

Marriage And The Gift Of Sanctification

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Take your Bible in hand and turn to Philippians chapter 2 this morning. Philippians chapter 2. As you turn there, let me ask, do you ever wish that you knew God's perfect will for your life? Isn't that something we ask? What is God's will for my life?

Well, the good news is you actually can know God's will for your life. God is not mysterious. He's not hidden His will from us. He's made it plain for us on the pages of Scripture. It says in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, for example:

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification;..."

This is the will of God, Your sanctification. If you're in Christ this morning, understand that He will now in all things at all times be working for your sanctification. We've seen this recently in Ephesians chapter 5, as we've talked about the fact that Christ gave up Himself for the church so that He might sanctify her. So God's will for our lives obviously includes every moment of every day, the most significant events, the most significant interactions and decisions, all the way down to the most mundane.

We understand He's not chosen to reveal the specifics of His will about each one of those interactions and decisions, but He has told us that in each of those daily events, He is always working to glorify His name, to build His church, and to sanctify His church. God's ordained all that will come to pass, but He's ordained all that will come to pass to accomplish the goal of our sanctification. That means that plan is all-encompassing, and it must encompass every earthly relationship that we have, including especially the gift of marriage.

So what's God's ultimate goal for you in your marriage? That He may be glorified in and through you as He brings about your sanctification. Now, what is God's ultimate goal for your spouse in your marriage? That He may be glorified in and through them as He brings about their sanctification. From the beginning in this series, we've talked about the fact that God's chief end for mankind is His glory, to bring Him glory, and to enjoy Him forever.

And what we'll see today is that one of the primary means that God uses of glorifying His name in us and causing us to enjoy Him in the way that we should is the process of daily sanctification. So the greatest need of your marriage and the greatest hope for your marriage is personal sanctification.

Over the last couple of weeks, we've looked at God's amazing standard for marriage in Ephesians chapter five. And let's just be honest, it's a daunting standard. It's not a standard that any of us have the ability to live up to. So how in the world are we going to be anything close to the standard that God's laid out in Ephesians five? How are we going to do that? Well, it's only going to come through the process of sanctification.

So for the remainder of this series, which will be this week and two more, we will deal specifically with how we pursue sanctification in our daily lives and how that is to affect all of our relationships and especially the relationship of marriage. Because as we are all transformed into the character of Christ one degree at a time, our marriages will grow into

Christ's standard one degree at a time. And as we grow into that standard, we will glorify and enjoy God more and more degree after degree, which means we'll enjoy the gift of marriage more and more degree by degree.

But if you don't catch anything else I say, I want us to understand this key truth this morning. And that is the fact that one of the greatest gifts of marriage is the gift of sanctification. One of the greatest gifts of marriage is the gift of sanctification.

Now, I understand some of you may be starting to lose your patience with me in this marriage series, because you've got real questions about real specific problems and you're wondering is he ever going to talk about this or is he ever going to talk about that? And all I keep talking about is theology. I promised you in this series that we would move progressively to more and more practical issues. And you may be starting to wonder if our definition of practical is the same. Let me just encourage you to hold on for a minute. Let me see if I can illustrate why I believe that the way that we're tackling this subject is the most helpful and practical way we could do it.

Consider this question for a moment. What are the primary differences between you and your spouse in personality and preference that most frequently cause conflict between you? What are the most common differences in preference and personality that cause conflict between you? Is it perhaps how you spend your money? Is it perhaps differing levels of interest and physical intimacy? Is it differences in how to operate with extended family relationships? Or maybe it's the difference in how to organize or prioritize your time as a family. Maybe it's different definitions of what constitutes cleanliness around the house. Maybe it's differing desires for depth in conversation.

You know, the answer that the world would give to each of those problems is this. I need to help you be more like me. That would solve it all. If I could just say it again, in fact, let me try just one more time just to say it from my point of view because I'm so convinced that if I could just convince you of my perspective, there'd be no more conflict and we would all both understand that I'm right and we could just move on. It's simple. I need you to be more like me.

