

# Biblical Sanctification in a Season of Uncertainty

Part 1: Introduction

Kindred Community Church

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## I. Introduction

- **Key Point: God's will for each believer in Christ is that we grow in sanctification and in Christ-likeness.**

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 – For this is the will of God, your **sanctification**; that you abstain from sexual immorality; . . . For God has not called us for impurity, but in **holiness**.

1 Peter 1:14-16 – As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, **you also be holy in all your conduct**, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

2 Corinthians 7:1 – Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, **bringing holiness** to completion in the fear of God.

God is making His people more like Jesus Christ (Sanctification):

1 Corinthians 11:1 - Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

1 Peter 2:21 - For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

2 Corinthians 3:18 - And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 - the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

John 16:14 - He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Philippians 2:12-13 - 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.

Philippians 1:6 - he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:1-2 - See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

## II. The Necessity of Trials in Our Sanctification

- **Key Point: The process of sanctification (becoming more like Jesus) requires that we encounter various trials.**

James 1:2 - Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of **various** kinds,

“The Greek word translated ‘various’ (*poikilos*) means ‘many colored’ or ‘variegated.’ It emphasizes not the number but the diversity of trouble that can come our way. The Greek word translated ‘trials’ (*peirasmos*) refers to **that which breaks the pattern of tranquility or happiness.**” (John MacArthur)

James 1:3-4 - for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Romans 5:1-5 - Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

"Nothing illustrates the immense benefits of Christian life better than responses to the . . . plagues that struck the empire. . . among Christians. . . were communities of mercy and self-help, . . . the impact of Christian mercy was so evident that in the fourth century when the emperor Julian attempted to restore paganism, he exhorted the pagan priesthood to compete with the Christian charities. . . But there was little or no response to Julian's proposals because there were no doctrines and no traditional practices for the pagan priests to build upon. It was not that the Romans knew nothing of charity, but for them it was not based on service to the gods. . . There was no salvation! The gods did not offer any escape from mortality. . . Christians believed in life everlasting." (Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity*)

"From the 14th century onward, the Black Death haunted Europe. In just five years it wiped out as much as half the population, with urban areas particularly affected. Outbreaks continued recurring in the following centuries, including the plague that struck Wittenberg in 1527. Many fled, yet Luther and his pregnant wife, Katharina, remained to care for the sick. . . Luther spoke of circumstances where fleeing was permitted and, ever conscious of our propensity toward self-righteousness, he warned Christians not to judge one another for different decisions. But in writing of his own commitment, he remarked: “We are here alone with the deacons, but Christ is present too, that we may not be alone, and he will triumph in us over that old serpent, murderer, and author of sin, however much he may bruise Christ's heel. Pray for us, and farewell.” [Letter dated August 19, 1527]” (Glen Scrivener, “Responding to Pandemics: 4 Lessons from Church History”)

"By the 1850s, London was the most powerful and wealthiest city in the world, with a population of more than 2 million. A cholera outbreak in 1854 struck fear into the hearts of Londoners. Charles Spurgeon, only 20 years old at the time, came to the capital to pastor New Park Street Chapel. He would look back to this plague as a key time of learning both for himself and also for the city. [Spurgeon said:] ‘If there ever be a time when the mind is sensitive, it is when death is abroad. I recollect, when first I came to London, how anxiously people listened to the gospel, for the cholera was raging terribly. There was little scoffing then.’

He tells the story of visiting a dying man who had previously opposed him: “That man, in his lifetime, had been wont to jeer at me. In strong language, he had often denounced me as a hypocrite. Yet he was no sooner smitten by the darts of death than he sought my presence and counsel, no doubt feeling in his heart that I was a servant of God, though he did not care to own it with his lips.’

The sinking sand of this world is a constant reality—but it often takes the storms of this life to reveal it. Spurgeon saw the plagues of his day as a storm that led many to seek refuge in Christ the Rock." (Glen Scrivener, “Responding to Pandemics: 4 Lessons from Church History”)

- We may describe the trial we are facing today (COVID-19 pandemic) as the trial of uncertainty.

Things We Don't Know:

- We **don't know** how long this situation is going to last.
- We **don't know** how many people will be infected.
- We **don't know** how many asymptomatic people are contagious.
- We **don't know** what the mortality rate is going to be.
- We **don't know** how many people will die.
- We **don't know** if a vaccine or treatment will be found.
- We **don't know** what the effects on our economy is going to be.
- We **don't know** what the effects on businesses and households are going to be.
- We **don't know** so much about how this virus works.

