**Growing Into Spiritual Maturity**

1 John 2:12-14

**12I am writing to you, little children [** tekniα **] because your sins have been forgiven for His name’s sake. 13I am writing to you, fathers** ginóskó **because you know Him who has existed from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men [** ischuros**, ] because you have been victorious and have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children [** paidia**, ] because you have come to know the Father. 14I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has existed from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and vigorous, and the word of God remains in you, and you have been victorious over the evil one.**

The purpose of these verses is for us to stop for a brief moment as John has been walking us through evidences that confirm our salvation. He didn’t write the letter to raise doubt, but to confirm new birth in Christ. AND he wrote so they could recognize and discern the false teachers and false professors who claimed to be Christian.

In verses 12-14, he hits the breaks here…it’s like a time out….to ask this question – “So, where are you in all this? Where are you in your walk with the Lord?” This was important to John to know they were growing, maturing in their faith. And I’m sure he recalled Paul’s indictment to the church in Corinth because they were believers, but they had not and were not growing and spiritually developing in the faith:

**However, brothers and sisters, I could not talk to you as to spiritual people, but [only] as to [**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians+3&version=AMP#fen-AMP-28412a)**]worldly people [dominated by human nature], *mere* infants [in the new life] in Christ! 2I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Even now you are still not ready. 3You are still worldly [controlled by ordinary impulses, the sinful capacity]. For as long as there is jealousy and strife *and* discord among you, are you not unspiritual, and are you not walking like ordinary men [unchanged by faith]? 4For when one *of you* says, “I am [a disciple] of Paul,” and another, “I am [a disciple] of Apollos,” are you not [proving yourselves unchanged, just] *ordinary* people?**

**5What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Just servants through whom you believed [in Christ], even as the Lord appointed to each his task. 6I planted, Apollos watered, but God [all the while] was causing the growth. 7So neither is the one who plants nor the one who waters anything, but [only] God who causes the growth. 8He who plants and he who waters are one [in importance and esteem, working toward the same purpose]; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9For we are God’s fellow workers [His servants working together]; you are God’s cultivated field [His garden, His vineyard], God’s building. - 1 Corinthians 3:1-9**

John was asking, “Given the fact that you are born again, where are you in your spiritual development? At what level are you in spiritual growth?”

Up to this point, it’s been very black and white. The whole conversation has been you’re either in the family of God or out of the family of God. He pauses now so we can give careful thought:

*At what stage of spiritual growth are you?*

**Let’s look at what Spiritual Growth Doesn’t Mean**

-Spiritual growth does not determine the believer’s standing in grace before God. That issue is final and complete the moment they have been born again. All sin is pardoned at conversion by Christ’s own sacrifice for sin and their standing ‘in Christ’ is fixed and irrevocable. We find this certain atoning work of Jesus having His righteousness imputed to the believer in Romans 3:21-26, Romans 4:5-8, Philippians.3:9, Colossians 2:10 and 1 Peter 2:24

-Spiritual growth does not affect God’s love for believers. He does not love the mature saint more, or like them more, or favor them more than the less mature. We find this in Romans 5:8 and John 13:1 that His love is not based on the individual merit of any person and that He loves to perfection, or to the maximum of His love.

-Spiritual growth is not measured by the calendar. In Hebrews 5:11-14 we find, “**11**Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. **12**For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. **13**For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. **14**But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” – People who have been believers for many years does not mean they are spiritually matured. This may result from inadequate or instruction in the Word (Ephesians 4:11-15) or fleshly disobedience and unfaithful application of sound teaching (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

-Spiritual growth is unrelated to the amount of theological information believers know. We find this in Romans 2:17-29. Constant disobedience produces indifference and a subdued conscience, stunting spiritual growth.

