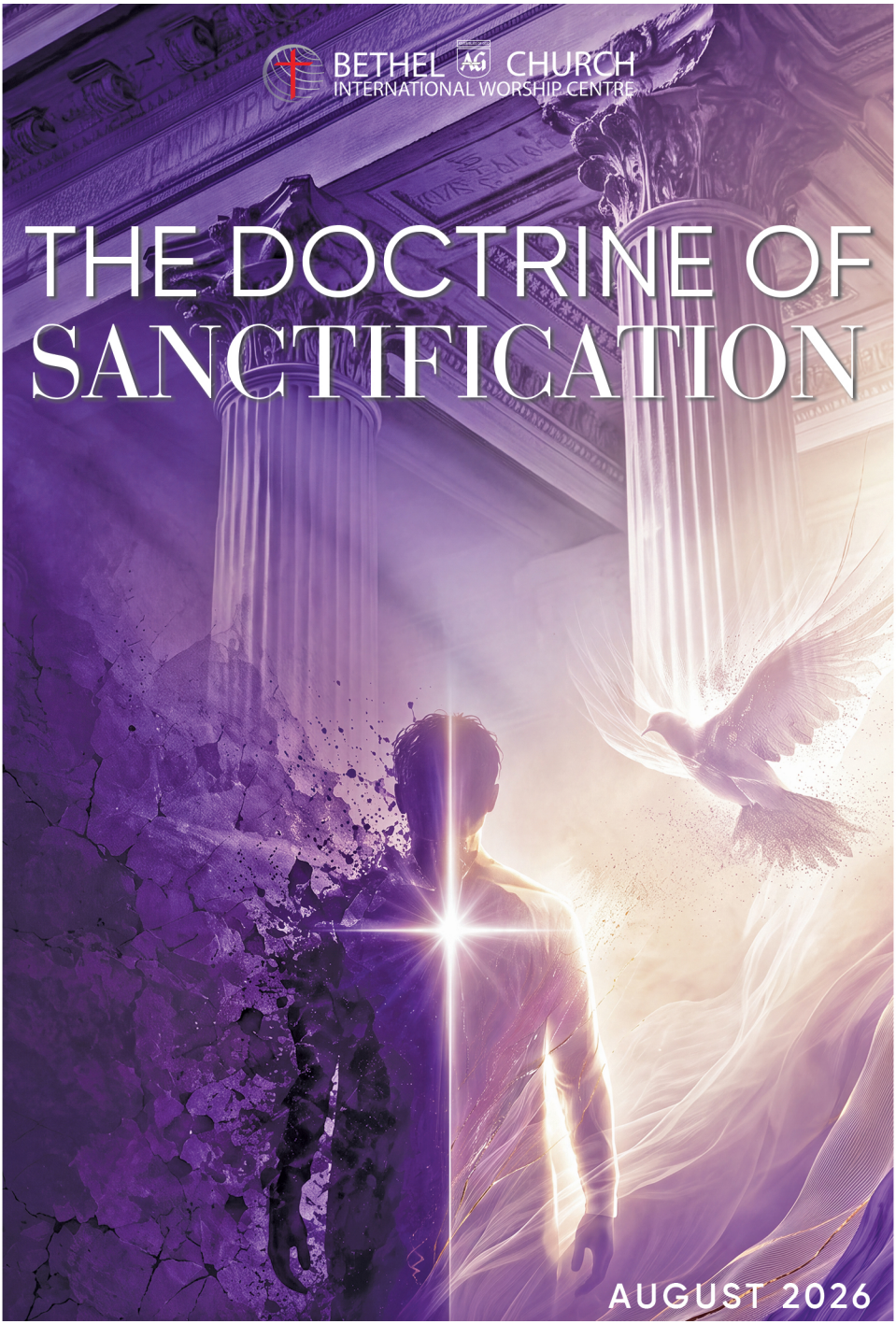

BETHEL CHURCH
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE
THE DOCTRINE OF
SANCTIFICATION
AUGUST 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Christian life does not conclude at the moment of salvation—it truly begins there. Salvation is not merely God's act of delivering us from the penalty of sin, but also His continuing work of reshaping our entire being into the image of His Son. This ongoing, lifelong transformation is what Scripture calls **sanctification**.

