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## Positional (Definitive) Sanctification - Our New Status in Christ

Thank you for being here this morning. I hope you had a good week. We have three more weeks in this 10 week study we are calling Transformed by Truth and then we are going to study 1 John together. That new study in 1 John begins on my 49th birthday - March 17. St Patrick and I share a birthday. We are going to study 1 John verse by verse in a study on the assurance of salvation. The good news about that study is that when we are done it should be warmer outside for a while.

Please take your Bible and open to 1 Corinthians 1. What Gary and I are attempting to do in this ten week study called Transformed by Truth is to show you how the word of God is dated, but it is not outdated. God's Word is all we need to know the Lord and to walk in the good works He has planned for our lives. We want to be a church that learns the truth, lives the truth and speaks the truth in love to each other so we all mature in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Over the next three Sunday mornings as we finish this study we want to focus on helping other believers grow in Christ, starting with ourselves. **The big word for this is sanctification.** The title for our lesson this morning is positional (Definitive) sanctification - Our New Status in Christ.

Most of the time when we think about sanctification, what are we thinking about? Most of the time when we talk about sanctification we are talking about the process of becoming more like Christ. Most of the time we think of sanctification in terms of what we do to become more like Christ, but this morning I want to challenge you to begin thinking about sanctification differently. We start with progressive sanctification, but in 1 Corinthians, before Paul addresses their sin starting in 1 Corinthians 1:10, he starts with their position in Christ. He spends

the first 9 verses greeting them and then tells them what he thanks God about before he tells them what to do.

Let me come at this from another angle. Paul reminds them who they are in Christ before he tells them what to do. How Paul helps the church in Corinth address sin in their lives is very instructive for us. Why? Who you are in Christ is the most important thing about you and knowing what happened to you when God saved you is foundational for living the Christian life.

Let me remind you of some of the things that were true of these believers when Paul wrote this letter. Here are some of the areas Paul corrects beginning in 1 Corinthians 1:10

- They were drifting from the centrality of the cross.
- There was major division in the church
- There was gross sexual immorality in the church that wasn't being disciplined
- They were a lawsuit happy church taking one another to court to settle their differences instead of getting the help they needed from the church
- They were using their bodies bought by Christ for sexual sin
- They were using their liberty in Christ to lead other people into sin.
- They misunderstood the roles of men and women in the church.
- Some were getting drunk at the Lord's supper
- Their spiritual gifts were not being used in love
- Some were spreading rumors in the church that there is no resurrection from the dead.

This is Paul's assessment of their corporate gatherings in 1 Corinthians 11:17, "But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse." That was Paul's assessment of their corporate gatherings - They cause more harm than good.

When you step back and think about all of the sin problems in this church, where would you start if you were writing them a letter? Think through this with me. When it comes to addressing their sin or when it comes to addressing your sin, where do you usually begin? I don't think many of us start where Paul started in the first nine verses in 1 Corinthians.

## 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

- 1 Co 1:1 Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,
- 2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
- 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,
- 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—
- 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—
- 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Knowing all of the sin problems in this church, how could Paul start his letter this way? He tells them that he *always* thanks God for them. What's up with that? How could an apostle give thanks for such a messed up church? Because Paul didn't see the local church the way most people see the local church. Most people see the local church from a human perspective. **Paul saw the local church from a divine perspective.**

Paul's ongoing love for this church was motivated and maintained by his divine perspective of the local church. Before Paul corrects the church in Corinth he walks them back through a correct view of the church in Corinth. This is huge.

How you see yourself affects your pursuit of progressive sanctification. Paul does the same thing in Romans 6. He tells them who they are in Christ and commands them to consider it true in verse 11 before he tells them what to do with their sin in verses 12-14.

Getting this order right is essential for dealing with any sin in your life. To deal with any sin you have to start by rehearsing salvation and what God has already done to save you. We often skip that part, but when we skip that part its like trying to drive a car without an engine.

***We cannot deal with any sin apart from union with Christ.***

Paul starts with what theologians call positional or definitive sanctification. In 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 he takes their hand and walks them back through what God did for them at the moment of their conversion. **In a sense, he takes them back to first base in the Christian life and shows them how they got on base.** A good way to think of this is to see the words were in verse 5 and in verse 9. You were enriched in Him. You were called into fellowship. What they needed most at this time was to remember what they were by the grace of God.

Let me start with a few definitions of what we are talking about when we talk about positional or definite sanctification and then we will walk through what Paul reminds the church in Corinth in the first 9 verses and how what he reminds them can help anyone with any sin.

