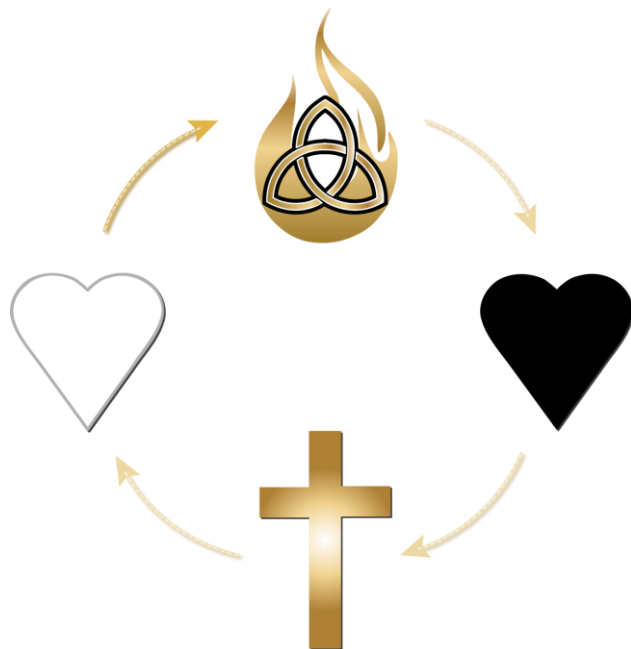


*Gospel-Centered  
Ministry*



## The Gospel of Justification

In an attempt to be a congregation that is God-centered, Christ-exalting and Holy Spirit-inspired, having a perspective assessment is a necessary thing. The natural sinful tendency of all Christians, and therefore church ministries, is to make more and more of man and less and less of God. But we must fight this perpetual drift. One of the foundational and most significant areas where this drift away from God-centeredness and into man-centeredness can occur is with regard to the gospel. The gospel is the “good news” that sinful men and women can be forgiven, cleansed, clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and given the position of eternal children of God. But this is not all the Bible has to say about the gospel. The gospel continues in the Christian life as “good news” while the sinful, selfish and weak child of God is practically transformed into the image of the Lord with ever increasing glory.

If we drift with the gospel we will drift in everything. To protect this tendency we must understand what the Bible teaches about the gospel. In an effort to solidify our understanding, we will look at what the Bible has to say about the gospel as it relates to the believer’s justification and what the Bible has to say about the gospel as it relates to the believer’s sanctification.

## **The Initiation of the Gospel for the Child of God** *Justification – Accepting the Gospel*

### **The Gospel is God-centered**

It is impossible to understand the gospel biblically if we do not understand what it is to be God-centered. God is the sovereign Creator, Ruler and Sustainer of His world. (The Eternal Glorious God is illustrated in Figure 1.) His triune glory is superior to everything and it always will be. Since this is true, God is not at fault to be self-exalting, because to exalt anything else above His own glory would be idolatry. Since God is properly God-centered it is reasonable to conclude that His people should be God-centered. Or to state it another way – God is joyously passionate about His own glory and His people should be as well. With that understanding firmly in place we must acknowledge that God will never set aside His sovereign glory for anyone at anytime.

Isaiah 48:9 & 11 *“For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off.... For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? **My glory I will not give to another.**”*

## The Eternal Glorious God

The triune God exists in glorious eternal contentment and makes Himself known to sinful men



Figure 1

### It's Not About Man

The fact that all God does He does for His glory demands that we joyfully affirm that the gospel is God-centered and not man-centered. God does not pursue man's salvation for the sake of man, but for the sake of His glory. This has been consistently expressed in the Old Testament regarding man, Israel and the new covenant.

Isaiah 2:22 *"Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for **of what account is he?**"*

Jeremiah 17:5 *"Thus says the LORD: **'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD.'**"*

Ezekiel 36:22–23 *"<sup>22</sup> Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: **It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.** <sup>23</sup> And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes."*

Ezekiel 36:32 *"**It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.**"*

### God's Glory Provides Security

God's commitment to Himself above man is a source of great security to His followers. Since the gospel of our salvation is for the glory of our God, the assurance of our salvation is not established or sustained by our devotion to God, but by His devotion to save us to the glory of His grace. Because of God's devotion to His glory in salvation, we are the recipients of unmerited favor and we are as secure in Him as He is glorious. When God created man, it was for His glory. When God recreated man through the gospel, it was for His glory. Man is created for the glory of God and man is saved for the glory of God. All of earthly life and all of eternal life is for the glory of God.

Isaiah 43:7 "...everyone who is called by my name, **whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.**"

Ephesians 1:4–6 "<sup>4</sup> ...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> **to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.**"

Ephesians 1:11–12 "<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> **so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.**"

### **The Standard Of Good Is God**

God is not a corrupt egomaniac. God is the fully righteous and holy God who manifests His benevolence through saving compassion that satisfies true justice. God is holy and righteous and He is the standard for all that is good and righteous. What is good and just is not established by popular vote, but by the character and biblical communication of God. It is out of God's goodness and for His glory that God makes Himself known on the earth.

Deuteronomy 32:4 "*He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.*"

### **God Dwells In Unapproachable Glory**

The glory of God's righteousness and holiness is so intense He is unapproachable. He is not to be trifled with as if He were some play toy for man's entertainment. God is not an old grandfatherly figure full of passivity and cuddliness. God is not mankind's divine buddy. God is a righteous and just God, who abounds in love and compassion, who all men do well to fear.

Exodus 33:20 "*But,*" he said, "*you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.*"

1 Timothy 6:15–16 "...*He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,* <sup>16</sup> *who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*"

Psalms 33:8 "<sup>8</sup> *Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!* <sup>9</sup> *For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.*"

Habakkuk 2:20 "*But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.*"

### **Understanding John 3:16**

If we do not understand God's righteous holiness we cannot appreciate the magnitude of His love and kindness. It is with full regard for His righteousness and justice that in love He sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. One of the most familiar verses to the general populous of the United States is John 3:16. Yet this familiar verse cannot be properly understood without a proper appreciation of the righteous justice of God. God's love is great because God sent His only Son into the world as a sacrifice of atonement. "*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*" (1 John 4:10) In this light we can see that John 3:16 is not the man-centered verse it is

often interpreted to be. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) This is a God-centered verse showing the significance of the justice of the God of love that was realized by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

The information that follows is not meant to be a rigid timeline, but a presentation of truths occurring at the time of salvation. Many things happen simultaneously and some things follow others as God moves in the hearts of sinful people with the gospel of justification.

