

Following Jesus Requires Sanctification

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[0 : 00] Well, a few weeks ago, I was listening to a sermon by a pastor and friend of mine, and he was talking about the way that churches often invite people to come.

We often say, come as you are. Of course, what we mean by that is don't try to clean yourself up morally before you come.

Don't try to make yourself right with God before you come. Just come. And my pastor friend acknowledged that he has no issue with inviting people to come as they are, but he made a very helpful amendment to that statement.

He said, yes, come as you are, but don't expect to stay that way. And that's our subject today. We've been discussing what it means to follow Jesus.

I've said that following Jesus requires faith. It requires the Bible. It requires the church, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Today, I will add that following Jesus requires change.

[1 : 06] It requires sanctification. It requires holiness. When we first come to Christ, we do come as we are.

In the very first part of the study, we looked at Mark chapter 1, when Jesus called his first disciples to follow him. If you remember, they were going about their business as fishermen when Jesus came along.

In fact, Peter and Andrew were in the act of casting their nets into the water when Jesus essentially interrupted and said, follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.

They didn't have time to clean themselves up. They certainly didn't say, Lord, can you give us a few minutes? We're not quite ready. The text would have us believe that they left everything and followed immediately.

And we could go further. It can be a dangerous thing to tell people that they need to clean themselves up or get right with God before they come to Jesus.

[2 : 06] Why? Because it's all in vain. We can't make ourselves right with God apart from Jesus. In Matthew 12, verses 43 through 45, Jesus tells the following parable.

He says, When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest but finds none. Then it says, I will return to my house from which I came.

And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself. And they enter and dwell there.

And the last state of that person is worse than the first. That's what it's like when we try to make ourselves right with God apart from Christ. We drive out the unclean spirit.

We sweep the floor. We make everything look nice. But without Christ, it's all in vain. Jesus says that spirit eventually returns. He sees how nice everything is.

[3 : 10] And he then returns with seven more evil spirits. So in the end, we're worse off than when we began. So we come to Christ as we are.

And what are we? We are the tax collector who went into the temple to pray. The Pharisee who was also there. He represents the person who cleans himself up.

When he prayed, he said, God, I thank you that I am not like other men are. Extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even this tax collector. He said, I fast twice a week and I give tithes of all that I get.

You know, look how beautifully swept my room is, Lord. Lord, I've cleaned it up just for you. The tax collector, on the other hand, would not even lift his eyes up to heaven.

But he beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. The tax collector didn't even try to clean himself up.

[4 : 18] Why? He knew he couldn't. He had nothing to offer. He went to the Lord empty-handed and ashamed.

He couldn't even look up toward heaven. What if he were to catch a glimpse of God? He would likely die on the spot because of his sinfulness. In the presence of a holy God. At the very least, he'd be compelled to cry out as Isaiah did.

Woe is me, for I am lost. Or as it says in the King James Bible, woe is me, for I am undone. The Pharisee came to the temple disguised as a righteous man.

I say disguised because he wasn't a righteous man. In fact, in that particular case, he was worse off than the tax collector because he presented himself as a righteous man.

The tax collector, on the other hand, he came as he was and nothing more. He didn't pretend in the least. And Jesus said, that man, the tax collector, went down to his house justified rather than the other.

[5 : 28] Come as you are. But don't expect to stay that way. Now, before we talk about the change that's required of us as followers of Jesus, let's take a moment to make a very clear distinction between two very important doctrines of the Bible.

That is justification and sanctification. Last weekend, I officiated a funeral, and someone in the family told me, I want you to preach the gospel, but do me a favor.

Don't speak Christianese when you do it. Don't use a bunch of big theological words that the average person won't understand. So, if by chance you have no idea what I mean by justification and sanctification, don't worry.

I'll attempt to do as I did last week and explain these terms. You know, it's interesting to observe the progression of church history. It's interesting to see how different doctrines were disputed or were misunderstood at different times in history.

