

# Sanctification: how should I live?

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## Introduction

The subject of sanctification is important. The way we live our lives before God has eternal consequences. Once we leave this life, there is no turning back. We can not return to this earth and have another go. The Bible urges the reader to seek wisdom. "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her." (Proverbs 3:13-15). Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to the important subject of sanctification.

People over the centuries have had various methods as to how best live a sanctified (God honouring) life. Some of the well-intentioned efforts have not been wise. We will look at some obvious and not so obvious mistakes in order to learn from them a little later in this paper.

In biblical Christianity, sanctification is unique. It is quite different to what is found in Roman Catholicism and the Christian sects and cults. It is also of course, very different to the religions of the world. One point in particular stands out - the salvation of the sinner is a different matter to the sanctification of the sinner. A sinner must be saved before he can advance in the Christian life. Before he is saved, he is spiritually dead to the things of God (Rom. 8:5, 1 Cor. 2:4, 2 Cor. 5:17). To fully appreciate the difference between the subject of salvation (justification) and growth in the Christian life (sanctification), it is best to read my paper on salvation first. It can be found on the main page of my web site at [www.defenceofthefaith.org](http://www.defenceofthefaith.org) under the title of *The Hindu, The Muslim and The Christian*.

Roman Catholicism and the vast majority of the sects and cults have to some extent, a human (sinner) works based means for the salvation of the sinner. In Roman Catholicism for instance, the sinner must partake of the prescribed sacraments in order to be on the path to salvation. I deliberately use the word 'path' because at no point can a person declare he is 'saved' according to Roman Catholic teaching. He like the Muslim and many others, is always striving, but never has the assurance of salvation.

With regard to justification (salvation) and sanctification, the two are mixed together and somewhat confused in Roman Catholic thinking and in the thinking of the sects and cults. In biblical Christianity, there is a clear distinction between the two doctrines.

Because I have dealt with justification in a separate paper, I will not go over that subject again. It will be assumed at this point that the reader understands the doctrine or

teaching of justification (the substitutionary atonement). We will now look at the meaning of sanctification.

## Sanctified - its Meaning

I hesitate to use the word 'sanctified', because it is not a common word, however, it is a biblical word, and it simply means, 'set apart'. Sanctification is both a separation from evil, and a separation to God and his will.<sup>1</sup>

God declared to the Israelites, "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." (Lev. 20:26). See also 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

We see from the above that the Israelite nation was *sanctified* or set apart by God. That is also true of the Christian and the Church as a whole.

John 17:19. "For them I sanctify [Gk. *hagiazō*] myself, that they too may be truly sanctified [Gk. *hagiasmenoi*]." The literal meaning of the original Greek *hagiasmenoi* is, they 'having been sanctified'. It is a completed act.

In another passage we get the same thought. Jesus said to Paul while he was on the road to Damascus, "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified [*hagiasmenois*] by faith in me." (Acts 26:18).

*hagiasmenois*, literally, 'having been sanctified'. See also John 17:19, Acts 20:32, 26:18. Rom. 15:16. 1 Cor. 1:2, 6:11. To jump to these references with Greek notes, click on [Go](#).

Our being set apart by God has two parts.

- Set apart by God before the foundation of the world.
- Set apart by God at the moment of faith in Christ.

With regard to our being sanctified or set apart before the foundation of the world, the Bible says, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. ..." (Eph. 1:4). The text does not use the word 'sanctified' or 'set apart', but the phrase 'he chose us' has the same meaning.

With regard to our being sanctified at the moment of faith (salvation or justification) in Christ, the Bible says. "...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." (1 Cor. 6:11). Our sanctification puts us in a very special relationship with Jesus Christ, and with other believers, "Both the one [The Holy Spirit] who makes men holy [*hagiazōn*] and those [believers] who are made holy [*hagiazomenoi*] are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers." (Heb. 2:11).

Our being sanctified by God has some very dramatic consequences, some of which are:

- Adopted as sons by God (John 1:12-13, Romans 8: 14-16, 9:8, Gal. 3:26, 4:4-6, Eph. 1:3, 1 John 3:1-2).
- Brought into the Kingdom of the Son (Colossians 1:12-14).

- God gives us a new name, we are called ‘saints’. The apostle Paul writes, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:” (Ephesians 1:1) see also Acts 9:13, Eph. 1:15, 18, 3:18, 6:18, Philip. 1:1, 4:21-22, Rom. 6:15, 2 Cor. 1:1, 8:3-4, Col. 1:4, 12, 26 (this is not a complete list of references).

Saint (Gk. *Hagios*) means holy. So saints are holy ones. The word holy comes from the Greek word *hagios*. The *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine says regarding the meaning of *hagios*, “... in Scripture in its moral and spiritual significance, separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God, sacred.”<sup>2</sup>

We will now leave behind our position before God, ‘sanctified’, and move on to what will be the major focus of this paper, that is, ‘sanctification’; the ongoing process.

