

Cyber Truths By E-mail

33. Growing In Christ's Likeness (November 21, 2007)



Restoration Ministries International

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Dear Friends,

You may have had conversations lately like the one we had the other day with a woman: She'd been taught by her denomination that you receive salvation the moment you believe that Jesus has justified you before our Father, and that sanctification is *optional* for a Christian.

However, according to God's changeless Word that calls us to "endure to the end" and to "overcome", the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit *presses followers of Jesus onward* in their journey unto salvation — *unless* they forsake Jesus as Lord of their lives. Let's explore this for a bit.

If you've read our Hebraic Article, *The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*, then you know that the earliest Church understood that salvation occurred at the *end* of our life pilgrimage on earth. Those who *endure to the end* will receive the heavenly welcome our Lord promises:

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels (Revelation 3:5). This is the moment of salvation!

Our *regeneration* — the new birth as the Holy Spirit takes up His residence within — wonderfully occurs when we *repent* (turn away from our sin and turn to our Father) and receive forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus. The salvation in which we're eternally delivered into His Presence, however, comes when we see Him face to face:

So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him" (Hebrews 9:28).

His part is sure! *Our* part is to press on in obedient trust as His Spirit purifies us and transforms us. The glorious *goal* of our lifelong trust in our Lord is the salvation of our souls (see 1 Peter 1:9). That goal will come about *at the end* of a journey that continues in trust:

Meanwhile, through trusting, you are being protected by God's power for a deliverance ready to be revealed at the Last Time (1 Peter 1:5).

Joyously hearing your name proclaimed from the Lamb's Book of Life calls for two essential elements that emanate from His grace:

Justification — placing your trust in, and *continuing* to trust in, the shed blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

Sanctification — the *lifelong purifying process* of the Holy Spirit that enables you to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ so that you *can* endure to the end.

The pilgrimage of a Jesus follower:

- **Begins** with Justification, your Spiritual Rebirth;
- **Continues** a lifelong process of Sanctification;
- **Culminates** ultimately in your Salvation before the Throne.

Perhaps you're among those who are so overly focused on the day you were *justified* that you've stopped any further growth in Christ's likeness. Do any of these scenarios describe you?

- You're *complacent* in your spiritual life and *self-satisfied* because you believe that you're "already saved". You walk in the *unrighteous ways of the world* yet call

yourself “Christian”. Repentance — turning away from sin — and walking in obedient trust don’t even occur to your deceived heart.

- It doesn’t bother you that your compromise with sin in your daily life *brings down the name of Jesus*. Others observe your choices and identify our Lord with your law-lessness.

- You deny or ignore His *Lordship* requirements for His followers — the life-long sanctification process of cooperating with the Spirit to reach your salvation goal.

[For more on justification and sanctification, see our Hebraic article: *The Gospel Of The Covenant Is The Pilgrimage To Salvation*; also, Jesus In Your Home Video: Section 2; Segment 10—*The Indwelling Holy Spirit* (Part 2).]

We shared with the woman mentioned on page 1 that in God’s sight, loving and obedient *pursuit of sanctification* is critical for anyone who would follow Jesus. We asked her a question: “What if you were told that if you married your husband, you’d receive \$3 million after he died. Would that be reason enough for you to marry him?”

She replied emphatically, “No!!! I married my husband because I wanted to be with him as his wife.” We replied, “That’s the *love relationship* our Father wants! The aim of the Gospel *isn’t* to guarantee you fire insurance from hell at the end of your life. It’s an offer for you to live in loving and obedient *covenant-union* with our Father through Jesus. And, as you live in daily union with Him, the Holy Spirit transforms you into ever-increasing Christ-likeness. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the POWER behind your transformation.”

This woman could then recognize the heresy of the false gospel her denomination teaches — that the Spirit *stopped working* when Jesus ascended. She quoted back to us her denomination’s lip service of the Spirit, “*having a form of godliness but denying its power*” (2 Timothy 3:5).

