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TOPIC PAPER
REPENTANCE AND SANCTIFICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Many times, in the counseling room, counselees come face to face with their own sin. God has charged the Biblical counselor with the work of identifying particular sin patterns in the lives of his respective counselees. Not only is the counselor tasked with wisely seeing and discerning these sin patterns, but also providing the light, through the Word of God, for the counselee to acknowledge and understand them as well. But, once the counselee recognizes the sin in his heart, what is he to do?

One of the most significant functions in Biblical counseling is to help the struggling counselee grow in his faith. The issues that are presented by the counselee are symptoms of a more substantial problem – the wayward heart. Thankfully, for the Christian, there is always the hope of change (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)! God wants to change the heart, the attitudes, and the actions of His people. This change will, in turn, have dramatic effects upon the relationships in the counselee's life – familial, friends, co-workers, and most importantly, his relationship with His Lord.

So, once a counselee begins to understand his sinful nature, what is he to do? How can this sin, which causes so much pain and destruction, be eradicated? The counselee, as a believer, has been given a tremendous gift from God, by the Holy Spirit. That gift is sanctification. This gift means that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the counselee can change. He does not have to remain where he is. But, what about the sin that is in his heart right now? Again, another gift from the Lord, repentance. *Repentance* and *sanctification* provide the counselee with the hope and expectation that things can be different. Things can be better.

Repentance, as a necessary discipline in the process of sanctification, cannot be overstated, for it beckons the follower of Jesus to turn from sin and pursue Christlike obedience

to God. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to underscore the necessary relationship between repentance and sanctification.

SANCTIFICATION DEFINED

Sanctification comes from two Latin words – *sanctus*, which means holy, and *ficare*, which means make. The Hebrew word *qâdâsh*,¹ (used for sanctify, sanctified, consecrate, dedicate) means to make, pronounce, observe as ceremonially or morally clean; appoint, consecrate, dedicate, hallow, be/keep holy. Sanctify, in the Greek, *hagiazō*², means to make holy, purify or consecrate, to venerate, hallow, be holy, sanctify. There are typically two Greek words used for sanctification – *hagiasmōs*³ (meaning purification, the state of purity, holiness, sanctification) and *hagiōsunē*⁴ (meaning sacredness, the quality of holiness). To sanctify, then, means to make holy, sacred, to purify. In the Old Testament, *sanctification*, or *sanctify*, was generally associated with God. God is holy, pure, set apart as distinct from anything or anyone else – He is the standard for holiness. As such, anything or anyone that He called His own or that He desired to use must be made holy, *sanctified*. The Old Testament frequently uses the word consecrate when talking about things that God required to be made holy/sanctified. To consecrate something means to make it pure, unmixed with any error, clean, sacred.

His priests were to consecrate themselves (1 Chronicles 15:14), as were his people (Exodus 29:43-46), certain places (2 Chronicles 30:8), certain times (Genesis 2:3), objects

¹ J. Strong. *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible; Vol. 2.* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), p. 102.

² Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible; Vol. 1.* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), p. 7.

³ Strong, 7.

⁴ Strong, 7.

(Leviticus 27:30-33), and also, animals and sacrifices (2 Chronicle 29:33).⁵ Virtually anything or anyone set apart by God is holy/sanctified because God is holy. In some instances, it was God who sanctified, and in some instances, God commanded sanctification. God’s people were sanctified because God called them and set them apart. However, God also required that they sanctify themselves, by ritual, cleansing, and/or sacrifice, in order to be fit for His use. The work of this sanctification was always to make the ordinary acceptable for the divine – to make distinct from what is common.