### **Sanctification - the ongoing process**

Sanctification as a process refers to the believer’s gradual change more and more into the likeness of Christ. It begins at the moment of salvation and continues throughout this life.<sup>3</sup>

In regard to the ongoing process of sanctification God says, “I am the Lord your God; consecrate [sanctify] yourselves and be holy, because I am holy...” (Lev. 11:44). The word of God is used in the process of sanctification, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:17). We are told in God’s word to, “...sanctify [set apart] Christ as Lord in your hearts...” (1 Peter 3:15) (N.A.S.V). It is also something which God continues to do in the believers life. “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 4:23).

Sanctification is quite broad in its range. It does not affect just one aspect of man’s being. To understand this it will be helpful to understand what happened when Adam and Eve sinned by eating of the forbidden tree. The tree of ‘the knowledge of good and evil’ (Gen. 2:9, 17).

Their sinful act brought about their spiritual death and their physical death. Sin and death was passed on to the whole human race through the actions of Adam and Eve (Rom. 5:16-19). The destruction that befell mankind is termed ‘the fall’. The breadth of the destruction is summed up in the phrase, ‘the total depravity of man’. Not meaning that man is depraved in one area as far as it is possible to go, but rather, the fall affects every area of man’s life. For instance, it affects him spiritually, mentally, emotionally, psychologically and physically. Every area of his being is affected, it is total. No area of man’s being escapes the destruction of the fall.

Just as ‘the fall’ was broad in its range of effects on man, so too, a thorough sanctification will be broad in its effects upon the Christian. If I go to Church and enjoy singing hymns, but show no interest in making someone’s life a little easier by giving a helping hand when needed, then something has gone wrong in the sanctification process. Proof that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit during his ministry on the earth was shown in part by his action toward others (Acts 10:38, 20:35).

In summary, the ongoing sanctification deals with the day by day shaping of the believer over a broad range of his being by means of the Holy Spirit, the reading of Scripture, the fellowship of the brethren - particularly with Church attendance - and the determined effort of the believer to improve himself. The apostle Paul declares, “... I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Cor. 9:26-27).

The apostle is speaking metaphorically when he says, ‘I beat my body’. He is willing to exercise a mental toughness which will ensure he stays on the right track.

Although mental toughness is required from time to time, it also needs to be said that a good Christian life does not mean a dull and boring life, Jesus said, “... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10). Jesus also promised peace. The type of peace which remains when the world is in turmoil. “Peace I leave with you: my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.” (John 14:27). See also 16:33.

### **The value of a sanctified life**

The sanctification process is a glorious thing, the Bible declares, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:18).

A sanctified life has value in this life and in the next. With regard to the eternal reward, the Bible says, “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.” (Eph. 6:7-8).

In another passage we read, “... Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ... their deeds will follow them.” (Rev. 14:13).

Something that is of value is worth working for, and it is certainly the case that Christians should work for their reward. To illustrate the importance of working with whatever God has given us, Jesus told a parable of a master who, before going on a long journey, gave his three servants talents (money used in ancient times). The two servants who used their talents wisely were rewarded for their work. The servant who did not use his talent was punished (Matt. 25:14-30). It is interesting to note that the reward given is in the form of greater responsibility and honour (25:21).

For those who have the responsibility of proclaiming Christ, but do not perform the task faithfully as they should, there is a stern warning from Scripture. God will judge each man’s work, “... the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” (1 Cor. 3:13). The Bible also warns that “... we who teach will be judged more strictly.” (James 3:1). So we can see from all of this the importance of a thorough sanctification in the life of the believer.

### **The Motivational Force**

The main motivational force for sanctification should not be what we can gain from it both in this life and the next; great though that gain will be. We should be primarily motivated from an appreciation of God's love for us and of what he has done for us. The Bible says, "... You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body." (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Those who are not motivated by a deep love for God who was clearly revealed to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, are either very weakly motivated, or they are not motivated for long. C.T. Studd (1860-1931, the famous cricketer and later missionary said, "If Jesus Christ be God, and he died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him." Studd was so moved by what God had done for him, he forsook his fame, fortune and comfort in England, and went to Africa where he willingly took upon himself hardship and difficulties in his efforts to proclaim Christ and make him known.

God asks us to be faithful to him out of an appreciation for what he has done for us. He told the people of Israel, "I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy." (Lev. 11:45). He also said, "Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt." (19:36). So their motivation for honesty was to be an appreciation of the fact that the Lord God was their God who had brought them up out of slavery in Egypt. Our first duty above all else is to love God, that point was made clear to a pharisee who asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment? "Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matt. 22:37).

When Jesus looked at a spiritually weak Church in the book of Revelation, he found that the problem was their lack of love. He said to the Church at Ephesus, "...You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen!..." (Rev. 2:4-5). Our love toward God will effect the way we treat other believers, Scripture says, "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands." (1 John 5:2). Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:15). Jesus himself was motivated by love, firstly by his love for his heavenly Father, and secondly by his love for the Church. In regard to his going to the cross we read, "...Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love." (John 13:1). In another passage we read, "...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (Eph. 5:25).

To a lesser degree, a Christian will be motivated by noting the negative consequences of a life which rejects God. The Bible gives this warning. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires

of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. ... Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done." (Rom. 1:21-28).