**Justification costs us nothing.
Jesus sacrificed everything to pay
the penalty for our sins.**

**Sanctification costs you everything.
You must rid yourself of the influence
of your sin nature-controlled soul
and become filled and led
by the Holy Spirit.
The process of sanctification
is extremely *discomforting* as
you leave behind your old sin-based
identity and take on the character
and love-based motivation of Jesus.**

The Road Map For Sanctification

Our *Going To the High Places* Study Guide accompanies Hannah Hurnard’s timeless classic, *Hinds’ Feet On High Places*. Each chapter of *Much Afraid’s* journey to the High Places is a classroom of personal transformation for her. Look at some of the issues she faced in the different chapters — issues *you’ve* doubtless encountered:

5. Encounter With Pride
6. Detour Through the Desert
7. On the Shores of Loneliness
9. Great Precipice Injury
10. Ascent of the Precipice Injury
11. In the Forests of Danger and Tribulation
12. In the Mist
13. In the Valley of Loss
14. The Place of Anointing
15. The Floods
16. Grave On the Mountain
17. Healing Streams
18. Hinds’ Feet
19. High Places
20. Return to the Valley

It isn't until chapter 18 that Much-Afraid was finally transformed and her name changed to Grace and Glory. Her heart was now *filled* with the love of the Shepherd — the culmination of the character lessons she learned on the journey. And filled with the love of Jesus, she deeply desired to go back to the very people who once hurt her. To love the ones who have hurt and betrayed you is a true sign of a transformed person.

Intentionally pursue your own sanctification — expediting the time in which you can be the love of Jesus to others. This is the *pattern* specifically delineated in 2 Peter 1:3-11:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for **life and godliness** through our **full** knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and goodness.*

*Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you **might become** divine sharers of the divine nature, having **escaped the corruption in the world caused by lust.***

*For this very reason, **give all dili-***

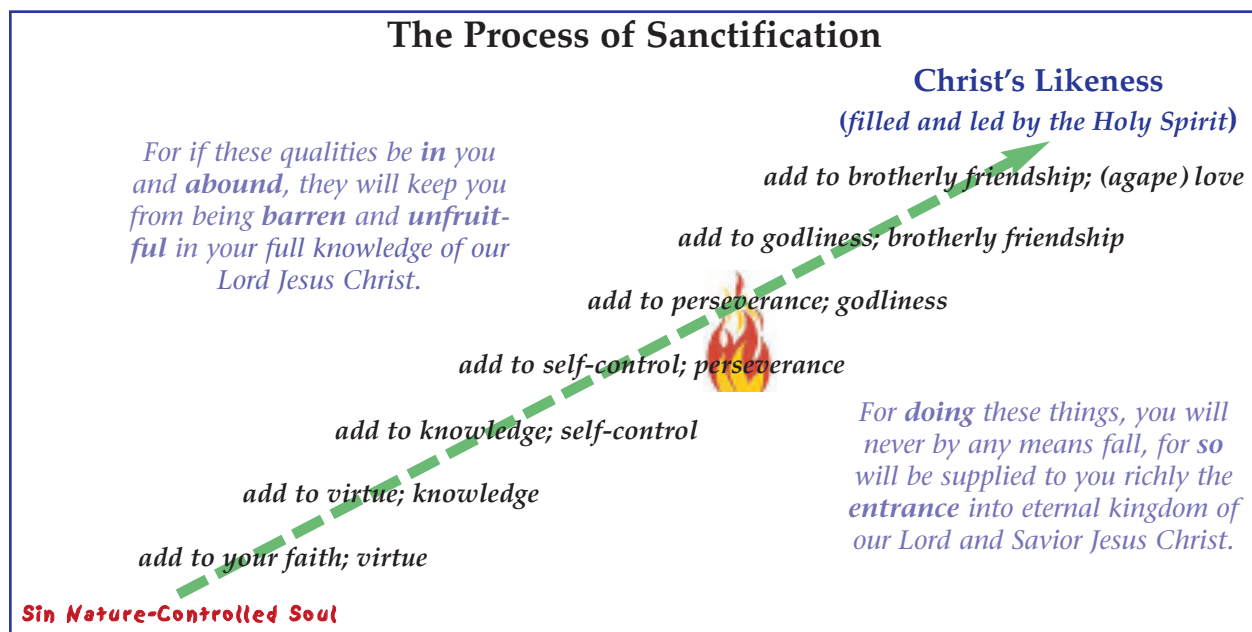
*gence to **add** to your faith **virtue**; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly friendship; and to brotherly friendship, love.*

*For if these qualities be **in you and abound**, they will keep you from being **barren and unfruitful** in your **full** knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*For he in whom these things are **not present** is shortsighted and blind, being **forgetful** of the cleansing from his **sins of the past.***

*Therefore, my brothers, **be diligent** to make your being **called and chosen sure**. For **doing** these things, you will never by any means fall, for **so will be supplied** to you richly the **entrance into the eternal kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

In your own pilgrimage to salvation, have you really taken *seriously* what Peter is saying here? He's writing to *you* and to all who follow Jesus. The Apostle opens his second letter by revealing his recipients: "To those who through the righteous-



ness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have **obtained a faith as precious as ours.**" He then assures us of the *divine power* (through the Spirit) that we've been given for *life and godliness* so that we might *share* in the divine nature and *stay free* from the world's enticing corruption. What glorious incentive as well as armament to battle our sin nature and temptation!