And yet the biblical answer to all of those questions is this. Both of us need to be more like Christ. Both of us need to be more like Christ. The world's definition of a good life is a life that produces the maximum amount of personal pleasure, comfort, and happiness. But God's definition of a good life is a life that results in the maximization of His glory and our enjoyment of Him. And our gracious God uses the gift of marriage as a tool in His hand for our sanctification.

The reason for that is because marriage typically provides the most consistent opportunity to experience what the Proverbs say in Proverbs 27:17. It says there:
"Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another."

Understand that sanctification will not happen unless you are put to the test on a daily basis. It takes no effort to be selfless or humble when you and your spouse share the same preference, the same perspective, and the same opinion. Unbelievers have no trouble remaining calm and content and happy when their spouse does and acts exactly as they

wish they would. But sanctification takes place when we have to exercise the muscles of faith, humility, and trust in Christ when our circumstances are not enjoyable or ideal.

Think about it. Why does iron sharpen iron? It's because the friction created by scraping two pieces of iron against each other peels off layer after layer of iron until eventually a sharp edge is formed. And so I'm going to challenge us this morning to change the way that we view differences between ourselves and our spouse.

If you're not married, I want you to think about the relationship in your life in which you're most tempted towards conflict and apply the same principles because these are not really marriage principles. They're sanctification principles that apply to every relationship in life.

You know, my wife and I have grown to see the wisdom of God in bringing us together not only because of the ways that we're naturally compatible but because of the ways that we're not. When we got married, I had areas of pride and selfishness hiding in my heart that I was unaware of. I had idols in my heart that I was cultivating and didn't even know it. And it turned out that I had a high opinion of myself and considered myself to be spiritually mature and even humble on our wedding day and yet I would soon find out I was not.

Within just a few weeks of marriage, my heart began to be painfully and graciously exposed. But that exposure of my heart came as God's gift to me not through the areas in which she and I were naturally the same, but as I had to respond to the areas in which we were different.

Now initially, I was discouraged by our differences because I thought our differences were the problem. But God graciously began to reveal to me through His word and through wise counsel that the issue was not our differences. The issue was my sinful heart responses to those differences. And suddenly, it became clear to me like a flash of lightning.

The key to a Christ-exalting Ephesians 5 kind of marriage is not convincing my wife to think and act more like me. The key is she and I both giving our maximum effort to think and act more like Jesus Christ. I don't need her to share my opinion and my perspective and preference in every area of life. In fact, that's actually a pretty boring life. The world doesn't need another me. We go well together because we're different.

I need to have the character of Christ so that I can respond to our differences with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I need to have the character of Christ so that I can do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but rather with humility of mind, consider my wife as more important than myself. Not looking out for my own personal interests but also for hers.

I need the character of Christ so that I can see my role in the home as not one to be served but to serve and to give my life for others in the way that Christ gave his life as a ransom for many.

So let me encourage you that there may be times indeed that you need someone to sit down with you and help you and your spouse resolve a certain difficult conflict. But understand that what you need more than that is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. And what

you'll find is that if both of you will stop trying to convince each other to see things your way and instead put forth all your effort towards Christ's likeness, something amazing happens. All of a sudden you have less conflict. When you do have conflict, you're able to resolve it in a way that builds up your relationship instead of tearing it down. And you discover that marriage can actually be a great source of joy and a whole lot of fun even in a fallen world. And that's what God desires for us.

And that's why I say the most important thing that we can do next in this marriage series is to better understand how to pursue personal sanctification. So that's what we'll do over the next three weeks. Today, we're going to look at a couple of biblical key texts on sanctification to understand how sanctification works. And in the next two weeks, we'll look at very practical ways in which that sanctification should flesh itself out in our relationships.