For example, the doctrine of justification was tragically misunderstood for years prior to the Protestant Reformation. Today, it seems that sanctification is the doctrine that, well, I won't say that it's misunderstood.

[6 : 54] I think it's more accurate to say that it's largely ignored. Many pastors and teachers will say to people, come as you are, but they never include that all-important amendment which says, don't expect to stay that way.

What do I mean? Well, first of all, let's talk about justification. What is the doctrine of justification? Let's talk about that tax collector who went into the temple and simply prayed, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Jesus said he left that place justified. What does that mean? What happened to him? Well, first of all, we need to be clear about the fact that we are guilty before God.

I was listening to a formal debate the other day between a Christian and a Christian turned atheist. And the atheist said, you know what, I got tired of telling people they have a problem they don't think they have.

He said a large part of his evangelistic efforts were spent trying to convince people that they were guilty sinners so that they would see their need for Christ. In his estimation, we shouldn't need to do that.

[8 : 14] If people were truly guilty, they would know they were guilty. They would feel it. We wouldn't have to convince them. Maybe you've run into this yourself. Well, here's the thing.

We're not guilty because we feel guilty. We are guilty. We are guilty because we are guilty. We are guilty because God's law says we are guilty.

And in a sense, we don't feel our guilt because we're guilty. Our sinful rebellion against God runs so deep that we suppress the truth.

In Romans 1, Paul says we suppress the truth in unrighteousness. It's as if we hide our sin with more sin. Our very denial of our sinfulness shows us how sinful we really are.

Feelings aside, God has declared us guilty. And that's the point. And the doctrine of justification explains how a guilty person can ever be made right.

[9 : 19] How could God ever declare a guilty person innocent? And for the answer, let's briefly look at Romans 3. Romans 3.

You'll notice how Paul spins the first half of the chapter hammering the point that we are all guilty. We are all condemned before God. And he says in verse 19, now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

In other words, we are all under God's law. We are all held to the same standard of his law. And his law says we are guilty. Every last one of us.

We have no more arguments to make. We are guilty. Then verse 21. But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

[10 : 49] This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

So in the previous passage, Paul established that we are not righteous. God's law proves we're not righteous. Instead, we are condemned before God.

As I said before, we are all guilty. So the question becomes, how can we be made innocent? How can we ever be accepted into God's holy presence in heaven if we are in fact guilty and condemned?

Well, here's the answer. The law says we're guilty, but the righteousness of God is manifested apart from the law.

We need righteousness, right? That's our problem. We lack any semblance of righteousness. And the first point Paul makes here is that the righteousness we need comes apart from the law.

[11 : 59] In other words, you and I are not going to pick ourselves up by the bootstraps, do what the law tells us to do, and make ourselves righteous before God.

As Paul has already said, the law only proves our guilt. When we compare ourselves to God's holy and perfect law, all we find are shortcomings. We're not going to meet that standard, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Instead, this righteousness we need, Paul says, is of God. That's important to note.

This is not our righteousness Paul is talking about. We don't want to make the mistake that Martin Luther made for so many years as he desperately tried to be as righteous as God demands.

Luther made himself miserable trying to keep God's law in order to be accepted by God. He was trying to justify himself before God by his works.

[13 : 03] That is, until he realized that when Scripture speaks of the righteousness we need, it's not talking about the righteousness we personally achieve. It's the righteousness of God.

He's the only one who is truly righteous. righteousness. This righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ is for all who believe.

Verse 24 says, we are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21. He says, for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

You see, there's an exchange taking place here. Christ, he came in the flesh, he lived under the same law as us, yet he kept that law perfectly as none of us could ever do.

[14 : 14] And for that reason he was qualified to take our punishment upon himself. Paul uses the word propitiation. In his crucifixion and death Jesus bore the wrath of God meant for us.

He redirected that wrath to himself. The word propitiation means he assuaged or he satisfied God's wrath. He appeased God by suffering as only a sinner or a guilty lawbreaker should suffer.