## God’s Pursuit of Sinners

In the light of God’s glorious righteousness, the Holy Spirit regenerates and convicts men and women of their sinfulness

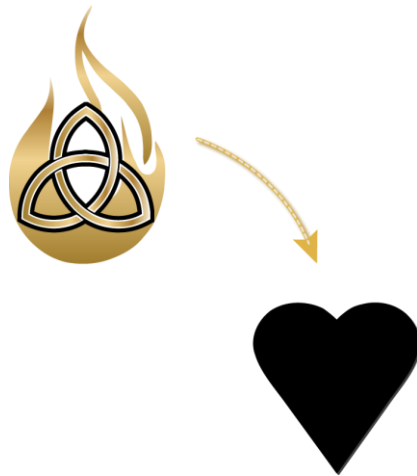


Figure 2

### The Arrows of God’s Influence

What does God use to bring about change in the hearts and lives of people? The initiative taken by God to reveal His gospel truth can come in a mixture of ways. God uses the general revelation of creation to speak to people (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-20). God uses the circumstances of life (both blessing and hardship) to awaken people to His presence and His ways (Psalm 139:7-12; Isaiah 45:7; Matthew 5:44-45). God uses a person’s conscience (Romans 2:14-15). God uses people and the church (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 2:14-17; Colossians 4:5-6). God always uses His word in the Bible, books, pamphlets, song, and verbal communication (Psalm 19:7; 119:130; Romans 10:14-17; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Colossians 3:16; 1 Peter 1:23). God is the glorious and primary mover behind all these things as He effectually presses upon people and moves them according to His redemptive purpose. The gold arrows on these graphics are used to help illustrate the gospel of justification and depict God’s influence as described above.

### Natural Man Is Spiritually Dead

Men and women will only appreciate God’s gospel glory when their hearts are awakened to their sinfulness and God’s righteousness by His grace. Divine initiative is essential because in their natural condition men and women are spiritually dead and insensitive to the things of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18 “For **the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,**

*but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*

1 Corinthians 2:14 “**The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**”

Romans 3:11 “...no one understands; no one seeks for God.”

Romans 8:7 “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; **indeed, it cannot.**”

Colossians 2:13 “And you, who **were dead in your trespasses** and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...”

## **Regeneration – The Gift Of Spiritual Life And Sensitivity**

God’s gospel work flows from an awareness of sinfulness resulting from the spiritual life God gives to those He came to save. Without spiritual life nothing happens. Regeneration is essential to awaken our awareness of God’s holiness and our personal sinfulness.

Ezekiel 11:19–20 “<sup>19</sup> And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, <sup>20</sup> that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

John 3:3 “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”

John 3:5–8 “<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’ <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’”

John 6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

John 6:63 “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

John 6:65 “And he said, ‘This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.’”

1 Corinthians 12:3 “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”

For unbelieving people to become responsive to the things of God, God must first grant them spiritual life.

## **Attention Please!**

When God moves to reveal Himself to man, He does so in a variety of ways. At times they are pleasant and at times they are painful, but they are always for His glory.

Isaiah 45:7 “I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.”

Ecclesiastes 7:14 “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other...”

Lamentations 3:38 “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?”

God may reveal Himself through creation, conscience, relationships, health, accomplishments,

disappointments, failure, hurt or a variety and combination of many things. Through these stimuli people become increasingly aware of God and the eternal significance of life. This awakened awareness can cause feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, which bring about much soul searching.

### **Sinners In Defiance Of God**

As God continues in His saving pursuit of men and women He will use creation, people, the Bible, books, sermons, advice, etc. to direct the hearts of people to the truth. The truth is, God is the righteous authority in life, we are all violators of His standards and His justice demands our judgment.

Romans 3:10–12 *“<sup>10</sup> None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*

Romans 3:23 *“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”*

We do not always display our sinfulness by doing what is overtly vile and wretched. We show that we are sinners by living self-absorbed, self-consumed lives making much of us to the dishonor and diminishment of God. This is also seen when we do “good things,” because we do them for self-satisfaction and self-glory, being completely insensitive to the fact that we bear the image of our Creator and anything “good” we do would only be a reflection of our Creator God.

### **Born In Sin**

We sin because we are sinners; we are not sinners because we sin. When we sin, we do what is natural. What is natural is to make much of us while disregarding God. This is what Adam did in the garden when He disregarded the instruction of God and thought he knew what was best and what he deserved. He bought into the lie of Satan that God was holding out on he and Eve, not wanting them to realize their full potential. He chose self-satisfaction over satisfaction with God and His ways. As the father of us all, the consequences of his decision are passed on to all of us as his descendants. In Adam we are all sinful from conception (Psalm 51:5) and subject to the just judgment of God, which is damnation in the torment of hell, separated from the blessing of God forever.

Romans 5:12 *“Therefore, just as **sin came into the world through one man**, and death through sin, and **so death spread to all men because all sinned...**”*

Ephesians 2:1–3 *“<sup>1</sup> And **you were dead in the trespasses and sins** <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, **like the rest of mankind.**”*

Matthew 13:36–42 *“<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” <sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. <sup>41</sup> **The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, <sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of***



**teeth.**

Revelation 20:11–15 <sup>11</sup> *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.* <sup>12</sup> *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. **And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.*** <sup>13</sup> *And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.* <sup>14</sup> *Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.* <sup>15</sup> **And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

### **Justice Demands Judgment**

God is love, but He cannot overlook the sin of men and women because God is also just. All sin must be punished. It cannot be ignored.

Galatians 5:19–21 <sup>19</sup> *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that **those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.***

Romans 2:8–9 <sup>8</sup> *...for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, **there will be wrath and fury.*** <sup>9</sup> *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek...*

Romans 6:23 *For the **wages of sin is death.***

2 Thessalonians 1:9 *They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...*

If we get what we deserve we receive the judgment of eternal separation from the blessing of God to experience eternal torment in hell.