In the New Testament, God has sanctified the one who repents and trusts in Christ for his salvation. Through the blood of Jesus, the Christian has been made a holy sacrifice, pleasing to God (Hebrews 13:11-16). The believer has been set apart to God in conversion and is living out that dedication to God in holiness. God has separated the follower of Christ out from the world to Himself. So, believers are referred to in the New Testament as “saints” (ἅγιος, *hagios*), literally “holy ones,” because they belong to God.⁶ Thus, in both the Old and New Testament, sanctification consists of two elements. First, God, ultimately, is the One Who sanctifies. He is the One Who separates out His chosen, calling them holy and His own. Second, God calls those whom He has sanctified to separate themselves unto Him continually. In Hebrews 10:10 the verb “sanctified” is a perfect participle, literally “having been sanctified,” indicating the present result of a past action. Sanctification is something that has been done once for all, but its effect continues—as stated in Hebrews 10:14, “those who are being sanctified.”⁷

⁵ L.L. Cranford. *Sanctification; Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003) pp. 1443–1444.

⁶ K.D. Litwak. *Sanctification; Lexham Theological Wordbook*. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁷ E.E. Carpenter & P.W. Comfort. In *Holman treasury of key Bible words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000) p. 385.

Wayne Grudem says sanctification is “a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and more like Christ in our actual lives.”⁸ The New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833), states: “We believe that Sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of His holiness; that it is a progressive work; that it is begun in regeneration; and that it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the Sealer, and Comforter, in the continual use of the appointed means—especially the Word of God, self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness, and prayer”⁹

In sanctification, both God and the Christian have specific responsibilities. Paul commands believers to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12–13). In this statement by Paul, he is describing the process of sanctification. God is the one who does the work of making the believer more like Christ, and the believer participates in that work by a life of continually turning away from sin and demonstrating his faith in Christ by obeying God's commands. The Holy Spirit plays the key role in this process: as the believer walks in the power of the Spirit he “will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). It is only by the grace and goodness of God that the believer even desires to become more like Christ. Kris Lungaard states, “The [Holy] Spirit is the Author and Finisher of our sanctification. He gives us new shipments of grace for holiness (Ephesians 3:16-19).”¹⁰

⁸ W.A. Grudem. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), p.1253.

⁹ Carpenter & Comfort. *Holman treasury of key Bible words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained*, 385.

¹⁰ Kris Lungaard. *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk About the Power and Defeat of Sin*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998) p. 148.

As for every believer, every saint, Paul says, “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity (Hebrews 6:1).” Sanctification, as a process, begins at the moment of Christian conversion and is empowered by the Holy Spirit through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Persistent, continual, Spirit-led sanctification is to characterize the life of the believer until life’s final breath, and he is in the presence of his Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

REPENTANCE DEFINED

It is vitally important to understand the biblical concept of repentance. It is central, not only to the New Testament but all of Scripture.¹¹ Rosaria Butterfield says, “Repentance is the only no-shame solution to a renewed Christian conscience because all it does is prove the obvious, that God was right all along.”¹²

The Hebrew words from which the word repentance comes are *shûwb* (meaning turn back, retreat [often again] recall, recompense)¹³ and *nâcham*, (meaning breathe strongly, sigh, to be sorry, pity, console, rue, avenge [oneself]).¹⁴ Many of the words in the Old Testament that would be translated from these two Hebrew words are *repent, repented, repentant, turn, turn from, turn back, return, seek, penitent*. The Greek word for “repentance” is a compound word derived from *meta*, meaning “after,” and suggesting “some type of change,” and *nous*, meaning “mind.” Thus, *metanoia* strictly denotes “a change of mind”—a rejection of past sinful ways. But

¹¹ R.C. Sproul. *What Is Repentance? first edition, vol. 18.* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust; Ligonier Ministries, 2014), pp. 1–37.

¹² Rosaria Butterfield. “*Sexuality, Identity, and the Doctrine of Repentance: My Train Wreck Conversion.*” SEBTS Lecture, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/74414951>.

¹³ Strong. *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible; Vol. 2*, 113.