So on the one hand God accepted Jesus as a substitute for us. He made him to be sin who knew no sin. God treated him as though he were us.

He imputed. That's one of those Christianese words. He imputed our sin to him. But that's not the whole exchange because Paul says we, the sinners whom Christ died for must become the righteousness of God.

Well how does this happen? Through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. Verse 25 Paul says that our redemption the benefits of Christ's propitiation is to be received by faith.

[15 : 34] Then verse 26 says God shows his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

So this is part two of God's imputation. Just as God treated Jesus as a sinner he treats us as his son declaring us innocent declaring us righteous.

How? How does one get to this place of justification? Well three times in this passage Paul says it is by faith. It's by believing. It's by trusting in the work of Christ on our behalf.

It's by going to God as the tax collector did and pleading Lord be merciful to me a sinner. I have no righteousness of my own. I have nothing to offer but I believe in what Christ has done.

I will trust in him and in him alone for my salvation. In the very next chapter Romans 4 Paul says in verses 4 and 5 now to the one who works his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due and to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly his faith is counted as righteousness.

[17 : 06] This is a point that Paul clarifies many times in his writings. We cannot be justified by our works. We cannot be saved by striving to keep the law no matter how hard we try at no point will God say to us okay you've done enough I declare you innocent.

You can sweep your moral house as many times as you want and you'll still be guilty. As the Pharisees show you may prove yourself even more guilty because of your self righteousness. No the only way that God will ever declare us innocent is through Christ and his truly righteous life and his atoning sacrifice on the cross we will never achieve it on our own we must turn to Christ in faith we must believe in him.

So that's essentially what we mean when we say to sinners come as you are come as you are but we shouldn't stop there to the detriment of many there have been more than a few evangelistic preachers who preached the doctrine of justification very clearly very boldly they speak in no uncertain terms about how sinners can be justified before God and saved but they say little to nothing about the doctrine of sanctification they tell people how to be saved they may assure them of eternal security you know once saved always saved but they say nothing about holiness or spiritual growth or the fruits of eternal life they say nothing about sanctification come as you are but don't expect to stay that way you see justification explains how we are declared holy declared holy sanctification explains how we become holy and if you think to yourself what does it matter that I become holy if God has already said I'm holy well let me give you two things to think about first Hebrews 12 14 Hebrews 12 14 says strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord the author of Hebrews is writing to presumably believers people who have already been declared holy through justification and he tells them to strive for holiness in other words you may be holy in a legal sense you may have a holy position before God but in a practical sense you're still a work in progress holiness and without this holiness no one will see the Lord second Romans 8 29 says for those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the first born among many brothers in other words holiness that is conformity to the perfectly holy son of

[20 : 47] God is the reason we are saved we are not saved to continue in our sins Paul addressed that at the start of Romans chapter 6 you see he assumed that some people would misunderstand his teachings about faith versus works of the law was he suggesting that the law doesn't matter was he suggesting that we can sin all we want and still be saved well here's how he answers that in Romans 6 1 are we to continue in sin that grace may abound by no means how can we who died to sin still live in it do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father we too might walk in newness of life by no means did God justify us to then sit back and let us continue in the sin that ultimately killed our savior savior no he saved us to change us he saved us declaring us holy and he immediately began work to make us holy to conform us to the image of his son without which no one will see the lord so right there you have the bible making two points that really should prompt us to sit up and take notice they should make us think okay this doctrine of sanctification it does matter this is no trivial thing because without striving for holiness hebrews says i can't see the lord and according to romans this is why god saved me he saved me to become holy like his son is holy so obviously this thing we call sanctification it does matter listen to what andrew randall says in his book following jesus although god considers us completely holy in christ and that can never be taken from us our lives are still to a greater or lesser extent unholy the great secret is that everyone else is in the same position as you not one of us will ever be perfectly holy this side of glory we will all sin every day until we die and so we all need god's grace every day until we die nonetheless over time we are sanctified which means that the holy spirit works in our lives to transform us so that we come to reflect the likeness of christ more and more what is counted true of us becomes true of us gradually