### **God Moves Sinners to the Cross**

God uses the awareness of sinfulness to drive a sinner to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing

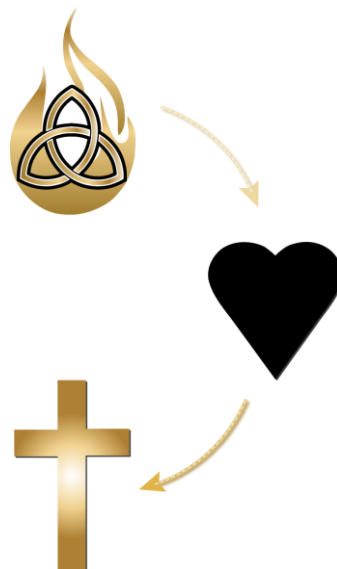


Figure 3

## Personal Effort Is Useless

The standard of God's righteousness is not revealed so we know what we need to do, it is revealed so that we realize we are sinners. God does not convict us of our guilt in regard to sin so that we will feel bad and try to do better by renewing our efforts to obey Him, go to church and be nicer to people. Feeling badly and trying to do better are not going to help us.

Romans 3:20 "*For **by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.***"

Galatians 2:16 "*...yet we know that **a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.***"

Since personal effort is useless the hope and help a sinner needs must be found outside of himself or herself. The Spirit of God brings deep conviction for sin and then presses the sinner to acknowledge their hope is found, not in the pursuit of personal betterment, but in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

## Jesus The Savior

Our hope is found outside of ourselves. Having violated God's righteous standard our sin has to be punished. We will either suffer eternally in hell or a sinless human sacrifice will need to be offered to appease the righteous wrath of God. The way of forgiveness and cleansing has been prepared by Jesus who took on human flesh, lived a sinless life and willingly gave Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of those who come to God by trusting the saving work accomplished by Jesus.

Romans 3:21–25 "*<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.** For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, **through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,** <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."*

Isaiah 53:5–6 "*<sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and **the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***"

1 Peter 2:24–25 "*<sup>24</sup> **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.** By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*

## The Holy Spirit Illuminates Jesus The Savior

It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's chosen that reveals the righteousness of God, the culpability for personal sinfulness and the reality of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life, shows the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and moves God's people to trust in Him alone as their salvation and righteousness.

John 16:8–11 “<sup>8</sup> And when he comes [the **Helper – Holy Spirit**], **he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:** <sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

Titus 3:4–7 “<sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,** <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

The reality of God moving men and women’s sinful hearts to the forgiving grace of the Savior is made known through humility and brokenness. This does not mean that a highly emotional response is necessary, but it does mean that deep contrition for sin is humbly realized before the Lord of glory. For many people this is a very emotional experience. For some it is not.

### Salvation Is All Of Grace

This is done completely by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This is the glorious and gracious work of God, not the work of man.

2 Corinthians 5:17–18 “<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> **All this is from God,** who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...”

Ephesians 2:8–9 “<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. **And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,** <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Since the Scripture is clear that salvation is all of grace, then the repentance and faith that are made evident are the result of God’s grace as well. Yes, God’s people respond with repentance and faith, but their response is not from their own unaided resources.

### **God Gives Repentance and Faith**

Repentance from the old man-centered way of life to faith in Christ and the promises of God

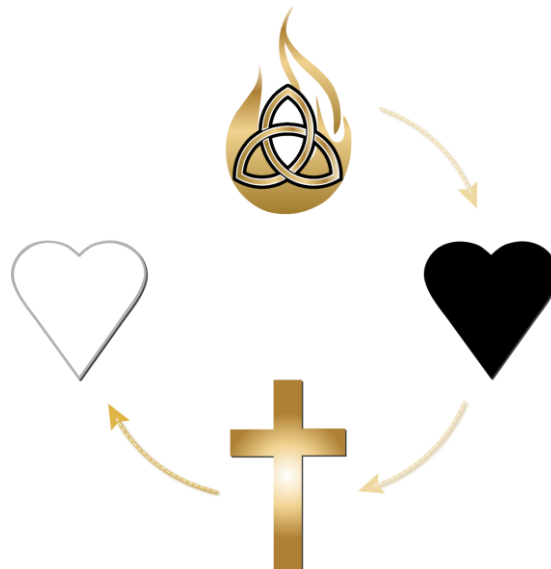


Figure 4

## Repentance And Faith Are Gifts

Repentance and faith are not the work of man; they are gifts of God. From the work of the Holy Spirit to drive us in our sinfulness to the finished work of Jesus, believers are inspired by God to manifest repentance and faith. Peter gave clear testimony to the Jewish leaders during the early days of the church that repentance and faith were gifts from God to Israel and consequently, they cannot be the work of man.

Acts 5:30–32 <sup>30</sup> *The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, **to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.** <sup>32</sup> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*

Later Peter again gave testimony to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem how he witnessed the evidence of the Holy Spirit at the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius and his household. The leaders of the church validated these conversions acknowledging that repentance was a gift from God and therefore, not a work of man.

Acts 11:15–18 <sup>15</sup> *As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup> If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” <sup>18</sup> When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then **to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.**”*

This same concept is reinforced by the Apostle Paul in his instructions to Timothy on the best way to handle opponents to the gospel ministry.

2 Timothy 2:24–26 <sup>24</sup> *And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup> correcting his opponents with gentleness. **God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,** <sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”*

Every aspect of salvation is the work of God on behalf of sinful men and women. God empowers us through His Spirit to respond to the gospel with repentance and faith so that salvation is fully the work of God and not the work of man.

1 Corinthians 1:30–31 <sup>30</sup> *And **because of him you are in Christ Jesus,** who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, “**Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.**”*

## Confession Of Faith

Yes, true believers repent of their sins and call out to God in faith, confessing Jesus as Savior and Lord. But we must understand that before it was a confession of the lips it was a conviction of the heart made real by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 10:9–10 <sup>9</sup> *...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”*

When we cry out to Jesus, we can rest assured God has already done an amazing work in our hearts. God brings joy and hope to our hearts because of the work of Jesus and we gladly confess Him as our Savior and Lord.

