

September 10th, 2017

# THE LIFE OF GOD IN THE SOUL OF MAN

John 17:17-19

A Scotsman by the name of Henry Scougal (1650-1678) penned a little book entitled “The Life of God in the Soul of Man.” It was originally written as a private letter to a friend, but when others read it, they pleaded that Henry allow it to be published. Less than a century later, George Whitefield, arguably the greatest evangelist since the apostle Paul, the Anglican who set the world on fire in the First Great Awakening took up Scougal’s book and said “I never knew what true religion was till God sent me this excellent treatise.”<sup>1</sup> He said in a sermon years later

“When I was sixteen years of age, I began to fast twice a week for thirty-six hours together, prayed many times a day, received the sacrament every Lord’s day, fasting myself almost to death all the forty days of Lent, during which I made it a point of duty never to go less than three times a day to public worship, besides the seven times a day to my private prayers, yet I knew no more that I was to be born again in God, born a new creature in Jesus Christ, than if I were never born at all...I must bear testimony to my old friend Mr. Charles Wesley; he put a book into my hands, called *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, whereby God showed me, that I must be born again, or be damned...I thus addressed the God of heaven and earth: ‘Lord, if I am not a Christian, if I am not a real one, God, for Jesus Christ’s sake, show me what Christianity is, that I may not be damned at last.’”<sup>2</sup>

What is Christianity? Dear congregation, how would you answer that? J.I. Packer has said that “We live at a time when uncertainty as to what constitutes

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Introduced by J.I. Packer, (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, Reprint 2009), pg. 5

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, pg. 14-15

[real Christianity]<sup>3</sup> is more widespread, perhaps, than at any time since Christianity was born.”<sup>4</sup> What is Christianity? First, let’s see what it’s not.

**1) Christianity cannot be isolated to the intellect (doctrine).** As if orthodox notions of Jesus Christ, or being persuaded to one theological camp is the essence of Christianity. Dear congregation the demons are all Calvinists.<sup>5</sup> They learned the best theology in the best seminary: heaven. Correct theological notions do not make you a Christian.

**2) Neither is the essence of Christianity found in duty.** Church activities, showing kindness to enemies, observing the sacraments, community outreach, bringing justice to the nations do not constitute the essence of Christianity. Jesus will look at some of the world’s greatest philanthropists on that Day and say “I never knew you; depart from me.” (**Matthew 7:22-23**) The essence of Christianity is not found in doing good.

**3) Nor is the essence of Christianity found in the affections (delight).** Scougal says here: “others put all religion in the affections, in rapturous heats and ecstatic devotion; and all they aim at is, to pray with passion, to think of heaven with pleasure, and to be affected with...melting expressions...and from thence assume a great confidence of their salvation.”<sup>6</sup> The essence of Christianity cannot be reduced to passion.<sup>7</sup>

### **Christianity is the life of God in the soul of man**

What then is Christianity essentially? Here is how Scougal answers: “true religion [true Christianity] is a union of the soul with God, a real

---

<sup>3</sup> original “true religion”

<sup>4</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Introduced by J.I. Packer, (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, Reprint 2009), pg. 6

<sup>5</sup> And yet 2 Peter 2:4 says that God has committed them to chains until the judgment.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, pg. 43

<sup>7</sup> Romans 10:2 “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”

participation of the Divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or in the apostle's phrase, 'it is Christ formed in us.'"<sup>8</sup>

Dear congregation, this is what Jesus is praying for in our passage. When He prays Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth," He's praying "Father, form *Me* in them." Christ being formed in you is what it means to be sanctified.<sup>9</sup> Consider how last week's passage connect our passage today. Last week, Jesus prayed that His disciples would be kept from the evil one (v.15). He prayed that Satan would not overpower them—that they would not suffer damnation. But that's not enough. For two reasons 1) Because endless existence by itself is not good news. Heaven without Christ is hell. 2) The disciples would face unimaginable hardships. And all of them (save John) would suffer horrible deaths. How would they endure? How will you endure? Trouble is coming. You don't have to be a prophet to say that. The Scripture says "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," (Psalm 34:19) How will you endure your hardships? You will only endure if Christ is formed in you. That is what Jesus prays for. 'Father, yes keep them from the devil. But don't stop there. Form Me in their souls.' This is what Christianity is: the life of God in the soul of man.

