THE DOCTRINE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH
Pt 1

“Sanctification, change toward God, is the goal of all Christian counseling. Successful counseling changes the Christian to make him more like Christ. Movement toward or away from the stature of Christ is a deeply moral issue, never neutral. So, the change we are talking about is substantial change of a person’s life. Brought about by the ministry of the Word, and blessed by the Spirit of God, it brings the counselee closer to the likeness of Christ. In short, it is significant change because it glorifies God.” *(Adams[[1]](#endnote-2))*

As we counsel people, our primary focus should be to help people bring God glory through the change of sanctification. God’s eternal purpose for them is to become more like Christ. These two simple thoughts should always be at the forefront of our minds as we help people to change. Doing so will relieve the tension or anxiety associated with difficult situations and help the counselee to grow in their understanding of the need for God to intercede in their lives. “To be sanctified is to have your faith simplified, clarified, and deepened. You need God. You know God. You love God. You see life, God, yourself, others more truly.” *(Powlison[[2]](#endnote-3))* Change toward God is changing in Christ. This change is progressive and will one day be complete.

“Whenever a person makes a turn for the better, sanctification is happening. Like the word save, sanctify has a past tense, a present tense, and future tense: In the past tense, your sanctification has already happened. You are a saint…You have been saved. In the present tense, your sanctification is now being worked out. God is working throughout your life… you are being saved. In the future tense, your sanctification will be perfected. You will live. Your love will be perfected. You will see God’s face when he decisively acts to complete his work of conforming you to the image of Jesus. You will participate in the glory of God himself.” *(Powlison[[3]](#endnote-4))*

Counseling/discipleship encompasses God’s eternal purpose for us to change into the image of Christ and continually grow in Christ. This occurs through the process of progressive sanctification.

 Rom. 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

 2 Cor. 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

 2 Pe. 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

Peter is issuing a command, “*But grow*” or increase. We can say then that 2 Peter 3:18 is not a suggestion, it is a command. If we are being commanded to grow. In what ways are we being commanded to grow?[[4]](#endnote-5)

Spiritual growth is in a Person

*“in grace ………… “of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

*“in the knowledge .. “of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

We are to grow in grace and knowledge in a person. The word grow can be translated with the word *increase*. So, we should be growing, increasing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The implication is that there is continual action going on in the believer’s life, growth in grace, growth in knowledge “*of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”.*

Grace is not only unmerited favor, it is the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in life.[[5]](#endnote-6) Grace is God imparting the character, nature and personality of Christ upon the heart of us as believers and that grace doing a divine work in us. Knowing Him and then knowing more about Him is more than academic or simply understanding or intelligent comprehension, “*in knowledge”* means to come to know by intimate knowledge that has a transformational effect. In other words, knowing Him is being influenced by Him. Knowledge that is more than knowing, it has to do with perception, understanding, reasoning, learning, with a focus on application of knowledge, that knowledge has had a transformational effect on me. That is what 2 Peter 3:18 is communicating to us, “grow in the grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “This is what all the work of grace aims at – an ever deeper knowledge of God, and an ever closer fellowship with Him. Grace is God drawing us sinners closer and closer to himself.”[[6]](#endnote-7)

*Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,*

Paul is stating that the influence of Grace on the heart does something in verse 12, it is training, it teaches. The Greek word for training has in mind what a parent does for a child, it speaks of the entire training process: teaching, encouragement, correction, and discipline. Grace is a teacher in this sense. Grounded in God’s nature, grace makes ethical demands of Christians consistent with His nature. But those demands are not beyond the believer’s ability to fulfill. We have the very nature of God in us which empowers us and enables us. All of this is accomplished by the empowerment and enablement of our new nature. 2 Cor 5:17

DIVINE EMPOWERMENT

*2 Pe 1:3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to[c] his own glory and excellence,*

DIVINE ENABLEMENT

*2 Pe 1:4 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.*

In short, the Holy Spirit of God uses the Holy Word of God to conform us into the image of the Holy Son of God.