## God's Declaration of Righteousness

By Faith the People of God are credited with the righteousness of Jesus

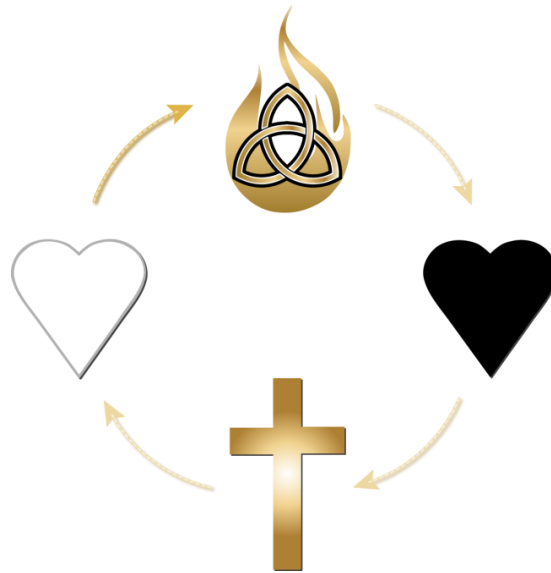


Figure 5

### Declared Righteous In Christ

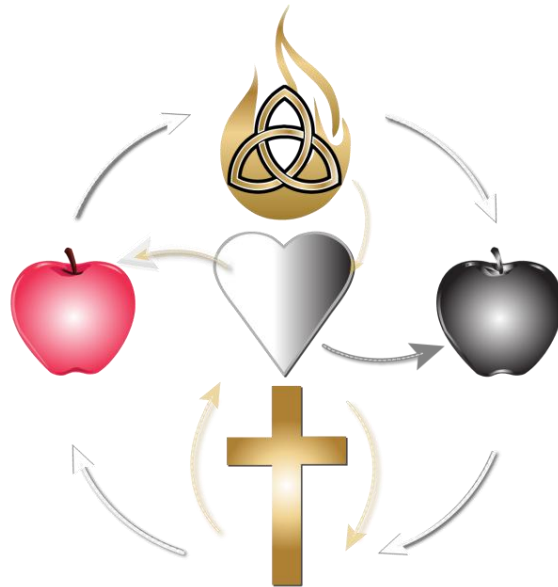
The fullness of salvation is culminated in the believer's justification. Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which He forgives our sins in Christ, grants to us Christ's righteousness, and declares us genuinely righteous in His sight. This is not supernatural smoke and mirrors. This is a true spiritual reality for every Holy Spirit empowered believer in Jesus!

Romans 4:25–5:2 <sup>25</sup> *[Jesus our Lord] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. <sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*"  
Romans 5:17 <sup>17</sup> *For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and **the free gift of righteousness** reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."*

2 Corinthians 5:21 *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, **so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**"*

Philippians 3:8–9 <sup>8</sup> *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...**"*

Every child of God stands before God cleansed, forgiven and clothed in the very righteousness of Jesus. What was impossible for us was made possible by the grace of our God through His glorious gospel. This is the great exchange – we give Jesus our sin and He gives us His righteousness. We didn't earn it, we didn't deserve it, but God did it to magnify His mercy and His grace. This is the God-centered gospel of justification! It is a one-time occurrence, but an eternal reality.



## The Gospel of Sanctification

## The Life of the Gospel for the Child of God

### *Progressive Sanctification – Living the Gospel*

The gospel is “good news” because it declares the kindness of God to meet the need of sinful men and women by declaring them righteous in and through the work of Jesus Christ. But it is important to remember that the “good news” of the gospel is not simply a past event for a believer. The gospel is an ongoing display of God’s grace that repeatedly meets our deficiency and depravity with His sufficiency and righteousness. The Christian life does not start with the gospel of grace and then progress with personal determination. Paul questioned the churches of Galatia about this same type of distortion of the gospel, asking “*Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*” (Galatians 3:3) Gospel grace is made known through the work of Jesus Christ as our living Savior and Lord and it is in this gospel grace believers consistently stand, grow and produce fruit.

Romans 5:1-2 <sup>1</sup> *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* <sup>2</sup> ***Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.***

Galatians 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.***

The following graphics are meant to help visualize and aid the understanding of the gospel as it relates to sanctification. Sanctification is the process of becoming more consecrated to God as the Holy Spirit empowers the child of God to be increasingly transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

### **All Believers Produce Bad and Good Fruit**

At any given time every believer is producing both bad fruit and good fruit

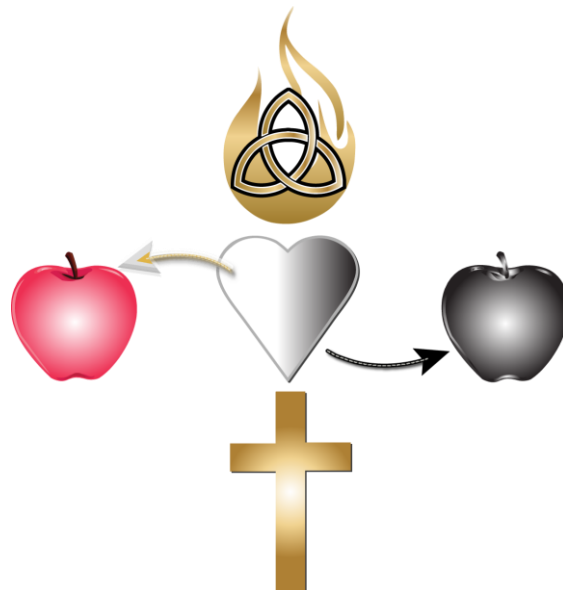


Figure 1

The direction of the life of the child of God has been changed from the hollow pursuit of sinful selfishness to the joyful pursuit of God’s glory through the fruit of Christ-likeness. Children of God find victory over many sins and display fruitfulness in many areas of life. Yet their continued life on this earth is not lived in sinless perfection. Although they are no longer enslaved within the realm of sin, but have been set free to serve and produce good fruit in the

realm of righteousness (Cf. Romans 6), followers of Jesus experience an ongoing battle with the world, the devil, and the desires of sinful selfishness and arrogance (Cf. Romans 7:7-25; Galatians 5).

Romans 7:4 *“Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”*

The earthly life of a Christian is an unending struggle against sin, weakness and selfishness. This does not mean followers of Jesus are living in persistent defiance of God and truth through unmitigated practices of sin. If this were the case it would confirm that they are not true born again children of God.

1 John 3:4–10 *“<sup>4</sup> Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”*

Every Christian’s life has been delivered from the controlling power of sin. Because of salvation, the people of God are not what they used to be. They have been permanently marked by the transforming grace of God and their direction in life has changed from sinful selfishness to a path of God-centeredness which yields clear evidence that life as a believer in Christ is gloriously different. But, even though the believer is not what he or she used to be, he or she is not yet all they should be. Satan, sin and selfishness are not the controlling forces in life, but they still have their influence. As the people of God mature in Christ, and produce good fruit that honors God, they still fight the weaknesses of the flesh and the power of sin.