Before looking at what a Christian should do in order to become more sanctified, it will be helpful to note what we should not do. History will now be our teacher as it provides us with many examples of what not to do.

### **What sanctification is not**

It is not Separation From the World - The Ascetics

The Christian ascetics believed that the way in which to please God was to deprive yourself of all the comforts of life, and isolate yourself from the corrupt world. Some endured much suffering and hardship in very isolated places in the hope of becoming more sanctified. An example of this comes from Jerome of the fourth century. He lived for a time in the desert and tells of how his skin (from long neglect) had become 'as black as an Ethiopians' and to eat food cooked was looked upon as a self-indulgence.

Self-laceration and whipping emerged as a mass movement in Italy and Germany during the Middle Ages. The reader will be pleased to know that such methods are not the way to a sanctified life.

### **Isolation**

Simeon the Stylite (c. 390-459)

He was a Christian ascetic who believed that the best way to be removed from the corrupt world, and overcome the weaknesses of the flesh through suffering was to stay atop a pillar with little protection from the elements. His pillar had a guard rail around the top, and a small roof. He stood night and day in the confined space spending much of his time in prayer. Simeon stayed on top of his pole for thirty-six years, during which time he not only prayed but also preached to the people who regularly gathered below his pillar.<sup>4</sup> One of his disciples, Alypius, of the seventh century reportedly stayed atop his column for sixty-seven years.

### **Monasteries**

A significant reason for the monasteries was because of the prevailing view that a Godly person had to remove his or herself from the corrupt world. Jesus however, did not tell people that they were to remove themselves from the world. In fact, he clearly stated in the parable of the wheat and the tares that we would be in the world until he returned. "Let both grow together until the harvest..." (Matt. 13:30).

The apostle Paul told the Church at Corinth that they were not to associate with those who were known to be particularly immoral. He clearly states that he did not mean separation from all wrong-doers, for that would mean leaving this world. (1 Cor. 5:9-10). He meant separation from wrong-doers who were making claims of being Christian. Christians are to show a high moral standard to the community they live in; they are to be the light of the world (Matt.

5:14-16). See also Phil. 2:15.

### **Not One Text**

Some preachers, have put forward the view that the secret of a successful Christian life is found in one brief passage of Scripture. Usually there is much truth in what they are saying, but there is more to Christian growth than a heavy application of one passage of Scripture.

In one case I recall from the days of my youth, a visiting speaker put forward the view that we can all live on a higher spiritual level if we apply John 15:1-8 to our lives. This passage talks about the relationship of Jesus Christ to the believer. With a good relationship to Jesus Christ, we will produce much good fruit. The passage is not telling us that we will produce the fruit without difficulties or hardship.

### **Overcoming sin**

Christians do not like doing wrong, or even wrong thoughts. So, how is this problem overcome? A passage which has been put forward as a simple formula for success in this area says, "... count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:11).

The passage is in effect telling us to have nothing to do with sin. We are to count or reckon ourselves dead to it. It is not telling us that we are to apply this thought once, then relax. It is to be applied to our lives on a daily basis, particularly when we are tempted.

While both passages of Scripture are beneficial for all Christians, they should not be regarded as the cure-all for all spiritual problems. Paul did not use any of the above passages, or any other passage for that matter, as a problem solving formula for any of the Churches in which there was trouble. Neither did Peter, or any of the other writers. The whole of Scripture should be used to build up the believer. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

### **Not One Experience**

Several years ago I visited a Church where, after the service, a young chap explained that he was going with several other young people from the Church, to the home of one of their number to have a time of praying and singing in order to 'build him up'. He went on to explain that he was going to a small town out west where there was no lively Church, so he was being 'built up', so that he could remain spiritually strong over the many months that he would be in the small town. I felt that the concern and efforts of these young people was commendable, but I also hoped that the chap concerned had more than a few lovely Christian experiences to rely on as an anchor for his soul. I sadly know of a few people who have been strong in their Christian experiences, but have become weak in their commitment to Christ a few years later.

A young chap may kiss a beautiful young lady and enjoy the experience, however; he could not commit himself to the young lady in a marriage relationship on the basis of a few lovely experiences together. He will need to gain some

information about her. Is she responsible? Is she considerate of others and forgiving of other peoples wrongs? etc. Only when he has respect for her quality of character can he truly love her. The same goes for our relationship with our heavenly Father. It is because of what we know about our heavenly Father that we love and obey him. Remember C.T. Studd, his love and action was based upon a knowledge of God's love for him. Because of the importance of knowledge, the Bible says, "... And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17b-19).

### **Not In Seeking Self Acceptance**

Unfortunately not all Christians realise that they are fully accepted by God because of the completeness of the salvation which they have in Christ. Several years ago I heard of a woman who would spend a lot of time in prayer each morning; often prostrate on the floor, seeking forgiveness for her sins, and acceptance before God. If she felt emotionally high during her prayer, she felt accepted by God. If she did not feel emotionally stirred, she felt that she was not accepted by God, so she went off to work feeling depressed and rejected. Her problem was twofold. Firstly, she had too much faith in herself. She felt that by her much praying, she could become acceptable in God's sight. The truth of the matter is that no person in themselves is acceptable in God's sight, "...There is no one righteous, not even one." (Romans 3:10).