“What happens is that the almighty Creator, the Lord of hosts, the great God before whom the nations are as a drop in a bucket, comes to you and begins to talk to you through the words and truths of Holy Scripture. What, then, does the activity of knowing God involve? Holding together the various elements involved in this relationship, as we have sketched it out, we must say that knowing God involves, first, listening to God’s Word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it, in application to oneself; second, noting God’s nature and character, as his Word and works reveal it; third, accepting his invitations and doing what he commands; fourth, recognizing and rejoicing in the love that he has shown in thus approaching you and drawing you into this divine fellowship.” [[7]](#endnote-8)

You and I have the greatest opportunity and potential to be everything God wants us to be, if we consistently seek God’s Truth and apply God’s Truth to everyday life. God has empowered us and enabled us, He is using His Truth to sanctify us, Jn 17:17, people, circumstances, and trials as well as a myriad of other means to conform us into the image of Christ. “Though the details bring innumerable variables to the table, constructive change occurs through the interplay of these five factors: God, Scripture, other people, life circumstances, and the human heart.”[[8]](#endnote-9)

Unfortunately, sometimes Christianity digresses into a form of “doing” rather than becoming like Someone, Christ. Spiritual growth is in a Person not something. As we do grow in Christ we do grow in specific areas of our lives, but that growth is in the likeness of Christ in these areas.

It is important that we understand that growth is in Someone, in the person of Christ, not something. *Eph 4:13 - until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,* God is continually throughout our lifetime, conforming us into the image of Christ. That is His eternal purpose, Rom 8:29. He has given us His divine nature for this purpose 2 Pe 1:4 and is reshaping us into Christ’s image. “God reshapes me into his own image. Amid all of life’s confusion, he transforms my heart so that I can think, desire, speak, and act in ways consistent with who he is and what he is doing on earth. Positive personal change takes place when my dreams of change line up with God’s purposes for change. As I leave behind goals of personal comfort and self-fulfillment, I reach out for Christ. I want to be more like him each day.” [[9]](#endnote-10) It’s not about what you are doing, it’s about what you are becoming. Like Christ, Christlikeness!

A person is more like Christ in how he manages his life circumstances today because of becoming more like Jesus Christ in specific areas of his life. “Substantial change requires the Holy Spirit’s alteration of the heart (one’s inner life known only to God and oneself). Outward changes of any significance must begin there. Anything less is an unbiblical and inadequate view of change.”[[10]](#endnote-11) [[11]](#endnote-12)Christlikeness is God’s purpose for us in life.

“The question in our discussion today is how we have substituted a person for an act? Grace speaks of unmerited favor bestowed on undeserving people. God’s grace is unmerited in the sense that we cannot earn it by merit, and we cannot prevent it by demerit.” [[12]](#endnote-13)

When we study the word grace, we find that grace not only means unmerited favor, but especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life. So, we could say that grace describes the whole of God's character and activity toward man. Grace has a greater influence, a shaping influence, one that engages the person to whom the riches of God’s grace at Christ’s expense has by unmerited favor been applied. This means that grace is not an abstract quality, but is an active, work, manifesting itself in Gods character, vitally impacting and centrally influencing the heart to become like Christ. Grace is a part of the character of God; therefore grace is a byproduct of God’s divine person. God is grace, His character exudes grace. Jn 1:14, 16, & 17. The implication of verse 16 “*And of his fulness have all we received”,* is that salvation has brought to us the full bounty of God’s Grace upon our lives. We are fully equipped and fully able to follow the command of 2 Pe 3:18, by His grace!

Unfortunately, sometimes Christianity digresses into a form of “doing” rather than becoming like Someone, Christ. For some, the process of sanctification is centered more upon telling people what to do, but very little about telling people how to do it. This is a result of an outward man view of sanctification. The emphasis is on performance, a list of “do’s and dont's”. Of course, how we live is important, but our focus should be on how we interpret and encourage Christlikeness. Some have focused on outer-man issues for so long that they are blind to seeing how to help people at meaningful and spiritual inner-man level changes. Their focus is not on the heart but on what one looks like, is involved in, is following, and so on.

So instead of developing a heart of conviction developed by wisdom; instead of the hard work of confrontation out of love and concern; instead of seeing heart issues, addressing heart issues and working on heart issues with people; instead of developing core values that take time to develop, we set up outer-man rules because it is easier to speak out about it, complain about it, or gossip about it, than actually taking someone aside, addressing the issue, and helping them with it.

Wouldn’t you agree that there are hundreds of people who are “doing something” for God, yet who are not growing to be more like the Lord Jesus in their spiritual lives? They have not learned to internalize spiritual truth and reproduce it in their lives. Personal change and development originate from the spiritual change of becoming more like God’s Son. “Doing something” is a response to becoming like God’s Son, not just for the sake of service, but because the desires of the heart are changing. For instance, a person is more like Christ in how he manages his life circumstances today because of becoming more like Jesus Christ in specific areas of his life. He displays a noticeable desire to be like Jesus, and his response to life around him is more Christlike. His continual pursuit of the Father’s will, “not my will but your will be done” Lk. 22:42, has changed his attitude and outlook toward himself and especially others. His heart’s attitude and response to life is more Christlike in the three principal areas of life - home, work and church. Jesus lived in a broken world, *Heb 2:14-18*, and modeled for us how to work through life’s circumstances perfectly. *1 Pe 2:21* He is our standard and example for life and godliness. Once a person begins to exercise godliness from the heart, change in life begins.

