Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**”  
Galatians 4:9 “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, **how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?**”

Galatians 5:1 “For freedom Christ has set us free; **stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.**”

Colossians 2:6–7 “<sup>6</sup> Therefore, **as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, (justification) so walk in him (sanctification),** <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

Works do not save us and works do not keep us. We are saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus and we are sustained by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus. Believers should joyfully reflect on the wonder of the cross acknowledging our desperate need of God and our dependence on God for forgiveness and cleansing.

### **Believers Come Empty-handed To Jesus**

It is the Holy Spirit of God that moves unbelievers to trust in the work of Jesus and it is the Holy Spirit who moves believers to trust the work of Jesus for their ongoing needs of forgiveness. We did not earn our justification and we will not earn our sanctification. By God's mercy and grace the believer stands empty-handed before the Lord to ask for forgiveness and cleansing. Since we are in continuous need, the grand and glorious reality is that the grace of God continually flows down to us. God mercifully opens our hearts to repeatedly receive His forgiving grace and goodness by faith.

Romans 8:34 *"Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, **who indeed is interceding for us.**"*  
Hebrews 4:14–16 *"<sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**"*

Hebrews 10:19–22 *"<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since **we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,** <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**"*

1 John 2:1–2 *"<sup>1</sup> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. **But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.**"*

The forgiveness of God in Christ is as precious in sanctification as it is in justification. When we sin we should not cower in prideful embarrassment, but confidently seek the forgiving and sustaining grace of our Lord.

1 John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

## God Grants Repentance and Faith

The grace of God that brings cleansing and forgiveness yields repentance and faith.

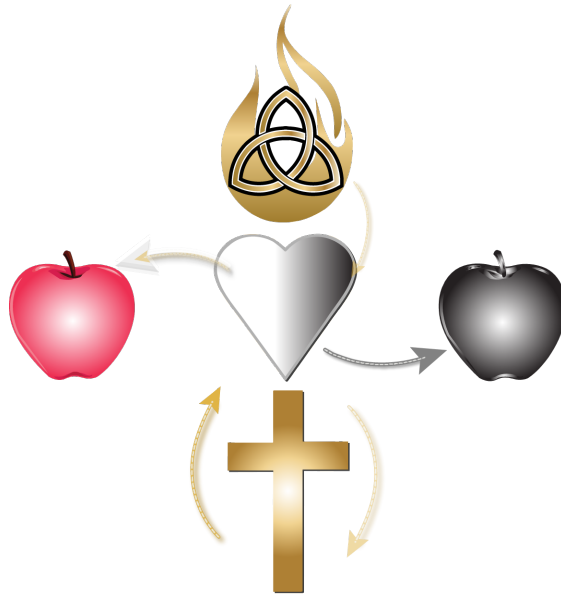


Figure 4

### The Spirit Of God Transforms The People Of God

The result of forgiveness and cleansing provided by Jesus for His people is the God-given ability to repent of sin and hold fast to the promises of God by faith. Believers need God to show His grace, not only by granting cleansing and forgiveness, but also by enabling transformation by faith in the promises of God.

Psalm 51:10–12 “<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup>

**Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”**

2 Corinthians 3:17–18 “<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. **For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**”

The children of God need to have confidence in the promises of God’s word that teach us that His grace will forgive us and transform us.

### God Makes His People Miserable In Their Sin

God works in the hearts of His people to produce godly grief, which is the inspiration of repentance. Godly grief is God’s way of making His children miserable in their sin. When a believer responds to the misery God produces, this results in turning from the deception of sin into the light of Christ and the satisfaction promised and provided by Him.

2 Corinthians 7:8–10 “<sup>8</sup> For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. <sup>9</sup> As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. **For you felt a godly grief,** so that you suffered no loss through us. <sup>10</sup> For



***godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.***

When the child of God is empowered by God's grace to repent of his or her sin, there is no hesitation or regret. The misery from sin is too great and the promise of forgiveness is too sweet to resist. Restored fellowship with God is like the cool water of satisfaction to a thirsty soul.