The famous preacher, John Knox (c. 1510-1572) who brought revival to Scotland, tells of how on one occasion, the devil tempted him with the thought, "See how many people you have brought to Christ, surely God must accept you now." The idea seemed attractive at first, however; John Knox quickly saw the error in such thinking and rebuked the thought with, "Get away from me Satan, there is only one person who is acceptable in God's sight, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ."

The second part to the woman's problem is that she did not have enough faith in Christ. John Knox correctly saw that his faith was not to be in himself, but in Christ. It is on the basis of His righteousness that we are accepted by God, not our own. "This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness." (Jeremiah 23:6). The righteousness of Christ is put to our account. It is because of what Christ has done that God loves us and calls us his children. (John 1:12-13, Romans 8:15-17, Galatians 4:6-7).

It is also because of what Christ has done that the Holy Spirit is given to us. Jesus promised complete spiritual satisfaction for those who come to him so that there would be no more spiritual thirst or hunger. He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35). See also Eph.1:3, 2:5-6.

### **Not in Church Reputation**

Some Christians will spend a lot of time and care choosing the right food and clothing in order to care for their health and appearance, but spend little time and thought in

choosing a Church for their spiritual nourishment. They may simply settle for a Church which has a good reputation. They may then feel they can be part of that good reputation. Christians however, need to be careful not to judge simply by outward appearances. The Lord Jesus Christ had this to say of the Church at Sardis, "... I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." (Rev.3:1). The Bible does not explain why the Church had a reputation for being alive, perhaps it was because of the many good deeds which the Church performed. Perhaps it had a good music ministry. The fact remains, it had a reputation for being alive, but in the sight of almighty God; it was 'dead'.

The Church at Sardis is not the only Church in Scripture to receive God's rebuke. The Church at Corinth had been greatly blessed by God. It had all the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:4-7), however, the apostle Paul under the guidance of the Holy Spirit had to say to them, "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly - mere infants in Christ." (1 Cor.3:1).

No doubt there were many in the Church who had no idea of its true condition before this assessment came to its notice. It possibly had a good reputation as did the Church at Sardis. It is God's judgment however that matters. Christians need to guard themselves against the thought that they will be spiritually strong simply by joining a Church with a good reputation, because the reputation may not be accurate, and spiritual strength does not come so easily. It only comes through a persistent and determined following of the truth. It will not come through following error.

### **No Escape From Suffering**

Jesus never promised any escape from suffering in this world, in fact he said, "...In this world you will have trouble..." (John 16:33). The apostle Peter says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." (1 Peter 4:12). In regard to our temporary sufferings, the apostle Paul says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18). Spreading the gospel involves suffering, the apostle says, "... join with me in suffering for the gospel ..." (2 Tim. 1:8). Christ had to suffer in order to bring us salvation (Luke 24:26). Jesus was familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3). On suffering see also Acts 5:41, Rom. 5:3-4, Heb. 2:10, 13:3.

### **No Escape From Sickness**

We should bring all of our sicknesses, in fact all of our needs to God in prayer. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Phil. 4:6).

While we are urged to bring all of our requests to God, he is not bound to answer them in the way in which we would like. David C Watson (1933-1984) was a prominent Pentecostal pastor in the UK. When he became very sick with cancer, much prayer went up from Christians around the world on his behalf. Some so called 'prophets' even gave him the assurance that 'this sickness is not unto death'. However; to the surprise of many, David Watson died after recording his

fight with the disease in a book, *Fear No Evil*.

David Wilkerson, another Pentecostal pastor is well-known because of his book, "*The Cross and the Switchblade*". Many have come to Christ and have been delivered from addiction to heroin through his ministry, but David suffered from ulcers, and his father - who was also a Pentecostal preacher - died from this illness. His wife Gwen, had a prolonged bout with cancer. She was cured after two operations, the second operation was a radical hysterectomy. These troubling health issues are recorded in David Wilkerson's book, "*Beyond the Cross and the Switchblade*".<sup>5</sup> These troubles have served to strengthen their faith; not weaken it, because God has given them sufficient inner strength in the midst of their weaknesses.

Many have proclaimed the view - particularly in the seventies and early eighties - that if a person has sufficient faith, he or she can be free from sickness. A passage which is often quoted in support of this view says, "...By his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24). What those who have this belief fail to do is quote the passage in full. It says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (2:24-25). When kept in context, it can be seen that the healing is spiritual, not physical. Many other passages of scripture refer to spiritual healing, e.g. Hosea 14:4, Jer.3:22.

Another passage often misquoted is, "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases." (Matt. 8:17). Again, those who quote this passage, fail to quote it in full in its proper context. The passage says, "'When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.'" (8:16-17). Quite clearly, this passage refers to a work which Christ carried out while ministering upon the earth 2,000 years ago. It is not a promise that Christ will always cure Christians when they get sick, if that were the case, David Watson would not have died from cancer.