### *The Big Idea...*

Christ formed in you is the essence of sanctification; this is the life of God in the soul of man

- ☆ The Aim: Our Sanctification
- ☆ The Actor of Our Sanctification
- ☆ The Agents of Our Sanctification

---

<sup>8</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Introduced by J.I. Packer, (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, Reprint 2009), pg. 44

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30 says Christ *is* our sanctification.

## I. The Aim: Our Sanctification

### The disciples' needed to be sanctified

As Jesus prays this prayer, it's important to remember that He is praying for the 11 disciples most immediately at this point. Why is that important to remember? Because arguably, these were the holiest men on earth. They walked with Jesus for three years, and yet Jesus prays in v.17 "Sanctify *them*" There is such thing as a Christian who has arrived. You have not arrived.<sup>10</sup> You desperately need sanctification. Just ask your family and friends. When Jesus prays for sanctification in v.17, He includes you in v.20 "I do not ask for these only, but also *for those* who will believe in me through their word"

### God's will: our sanctification

Sanctification is not an option in the Christian life. It is God's express will for your life. 1 **Thessalonians 4:3** says "For *this* is the will of God, your sanctification"

### God chose us for sanctification

Your sanctification is the very reason why God elected you. **Ephesians 1:4** says "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be *holy and blameless* [that is—be sanctified] before him."<sup>11</sup> God elects people for salvation so that they would be holy (sanctified).<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> The Apostle Paul affirmed this about himself "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." Philippians 3:12

<sup>11</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:13 "But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth."

<sup>12</sup> Sanctification is why you were predestined: Romans 8:29 "For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Your highest destiny is to be conformed to the image of Christ which is the essence of sanctification.

### Satan: “You can’t have both holiness and happiness”

But it’s at this very point where the devil will try to use our own language against us. When Jesus prays in v.17 “*Sanctify them*” Honestly, my flesh recoils at the thought. To be sanctified sounds either incredible painful or dreadfully boring. Those are words that you will never hear at a party: “let’s pursue holiness together.” As Jonathan Edwards said in his day: Men are apt to drink in strange notions of holiness from their childhood, as if it were a melancholy, morose, sour, and unpleasant thing.”<sup>13</sup> Randy Alcorn recounts a conversation that he had with a teenage boy who had questions about his faith.

“What does God’s holiness mean?” I asked  
 His clear, biblical answer: “He’s perfect without sin.”  
 “Absolutely true. Does thinking about God’s holiness draw you to him.”  
 He responded sadly, “No.”  
 I asked him whether he wanted to be holy 100 percent of the time.  
 “No.”  
 Me neither. I should, but I don’t”  
 Then I surprised him. “Guess what you want 100 percent of the time.”  
 He didn’t know.  
 “Have you ever once thought, *I don’t want to be happy?*”  
 “No.”  
 “Isn’t that what you really want—happiness?”<sup>14</sup>

Dear congregation, isn’t that what you really want—happiness? Of course it is. And this is why *many* abandon the faith. Because they think that holiness is the enemy of happiness.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-highest-beauty>

<sup>14</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Happiness*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), pg. 110

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, pg. 340

—  
 2 Timothy 4:10 “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.”

### Jesus: “holiness is happiness”

But Jesus saw no divorce between holiness and happiness. He prayed for both things for His disciples. In v.13 “*these things I speak* in the world, that they may have *my joy* fulfilled in themselves.” In v.17, He prays “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” Jesus wanted His disciples to be both happy (v.13) and holy (v.17).

### What does it *mean* to be holy?

When Jesus asked the Father to sanctify his disciples in v.17. He didn’t mean *merely* for them to be separate from the world. That is a legitimate use of the word sanctify.<sup>16</sup> But in this context, it means more. Jesus was praying that their souls would be renewed after the image of God. In other words, Jesus prayed the life of God into their souls.

Listen to how Paul agonized over this reality to happen to the saints in the Galatian church “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” (**Galatians 4:19**) To the Colossians he wrote “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, *which is* Christ in you, the hope of glory” (**Colossians 1:26-27**) The main purpose of your redemption is so that Christ could be formed in you.

