

However, as we have seen, **God works in sanctification** and **we work**. It is an ongoing cooperative process. God's work is primary and **our effort** is **secondary**. Therefore we are called to **God-dependent effort** throughout the New Testament. This can be seen in several places. Consider that we are "**led by the Spirit**" indicating that our very lives are directed by the Holy Spirit as we progress toward Christlikeness.

**Romans 8:12-14** - 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; **but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.** NASB

**Galatians 5:16-18** - 16 But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 **For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another**, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.** NASB

Moreover, we are commanded by God to "**work out**" our "**salvation**" and in a very ardent and reverent way he says, "**with fear and trembling**" (Phil 2:12).

**Philippians 2:12-13** - 12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation** with fear and trembling; 13 **for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** NASB

And when Paul says "**work out your salvation**" he uses the term **salvation** here **NOT** as the **initial justification** that occurred when we believed, but **as the ongoing process** of further realizing the blessings and benefits of salvation (or sanctification) in our daily lives. We are to **exert God-dependent effort** to press on toward Christlikeness, thus **bearing His image** in greater degree, and experiencing the enjoyment of Christ's virtue more and more as a result.

**2 Corinthians 7:1** - Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness** in the fear of God. NASB

**Philippians 3:10-14** - 10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 **Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.** 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and **reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** NASB

**Hebrews 12:14** - **Pursue** peace with all men, **and the sanctification** without which no one will see the Lord. NASB

Notice here in these Scriptures that we are to "**cleanse ourselves**" and to "**press on toward the goal**" and to "**pursue...sanctification,**" clearly showing that we are called to exert effort by the Spirit to "**perfect holiness**" in this life. Many passages in the Bible describe different aspects of our role and explain it as an **active role** on our part.

**Romans 8:12-13** - 12 So then, brethren, **we are under obligation**, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** NASB

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-8** - 3 **For this is the will of God, your sanctification;** that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that **each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,** 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. 7 **For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.** 8 Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. NASB

**1 John 3:2-3** - 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. 3 **And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.** NASB

**1 Corinthians 6:18-20** - 18 **Flee immorality.** Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy

Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: **therefore glorify God in your body.** NASB

Further, this **active role** that we play is also seen with hearty images in the New Testament which show the **Christian maturing process** as one of **great difficulty**. These images are but not limited to:

- **Struggle/Race –**

**1 Timothy 4:10-11** - 10 For it is **for this we labor and strive**, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. NASB

**1 Corinthians 9:24-27** - 24 Do you not know that **those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.** 25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but **I buffet my body and make it my slave**, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. NASB

**Hebrews 12:1-2** - Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and **let us run with endurance the race that is set before us**, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. NASB

- **Conflict/Tension –**

**Romans 7:15-23** - 15 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for **I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.** 16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for **the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.** 19 **For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.** 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, **I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.** 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, **waging war against the law of my mind**, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. NASB

**Galatians 5:17** - 17 **For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another**, so that you may not do the things that you please. NASB

- **Battle/Warfare –**

**Ephesians 6:10-13** - 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. 11 **Put on the full armor of God**, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness** in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, **take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day**, and having done everything, to stand firm. NASB

**1 Timothy 6:12** - 12 **Fight the good fight of faith**; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. NASB

**2 Timothy 2:3-4** - 3 **Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.** 4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. NASB

- **Chastening/Suffering -**

**Philippians 1:29-30** - 29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, **but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me**, and now hear to be in me. NASB

**Hebrews 12:10-11** - 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.** 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; **yet to those who have been trained by it**, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. NASB

**1 Peter 4:15-19** - 15 By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but **if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that**

**name let him glorify God.** 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? 19 Therefore, **let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator** in doing what is right. NASB

And so we are called to **strive** and **exert God dependent effort** to see the battle or race won and the process of becoming like Christ completed to greater and greater degree.

**2 Peter 1:5-8** - 5 Now for this very reason also, **applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence,** and in your moral excellence, knowledge; 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 **For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** NASB  
**Hebrews 6:9-12** - 9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and **things that accompany salvation,** though we are speaking in this way. 10 For God is not unjust so as to forget **your work and the love which you have shown** toward His name, in **having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.** 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 **that you may not be sluggish, but imitators** of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. NASB

Our role is very much active and this **active role** is the **major goal of Christian life.** This of course is because God's chief purpose in our salvation is to manifest His own glory and excellence as God, and **He does this in us through sanctification, causing us to bear His image in greater degree** throughout the Christian life. This is emphasized again and again in large sections of the New Testament such as Romans 12-14, Ephesians 4:17-6:20, Phil 4:4-9, Col 3:1-4:6. 1 Pet 2:11-5:11, 2 Pet 1:5-8, 1 John 2-3). Since this is the major goal of Christian life, see then how important it is that **we continue to actively pursue holiness** in our lives until we achieve the goal, Christlikeness.