“A week ago it would not have seemed plausible that the United States, much less other nations would be facing what we now know is a new reality—the shutdown of travel between the United States and Europe, a 40% fall in airline travel coast to coast, which is likely to become far greater than that in short order, and then of course the sending home of college, seminary, and other students from campuses, the shift to online instruction, and the understanding that **all of this was made necessary and advisable within what can only be measured in a scope of hours, or perhaps even a few days.**

**We do not know** at this time the full impact of this pandemic. **We don't know** how this story is going to be recorded in history. . . we do know this: all around us are people who are having to think about things they don't want to think about, to face realities that they would rather not face and those ultimate questions. . . **We do not know** exactly how a map of the epidemic is going to be recorded. **We do not know** a very great deal, but we do now know to take this threat very seriously. **We don't even know what kind of announcements are going to make sense within a matter of just days.**” (Al Mohler, “A New Normal that Isn't Normal at All: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Humbling of a Civilization”)

Elements of The Trial of Uncertainty<sup>1</sup>

- Uncertainty over Physical Goods
- Uncertainty over Routines and Schedules
- Uncertainty over Finances and the National Economy
- Uncertainty over Relationships
- Uncertainty over Physical Suffering and Death

- **Thesis: A season of uncertainty is a spiritual opportunity to grow in faith and in likeness to Christ.**

**“Suffering is both the acid test and the catalyst.** It reveals and forms faith. It also exposes and destroys counterfeit faith. Afflictions expose illusory hopes invested in imaginary gods. **Such disillusionment is a good thing, a severe mercy.**

God's hand is intimately mixed up in our troubles. Each day will bring you “its own trouble” (Matt. 6:34). Some difficulties are light and momentary—in your face today and forgotten tomorrow. Other hardships last for a season. Some troubles recur and abate cyclically. Other afflictions become chronic. Some woes steadily worsen, progressively bringing pain and disability into your life. And other sufferings arrive with inescapable finality—the death of a dream, the death of a loved one, your own dying and death.

<sup>1</sup> As of March 17, 2020. Many thanks to the Kindred Office Staff (Beth, Cindi, Jaelyn, and Chris) for helping me compile these observations.

But whatever you must face changes in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise that you, too, will live. Faith can grow up. You can learn to say with all your heart, in company with a great cloud of witnesses: “We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:16–17). We can learn to say it and mean it, because it is true.” (David Powlison, *God’s Grace in Your Sufferings*)

James 4:13-16 - Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Matthew 6:33-34 - But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

### III. Getting to the Heart of the Matter

- **All biblical sanctification is heart sanctification.**

Proverbs 4:23 - Keep your **heart** with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Matthew 12:33-35 – “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of **the abundance of the heart** the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Mark 7:22-23 – For from within, **out of the heart of man**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.

“The word ‘heart’ is used over 700 times in Scripture. It refers to our inner man, the core of our being, our mission control center. The heart is the composite of thoughts, desires, emotions, and beliefs and guides our daily choices. This is why Solomon urged his son, ‘Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.’ (Prov. 4:23)” (Steve Viars)

“The heart is the ‘real’ you. It is the essential core of who you are. If my heart is the source of my sin problem, then lasting change must always travel through the pathway of my heart. It is not enough to alter my behavior or to change my circumstances. Christ transforms people by radically changing their hearts. If the heart doesn’t change, the person’s words and behavior may change temporarily because of an external pressure or incentive. But when the pressure or incentive is removed, the changes will disappear.” (Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*)

Matthew 5:8 – “Blessed are the **pure in heart**, for they shall see God.

Psalms 51:10 – Create in me a **clean heart**, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalms 86:11 – Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; **unite my heart** to fear your name.

#### IV. What Uncertainty Reveals About Our Heart Condition

##### A. Uncertainty reveals what we **trust**.

Proverbs 3:5-6 – Trust in the LORD with all your **heart**, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Isaiah 30:15 – in quiet and in **trust** shall be your strength.

Psalms 127:1 – Those who **trust** in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

“Trust is not a passive state of mind. It is a vigorous act of the soul by which we choose to lay hold on the promises of God and cling to them despite the adversity that at times seeks to overwhelm us. . . God’s plan and His ways of working out His plan are frequently beyond our ability to fathom and understand. We must learn to trust when we don’t understand.” (Jerry Bridges, Trusting God)

“The Bible – the penetrating and light-giving word of the Searcher of hearts – is concerned to pierce below behaviors and emotions in order to expose motives, to lay people bare before Him with whom we have to do. . . A hypocritical faith professes, sings, and prays one way, but trusts something else when push comes to shove. . . [Where] do you place life-directing, life-anchoring trust? In other people? In your abilities or achievements? In your church or theological tradition? In possessions? In diet, exercise, and medical care?” (David Powlison, “X-Ray Questions – Drawing Out the Whys and Wherefores of Human Behavior”)

##### B. Uncertainty reveals where we have placed our **hope**.

Psalms 131:1-3 – O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, **hope in the LORD** from this time forth and forevermore.

Romans 15:4, 13 – For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. . . May the **God of hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

**“Biblical hope is the confident expectation of God’s future beneficial activity which is rooted in the promises found in God’s Word.”**

- “False hopes” center around a particular outcome rather than the God who is Lord over every outcome.

“. . . the hope of which the New Testament speaks is a firm and solid expectation of that which will *surely* come to pass in eternity. . . True hope stems from the unshakeable confidence that God is absolutely faithful to His promises, and therefore all those promises are as sure and certain as God Himself.” (John MacArthur)

##### C. Uncertainty reveals what we truly **love**.

1 Corinthians 13:13 – So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.