*1 Tim. 4:7-8 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*

Let’s define some aspects of salvation and sanctification:

1. Regeneration: The new birth produced through the implantation of spiritual life by the Holy Spirit. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God. It is not a work of man. It is not something that man can do but something that God does. “In this sense the soul is passive in regeneration, which (subjectively considered) is a change wrought in us, and not an act performed by us.” (Hodge[[13]](#endnote-14)) Jn. 1:12-13 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

2. Conversion: The turning from sin unto God. Faith, repentance, and conversion are human enablement’s given by God. A change is produced in the soul of the sinner, and the Holy Spirit imparts life to the one who is dead in trespasses and sin. Eph. 2:1 "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sin."

Matthew Henry described conversion: *"The understanding is opened to receive the divine light, the will opened to receive the divine law, and the affections opened to receive the divine love. When the heart is thus opened to Christ, the ear is opened to His Word, the lips opened in prayer, the hand opened in charity, and the steps enlarged in gospel obedience.”*

3.Justification: A legal action whereby the believing sinner is forgiven, cleared of all his sins, and accounted righteous. Justification changes, or declares to be changed, the relation of the sinner to the justice of God. Justification is by faith alone. *Rom. 4* Based on Christ’s finished work we are declared just!

Justification is an act -- Sanctification is a work. Justification is declaratory -- Sanctification is experiential. Justification is done for us -- Sanctification is done in us.

4. Sanctification: “Separation” or “setting apart” - from the same root as “holy” and “saint”. It is a one-time act done to a believer immediately at salvation by the Holy Spirit, *2 Th. 2:13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.* It isa gradual process whereby the believer is set apart more and more from sin to God on a daily basis. It covers the entire earthly lifespan from justification to glorification and is not to be thought of as just an act (like justification), but an ongoing process. Sanctification is the continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in believers, making us holy by conforming our character, affections, and behavior into the image of Jesus Christ. Viewing salvation from the right perspective enables us to see the difference between the act of salvation, and the continued effects of salvation in the believer’s life, and thereby understand how he changes. *1 Th. 5:23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

5. Glorification: The divinely wrought change that takes place in the believer when he dies, whereby he becomes sinless, (and especially referring to the resurrection, when he will be made complete in perfection of both body and soul).

Sanctification is a Work Done by God in Three Distinct Ways. *Rom. 6:1-14*

* Positional sanctification: The work of the Holy Spirit setting us apart to salvation. There *is* an immediate aspect of sanctification that is simultaneous with justification*: 1 Cor.6:11 “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.”*
* Progressive sanctification: The growth process that is ongoing in the life of every believer in grace conforming him to the likeness of Christ. *Jn. 17:19* “*And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”*
* Permanent sanctification: Glorification, being conformed to the image of Christ in eternity, is the final and complete transformation into the likeness of Christ when we are changed into His image. *1 Jn. 2:3* “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”*

Applying these truths about Spiritual Growth in the discipleship /counseling process:

I. What happens when a Christian does not grow?

1. Like a baby they:
2. Need constant care. They usually become high-maintenance Christians always needing guidance.
3. Have limited joy. Babies are only happy when they are satisfied and are easily upset.
4. Do not have the capacity to serve others. Babies are served, they do not serve.[[14]](#endnote-15)
5. When a Christian does not grow spiritually:
6. They exhibit all of the above in their lives.
* They are easily tossed about by things.
* They can become hard to please and are often selfish.
* They become easily depressed and discouraged.
* They become divisive and sometimes unruly.
1. Why must believers grow?
	1. Jesus did. *Lk. 2:52*
* Believers are commanded to grow. *2 Pe. 3:18*
* It is God's plan. *Rom. 8:28*
* It avoids unnecessary trouble and problems. *Eph. 4:14,15*
1. This doctrine of spiritual growth/sanctification is the basis for all the church’s ministry to believers.
* Often a person who claims to be saved will be puzzled or stumped when asked if they are growing and changing in their spiritual life. If asked where in a specific area did they grow spiritually in the past week, month, or year, too often they are perplexed and don’t have a direct answer to that question.
* The doctrine of spiritual growth impacts everything, including these relationships: marital, parent/child, employee/employer, church member to church member, and friendships. There is not one single relationship in life that is not affected by our spiritual growth. If there is no spiritual growth, there is no positive spiritual impact in the principal relationships in life. The three main areas of life are the home, work, and church. Those three areas are the principal places we spend the majority of our time and effort. Look for spiritual growth in the three principal areas of life, if there is no growth, probe to find out why.

