

Biblical Sanctification - Part 6

(A Series from Terry Landrum)

Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual respect to God's law and habitual effort to live in obedience to it as the rule of life. It is a great mistake to suppose that a Christian has nothing to do with the law and the Ten Commandments because he cannot be justified by keeping them. The same Holy Spirit who convinces the believer of sin by the law, and leads him to Christ for justification, will always lead him to a spiritual use of the law, as a friendly guide, in the pursuit of sanctification. Genuine sanctification will show itself in a habitual endeavor to do Christ's will and to live by His precepts. A sanctified man will try to do well in the world and to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him. He will aim to be like His Master, full of kindness and love to everyone, and this not in word only, but by deeds and actions and self-denying work according as he has the opportunity. Genuine sanctification will always show itself in habitual attention to the passive graces of Christianity, which are submission to the will of God and bearing and forbearing each other. These are the graces that have the greatest influence on the world. It is nonsense to pretend to sanctification unless we follow after the meekness, gentleness, longsuffering and forgiveness of which the Bible makes so much. People who are habitually giving way to cross tempers in daily life, and are constantly sharp with their tongues and disagreeable to all around them, spiteful people, vindictive people, revengeful people, malicious people, do not know about sanctification. (Ryle, Holiness, pp 27-28)

The Bible teaches that the believer has three main spiritual responsibilities in the sanctification process. God, the Holy Spirit, is the primary initiator in all of these activities, and a believer must cooperate with what the Holy Spirit is doing in his life. The apostles Paul and James give these three responsibilities to us. Paul's instruction is given to us in

Eph 4:22-24

*22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,
23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

James's instruction is in

James 1:21-22

*21 Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.
22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

The three activities that these passages call us to do are to 1.) Put off the old; 2.) Renew our mind; 3.) Put on the new. When the Holy Spirit enables a believer in these activities, then He, the Holy Spirit, will produce a certain kind of fruit in our lives. Our flesh will be restrained, our mind will be renewed, and Christ will be revealed through our example and ministry to others.

The last time we met we discussed what it means to "put off the old." Sometimes the Bible refers to this as "mortifying" or "putting to death" the "deeds of the body." This means we are to

kill their action by dealing with the indwelling sin that motivates them. When we do this, we have mortified the "flesh" or killed its influence on us at that moment. In order to do this we must **know** some facts about our identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. We have been crucified with Christ and are dead to sin. We must **consider** these facts to be true for us in our own life, whether our feelings at any given moment agree or not. Then, as a result of what we know and consider, we must **present** our whole selves, mind and body, to Christ, to be used for His glory. These three instructions need to be heeded each day that we live. (Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, pp 530-534)

Information from Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, and Jim Berg, *Changed Into His Image*

Now the reason why it is so hard to kill the actions of our indwelling sin is that we are creatures of habit.

The three most fundamental problems with a habit are,

1. We have become comfortable with the habit
2. We automatically respond to certain given situations or stimuli in a habitual way
3. We engage in the practice, or at least begin to do so, without conscious thought or decision

Breaking habits require regular, structured, endurance in putting off and putting on. Jay Adams calls this process "dehabituation/rehabilitation." The elements involved in this process are:

1. Becoming aware of the practice (pattern) that must be put off (dehabituation)
2. Discovering the biblical alternative
3. Structuring the situation for change
4. Breaking links in the chain of sin
5. Getting help from others
6. Learning to see how particular sin habits affect our entire relationship to Christ
7. Practicing the new pattern (rehabilitation)

It is critical for us to become fully aware of the nature, frequency, and the occasion for any practice. Unless we know exactly what we are doing, we will not know how to correct the practice. Only by discovering the frequency of the practice can we become aware of the severity of it. Unless we become aware of the occasions that trigger the practice, we will never be able to break the chain of reactions at its first link.

Once we've identified habits that we need to stop, we need to learn what the biblical alternatives are and then structure our situations to make positive changes. In addition, we need to learn how to break links in the chain of sin. There are at least two points at which we can stop a sinful action - at the point of resistance and at the point of restraint. In other words, we are to learn to prevent the sinful behavior from ever happening in the first place, or, once the sinful behavior has begun, we are to learn to curtail it. We can go a long way to preventing the sinful behavior from ever happening in the first place if we **moment by moment learn to look beyond our own behavior and emotions and ask ourselves, "What is the ruling lust in my heart right now that is driving this behavior or emotion? Am I going to please God or please myself in this or that thing before me?"** (Berg, *Changed Into His Image*, p 58)