“Some Christians have an adequate or even exceptional amount of biblical and theological knowledge, and yet are shockingly immature spiritually. That is a dangerous position to be in because the more biblical information one receives but does not apply, the more deceived he becomes about his own spiritual condition.” – Dr. John MacArthur

-Spiritual growth has nothing to do with outwardly successful ministry activity. Some of the busiest people in the church are unskilled in the truth and immature in wisdom that comes from above (James 3:17-18). Great success, a high level of leadership and influence, heading a corporation, generating much financial resources and support …these are not indicators of genuine spiritual maturity. In fact, for Paul, weakness, suffering, persecution, and poverty were the true signs of his maturity in the Lord. (2 Cor. 6:3-10, 11:23-33, 12:9-10; Phil. 4:11-13; 1 Tim. 6:6-10)

-Spiritual growth is not mystical, psychological, or determined by experiences that produce good feelings. Today we hear and see so many elevating themselves to a place (in their own minds) of spiritual maturity because of what they claim to ‘hear from God’ or ‘experience of God.’

**Wisdom is not in what you know, but in what you do with what you know.**

**Our high and privileged calling is to do the will of God in the power of God**

**for the glory of God.**

**J.I.Packer**

Wisdom is *doing* holiness; living God’s standards while *being* distinct from the world. 1 Peter 1:16

The only way to grow spiritually is in our understanding and application of God’s truth *prayerfully.* That’s what it means to walk in the wisdom of God, and that is what it means to be **sanctified.**

***18****Just as You commissioned and sent Me into the world, I also have commissioned and sent them (believers) into the world.****19****For their sake I sanctify Myself [to do Your will], so that they also may be sanctified [set apart, dedicated, made holy] in [Your] truth.* ***20****“I do not pray for these alone [it is not for their sake only that I make this request], but also for [all] those who[will ever] believe and trust in Me through their message,” John 17:18-20 AMP*

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**John writes to specific groups.**

**Verse 12 - *“Little children” –*** *“teknia”* - “born ones” – They have been pardoned and released from spiritual debt through His name because they have confessed His name, believing in Him as Savior. They have repented of their life of sin and believe in Christ, and walk in the evidences of being born again as John has been stating at the first of his letter:

* Theological Test They believe in and love the true Christ
* Moral Tests They acknowledge they are a sinner and confess their sins

They desire a life of holiness/obedience and hate sin/unrighteousness

* Relational Test They love others

**The Infancy Stage – Spiritual Development Level 1**

**Verse 13** - *“children”* – *“paidia”* - He is referring to “babes or little ones” in the faith – “You know the Father”– praise the Lord! They are born again.

These children are either one of two things

1. Those who are just beginning their Christian walk.
2. Those who have been a believer for some time but have not grown/developed spiritually.

**The Infantry Stage – Spiritual Development Level 2**

Verse 13 and 14 – “*young men”* – *“ischuros”* - He is referring to maturing men and women in the faith who, by accepting Jesus as Savior and knowing and applying the Word of God, they:

1. have grown out of the infancy stage
2. have matured in vigor, strength, and they want their life to count for Kingdom purposes
3. have overcome the evil one
4. have to expose error and defend the truth – the holiness and glory of God is shaping their heart (their will), their mind, their spirit and strength. They actively seek the will of God.

***Victorious*** – (cf. [2307](https://biblehub.com/greek/2307.htm) */thélēma*, [4102](https://biblehub.com/greek/4102.htm) */pístis*) - an adjective - "engaging, combative strength. For the believer, this vigor is God's power "standing by" – ready to bring about His preferred-will, through faith. This *engaging* and victorious strength is *always and immediately available* from the Lord, which accomplishes *His assignments*.

THE WORD OF GOD ABIDES IN THEM. The Word is not just in one ear and out the other. The Word resides in them and the more they learn, they realize how much they don’t know. They are like a sponge….the Word is putting nutrition in them and energizing them. They hunger and thirst for truth and there has to be a release of the zeal for the living Word that is in them. A believer CAN’T be strong and vigorous and victorious without the Word of God abiding in them.