II. What happens when shortcuts to spiritual growth are implemented?

* One shortcut is the view that decisions, crisis experiences, and quick fixes provide spiritual growth and thereby make the process of sanctification mystical. This view arises from being feeling-oriented about God. “I feel God is with me, I feel the Spirit in me” is a commonly used phrase. This is akin to experiencing good feelings about spiritual things without tangible change. Be careful to watch for a spiritual life that is feeling-oriented.
* Another shortcut is the quick fix. Today in our instant-gratification and instant-success mindset many believers want a fast track for spiritual growth. They desire an easy quick-fix method to eliminate the struggle - any method to make the Christian life easier and more successful. Be careful to listen to language that suggests that problems must be fixed soon, or the idea that they must get past a problem area hurriedly. Impatience is a sign of desire for the quick fix. Consider that God may have other plans for this person; He may want them to endure the situation to learn and grow. Make sure to express this possibility to the individual.
* There are many shortcuts that involve a kind of mysticism that leads to a certain mindset that is communicated in various questionable viewpoints. Often, clichés that describe what a person will do to take care of sin problems or describe a spiritual experience. Here is a sample of those various views and clichés. Some are dated but you can add your own experience or one you have heard in the past.
1. *Salvation Solves It All*
2. Some people think that a true salvation experience spells automatic victory over sin, the gospel gets substituted for a cure all, but the Scripture never says justification replaces sanctification. It is important to understand that sanctification is a process, that salvation is indeed a one-time event, but it also includes continual growth in grace.

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

This passage in Ephesians contrasts justification with progressive sanctification. A clear understanding of the gospel and its effects is vitally important for believers to understand.

B. *Dedication Makes It Easy*

1. “I’ve dedicated my life to the Lord.”

What does it mean to you to dedicate your life to the Lord? What does the term rededicate mean to you? Does it mean “I’ll do better, try harder, apply intestinal fortitude, etc.?” The concept of dedication, if not explained thoroughly, can leave the person who makes this claim very fuzzy. Exactly what did I dedicate? Is repentance and confession involved or just giving something over to Christ?

It is Biblical to present our bodies to God, Rom. 12:1,2 *as a living sacrifice*. It is also Biblical to make sure we are yielding our bodies to God in concrete ways. Rom. 6:13 …. *present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.* Presenting our members to be used and controlled by the new man that we are in Christ as an instrument for righteousness. This means fighting the flesh and giving our outer-man and our inner-man over to God’s purposes.

The word translated, *yield*, or *present,* indicates concrete commitment toward something. To present, or more exactly to place, as to place something at someone’s disposal, better describes what we might call “dedicating our lives to the Lord”.

*Rom. 6:13….present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

Rom. 6:16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Rom. 6:19 ….. so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

It is important for a person to understand confession and repentance. It is very important for them to understand how repentance is not only a onetime event before God in salvation, but also a daily walk with God. Take time to go through the confession and repentance homework. 9 Confession & Repentance bah.docx

1. “I’ve laid it all on the altar.”

What did you lay on the altar? Does laying it all on the altar automatically solve the problem? The choice to lay on the altar does not automatically change anything except my perspective on what brought me to the altar. Although this might be an old expression of confessing to God any given sin or the lack of dedication to God, its modern counterpart would be a level of heightened commitment, or what might be called a “commitment moment”.

When an individual commits to something, it does not automatically eliminate the struggle. If we start and stop with commitment, the solution to the problem remains vague and unclear. We should help the individual understand that a commitment is fine, but there is more required. Jesus said in *Luke 9:23 “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* Being a disciple is indeed a call to total commitment. We are called to self-denial, literally a death to self, but God doesn’t just call us to self-denial, He calls us to live in and through Christ as the true vine and we as the branches. We cannot bear fruit in life without Him being the source and center of life. In *John 15:1-8,* He calls us to deny a life of our own and live life in Christ, and in *Col. 3:1-4*, with our affections, desires, and goals centered on His kingdom purposes. Counting the cost of true discipleship is recognizing that God’s goals are my goals and not the other way around. To decide to follow Christ with no intention for specific spiritual growth, with only a decision moment that included a commitment, will not bring about change. Take time to speak to that person about their “decision moment”.