haltingly imperfectly but really earlier

I mentioned the christian who became an atheist he was actually a pastor he said he got tired of trying to convince people they were guilty of breaking a law they didn't even know existed I often get the impression that people have accepted Jesus if you will not because they feel guilty not because they desire a savior but because he's a nice accessory in their lives they have a lovely spouse a happy home a good job and they feel perfectly content and Jesus well he's a nice little bonus he's not necessarily life changing or anything but he's nice to have he gives a little depth to life if nothing else he teaches us how to be a good person I would argue that if Christ has not changed us we don't have Christ at all listen to what Paul says in 1st

Corinthians 6 do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who practice homosexuality nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor revilers nor swindlers and we could certainly add many of the so called lesser sins to that list he says they will not inherit the kingdom of God and such were some of you but you were washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God come as you are but don't expect to stay that way when Paul writes to the church in Corinth and let's not forget that this church was far from perfect they had all kinds of problems but when

Paul writes to them he assumes they have been changed from what they once were they're not the same as they used to be they don't enjoy their sins as they used to be as they used to now they may still struggle with some of those sins but they don't relish them like they did before they don't habitually practice them any longer when they came to Christ in repentance and faith Christ in his spirit changed them and Christ in his spirit were still changing them this is Paul's assumption about all believers I grew up in a theological tradition that assumed that since salvation is by God's grace alone which is correct sinners cannot be actively involved in the least they contribute nothing they do nothing in any sense as strange as it may sound they believed

God may sovereignly save you possibly without you even knowing about it then if God blesses you at some point in the future you may hear the gospel learn of Christ and believe in him but if you do and yet you don't continue to follow him throughout your life well once saved always saved you'll be fine now I can give them credit for certain points of their understanding they're right about certain things and I believe their hearts are in the right place they're striving to give God all the glory for salvation but they unknowingly undermine his glory by undermining his sovereignty namely over our hearts and minds 2nd Corinthians 5:17 says if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation he's not the same he can't be and this has real world real life implications

[28 : 10] I always think about that illustration from Paul Washer he talks about the guy who shows up late to a meeting and says I'm sorry but sorry that I'm late but I was on my way I got a flat tire I stopped to change it one of the lug nuts rolled out on the highway I went to retrieve it and I got hit by a logging truck and everyone at the meeting is looking at him going that's impossible you can't have an encounter with something as big as a logging truck and walk away unscathed well you can't have a genuine encounter with almighty God and walk away unchanged it's impossible God foretold the new covenant through Ezekiel and he said I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols

I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules the Lord says I will save you but I will not save you because you have changed I will save you to change you I will change you from the inside out I will replace your very heart I will turn your affection from those idols which you once loved to myself I will put my spirit within you and cause you notice that I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules you won't just obey you'll find yourself wanting to obey come as you are but don't expect to stay that way and at this point

I think we can revise that statement just a little we could say come as you are but you will not stay that way God won't allow it by his power and his grace you will change how much will you change how quickly how far will you get in conforming to Christ before your death only God knows but he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ if you are in Christ his work of sanctification has already begun you can be sure of that and you can be sure that he will bring it to completion one day you will be perfectly holy in 1 Peter 1 starting at verse 3 Peter

writes blessed be the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ according to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time when we set out to follow Christ this is where we hope the land in the end right he saves us for an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled unfading kept in heaven for you but we are also as much as we are saved for that paradise we are also saved from our sin Peter continues jumping down to verse 13 therefore preparing your minds for action and being sober minded set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of

