

## Biblical Sanctification - Part 3

(A Series from Terry Landrum)

Christ's work of making New Men [is like] . . . turning a horse into a winged creature. . . It is not mere improvement but Transformation. It is a change that goes off in a totally different direction - a change from being creatures of God to being sons of God. (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, pgs 183-186)

The result of the sanctification process is that the believer looks increasingly like Christ - he becomes a "grown-up Christian." That is God's goal for us and since it is our heavenly Father's desire, we should make it our goal as well, to be brought, as Paul said, "to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

*Eph 4:14-15*

*14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*

*15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ ,*

We "grow up in all aspects into Him" by working out our salvation with fear and trembling, because God is working in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13). Sanctification is to be a wonderful blend of our best efforts and God's resources. It is His work and our work - a divine partnership in which the glory belongs to Him alone. Our motivation for holy living is that it *pleases* our Father.

*Titus 3:5-7*

*5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,*

*6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*

*7 that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

Eph 1:3-5 tells us that God the Father chose us by Himself and for Himself before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him. That is the whole purpose of our salvation. Because of the kind intention of His will, He predestined us to adoption as His own sons through Jesus Christ.

*Col 1:19-22*

*19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

*21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,*

*22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--*

Since we have been graciously adopted as sons to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4), then **we should make a conscious commitment to be what God has already declared us to be in Christ** . Two major passages that describe this declaration of the believer's death to sin in principle are:

*Col 2:10-14*

*10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;*

*11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;*

*12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*

*13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,*

*14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

*Rom 6:1-11*

*6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?*

*2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*

*3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?*

*4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

*5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,*

*6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;*

*7 for he who has died is freed from sin.*

*8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,*

*9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.*

*10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*

*11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

*Col 3:1*

*1 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

Being raised up with Christ means "to be co-resurrected." It is an accomplished fact. Believers are entered spiritually into Christ's death and resurrection at the moment of their conversion. Galatians 2:20 says, "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 that verse, the apostle shows the union of the believer with the Lord, so that they have a shared life. Romans 6:3-4 teaches the same truth: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." (MacArthur's New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon)

The "baptism" here is not into water, but an immersing into the Savior's death and resurrection. Through our union with Christ, we, who are believers, have died, have been buried, and have risen with Him. We possess divine and eternal life, which is not merely endless existence, but a heavenly quality of life brought to us by the indwelling Lord. Consequently, we have an obligation to live consistently with those realities. This obligation is explained to us in Rom 6:12-22. (Ibid)

If we are to obey the exhortation of Romans 6:12-22, we must first understand what Paul means by the expression "we died to sin." Some have gotten the idea that to have died to sin means to somehow be removed from sin's ability to touch us, and that we practically make this come about by considering ourselves dead to sin. In other words, if we just consider ourselves dead to sin, then sin can't touch us. But we know that that is contrary to our experience and so, this cannot be what it means. Romans 6:2-11 tells us that our dying to sin is the result of our union with Christ. Because He died to sin, we died to sin. Therefore, it is apparent that our *dying* to sin is not something we do, but something Christ has done, the value of which is given to all who are united with Him. The wages of sin is death, so we must die. Christ died so that these wages for sin would be paid. Therefore, by union with Christ, we have died our required death in Him. The result of this is that the penalty for sin has been paid and sin can never claim us again. (Ibid)

Before our conversion we were in the kingdom of Satan and sin. We "walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). We were under the power of Satan (Acts 26:18) and the domain of darkness (Col 1:13). Paul said we were slaves of sin in Romans 6:17. We were born into this kingdom of sin, slavery, and death. Before our conversion, we were in bondage to sin. We were under the reign and rule of sin. Regardless of how decent and moral we were, we lived in the kingdom of sin. However, through our union with Christ, we have died to the "domain of sin", or to the "reign of sin", or to the "realm of sin", however you want to say it. We have been set free from our bondage to sin (Rom 6:18), and have been placed in the kingdom and realm of righteousness. (Ibid) Its presence and power still affect us-but it cannot condemn us.

John Murray, in commenting on the clause "we died to sin," said,

If we view sin as a realm or sphere, then the believer no longer lives in that realm or sphere. And just as it is true with reference to life in the sphere of this world that the person who has died 'passed away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found' (Psalm 37:36), so it is with the sphere of sin; the believer is no longer there because he has died to sin . . . The believer died to sin once and he has been translated to another realm. (Ibid)

Now that we have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness and placed in the kingdom of righteousness, Paul can tell us in Col 3:2 to "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." "Set your mind" could simply be translated, "think," or more thoroughly, "have this inner disposition." The present tense indicates continuous action. Lightfoot paraphrases Paul's thought: "You must not only seek heaven, you must also *think* heaven" (*St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [1879; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959], p. 209; italics in the original). Why are we to think heaven? Because "we have died and our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). We have died to the world system through our faith and union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Now that we understand what it means to have died to sin in principle in Rom 6:1-11, we can better understand what our obligation is to die to sin in practice. Paul explains the believer's death to sin in practice in Romans 6:12-22:

*Rom 6:12-22*

*12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,*

*13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

*14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.*

*15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!*

*16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?*

*17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,*

*18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

*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.*

*20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.*

*21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.*

*22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.*

The first thing we should notice in this passage is that the pursuit of holiness - this not allowing sin to reign in our mortal bodies - is something we have to do. Paul's statement is one of exhortation. He is addressing himself to our wills. When he says, "do not let sin reign," he is implying that this is something that we are responsible for. The experience of holiness is not a gift we receive like justification, but something that we are clearly exhorted to work at. The second thing to notice is that Paul's exhortation is based on what he had just said in verses 2-11. By using the connecting word "therefore," he is saying something like, "In view of what I have just said, do not let sin reign in your mortal body." It is evident that the word "therefore" in verse 12 refers back to the fact that we have died to sin, and because we have died to sin, we are not to let it reign in our mortal bodies. (Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, pp 54-60)

We can conclude our thoughts on this subject by noting that just as Paul did in Romans 6 in moving from principle to practice, he does so again in Colossians 3. After discussing the position of the believer in Col 3:1-4, he moves to the practical exhortations to put off the old man in verses 5-11, and putting on the new man in verses 12-17.

Now, if we have been delivered from the realm of sin, why do we still sin? Well, the primary reason is because

*2 Cor 4:7*

*7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,*

*1 Cor 13:12*

*12 For now we see in a mirror dimly,*

*1 John 3:2*

*2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be*

*Rom 8:23*

*23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.*

*2 Cor 5:1-10*

*5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

*2 For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven;*

*3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked.*

*4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do*



*not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

Our new life in Christ is real and powerful, but so is remaining sin in our earthly bodies. Though God has delivered us from the reign of sin, our sinful natures still reside within us. Though sin is no longer our master, it can still overpower us if we are not presenting ourselves to God as servants of righteousness. Although, technically, the old man - all that we were before salvation - has been "crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6), and sin's absolute rule over us has been broken, we still possess a residual effect of that old man even after conversion. We still have an indwelling principle of sin in us that corrupts every part of us. Paul sometimes calls it "the flesh." It is in constant conflict with the Holy Spirit and it represents everything within us that attempts to make life work apart from God. (Jim Berg, *Changed Into His Image*, pg 25)

*Gal 5:17*

*17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*

The Scriptures are full of passages that describe how often God targets man's own way as his most basic problem. (Judges 17:6; Ps 81:12; Prov 3:5; Prov 3:7; Prov 12:15; Prov 23:4; Prov 28:26; Isa 5:21; Rom 12:16; 1 Cor 13:5; Phil 2:21; 2 Tim 3:2; Jude 16). Rom 3:10-18 describes how all are guilty before God, and Rom 1:18-32 describes the reasons and the results of our guilt before God.

The Bible teaches that the sin principle has infected every part of man's being. We call this truth "total depravity." Man is depraved - fundamentally crooked, as we have seen. Total depravity does not mean that an individual man is as wicked as is possible but that his fundamental crookedness has penetrated his total being. No part of his body or of his immaterial being is left untouched. The sin principle has darkened our understanding of things. Therefore, how frequently do we rush through our day, or our lives, asking questions and making decision after decision, touching lives in this way or that, with no thought of what corruption has tainted those questions and decisions? (Berg, *Changed into His Image*, pg. 38).

Bible teacher A.W. Tozer describes the problem this way:

The struggle of the Christian man to be good while the bent toward self-assertion still lives in him as a kind of unconscious moral reflex is vividly described by the apostle Paul in the seventh chapter of his Roman Epistle; and his testimony is in full accord with the teaching of the prophets. Eight hundred years before the advent of Christ the prophet Isaiah identified sin as rebellion against the will of God and the assertion of the right of each man to choose for himself the way he shall go. "All we like sheep have gone astray," he said, "we have turned every one to his own way," and I believe that no more accurate description of sin has ever been given. The witness of the saints has been in full harmony with prophet

and apostle, that an inward principle of self lies at the source of human conduct, turning everything men do into evil. To save us completely Christ must reverse the bent of our nature; He must plant a new principle within us so that our subsequent conduct will spring out of a desire to promote the honor of God and the good of our fellow men (Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, pg 48)

The Puritan writer John Owen reminds us of the danger within our own being.

[Since] there is such a law [of indwelling sin] in Christians, then it is our duty to find it out, as if a fire were in our home. Our earnestness for grace, our watchfulness, and our diligent obedience depends upon this discovery. Upon this one hinge the whole course of our lives will turn. Ignorance of it breeds senselessness, carelessness, sloth, self-sufficiency, and pride - all of which the Lord's soul abhors. Eruptions into great, open, conscience-wasting, and scandalous sins are the result of a lack of due consideration of this basic law of indwelling sin. (John Owen, Sin and Temptation)

It is not without reason that Paul writes the book of Romans in the particular order he did with the first three chapters describing the sinful nature of man, the next two chapters discussing salvation and then the next three chapters, 6-8 describing to us progressive sanctification. We must have a right understanding of the nature of man before we can discuss the remedy of sanctification in the believer. He said in Romans 7:18-23,

*Rom 7:18-23*

*18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing (to do right) is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.*

*19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.*

*20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.*

*21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good.*

*22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,*

*23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.*

The Amplified Bible puts verse 18 this way.