Many of the saints mentioned in Scripture experienced sickness. King David became very sick in his old age (1 Kings 1:1). Elisha, through whom God had worked many miracles died from sickness (2 Kings 13:14). It did not mean that he had lost favour with God. God still worked miraculously through him, even in the midst of his sickness, see 13:14-19. Also, after he had died, God worked through him. "Once, while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet." (2 Kings 13:21).

The apostle Paul also knew sickness. In his letter to the Galatians he said, "...my sickness was a trial to you..." (Gal. 4:14). God worked through Paul on one occasion to heal a person who had been a cripple from birth (Acts 14:8-10). On some other occasions, God did not heal through him. He said to Timothy, "...I left Trophimus sick in Miletus." (2 Tim.

4:20). He also told the Philippians of the sickness of his good friend Epaphroditus, "Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him..." (Phil. 2:27). His advice to Timothy on one occasion was, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul at one time asked that a 'thorn in my flesh' be taken away (2 Cor. 12:7-8). However, God's reply to him was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9).

Kurt Kosh in his book, "**Between Christ and Satan**", relates several instances where people have received healing through demonic powers. When they later put their faith in Christ, **the sicknesses from which they had been healed, returned**. Satan knows that people can benefit from suffering, therefore he is at times willing to heal, particularly if he can win some allegiance to himself in the process.

From this we learn that Christians should pray for relief from suffering; however, if relief is not given, then we need to recognise that suffering is part of God's mysterious plan for that life. "...suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5:3-4).

For those who wish to pursue this subject further I recommend a book titled, "**We Let Our Son Die**" by L. Parker. The book tells of how a zealous Pentecostal couple took their diabetic son to a healing service. He was prayed for, and they were told that he was healed. The couple stopped his medication and continued in faith. They believed he was healed in spite of all signs to the contrary. Eventually the son died and the parents faced the wrath of the law. This is just one instance where a poor understanding of Scripture has led to tragic consequences.

### **No Escape From Indwelling Sin**

"...let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light ... do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." (Romans 13:12,14).

When a person comes to know Christ as saviour, he or she is given a new nature so that there is now a desire to do good, however; as can be seen from the above verse, the old nature remains and puts up a warfare against the new nature. "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other..." (Gal. 5:17). This means spiritual warfare for the Christian, so the apostle Paul urges the Christian to put up a strong fight. "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed..." (Col. 3:5). See also Rom. 13:14. The apostle previously said, "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." (Col. 3:3).

After considering the above verses, we can be sure he is not meaning the sinful nature when he says 'you died'; also we know from personal experience that our sinful natures are still alive. Rather; he is saying the former self is no more. By 'former self' I mean the pre-Christian spiritually dead self. The post-conversion, spiritually alive self is no longer condemned to a life of sin. So we read in another passage, "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor.5:17).

Because of the new nature within a Christian, the old

nature is weakened, it has been dealt a mortal blow. It will however, remain with us until we die. Some have taught the view that it is possible to be sinless in this life. That however is impossible while our sinful nature remains. Scripture clearly settles the matter by saying, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8). The desire to be rid of our sinful nature is part of the reason we look forward to the coming of our saviour. "... we know that when he appears, we shall be like him..." (1 John 3:2). See also 1 Cor. 15:49.

### **No Guaranteed Wealth**

There is a so-called 'positive thinking' view which basically says, "If you try hard enough, you will succeed." It sometimes goes under the name of 'possibility thinking.' Some in the Church have adopted this view with some modification. Statistics do not support the view. When people go into business, they expect to succeed, yet more than 65% of businesses in Australia fail within the first three years. Philippians 4:13 is sometimes quoted to give support to the view. The verse says, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." The verse is taken to mean God will give the strength to succeed in whatever the believer chooses to do. However; the context reveals a different meaning. The apostle Paul is actually speaking of his hardships, and says, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles." (Philippians 4:12-14).

The apostle is telling the Philippians that God gives him the strength to cope with every situation - the bad as well as the good. A few years back, I came across a single chap who was approaching forty and was concerned that God had not provided him with a wife. His argument was that God is powerful, he can provide him with a wife and wealth to make him happy, so why hasn't he done so? My response to his concern was to explain that God can do an even bigger miracle than the one he was seeking. God can make him content even though in the eyes of the world he shouldn't be because he is single. He did not like my solution. Several months later the subject came up again. He confessed he was starting to seek contentment in difficult circumstances. The Christian who is content in difficult circumstances presents a strong witness of the work of God in his life. Many years ago I passed an old car with an interesting bumper sticker at the back. It read, "the Devil gives want power, God gives will power."

We will now leave behind what sanctification is not and consider some of its positive aspects.

### **The fruit of the gospel**

Being sanctified, and the ongoing process of sanctification is a fruit of the gospel. The word 'gospel' comes from a Greek word which means good news. Initially the word is used of the good news about the Kingdom of God, but later it is used to refer to the good news of what God has done in Christ to reconcile the world to himself.

- The 'gospel' is the good news of that great work of God in Christ by which he brings all who trust in Christ to himself.
- The 'fruit of the gospel' is that great work of God in the believer which makes the believer more Christ-like and produces good deeds.