In a book called *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, author David Peterson writes, "Definitive sanctification is a more important theme in the New Testament than has generally been acknowledged. Rightly understood, this doctrine is a key to holy living and a way through the impasse created by much previous debate. God calls us and enables us in Christ to live as those possessed by God and empowered by his Holy Spirit."

Although theologians often speak of sanctification as a process of transformation following conversion, Peterson argues that the New Testament primarily speaks of sanctification as **“God’s way of taking possession of us in Christ, setting us apart to belong to him and to fulfill his purpose for us.”** He does not deny that sanctification has ongoing effects, but claims the stress of the New Testament writers is on the definitive aspect – **the status we are given by God as “saints.”**

Again, when it comes to the doctrine of sanctification most of us think in terms of progress, but the emphasis of the New Testament, especially in Romans 6-8 and here in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 is on position. **Who we already are in Christ precedes and empowers how we live for Christ. Knowing who you are in Christ and what God has already given you in Christ is the missing ingredient in many Christians minds when it comes to replacing sin with righteousness.**

This morning I want you to see 4 truths about every Christian at the moment of conversion that motivate godly living:

1. Every Christian at the Moment of Conversion is Set Apart - 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

These first three verses in 1 Corinthians are not hard to understand. What is Paul doing in these first three verses? Paul starts with a greeting in the first 3 verses. There is a word that stands out in this gospel greeting. It's the word called. Paul sees himself as called to be an apostle and he helps these believers see themselves as people called by God. Why is Paul an apostle? Why are these people saints in Christ Jesus? Because God called Paul to be an apostle and God called these people to be saints in Christ Jesus. There is no other explanation.

We can't think about Paul the right way or the local church the right way if we misunderstand what Paul means by called.

Sinclair Ferguson writes, "One of the New Testament's most frequent one-word descriptions of the Christian is that he is called. The believers in Rome (Romans 1:6-7), Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2), Galatia (Galatians 1:6), Ephesus (Ephesians 4:1), Philippi (Philippians 3:13-14), Colossae (Colossians 3:15), Thessalonica (2 Thessalonians 1:11), are all 'called ones,' and in each case it is obvious that God's summons achieved its purpose."

It was through Paul's preaching of Christ crucified that God called these people to himself. This is huge. David Prior writes, " If God had not thus called, he (Paul) would not have become an apostle and they would not have found Jesus Christ to be the wisdom and the power of God, let alone come to share in him and be his special people, his saints. This, almost self-conscious, harping on God's call would indicate that Paul's use of the word *ekklēsia* (literally 'a company of those called out') to describe the church at Corinth is also not accidental. Thus God calls each individual by name, and a person responds by calling on *the name of the Lord* (cf. verse 2). The fact that these Corinthians, and countless others *in every place*, call on *the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* is proof positive that God has already made his call sound clearly enough for them to hear and respond. All those who thus hear God's call and respond are members of the *ekklēsia* of God. They have been set apart by God in that call, and are reserved for Jesus Christ (*sanctified in Christ Jesus*). There is as close a unity between such people *in every place* as there is between Paul and the Christians of Corinth in that single place."

To really feel the force of this you have to remember the way these people lived before God summoned them to salvation. Remembering how sinful we were when God called us helps us stand in awe of the call. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul provides us with a sin summary. How these people lived before the gospel changed their lives.

## 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

- 9 Or 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,
- 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.
- 11 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.

Do you see all the “were’s” in verse 11. That’s definitive sanctification. That’s the transformation that comes through the gospel. Paul is reminding real sinners that they are not who they once were because of what God did for them through the gospel.

Have you ever thought of this when trying to tackle sin in your life? I can’t do this because what I once was is no longer who I am. Sin does not define me anymore. My new status as a saint in Christ Jesus is what defines me. Now, in the power of the Spirit I can tackle this sin. I fight sin in my life because at a moment in time God washed me, sanctified me and justified me. What God did for me is why I strive to live a holy life that goes against the flow of the wicked world around me. That's why I fight the good fight. Not to earn approval, but because I have it.

*Because of what God did for you in the past, you live for Him in the present.*

What I am trying to remind you this morning is that when God saved you, your status changed and how God sees you changed. He now sees you united to His Son. Jerry Bridges describes it this way in a helpful book called *Respectable Sins*, "The Greek word for saint is hagios, and it refers not to one’s character but to a state of being. Its literal meaning is “one who is separated unto God.” In this sense, every believer—even the most ordinary and the most immature—is a

saint. The actual wording of Paul's address in 1 Corinthians is to "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1:2)."

