Sanctification: Changing Toward Holiness

<u>Sanctification and Counseling</u>
        Part of every biblical counseling case is sanctification. Along with helping the counselee understand what the Bible teaches about the specific difficulties they face, discipleship also occurs. The brother or sister is assisted in developing quality daily time with God in His Word and in prayer. They are connected with church Bible studies and aided in getting the most out of church services. They are taught about sanctification. As they embrace these truths from the Word and develop a close and vibrant walk with God, their perspectives of problems, change and God become God's perspectives. They become strengthened by the Word as they seek to implement the truths of the Word in relation to the hard times that brought them to counseling. By God's grace they grow in discipleship, in sanctification, and in relation to life problems.

<u>What is Sanctification?</u>
        Sanctification is changing toward godliness. The Bible says that it is God's will for us to be sanctified (1Thessalonians 4:3). Such terminology conveys the importance of sanctification.
        The root word for the word translated "sanctification" is the Greek word which means "Holy". In the New Testament, both the word translated "sanctification" (hagiasmos) and the word translated "sanctify" (hagiazo) come from the root word for "Holy". Thus, the idea communicated is that of becoming more like Christ Himself.
        "Sanctify" and "sanctification" are sometimes used in different specific ways. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7, "sanctification" refers to the completion of the process of overcoming a particular sin (sexual immorality). In Hebrews 10:10 and 14, "sanctified" communicates the passing into the Christian life through faith in Christ, that is to enter the process of changing toward holiness. In all their uses, the forms of "sanctification" identify, in general or in specific terms, part or all of the ongoing transformation toward Christlikeness which is the occupation of all believers while on earth.

<u>Justification-Sanctification-Glorification</u>
        There are three theological terms which identify the three stages of salvation.
        Justification occurred the day a person became a Christian. When by faith a soul embraces the gospel, a lifetime of sin is forgiven and the one separated from a Holy God begins a new life (Romans 5:1-2). Reconciliation to God takes place (Romans 5:10-11).
        Sanctification encompasses all the time in between the precise points of justification and glorification. It is the putting off of sin and putting on of righteousness (Ephesians 4:22-24). It is the transition from being salves of unrighteousness to being slaves of God for the purpose of righteousness (Romans 6:10-13).
        Glorification will come to pass when the believer sees the Lord face to face in heaven (Revelation 21:1-7). Sin will no longer be a temptation or an option (1 John 3:1-3). Each stage signifies a specific point in time or an era in time. Each also relates to the believer's place in regard to sin.

Contemplating sanctification as on of the three stages of salvation puts our lives today in perspective. We once gained our introduction by faith into this life with God. For the first time we were forgiven, clean, not guilty, justified. One day we will reach our destiny, holiness, by God's grace. We will have glorification, life in heaven where there is neither sin nor the option of sin. Consequently, it only makes sense that in between we are to be moving toward holiness, progressing in relation to salvation, changing, being sanctified.

Sanctification is a Process, Not an Event

Sanctification is a journey, not a place. It is an ongoing labor, a work in progress. It is not a finished one-time act. For us as Christians it is our vocation, our purpose, and our calling. To be pursuing sanctification is to submit our will to the Lord's.

In John 17:17 Jesus prays for future believers, those who would receive the gospel through the words of the apostles. He asks the Father to sanctify us in truth; He states that His Word is truth. This identifies sanctification as a process, since the work God accomplishes through the Word involves progress in relation to salvation (1 Peter 2:1-3). Jesus is asking the Father to act to change us toward holiness through His Word.

Ephesians 5:26 also shows sanctification to be an ongoing process. There it is said that part of the biblical husband's responsibility is to be used by God to help his wife grow spiritually.

Philippians 1:6 assures us of God's ongoing work in modifying who we are. He began this good work in us; He will continue bringing us toward perfection until the day we see Christ (glorification).

Paul himself exemplifies this explanation of sanctification in Philippians 3:!2-14. He is not perfect now. But he presses on toward that goal. The effort includes forgetting what lies behind (bondage to sin before salvation) and reaching forward to what lies ahead (perfection in heaven). He understood that day in his life in relation to the three stages of salvation. He also saw sanctification as an ongoing process, one in which he was diligent to be participate.

Change and Counseling

Do you believe the Bible teaches these things about sanctification? Do you believe that discipleship is part of what should occur in counseling people who are overwhelmed by difficulties? Every type of counseling has the goal of change. The goal of biblical counseling is change toward holiness. Ask people you know who have gone to other types of counseling: what was the goal? What change did the counselor seek to occur in you? What were the means to cause or enable this change? Was the basis of change inner strength, love of self, or God's Word? For the biblical counselor the great joy is observing God causing change through His Word. At the end of counseling, the counselee has not only overcome their problem through the Word, he or she has also been discipled and now has the life purpose of changing toward holiness through quality daily time in the Word, prayer, and church involvement.