¹⁴ Strong, 77.

it also connotes remorse for sin, accompanied by a desire to turn away from one's sin and to God for salvation. Such repentance accompanies faith in Christ (Acts 20:21).¹⁵

Repentance is a complete transformation or change of mind, attitude, heart, and will. Biblical repentance has intellectual, emotional, and volitional elements. The intellectual element involves "a change of view, a recognition of sin as involving personal guilt, defilement, and helplessness." The emotional element involves "a change of feeling, manifesting itself in sorrow for sin committed against a holy and just God." The volitional element involves "a change of purpose, an inward turning away from sin, and a disposition to seek pardon and cleansing."¹⁶ Each of the three elements is dependent on the other two. Repentance, then, is a whole-person response to one's sinfulness in light of God's goodness. It is total surrender.

Repentance is required for salvation. It is a recognition that God is holy, and man is not. It is an acknowledgment of one's sinfulness and the awareness that only God can forgive through Christ. It is an admission of guilt paired with the faith that God will forgive and that Jesus is the means by which God saves and forgives. In the Old Testament, God's prophets heralded the message of repentance – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Jonah, Zechariah – to name a few. The call was for the Israelite nation to forsake their worship of foreign God's and turn back to Yahweh, the One True God. In the New Testament, repentance was the keynote of John the Baptist's message, calling for a complete turn from self to God (Matthew 1:1-3). Both Peter and Paul preached repentance and belief for the forgiveness of sin – the conversion of the wicked (Acts 3:19, Acts 20:21). Repentance unto salvation was a hallmark of Jesus's preaching

¹⁵ Carpenter & Comfort. *Holman treasury of key Bible words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew words defined and explained*, 376.

¹⁶ Louis Berkhof. *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1938), p. 486.

(Matthew 4:17, Luke 5:31-32). Repentance and belief co-occur in an unbeliever leading to salvation. *“I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable ... testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).”* Hebrews 6:1 says that repentance is the first act of salvation from dead works and faith toward God.

Repentance, however, is not just a one-time event, for the unbeliever, leading to salvation. God, through His prophets, in the Old Testament, is continually calling His chosen people to repentance. Paul is regularly calling the believers to repentance in his letters. In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus is calling the church to repentance. Repentance, turning from self and sin to God, is to be a continual, on-going activity for the believer. Much like Isaiah, when confronted with the person of Christ, the natural response of the Christian is to turn away from sin and to God. When Isaiah saw the Lord, he immediately became aware of his sinfulness (Isaiah 6). As the Apostle Paul walked with Jesus, he became increasingly aware of his sinfulness (1 Timothy 1:15). Their continual response to God was one of repentance. Martin Luther, in the first of his 95 Theses says, “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said ‘repent,’ willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.”¹⁷

For both the believer and the unbeliever, repentance is the work of God. In Romans 2:4, Paul says that God’s patience is evidence of His kindness, which is leading men to salvation. The very act of repentance, which is required by God, is initiated by Him (Acts 5:31). Repentance is a gift given from Jesus, Himself (Acts 5:31, 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25). According to Ephesians 2:8-9, the very faith required for repentance is given by God. There is nothing in humanity that

¹⁷ Martin Luther. *Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the power and efficacy of indulgences: October 31, 1517*, electronic ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1996).

would cause him to seek repentance on his own – he is not good or righteous (Psalm 14, Ecclesiastes 3, Romans 3). So, that which man cannot do, God does. It is God, in His goodness and grace, Who draws men unto Himself, granting faith and repentance. Thomas Watson states, “Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.”¹⁸

A quick word about false repentance. Repentance is sorrow, remorse. Repentance is knowing and understanding one’s sinfulness. But this is not all repentance is. Many believe that giving intellectual assent to one’s sinfulness or being upset and saddened by their sinfulness is repentance. However, as already discussed above, repentance involves the intellect, emotions, and the will. In other words, Biblical repentance compels the offender to turn from their sinfulness towards God. Repentance is actionable – it requires turning from sin, casting it off, and moving forward in Christlikeness. Wayne Grudem says repentance is “a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.”¹⁹

REPENTANCE AND SANCTIFICATION

“Repentance is a key part of the Christian life. It never feels good — and if it does, you’re doing it wrong — but it is necessary. It’s what reminds us of our need for grace while displaying our growth in grace to the world around.”²⁰ Repentance lays the groundwork for sanctification. Where sanctification in the believer is focused on becoming more like Christ and maturing in the faith, repentance is the process of confessing and removing the sin and

¹⁸ Thomas Watson. *The Doctrine of Repentance, Useful for these Times*. (Louisville, KY: GLH Publishing, 2016), p.7.