The ongoing work of sanctification in a believer's life is clearly a fruit of the work of Christ and a fruit of the gospel.

### **The Practicality of Sanctification**

For the heathen, the more he or she is devoted to his or her god, the greater the enslavement to religious ritual. In some cases, poverty is the result. Many missionaries are able to tell of cases where people have been able to lift themselves out of poverty once they have come to know Christ as their saviour. The reason for that being the practicality of Christianity. Those who come to know Christ as their saviour, and grow in him, experience a change in their lives which is for the betterment of themselves, and for others with whom they have contact. Growth in Christ will bring about a greater:

#### 1. Freedom

Those who know Christ and faithfully follow him find freedom; freedom from bondage to the desires of the flesh. Some have found freedom from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Christians also gradually find freedom from the faults in their lives; greed, anger, laziness, jealousy etc. Some find freedom from bondage to a false religion. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Cor. 3:17). See also Gal. 2:3-4, Psalm. 119:44-45, Luke 4:18.

#### 2. Love for others

"And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another, as he commanded us." (1 John 3:23). Love is one of the manifestations of the Spirit in the believer's life. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control..." (Gal. 5:22).

#### 3. Care for others

There are many passages in scripture which urge us to do good. "Let us not become weary in doing good..." (Gal. 6:9). "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Heb. 10:24). "And do not forget to do good and to share with others..." (13:16). "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:27). See also 2 Cor. 9:8, Titus 2:7, 14, 1 Peter 3:17).

### **The Means to Sanctification**

#### The Holy Spirit

The primary means to sanctification is through the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. So the apostle Paul's prayer to the Thessalonian Church was, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through..."

(1 Thess. 5:23).

One of the ways in which he does this is through discipline. In comparing the discipline of God to that of our parents we read in scripture, "For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness." (Hebrews 12:10).

Discipline is often implemented through the hardships of life which God puts us through. If God's children are careless with their money or lazy, they will soon become poor. If they are rude to others, they will soon lack friends. In many ways God brings discipline upon his children. We are to highly regard this discipline because it comes to us with love. "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves he disciplines..." (Heb. 12:5). The only way to avoid this discipline is for us to not be disobedient to him in the first place.

The Holy Spirit also sanctifies us through his word; the Bible. Jesus said, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17). We cannot be sanctified through incorrect means, so it is important for us to find out the truth. We do that through reading the Bible or hearing the message of the Bible proclaimed to us. However, it is not enough to simply read or hear, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22). Another way in which we are sanctified is through our communion with our heavenly Father; through prayer. "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2. N.A.S.B). See also Luke 18:1, 6:28, Matt. 6:5-13, Romans 8:26-27, Luke 6:12, 1 Thess.5:16-17.

We are also sanctified through our gathering together as part of God's Church. God added to the Church those who were saved (Acts 2:47). Jesus Christ has been given to the Church as the supreme ruler over all things (Eph.1:22). Because of the importance of the Church for the growth of the believer, we are warned, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of so doing, but let us encourage one another..." (Heb. 10:25). God has given to the Church men with various gifts in order to build it up (Eph. 4:11-13). It is through the Church that God proclaims the truth (Eph. 3:15). From the above, it is obvious that all believers should join themselves to a Church which faithfully proclaims the word of God in order that they grow spiritually.

### **Human Effort**

It is surprising that there are some Christians who believe that while they should make every effort to earn money for food, clothing and entertainment, they do not believe that they should strive for righteousness. This view comes from a teaching which was prominent in the 1970s. It claims that Christians should allow God to take control of their lives, that they should 'let go and let God.' The idea is that Christians should empty themselves of their own wills, and allow God's will to take over. The teaching suggests that if this happens, the person concerned will become like a Christ on earth, and all personal sin and difficulties will be conquered. The idea sounds so great, it is a wonder that the apostle Paul did not think of it. He could have used the formula to cure all of the

problems in all of the churches he came across, and conquered the world with Christianity in a very short period of time. The plain fact of the matter is that this teaching is simply not true. There is no suggestion in Scripture that any of the great saints of the Bible were merely robots under the guidance of the Holy Spirit doing his will. Likewise, there is no suggestion in the New Testament that Christians should empty themselves of their wills in order that Christ take over.

The apostle Paul told the Christians at Rome to "...put to death the misdeeds of the body..." (Romans 8:13). In other words, they are to make every effort to stop doing that which is wrong. They are to use all of their will-power with the aid of the Holy Spirit to do that which is right. He told another group of Christians, "Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1). We are also told, "...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us... In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." (Heb. 12:1,4). From these passages it is clear to us that far from doing nothing, Christians are to strive for that which is good, and they are to 'struggle against sin'. See also 1 Cor. 9:24-27.

From the emptying ones self error, we will move to a somewhat opposite error, that is the desire to be filled with various emotional experiences.