While justification declares us righteous before God in a single moment, **sanctification is the daily journey of becoming what God has already declared us to be.** So, sanctification is the gracious work of God, in partnership with the willing obedience of the believer, by which we are progressively set free from the power of sin and increasingly conformed to the character of Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is one of continual growth. Though sanctification will never be complete in this life, this is neither an excuse for complacency nor a reason for discouragement as we battle with sin. As we walk in the Spirit, the power of sin steadily weakens and Christ's character increasingly shines through us. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The goal of sanctification is not merely to make us better people, but to make us more like Jesus. God's purpose is to form His character within us so that our thoughts, desires, words, and actions increasingly reflect His glory. Therefore, sanctification is not an optional part of the Christian life—it is the normal and necessary evidence of a life that has truly been transformed by the saving grace of God.

GOD'S ROLE AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY

One of the greatest tensions in the Christian life is understanding the relationship between God's work and our responsibility in becoming holy.

Is sanctification entirely God's work, requiring us only to surrender? Or does it depend primarily upon our own determination and effort?

Scripture rejects both extremes. The New Testament consistently presents sanctification as a **divine-human partnership**. God initiates, empowers, sustains, and completes the work, while believers are called to respond through faith, obedience, and perseverance. Every command to pursue holiness rests upon the assurance that God Himself is already at work within us.

- ***God's Role in Sanctification***

Sanctification begins with God because holiness originates in God. He does not merely command His people to be holy; He works within them to make them holy. Paul therefore prays, *"May the God of peace himself **sanctify** you completely"* (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Sanctification is not primarily a human achievement but a divine accomplishment.

Our sanctification rests entirely upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. Paul declares *"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and **sanctification** and redemption—"* (1 Corinthians 1:30). Holiness is therefore not something

we manufacture; it is something we receive because we are united with Christ. Through His death, the power of sin has been broken. Through His resurrection, a new life has begun. Sanctification flows from our union with the risen Christ.

God's work extends beyond changing our behaviour. He transforms our desires. Left to ourselves, we naturally pursue our own ambitions and pleasures. Yet through His grace, God reshapes our hearts so that we begin to love what He loves and desire what pleases Him. Paul captures this beautifully: *"For it is **God who works** in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure."* (Philippians 2:13)

Hebrews reminds us that *"God **disciplines** His children for our good, that we may share in His holiness"* (Hebrews 12:10). Trials, disappointments, correction, waiting, and suffering are not interruptions

Set Apart for God

The Hebrew idea of *'qadosh'* commonly translated *'holy'* carries the sense of being set apart, consecrated, and devoted to God. **Sanctification therefore begins with belonging to God before it becomes a matter of how we live.**

In the Old Testament, people, places, objects, and times could be sanctified for God's purposes. The Sabbath was set apart (Gen. 2:3), the tabernacle and its vessels were consecrated for worship (Ex. 40:9), and the priests were set apart for sacred service. These outward acts pointed toward a deeper reality: God's people themselves were called to be holy because they belonged to Him (Lev. 19:2).

Yet Old Testament holiness was never merely external. God repeatedly confronted hearts that performed religious rituals while remaining distant from Him. He desired obedience, justice, mercy, and wholehearted devotion (1 Sam. 15:22; Mic. 6:8). The prophets therefore looked forward to a deeper work of God in His people—a cleansing of the heart and a transformation from within.

Ezekiel captures this hope beautifully: God promises to cleanse His people, give them a new heart, and put His Spirit within them so that they will walk in His ways (Ezek. 36:25–27).

The Old Testament therefore lays the foundation for Christian sanctification: God sets His people apart, calls them to holiness, and promises to transform them from the inside out.

to God's sanctifying work; they are often the very tools He uses to transform our character.

Notice that God not only empowers our actions but also changes our will. **He creates new desires before He produces new behaviour.** This is one of the greatest evidences of sanctification—***not merely that we obey God, but that we increasingly want to obey Him.***

The Lord Jesus is the perfect model of holy living. His humility, compassion, purity, obedience, forgiveness, dependence on the Father, and love for others become the pattern for our own lives.