## God Convicts Believers of Sin

God - the workman in justification and the workman in sanctification

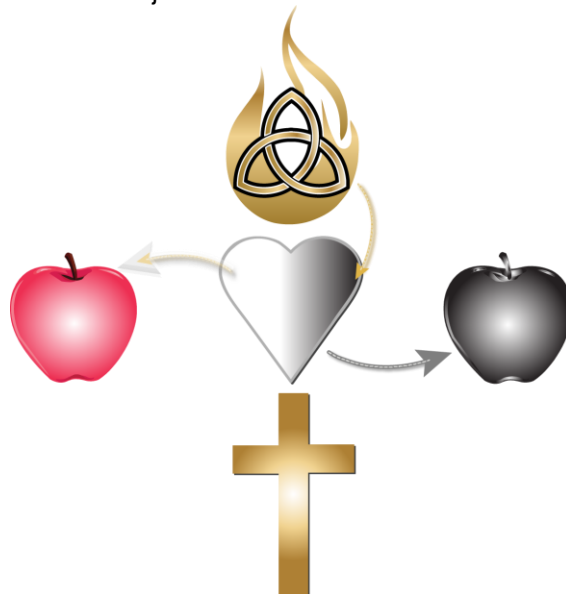


Figure 2



## The Arrows Of God's Influence

What does God use to bring about change in the hearts and lives of His redeemed people? God uses many of the same things to impress the hearts of His people that He used to get their attention when they were initially saved. Believers are the worshipers of the God of creation and God still uses general revelation to speak to His people (Romans 8:19-23). God uses the circumstances of life (both blessing and hardship) to work in the hearts of His people (2 Corinthians 1:8-9; 4:16-18). God grips the conscience of His children (Romans 7:21-23). God uses people and the church to give believers guidance, illumination and accountability (Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 3:12-17). God always uses His word in the Bible, books, pamphlets, song, and verbal communication (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). God is the glorious and primary mover behind all these things as He effectually and lovingly presses upon His people, moving them in accordance to His sanctifying purpose. The gold arrows from God on these graphics are used to help illustrate the gospel of sanctification and depict God's influence as described above.

## Positionally Righteous, Practically Not

All born again believers stand in **positional** righteousness in Christ before God. But no living born again believer stands in **practical** righteousness before God. Post justification life for the child of God is very different because this takes all of life and moves it in a God-centered direction. But the Christian life still has its battles and sinful failures so that confession, forgiveness and cleansing play an important part in the believer's maturing process. In this sense, all living believers are simultaneously saints and sinners and the need of ongoing practical cleansing is something the Scripture makes clear.

John 13:10–11 <sup>10</sup> *Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, **but is completely clean**. And you are clean, but not every one of you."* <sup>11</sup> *For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

1 Corinthians 5:7 *"Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, **as you really are unleavened**. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."*

Followers of Jesus embrace the life-long pursuit to practically become what they are positionally.

## Christian Churches Must Deal With Christian Sinners

The need of dealing with ongoing manifestations of sin is also seen in passages that instruct the church on how to confront and restore the people of God who have fallen into sin. Local churches must be concerned about the real battle all believers have with sin. There is no benefit from living in denial. Loving accountability and confrontation should be part of the normal life of any local church. This does not call for a haughty spirit of self-righteous condemnation. It calls for fellow members of the body of Christ, who are characterized by loving and humble hearts, to help one another and stir one another up toward love and good deeds. We are to be people who hunger and thirst for righteousness and help others who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness find satisfaction in the sanctifying grace of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 18:15–17 <sup>15</sup> *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."* <sup>16</sup> *But if he does*

not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Galatians 6:1–2 “<sup>1</sup> Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Hebrews 3:12–13 “<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

James 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

1 John 1:8–10 “<sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

To help fellow believers face their sin and seek forgiveness is not always an easy thing to do, but it is a necessary and loving thing to do. Those who are overtaken in faults have usually developed a degree of callousness and may not be responsive to the initial attempts of restoration. This should not shock people in the church, but with loving and prayerful diligence, fellow church member need to be prepared to help in the restoration of those who have fallen prey to sin. Such diligence does not come naturally, but supernaturally as the Spirit of God produces love and persistence in our hearts.

### **God Moves Sinful Believers to Jesus**

God moves His people to the cross to seek forgiveness and cleansing for sin

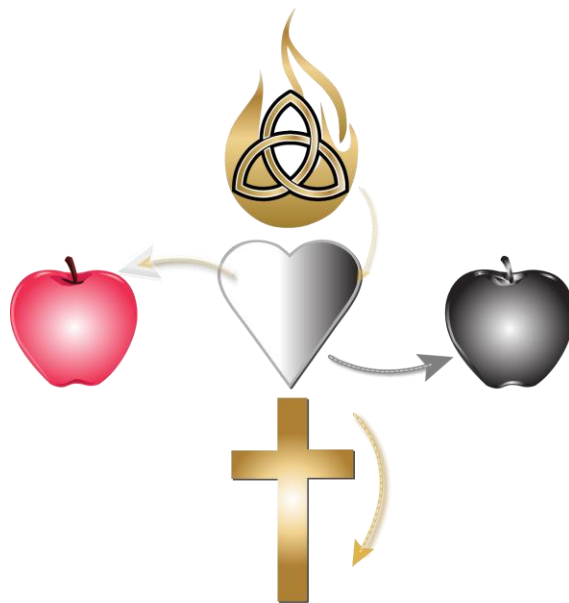


Figure 3

**As It Began, So It Continues**

Man-centered religion attempts to meet God's standards with personal performance. This is the natural tendency of all human beings and this desire is what can make religion dangerous. God's favor cannot be earned! Yet every prompting of the flesh wants to try. The true gospel, the one we live in and stand in every moment of every day, is focused on what God does for us rather than on what we do for God. This is particularly true when it comes to dealing with our sin as believers.

Just as the gospel of justification points the sinner to the cross work of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of forgiveness and cleansing, so does the gospel of sanctification. We are not capable of paying for our sins as believers anymore than we could pay for our sins as unbelievers. We cannot earn God's favor and forgiveness as believers anymore than we could earn God's favor and forgiveness as unbelievers. The way our salvation began is the way it continues.