### **When God Moves There Is No Place For Pride**

God-given grief goes hand in hand with humility. The believer will only humble himself or herself because of the enabling grace of God. What God commands, by grace He supplies. God graciously provides warnings from Scripture, conviction from the regenerate heart, and warnings from the people of God that get our attention and lead us to respond to our sin with brokenness and contrition. Humility, repentance and faith continue to be the fruit of God's gospel grace – the gospel of sanctification.

James 4:6–10 ***“But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”***<sup>6</sup> ***Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.***<sup>8</sup> ***Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.***<sup>9</sup> ***Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.***<sup>10</sup> ***Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.***

1 Peter 5:5–11 ***Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”***<sup>6</sup> ***Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,***<sup>7</sup> ***casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.***<sup>8</sup> ***Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.***<sup>9</sup> ***Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.***<sup>10</sup> ***And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.***<sup>11</sup> ***To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.***

### **God's Discipline Produces A Harvest Of Righteousness**

God loves the glory of His name and His children too much to let them tromp around unrestrained in sin. We know His word and His ways, and He desires for us to walk in them. So when we get out of line, His grace provides correction.

Hebrews 12:5–11 ***“And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.’”***<sup>6</sup> ***For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”***<sup>7</sup> ***It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”***<sup>8</sup> ***If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.***<sup>9</sup> ***Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”***<sup>10</sup> ***For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.***<sup>11</sup> ***For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those***

***who have been trained by it.***

One of the primary resources God uses to correct the sinful deviations of believers is the people of the church. In this sense the church is a wonderful means of grace and nurturer of the fruit of righteousness.

Hebrews 3:12–14 <sup>12</sup> *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* <sup>13</sup> *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* <sup>14</sup> *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

## God Enables Fruitfulness

Trusting the enabling grace of God produces God-honoring fruit and inspires hope in future grace

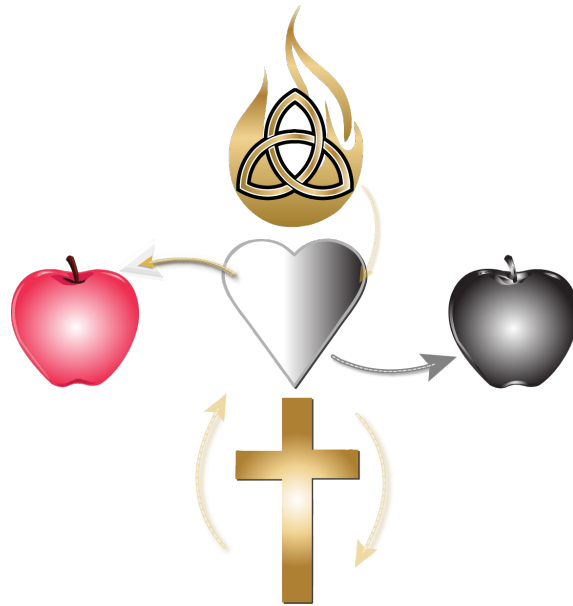


Figure 5

### Fruitfulness Is A Supernatural Reality

Fruitfulness in the Christian life is not for the glory of the Christian, but rather for the glory of the Lord. Believers are not productive because they are godly and capable, but rather believers are productive because of the power and grace of God. It is He who makes His people godly and capable. Only when believers are humbly and vitally dependent on the Lord are they productive. This is the confidence we have in Christ and it is the substance of our prayers.

John 15:5 ***"I am the vine; you are the branches. **Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**"***

John 15:16 ***"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."***

James 2:14 says, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" (The implied answer is "No.") Being a fruitless Christian is not possible. Such a statement should not cause oppression, but should yield hope and humble anticipation. God wants to declare His glory through the fruitfulness of His people. For this to be realized He has provided believers with the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of the local church and the precious promises of God's word, all of which a believer embraces by faith.