The writer to the Hebrews therefore urges believers to *"fix our eyes on Jesus"* (Hebrews 12:2). Peter likewise reminds us that Christ left us *"an example, that you should follow in His steps"* (1 Peter 2:21). The Christian life is ultimately the lifelong pursuit of becoming like the One who saved us.

- ***Our Responsibility in Sanctification***

Although God is the primary agent in sanctification, He never treats believers as passive spectators. Throughout Scripture we are repeatedly called to pursue holiness with diligence and intentionality.

Paul commands believers to *"**work out your salvation** with fear and trembling"* (Philippians 2:12). He is not suggesting that salvation is earned by works; rather, those who have been saved are to progressively express that salvation in every area of life. This is why the New Testament contains so many practical commands.

We are called to action to:

- **Present** ourselves to God (Romans 6:13)
- **Put** sin to death in your body (Romans 8:13)
- **Present** your bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1)
- **Strive** for holiness (Hebrews 12:14)
- **Abstain** from sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3)
- **Cleanse** ourselves from every defilement (2 Corinthians 7:1)
- **Make** every effort to grow in Christian character (2 Peter 1:5–8)

These commands remind us that spiritual maturity never happens accidentally. **Holiness requires intentional obedience, daily repentance, and continual surrender.** But God never asks us to become holy in our own strength. The One who commands holiness also supplies the grace, power, and presence needed to pursue it. Our responsibility is not to manufacture holiness but to cooperate with God's work through faith and obedience.

Divine sovereignty does not eliminate human responsibility. **God's grace is not opposed to effort—it is opposed to earning.** We do not strive to gain God's acceptance; we strive because we have already received it in Christ. Sanctification requires both wholehearted trust in God's transforming power and diligent pursuit of holiness. There are no shortcuts to sanctification. The Christian grows in holiness not by choosing between trust and effort, but by embracing both. Trust without obedience leads to spiritual complacency, while effort without dependence on God breeds pride. True spiritual growth flourishes only when faith and obedience walk hand in hand.

WHAT SANCTIFICATION IS NOT

Many misunderstandings about holiness arise when sanctification is reduced either to perfection, self-improvement, or an attempt to earn God's acceptance.



1. Sanctification Is Not Perfection

Sanctification does not mean reaching a state in which a Christian can no longer sin. The New Testament never presents spiritual maturity as sinless perfection. John reminds believers that *"if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves"* (1 John 1:8), while Paul openly acknowledges that he has not yet arrived but continues to press forward toward the goal (Philippians 3:12–14).

The mature Christian is not one who has ceased to struggle, but one who increasingly hates sin, loves righteousness, and returns to Christ in repentance.

2. Sanctification Is Not Natural Self-Improvement

Sanctification should not be confused with becoming more disciplined, productive, mindful, or morally respectable. These may be valuable aspects of human development, but a person does not need to be a

Christian to pursue them. Sanctification involves more than changing our behaviour; it reaches our desires, affections, motives, and aligns our will with God's will. Spiritual maturity therefore cannot be reduced to becoming a better version of ourselves. It is becoming increasingly like Jesus.

3. Sanctification Is Not a Way to Earn God's Love

We do not become holy so that God will finally love us. We pursue holiness because, in Christ, we are already loved and accepted by grace. Just as salvation begins with God's grace, sanctification continues by grace (Galatians 3:3).

Sanctification is therefore not an anxious attempt to earn acceptance but a grateful response to the grace we have already received.

Walking in the Spirit

To walk in the Spirit is to make the Spirit-directed life the defining posture of Christian discipleship. Paul says, *"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh"* (Galatians 5:16). This is not passive spirituality or self-powered religion. It is a daily dependence upon the Spirit as we centre our lives on Christ.

Walking in the Spirit begins with dying to self. Jesus calls His disciples to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). The Spirit leads us away from self-rule and teaches us to surrender our desires, ambitions, and preferences to the will of God. We no longer ask merely, *"What do I want?"* but *"What does Christ desire?"*

Walking in the Spirit also means relying on the Spirit to overcome the works of the flesh. We actively resist sin while depending on the Spirit's power (Romans 8:13).

Walking in the Spirit requires a perfect balance of Kingdom character and Kingdom power.