The goal is biblical action, not sinful reaction; control by the Scriptures, not by the situation. While resistance is the desirable response, since that alone will keep us from sinning, we nevertheless have to learn what to do whenever we fail to resist temptation. **We need to learn self-control.** Restraint means to recognize our sin as it happens, seek forgiveness for it, and obtain help to discontinue it. **The more frequently we prevent sin, the less frequently we will need to curtail it, and the more frequently we curtail it, the sooner we will be able to prevent it altogether .**

Oftentimes, we need reminders and encouragement in breaking sinful responses with biblical ones. Sometimes, in sin, we might think that such help is beneath us. Often, pride is behind the objection. But Christians everywhere are exhorted to help one another. No one who knows Christ and wants to put off the old man with his temper, lust, lying, etc., need go without help. If we are willing to state our purpose and request help, we will find it among God's people. Only people who have not repented of their sins will feel that they do not need help. Repentant persons readily accept all the help that they can get.

Since so much time must be spent in searching and discovering the specific changes and aspects of changes that we must make, we may tend to focus too much on the change and forget the more basic fact that the change we are focusing on has to do with pleasing God. The motivation for change comes from wanting to please God, not wanting to please our self. Jim Berg, in his book, *Changed Into His Image*, gives the following illustrations,

1. A spoiled teen may stop his sulking (a desirable change), but only because his parents have acquiesced and have given him the car he wanted.
2. A depressed wife may become "her old cheerful self" again (a desirable change), but only because her alcoholic husband has granted her a divorce.
3. A college student may be getting better grades (a desirable change), but only because she has found a boyfriend whose affection has lifted her spirits so that she feels like studying again.
4. An embittered dockworker may stop his complaining about the foreman's decisions (a desirable change), but only because the foreman was transferred to another terminal.

As you can see, we have to be specific about what kind of change we are talking about and how it is to be accomplished. A mere relief of the symptoms of despair, anger, fears, and so forth does not necessarily mean the real problem has been solved, as is apparent from the situations above. The real problem in these scenarios is not lacking a car, having an alcoholic husband, lacking a boyfriend, or having a foreman with poor judgment. The real problem is the changes occurred for self-serving reasons. (Berg, *Changed Into His Image*, pg 2-3).

Sanctification does not consist in the occasional performance of right actions. It is the habitual working of a new heavenly principle within, which runs through all a man's daily conduct, both in great things, and in small. There are many people who do many right things under the influence of sickness, affliction, and death in the family, public calamities or a sudden qualm of conscience. Yet all the time anyone can see plainly that they are not converted and that they know nothing of sanctification. (Ryle, Holiness, pg 25)

These changes are only superficial changes. We must learn to see how the changes we make affect our entire relationship to Christ. If they improve our relationship, then the change was effective. If the change does not improve our relationship to Christ, then even though the

change may be outwardly desirable, it probably will not last because we didn't make the change for the right reasons. Why? Because, to some extent, more or less, any behavior problems we have will relate to other areas of our life. Also, all aspects of our life have effects upon the problems we may be having. So, if we are not living a disciplined life of regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship with other believers, and exercising our spiritual gifts in ministry in the church, then we are not receiving the regular sustenance necessary to make positive biblical changes. Vice-versa, if we persist in our sinful behaviors, these behaviors cannot help but dull our desire to build godly discipline into our life. If all areas of our life are strengthened through godly discipline, then any particular problem we may be focusing on changing will not balloon out of proportion with the rest of our life. We don't want the focus of our life to be built around problem-solving. We want the focus of our life to be built around pleasing and serving Christ.

Since any desirable changes we make in our horizontal relationships (with others or with our environment) must be grounded in the strength of our vertical relationship with Christ, we must always be about the task of strengthening that relationship. Everything else will flow from that relationship. Therefore, the second part of biblical change is renewing our mind. The three parts of biblical change work together. So it isn't a matter of putting off, then renewing our mind, and then putting on. All these things work concurrently.

Information from Jim Berg, *Changed Into His Image*

The Christian life is first and foremost about God. It is not primarily about escape from hell or deliverance from life-dominating sins or freedom from unsettling emotions. Our despondency, anger, worry, fear, guilt, bitterness, lust, and so forth are indications that our dependent love relationship with God has grown cold - or has never developed in the first place. Having a renewed mind involves having a relationship with Christ that actually changes us because of our exposure to Him. God created us to be most satisfied, joyful, and useful when we have an ongoing, dependent, life-yielding personal relationship with Him. We function well only when we are having ongoing fellowship with Christ. Fellowship, in this context means more than just having all known sin confessed. Having "a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men" is a crucial starting point (Acts 24:16). But fellowship is more than confession. The apostle John instructs us to "abide in the vine" and to "walk in the light" (John 15:4 and 1 John 1:7). Paul describes it as a "walk" (Eph 4:1, 17, 5:1-2, 8) as being "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19), and he exhorts us to "meditate on these things" (1 Tim. 4:15).