Now, if you haven't been with us, just really quickly, what we've covered so far is the fact that we exist for the glory of God and the enjoyment of God. We've seen in Genesis 2 and 3 the perfect design of marriage and the corruption of marriage. And Titus chapter 3, we've seen that the gospel is the lifeblood of marriage. And then we've been studying the transformation of the gospel. **The gospel transforms you. The gospel transforms marriage.** And we've seen that primarily in Ephesians chapter 5 because **The gospel transforms wives. The gospel transforms husbands.** And then we saw this mystery that's been revealed. **The gospel is illustrated by marriage.**

Now, with all of that in mind, I want us to look at the issue of sanctification based around two primary points. The first will be **The Call to Sanctification**. The call to sanctification. And right out of the gate, I want to make sure that we're clear about our terminology and what I mean when I say the word sanctification. The verb sanctifies: to purify or to make holy.

In this case, the Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sanctification this way. "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness."

So this morning, when I say sanctification, I'm referring to sanctification in the progressive sense. That is that after justification, when we are justified, declared righteous by grace through faith, we now enter into a lifelong process where we are being made holy one step at a time, one degree after another, until Christ brings us home to glory. It is true that no believer will reach moral perfection in this life. And yet it's also true, the Bible teaches that each Christian ought to grow in their spiritual maturity and in righteousness throughout their lives.

There's no such thing as a Christian who never experiences any kind of change in regard to sin in their life. We saw that in Titus three and the issue of regeneration. If you weren't here, you can go back and listen to that.

But the reason that it's an impossibility ultimately for a believer not to progress at all in their faith is because of what Paul says, for example, in 1 Thessalonians 5. Listen to this at the end of 1 Thessalonians 5:

“23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Now listen to verse 24) Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”

He's going to do it. He doesn't fail in His promises. God calls us to sanctification and God causes that sanctification to come to pass. Now it's important for us to understand how does that happen? How exactly does progressive sanctification take place in the life of the Christian? To see that, we're going to look at a place in scripture in which sanctification is described in two verses very succinctly and very helpfully.

Philippians chapter two, Philippians two, 12 and 13:

“12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

Now if we boil down the key truths in these two verses, we basically come away with this. **Your sanctification demands your maximum effort, but it is accomplished by God alone.** Your sanctification demands your maximum effort, but it is accomplished by God alone. This text is one of the clearest and most succinct descriptions of biblical sanctification. It breaks down into two key points that we'll cover together. One, sanctification demands your maximum effort, and number two, Sanctification is accomplished by God alone.

Now in the background, it's important for us to understand the apostle Paul is writing to the Philippian church. He's imprisoned in Rome. This is one of his prison epistles. He writes about basic Christian living, really issues of joy and unity in the body of Christ, and this issue is put to us clearly in chapter two, which begins with a call to unity, and he says the key to unity in the church is humility, cultivating humility and selflessness, and then he gives us this beautiful illustration. One of the wonderful explanations of what Christ has done for us in Philippians two, that He left heaven, He took on humanity, became a man with real human flesh, died for our sins, even to the point of dying on the cross, therefore God has highly exalted Him, and every knee will bow and tongue confess that He is Lord.

That becomes an illustration then of how we are to pursue unity and humility ourselves, and the process for putting on humility really comes in this process by which we are sanctified. That's the context in an overview that leads into verse 12. So let's look at the first truth together here.

Truth One: Sanctification Demands Your Maximum Effort. It begins in verse 12, *“So then, my beloved”* “so then” points us back to what he just described about Christ being the ultimate example of humbling Himself to redeem us. So then in light of that, we're to be motivated to go and do likewise, to lay down ourselves, to walk in the example that Christ said of perfect humility.

He uses a term of endearment, *my beloved*, my dear ones, my prized ones, my valued ones, and so Paul speaks to them not only as an apostle, but as a friend. He has affection for these people. He commends them on the fact that they're already pursuing obedience. He says, *just as you have always obeyed*, these are not unbelievers. It's not a church in chaos like

Corinth. This is a church for which he has fond affection, a church that is pursuing obedience, and they've done that even when he's not present.

