

## Biblical Sanctification - Part 2

(A Series from Terry Landrum)

John R. W. Stott, in making some comments concerning the new birth and turning to Christ had these things to say.

I find it helpful to think in these terms. Our biography is written in two volumes. Volume one is the story of the old man, the old self, of me before my conversion. Volume two is the story of the new man, the new self, of me after I was made a new creation in Christ. Volume one of my biographies ended with the judicial death of the old self. I was a sinner. I deserved to die. I did die. I received my deserts in my Substitute with whom I have become one. Volume two of my biography opened with my resurrection. My old life having finished, a new life to God has begun." (Stott, Authentic Christianity, pg 200)

"In Acts 9 we see that conversion is only the beginning. The same grace that brings a person to new birth is able to transform him or her into Christ's image. Every new convert becomes a changed person, and has new titles to prove it, namely a 'disciple' (verse 26) or 'saint' (13), newly related to God, a 'brother' (17) or sister, newly related to the church, and a 'witness' (22:15; 26:16), newly related to the world. If these three relationships - to God, the church and the world - are not seen in professed converts, we have good reason to question the reality of their conversion. But whenever they are visibly present, we have good reason to magnify the grace of God." (Stott, Authentic Christianity, pg 202)

Sanctification is a symbiosis between God, who is at work in the believer in the person of the Holy Spirit, and the believer himself, who must always strive for holiness. We must never speak of sanctification without acknowledging both sides.

The Holy Spirit is not some mystical or cosmic impersonal influence or force. He is one of the three Persons of the Godhead - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is the Agent who shows us our need of Christ and imparts Christ's life to us at salvation. He then begins the work of changing our lives to become like Christ through sanctification, and He empowers us for service to Christ.

Paul testified that the Holy Spirit's leadership in a man's life is one of the chief evidences of that man's salvation. He said

*Rom 8:14*

*14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

Paul does not mean in this verse that we should expect the Spirit of God to give us mystical leadings and nudgings, and thereby direct our lives. The Holy Spirit will only change us as we cooperate with His leading. Rom 8:14 is in the context of Romans 6-8, which speaks of the *work* of sanctification that God is working out in our lives.

Sanctification has been designed by God to be a cooperative venture between God and us. Notice the joint responsibility in the following verses:

*Rom 8:13*

*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.*

*Gal 2:20*

*20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.*

In each case, we are commanded to do something: "put to death the deeds of the body" and "live in the flesh [in this body] by faith in the Son of God." At the same time, God says He is doing something: "by the Spirit," and "Christ lives in me."

Another passage we looked at last week was Philippians 2:12-13.

*Phil 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.*

In each of these passages, Paul is stating that sanctification is a symbiosis between God, who is at work in the believer, and the believer himself, who must always strive for holiness. We must never speak of sanctification without acknowledging both sides. Believers must use all their energies in serving the Lord with diligence. At the same time, all that is accomplished within us is the work of God.

The main emphasis of Phil 2:12 is the phrase, "work out your salvation." The Greek verb translated "work" could be translated, "keep on continually making the effort to work out your salvation." That is the believer's part in sanctification. Some have mistakenly concluded that working out our salvation means we must earn it, i.e. to work for salvation. But the Scriptures are clear in passages such as Eph 2:8-9, Rom 3:20, 23-24, and 28 that salvation is not earned but is a gift from God. "Work out your salvation" is not a command for unbelievers to work for their salvation. It is a call to believers for sustained effort and diligence in holy living based on the divine resources within them. (MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, pg 199-209)

Scripture is full of such admonitions to work out our salvation.

*Rom 6:19*

*19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness,*

*resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.*

*2 Cor 7:1*

*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.*

*Eph 4:1*

*4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,*

In 1 Cor 9:24-27 Paul says,

*1 Cor 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.*

Paul fought to win and he pursued holiness with much effort.

*2 Tim 4:7*

*7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;*

The command to work out our salvation speaks of striving toward a goal, or bringing something to fulfillment, fullness, or completion, just as you might "work out" a difficult problem. The expression speaks of resolving something, perfecting it, or bringing it to completion. It is as if Paul says: "Don't stop halfway; go on until the work of salvation is fully wrought out in you. So, the sense of this verse is not to work *for* our salvation, but to work *on* our salvation in the sense of moving towards our future glorification.

Now, we are to work out our salvation "with fear and trembling." Although God is patient and forgiving when we sin, sin inevitably has consequences. That's why we must pursue sanctification "with fear and trembling." The Greek term rendered "fear" is where our English word "phobia" comes from and the Greek word for "trembling" is the origin of our word "trauma." Together, these words speak of a healthy fear of offending God and a proper anxiety to do what is right in His eyes. It is not a fear of eternal doom, but a reverential awe that motivates a person to righteousness. This kind of fear is fear of sinning, distrust of one's own strength in the face of temptation, and a sense of horror at the thought of dishonoring God. (MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, pg 199-209)

In Phil 2:13 Paul explains God's part in sanctification: "It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." God Himself indwells us and empowers us to do His will. There are several truths in this verse that will help us understand our divine resources for holy living. First, Paul said that it is God who is at work in us. God is so intimately involved in our life and is so concerned about our spiritual well being, that He personally indwells us to effect what He commands. The energy behind our spiritual progress is not our abilities or resources, nor is it the encouragement and support of other Christians, or the instruction of pastors and teachers in God's word, as important as all of these things are. The real cause of all spiritual progress is that God Himself is working within us to effect our sanctification. That is why sanctification can never be totally deterred. The same God who justifies us will sanctify us and ultimately glorify us. (Ibid)