C.S. Lewis said,

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing." (Lewis, Mere Christianity, 54)

The kind of relationship that God has in mind for us means that both he and we will find our greatest joy in the joy of the other. The obvious questions include these: "How can I know God in this way?" "What does it mean to know God, and how is that relationship developed?" "How is it possible for a creature to have a personal relationship with his Creator?" "What is the difference between knowing God and knowing *about* God?"

Perhaps these questions can best be answered by thinking back to the time that we were dating our spouse. While we may have talked to each other about things going on around us, most of our conversation was about each other. We were always discovering new things about each other and then commenting on and complimenting each other on what we saw in each other. We explored each other's opinions, likes, and dislikes, family backgrounds, interests, and knowledge about various topics. In addition to our private conversations, we probably showed our affection by giving each other small gifts. Some of the gifts may have no meaning to anyone else but have great personal significance to the both of us. We never seemed to have enough time to be with each other, and we were always planning the next time we would be able to see each other again. We weren't able to keep our joy with each other a secret. We talked about each other to roommates, family, and anyone else who would listen. Anyone who had much contact with either of us would have sensed that there was something going on between us. Our relationship was characterized by continual personal interaction. **A relationship with God includes the same basic elements of learning about Him, followed by much personal interaction with Him .**

Knowing God in a personal way requires that we have a desire for God and that we continually seek Him. Fortunately, God places within those of us who are His children a desire for a relationship with Him.

Phil 2:13

13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Augustine in his *Confessions* writes, "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose [finds it rest] in Thee." David described God's work in his heart this way:

Ps 42:1-2

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for Thee, O God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?

Ps 63:1

O God, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, In a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Ps 73:25-26

25 Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Ps 84:2

2 My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

If my only desires in life are for myself and for relief from my problems, and I experience no desire whatsoever for a relationship with God, then my first step needs to be a very careful examination of whether or not I even belong to Him. If I am a true believer, then along with my desire to have deliverance from whatever problems seem to plague my life, I will have a desire for a better relationship with God. In fact, I may experience a great deal of frustration that the kind of relationship with Him that I desire seems so elusive. An unbeliever never experiences that kind of frustration. He may know he does not have fellowship with God, but it doesn't bother

him. He is content to seek his own solutions to his own problems, apart from God. **Any attempt to solve the problems of life apart from a dependent relationship with God is both arrogant and, in the long run, ineffective.**

Our desire for God is then, first, an assurance that we are His children, and second, the sign that He is at work in our lives. If we have a desire for God, then we will also seek Him. Deuteronomy 4:9 says that we must seek God with all our heart. Jesus said no man can serve two masters (Matt 6:24). If we consider God and His interest a small thing, it is because we must be passionate about something else. **Apathy toward God is the result of being passionate toward something or someone else.** We can only have a dependent, personal relationship with God if we are willing to seek Him and forsake all other loves. God does not reveal Himself to the casual observer, but only to the wholehearted and single-minded. Notice the whole-hearted search for wisdom in Proverbs 2:1-5

Prov 2:1-5

*2:1 My son, if you will receive my sayings, And treasure my commandments within you,
2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding;
3 For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding;
4 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures;
5 Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, And discover the knowledge of God.*

God deserves first place in our lives, and demands it, if we are to know Him in any kind of personal, intimate way. Seeking God is not just an exercise in exploring Bible content or studying systematic theology. These are only a means to an end, never ends in themselves. The Bible is first and foremost a revelation from God about His Son. There is a Person at the center of everything we read in the Bible. If we merely look for principles and encouraging passages, we will find what we are looking for, but we may miss God in the process. We have to stop and ask our self, "What does this passage reveal to me about Jesus Christ?" **If we don't see the Person behind the principles, we will have missed God's intention for His revelation.**

J.I. Packer, in *Knowing God*, asks,

How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God? The rule for doing this is demanding, but simple. We turn each truth about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God. Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to our self, the various things that we know about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God. Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let His truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart. It is a matter of talking to oneself about God and oneself; it is, indeed, often a matter of arguing with oneself, reasoning oneself out of moods of doubt and unbelief into a clear apprehension of God's power and grace. Its effect is ever to humble us, as we contemplate God's greatness and glory, and our own littleness and sinfulness, and to encourage and reassure us - "comfort" us, in the old, strong, Bible sense of the word - as we contemplate the unsearchable riches of divine mercy displayed in the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . And it is as we enter more and more deeply into this experience of being humbled and exalted that our knowledge of God increase, and with it our peace, our strength, and our joy. God help us, then, to put our knowledge

about God to this use, that we all may in truth "know the Lord." (Packer, Knowing God, 18-19)