1. “I’ve decided to let Christ be the Lord of my life.”

To whom does this choice belong? If a believer can make this choice, who is assuming the position as authority? No individual chooses to let Christ be the Lord of his life. If a person is genuinely saved, Christ is already the Lord of his life. Speak to this person about the Lordship of Christ.

1. “I gave it all to Jesus.”

What and how did you give it to Him? Help this person to be specific.

1. “I’ve died to self so Jesus can live through me.”

Be very careful of this concept. It is true that we are commanded to die to self, but it does not allow us to be irresponsible in obeying the commands of Scripture. Jesus lives in and through us, but we are in partnership with Him in the sanctification process. Help this person to understand what this means.

1. “I gave my burden to the Lord.”

Again, a decision is not intended to easily relieve or excuse us from our responsibility to obey Scripture. Decisions are made or should be made about something specific; an individual may be convicted about something, draw that out. In other words, the individual has identified through the preaching of the Word, personal Bible study, or some other exposure to the Word, a sinful habit, practice, or way of thinking. This forces a concrete change rather than allowing things to stay fuzzy. Lead them to understand how they can now deal specifically with that burden.

1. *Stronger Devotional Life Will Lead to Solving Problems*

Many believers have preconceived notions about vaulting themselves into a higher level of spirituality or experience through daily devotions, whereby they receive some type of emotional surge for the day. Some believers feel they get some kind of zap of inspiration, a feeling of urge, a nudge or feeling of warmth cascading over them because of devotional thought. Devotions are proper, but the end result of our devotional life should only be growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, in order to become more like Christ. If not, ask deeper questions about their devotional life. What does their devotional life look like? Help them with an understanding of how devotional reading and prayer life should look. God did not give us His Word to be solely inspired by it; He gave it in a clear form so that we can apply it to our lives. *2 Tim. 3:16-17 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

III. What are consequences of the belief that God Alone Is Active And Man Is Passive?

* Extremes in “growth and change” theology occur.
1. Quietism asserts that the Christian is to be passive (quiet) in the process of spiritual growth and to let God do everything.
* According to quietist teaching, the Christian must exert no energy or effort in the process whatsoever. Feeble human effort only hinders the working of God’s power. Quietists believe Christians must simply surrender fully to the Holy Spirit (also called “dying to self,” “crucifying oneself,” “mortifying the flesh,” or “placing one’s life on the altar”). The Spirit then moves in and lives a life of victory through us, and Christ literally replaces us (“It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me.”) This is a misinterpretation and perversion of *Gal. 2:20*. Quietism stresses self-denial (to deny oneself, give up; renounce). The individual must cease all attempts to do anything about his problems. Complete passivity is to be strived for: when this is attained, sin is impossible. All forms of works are regarded as futile and even harmful (works might damage this state of perfect rest in the presence of God). Christ or the Holy Spirit in the believer is supposed to act instead of the believer himself. The slogan is: “Let go and let God.” It is a form of hyper-grace, just love God and it will all go well, God’s grace will cover it all.
1. Keswick theology: The view that God alone is active, and that man is passive.
* A form of fatalism that basically teaches that it is the believer’s duty to take leave of his own personality so that Christ can make all the decisions. Keswick theology stresses man must become inactive instead of being active. Self is so bad that it cannot enter the struggle. We must wait for the second blessing. The slogan is: “Let the Holy Spirit live it through you.”
* Keswick theology is a modified Wesleyan holiness approach. Wesley taught a second work of grace and the idea that man can reach perfection/sanctification, or sinless perfection. He taught that the sin nature may be eradicated at a crisis experience, calling this result “Christian perfection” through entire sanctification by faith. Wesley used terms like “Christian perfection”, “perfect love”, and “holiness” as synonyms for his doctrinal teaching. John Wesley believed Christian perfection is available to all believers in this life as a gift from God, and to be accomplished in a moment in time. He stated that Christian perfection encompasses the love of God and our neighbor and implies deliverance from all sin. In a letter to the London bishop, Wesley described “one that is perfect” as “one in whom is, 'the mind which was in Christ,' and who so 'walketh as He walked;' a man that 'hath clean hands and a pure heart;' or that is 'cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit;' one 'In whom there is no occasion of stumbling,' and who, accordingly, 'doth not commit sin.’” *(Wesley[[15]](#endnote-16))* Believers are to expect Christian perfection in this life, not at death.
* Wesleyan theology stresses an “infusion of grace”. Many counselees who do not profess Wesleyanism may similarly be striving for perfection or seeking an infusion of something to ease the load or find an easy way to change. Both Keswick and Wesley teaching are ultimately perfectionistic in the sense that they redefine sin, limiting it to volitional acts of rebellion (at least with reference to one’s ongoing fellowship with God). The result is that an individual may at any point in time be described as sinless.
1. Passive Christianity.