*18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot perform it. [I have the intention and urge to do what is right, but no power to carry it out.]*

This is what we are up against. Paul is describing every believer's sinful tendency that is not done away with at conversion. Our sinful tendencies still wield their influence upon

us, even though sin's absolute power over us is broken and we are no longer slaves to sin (i.e., we no longer *have* to sin). Our natural response to this, if we are living the Spirit-filled life, is to cry out with Paul,

*Rom 7:24-25*

*24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*

Well, thanks be to God that He set us free from the body of this death, through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ as Paul exclaims in verse 25. But just to make sure we understand the struggle that he is describing, he summarizes once more for us at the end of verse 25 that,

*25 . . . on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.*

However, Paul immediately tells us in verse 1 of Romans 8 that, even though the struggle is there,

*Rom 8:1-4*

*8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

*2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*

*3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,*

*4 in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

There can be little doubt that God sees our independent spirit - the very thing the world, and especially our American culture, considers a virtue - as the root problem of man. Our flesh is at war against God.

*Rom 8:7*

*7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so;*

It is no wonder, then, that when we begin to submit to the Spirit of God as He works in our lives that our flesh rises up and resists that work. If you at the moment are not experiencing this warfare, then either you are drifting with sin's current and not feeling its strength as it carries you along, or it is deceiving you by its silence only to strike when you are not watching. We will not experience the true strength of our sinful heart until we start resisting it. This reality, that the actual extent of indwelling sin's pull is unknown to us until we begin doing right, is very much like our experience of paddling a canoe. As long as we are going with the current, we have no idea how strong the current really is. Only when we decide to turn the canoe around and start paddling



against the current do we experience its true strength. (Berg, Changed Into His Image, pg 33)

Thus Paul warns,

*1 Cor 10:12*

*12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

*1 Peter 5:8*

*8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert.*

*Matt 26:41*

*41 "Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

Let us, then, put away any thought that during the process of sanctification we can become confident within ourselves or that we can/must trust in ourselves. While we are in this mortal body, our sinful bent will be ever present and ever active, and we dare not forget about it or fail to arm ourselves against it.

Though sin no longer reigns in us, it will constantly try to get at us. Though we have been delivered from the kingdom of sin and its rule, we have not been delivered from its attacks. As Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones says in his exposition of Romans 6, though sin cannot reign in us, that is, in our essential personality, it can, if left unchecked, reign in our mortal bodies. It will turn the natural instincts of our bodies into lust. It will turn our natural appetites into indulgence, our need for clothing and shelter into materialism, and our normal sexual interest into immorality. That is why Paul exhorts us to be on our guard so that we will not let sin reign in our bodies. Before our salvation, before our death to the reign of sin, such an exhortation would have been futile. You can't say to a slave, "Live as a free man," but you can say that to someone who has been delivered from slavery. Now that we are in fact dead to sin - to its rule and reign - we are to count on that as being true. We are no longer slaves to sin. We can now stand up to sin and say no to it. Before we had no choice; now we have one. **When we sin as Christians, we do not sin as slaves, but as individuals with the freedom of choice. We sin because we choose to sin.** (Jerry Bridges, The Pursuit of Holiness, p 60)

So, we see that God has made provision for our holiness. Through Christ He has delivered us from sin's reign so that we can now resist sin. But the responsibility for resisting is ours. God does not do that for us. To confuse the potential for resisting (which God has provided) with the responsibility for resisting (which is ours) is to walk down the path of defeat in our Christian walk. (Ibid)

It is time for us to face up to our responsibility for holiness. Too often we say we are "defeated" by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated; we are simply disobedient. It might be well if we stopped using the terms "victory" and "defeat" to describe our progress in holiness. Rather we should use the terms "obedience" and "disobedience."

When I say I am defeated by some sin, I am unconsciously slipping out from under my responsibility. I am saying something outside of me has defeated me. But when I say I am disobedient, that places the responsibility for my sin squarely on me. We may, in fact, be defeated, but the reason we are defeated is because we have chosen to disobey. We have chosen to entertain lustful thoughts, or to harbor resentment, or to shade the truth a little. We need to brace ourselves up, and to realize that we are responsible for our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. We need to reckon on the fact that we died to sin's reign that it no longer has any dominion over us that God has united us with the risen Christ in all His power, and has given us the Holy Spirit to work in us. Only as we accept our responsibility and appropriate God's provisions will we make any progress in our pursuit of holiness. (Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, pp 84-85)