2 Peter 1:3–11 <sup>3</sup> ***His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,*** <sup>4</sup> ***by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*** <sup>5</sup> *For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,* <sup>6</sup> *and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and*

*steadfastness with godliness,<sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.<sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, **they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**<sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.<sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

### **Fruitfulness Is Varied And Beautiful**

The fruitfulness of the child of God is seen in many ways. Certainly there is the multifaceted fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23-24); the fruit of corporate worship (Ephesians 5:18-21; Colossians 3:12-17); the fruit of a church maturing in Christ through the loving and active ministry of spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12-14; 1 Peter 4:10-11); the fruit of joy and perseverance in suffering (Romans 8:18-39, James 1:2-5); the fruit of helping lost souls find Jesus the Savior (John 4:35-38; Romans 10:14-15). These and many, many more are the fruits that God produces in His people to the praise of His glory and grace.

### **Rejoicing In The Glory Of The All-sufficient Benevolent God**

God does not need us. God has no deficits. He is the all-sufficient, benevolent God and out of His fullness and grace He supplies everything that is needed. The Apostle Paul instructed the Athenian philosophers about the sufficiency of God in Acts 17:24-25. *"<sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."* Some will say, "But aren't we told to serve the Lord?" Yes, we are told many places in Scripture to serve the Lord. However, we are not expected to serve the Lord from the resources of human effort and determination. We serve the Lord in the strength that He supplies. This becomes the most consistent deduction as we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.

2 Corinthians 3:5 *"Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but **our sufficiency is from God...**"*

1 Corinthians 15:10 *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, **though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.**"*

Ephesians 2:8-10 *"<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**"*

Philippians 2:12-13 *"<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for **it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**"*

Colossians 1:28-29 *"<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, **struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.**"*

It is a joy, not a burden, to be effective and fruitful as Christians. It is a joy because we know that the ability is not demanded of our human efforts, but is the product of indwelling grace through the gospel of Jesus Christ. With this in mind, we should trust the promises of God, work hard by the grace He provides, walk in the joy and satisfaction of the gospel of sanctification in Christ and do everything we can to invite others to find refreshment and satisfaction in the grace of Jesus Christ.

## Sanctification Is An Ongoing Process

Replacing sin and selfishness with God-honoring fruitfulness is a life-long process

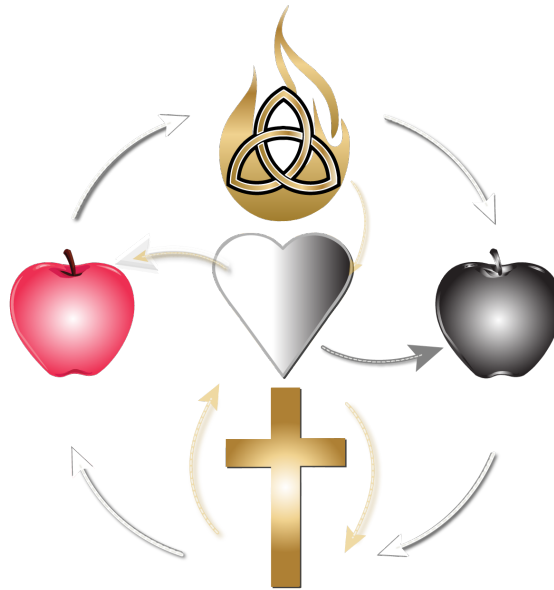


Figure 6

The white arrows in the graph are used to show the work of sanctification is an ongoing process. Every living child of God is engaged in the life-long work of sanctification. This work will be completed at the return of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:12–13 <sup>12</sup> *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,*** <sup>13</sup> *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Philippians 3:12–16 <sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, **but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*** <sup>13</sup> *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* <sup>15</sup> **Let those of us who are mature think this way,** and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

<sup>16</sup> *Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

The follower of Jesus looks forward with a hopeful heart to the time of glorification when Jesus returns.