Power without character leads to destruction; and character without power leads to complacency. The Holy Spirit builds Christlike character through His fruit (Galatians 5:22–23) and provides supernatural capability through His gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4–11). Ultimately, the Spirit calls us to both to become like Christ and participate in the works of Christ.

HOLY SPIRIT – OUR AGENT OF TRANSFORMATION

Sanctification is impossible apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. While the Father purposes our holiness and the Son secures it through His death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit applies Christ's saving work to our daily lives. Every victory over sin, every act of obedience, and every evidence of Christlike character is the result of His gracious work within us. The Christian life is not merely believing in Christ but living by the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament consistently presents the Holy Spirit as the divine agent of sanctification. Paul writes, *"God chose you from the beginning to be saved through* ***sanctification by the Spirit*** *and belief in the truth"* (2 Thessalonians 2:13).



Likewise, Peter speaks of believers as those who have been chosen *"through the **sanctifying work of the Spirit**"* (1 Peter 1:2). These passages remind us that sanctification is not a human invention or a self-improvement project—it is the ongoing work of the Spirit of God within every believer.

The following is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in Sanctification:

The Spirit Gives New Life

The Holy Spirit first begins His sanctifying work by giving us new life. He regenerates us, grants a new heart and creates new desires, replacing hearts of stone with hearts that delight in obeying God (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

The Spirit Convicts and Cleanses

The Holy Spirit graciously exposes sin not to shame or condemn believers but to restore them to joyful fellowship with God (John 16:8). Hidden sins, impure motives, selfish ambitions, pride, bitterness, unbelief, and compromises are brought into His searching light. As we confess and repent, the Spirit continues His cleansing work, making us increasingly holy (1 John 1:9).

The Spirit Empowers Our Victory Over Sin

The Spirit weakens the dominion of sin while strengthening our desire for righteousness. He renews our minds, redirects our affections, and gives

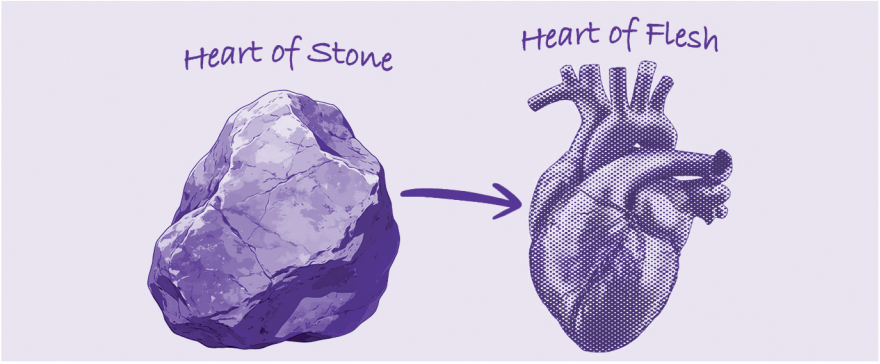
us the strength to obey God's commands. Every victory over temptation is evidence of His power at work within us (Romans 8:13).

The Spirit Transforms Our Character

The Holy Spirit continually forms the character of Jesus within us. Paul describes the evidence of transformation as the fruit of the Spirit: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (Galatians 5:22–23). These qualities cannot be manufactured by willpower or religious discipline. They are the supernatural evidence of a life surrendered to the Spirit.

Ultimately, sanctification is the lifelong work of the Holy Spirit, transforming believers from the inside out. As Paul beautifully declares, *"We all... are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This is the hope and confidence of every believer: the Holy Spirit who began His work within us will continue faithfully until we are perfectly conformed to the image of Christ.



TWO MOVEMENTS OF SANCTIFICATION: PUTTING OFF AND PUTTING ON

Throughout the New Testament, the transformation of a believer unfolds in two complementary movements.

The first is **putting off** the old self with its sinful desires and practices—a process theologians have traditionally called *mortification*.

The second is **putting on** Christ or the new life in Christ by cultivating His character and walking in obedience—a process often referred to as *vivification*.

The Apostle Paul repeatedly presents these truths together. He exhorts believers to *"put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires"* and *"put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness"* (Ephesians 4:22–24).