How does this help us in the Christian life? When God calls us through the gospel into union with Christ our status is changed, not just temporarily, forever. My new status as a saint in Christ is what defines me. It doesn't matter anymore what other people think about me. **It doesn't even matter what I think about myself.** It doesn't matter what I feel about myself. All that matters is that God has called me out of my sin to belong to Christ.

Holiness is not about what I achieve - It's about what I receive first and foremost by belonging to Christ Jesus. He is my holiness. I can never take credit for this. God summoned me to salvation through the gospel and I called on Christ to save me and God united me to His Son, trading all my sin for all His righteousness. Paul circles back to this in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

The first thing Paul reminds these believers in his gospel greeting is their status - Every Christian at the Moment of Conversion is Set Apart for God.

The second thing I want you to see in what Paul thanks God for beginning in verse 4 is:

2. Every Christian at the moment of conversion is Spiritually Empowered - 1 Corinthians 1:4-7

1 Corinthians 1:4-7

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,



- 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—
- 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—
- 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ

What I want you to see again is that Paul is not telling these people what to do. He starts doing that in verse 10. Before he tells them what to do he tells what he always prays for them - How he thanks God always for what God already gave them in Christ. Paul is letting us listen in to his prayer life and what he thanked God for when he thought about these saints in Corinth.

In these verses he tells them that he always thanks God for them. He can thank God for a messed up church because of the grace they received in Christ. When you step back and think about it, there is always something to be thankful for if you start with grace. Grace is not merited. It is what God gives undeserving people.

Again, when it comes to our sin struggles we often get this wrong. We think that we have to overcome our sin and then God will give us grace. But that's the opposite of how it works. God's grace is the only thing that can help us change. Guilt motivates change for a season, but grace motivates change for a lifetime.

Paul believes their conversion is real because in verse 5 he writes that "in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and knowledge." They had everything they needed as a church body to please the Lord.

Here is another thing I find interesting in 1 Corinthians. **Paul gives thanks for God giving gifts to His people that they are using the wrong way.** Is that unique to anyone else? Later in 1 Corinthians 12-14 Paul reminds them how to use the spiritual gifts God gave them the right way. But the fact that God gave them everything they needed to know the Lord and to serve the Lord was something Paul continually thanked God for.

This church was spiritually loaded, not because they were so great, but because God was so gracious. They were not lacking any gift according to verse 7 as they waited for the return of Christ.

Yesterday our oldest daughter Addison finished her basketball season. They lost in the championship game. At the end of the season last year Addison told us she didn't want to play basketball again. She was adamant about it and she rarely gets adamant about things. Then something happened. They got a new girls basketball coach. Addison still didn't want to play, but one day the new coach walked up to Addison and he told her there was a spot for her on the team if she wanted it. He saw something in her that she probably didn't see in herself.

That one short conversation from the new coach changed her mind about playing. Someone saw something in her that suggested she could be a valuable part of the team. A contributor and not just a cheerleader who sits on the bench and claps for people playing. Addison had a great season. She got a lot better this year partly because she got a new coach who instead of pointing out her problems started with her potential.

Whenever we struggle with sin it's always good to slow down, tap the breaks and remember what God gave you in Christ Jesus. Start by thanking God for His grace and remember you do indeed have the power to please the Lord. Also, go back to Christ. Do you notice how many times Paul refers to Christ in the first 9 verses?

- Once in verse 1
- Twice in verse 2
- Once in verse 3
- Once in verse 4
- You see in Him in verse 5
- Once again in verse 6
- You see our Lord Jesus Christ in verse 7
- Lord Jesus Christ at the end of verse 8

- Jesus Christ our Lord at the end of verse 9

I don't know what you think when you read that many references to Christ, but you'd almost start to believe that a Christian needs to think less about themselves and more about their Savior. Get your eyes back on Jesus.

If you are going to keep fighting sin and help other believers fight sin remember every Christian at the moment of conversion is set apart and every Christian at the moment of conversion is spiritually empowered:

### 3. Every Christian at the moment of conversion is secure - 1 Corinthians 1:8

1 Corinthians 1:8 describes the security of the believers salvation. Notice the end of verse 7 describes the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. What's that? That's the second coming. The return of Christ. With that day in view, what does Paul remind them in verse 8? He reminds us that our Lord Jesus Christ will sustain us to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friend, you're not alone to make it all the way from here to heaven. The same Christ who saved you in the past sustains you in the present. This is great news for people who still struggle with sin and sometimes wonder if they're going to keep going when the going gets tough.

David Prior has a good word for us here, "If we have been called, on the initiative of God himself, to share in his Son, Jesus Christ, then God will not abandon us or go back on his promises. That is the force of the word *pistos* (= *faithful*). We can totally depend on God: he is not a man, he cannot deny himself, he will keep his word. **The church is his responsibility: he is committed to 'the perfecting of the saints'.**" Wow!