1 John 3:1–3 <sup>1</sup> *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.* <sup>2</sup> *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* <sup>3</sup> **And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.**

## **Satisfying Fountain Illustration**

Few people understand this concept more than Dr. John Piper. He is the pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota and a prolific writer. God has used Dr. Piper to inspire many people with a renewed delight in the goodness and grace of God. A phrase that is repeated in many of his books and throughout his ministry sums it up—"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." In a message titled "***Can we give anything to Christ?***" John Piper gives an illustration that aptly makes the point concerning the sufficiency and benevolence of God in all things.

Jesus gives us the gift of himself and we ask, "Now what can I render to Jesus for all the benefits of his fellowship?" Answer: Ask him for his help. That's the gift he wants.

The reason Christ wants this is because he always wants to get the glory while we get the benefit. Glory comes to him when we depend on him rather than try to enrich him. If we come to him with gifts—as though he needed something—then we put him in the position of a needy person, and we're the benefactors. He always wants to be the one who is infinitely self-sufficient. Therefore the only gifts that we can bring Jesus are gifts of praise, thanks, longing, and neediness.

A fountain is not glorified by us hauling buckets of dirty water up the mountain and pouring them in. A fountain—a spring in a mountain—is glorified, rather, by us lying down at the edge of the stream, putting our face in, drinking our fill, and getting up and saying, "Ah!" That's called worship. Then we take a bucket, dip it in, walk down the hill to the people in the valley who don't know that the spring exists, and we say, "Taste this! It's right up there, and his name is Jesus!" The kind of gift that the fountain wants is drinkers, because then he looks truly overflowing, rich, and self-sufficient. And that's exactly what he wants to look like.

## **Summation for Application of the Gospel of Sanctification**

### **Chart For Gospel-Centered Clarification**

The flesh is all about making the effort to earn and deserve God's goodness and grace. We must resist this godless drive with rabid intensity. Since the temptations are subtle and frequent we will benefit by checking our focus and making sure God is in the crosshairs of our sights. The following are some things to keep in mind to make sure our perspective is where God would have it to be. They can help us to keep a biblical perspective on our priorities that are beneficial for any believer and anyone to whom he or she ministers.

Christ-centered Gospel	Man-centered Legalism
Christ is the living Savior	Christ is our example
God's grace descends to us	Our works ascend to God
God is the Seeker	We are the seekers
God is the Judge and Justifier	God is our encouraging buddy
Bible is a treasure of the riches of Christ	Bible is a book of cause and effect equations
The church focuses on God's service and ministry	The church focuses on our service and ministry
Baptism – Christ meets the believer bringing blessings of grace	Baptism – the believer's first step of obedience evidencing commitment
Communion – Christ meets His people inspiring cleansing, refreshing, unifying grace	Communion – an observance to show our obedience and devotion
Worship – joyfully reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth (John Piper)	Worship – what we give to God
Delight	Duty

### Practice Rooted in Position

It is far too easy to push for change and expect commitment without establishing the necessary groundwork of our resources in Jesus Christ. By grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for God's glory alone we have been brought into the family of God and declared righteous in Jesus. From this position and the continuing flow of God's grace we repeatedly receive the power and fortitude to practice the things required of believers.

As we read Scripture we must acknowledge our natural bent is to embrace the imperatives that tell us the things we must do and the ways we should feel. But if we do this without understanding our position through the indicatives of Scripture (things to believe about who we are in Christ), we get the cart before the horse. This results in frustration and discouragement because we are attempting to obey the commands and live our Christian lives in the power of personal performance. Rather, we should recognize our hopeless and helpless state by repeatedly and humbly approaching the throne of grace where the mercy and goodness of God flows to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness that only the Lord can provide.