¹⁹ Grudem. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 1253.

²⁰ Josh Squires. *A Recipe for Repentance*, March 19, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-recipe-for-repentance>.

strongholds that block the process of sanctification. Stated more plainly, without repentance, there can be no sanctification. It is the gift of repentance that God gives the believer that cleans and purifies the heart so that growth can take place. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Confession and repentance will result in forgiveness and cleansing from the Father. Psalm 24 reminds the Christian that only he who comes with clean hands, a pure heart, and a soul that is not given to idols will find an audience with the Lord. Psalm 24 is talking about the act of repentance which leads to fellowship with God. Repentance is also evidence *of* sanctification, as it is an act of obedience (Ezekiel 14:6, 18:30, 32) which is pleasing to God (Jeremiah 34:15). Repentance lends itself to sanctification and sanctification lends itself to repentance.

In the next few sections, three passages of scripture will be examined to show the correlation between biblical repentance and sanctification. More scriptures could undoubtedly be used, but the point will be made; humble, sincere repentance, prompted and empowered by the Holy Spirit must precede sanctification. For repentance is agreeing with God that the heart is sinful and in need of His forgiveness and cleansing. The broken spirit and the contrite heart are abiding signs of the believing soul. The way of sanctification is the way of contrition for the sin of the past and of the present.²¹

David’s Return to the Lord – Psalm 51

Psalm 51 gives a beautiful picture of repentance and the resulting sanctification of the believer. Before the writing of this Psalm, God’s prophet, Nathan, confronted King David concerning his grievous sins – his affair with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah (2

²¹ John Murray. *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*. (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), p. 116.

Samuel 11). Psalm 51 is David's prayer of repentance to God as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, by way of Nathan.

Psalm 51 begins, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." Here we see an element that is fundamental to repentance. Usually, when a person becomes aware of his sin and turns from it, he casts himself on the mercy of God. The first fruit of authentic repentance is the recognition of one's profound need for mercy. When David pleads with God to blot out his transgressions, he's asking God to remove the stain from his soul, to cover his unrighteousness, and to cleanse him from the sin that is now a permanent part of his life. So, he says, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!" In a spirit of repentance, David is not only asking for forgiveness, but also for the strength not to sin this way again.

In Psalm 51:3, David continues, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51:3). This statement isn't simply a casual acknowledgment of guilt. He is a haunted man; he says, "I know I am guilty." There's no attempt to minimize his guilt. There's no attempt at self-justification. In this text, by the power of the Holy Spirit, David is brought to the point where he is honest before God. He admits his guilt, realizing that his sin is ever present. He can't get rid of it, and this haunts him. This admission of guilt is fundamental to repentance. In verse 4, he then he cries out, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." Of course, David is not saying that he did not sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, nor is he minimizing his sin against them. But he is acknowledging that the most offended party in this transaction was God, the One Who is without sin. His sin against God was first and most important. God alone is blameless, and God alone has the right to judge!

In 51:5-7, David is crying out to God from the depths of his soul. He has sinned against God. Again, he cries out for cleansing in verse 7. “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” This second cry for cleansing seems to underscore David’s realization that he is utterly totally dependent on God for forgiveness and cleansing. In verse 8 he says, “Let me hear joy and gladness, let the bones that you have broken rejoice.” This Psalm is a companion to Psalm 32. In 32, David speaks of how the conviction of God crushed him, causing him literal physical pain. Here, David is calling out to God to restore his joy and gladness through the forgiveness and cleansing that only God can provide.