A passive Christian has an attitude and behavior of one, while feeling miserable or needing closeness with God, waits for God to do something. Passive spirituality stresses taking an inactive approach to life by waiting for God to act upon them in some mystical way before responding to sin. These mystical ways could include a warmth of conviction, the sting of guilt, or the feeling of God's departure. A passive Christian waits for some sign from heaven: a car wreck, a house burns down, the loss of a job, sickness, etc., before responding.

IV. Consequences of the view that Man must look within himself in the process of sanctification.

Like salvation, or the more technical term, soteriology, sanctification, or the doctrine of spiritual growth has unnecessary baggage attached to it. For example, we read in Galatians chapter 3.

*Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*

In chapter 1 verses 6-10, Paul is addressing a different gospel, a false gospel that proposed that believers must keep the Old Testament law, adding baggage to the gospel and confusing the message of the gospel. These group of Judaizers had infiltrated the church as well as attacked Paul’s character. The Judaizers were a faction of the Jewish Christians, both of Jewish and non-Jewish origins, who regarded the Levitical laws of the Old Testament as still binding on all Christians. The Judaizers taught that submitting to circumcision, keeping the feast days of the Jewish calendar, basically a faith plus Law, contrast here is between faith and Law. Paul’s deep concern over the churches’ defection from the gospel causes him to write………*Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?*

The word “bewitched” has the connotation of deception. The idea of the word is to harm by means of magic. The ancient world would understand what Paul was saying, there was a widespread belief that the presence of unseen evil was the cause of most harmful disruption in life. They were accustomed to hearing about being surrounded by invisible and hostile beings which sought power over them, or their region by magical means. This word was used to refer to the casting of the evil eye on someone. This word infers deception, by being placed under a spell. *“has bewitched”. “to do hurt to someone through unfavorable words.”* (Theological dictionary of the New Testament) To charm or fascinate in a misleading way, to deceive a person by devious and crafty means, with the possibility of a religious connotation

This is certainly not to be understood in a realistic way as mechanical magic. The danger is that the Galatian believers, “have willingly yielded to these magicians and their influence without realizing to what powers of Falsehood they were surrendering. The characteristic point of the βασκανία is that it exerts its influence without extraordinary means.” (Theological dictionary of the New Testament) The New Living Translation states, “Who has cast an evil spell on you?”. That would be a good way to describe what has happened to the believers Paul is addressing, it was as though they were fascinated, or spell bound by these false teachers so that they fail to see the obvious that is then addressed in the rest of the verse. They were deceived without noticing or taking into consideration what Paul would say next.

*Galatians 3:1…It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.* Paul here is reinforcing how Christ and His gospel had come to them with full clarity as portrayed in His crucifixion. The Galatian believers saw the crucified Christ in the powerful presentation of the gospel by Paul. Later Paul would write*: 4:15 What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?* You would have gone overboard in following what I was teaching and showed great love and sacrifice for my ministry, but now, have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? When people hear a truth that is counter to their long held unbiblical truth, they often become defensive and oppose the messenger. That is what is happening to Paul. That is what happens in our day, especially when dealing with long held short cuts and self-help efforts for spiritual growth.

When people hear counter biblical data about the self-help, self-esteem, self-love, or self-worth movement, they do at times become agitated. This philosophy so permeates our society, even deeply into Christianity that believers have fell into the trap of being influenced by its philosophy.

1. The Self-help movement.
2. Self-help is the belief that self is a bundle of needs, and that personal growth is progressively meeting these needs. The Self-help movement, sometimes called self-improvement is the idea that we can better ourselves through self-effort, identifying deeper needs, improving will power, having a better self-image.

Abraham Maslow described within his, (Hierarchy of Needs, there are five), something called our essential inner nature that includes, “esteem“, and self-actualization”. Similar to what is meant by self-help. He believed that unless this essential core is accepted, loved, and allowed to grow and develop, it is not possible to strengthen your inner self. To the extent that our needs are met we become better at functioning within society, families and so forth.