Jesus Christ as obedient children do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance but as he who called you is holy you also be holy in all your conduct since it is written you shall be holy for I am holy look forward don't look back don't be conformed again to your former passions those passions that you had before Christ why does it matter you know if we're heaven bound why does it matter can we just live however we want you know biding our time until we reach heaven no because we aren't just saved from idolatry and those former passions and all of that sin which we once loved so much think of the Israelites in the Old Testament God rescued them from their slavery in Egypt he led them to the promised land but notice two things in that story first it was utterly foolish of them to crave their old life in slavery when they met difficult circumstances in the wilderness they complained claiming they would have been better off if they had still been in [33 : 44] Egypt that's nonsense and it's equally foolish for us to crave the sins we were once enslaved to second you'll notice the Israelites spent a fair amount of time wandering the wilderness before they reached the promised land why you know they were destined for that place why didn't God take them there immediately well as we learn from reading their story they had a lot of lessons to learn they had lingering sins to be to be weaned from if you will they had discipline to endure they had growing to do in short God spent those 40 years sanctifying them when God saves us he doesn't immediately take us to heaven does he and that's because we too have growing to do and God spends the rest of our lives sanctifying us he says you shall be holy and the moment he saves us that process begins in

Romans 7 Paul writes my brothers you 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 for while we were living in the flesh our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death but now we are released from the law having died to that which held us captive so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code we're no longer slaves to the law we're no longer slaves to our sinful passions yet in our Christian freedom we face a new struggle don't we and Paul speaks of this when he describes his own struggle Romans 7 21 so I find it to be a law that when

I want to do right evil lies close at hand for I delight in the law of God in my inner being but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members in a sense this is what sanctification looks like it's certainly what sanctification feels like it feels like a constant struggle between the sinful desires of our flesh and the pure desires of our regenerated hearts to be holy but keep in mind that this struggle is actually good news as difficult as it is as tiring as it can be this is good news because this means we're no longer enslaved to sin we are free to follow Christ we are free to pursue good we are free to strive for holiness we're not free to continue sinning we're free to fight against our sin and better yet free to overcome it in his book seven leaders in in

Murray writes for the person who fears and loves God the command be holy for I am holy is not grievous rather it corresponds with an in most desire again just like justification sanctification is not an act of picking ourselves up by the bootstraps just as justification is all of grace sanctification is also all of grace this is God's spirit working within us I will put my spirit within you God says and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules Philippians 2 12 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you both to will that is to want or to desire and to work for his good pleasure it's truly unfortunate that much of the contemporary church frowns upon the thought of holiness of course they have the wrong idea about it well maybe they don't maybe they don't not long ago

I had an extra copy of J. Ryle's book holiness and I gave it to someone and he read the first chapter on sin and he said to me wow this guy does not make light of sin does he no he doesn't and for good reason God does not make light of sin sin is what put his son on the cross but I wonder whether many have minimized teachings about sanctification and holiness because they want to minimize the seriousness of sin and the inevitability of our conformity to Christ and I say this is unfortunate because there's tremendous joy to be found in a holy life because there's tremendous joy to be found in Christ if we're following him we will follow him into greater and greater holiness not to mention the joy that comes with it we're not going to find this kind of joy in our sin we'll find it in holiness in conformity to Christ and I'm going to leave you with this

[39 : 35] Galatians 2 20 says I have been crucified with Christ it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me in 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 commenting on this verse Todd Wilson writes Paul of course the author of Galatians Paul is tried like Jesus executed like Jesus raised like Jesus and thus now he like Jesus lives to God his life is continually marked by cruciformity but so too is it continually sustained by resurrection power the same is true for everyone of God's born again people we are sustained by God's resurrection power and we're thankful to God for that because following

Jesus requires holiness let's pray heavenly father father we thank you for your spirit and our conversions who entered into our hearts replacing them with hearts of flesh making us to know you making us to know your son and then leading us throughout our lives continually working to remove that sin that we once craved and loved so much lord it is a struggle but we're thankful for this sanctification we're thankful to be made more and more like our lord and savior we ask that you would help us daily moment by moment lord it is a struggle for us we do often times find temptations unbearable we crave our old passions but lord your grace is sufficient you're greater than our sin and you can lead us away from it you can help us overcome by your power we trust in you lord forgive us for the many many times we have failed in christ's name i pray amen