The sequence in this Psalm is significant – acknowledgment of sin, confession, asking forgiveness, and then cleansing and restoration. “Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me, cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.” The prayer of repentance is a refuge for the believer (Psalm 32:7). It is the godly response of one who knows that he is in sin. This type of response should mark the lives of all those who are converted.

In 51:12-17, upon forgiveness and cleansing, God restores the joy of His salvation to David. “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.” God has forgiven David and restored David’s joy. God has restored David’s spirit of willingness to serve Him. And now, David has committed himself to teach sinners of God’s willingness to forgive and cleanse. “Open my lips,” he says, “and my mouth will declare your praise.” Once again, David’s relationship with God is restored, because of the kindness of God which led him to repentance, so that God could delight in forgiving and restoring David. David’s fellowship with his creator

had been stifled due to his sinfulness. But with a humble and contrite heart, David repented, and his relationship with the Lord began to flourish again.²² David's response is joyful praise!

The Corinthian Church – 2 Corinthians 12 and 13

The apostle Paul had been charged by God with quite a unique job. He was to be the apostle to the Gentiles. This assignment indeed came with many challenges. Not only was he teaching a new message, the message of the gospel of Jesus, to a group of people who had very little working knowledge of Christianity, but he also had to 'unlearn' them many myths, philosophies, and practices they were very familiar with, to which they were accustomed. Add to this, the fact that many in the Jewish community did not understand and/or approve of Paul taking 'their' religion to the Gentiles. Paul faced opposition, it seemed, from everywhere. But, along with this charge God had given Paul, he also had been given a divine love for the Gentiles. He indeed *was* their pastor as he traveled from town to town and region to region to share with them this new message of hope. One of the cities he had ministered in was Corinth. Paul had seen many Gentile converts in Corinth. He was deeply invested in the Christian church in Corinth and especially passionate about their sanctification as new believers.

Paul had written several letters to the church in Corinth to help them with some of the issues they had been having and to address some of their questions. Among some of the problems that had infiltrated the Corinthian church were various forms of sexual immorality, factions in the church, asceticism, suing one another, idolatry and eating meat sacrificed to idols, and other erroneous Christian practices. One of the issues that Paul had addressed was the accusations made against him by false teachers that would discredit his ministry. To his dismay, some of the Corinthians believed these false teachers.

²² R.C. Sproul. *What Is Repentance? first edition, vol. 18, 1–37.*

In 2 Corinthians 12:20, Paul says, “for I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish...” Paul says that he had a particular fear at the thought of going back to visit the Corinthians. He was afraid. But of what exactly was Paul afraid? In 13:1, he says that this will be his third visit. Paul had been there once to establish the church. He had been there a second time to confront some sin and what was known as the sorrowful visit referred to in chapter 2 verses 1 and 2 – in which he says that he was not too sure that he would be coming back. Paul was not angry, he was hurt, and his heart was downcast (7:6). He had an encounter in which he confronted the sin of the Corinthians, to which they did not respond very well.

In verse 21 of chapter 12, Paul tells the reader why he is fearful. “Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.” Paul fears that his spirit will be brought low again and his heart will again be downcast because of the lack of repentance by some. He says that he will mourn at their unrepentant state. The apostle did not want to return and see the sin that he had seen before. Notice that he says that some had sinned before and had not repented of the sin which they have practiced. This paints a picture that perhaps some have developed a pattern of sin. In verse 5 of chapter 13, Paul tells those continuing in sin to “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” Paul’s passion was for their sanctification. He desired for them to be edified, built up in the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:19). He did all things for their edification, their sanctification. In his passion for their sanctification, he mourns at their lack of repentance! Why? Their unrepentance means one of two things: one, they would not progress in sanctification until they repented, or two, they had never repented and

thus were never sanctified, to begin with. Paul said, if you will not repent, you need to test yourself to see if you are even in Christ. Either way, saved or unsaved, repentance in faith is the necessary first step for walking with the Lord.