He goes on to say, *not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence*. They have evidenced their faith to be genuine because they didn't just put on a show when Paul was there personally, but they continued on to follow the Lord and to bear fruit, and he affirms that, but now he's going to call them to continue even further. He takes up really the mantle that he will give to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:1, where he says:

"Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more."

That's essentially what he's saying. Excel still more Philippians, and to us at Northlake Bible Church, excel still more. We're never to reach a place where we're comfortable with our spiritual progress. We're always to be pushing to grow in sanctification in our likeness and our love for Christ. But all of that brings us to the command, and really, this is what he's been leading to in verse 12, *"work out your salvation..."* Work out your salvation.

Now, this is an emphatic command. It is given to each individual as if he says, work out your own salvation. Each of you sitting here today, if you're in Christ, take it as a personal charge from our Lord through Paul, work out your salvation. Be diligent to do so. It's not a suggestion. It's a command.

But it may be a little bit confusing because he uses the word "salvation". What exactly does he mean when he says work out your salvation? Well, I've explained this many times in the past, but it's important that we don't get confused here, so let me explain it again. The Bible uses the term salvation in three different verb tenses. In the past tense, you have been saved. In the present tense, you are being saved, and in the future tense, you will be saved.

The reason for that is when we put those three verb tenses together, we come away with an understanding of the full package of our redemption. We have been justified. That's past tense. It has happened never to be undone. You're declared righteous based on the work of Christ by grace through faith, but that then enters into this process that we described to start the message of sanctification. That's the present tense use of the word salvation. We are being saved. It's not calling into question our justification. It's saying this process of being made holy is happening in real time in our lives, and then finally, we will be saved. That is God will complete what He began in us and bring us to glory, and we will ultimately be glorified with Him forever.

Now here, the verb is used in the present tense. Work out your salvation. Speaking of that process of sanctification that is ceaseless and ongoing. MacArthur says it this way: "Paul is not speaking of attaining salvation by human effort or goodness, but of living out the inner transformation that God has graciously granted."

It begins with regeneration as we studied in Titus chapter three, and because that inner transformation has happened in the life of every Christian, it will express itself through bearing good fruit in sanctification. The command is actually the words "work out". Work it out. Continually. Present tense. Work hard at obedience. Work to be conformed and

transformed more into the image of Christ. This is why I entitled the first truth here. Sanctification demands your maximum effort. That's what he's calling for. He's not asking. He's demanding that we press on and excel still more, and there are several passages in the New Testament that say essentially the same thing.

First Peter chapter one, verses 13 to 16:

"13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

In the famous passage in Romans 12:1-2:

"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

So you can see scripture is filled with this concept that we are to pursue holiness, run hard, sprint towards Christlikeness. But Paul doesn't stop with just the command. He gives us the attitude that goes with the command. As we give our maximum effort, he adds the words *"with fear and trembling"*. Work out your salvation and do it with fear and trembling.

Now this is not a call to fear God in the sense of terror to cause us to flee from Him, nor is it a call to be fearful of final judgment as if God's still withholding judgment about our salvation. But the combination of the terms *"fear and trembling"* are a common pairing throughout the scripture, especially in the Old Testament, but also into the New Testament.

And in context here, this is a call to reverent honor of God. It's an acknowledgement of His holiness and of His power that causes us to adore Him, to worship Him, and to obey Him. Fear and trembling. It's a reminder that *"the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom,"* Proverbs 9:10. Understand that you will not make progress in holiness if you do not fear God. The fear of God drives us to love Him and to serve Him and to pursue Him. And so it is. We're to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

But if we were just to leave it there at truth number one, we would leave this place thinking that we actually have the power to sanctify ourselves. All we really need to do is get serious about it and pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and ultimately we'll be holy. But the problem is there's a second truth. There's a parallel truth that's presented right alongside this command to give our maximum effort. It's **Truth Number Two: Sanctification is Accomplished by God Alone**. It's accomplished by God alone. This is verse 13: *"for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."*

Now, if you're a Christian this morning, then you already understand, painfully so, that we are locked in a war with our flesh. Every day is a battle against sin. Every day our new nature in Christ goes head-to-head with our flesh and we battle it out seeking to walk in righteousness. And so this call in verse 13 reminds us of our inability. In and of ourselves, we

do not have the power or the strength even though we're giving our maximum effort to be made holy.