Peter then lists a series of steps by which we can *deepen and mature* our own spiritual development. What is he directing us followers of Jesus *to do*? He is presenting to us the steps to our own sanctification as we lovingly yield to the Spirit at work in us. An alternate translation highlights the goal of ongoing obedient trust:

For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let's take a closer look at each of these qualities that we are called to *exert every effort diligently* so that they might be added to our lives. In a sense, the progression of these qualities parallels the chapters of *Hinds' Feet On High Places* in which Grace and Glory was empowered to *love (agape)* as the Shepherd does.

1. Add to your faith, virtue

The intensity in the Greek of what is translated as "diligently add to" carries with it a much stronger meaning: "Try your hardest and then try even harder!" Your *trusting faith* is that which justifies you in Jesus — but *not* if that so-called faith is mere head knowledge and passive religious ritual. Someone who agrees cognitively with biblical truth but has no Spirit of Christ within deceives himself into thinking he's "saved" when he is not.

Do not mistake "virtue" for the pleasant personality or easygoing compliance you may have been born with. Christian virtue is *courage and moral excellence* that must be developed and nurtured by the Spirit as you choose to conform your life and conduct to the character of Jesus and to God's commands.

If yieldedness to the Spirit of Christ *isn't* characteristic of your faith, then you're camped out in your sin nature. Continuing to grieve and resist the Spirit may bring about a hardened heart that turns away from the King (see Hebrews 3:13).

2. Add to your virtue, knowledge

Many people errantly understand the word "knowledge" to mean "being informed about" rather than to *know experientially* as a reality. Knowledge **about** compels them to *study* more, becoming data-filled *about* the Bible without any corresponding transformation into the character of Jesus. But without Spirit-wrought change, there is no sanctification.

To know God means your pursuit of God Himself. *Knowing* Him is not the same as knowing *about* Him: "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding*" (Proverbs 9:10). What connection between *knowledge of* (the wisdom of *obedience*) and *understanding* do you think is being spoken of here? It's a heart determination to live to *please God*.

As you get to *know* someone experientially through interaction in the relationship, you begin to *understand* their heart, their motives, what pleases them.

A great deal of our understanding of God is revealed through His Names: God the Provider, Merciful, Just, Forgiving, Long-suffering, etc. We also learn much

about His relationship to His people by observing His interaction with them in the Bible.

Jesus warns that the mind can hold tightly to that which is absolutely false if it gives way to preconceived ideas. The lazy and wicked servant of the Talents Parable buried the money entrusted to him. When asked to render account, the servant was judged by his own words and found guilty: *“You wicked, lazy servant! So you **knew** [perceived or considered] that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?”* (Matthew 25:26).

We will *all* be called to render account to God. In fact, Jesus goes on in this chapter to warn us about the criteria at the Judgment Throne for acceptance or rejection: *“I tell you the truth, whatever you **did not do** for one of the least of these, you **did not do** for Me”* (Matthew 25:45).

Make sure you **know** our Lord (and are **known by Him**) *before* you see Him face-to-face. Please, scrutinize your life *now* to discern if you are being judged and chastened by our Lord so that the condemnation promised to the world will not befall you (see 1 Corinthians 11:31,32).

3. Add to your knowledge, self-control

“Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28). Walls are useless if they’re broken down. They offer neither strength nor protection. Neither does a person who refuses to rule his own soul. Those with no self-control are unreliable and unpredictable, full of excuses or blame.

A relational knowledge of God stirs you to rule over your fleshly self so that you resist your sin nature and yield to the Holy Spirit. And, self-control means that you take *full responsibility* for yourself so that your “walls” can be relied on.

4. Add to your self-control, perseverance

What precedes the maturation of perseverance? *“We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that **suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope**”* (Romans 5:3,4). The character and hope that emanate from persevering through trials were traits that held our persecuted Roman brethren firm in their trust.