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

Galatians 4:9 “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, **how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?**”

Galatians 5:1 “For freedom Christ has set us free; **stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.**”

Colossians 2:6–7 “<sup>6</sup> Therefore, **as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, (justification) so walk in him (sanctification),** <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

Works do not save us and works do not keep us. We are saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus and we are sustained by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus. Believers should joyfully reflect on the wonder of the cross acknowledging our desperate need of God and our dependence on God for forgiveness and cleansing.

### **Believers Come Empty-handed To Jesus**

It is the Holy Spirit of God that moves unbelievers to trust in the work of Jesus and it is the Holy Spirit who moves believers to trust the work of Jesus for their ongoing needs of forgiveness. We did not earn our justification and we will not earn our sanctification. By God's mercy and grace the believer stands empty-handed before the Lord to ask for forgiveness and cleansing. Since we are in continuous need, the grand and glorious reality is that the grace of God continually flows down to us. God mercifully opens our hearts to repeatedly receive His forgiving grace and goodness by faith.

Romans 8:34 “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, **who indeed is interceding for us.**”

Hebrews 4:14–16 “<sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.** <sup>16</sup> **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**”

Hebrews 10:19–22 “<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since **we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,** <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over

the house of God,<sup>22</sup> **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**

1 John 2:1–2 “<sup>1</sup> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. **But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.** <sup>2</sup> **He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.**”

The forgiveness of God in Christ is as precious in sanctification as it is in justification. When we sin we should not cower in prideful embarrassment, but confidently seek the forgiving and sustaining grace of our Lord.

1 John 1:9 “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*”

## God Grants Repentance and Faith

The grace of God that brings cleansing and forgiveness yields repentance and faith

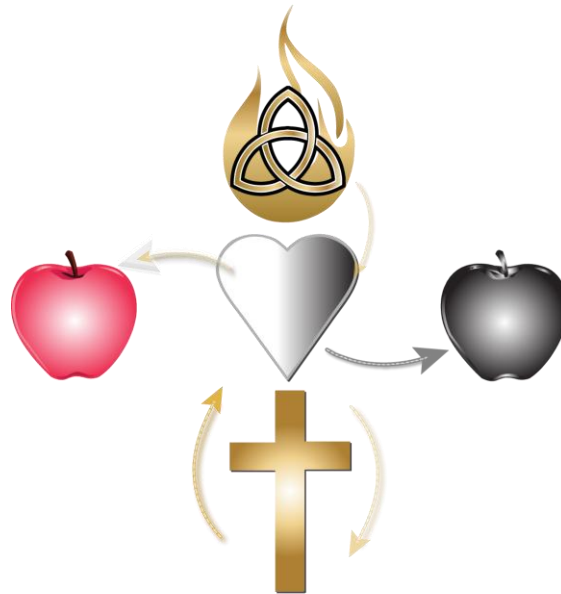


Figure 4

## The Spirit Of God Transforms The People Of God

The result of forgiveness and cleansing provided by Jesus for His people is the God-given ability to repent of sin and hold fast to the promises of God by faith. Believers need God to show His grace, not only by granting cleansing and forgiveness, but also by enabling transformation by faith in the promises of God.

Psalm 51:10–12 “<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> **Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.**”

2 Corinthians 3:17–18 “<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. **For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**”

The children of God need to have confidence in the promises of God’s word that teach us that His grace will forgive us and transform us.

## God Makes His People Miserable In Their Sin

God works in the hearts of His people to produce godly grief, which is the inspiration of repentance. Godly grief is God's way of making His children miserable in their sin. When a believer responds to the misery God produces, this results in turning from the deception of sin into the light of Christ and the satisfaction promised and provided by Him.

2 Corinthians 7:8–10 <sup>8</sup> *For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while.* <sup>9</sup> *As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For **you felt a godly grief**, so that you suffered no loss through us.* <sup>10</sup> *For **godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret**, whereas worldly grief produces death.*”

When the child of God is empowered by God's grace to repent of his or her sin, there is no hesitation or regret. The misery from sin is too great and the promise of forgiveness is too sweet to resist. Restored fellowship with God is like the cool water of satisfaction to a thirsty soul.

## When God Moves There Is No Place For Pride

God-given grief goes hand in hand with humility. The believer will only humble himself or herself because of the enabling grace of God. What God commands, by grace He supplies. God graciously provides warnings from Scripture, conviction from the regenerate heart, and warnings from the people of God that get our attention and lead us to respond to our sin with brokenness and contrition. Humility, repentance and faith continue to be the fruit of God's gospel grace – the gospel of sanctification.

James 4:6–10 <sup>6</sup> **But he gives more grace.** *Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”* <sup>7</sup> *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* <sup>8</sup> *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* <sup>9</sup> *Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.* <sup>10</sup> **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**”

1 Peter 5:5–11 *Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* <sup>6</sup> *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,* <sup>7</sup> *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.* <sup>8</sup> *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* <sup>9</sup> *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.* <sup>10</sup> *And after you have suffered a little while, **the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*** <sup>11</sup> *To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

## God's Discipline Produces A Harvest Of Righteousness

God loves the glory of His name and His children too much to let them tromp around unrestrained in sin. We know His word and His ways, and He desires for us to walk in them. So when we get out of line, His grace provides correction.

Hebrews 12:5–11 <sup>5</sup> *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as*

sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” <sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup> **For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.**

One of the primary resources God uses to correct the sinful deviations of believers is the people of the church. In this sense the church is a wonderful means of grace and nurturer of the fruit of righteousness.

Hebrews 3:12–14 <sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

### God Enables Fruitfulness

Trusting the enabling grace of God produces God-honoring fruit and inspires hope in future grace

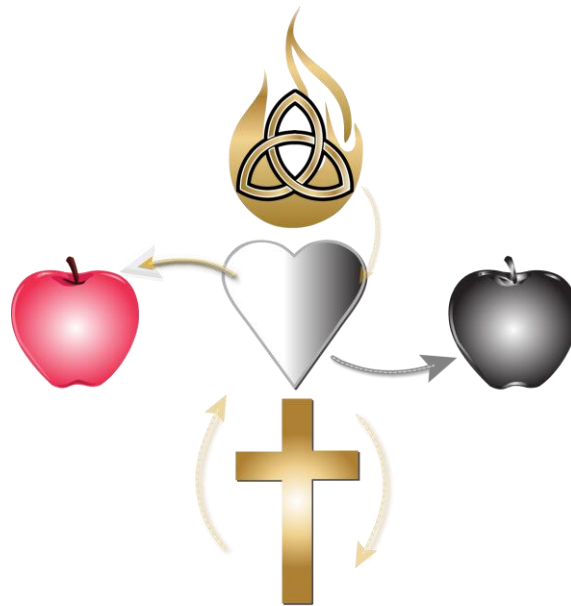


Figure 5

### Fruitfulness Is A Supernatural Reality

Fruitfulness in the Christian life is not for the glory of the Christian, but rather for the glory of the Lord. Believers are not productive because they are godly and capable, but rather believers are productive because of the power and grace of God. It is He who makes His people godly and capable. Only when believers are humbly and vitally dependent on the Lord

are they productive. This is the confidence we have in Christ and it is the substance of our prayers.