We need the work of God. But thankfully, that's exactly what Paul says we have, "*for it is God who is at work in you.*" And if you're a Christian, "you" means you. Take it to heart. God is at work, present tense, all the time in you. And that's why there's hope. That's why there's hope that our efforts are going to amount to anything. The truth is God alone can justify you and God alone can sanctify you.

Yes, we're to give our maximum effort and God blesses that effort, but ultimately it is God who does the work of sanctification. It's God who gets the glory. This is why you can have hope that your life won't stay the same if you're a Christian. And it's why you can have hope that your marriage doesn't have to stay the same or whatever other difficult relationship you're in because God's not done. He's not done with you. And if that person's in Christ, He's not done with them. And so there's much hope. There's so much hope to be had for ourselves and for our relationships.

Now, here's the difference with justification. That is salvation, at the moment of salvation, saved by grace through faith, declared righteous. That is completely passive when it comes to our efforts. We are dead in sin. God chooses us and eternally past, as we read in Ephesians 1, God is the one in time through the gospel who draws us to salvation. He even gives us the gift of faith and repentance. It's a work of God, our salvation.

But sanctification is an act in which we are called to be active. It is still the work of God, ultimately, as we see here in this verse, but we are called to act. We are called to give our effort towards sanctification. That means the diligence of your efforts towards sanctification will have a direct impact on how quickly you grow in holiness. But at the same time, we must never think that we can bear spiritual fruit solely based on our own individual efforts.

The hope is the fact that he says, *it is God who is at work in you*. That's our confidence. So don't give into the temptation of thinking that you can be godly on your own efforts apart from the work of the spirit.

But on the other hand, don't think that we're to let go and let God, so to speak, and do nothing and not put forth our genuine effort. We are, but we do so dependently, relying fully on the work of God in us. That's the balance.

Now notice as we read verse 13, he not only gives us the assurance that God is at work in us, he tells us exactly how. There are two primary ways in this text that God is at work in us. Verse 13, *for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work*, to will and to work.

So the first way that God's at work in us is **to will**. That is, God gives us the very will or desire to obey him. It is God who stirs up our affection and our desire to give our maximum effort towards holiness. Even the inward desire to be godly comes from God.

If you don't feel like walking in holiness this morning, this gives you the answer as to what you are to do. If you're here and your honest heart before the Lord is you really just don't have motivation to walk with Christ and to pursue holiness, because that ultimately comes

from God, what you need to do is cast yourself at the feet of Christ in prayer. Run to God asking God, give me even the desire to please you. Stir it up within me. The answer is not to reach down first and pull yourself up by your own strength as if that will do anything. Throw yourself at the feet of the cross and beg God to even give you the desire. Confess, I believe, Lord, help my unbelief. I am wholly dependent on you even to want to get out of bed and read the word, even to want to get out of bed and pray, to want to share the gospel with my neighbor, to want to be kind. All of that is dependent on you. So cast yourself at the feet of Christ in prayer.

God's in charge of the inward working, but He's also in charge of the outward work because he goes on to say *both to will and to work*. This is actual outward acts of obedience, the strength to actually do the work. He produces desires and then he produces outward actions that match those desires. The word work means exactly what you would think it means. It means **"to put one's capabilities into operation."** The Lord does that work in us.

This is a reminder, of course, that this has been God's plan for us from the beginning. He saved us unto good works. Ephesians 2:8-10:

"8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as 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 so that we would walk in them."

It's God who saves. It's God who gives us the desire. It's God who gives us the strength and it's God who causes that then to work itself out into actual actions of obedience. This is why Jesus would say in John 15:

"4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

This is the way we ought to think about our spiritual Christian lives. We are by God's grace attached to the vine. We are abiding in the vine and it's because ultimately of what's coming through the vine that we as branches have any hope of bearing good fruit.