1. This kind of thinking is the basis for the self-esteem, self-love, self-worth, movement. It is recognized especially in Christian psychiatry, which is typically an eclectic mixture of psychiatric methods and personal belief about Christianity.

“Jesus said, you are of more value than the birds Matt. 6:26. I take that to mean ultimately that humans have the unique capacity to enjoy God as God and reflect his worth and glory as no other creature can. Thus the worth of the human being is our God-given potential to make much of God by enjoying him and valuing him and cherishing him and his ways.”[[16]](#endnote-17)

We do have worth; however, our worth is in Christ and what it cost Him to pay for our redemption. Nowhere in the Bible does it tell us to work for or desire self-esteem, self-love, or self-worth. The Bible does tell us to esteem others more than ourselves. *Phil 2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* The Bible also tells us to esteem Christ above all. *Phil 2:9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,*

Our worth is in our identity. *1 Cor. 3:23 and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.* Our worth is in Christ who lives in us. *Gal. 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.* Our worth is in a life hidden with Christ. *Col. 3:1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

For many, self-esteem, self-worth, and man-centered theology have created a greater confidence in self rather than the Holy Spirit. The truth is, only the Holy Spirit can produce and sustain spiritual life. Apart from Him, all our efforts are in vain. Our confidence is Christ in us, in the work of Christ in us.  *Phil 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* We ascribe Him glory and prominence as He works a work in us, recognizing that we are instruments for His purpose not our own self-image. Rather the image of Christ in us, this is where true confidence not worth is ascribed.

The notion that our worth is connected with anything other than our identity in Christ actually creates a strain within our hearts. We are sinners that have been saved by grace. We are confident people because we are assured of the work that Christ is doing in us and through us. *Phil 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* We ascribe Him glory and prominence as He works a work in us, recognizing that we are instruments for His purpose not our own self-image.

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2. The Greatest Commandment reads, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength…(and) love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these Mk12:29-31. The assumption is that you already love yourself, the passage is not promoting self-love, self-worth or self-esteem, it is stressing the fact that man already loves himself and should love his neighbor as he does himself. “The weight of other biblical texts, church history, and evangelical theology all indicate that Jesus meant, “You already love yourself. What you need to learn is to focus the same amount of attention, interest, and concern that you already give yourself on others.”[[17]](#endnote-18) “The same self-love that is presupposed by Jesus is likewise presupposed in Paul’s argument in Eph 5:28,29, where he urges husbands to love their wives “as you love [are loving] your own body.”[[18]](#endnote-19) This is an area in which a counselor may need to spend considerable time. We want believers to see their worth in Christ.
3. Self-help stresses what man must do for himself. (humanistic). Man can obey in his own strength. A chief goal of the self-help movement is satisfying your own perceived needs -- being self-satisfied. You should “look deep within.” You should “get in touch with your inner self” for a deeper, richer spiritual life. The way to “get closer to God” is to feel better about yourself. Self-help is the way to “get the victory over life.”
4. The movement toward Pragmatism.
	1. *“Pragmatism is a philosophical movement that includes those who claim that an ideology or proposition is true if it works satisfactorily, that the meaning of a proposition is to be found in the practical consequences of accepting it, and that unpractical ideas are to be rejected.” [[19]](#endnote-20)*

The error of pragmatism is that it regards methodologies that “work” as more important and more viable than those that are Biblical. A pragmatist is concerned primarily with whether a given practice is expedient, not necessarily with whether it is in harmony with Scripture. Pragmatism builds a strategy from the practical, rather than asking what is Biblical. The result is a man-centered counseling that attempts to accomplish divine purposes by superficial programs and human methodology rather than by the Word or the power of the Spirit.

* 1. Pragmatism stresses using marketing methods for spiritual growth, step programs, and “1,2,3, methods” - as long as they bring success, they must be good.
* The slogan is: “If it works, keep on doing it; if it doesn’t work, try something else until you get it right”. Much pragmatic thought is borrowed from secular counseling methods. Help the counselee to understand that counseling is not about a method, it is about a process - the process of spiritual growth.