Mortify Sin, Put Off/Put On – Colossians 3

In Colossians 3:1, Paul says, “Since you were raised with Christ...” He is speaking to believers here. He is just as concerned with the sanctification of the Colossian Christians as he is with the Corinthian Christians. So here, the apostle is speaking to Christians, and he is once again giving instruction on the life to which the believer is called. These Colossians *are raised with Christ*. They are sanctified, in that they were set apart by God, for God, at the moment they “repented from dead works and believed toward God (Hebrews 6:1).” He says, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (3:1).” The believer is in Christ. He cannot ever *not be in Christ*, nor can he ever be *more in Christ*. “[This] positional reality, however, must be worked out in the believer’s practical living. There can be no holiness or maturity in a life where sin runs unchecked. We have died to sin’s penalty, but sin’s power still can be strong, and our flesh is weak. That is why we must continually put sin to death by yielding to the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13).”²³

In verse 5 Paul tells the believer that his sin must be “put to death!” Paul uses decisive, forceful language in this passage. Sin is a murderer, and the believer must murder sin. Though Christ has defeated the reign of sin in the believer’s body, its pull and allure to his fleshly body are still strong. He must deal treacherously and quickly with sin. He must live entirely dependent upon the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). He must let the Word of God dwell in him richly

²³ J. F. MacArthur, Jr. *Colossians; MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p 135.

(Colossians 3:16)! Sin must be cut off at the knees. How? Humble, submissive, continual repentance. The Believer is to confess his sin quickly!

Verses 9 and 10 provide the power for this type of decisive action against sin! Because Jesus has ‘put off the old man’ and ‘put on the new man’ the believer now has the power and desire to mortify sin! Paul continues in verse 8 by saying, “But now you yourselves are to put off all these things: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.” This is the same charge to the believer as *killing sin*. This is a continual dying to oneself, turning from sinfulness and turning to God.

As Paul is concerned with the sanctification of the believer, he now says in verse 12, “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy [*hagios*, sacred, consecrated] and beloved, put on...” As the believer turns from sin by *putting off*, now he turns to God by *putting on*. The put off/put on language is a marvelous picture of dying to self, by continual submission and repentance, and turning to God and growing in maturity by obedience – progressive sanctification. Colossians 3:17 caps it off. “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

REPENTANCE, SANCTIFICATION, AND THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

The application of repentance and sanctification is not a difficult one to think through and has almost endless possibilities. As already stated, it is the will of God for the believer to grow and mature in relationship to Him (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). Thus, it is indeed the will of God for each counselee who walks into the counseling room to progress in their sanctification. If the sanctification of the counselee is the ultimate goal of Biblical Counseling, then repentance must also play a vital role in the counseling room.

Take, for example, the husband who spends money impulsively with little, to no, regard for his wife and children. How about the mother that continually hovers over her three children, watching every move they make and giving them very little space to begin learning to make their own decisions? Consider the son who treats his parents with disrespect with both his degrading speech and blatant disobedience. Finally, think about the daughter who shuts herself off from the rest of the family and is seemingly controlled by thoughts of not being pretty enough – to the point that these thoughts are now beginning to control her actions and behavior. There are many different, but common sin issues which will harm the Christian family – competition, jealousy, anger, marital infidelity. How can Biblical counseling help? How can the Word of God help? Is there any real hope for change for this family, or any other family?

A quick look in the book of James, chapter four, will provide insight and help for the family struggling with these sin patterns, desiring to move forward. James 4:1-5 identifies the origin of these sins. James is speaking to the church, but indeed, these words find familiarity in the family as well.

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?”

James pinpoints, with divine accuracy, the cause of familial fights, quarrels, and hardships. He even uses the word *wars*. Sinfulness and its ensuing relational conflict can feel like a war. The source of these fights, quarrels, and wars? The heart! Every human who has ever walked on planet earth, or who will walk on planet earth (save Christ) has a heart that is naturally bent in the direction of sinful pride. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things,

and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Every human heart is sinful. This is the source of struggle, arguments, contention, and warring in the family. James makes this same point in chapter one. Each person is tempted when he is led away by “*his own desire.*” It does not take long to see this truth come to fruition in the Bible – in the context of familial strife. One only has to go four chapters into Genesis to see the first murder in the Bible – brothers Cain and Abel.

