

Trust The Process

Even if you are just a casual sports fan - college or professional - it is likely that you have heard an athlete indicate that it is important to “trust the process”. The saying apparently originated with Sam Hinkie, the general manager of the Philadelphia 76ers, during his short tenure from 2013 to 2016. “Trust the process” became a mantra inside the 76ers’ locker room, and eventually became an expression denoting faith in the 76ers’ long-term hopes to compete for a championship. Now athletes and others alike use this phrase to indicate their confidence that they will reach their desired goal through steady improvement even if things look hard and hopeless at first.

The Apostle Paul expresses an even greater confidence than the one used in sports, culture, and personal life. It is more than a hope, but a certainty that God will finish what He has started, because He is fully willing and able. Furthermore, because of God’s character, God functions as the ultimate underwriter to all of His plans, making them incapable of failing. **God is sure**, since He never changes. **He is true**, because He is holy and just. And **He is faithful**, for He remains gracious and merciful. **Whatever God chooses to do, He does without contestation and with sovereign authority**. Unlike you and me, God will never leave any of His works unfinished or promises unfulfilled. He completes what He starts. In Philippians 1:6, Paul’s confidence in God is articulated this way:

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

As Paul faithfully remembered the dear Philippian believers in his prayers, memories of their time together must have flooded his mind. Whether he was personally involved or just heard of their conversions, his gratitude for the gift of his friends and fellow laborers in the Gospel was uncontainable (Phil 1:3-5). It was evident that God had started a wonderfully “good work” in them, and he was certain that God would complete it.

So what is this “good work” that God began and is certain to complete? What is this process of transformation? The Bible calls this process sanctification and indicates that it has three distinct aspects: past, present, and future. Let’s briefly look at all three aspects individually and consider how we must trust the Lord throughout the process.

Past sanctification is also referred to as justification. It is a one-time, instantaneous act that occurs at the point of a person’s conversion. God makes an

authoritative pronouncement that declares a sinner innocent based on Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice. At the moment we repent and believe, we are forgiven of our sins, declared righteous by God, made new creations, and set apart from sin and the world. It does not make us sinless, but legally pronounces us as innocent. This is an undeserved and unearned gift! Romans 3:23-24 reminds us that, "... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Occasionally, past sanctification is also called positional sanctification, because a justified person receives a new position or status: a sinner becomes a saint, an orphan becomes a beloved child, the guilty become innocent, etc. However, since believers rarely live up to their status, God does more than change our position. He also changes our practice through present sanctification.

While it can cause confusion, **present sanctification is usually simply referred to as sanctification**. Present sanctification is the moment-by-moment, day-by-day process that shapes believers to look more and more like their Savior. Just like its past aspect, sanctification's present "good work" is accomplished by God. The Holy Spirit empowers us to obey (Gal 5:16-17, 25), instructs us in the Scriptures (Jn 14:26; 15:26), changes our thoughts, desires, and actions by aligning them with God's will, and produces in us the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Often, present sanctification is also called progressive sanctification, because it is a continuous process of growth rather than a one-time act. As a matter of fact, it involves cooperation with the Spirit's work through prayer, studying scripture, and seeking fellowship with other believers to bring about maturity. God is not yet finished with us, but according to Paul, He will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Which leads us to the final glorious aspect of sanctification: future sanctification.

We have seen that God is involved in sanctifying us in the past and in the present. He is the Initiator of our redemption and the Agent of Change in our maturation. Yet Paul claims that God "will bring it to completion" (lit. *full completion*), meaning that He is also the Finisher in our perfecting. This is where the third and final aspect of sanctification comes into play. **Future sanctification is commonly called glorification**. It refers to the final destination of the transformational process and is the ultimate act of God in changing believers' physical and spiritual state. At Christ's second coming, His glory will be made manifest and we will be instantaneously glorified - the "perishable" will put on the "imperishable" (1 Cor 15:53). God guarantees our glorification and its inheritance by giving Himself as a down payment. The Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer, functions as a type of

engagement ring pledging that God will lead us down the aisle to meet Jesus, our Bridegroom, and usher us into perfect communion with Him. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:13-14:

In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

On that day of Jesus' return, each of us will receive a new and glorious body (1 Cor 15:42-43); we will share in Jesus' glory (Rom 8:17); and we will receive the inward beauty of holiness. What a day that will be! As the hymn writer penned: "O that will be glory for me, glory for me, glory for me; When by His grace I shall look on His face; That will be glory, be glory for me." I couldn't agree more!

Paul concludes another letter to a separate church in the region of Macedonia with this prayer: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thess 5:23-24). These words are a gentle, but not so subtle reminder, that we can trust the process, because joy is found now and glory is certain to come.

Psalm 103:1-5, 10-14 (ESV) - "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's... ***He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.***"