***“For everyone born of God is victorious and overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has conquered and overcome the world—our [continuing, persistent] faith [in Jesus the Son of God].”***

1 John 5:4

**The Intimacy Stage – Spiritual Development Level 3**

Verse 13 and 14 – “*Fathers”* – *“ginosko”* - He is referring to spiritually mature men and women. *Fathers* represent those who:

1. have grown in the grace and knowledge of Christ over many years
2. have spent prolonged time in the Word – experientially learned strong doctrine
3. have had their way of thinking (minds ) renewed by Scripture – they think biblically
4. have fought many battles
5. have forged through storms
6. discerned and defended the truth from lies and error repeatedly

“Fathers” are spiritually mature because they’ve been *developed* in faith and in doctrine. There is a depth to their life and a height to their worship and because there is a depth to their life and a height to their worship, there is a breadth to their *influence.* They are hitting it on all directions. Their knowledge of God has been so expanded that they have grown up – they think of God at a much higher holier level. He’s not just ‘the man upstairs.” They’ve grown to love being sanctified as well.

**What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we have in life? To know God. What is the eternal life that Jesus gives? To know God. What is the best thing in life? To know God. What in humans gives God most pleasure? Knowledge of himself.**

**J.I. Packer**

You GROW into this stage and it takes time ***and*** God’s Providence. ~~What is Providence?~~

“Know” means “an *experiential* knowledge” *– honeymoon knowledge* - *50th year of marriage knowledge*

**I am not asking whether you know things about Him but do you know God, are you enjoying God, is God the center of your life, the soul of your being,**

**the source of your greatest joy? He is meant to be.**

**Martyn Lloyd Jones**

**Verse 14 – The Reinforcement**

John is a master teacher – he reinforces what he just said. It’s like the old saying –

**“Tell them what you want to say, and then tell them what you told them.”**

*“I am writing to you …” and “I have written to you…”*

***14I have written to you,* fathers, because you know Him who has existed from the beginning. *I have written to you,* young men, because you are strong and vigorous, and the word of God remains in you, and you have been victorious over the evil one.**

John reviews only level 3 and level 2 because he doesn’t want them to be comfortable in level 1.

And then he moves on…he transitions again to a new topic, but it is a topic that has a profound impact on the spiritual growth exhortation he just wrote about.

**Every believer is a witness whether he wants to be or not.**
― **Donald Barnhouse**

**Love Not the World**

**1 John 2:15-17**

John shifts right into the very sin that we find throughout the entire New Testament that stunts and stops spiritual growth.

Loving the world.

***15Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.***

Obviously, this is not the same ‘world’ we find in John 3:16.

There is a love that God hates. As believers, our heart is to be in alignment with Gods heart so that means we must love what God loves and we must hate what God hates.

**Verse 15** – “*do not love the world nor the things in the world”* - John is saying it is strictly forbidden. The word “world” is used 10 different ways in John’s writings. Here in verse 15, it refers to the Satanically governed evil world system. It is an invisible world system with perverted values, rampant sin, godless priorities, and secular ideologies. There is a networking and an infrastructure of this evil system with an agenda that is anti-God, and anti-Christ, and anti-Family, and anti-purity, and it is run by secular humanism and selfish living and worldly thinking. It is utterly hostile to God.

**Verse 15** *- “nor the things in the world” -* worldly possessions, worldly pursuits, worldly pleasures that become more important than doing the will of God.

**The Conflict –**

**Verse 15** *- “if anyone loves the world”* – if anyone lives to get ahead in this world – if anyone longs to be like the world (in behavior, attitude, and beliefs) … “*the love of the Father is not in him.”*

 The two ‘loves’ cannot reside in the same heart at the same time.

* Categorically, John writes this to divide the people into believers and unbelievers. Believers live for God. Unbelievers live for this world. Those are the only two categories in this world.
* Relatively, a believer can get insnared in the things of this world. A Christian who has become worldly – as their love for the world increases, love for God decreases. The more you love the world, the less you will love God. The more you love God, the less you love this world. The decision has to be made who your master will be….Jesus Christ or the world. You cannot love both.

It’s impossible to love God and love what He opposes…what HE hates!

God is not opposed to possessions. He is opposed to any possessions or the accumulation of possessions or the pursuit of possessions possessing you.

***“15Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” NASB***

**The Challenge**

**Verse 16**

This world is aggressively after us. It is its own evangelist. This world is seeking to CCC - capture, control, and corrupt us.

**Verse 16** – ‘*for all that is in the world’* – John specifies 3 deadly forces that are in the world.

Remember these verses are written to Christians ….”the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life.” “And” connecting all three of those because they work together. They do not work independently they work together.