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. **Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**"*

John 15:16 *"You did not choose me, **but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.**"*

James 2:14 says, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" (The implied answer is "No.") Being a fruitless Christian is not possible. Such a statement should not cause oppression, but should yield hope and humble anticipation. God wants to declare His glory through the fruitfulness of His people. For this to be realized He has provided believers with the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of the local church and the precious promises of God's word, all of which a believer embraces by faith.

2 Peter 1:3–11 *"<sup>3</sup> **His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,** <sup>4</sup> **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.** <sup>5</sup> *For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,* <sup>6</sup> *and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,* <sup>7</sup> *and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.* <sup>8</sup> **For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** <sup>9</sup> *For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.* <sup>10</sup> *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.* <sup>11</sup> *For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*"*

### **Fruitfulness Is Varied And Beautiful**

The fruitfulness of the child of God is seen in many ways. Certainly there is the multifaceted fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23-24); the fruit of corporate worship (Ephesians 5:18-21; Colossians 3:12-17); the fruit of a church maturing in Christ through the loving and active ministry of spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12-14; 1 Peter 4:10-11); the fruit of joy and perseverance in suffering (Romans 8:18-39, James 1:2-5); the fruit of helping lost souls find Jesus the Savior (John 4:35-38; Romans 10:14-15). These and many, many more are the fruits that God produces in His people to the praise of His glory and grace.

### **Rejoicing In The Glory Of The All-sufficient Benevolent God**

God does not need us. God has no deficits. He is the all-sufficient, benevolent God and out of His fullness and grace He supplies everything that is needed. The Apostle Paul instructed the Athenian philosophers about the sufficiency of God in Acts 17:24-25. *"<sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."* Some will say, "But aren't we told to serve the Lord?" Yes, we are told many places in Scripture to serve the Lord. However, we are not expected to serve the Lord from the resources of human effort and determination.

We serve the Lord in the strength that He supplies. This becomes the most consistent deduction as we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.

2 Corinthians 3:5 “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but **our sufficiency is from God...**”

1 Corinthians 15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, **though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.**”

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

Philippians 2:12–13 “<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for **it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**”

Colossians 1:28-29 “<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, **struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.**”

It is a joy, not a burden, to be effective and fruitful as Christians. It is a joy because we know that the ability is not demanded of our human efforts, but is the product of indwelling grace through the gospel of Jesus Christ. With this in mind, we should trust the promises of God, work hard by the grace He provides, walk in the joy and satisfaction of the gospel of sanctification in Christ and do everything we can to invite others to find refreshment and satisfaction in the grace of Jesus Christ.

## Sanctification Is An Ongoing Process

Replacing sin and selfishness with God-honoring fruitfulness is a life-long process

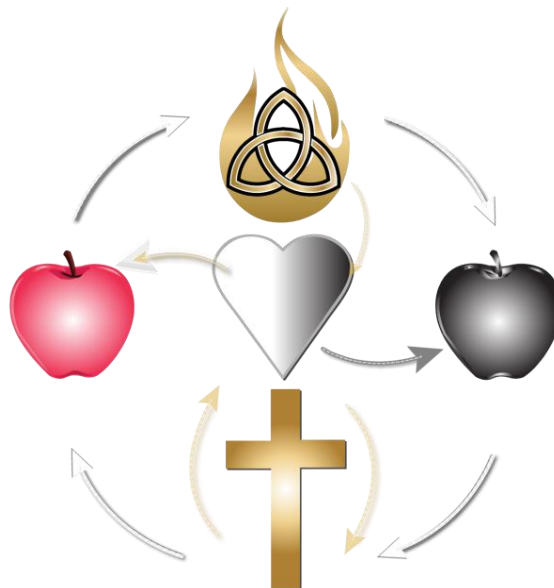


Figure 6



The white arrows in the graph are used to show the work of sanctification is an ongoing process. Every living child of God is engaged in the life-long work of sanctification. This work will be completed at the return of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:12–13 <sup>12</sup> *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,*** <sup>13</sup> *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Philippians 3:12–16 <sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, **but I press on to make it my own,** because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* <sup>13</sup> *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* <sup>15</sup> **Let those of us who are mature think this way,** and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

<sup>16</sup> *Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

The follower of Jesus looks forward with a hopeful heart to the time of glorification when Jesus returns.

1 John 3:1–3 <sup>1</sup> *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.* <sup>2</sup> *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* <sup>3</sup> **And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.**

### **Satisfying Fountain Illustration**

Few people understand this concept more than Dr. John Piper. He is the pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota and a prolific writer. God has used Dr. Piper to inspire many people with a renewed delight in the goodness and grace of God. A phrase that is repeated in many of his books and throughout his ministry sums it up—"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." In a message titled "**Can we give anything to Christ?**" John Piper gives an illustration that aptly makes the point concerning the sufficiency and benevolence of God in all things.

Jesus gives us the gift of himself and we ask, "Now what can I render to Jesus for all the benefits of his fellowship?" Answer: Ask him for his help. That's the gift he wants.

The reason Christ wants this is because he always wants to get the glory while we get the benefit. Glory comes to him when we depend on him rather than try to enrich him. If we come to him with gifts—as though he needed something—then we put him in the position of a needy person, and we're the benefactors. He always wants to be the one who is infinitely self-sufficient. Therefore the only gifts that we can bring Jesus are gifts of praise, thanks, longing, and neediness.