Likewise, in Colossians 3, believers are first commanded to *"put to death"* whatever belongs to their earthly nature (3:5) before being instructed to *"put on... compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"* (3:12). **Christian maturity is therefore not simply about removing sinful habits but replacing them with the character of Christ.**

Putting OFF Sin

The first movement of sanctification is putting off the old self with its sinful desires, attitudes, and practices (Ephesians 4:22). Sin is not a passive weakness but an active power that continually seeks to deceive, enslave, and draw believers away from intimate fellowship with God. Left unchecked, it hardens the heart, weakens the conscience, diminishes spiritual vitality, and robs the believer of joy and effectiveness in God's kingdom.

Therefore, Scripture calls believers to put sin to death. This involves far more than avoiding outward sinful behaviour. We are to identify and forsake the hidden sins of the heart also—*pride, selfish ambition, envy, bitterness, lust, unbelief, greed, fear, and every affection* that competes with Christ for first place (Colossians 3:5, Romans 12:1-2).

The battle against sin is daily and intentional. It requires continual repentance, honest self-examination, and wholehearted surrender to God (2 Corinthians 13:5, Hebrews 12:1).

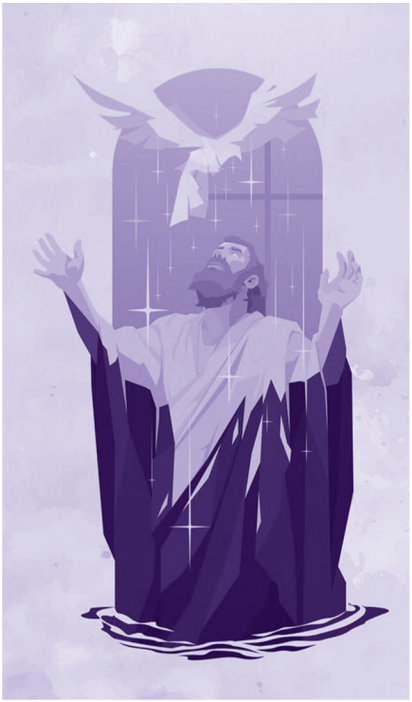
Putting ON Christ

Sanctification, however, is not complete when sin is removed. The Christian life is never defined merely by what we reject, but by what we embrace. As the old self is put off, the new self must be intentionally put on (Ephesians 4:24). The heart cannot remain spiritually empty; it must be filled with the life of Christ.

Putting on Christ means cultivating the character of Christ in every area

of life. Paul exhorts believers to clothe themselves with *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and above all, love* (Colossians 3:12–14). These are not merely moral virtues to imitate, but the visible expression of Christ's life within us. Likewise, the fruit of the Spirit is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is transforming us from the inside out.This positive work of sanctification is more than replacing bad habits with good ones. **It is the renewal of our minds, the reordering of our affections, and the shaping of our desires so that we increasingly love what God loves and delight in His will.**

The Rhythm of Sanctification



These two movements—putting off and putting on—must always remain together. To focus only on putting off sin can produce a life marked by legalism, fear, and constant unhealthy self-examination. To focus only on putting on Christ while neglecting the seriousness of sin leads to spiritual complacency. Biblical sanctification embraces both. This is the lifelong rhythm of Christian growth: continually dying to sin and continually living unto God, until the day sanctification reaches its completion in glorification.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL – CHRISTLIKENESS

The Apostle Paul declares, *"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son"* (Romans 8:29). This verse reveals that Christlikeness is not simply a personal aspiration but the eternal purpose of God. Humanity was originally created in the image of God, but sin marred that image. Through the saving work of Christ and the transforming ministry of the Holy Spirit, God is restoring what was lost. Sanctification is therefore God's gracious work of restoring His image in His redeemed people.

But what does it mean to become like Christ?

Christlikeness is not an attempt to reproduce every historical detail of Jesus' earthly life. Rather, it is to reflect His character, embrace His priorities, and imitate His way of living.

- **We are called to imitate His humility,** following the example of the One who humbled Himself and took the form of a servant (Philippians 2:5–8). True greatness in God's kingdom is found in self-denial, not self-promotion.

- **We are called to imitate His servant-heartedness.** On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus washed His disciples' feet and declared, *"I have given you an example"* (John 13:15). Christlikeness willingly embraces even the lowest acts of service for the good of others.