1. **Lust of the flesh** – *lust* – Here ‘lust’ is translated to mean 3 things: *strong cravings, strong desires, longings that set a hook in you.* The flesh is still inside us even when we are converted. Our flesh is under the Mastery of Jesus Christ, but it has sinful appetites. Galatians 5:16 – “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” The flesh is not dormant. There is a conflict (Galatians 5:17) – There is this intense warfare inside of a Christian.
2. **Lust of the eyes** - the eyes are so key to what is triggering the flesh. What you set before your eyes has an entry point into your body and into your flesh. Your eyes are like the window of your house...it becomes an entry point such that what you look at with your eyes has the capacity to excite and ignite your flesh. So many temptations enter through our eyes and lures our flesh. This is the downfall of many Christians. Their eyes went to what it should not have been looking at.

*2 Samuel 11:2 -* *Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king’s house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance.*

*Ecclesiastes 2:10 - All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them.*

*Matthew 5:28 - but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

*Matthew 5:29 - If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

*Matthew 6:22-23 - “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.****23****But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

There is a direct connection between the eyes and the heart. We must guard our eyes.

1. **The boastful pride of life** – What we see that appeals to our flesh, ignites our pride. It’s a deadly force. Longing for this “thing” leads to self-elevation and self-importance and is what is driving this evil world system. “I deserve to have \_\_\_\_. “I’m entitled to \_\_\_\_.” “I worked hard for \_\_\_\_.” All of this IS the devil’s work using the system that he controls. And it is all around us.

“One of the consequences of sin is that it makes the sinner pity himself instead of

causing him to turn to God. One of the first signs of new life is that

the individual takes sides with God against himself.”
― **Donald Barnhouse**

**The Contrast**

**Verse 17**

***“The world is passing away and also its lusts***”….the evil world system is passing away. There is no real substance to it. It’s like sinking your teeth in cotton candy. It’s passing away with all of its paganism and materialism and idolatry.

***“BUT the one who does the will of God lives forever.”*** The one🡪 is a believer – ***“who does the will of God”* –** they are actively pursuing the things of God. John is speaking here in black and white terms. … Admittedly, it has a negative tone to this because John understands the grip the world can have on us. Knowing the only antidote is to love God, love His Word, love Christ, to love His kingdom, to love believers, to love His church and to love the will of God.

As John wrote about the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, it was the words of Paul as he addressed the churches in Romans 6 that I’m sure spurred his directness – John asked about their spiritual development because he knew that the work of “sanctification” is the ultimate proof (fruit) of having genuine salvation and a deepening relationship with Christ.

In God’s providence, Paul’s inability to visit Rome gave the world this inspired masterpiece of the gospel doctrine. He wrote this letter from Corinth around AD 56 toward the close of this 3rd missionary journey and Phoebe was given the great responsibility of delivering this letter to the Roman believers (16:1-2) This letter’s purpose was not to correct deviating theology or rebuke ungodly living because the Roman church was doctrinally sound. It, like all churches, was in need of the rich doctrinal and practical instructions this letter provides.

Chapters 6-8 address what John was also encouraging when he said, “My little children, I am writing these things to you **so that you may not sin.** And if anyone **sin**s, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;” 1 John 2:1.

### Believers Are Dead to Sin, Alive to God

***6****What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?****2****May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?****3****Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?****4****Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.****5****For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,****6****knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;****7****for he who has died is freed from sin.*

***8****Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,****9****knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.****10****For the death that He died,* ***He died to sin once for all****; but the life that He lives,* ***He lives to God****.*

***11Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.***

***12****Therefore* ***do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts****,****13****and* ***do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin****as instruments of unrighteousness; but****present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead,*** *and* ***your******members****as instruments of righteousness to God.****14For sin shall not be master over you****, for you are not under law but under grace.*

***15****What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!****16****Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of  sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?****17****But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient* ***from the heart*** *to that form of teaching to which you were committed,****18****and* ***having been freed from sin****, you became slaves of righteousness.****19****I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness,****resulting in sanctification****.*

***20****For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.****21****Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.****22****But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit,****resulting in sanctification,*** *and the outcome, eternal life.****23****For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**V.10** – “*He died to sin”* … Christ died to sin in two senses: 1) in regard to sin’s penalty, and 2) in regard to sin’s power. Paul’s point is that believers have died to sin in the same way.