He equates their sinful, desiring hearts with adultery. Adultery was God’s indictment upon the Israelite nation who continued in their worship of foreign idols (Jeremiah 3:8). The one who is a spiritual adulterer is choosing to worship himself – not God. He has set himself up as the one to be worshipped, idolized. A Christian family in constant turmoil and fighting is a family that is given to idolatry. Something other than God is ruling their hearts. James also calls such a person an enemy of God. Perhaps the real issue with a counselee is that “repent[ance] from dead works and faith toward God” has never taken place. An enemy of God cannot possibly be a believer!

James goes on to say in 4:7-10;

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

Here, James is instructing the believer (and, as previously shown above, the deceived unbeliever) concerning his sinful heart and subsequent behavior. James is focusing on the discipline of *repentance*. James is extending a call to repentance; for the believer to put away any remaining vestiges of his sinfulness, and the unbeliever to come to the Lord in repentant faith.

In the same way as David (Psalm 51), the counselor must call on the counselee to repent. That repentance begins with humble submission to God and a turning away from self. “Submit to

God. Resist the devil.” In humble submission, draw near to God (Isaiah 55:6). Now is the time to cleanse your hands and purify your hearts (Isaiah 1:15-16, Psalm 24 – this is the one who may come before the Lord). Mourn, be broken over your sinfulness, weep (Matthew 5:3-4). Humble yourself before God! The word for humble, *Tapeinoō*, literally means to make yourself low. In recognition of the sinful heart of man and the holiness of God, the only right response before God is humility (Isaiah 6)! He will exalt you. He will save and restore you. “This is a picture of the way in which God gives His “greater grace” (James 4:6) to those who come into the presence of the Lord in repentance and humility. He will exalt them lavishly (Ephesians 1:3-7).”²⁴

There is hope for this family. That hope is Jesus. The beautiful, hope-giving truth for the family in the thick of sinful idolatry, conflict, strife, and warring is that things don’t have to remain this way. Sin is powerful, for sure. But the grace extended by God to everyone who believes through the person of Jesus Christ is more powerful. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).” God wants to forgive sin; He delights in showing mercy (Micah 7:18).

CONCLUSION

The desired goal of Biblical counseling is to draw the counselee into closer fellowship with God – to ever point them to the goodness, mercy, and grace that can be found in Christ alone. The message of the gospel of Jesus is *the* message of hope.

The Biblical counselor works to provide accurate, wise, Godly counsel to the one struggling with sin – often sin of which the counselee is not even aware. The impetus is to help the counselee grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Peter 3:18). As the

²⁴ J. F. MacArthur, Jr. *James; MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), p 214.

counselee begins this process of growth and maturity in the Lord, He will learn to trust and obey God in all of life. This process is called sanctification.

The enormous barrier to this process of sanctification, however, is the sinful, pride-filled human heart. It is the job of the counselor to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and expose the heart's sinful predisposition. As this penchant to sin is exposed, by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit, the remedy will also be seen. Repentance. As with King David, God will forgive the confessed sin of a broken, humbled, remorseful man. The fruit of genuine repentance, empowered by the Spirit of God, produces righteousness. MacArthur says, "Genuine repentance pleads with the Lord to forgive and deliver from the burden of sin and the fear of judgment and hell. It is the attitude of the publican who, fearful of even looking toward heaven, smote his breast and cried, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). Repentance is not merely behavior reform. But because true repentance involves a change of heart and purpose, it inevitably results in a change of behavior.²⁵

In the same way, sanctification is to characterize the life of a genuine believer, so is repentance. Scripture is replete with the call to continual, humble repentance of the believer. A broken and contrite heart pleases God... that is the sacrifice He desires (Psalm 51:15,16) "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time (1 Peter 5:5-6)."

²⁵ John MacArthur. *What is Biblical Repentance?* July 13, 2009. <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A330/what-is-biblical-repentance>

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