### Emotional experiences

A young Christian chap who has had a dramatic conversion to Christ will at first feel spiritually high. Christ may feel so real and close to him that he almost feels that he could reach out and touch him. He may feel so emotionally high that he might wonder what is wrong with other Christians that they do not express the zeal and enthusiasm for Christ that he so easily displays. After some time this feeling of warmth and closeness will diminish. The young chap may search his life to see where he has sinned to cause the Lord to leave him, but he is not able to find any particular incident. However; after a time, perhaps while listening to a sermon, reading the Bible, or singing a beautiful hymn, the feeling of closeness and warmth comes back again. Then after a time, it goes again, just as mysteriously as it came. Eventually, after a few up and down experiences, the young chap comes to the realisation that God loves him and is with him all of the time whether he feels spiritually high or not. Also, he comes to the point in his life where he realises that he can be obedient to God and serve him without any dependence upon his feelings in order to do so.

When Jesus went to the cross, it was because of his knowledge of the Father, his love for him and for the Church. "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." (Luke 9:51). He was not merely led by his emotions.

### The Greatest Spiritual Experience

Thomas had a wonderful experience; he saw Jesus. Jesus however, put his experience into perspective, he said, "...'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" (John 20:29). Many young Christians are not sure of what is the

greatest spiritual experience they can have. Because they are not sure, they can fall victim to those who promote experiences which are very powerful emotionally, but are far less important than the greatest experience. The greatest experience that you can have is to **know Jesus Christ as your saviour, and to grow into his likeness.** All other experiences do not compare to the experience of Spiritual birth and growth. I think all Christians would find the experience of seeing Jesus in the flesh a very powerful experience, but Jesus told Thomas, "... blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29).

### The essence of sanctification

The Bible says, "**Delight yourself in the LORD ...**" (Psalm 37:4).

The above passage is in bold letters because it is very important. A Christian's primary delight is to be in the Lord, not in the things of this world. Now that does not mean I should spend much of my life in a comfortable chair having wonderful pleasant thoughts about God - a life of quiet contemplation while the world passes me by.

Taking delight in the Lord should stir us to action. Just how we are stirred to action will depend to some extent on what gifts and abilities God has given us. Taking delight in God will involve from time to time, taking delight in his creation.

From taking delight in God's creation, I come to understand what God is like. For instance, God created the beautiful flowers for our enjoyment. From this I understand that God is taking a special interest in people. There is order in the laws of the universe and in nature. From this I understand I should aim for order in my own life, and provide for others just as God has provided for me.

Taking delight in God will also involve taking delight in people for the following reason. People are made in the image of God. If we are to take delight in God, then it follows to a lesser degree that we are to take some delight in people. 'People', not 'things', should have a high priority in our lives. Our interest in people should not be of an interfering type - unless absolutely necessary, but rather, of an encouraging and helping type.

Jesus told his disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35).

People have a tendency to focus on themselves and on worldly possessions, but for the Christian, our focus is to be on God and on others. Our relationship to others is to be of a particular type; not as lord and master, but as a servant.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and said to them, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:14-15).

Regarding service, Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your



servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:25-28).

### Example

Hal Finger, a pastor near retirement age took on a ministry in a struggling Church. His love, and that of his wife for people and desire to help was infectious. If a woman in a household was sick, his wife would often prepare a meal for the family. On one occasion Hal discovered a widow was given a quote to paint the roof of her house which was well beyond her meagre income. He decided he would paint the roof himself! That act of kindness added to his reputation. Because he had been in the ministry for some years, he had many sermons which he could draw upon, so he could have lived a relaxed lifestyle if he had so chosen, but Hal and his wife were made of sterner stuff than that. They both preached powerful sermons by the way they lived. They are now with the Lord who gives a reward for faithful service which beyond what any man deserves.



In sanctification, there is value in performing menial tasks, particularly for others.

### Dying to self

While the sanctification process brings about a contentment which the world can not take away, it also involves something which to the world does not make sense, that is, dying to self.

“The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12:25). Dying to self is seen in the words and actions of John the Baptist who said of Jesus, “He must become greater; I must become less.” (John 3:30).

A business several decades back advertised its dying trade (dying garments), with the following slogan.

“We live to dye, we dye to live. The more we dye, the more we live.” That slogan to some extent sums up the Christian life. The more he dies to self and his own inconsiderate wishes and lives for Christ, the more he lives and finds satisfaction in life.

The Christian attitude should be that of Christ who humbled himself, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:6-11).

The sanctification process also involves pruning. In order to advance, it may be necessary to get rid of some of the clutter in our lives. Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” (John 15:1-2).

### A modern day hindrance to sanctification

Christians in today’s society face additional challenges to those faced by Christians when I was a boy. A challenge today is to avoid the many things which can distract from the task at hand. A love of the world and the things which it offers has been a problem in every age. Today, ‘things’ are very cheap, consequently, we have a large number of worldly possessions which detract our attention.

For those born after 1960, let me explain what happened when TV sets started entering homes. Before TV there was a slight measure of boredom from time to time in every home. To fix the problem, it was important to have people over for a chat and perhaps sing or just listen while someone played a musical instrument. ‘People’ were seen to be the key to enjoyment in those days. A visitor was welcomed for a chat, usually without any prior arrangement. There were few phones in those days, hence, the many surprise visits from people.

