

# Are You the Real Thing

Philippians 2:12-13

## Preface

In the movie “Fireproof”, Caleb’s marriage is on the brink of disaster. At the same time he is struggling under conviction from God. God is calling Caleb to the cross. Caleb’s coworker Michael is a devoted Christian.

In the fire station Caleb listens carefully as his friend Michael speaks of his brush with death and his faith. When Michael walks away another firefighter steps in to make fun of Michael’s faith. To which Caleb responds, “You can say what you want but you and I both know Michael is the real thing.”

That remark has stuck with me. I believe Caleb was saying that there was something special about Michael’s faith and it was evident to others that it was real. Michael’s Christianity was not pious or arrogant but it was also not phony or hypocrisy.

Michael’s faith permeated every aspect of his life and it showed. Michael was the real thing.

The question I asked myself and I want to ask you this morning is; **“Are you the real thing?”**

## Scripture – Read

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Philippians 2:12-13 NIV*

## Introduction

Are you the real thing? Are you truly a Christian whose life is being transformed and molded into what God desires?

Salvation is not just about believing and then knowing you will go to heaven when you die. The gospel is the offer of life in God’s kingdom. God’s plan is that his image be restored to its beauty and glory in your life. We call this process sanctification.

Sanctification is the process by which we work together with God to be transformed from who we were to who he would have us become. As believers we are set apart as the children of God and we begin the process of becoming his vessels to serve him and show others his love.

Sanctification is a joint project between us and God. When Paul says “Work out your own salvation,” that tells us that we have an important role in the process.

At the same time, we are not in this process alone. In fact, it would be impossible without God. Paul says, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” He does not mean in a sense of anxiety. Instead Paul uses the phrase to refer to a humble attitude of dependence on God and recognizing that while we do have a role to play, we do not control the process.

Illus: Think about a sail boat. I have only been sailing twice in my life and both times I found it a good bit of work. There were ropes to be tied and sails to go up and down or moved from one side to another. There was also the wheel to be tended. You had to pay attention and be responsive.

At the same time, there was the wind. When sailing you are completely at the mercy of the wind. If there is no wind, you do not go anywhere. You have to do your part and you have to be ready but it is the wind in the sail that results in forward progress.

In the same way, you and I have a role to play in sanctification but it is the Holy Spirit of God that provides the power and moves the process forward.

In John 3:8 speaking of the Spirit of God Jesus says, “*The wind blows where it chooses. You hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone born of the spirit.*”

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is powerful and yet mysterious. When we make ourselves available to God, life becomes an adventure where the Holy Spirit is our tour guide.

We must be ready and willing to follow the leadership of God. We must be eager and open to His transformation in us. The Holy Spirit will take us to places beyond our imagination.

This is the process of sanctification. Today I would like to discuss four truths of what the Bible teaches about sanctification.

## 1. Sanctification is to be pursued

For a believer, the Holy Spirit calls us to be set apart; to be transformed and to become holy. It is the observance of this process that causes us to see amazing changes in someone's life after they become a Christian.

On the other hand, it is the lack of this change that often causes us to view some people as half hearted or uncommitted Christians. We observe that they profess to be a Christian yet there is no evidence of change in their life. They do not appear to be "the real thing."

For some, it is the fear of the process of sanctification that causes them to reject the gospel all together. Some people foolishly fear what lifestyle changes might be required once they become a Christian and thus reject the calling of the Holy Spirit. Pray for such people as the war rages inside.

Paul speaks more of the process of sanctification in Philippians 3:12-13 when he says, *"<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

Though Paul's identity is secure as a Christian, he must press forward in the process of experiencing the prize, becoming who God calls him to be.

The truth is this is a process in which we must remain diligent. We will not always get it right. We will make mistakes along the way. The key is to put the mistakes behind us and press on. We are in the process of being formed spiritually.

Are you the real thing? Are you trying to become the real thing? Is it your heart's desire to know God and live for him? Are you devoted? Are you pursuing sanctification?

Illus: It amazes me that people will pursue other things with great devotion. People will work hard in their business or profession. People will work hard at getting in shape physically or getting better at a sport or even a hobby. But too often we devote little time or effort pursuing who God wants us to be.

Sanctification is to be pursued.

## 2. Sanctification is a process not an event.

Illus: Too often we are like our kids on a long vacation. We are constantly asking, "Are we there yet?" We want it to be an instantaneous event.

Illus: Back in the 80s I worked in the Montlimar building in Mobile on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor. Sometimes I would be in a big hurry when I got on the elevator to go up to my office. I would just keep pressing the 9 button repeatedly. It was as if I thought the elevator was going to say to itself, "This guy is in a hurry. I better skip all the other floors and head right to the 9<sup>th</sup> floor."

We live in a day of email, cell phones, text message and fast food. We want instant gratification.

Sanctification does not happen that way. Paul says, Am I there yet? Not yet. Not today. Not tomorrow. But this one thing I do. I don't give up. I keep pressing forward.