John Calvin says it this way: "there are in any action two principal departments, the inclination and the power to carry it into effect. Both of these he ascribes wholly to God. What more remains to us as a ground of glorying?" Understand, every ounce of spiritual fruit that's ever been grown on your spiritual tree is to the praise of the glory of His grace.

He saved you, He stirs affection and desire within you, He strengthens you and He causes that to bear good fruit of outward acts. Why does He do this? Well, he says it here at the end of verse 13:

"for His good pleasure."

For His good pleasure. It pleases the heart of God to see His children looking more like His Son and walking like His Son. It pleases Him, He loves it. So it is that He causes it to happen in us day in and day out for His own good pleasure.

Now right now I hope that you are energized and that you are motivated to run out of this room and to give your maximum effort to grow in Christ. That should be the feeling that we have as we get through looking at those verses just briefly. But the next question is, how practically? How do I do that? What would it look like if I were to put forth my maximum effort towards growth and holiness?

And so that brings us to a second key point here, **The Process of Sanctification**. The process, we've seen the call, now here's the process of sanctification. The scriptures actually give us a clear process for how to grow in Christ. And we can break that down into three basic steps that I'll show you here in just a moment in Ephesians chapter four. But this is what we call the process of change.

How do we go from sin to righteousness? The Bible says we are to **put off, renew our mind, and put on**. Put off, renew your mind, and put on. Let me show you this in Ephesians chapter four. It's also in Paul's letter to the Colossians, but we'll look at it here in Ephesians four. Now we're jumping in at verse 20. He's just now moving into this section in chapter four. He's left the doctrinal section of the letter in the first three chapters. He's moving into the practical aspects and leading up to verse 20. He's calling them to walk in righteousness and reminds them of the way the world lives and tells them not to live that way, verse 20:

"20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, (You don't live like the world anymore) 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

Now understanding this passage is really foundational to putting forth our maximum effort in growth and holiness. This really is how Christians grow and change. The first step here of putting off is given to us through the words, *lay aside the old self. In reference to your former manner of life, lay aside the old self*. The old self here in this context is referring to the way that we used to live prior to coming to Christ. That's represented now by what the Bible calls our flesh.

We have a new nature. If anyone's in Christ, he's a new creature. Behold, old things have passed, new things have come. 2 Corinthians 5:17. You have a new nature if you're in Christ, but you still have a flesh. Romans 7 talks about the battle of the flesh.

That flesh is desiring to put on the clothes of the old man, the way you used to dress, the way you used to look and act. He's attracted to that old way of life. And so all throughout your day, what's happening is your flesh is tempting you to look the way you used to look, to talk the way you used to talk, to act the way you used to act, to think the way you used to think.

And so Paul says the first step in walking in godliness is to recognize that sinful temptation of the flesh, to grab ahold of it and to throw it from you. This word, "lay aside the old self", is a word used for taking off an article of clothing like this jacket. Take it off and throw it from you. That's the idea. That's the first step. And by the way, this is how we battle sins of

all kinds. Whatever kind of sin you're dealing with, this is the pattern. The first way we give our maximum effort is by being committed to taking every thought captive and every single temptation that comes, you actively take hold of that thought and you choose to put it off.

But notice, he doesn't stop there. And it's important to notice that because so many times our battle with sin consists of just trying to stop, right? Stop it. You ever find yourself having a conversation in your head that goes like this? Stop it. Don't look at that. Don't think that. Don't feel that way. What's wrong with me? If you fight sin that way, and that's the sum total of your battle with sin, you'll find yourself frustrated, you'll find yourself defeated and beaten down. Because that's only step one. To stop it or to put it off is important. It's crucial.

But it's crucial that we then go on to steps two and three if we actually want to walk in righteousness. And the second step here comes to us in the same passage *and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind*. Lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted, and **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**. This is step two. So step one, we throw off that sinful thought, that sinful inclination, and we proactively fill our minds with the truth. This is Romans 12, two that we read earlier:

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed (how?) by the renewing of your mind..."