This verse tells us that it is God who is "at work" in us. The Greek word for "work" is where our English word "energy" comes from. God is the one who energizes our spiritual progress. The infinite power of God Himself is what drives our sanctification. We persevere because he energizes us. Since there is no limit to His power, we know He will ultimately complete what He has begun in us (Phil 1:6). God can and does accomplish purposes through His power at work in us that are beyond our ability to plan, reason, or even dream. Sin will slow the process, but God will accomplish His purposes even if He has to chasten the believer to do it. (Ibid)

Now, this verse goes on to say that the reason that God is energizing us is to give us the desire and the ability to will and to work for His good pleasure. His power gives us both the desire and the ability to do what is right. All behavior rises out of desires and intentions. God works in us to instill godly desires so our behavior will be pleasing to Him. How does He do that? By using two things to conform our desires to His. The first is holy discontent. God makes us dissatisfied with our fleshly nature. It's the desire to put off the old man. The second thing is holy aspiration. That's the flip side of discontent. It's a longing for something better, purer, and more holy. It's the desire to put on the new man. God energizes us for the things that satisfy and please Him. Such is the goal of the sanctification process. **Working out our salvation with fear and trembling pleases Him.** Believers are very dear to God; so when we obey His will, He is pleased. God wants our best, and He will energize us to that end, because that's what pleases Him the most. So, we see that in sanctification, there is to be a wonderful blend of our best efforts and God's resources. God calls us to holiness, and then makes us holy. It is His work, and it is our work - a divine partnership. But the glory belongs to Him alone. (Ibid)

I would like to draw your attention back to the statement I made a second ago, when I said that all behavior arises out of desires and intentions. Motivation is so often lacking in Christians. And this should not be the case. Because of our high calling in Christ, we should have no problem finding the motivation to live differently and to live a life consistent with that to which we have been called. What higher motivation do we need for holy living than our high calling? The Scriptures urge us to *be* what God has

*declared* us to be in Christ. We fail too often to see who we are and to think about who we are in Christ. (Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, pg 161-164)

This is why Paul gives us so many examples and exhortations in his writings of how to pray for each other. For example,

*Col 1:9-14*

*9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,*

*10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

*11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously*

*12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*

*13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,*

*14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*

**Paul's exhortations to be what we are have meaning and potential only to those who already are what they may be.** Only those who legitimately can consider themselves dead to sin, alive to God, risen with Christ and "in Christ" know what they must become. Bishop Ryle states that "It matters little what we wish and what we hope and what we desire to be before we die. We must ask ourselves what are we now? What are we doing? Are we sanctified or not? If not, the fault is our own. If we would be sanctified, our course is clear and plain: we must begin with Christ. We must go to Him as sinners, with no plea but that of utter need, and cast our souls on Him by faith, for peace and reconciliation with God. The very first step towards sanctification, no less than justification, is to come with faith to Christ. We must first live and then work." (Ryle, *Holiness*, pg 30).

Moreover, only such persons, who by virtue of their relationship to Christ (who in the person of the Holy Spirit indwells them), have the power to become what they are. It is wrong for us to think of our present imperfect existence as a more real situation than our promised, future state of sinless perfection. Our present life is unnatural and temporary, and this is, in a sense, less real than the eternal perfection that we have secured in Christ. Our motivation for holy living is to recognize fully the reality of our eternal inheritance that awaits us. Our present living should be strongly conditioned by our future. (Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, pg 161-164)

Too many Christians disregard the riches of an inheritance that cannot be defiled (1 Peter 1:4).

*1 Peter 1:3-5*

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,  
4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,  
5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Peter is giving us a picture of our heavenly inheritance that is impervious to death, sin, and the effects of time. Scripture has much to say about the Christian's inheritance. We are children of God, joint heirs with Christ, and therefore, we are beneficiaries of a richer legacy than our human minds can ever comprehend (Rom 8:16-17). We are heirs together with Christ Himself. We must remember how we got that way - through our new birth, the Spirit made us a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). He took up residence in us and started transforming our thinking and our behavior. Our perspectives and values are changing as our focus shifts from self to Christ. We didn't earn or purchase our inheritance. It was given to us (see 1 Peter 1:3). God the Father justifies us freely, and then works His transforming power to change us into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Focusing on our inheritance is a powerful motivator to die to self and to live for Christ. This world's trials aren't even worthy to be compared with our eternal glory. (MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, pg 39-50)

"We need to learn to talk to ourselves, and ask ourselves questions: 'don't you know? Don't you know the meaning of your conversion and baptism? Don't you know that you have been united to Christ in his death and resurrection? Don't you know that you have been enslaved to God and have committed yourself to his obedience? Don't you know these things? Don't you know who you are?' We must go on pressing ourselves with such questions, until we reply to ourselves: 'Yes, I do know who I am, a new person in Christ, and by the grace of God I shall live accordingly.' On 28<sup>th</sup> May 1972 the Duke of Windsor, the uncrowned King Edward VIII, died in Paris. The same evening a television program rehearsed the main events of his life. Extracts from earlier films were shown, in which he answered questions about his upbringing, brief reign and abdication. Recalling his boyhood as Prince of Wales, he said: 'My Father [King George V] was a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes when I had done something wrong, he would admonish me saying, "My dear boy, you must always remember who you are."' It is my conviction that our heavenly Father says the same to us every day: 'My dear child, you must always remember who you are.' (Stott, *Authentic Christianity*, pg 215-216)