In the pursuit of sanctification, you will fail, probably often. What should you do if you are serious about pursuing sanctification? Get right back up and keep persevering. It is a process.

In verse 13, Paul has a strategy for dealing with yesterday's regrets, and it can be expressed in a single word: forget. He says, "I forget what is behind me." We tend to think of forgetting as a bad thing, as something we shouldn't do. But forgetting is indispensable to sanctification.

You must learn to ask the Holy Spirit, "Will you help me overcome yesterday's mistakes, sin, guilt, and disappointments?" We must learn from our mistakes but we must also move on. We can't be shackled to yesterday's regrets because sanctification is a journey, not an event. Therefore Paul says, "I forget what's behind me and press forward."

It's guaranteed you'll slip; the danger is when you slip you'll get discouraged and give up. We must not allow failures keep us trapped in yesterday. We must not allow our past successes to keep us trapped in yesterday either.

Sanctification is a process. So don't give up. Don't stop growing. Don't stop being transformed.

### 3. Sanctification is empowered by God not by us

Remember we must prepare the sails but God supplies the wind.

When talking about transformation, Paul often uses a passive imperative form of the verb. Look at Romans 12:2: *“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may discern what is the will of God.”*

Paul does not write, “Transform yourself.” Instead he says, “Be transformed.” In other words, let God do the work in you.

Where are the winds of the Spirit blowing in your life? Where and how is God at work in you? What sin is God seeking to free you from? What sacrifice or commitment is He calling you to make?

There are a few ways you can discern how the Spirit is working in your life. One way is to ask the question, “God, how are you seeking to transform me in this moment?”

Illus: When you’re in under-ten-items line at the grocery store, and the person in front of you has 30 items, you can say, “God, how can you use this moment to teach me patience?”

When God tugs on your heart to serve or help in his work but you feel inclined to procrastinate you can say, “What the heck, I am going to step out on faith and just say yes I will do that.”

It is challenging to rely on the Holy Spirit as our counselor from day to day. We must learn to speak with God about everything and cease every moment to grow in our faith and understanding.

Sanctification is never a mechanical thing. You must allow the winds of the Spirit to blow in your life. That’s why sanctification will look different from one person to another, and it will look different in different stages of your life. You need to discern how God is at work in your life.

Illus: Someone suggested in a small group setting you might ask others, “What do you see in my life that needs to change?” Would you be willing to ask someone that question? Most of us would not be willing to ask others that question. But that is precisely the question we should all be asking God.

How is God at work in changing your life today?

### 4. Sanctification benefits others

We should pursue sanctification for the sake of others, not just for our own fulfillment. We cannot pursue sanctification just for our own individual needs. We must have others in mind at all times.

The scribes and Pharisees in Jesus’ day thought of themselves as holy but they couldn’t seem to love anyone. They were too absorbed in themselves to care about others.

Sanctification is when you aren’t consumed with being good but rather focused on doing good.

Sanctification is when we discover the key to being loved by others is loving others.

As Christians we are called to live in harmony and united for the common benefit of the family of God. We are described as parts of the body joined together for the whole.

In Philippians 2:14 Paul writes, *“Do all things without murmuring and arguing.”* In other words, as the community matures we should find no grumbling and no arguing, but rather grateful hearts.

I have known churches where the people were cantankerous and bitter, and yet they were thought of as holy people. They were religious but lacking in love.

The goal of sanctification in a single word is love.

God loved you when you were the hardest to love. God wants to sanctify you, and bring you to the point that you can love others even when they aren’t very lovable. God’s intent is to sanctify you so you can love as He loves.

Sanctification is God’s destiny for you. If you miss that, you miss your very purpose in life.

## Conclusion

This week I read the writings of a man speaking about observing the actions of a friend. The friend had many deep childhood wounds. He goes on to explain that the man virtually had no father. His mom was a troubled person who married five different men, none of which lasted long. She spent little time raising her son and gave him little encouragement.

He is a grown man now with his own family. Several years ago his mother was dying with a degenerative muscular disease and lost all physical capacity. None of her other children would have anything to do with her, and none of the men with whom she'd been married even acknowledged her.

But this one son decided to love her. He took her home and cared for her, feeding her by hand, combing her hair, and cleaning up after her messes. The friend describes visiting the man in his home and observing the labor involved and the woman's constant crying and moaning. He thought to himself, "I've been given the blessings of church, scripture and family exponentially greater than this guy, yet I don't know if I could love like this."

When the lady died, 16 people came to her funeral. Not even all her kids came. But the one son played a tape and sang a song she loved and spoke kind words about his mother.

He didn't love her perfectly but in spite of everything, he found a way to love her. And, he loved her when it was the hardest. He loved her when no one else would love her.

That's what sanctification looks like.

Sanctification is when you and I put ourselves in the background and let God's plan be in the foreground.