The Apostle weaves together the testing of faith with perseverance because it’s through *testing* that faith is proved genuine, and control over self’s inclination to quit is revealed:

*Consider it **pure joy**, my brothers, whenever you face **trials of many kinds**, because you know that the **testing of your faith** develops perseverance. Perseverance **must finish its work** so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything* (James 1:4).

Why is perseverance so important to your faith pilgrimage? Because learning to persevere through the trials and sufferings God permits in your life is His way to break down the rebellion fanned by your sin nature. If you *don’t* persevere in the path of Jesus, you’ll yield to the easiest and least sacrificial way in your life choices.

Christendom today overflows with those who have given up on enduring for the glory of God. They’re all talk and no walk — a shallow form of religious practice that evidences no life in the Spirit.

Perseverance, like a fire of purification, tests how pure your *motives* toward God are, and how determined you are in your faith. An old maxim befits those who have learned to persevere in Christ:

**“When the going gets tough;
the tough keep going.”**

Note from the sequence in Romans 5:3,4, that surrendering to adverse circumstances *inhibits* Christ-like character and hope. Those who shrink back attract no one to Jesus! And, as James indicates, neither will they mature in their faith.

5. *Add to your perseverance, godliness*

The easiest way to describe a godly person is that they readily and willingly abide by the laws of God out of a loving and obedient fear of Him. The godly are the *physical* representation of what it means to live in *spiritual* Covenant union with our Father through Jesus.

Picture the path that leads to godliness: faith, knowledge of God, self-control, and perseverance.

To walk in obedient trust this far displays intense determination to become more like the Jesus you love as your Lord! The motives of your heart are to do by His grace whatever is required of you to be like Him, and to represent our Lord in the flesh to others who might then respond to His Spirit's wooing.

6. *Add to your godliness, brotherly friendship*

Jesus uses the parable of the "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:30-37) to depict what *love in action* looks like. The Samaritan went the extra mile to help a person he didn't even know. He treated him like you'd treat a brother! Ask yourself: Are *you* more like the priest, the Levite or the Samaritan in your response toward those who can't pay you back (or even toward those in your relational sphere!)? How would those who know you describe you?

If you truly want to pour forth brotherly kindness, you must willingly let yourself be intruded on by others, incon-

venienced by others, and even hurt and betrayed by others. This is Jesus *in the flesh* as mirrored in your own life.

As those whose lives are interwoven as *brothers and sisters* in the Body of Christ, how do you respond to the command given us to "*Remember the prisoners as if chained with them — those who are mistreated — since you yourselves are in the body also*" (Hebrews 13:3). How can *you* show brotherly friendship to those who are currently suffering for their trust in Christ?

7. *Add to your brotherly friendship, (agape) love*

Jesus defined the greatest commandment as a continuum of our relationship with God to that of our human counterparts:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27).

Paul tells us, "*If we are united with Jesus... the only thing that matters is our trusting faithfulness expressing itself through (agape) love*" (Galatians 5:6). Love, the *agape* love that pours out of us in response to the Holy Spirit within us, is all that avails. How is this kind of love lived out on a daily basis in the power and the stirring of the Spirit? Listen:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

- Put a check mark over the qualities that exemplify your life. Circle the ones that reveal character flaws you need to lay on the altar of self and offer to the Holy Spirit for His transformational work in you.

Can you now see from Peter's sequence the progressive pattern through which *agape* love is developed? Can you see why he would warn you that these qualities are to *abound* for the glory of God and for your own spiritual growth?

If you *aren't* being transformed into Christ's likeness, if you *aren't* growing in the love of God toward others, then seriously examine your relationship with God. Will your self-chosen stagnation derail you on your pilgrimage to salvation so that disobedience keeps you from enduring to the end?

You may be thinking, "They're writing about *works* here." Actually, we are — but in the sense of responding in obedient trust through the Spirit of Christ to fulfill His Kingdom purposes! *Justification* is free, an accomplished victory by Jesus. *Sanctification* which leads to your salvation is going to cost you everything you once were in your slavery to sin. That's why Paul could so emphatically urge:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing (Philippians 2:12-14).

Your reverent fear of God is the beginning which compels you to flee the influence of your sin nature. Your love for Him motivates you to become like His

Son Jesus by His grace as you yield to the Spirit in you. May the encouragement and admonition in these words *spur you on* in your desire to be like Jesus!

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us keep running with endurance the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).