

God's Work Through the Truth

A Bible Study Outline • John 17:17

BIG IDEA: Jesus prayed that the Father would make His people holy — and He told us exactly how: through the truth of His Word. God is in the business of making broken people genuinely whole, and truth is His instrument.

I. The Question Sanctification Raises

What does it actually mean to become more like Christ?

- **A.** Jesus consecrated Himself to the Father's plan so that we could be set apart for God. (*John 17:19*)
- **B.** Becoming truly devoted to God is not automatic — it raises a real question: *How does it actually happen?*
- **C.** Two old answers the church has tried:
 - **The Monastery Answer** — Leave the world behind; holiness requires isolation.
 - But Jesus said we have been *sent into* the world, and He did not ask the Father to take us out of it. (*John 17:15, 18*)
 - **The Embedded Answer** — Stay in the world and live differently from it. This is where Jesus places us.
- **D.** The real question remains: *What is the actual way to become like Christ?*

II. Three Principles of Sanctification

Principle 1 — Sanctification Is God's Work in the Believer

He does not ask us to produce it. He produces it.

- **A.** Jesus did not pray, "Father, help them try harder." He prayed, "*Sanctify them.*" (*John 17:17*)
- **B.** You cannot separate justification from sanctification.
 - **Justification** = God declares you righteous before Him.
 - **Sanctification** = God makes you more like Christ day by day.
 - Both are His work, from start to finish. (*Philippians 1:6; 2:12–13*)
- **C.** How God draws and transforms us may look coincidental from where we stand — but it is never random. It is God working His purposes. (*John 6*)
- **D.** God uses more than one instrument in His sanctifying work: His discipline (*Hebrews 12:6*) and the whole arc of your salvation story. (*Romans 8:30, 38–39*)

Bottom line: Sanctification does not ultimately depend on you. It depends on Him. But that is not permission to drift — it is the foundation that makes the work possible.

Principle 2 — Sanctification Comes Through the Truth of His Word

God's instrument is His Word. Our role is not passive.

- **A.** God brings us into a real relationship with truth — and that truth, working in us over time, produces holiness. (*John 17:17*)
- **B.** The Bible never teaches that our role is simply to sit still and wait.
 - We are the branch; He is the vine. We must remain in Him. (*John 15:1–5*)
 - The life we now live, we live by faith in the Son of God. (*Galatians 2:20*)
- **C.** This is not surrender-and-drift. Sanctification is hard, cooperative, daily work that God empowers. The Bible uses four action words for our part:
 - **Mortify** — Put sin to death. Starve it out. Do not feed it. (*Romans 6:11; Colossians 3:5*)
 - **Stand** — Hold your ground in faith when pressure comes. (*1 Corinthians 16:13*)

- **Flee** — Some things are not to be fought. They are to be run from. (1 Timothy 6:11)
- **Cleanse** — Confess sin. Do not let it accumulate. (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 1:8–9)
- **D.** God works in us over time and through means — not all at once.
 - He says, “You have been forgiven — now walk like it.” (Ephesians 4:25–32; 1 Peter 1:14–15)
 - He says, “Know who you are and stop doing what you used to do.” (1 Peter 4:1–4)
 - He says, “If you have this hope, purify yourself.” (1 John 3:3)

Bottom line: God works through His Word. He calls you to work with Him — not instead of Him, and not without Him.

Principle 3 — Sanctification Is Fruit That Grows from What You Believe

What you believe about God shapes how you live for God.

- **A.** Right doctrine is not optional equipment for holy living — it is the root of it.
- **B.** Paul makes this plain in 1 Corinthians 15: get the resurrection wrong, and your life will eventually follow. Theology always leaks into behavior.
- **C.** The truth Jesus prays over us in John 17:17 is not just information — it is the very soil in which a holy life grows.
- **Note:** *This principle deserves its own full treatment — we will return to 1 Corinthians 15 at the right time.*

Bottom line: Guard what you believe. Bad theology quietly does to the soul what bad water does to a body — the damage shows up later.

III. Bringing It Together

What has Jesus shown us?

- **Sanctification is God's work** — He is the one making you holy.
- **Sanctification comes through the Word** — truth is the instrument, and you must engage it actively.
- **Sanctification is rooted in what you believe** — right doctrine is the soil a holy life grows in.

The Gospel Beneath It All

The reason any of this is possible is not our effort — it is Christ's. He consecrated Himself (John 17:19) so that we could be sanctified. Every act of mortifying, standing, fleeing, and cleansing is only possible because He first did what we could not do for ourselves.

We work because He worked. We pursue holiness because He purchased it.

Closing

- **One truth to carry home:** God has not left your growth to chance or willpower. He has given you His Word, His Spirit, and His Son — and He is committed to finishing what He started in you. (Philippians 1:6)
- **One question to sit with:** *Where in your life right now is God calling you to actively cooperate with His sanctifying work — not to earn it, but because He has already begun it in you?*
- **One action to take:** Pick one of the four words this week — mortify, stand, flee, or cleanse — and ask God to show you where it applies. Then do it.