You may be asking right now, "How does a search for God and a study of His attributes, change me and make me more like Christ? What does this have to do with renewing my mind?" The answer is that exposure to God will bring about profound change in us - the kind of change to Christlikeness that we need. How does the study of God's attributes fit into our study of biblical change? Some theologians divide the attributes of God into communicable and noncommunicable attributes. We use these two terms more commonly to talk about diseases. A communicable disease, like measles, is one you can "get" from someone else. A noncommunicable disease, like cancer, is one that cannot be passed from one person to another through normal contact. A noncommunicable attribute is one that no creature of God can "get." These attributes include omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, transcendence, and eternity. Being like Christ does not involve acquiring any of these attributes. That is impossible. Being Christlike, rather, means acquiring His communicable attributes - those generally known as the "fruit of the Spirit." Galatians 5:22-23 lists several facets of the Spirit's fruit. This list is representative, not exhaustive. It lists the communicable attributes of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. These are qualities that God possesses and that any believer can "get" if he is controlled by the Holy Spirit. When Christ walked on this earth, these were characteristics of His life. Only when we manifest these characteristics, can we say that we have a Christian, or Christlike, character.

2 Corinthians 3:18 is a key verse in understanding biblical change:

2 Cor 3:18

18 But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Believers have an "open" or "unveiled" face - that is, the veil of blindness has been lifted and we can perceive what God's Spirit wants to teach us about Himself. As God shows us His glory in His Word, we experience a very specific change. We will display an ever-increasing reflection of those "glories" in our own lives. God's glory is the manifestation of His attributes. This passage tells us that we are "changed" when we are exposed to God with an "unveiled face". Paul is saying that **no one who is exposed to the glories of God as they are revealed by God's Spirit through the Scriptures will remain the same.**

A.W. Tozer says,

For millions of Christians . . . God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle . . . A loving Personality dominates the Bible, walking among the trees of the garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always a living Person is present, speaking, pleading, loving, working, and manifesting Himself whenever and wherever His people have the receptivity necessary to receive the manifestation. It remains for us to think on [these truths] and pray over them until they begin to glow in us. If we cooperate with Him in loving obedience, God will manifest Himself to us, and that manifestation will be the difference between a nominal Christian life and a life radiant with the light of His face. (Tozer, The Pursuit of God, 46, 56, 58)

A believer who is not manifesting godliness in some area of life can do only one thing - spend more time in the Word asking God to illuminate his mind and heart. If we truly want more change in our lives, we will look at what is on our agenda today to see whether anything can be postponed or eliminated so that we can spend more time being exposed to the glory of God. When God's Spirit illumines our mind with truth, we will be shown the urgency and the responsibility of the truth, and we will respond by saying, "This is compelling; I must do it!" When the Holy Spirit reveals the glory of God to us, our response is always, "This is right; I must believe it! This is beautiful; I must praise it! This is compelling; I must do it!" A man moved in this manner by what he is seeing of God is being revived and others cannot help but notice the profound change.

We cannot change any part of our life without a growing relationship with our Creator. We must first be reconciled with and submissive to God. In addition, there must be something going on between our self and God for any real progress to be made. Everything God allows in our lives is designed by Him to draw us to Himself in humble submission and dependence. We will grow only when we are moving towards that end. If you haven't seen much progress in your own walk with Christ, let me suggest that you plan to take a day or weekend off and spend it alone with God. Married couples find it necessary to get alone together on a regular basis to improve their relationship with each other and to build their marriage. The main idea is to remove themselves from daily distractions so they can devote their thoughts and attention to each other and to their relationship. Plan a similar "retreat" alone with God. During this time alone with God, ask Him to bring to your mind any matters that need to be reconciled with Him or others. Spend quality time in the Scriptures, and meditate on what changes you need to make in your life to carry out what you learned from God's Word. You must take time for God to speak to you. Ask Him to illumine you by His Spirit, through His Word. Listen to Him as you read and reflect seriously on what He says.

We cannot know God "on the run" any more than we can know any other person that way. Personal relationships take enormous amounts of time devoted to interaction with the other person.

Charles Spurgeon began his Sunday morning sermon at the New Park Street Chapel on Jan. 7, 1855 by stating,

It has been said by some one that "the proper study of mankind is man." I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. (Spurgeon, The New Park Street Pulpit, vol. 1, page 1)

Next week, we will continue to endeavor to gain a working understanding of how God's Spirit uses God's Word to renew our mind.