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And the gift that God has given us to renew our minds is the word of God.

John 17:17:

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

Or 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17:

"16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Notice there are **Four things** there that **the Word of God does in the life of the believer: Teaches truth, convicts of sin, corrects error, trains in righteousness**. And the end goal for a person who has been taught by the Scripture is to be adequate and equipped for every good work. So the Scriptures then are the gift. The Scriptures are the tool.

As it says, even in the armor of God, in Ephesians 6:17:

"17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

The word "sword" there is the Greek word for the, not for a long sword, but for the short sword that a soldier would carry for close hand-to-hand combat. This is take the sword of the word and cut down that temptation. And really, that's where we live. We live in close quarter, hand-to-hand contact with sin. It's right, it's in your head. Take the sword of the word and cut it down, he says. That's the idea.

Renew your mind with truth. Christian, this is why Scripture, memory, and meditation are so essential in the Christian life. Scripture memory is not just for children in Awana. Scripture memory is that we would treasure the word of God in our hearts. Why? That we may not sin

against Him. What does it say about the blessed man? Why is it that the blessed man in Psalm 1 doesn't walk according to the counsel of the wicked? Because he delights in what? The law of the Lord. And how often does he do it? Day and night. He's washing his mind with the word. Christian, memorize scripture.

It's not about quantity so much as it is quality. I'd rather you memorize one verse a month and know that verse and to soak on that verse and to be able to call it to mind at a moment's notice than five a day but not remember really the verses you're memorizing. But take up the sword of God's word and wash your mind with it. Have it at the ready to be able to quote it at a moment's notice.

So practically, how do we fight sin? Let's say you're driving down the road and you see a filthy billboard and there's a temptation to lust or you're driving down the road and you think on a past situation and it makes you anxious or angry or selfish and you feel that rise up in your heart. Step one, as soon as you recognize it, the very moment that you recognize that temptation, you grab a hold of it and choose to throw it from your mind as you rush mentally to the truth and you keep your mind on the truth.

You physically quote to yourself a verse like the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness. Oh God, help me to think on Your mercies today. Thank you that You are faithful to me. You never fail me and You are good. Help me to walk in those truths.

You run to it and you fill your mind with it because God has given us a gift. One of the gifts of being finite is the fact that we cannot intently concentrate on more than one thing at a time. We like to think that we multitask and we don't. We can only really think about one thing intently at a time and so if you fill your mind with truth, there's no room for error. There's no room for lust. There's no room for anger. There's no room for anxiety because we fill our mind with the word of God and we wash it with the word of God. That's what it is to renew your mind. Put off, renew your mind.

But that then leads to the third and final step in the process and **put on the new self**. And put on the new self. The final step is to put on the opposite righteous virtue. You're tempted towards pride. You're trying to put on humility. You're tempted towards lust. You're trying to put on purity. You're tempted towards impatience. You're trying to put on patience. We are trying to think biblically about what does the word say I ought to be doing and then use the word of God to renew our mind so that we can do that thing.

Now the helpful thing here is that Paul actually gives us several examples practically of what this will look like in the remainder of the chapter. So in Ephesians 4, we won't go through all these in detail but I just want you to see it. In Ephesians 4 beginning in verse 25, he begins to list different sins that we struggle and the way that we ought to move from sin to righteousness. So follow this with me, beginning in verse 25 down through the end of the chapter.

"25 Therefore, (that is in light of these commands) laying aside falsehood (that is the sin of lying), speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must

labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you (put it off), along with all malice. (here's what we put on) 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Understand the biblical call to repentance is not simply a call to stop sinning. It is a call to be righteous. Notice in each of those examples, Paul doesn't say to the person who sins with the sin of lying to simply stop lying. He says, stop lying and speak truth each one of you to your neighbor. That is have a mouth now filled with truth.

He doesn't say to the person who is a thief, hey, stop stealing. That's bad. That's not what he says. He says, stop stealing, labor with your hands, get a job and then give away freely the things you have and be generous with other people. You see the transformation?