A fountain is not glorified by us hauling buckets of dirty water up the mountain and pouring them in. A fountain—a spring in a mountain—is glorified, rather, by us lying down at the edge of the stream, putting our face in, drinking our fill, and getting up and saying, "Ah!" That's called worship. Then we take a bucket, dip it in, walk down the hill to the people in the valley who don't know that the spring exists, and we say, "Taste this! It's right up there, and his name is Jesus!" The kind of gift that the fountain wants is

drinkers, because then he looks truly overflowing, rich, and self-sufficient. And that's exactly what he wants to look like.

## **Summation for Application of the Gospel of Sanctification**

### **Chart For Gospel-Centered Clarification**

The flesh is all about making the effort to earn and deserve God's goodness and grace. We must resist this godless drive with rabid intensity. Since the temptations are subtle and frequent we will benefit by checking our focus and making sure God is in the crosshairs of our sights. The following are some things to keep in mind to make sure our perspective is where God would have it to be. They can help us to keep a biblical perspective on our priorities that are beneficial for any believer and anyone to whom he or she ministers.

| <b>Christ-centered Gospel</b>   | <b>Man-centered Legalism</b>   |
|---|--|
| Christ is the living Savior   | Christ is our example  |
| God's grace descends to us  | Our works ascend to God  |
| God is the Seeker   | We are the seekers   |
| God is the Judge and Justifier  | God is our encouraging buddy   |
| Bible is a treasure of the riches of Christ   | Bible is a book of cause and effect equations                          |
| The church focuses on God's service and ministry                                    | The church focuses on our service and ministry                         |
| Baptism – Christ meets the believer bringing blessings of grace                     | Baptism – the believer's first step of obedience evidencing commitment |
| Communion – Christ meets His people inspiring cleansing, refreshing, unifying grace | Communion – an observance to show our obedience and devotion           |
| Worship – joyfully reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth (John Piper)    | Worship – what we give to God  |
| Delight   | Duty   |

### **Practice Rooted in Position**

It is far too easy to push for change and expect commitment without establishing the necessary groundwork of our resources in Jesus Christ. By grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for God's glory alone we have been brought into the family of God and declared righteous in Jesus. From this position and the continuing flow of God's grace we repeatedly receive the power and fortitude to practice the things required of believers.

As we read Scripture we must acknowledge our natural bent is to embrace the imperatives that tell us the things we must do and the ways we should feel. But if we do this without understanding our position through the indicatives of Scripture (things to believe about who we are in Christ), we get the cart before the horse. This results in frustration and discouragement because we are attempting to obey the commands and live our Christian lives in the power of personal performance. Rather, we should recognize our hopeless and helpless state by repeatedly and humbly approaching the throne of grace where the mercy and goodness of God flows to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness that only the Lord can provide.

In Philippians chapter 3 Paul explains how he turned from the emptiness of self-righteousness to the fullness of righteousness in Christ. He remembers his life as a legalistic Pharisee when he used to have misguided confidence in the flesh that he could live the righteous life God required. But the mercy of God helped him to realize that attempting to serve the Lord with

legalistic determination was futile and he discarded that pursuit as worthless. He says, “<sup>8</sup> *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...***” (Philippians 3:8-9) We, too, must realize that we cannot understand the imperatives if we do not understand the indicatives (Cf. Romans 1-11 – indicatives, Romans 12-16 – imperatives; Ephesians 1-3 – indicatives, Ephesians 4-6 imperatives; etc.).

Looking at a portion of Paul’s letter to the Romans may aid us further in understanding that a believer’s practice (imperative) must flow out of a believer’s position in Christ (indicative).

Romans 11:33-12:2 “<sup>33</sup> *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* <sup>34</sup> *“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”* <sup>35</sup> *“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”* <sup>36</sup> *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. <sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

From Romans 12:2, God lets us know that our lives are not to be pressed into the mold of the world. It is natural and easy to “fit into” the world and live by its man-centered ways, which include man-centered religious ways, yielding the fruit of comparative condemnation or comparative discouragement. We must fight the tendency to conform to man-centered worldliness.

This fight is embraced by renewing our minds, which means refreshing our thinking and living by the truths and promises of God’s word that make much of God’s mercy for us. We must be refreshed in the rich mercy of our God that flows down to His elect so that all glory is God’s. It is these God-centered truths we are called to remember so that we never resolve by mere human determination to try to live and minister for God. It is with open-handed lives that we stand before the gracious throne of God to receive His abundant mercy, which is the source of our spiritual, mental and physical power to worship and minister for God. We tap into this source by the grace of God that inspires us to be captivated by the glory of the Lord who is full of mercy and provides us with all we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him (Cf. Romans 1:1-11:36).

Our renewal is a repeated Spirit-wrought determination to focus and reflect on the beauty, splendor and all-sufficient grace of the Lord. This is what Paul instructed the Corinthian believers to do. “*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*” (2 Corinthians 3:18) We cannot understand the imperative (Romans 12:1) “present your bodies as a living sacrifice” until we have worshipfully reflected on the indicatives summarized as “the mercies of God” (Romans 1:1-11:36).

In fact, we can have our minds filled with the teachings of Scripture, but we will not understand

the truth of Scripture unless we see it in the proper God-centered light, revealing that the grace of Almighty God flows richly and abundantly to us through Jesus Christ. We are not competent in ourselves, our competency is found in Christ alone. He is the living water of God's grace and mercy flowing down to us. As Paul says, "*Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*" (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)

When our minds are repeatedly renewed with a God-centered and Christ-exalting perspective, we are enabled to discern what is the will of God. There is no profitable point in trying to understand the teaching of Scripture from any other perspective. There is no point in trying to decide on an act of service or ministry from any other perspective. In this light it is easy to see how Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:1-2 flows out of the doxology of Romans 11:33-36. All things must be tested from this perspective. Without this humbled assessment, all beliefs and actions are distorted.

### **God help us sustain a gospel-centered ministry!**

The information presented above is for the purpose of Scripturally checking our perspective so that we resist the various temptations to drift into man-centered ways of living life and doing ministry. Our desire is to be diligent and joyful in pursuit of God's glory and the pursuit of satisfaction that flows from God the Father through the work of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. We live and serve by the grace of our great God. May God continue to enable us to maintain a God-honoring gospel-centered focus in ministry!

(The ideas presented above are the result of God's blessings flowing to through the writings of John Piper in ***Desiring God*** and ***The Pleasures of God***, the writings of Michael Horton in ***Christless Christianity***, the writings of Paul David Tripp and Timothy S. Lane in "***How People Change***," and the preaching of Jesus in the ***Sermon on the Mount***.)