In Philippians chapter 3 Paul explains how he turned from the emptiness of self-righteousness to the fullness of righteousness in Christ. He remembers his life as a legalistic Pharisee when he used to have misguided confidence in the flesh that he could live the righteous life God required. But the mercy of God helped him to realize that attempting to serve the Lord with legalistic determination was futile and he discarded that pursuit as worthless. He says, <sup>8</sup>*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...*** (Philippians 3:8-9) We, too, must realize that we cannot understand the imperatives if we do not understand the indicatives (Cf. Romans 1-11 – indicatives, Romans 12-16 – imperatives; Ephesians 1-3 – indicatives, Ephesians 4-6 imperatives; etc.).

Looking at a portion of Paul's letter to the Romans may aid us further in understanding that a believer's practice (imperative) must flow out of a believer's position in Christ (indicative).



Romans 11:33-12:2 <sup>33</sup> *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* <sup>34</sup> *“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”* <sup>35</sup> *“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”* <sup>36</sup> *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* <sup>1</sup> *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* <sup>2</sup> *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

From Romans 12:2, God lets us know that our lives are not to be pressed into the mold of the world. It is natural and easy to “fit into” the world and live by its man-centered ways, which include man-centered religious ways, yielding the fruit of comparative condemnation or comparative discouragement. We must fight the tendency to conform to man-centered worldliness.

This fight is embraced by renewing our minds, which means refreshing our thinking and living by the truths and promises of God’s word that make much of God’s mercy for us. We must be refreshed in the rich mercy of our God that flows down to His elect so that all glory is God’s. It is these God-centered truths we are called to remember so that we never resolve by mere human determination to try to live and minister for God. It is with open-handed lives that we stand before the gracious throne of God to receive His abundant mercy, which is the source of our spiritual, mental and physical power to worship and minister for God. We tap into this source by the grace of God that inspires us to be captivated by the glory of the Lord who is full of mercy and provides us with all we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him (Cf. Romans 1:1-11:36).

Our renewal is a repeated Spirit-wrought determination to focus and reflect on the beauty, splendor and all-sufficient grace of the Lord. This is what Paul instructed the Corinthian believers to do. *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* (2 Corinthians 3:18) We cannot understand the imperative (Romans 12:1) “present your bodies as a living sacrifice” until we have worshipfully reflected on the indicatives summarized as “the mercies of God” (Romans 1:1-11:36).

In fact, we can have our minds filled with the teachings of Scripture, but we will not understand the truth of Scripture unless we see it in the proper God-centered light, revealing that the grace of Almighty God flows richly and abundantly to us through Jesus Christ. We are not competent in ourselves, our competency is found in Christ alone. He is the living water of God’s grace and mercy flowing down to us. As Paul says, *“Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”* (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)

When our minds are repeatedly renewed with a God-centered and Christ-exalting perspective, we are enabled to discern what is the will of God. There is no profitable point in trying to understand the teaching of Scripture from any other perspective. There is no point in trying to decide on an act of service or ministry from any other perspective. In this light it is easy to see

how Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:1-2 flows out of the doxology of Romans 11:33-36. All things must be tested from this perspective. Without this humbled assessment, all beliefs and actions are distorted.

**God help us sustain a gospel-centered ministry!**

The information presented above is for the purpose of Scripturally checking our perspective so that we resist the various temptations to drift into man-centered ways of living life and doing ministry. Our desire is to be diligent and joyful in pursuit of God's glory and the pursuit of satisfaction that flows from God the Father through the work of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. We live and serve by the grace of our great God. May God continue to enable us to maintain a God-honoring gospel-centered focus in ministry!

(The ideas presented above are the result of God's blessings flowing to through the writings of John Piper in ***Desiring God*** and ***The Pleasures of God***, the writings of Michael Horton in ***Christless Christianity***, the writings of Paul David Tripp and Timothy S. Lance in "***How People Change***," and the preaching of Jesus in the ***Sermon on the Mount***.)