After TV entered homes, entertainment was virtually on tap, and it was of a high quality for the time. The downside of all this was the diminishing time available for family and friends. Soon, it was not acceptable behaviour to just drop in on someone for a chat. You now need to make an appointment. It is not so much the case that we turn to people to rectify boredom, but rather ‘things’. The number of things have increased. We now have mp3 players, computers, digital cameras and mobile phones which entice us to take up our time.

The modern trend for a teenager to spend much of his or her time connected to some sort of electronic device is not just an interest of this writer, it has caught the attention of others as well. A leading magazine a year or two back ran an editorial with the title, ‘All wired up’. It dealt with the issue of teenagers spending a lot of time listening to music, or fiddling with some sort of device, even when doing homework. Spending much of ones time disconnected from God and society will have negative consequences. Unfortunately, the distraction is not limited to teenagers.

The Bible warns, “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, **lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.**” (2 Tim. 1:1-4).

The last part of the verse is placed in bold because it is the opposite to the key verse mentioned earlier - Psalm 37:4. The key problem is a misplaced love. There is no, or little ‘delight in the Lord’.

There is much more that could be said on the important subject of sanctification. If I was the greatest writer and the

greatest theologian in the world, whatever I wrote still could not do justice to this important subject. The best that I can do now is point the reader in the direction of Jesus Christ.

### Christ-likeness From Sanctification

The Christian's aim should be for greater Christ-likeness, for that is what God seeks to produce in our lives, and for that reason the apostle Paul says, "...clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Romans 13:14). The result of which we will live as he lived, have the attitude he had and show something of the love he displayed.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:18).

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of sanctification?
2. What is the outward sign of Christian growth?
3. Is Christian growth through human effort, the work of the Holy Spirit, or both?
4. Describe two means by which we grow spiritually?
5. What is the Christian's highest priority? (Matt. 22:37).
6. What is Paul referring to when he says 'you died'? (Col. 3:3).
7. Who was the prominent prophet who died of sickness? (2 Kings 13:14).
8. Who was the sick person who was left by Paul in Miletus? (2 Tim. 4:20).

### ANSWERS

1. Sanctification involves separation from evil and separation to God. It is the process by which we become more Christ-like.
2. The display of a more Christ-like character.
3. Both.
4. Prayer, Bible study, coming under sound preaching, fellowship with other believers, through doing God's will, through experiencing God's discipline.
5. Love God with all our heart.
6. The old (pre-Christian) self.
7. Elisha.
8. Trophimus.

### Greek Notes on sanctified and sanctification

#### Sanctified - Present reality (Gk. *Hagiazo*)

John 17:19. "For them I sanctify [*hagiazo*] myself, that they too may be truly sanctified [*hagiasmenoi*]." Literally, they 'having been sanctified'.

Acts 20:32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified [*hagiasmenois*]." Literally, those 'having been sanctified'.

Acts 26:18 Jesus said to Paul, "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified [*hagiasmenois*] by faith in me."

*hagiasmenois*, literally, 'having been sanctified'.

Romans 15:16 "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified [*hagiasmene*] by the Holy Spirit." Literally, 'having been sanctified'.

1 Cor. 1:2 "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified [*hagiasmenois*] in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours:"  
*hagiasmenois*, literally, 'having been sanctified'.

1 Cor 6:11 "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified [*hegiasthete*], you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

*hegiasthete*, means 'ye were sanctified'.

#### Sanctification - Sanctify, the ongoing process.

1 Thess. 5:23 "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify [Gk. *hagiasai*] you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

John 17:17 "Sanctify [*hagiason*] them by the truth; your word is truth."

*hagiason*, 'sanctify'.

John 17:19 "For them I sanctify [*hagiazo*] myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."

*hagiazo*, 'sanctify'.

Hebrews 2:11 "Both the one [The Holy Spirit] who makes men holy and those who are made holy [*hagiazomeni*] are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers."

*hagiazomeni*, being sanctified.

### Recommended Reading

- David Holden        *“The Hindu, The Muslim and The Christian”*. See web site listed below.
- J.C. Ryle            *“Holiness”*
- Albert M. Martin    *“Living the Christian Life”*, (booklet)
- Donald MacDonald   *“Christian Experience”*
- Fritz Ridenour      *“How to be a Christian Without Being Religious”*
- Oswald Sanders     *“The Best that I Can Be”*
- Richard Foster      *“Celebration of Discipline”*
- Erroll Hulse        P o s i t i o n a l S a n c t i f i c a t i o n,  
*“Reformation Today”*, No. 237, Sept. 2010, p. 3. (Booklet, available through subscription).

### End Notes

1. Sanctification, *“Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words”*, W E Vine, Oliphants, London, 1973, p. 317. See also *“Bakers Dictionary of Theology”*, Michigan, 1975, p. 470.
2. Holy, *“Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words”*, p. 226.
3. Sanctification, *“Systematic Theology”*, Wayne Grudem, IVP, Nottingham, 1994, p. 746.
4. Simeon the stylite, *“The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church”*, Zondervan, Michigan, 1974, p. 905.
5. David Wilkerson, *“Beyond the Cross and the Switchblade”*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1975, p. 171.

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