- **We are called to imitate His sacrificial love.** Paul commands believers, *"Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for*

us" (Ephesians 5:2). Christian love is not merely emotional affection but self-giving love that seeks the good of others, even at personal cost.

- **We are called to imitate His patient endurance.** Christ suffered unjustly yet entrusted Himself to the Father. Peter reminds believers that Christ left us *"an example, so that you might follow in his steps"* (1 Peter 2:21). Trials, disappointments, and persecution become instruments through which God shapes us into the likeness of His Son.

- Finally, **we are called to imitate His mission.** Just as the Father sent the Son into the world, Christ now sends His people (John 20:21). Christlikeness is never isolated from God's mission. Those who resemble Christ will also share His compassion for the lost, His concern for the broken, and His commitment to proclaiming the gospel.

Trying vs Training

Many Christians sincerely desire to become like Christ. They try to pray more, try to read the Bible more and try to live holy lives. While these desires are commendable, good intentions alone rarely produce lasting spiritual transformation. The Christian life is not built on occasional attempts but on intentional training. Scripture does not merely call us to try harder; it calls us to ***"train yourself for godliness"*** (1 Tim. 4:7).

A healthy garden flourishes not simply because it is watered, but because weeds are continually removed. **Just like a wise gardener, we must both cultivate and prune.** Likewise, sanctification involves both putting off the old self and putting on the new. We must honestly ask ourselves: *What habits draw me closer to Christ? What patterns quietly pull me away? What virtues should I cultivate? What sinful desires must I continually put to death?*

Paul compares the Christian life to the disciplined training of an athlete who exercises self-control in every area to win an imperishable crown (1 Cor. 9:24–27). Athletes are not shaped by occasional efforts but by consistent practice. Likewise, we cannot simply add Jesus to an already hurried, distracted, and overcrowded lifestyle and expect Him to become the centre of our lives. Following Christ requires intentionally rearranging our priorities so that communion with Him becomes the defining rhythm of our lives. **Trying begins the journey, but training produces transformation.**

A CURRICULUM FOR CHRISTLIKENESS: SPIRITUAL HABITS

While the Holy Spirit is the divine agent of sanctification, He works ordinarily through God-appointed means to accomplish this transformation. Just as no student graduates without a curriculum and no athlete succeeds without training, the Christian life requires intentional formation. **If we desire to become like Christ, we must intentionally cultivate a way of life that continually places us before His transforming presence.**

We carefully plan our finances, careers, education, health, retirement, family life, and even our daily schedules. Yet few of us have a thoughtful plan for the most important pursuit of all—*to be with Jesus, become like Him, and do what He did*. In a world marked by hurry, digital distraction, endless entertainment, and chronic exhaustion, our spiritual lives are often left to chance. The noise of modern life can easily drown out the gentle voice of God.

The Apostle Paul urged believers to imitate his *"way of life in Christ Jesus"* (1 Corinthians 4:17), reminding us that discipleship is not merely believing right doctrines but adopting **a Christ-centred way of life**. A simple plan to follow Jesus daily. Christians throughout history have spoken of a *Rule of Life*—not a legalistic set of rules, but a schedule, a set of practices, and relational rhythms that intentionally create space for communion with God.

Jesus Himself concluded the Sermon on the Mount by teaching that the wise person is not merely *"the one who hears His words but the one who puts them into practice"* (Matthew 7:24–27). Christian maturity grows through faithful practices or spiritual habits.

These practices are never the goal; they are only the pathway. They do not earn God's favour, increase our worth, or make us spiritually superior to others. They are not measures of spiritual maturity but means through which God's grace shapes our lives. They continually remind us that apart from Christ we can do nothing.

Some of the foundational spiritual habits include:

Prayer – cultivating continual communion with God, expressing dependence, worship, confession, thanksgiving, and intercession.

Bible Reading and Meditation – allowing God's Word to renew the mind, shape our worldview, and conform our thinking to Christ.

Solitude and Silence – withdrawing from noise and distraction to listen attentively to the voice of God and examine the condition of the heart.

Fasting – denying legitimate physical desires in order to deepen spiritual hunger for God and strengthen dependence upon Him.

Sabbath Rest – receiving God's gift of rest, worship, delight, and trust rather than living in relentless striving.