It's totally different than just stop stealing. He doesn't say, you know, the old saying, if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. That's not what he says. He says, let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth. Yes, that's true. Don't say those things. But then he says, repent of that and use words that are well-timed for the need of the moment to edify the person listening to you. So to put it back in terms of that old saying, if you can't say anything nice, repent and say something nice. That's the biblical example.

We're called to walk in real righteousness. So in summary, as we put together Philippians and Ephesians this morning, this is what we come away with:

Every Christian is to dependently give their maximum effort towards sanctification by continually putting off sinful temptation, renewing their minds with God's word, and putting on the opposite righteous virtue.
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That is how we give our maximum effort in a nutshell. We do it dependently, recognizing prayerfully that we desperately need God's help, but we give our maximum effort and we strive for godliness.

Now, as we think about this this morning and draw this to a close, I want to encourage us to really apply the things we're learning. And so first of all, if you're married, let me speak to you first this morning. I want you to consider how the pursuit of holiness that we just described would change the way you act and react towards your spouse. If you really did these things, if you really lived in accordance with what we just studied, how would it change the way you act and react to your spouse?

If you're single, I want you to pick another relationship or group of relationships in which you struggle with conflict and ask yourself, if you really applied the truths that we've learned today, how would it change the way you act and react to that person or persons?

And as we bring it home, let me just give you three quick points of application to begin putting this into practice.

Number one, **Commit to Give Your Maximum Effort.** Commit to give your maximum effort. Ask yourself, how much effort, honestly, do you daily put towards growth and holiness? How much does that occupy your mind, your plan for the day and your efforts? Specifically in marriage, how diligently are you pursuing sanctification in the way you think about your spouse and the way you speak to your spouse and the way you act towards your spouse?

Secondly, **Confess Your Reliance on God's Strength.** Confess your reliance on God's strength. Listen, if you're beaten down right now in the battle with sin, you're losing the battle. Let me ask you, how much time do you spend every day in prayer? How much are you running to God? Do you walk with God in prayer? Are you desperate for God in prayer?

You know, this dependence begins with the gospel in salvation. If you're here this morning and you've never come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, you've never turned from your sins and put your faith in Christ alone, understanding that He lived and died and rose again to pay the penalty for sin, that's where this begins. You have to humble yourself and understand your need for God because of your sin and that Christ is the only way. But that act of dependence initially begins a lifestyle of dependence in which we live 24-7 in reliance on a holy, gracious God to strengthen us. How dependently are you really living when it comes to prayer and meditation on God's truth?

And then thirdly, **Practice The Biblical Process For Change.** Practice the process that we've laid out this morning. We have a biblical process of putting off, renewing our mind and putting on, but are we doing that? And to help you with that, I put together a physical worksheet to help you walk through the process of change. It's available at the Connection Center, it's available on our website under the resources page and I would encourage you to take that physical worksheet, take a sin that you're currently battling, write it at the top and then just follow it through and begin to practice the process that Paul lays out in Ephesians 4.

As we get skilled at fighting sin in this way, this is how we give our maximum effort and it's how we grow in righteousness. It's essential to personal godliness and it's therefore essential in all of our relationships and especially in the relationship of marriage. So this is the biblical foundation for sanctification. Come back the next two weeks and we will look specifically at how to work this out in our relationships. Let's pray together.

Lord God, so much rich truth in Your word. Thank You that Your word is practical. There's nothing more practical on the planet than the all-sufficient inspired word of God. Help us, Lord, not to believe the lie that the thing that will help our marriage the most is psychology or self-help books when the thing that will help us the most is to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need Your strength. We need to walk in righteousness and You alone can help us to do that. God, help us to be reliant, dependent Christians but help us to be disciplined Christians who seek to give our maximum effort for Your glory, to walk in righteousness, to pursue You. May You bless that and cause it to bear much fruit for Your glory and for Your pleasure. It's in Christ's name we pray, amen.