What is something good to preach to your heart on a daily basis? The Christ who saved me is the Christ who will sustain me. Remind yourself of that every

day. On that last day God will ensure that absolutely no charge or accusation is laid on His people. Hopefully, this breeds confidence. Confidence in Christ.

The fourth truth that happened to us at the moment of conversion that motivates progressive sanctification is in verse 9. I think Paul may have saved the sweetest description of conversion for verse 9.

1. Every Christian at the moment of conversion is set apart
2. Every Christian at the moment of conversion is Spiritually empowered
3. Every Christian at the moment of conversion is secure
4. Every Christian at the moment of conversion is satisfied

What do I mean by satisfied? The best part of being a Christian is that we are brought into union with Christ. Nothing is more satisfying to a believer than union and communion with Christ. That's what we are called into. Fellowship is a word of intimacy.

1 Corinthians 1:9

- 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This, to me, is probably the most amazing verse in this section because it reminds us that salvation is personal. It's meant to be intimate.

Remember what Jesus prayed for us the night before the cross.

John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Who initiated this relationship? We did not initiate this relationship. God did. The God who is faithful is the God who called us into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. God did this. God called us into this new relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord.

What does this have to do with addressing sin in our lives? Sin severs our close relationship with Christ. You can't walk with the Lord and live in disobedience. The other side of this is that if you are enjoying fellowship with your Lord and Savior you will be less likely to want to sin. John Piper, "Sin is what we do when we are not satisfied with Christ."

Understanding the close relationship we have been brought into is essential for battling sin. A while back I read a morning devotion by Charles Spurgeon. It was called a beautiful bride based on Song of Solomon 4:7, "You are altogether beautiful, my love."

Spurgeon writes, "The Lord's admiration for His Church is very wonderful, and His description of her beauty is very glowing. She is not merely beautiful, but "altogether beautiful." He views her in Himself, washed in His sin-atoning blood and clothed in His meritorious righteousness, and He considers her to be full of attraction and beauty. No wonder that this is the case, since it is simply His own perfect excellency that He admires; for the holiness, glory, and perfection of His Church are His own glorious garments worn by His well-beloved spouse.

She is not simply pure or well-proportioned; she is positively lovely and fair! She has actual merit! Her deformities of sin are removed; but more, she has through her Lord obtained a meritorious righteousness by which an actual beauty is conferred upon her. Believers have a positive righteousness given to them when "he chose us in him" (Eph. 1:4). Nor is the church barely lovely—she is superlatively so. Her Lord styles her "most beautiful among women." She has a

real worth and excellence that cannot be rivaled by all the nobility and royalty of the world.

If Jesus could exchange His elect bride for all the queens and empresses of earth, or even for the angels in heaven, He would not, for He puts her first and foremost! Like the moon she far outshines the stars. Nor is this an opinion that He is ashamed of, for He invites all men to hear it. He sets a “behold” before it, a special note of exclamation, inviting and arresting attention. “Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful!” (Song of Sol. 4:1). He publishes His opinion widely even now, and one day from the throne of His glory He will declare the truth of it before the assembled universe. “Come, you who are blessed by my Father” (Matt. 25:34) will be His solemn affirmation of the loveliness of His elect."

I don't believe that Song of Solomon is primarily about Christ and the church. It's about Solomon and the Shulammitte woman. Christ is a much better husband to his bride than Solomon was to his - Solomon's love for the Shulammitte woman can't hold a candle to the love Jesus has for the church. Solomon had 700 wives, Jesus has one bride. Solomon was unfaithful. Jesus is always faithful. Solomon's love eventually died out. Jesus' love for the church is from everlasting to everlasting. Jesus will never stop loving you if you are His bride.

So what? What you have been brought into should be your highest priority on a daily basis. The most important thing about a believer is that God has called them into union with Christ leading to communion with Christ. There's nothing more special to a believer than that. We sin when we stop pursuing Jesus as our primary love relationship. The more satisfied we are with Jesus the less satisfied we are with anything the world has to offer.

This is where Paul begins with a group of people that in the Southern part of our country would be referred to as a hot mess church. Paul spends the rest of 1 Corinthians correcting the church from 1 Corinthians 1:10 for the next 15

chapters, but he starts by walking them back through what God did for them when God saved them. That's foundational for addressing sin in your life. Go back to first base and contemplate your union with Christ and ask for His help to change to be more like Him. Sanctification in a phrase is this - Be who you already are in Christ. The Spirit helps us. Let's pray.