

He Chose to Love Us Forever

1. Max used the structure of the cross to describe how God forgave us without lowering His standards: “One beam reaches out, representing the width of God's love,” he said, “and the other reflects the heights of His holiness. The cross is the intersection of His love and His holiness.” The Apostle Paul provides a beautiful description of God's work on the cross when he writes, “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 Corinthians 6:11). Paul stresses the miracle of what God did for us on the cross with three distinct words:

- ***Apolousasthe*** (washed): to be washed entirely (not just a part), especially the removal of dirt; spiritually cleansed and purified by God.
- ***Hēgiasthēte*** (sanctified): made holy, consecrated, set apart for a purpose.
- ***Edikaiōthēte*** (justified): declared righteous, not guilty (in a legal sense); approved by God and conforming to God standard.

We all come to God in unique ways--some as children, others as adults; some through the intensity of a crisis, others through the quiet routines of life; some at a specific point in time, others during a broader season of life. Overall, how would you describe the journey that brought you to the Cross?

- As you reflect on your experience of surrendering your life to Christ, which of Paul's three words in 1 Corinthians 6:11 do you relate to most or find most meaningful?
- How would you characterize the role your conversion experience plays in your life with God in this season of your life? For example, if you've been a Christian for many years, it may be that you don't often think of it or perhaps take it for granted. If you're a new believer, it may be a daily source of joy, gratitude, and strength.

2. Max described two kinds of sanctification: *positional sanctification*, which is God's work for us; and *progressive sanctification*, which is God's work *in* us. Here is how theologian Wayne Grudem briefly summarizes the two.

Positional Sanctification (Justification)	Progressive Sanctification (Transformation)
A legal standing	An internal condition
Once for all time	Continuous throughout life
Entirely God's work	We cooperate
Perfect in this life	Not perfect in this life
The same in all Christians	Greater in some than in others

- Hopefully, this chart is helpful for clarifying the two kinds of sanctification. In what ways, if any, would you say we sometimes confuse the two? How would you describe the potential outcome of neglecting either one?
3. “We can't be more saved than we were the day we accepted Christ's sacrifice on the cross and received salvation,” Max said, “but we can grow in that salvation.” In his second letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul beautifully acknowledges the reality of such progressive sanctification, the expectation that we are continuously transformed by Christ: “And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into His glorious image” (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Message puts it this way: “And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah; our lives gradually become brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like Him.”

The root of the Greek word Paul uses for changed is *metamorphoō*, which is also the source of the English word *metamorphosis*. A metamorphosis is a complete and profound change that happens through growth. In the natural world, metamorphosis is what occurs when a tadpole becomes a frog, or a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. The kind of life change metamorphosis implies is radical—from one form into another—but it is also gradual.

- What makes this kind of radical/gradual spiritual growth uniquely challenging?
 - The process of change can be discouraging because we can't always see it when we are in the midst of it. As you reflect on your life with God, what is one gradual but significant change you've experienced over time, and what insights might this experience provide as an encouragement for any gradual changes you're working through now?
4. Progressive sanctification includes not only the expectation of growth but also an increasing aversion to—and freedom from—sin. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul uses the image of light to help his readers understand what living out their salvation in this way requires of them: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—testing what is pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:8-10).
- Paul could have used the phrase “people of light” instead of “children of light.” What nuances might his use of *children* suggest about what living in light requires of us?
 - Take a moment to think of someone you know whose life demonstrates the fruit of light—all that is good and right and true?
 - Christ demonstrated His love for us on the cross, but His love didn't stop there. Every day He invites us to receive His love and to be changed by it. As you continue to journey through Lent to Easter, in what ways or in what areas of life are you most aware of your need to receive God's love? How do you hope or fear you might be changed by that love?