Now there is also a **passive role in sanctification** that we play and it is a very important part of the process. This passive role is seen in texts that encourage us to **yield ourselves in faith or trust in God,** and **looking to Him in prayer** for strength and in **dependence upon Him** for the grace and help that we need to become like Him and obey Him. In fact, most everything we do in Christian life, if it is to be done to the glory of God is an **act of faith and trust in God's strength** to accomplish. This is surely true about the process of mortifying sin and behaving in a godly righteous way.

**Romans 6:11-14** - 11 Even so **consider yourselves to be dead to sin,** but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore **do not let sin reign** in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, 13 and **do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin** as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. NASB

**Colossians 3:5** - 5 Therefore **consider the members of your earthly body as dead** to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. NASB

We are **dependent** on the Holy Spirit's work to grow in sanctification, and this can be clearly seen in texts like Phil 2:13-13 and Romans 8:12-13.

**Romans 8:12-13** - 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body,** you will live. NASB

Grudem comments on this passive role in sanctification; *"Unfortunately today, this **"passive" role in sanctification, this idea of yielding to God and trusting him to work in us "to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13), is sometimes so strongly emphasized that it is the only thing people are told about the path of sanctification. Sometimes the popular phrase "let go and let God" is given as a summary of how to live the Christian life. But this is a tragic distortion of***

*the doctrine of sanctification, for it only speaks of one half of the part we must play, and, by itself, will lead Christians to become lazy and to neglect the active role that Scripture commands them to play in their own sanctification.*” (from Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem)

Nevertheless we not only yield and submit ourselves to His divine will, but we are called to **exert God-dependent effort to press on** toward Christlikeness, as He molds and fashions us, thus **bearing His image** in greater degree. Below we will talk further about the role of the Gospel and of faith in Sanctification.

### **Sanctification Continues throughout life**

Some have maintained that the idea of attaining **sinless perfection** in the Christian life is a **real possibility**. But the Bible nowhere teaches this, in fact it clearly teaches that sanctification continues throughout life until death and **only at the resurrection will we be finally free** from the constraints of mortality and bodies subject to temptation and sin. This erroneous teaching of “**perfectionism**” is founded on certain scriptures where we are given the goal of sanctification, which is to mortify and vivify (put off-put on) calling us to seek after the perfection of God’s holiness in our lives such as;

**Matthew 5:48** - 48 “Therefore **you are to be perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect. NASB

**2 Corinthians 7:1** - Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness** in the fear of God. NASB

**1 John 3:4-6** - 4 **Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness**; and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in Him sins; **no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him**. NASB

In the case of Matthew 5:48 when Jesus calls us to God’s perfection, we see the clear and obvious goal of all Christian character and conduct, which is the very nature of God Himself. Shall the God who is holy and seeks to conform us to His character call us to less than is own perfection? We are called to strive for perfection, that is clear. But **nowhere** does the Scripture say or **even imply** that **such a goal can be obtained**, but on the contrary it clearly teaches that we are **not capable of attaining** such a goal (Rom 6-7, Gal 5:16-24, Phil 3:10-14), but are in many places **urged to strive** for it (Eph 4-6, Col 3, Rom 12:9-21, 1 Pet 1:13-5:9).

**James 3:2** - 2 For **we all stumble in many ways**. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. NASB

**1 Peter 2:11** - 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers **to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul**. NASB

Both James and Peter acknowledge (as does John 1 Jon 3:7-10) that we sin in various ways because we are at war with “**lusts**” in our soul and we therefore “**stumble in many ways**.” And Paul gives this warfare an extensive treatment in Romans 7, but elsewhere is continually urging us to strive against sin and press on to the goal of heavenward perfection.

**2 Corinthians 7:1** - Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness** in the fear of God. NASB

But the context of 1 John 3 clearly debunks the idea of sinless perfection. For if verses 4-6 were teaching sinless perfection, then verses 7-10 would disqualify every single Christian from salvation because we all continue to sin in the course of daily life.

**1 John 3:3-11** - 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you; **the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil**; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 **No one who is born of God practices sin**, because His seed abides in him; and **he**