**V. 10** – “*He lives to God”* … we live for God’s glory. This means viewing our flesh as dead, and alive as slaves to the holiness and righteousness of God.

**V. 11-14** – Paul addresses the logical conclusion of his readers: If the old self is dead, why is there continually a struggle with sin and how can the new self become dominant? His exhortation is contained in two verbs – two action words that are continual actions **of the heart** – of the mind – of the will - of the place for decision and action:

* **Consider (NASV) / reckon (NKJV) / think (GNT) / count (NIV)**

***“In the same way you are to think of yourselves as dead, so far as sin is concerned, but living in fellowship with God through Christ Jesus.” Romans 6:11***

* **Present (NASV) / offer (NIV) / give (GNT)**

***“Instead, give yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life, and surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes.” Romans 6:13***

**The Christian faith is ultimately not only a matter of doctrine or understanding or of intellect, it is a condition of the heart.**

**Martyn Llyod Jones**

**V. 11 - Consider / think / reckon / count** – the Greek word translated here is was often used metaphorically to refer to having an absolute, unreserved CERTAINTY (confidence) in what one’s thinking (mind) knows to be true – the kind of heartfelt certainty that affects a person’s actions and decisions. Paul is urging us to embrace by faith what God has revealed to be true – which is we are ***dead … to sin.***

**V. 12 – mortal body –** The brain and its thinking processes are part of the flesh (the mortal body) and thus tempt our souls with its sinful lusts. When John mentioned the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, he knew clearly this exhortation by Paul that we are to view our mortal body flesh as dead.

**V. 13 - Present** – This refers to a decision of the will – the heart – When we **give** ourselves to God, we are fully surrendering our will to His will.

* **Progressive sanctification** is the entire work of our will cooperating with the Holy Spirit Who is continually enabling us to be made more and more in the image of Christ.
* **Positional sanctification** is being set apart for God’s holy kingdom the moment we are born again. We have been positionally and eternally sanctified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

**The benefit of being slaves to God is sanctification.**

**John MacArthur**

As we are being sanctified in Christ, there is a purifying work also happening in our life – a growing love for truth and a growing hatred for sin and falsehood. Being sanctified produces in a believer a pressing forwardness more and more to know Him.

**The most vital question to ask about all who claim to be Christian is this:**

**Have they a soul thirst for God? ... Is their life centered on Him?**

**Do they press forward more and more that they might know Him.**

**Martyn Llyod Jones**

There is also a sharpening of spiritual discernment at work, helping us to divide truth from what is false. As you grow spiritually, the Holy Spirit will use the Sword of the Spirit in wielding the Word of God that “dwells within you richly” to divide what is true from what is false.

**HOME ASSIGNMENT**

**If I had only three years to serve the Lord,**

**I would spend two of them studying and preparing.**

**Donald Barnhouse**

Next week we are going to look at John’s direct instructions regarding discernment of false teachers. John wanted them to understand that the false prophets had risen from within the church – the told them that they went out “*from among us.”*

The danger is never what happens outside the church as it relates to the purity and strength of the church – the greatest danger is from within.

**Before next Wednesday --**

1. **Read all of 1 John 2:18-29** – read prayerfully as many times as you can, asking the Lord to open your eyes to see wonderful things in His Law. (Psalm 119:18)
2. **Read all of Romans Chapters 6-8**
	* As you read these chapters in Romans, make note of any words, word phrases, instructions or exhortations that we find in John’s epistle. For example:

Romans 7:5 says, “*For while we were* ***living in the flesh****,* ***our sinful passions****, aroused by the law, were at work in our members****to bear fruit for death.”***

Paul points out that living in the flesh and it’s sinful passions (lusts) results in death, spiritual death.