Conclusion: If the preceding premises and statements accurately portray the way to grow and change spiritually, then every imperative, exhortation, and admonition in the New Testament is a hollow command or addressed to the wrong people. There is no magic wand or whiffle dust to throw on people; there are no zaps, boosts, or special elevators to take us to some other level of spirituality. Through self-help man cannot reach a different plateau; man is habituated toward sin and sin must be dealt with by the Holy Scriptures. We’ve outlined some popular substitutes, but we must understand clearly the goal and process of the Word of God. Being consistent in using God’s program of change is what will transform our counselees. The thrill of understanding God’s way is how problems and issues can be dealt with, forgiveness can be enjoyed, and growth to please God can be realized.

V. what happens when the BELIEVER has a clear understanding of SPIRITUAL growth and change?

1. They take an active approach toward God by:
2. Confessing sin to God and the appropriate people.
3. Having a plan to put off the sinful patterns developed and put on new Godly patterns by the renewing of the heart/mind.
4. Identifying the sin in their lives.
5. Taking on personal responsibility while depending on the strength promised by the Holy Spirit.
6. They recognize that God is active and involved in the process of their sanctification.
* The Father purges the fruitful vine as they submit to the pruning. Submission is a key factor; pruning is not always comfortable.

Jn. 15:2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

* The Word of God is the sanctifier. The Word of God is the key agent of change.

Jn. 15:3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you

Jn. 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

These three verses in John tell us that the Word of God is used as the sanctifier and that the Father does the purging. Every teaching from the New Testament, after the Great Commission given in *Matt. 28:19-20*, is a description of winning and equipping faithful disciples in the local church *Eph. 4:11-12*. All this is possible because of God’s sufficient and all-encompassing Word that is applicable to all of life and godliness *2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pe. 1:3*.

We have the Holy Spirit working in us *1 Cor. 2:12-13,* and we have the very nature of God in us which empowers us *2 Pe.1:4*. In short, the Holy Spirit of God uses the Holy Word of God to conform us into the image of the Holy Son of God. You and I have the greatest opportunity and potential to be everything God wants us to be, if we consistently seek God’s Truth and apply God’s Truth to everyday life. If we do a constant inventory on our lives and lay our lives up against the grid of God’s Word, we can examine the dissimilarities and it should motivate us to change. Keep this in mind as you work with counselees.[[20]](#endnote-21)

1. Adams, Jay E. How to Help People Change [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Powlison, David. How Does Sanctification Work? p.14 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Ibid pg. 13,14 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Barrett, Michael, Complete in Him pg. 195 “I like to think of sanctification as the believer’s becoming in experience what grace has purposed him to be. Sanctification is living in the reality of gospel grace. Since in our justification God regards us as holy and righteous, we should live as though we are. Although holiness is not the prerequisite for salvation, it is the evidence of it. This is why I say that sanctification is the essential and certain *effect of the gospel*.” [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Packer, J.I., Knowing God Ch 1 The Study of God. Knowledge applied. “Do not all children of God long, with the psalmist, to know just as much about our heavenly Father as we can learn? …….. Yes, of course it is. But if you look back to Psalm 119 again, you will see that the psalmist’s concern to get knowledge about God was not a theoretical but a practical concern. His supreme desire was to know and enjoy God himself, and he valued knowledge about God simply as a means to this end. He wanted to understand God’s truth in order that his heart might respond to it and his life be conformed to it.” [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Ibid Ch 21 These inward trials [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Ibid Ch 3 What knowing God involves. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Powlison, David. How Does Sanctification Work? pg. 63 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Tripp, Paul, Lane, Timothy, How people Change.pg pg. 40 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. Adams, Jay E.; Zondervan. How to Help People Change [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. See also <https://christinyoucounseling.com/> homework page <https://christinyoucounseling.com/counseling/homework/> 8 Getting to the Heart [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. See Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace, (living confidently in God’s unfailing love)* pgs. 15-34, for further study. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Hodge, Charles. Systematic Theology, p. 31 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Packer, J.I., Knowing God. Ch 21. “Earthly parents enjoy their babies, but are, to say the least, sorry if their growing children want to be babies again, and they hesitate to let them return to babyish ways. It is exactly so with our heavenly Father. He wants us to grow in Christ, not to stay babes in Christ.” [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Wesley, John. Written in 1744, *Works,* vol. v. pg. 35. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Piper, John Taste and see: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life, pg125 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Brad Hambrick, If Not Self-Esteem, Then What? Pg4 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Adams, Jay E., The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, and Self-Image pg. 69 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. https://iep.utm.edu/pragmati/ [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. You are free to distribute this paper as a homework assignment or use its contents for other useful means, as long as it is not altered, and credit is given to the author Brad Hilgeman. <https://christinyoucounseling.com> [↑](#endnote-ref-21)