Worship – fixing our hearts on God's greatness, allowing His presence to reshape our loves and priorities.

Generosity – loosening the grip of materialism by reflecting God's generous heart toward others.

Service – following Christ's example by humbly using our gifts to bless and build up others.

Witness – participating in Christ's mission by proclaiming the gospel through both our words and our lives.

Christian Community – growing together through fellowship, encouragement, accountability, prayer, and mutual care within the body of Christ – the church

As we faithfully cultivate these rhythms, the Spirit gradually renews our minds, reshapes our desires, strengthens our obedience, and forms the character of Christ within us. Day by day, through these ordinary practices empowered by extraordinary grace, believers are progressively transformed into the image of Jesus. This is the curriculum of Christlikeness—the lifelong apprenticeship of becoming more like the One we love and follow.

The Paradox

One of the remarkable marks of genuine sanctification is that the holier a believer becomes, the more deeply he is aware of God's holiness and his own sin.

As we draw nearer to Christ, we do not become more impressed with ourselves; we become more captivated by His holiness and more conscious of the areas of our lives that still need His transforming grace. Spiritual maturity does not produce self-righteousness but humility. **The closer we walk with Jesus, the more we long to be fully conformed to His image and the more we grieve over anything that hinders that likeness.**

This pattern is seen throughout Scripture. When Isaiah beheld the holiness of God, he did not boast in his prophetic calling but cried, *"Woe is me!... I am a man of unclean lips"* (Isaiah 6:5). Likewise, Job, though commended by God for his integrity, responded to the overwhelming revelation of God's majesty by saying, *"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes"* (Job 42:5–6). Greater revelation produced greater humility.

This is the paradox of sanctification: **the more Christ transforms us, the less we compare ourselves with others and the more we compare ourselves with Christ.** And therfore, our love for God deepens, our hatred for sin intensifies, and our longing to be perfectly like Jesus grows stronger.

OBEDIENCE: THE PATHWAY OF SANCTIFICATION

The New Testament consistently teaches that genuine faith produces a life of obedience. The Lord Jesus repeatedly taught that obedience is evidence of a genuine relationship with Him. He said, *"If you love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). Love for Christ is demonstrated not merely by words or emotions, but by a life that gladly follows His will. Again, Jesus declared, *"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me"* (John 14:21), and challenged those who professed faith without obedience: *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?"* (Luke 6:46). At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compared the obedient believer to a wise man who built his house upon the rock by hearing His words and putting them into practice (Matthew 7:24).

James echoes the same truth. He urges believers, *"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only"* (James 1:22), warning that hearing without obedience leads to self-deception. He further writes, *"Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead"* (James 2:17). Genuine faith always expresses itself through obedient living.

Please be aware that **we do not obey in order to become God's children; we obey because we are His children.** As the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts, our lives increasingly reflect a desire to please God and walk in His ways. Sanctification, therefore, is the lifelong work of learning to joyfully obey Christ.

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of sanctification is ultimately the story of God restoring His image in His people. Every work of the Holy Spirit, every act of obedience, every spiritual discipline, every trial, every victory over sin, and every moment of repentance serves one magnificent purpose—to make us more like Jesus. The more we become like Christ, the more His beauty is reflected in us, and the more we experience the joy of belonging wholly to Him. Sanctification is not the loss of life but the recovery of the life we were created to live.

The Bible closes with a breathtaking vision of our destiny. John writes, *"They will see His face"* (Revelation 22:4). Throughout Scripture, no sinner could look upon the unveiled glory of God and live. Yet in the new creation, the redeemed will behold the face of Jesus without fear or shame. The work of sanctification will finally give way to glorification. We shall no longer struggle to become like Christ—*we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is* (1 John 3:2).

May we daily seek to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did, until the day faith becomes sight and we hear our Lord say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25:21). Then the work of sanctification will be complete, and we shall dwell forever in the presence of the One who loved us, redeemed us, and transformed us into His glorious likeness.

Chapel Service

Every Wednesday | 7pm
@ Temple of God



Teens Church

Every 2nd Saturday | 5.30pm
@ Temple of God



Hospital Visit

Contact: 080-67537777



Meet our Pastors

for Prayer & Spiritual Assistance
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SEPTEMBER 2026 CHURCH EVENTS



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