And 1 John 2:16 says, *“For everything in the world—****the lust of the******flesh****,* ***the lust of the eyes****, and* ***the pride of life****—****comes not from the Father*** *but from the world.”*

John points out that living in the flesh (and names them specifically), comes NOT from the Father, but from the world. They both point out that the living in the flesh leads to and indicates eternal separation from God.

1. **Read the document titled, “What is Positional and Progressive Sanctification?”**

**What is Positional and Progressive Sanctification?**

The word translated “sanctification” in most Bibles means “separation.” It is used in the New Testament, according to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, of the separation of the believer from evil, and it is the result of obedience to the Word of God. Progressive sanctification is what gradually separates the people of God from the world and makes them more and more like Jesus Christ.

Sanctification differs from justification in several ways. Justification is a one-time work of God, resulting in a declaration of “not guilty” before Him because of the work of Christ on the cross. Sanctification is a process, beginning with justification and continuing throughout life. Justification is the starting point of the line that represents one’s Christian life; sanctification is the line itself.

Sanctification is a three-stage process – past, present, and future. The first stage occurs at the beginning of our Christian lives. It is an initial moral change, a break from the power and love of sin. It is the point at which believers can count themselves “dead to sin but alive to God” ([Romans 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%206.11)). Once sanctification has begun, we are no longer under sin’s dominion ([Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%206.14)). There is a reorientation of desires, and we develop a love of righteousness. Paul calls it “slavery to righteousness” ([Romans 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%206.17-18)).

The second stage of sanctification requires a lifetime to complete. As we grow in grace, we are gradually – but steadily – changing to be more like Jesus ([2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%203.18)). This occurs in a process of daily spiritual renewal ([Colossians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%203.10)). The apostle Paul himself was being sanctified even as he ministered to others. Paul claimed that he had not reached perfection, but that he “pressed on” to attain everything Christ desired for him ([Philippians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%203.12)).

The third and final stage of sanctification occurs in the future. When believers die, their spirits go to be with Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%205.6-8)). Since nothing unclean can enter heaven ([Revelation 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev%2021.27)), we must be made perfect at that point. The sanctification of the whole person—body, soul, and spirit—will finally be complete when the Lord Jesus returns and we receive glorified bodies ([Philippians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%203.21); [1 Corinthians 15:35-49](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%2015.35-49)).

God’s work in sanctification involves all three members of the Trinity. God the Father is constantly at work in His children “to will and to work for His good pleasure” ([Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.13)). He changes our desires, making us want to please Him, and He empowers us to do so. Jesus earned our sanctification on the cross and, in essence, has become our sanctification ([1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%201.30)) and the “perfecter of our faith” ([Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2012.2)). The Holy Spirit is the primary agent of our sanctification ([1 Corinthians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%206.11); [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Thess%202.13); [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet%201.2)), and He is the one who produces in us the fruit of sanctification ([Galatians 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%205.22-23)).

Our role in sanctification is both passive and active. *Passively,* we are to trust God to sanctify us, presenting our bodies to God ([Romans 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%206.13); [12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%2012.1)) and yielding to the Holy Spirit. “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified” ([1 Thessalonians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess%204.3)), and God will have His way. *Actively,* we are responsible to choose to do what is right. “Each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable” ([1 Thessalonians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thess%204.4)). This involves putting to death the “misdeeds of the body” ([Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%208.13)), striving for holiness ([Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%2012.14)), fleeing immorality ([1 Corinthians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%206.18)), cleansing ourselves from every defilement ([2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%207.1)), and making every effort to supplement our faith ([2 Peter 1:5-11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Pet%201.5-11)).

Both the passive role and the active role are necessary for a healthy Christian life. To emphasize the passive role tends to lead to spiritual laziness and a neglect of spiritual discipline. The end result of this course of action is a lack of maturity. To emphasize the active role can lead to legalism, pride, and self-righteousness. The end result of this is a joyless Christian life. We must remember that we pursue holiness, but only as God empowers us to do so. The end result is a consistent, mature Christian life that faithfully reflects the nature of our holy God. John makes it clear that we will never be totally free from sin in this life ([1 John 1:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%201.8-10)). Thankfully, the work God has begun in us He will finish ([Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%201.6)).

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