### Holiness is love to God

What would this look like? What does Jesus want from you *mainly*? Your tithe check? Your fifteen minute devotional in the morning? Your orthodoxy? Your tireless volunteering? Your evangelizing the lost? Your carefully raising your children in the faith? Jesus speaks to all of these things. He wants them all. But is that what He wants from you *mainly*? Remember what God told Israel? “This people draw near with their mouth and honor me

---

<sup>16</sup> Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G37&t=KJV> accessed September 10, 2017

with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (**Isaiah 29:13**) God forbid that we would be a church that would draw close to Jesus in our tithing, in our devotions, in our orthodoxy, in our volunteering, in our evangelizing, in our child-rearing, but have our hearts far from Him! Holiness does not consist in those things. Holiness consists in having your soul united to Jesus Christ, such that you seek to love Him “...with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (**Mark 12:30**)

That’s what holiness consists in *mainly*. Jesus is praying ‘Father sanctify them—separate them from the kingdom of sin, and Satan, and self, so their hearts will be fully mine.’ That’s why happiness and holiness must always go together. **You will never be happy if the object of your love does not meet your soul’s capacity.**<sup>17</sup> As adults we often look at our children who are so enamored with the latest toy and recognize their affection is misplaced. That toy cannot answer their soul’s longing. We see the foolishness of it. And then we turn around and find our happiness in bigger toys. Or in the next relationship. Or in the next job. Scougal says here: “What is a little skin-deep beauty, or some small degrees of goodness, to match or satisfy a passion which was made for God; designed to embrace an infinite God?”<sup>18</sup> Dear congregation, holiness is not a means to happiness. It is happiness itself. This is God’s great aim for you. That He would make you holy.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> “How little people know who think that holiness is dull. When one meets the real thing...it is irresistible.” (C.S. Lewis) Randy Alcorn, *Happiness*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), pg. 340

<sup>18</sup> Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Introduced by J.I. Packer, (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, Reprint 2009), pg. 74

<sup>19</sup> This is to share in the very Divine nature itself! 2 Peter 1:4 “he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” cf. Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Introduced by J.I. Packer, (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, Reprint 2009), pg. 49

## II. The Actor of Our Sanctification

### We can't even control our own hearts

Recently, I was listening to a very popular radio program. This woman was giving a testimony of her hardships as a Christian. Very intense. Everyone in her life failed her. After hearing this, the host responded by saying “You can only control your own heart.” This precious sister gracious responded “Can we?” Dear congregation, how much control do you have over your own heart?<sup>20</sup>

### Sanctification is a work of God, not us

Look at what is missing in Jesus' prayer. Jesus doesn't pray 'Father help them sanctify themselves.' He says Father 'You sanctify them.' And then in v.19 Jesus prays “And for their sake I consecrate myself, *that* they also may be sanctified in truth.” Sanctification does not partly depend on you and partly depend upon God. Sanctification wholly depends upon God. That's why the Shorter Catechism defines sanctification in the following way:

Q. 35. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is *the work of God's free grace*, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

Sanctification is the work of God. Sanctification is not you do your part and God will do His part. If the Father doesn't sanctify you, none of your efforts

---

<sup>20</sup> Why do you think Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:13 “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil?” Because if Jesus let us have complete control over own hearts, we would run into temptation. We would run into ruin. Augustine the 5th century church father knew this truth probably better than anyone in the first millennium of church history. Enslaved to debauchery, living in complete immorality, he was miraculously saved. And yet even after salvation he recognized that he had no power in himself to obey God's commands. He once prayed this prayer: “There can be no hope for me except in your great mercy...no man can be master of himself, except of God's bounty...You command me to be [self-controlled]. Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will!” Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, (London, England: Penguin Classics, 1961), pg. 233

will matter in the least bit. Turn with me to **Philippians 2:12-13**. Paul just got done talking about Jesus Christ was obedient to death—even death on a cross—and therefore the Father highly exalted him—so that every knee would bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. And then Paul turns to the importance of our obedience. Picking up in v. 12 “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,”<sup>21</sup> That word “work” points to a continued, sustained, strenuous effort.<sup>22</sup>

We know He’s talking about sanctification. “Work out this salvation” does not mean earn your salvation. You cannot earn justification. **Galatians 2:16** “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ,” So what is Paul saying? Since God already worked salvation in you, now work it out. Obey. Grow. Labor strenuously, with continued sustained effort. Sanctification is labor. Fighting against habitual sin, growing in the knowledge of Christ, enduring heart wrenching trials, loving others when they give you every reason not to, are the hardest things that you work through in life. Your greatest stress is your sanctification. Working out your salvation is the most difficult task you face.<sup>23</sup> So how can I say that sanctification is the work of God?

---

<sup>21</sup> He’s very serious about personal holiness. **Hebrews 12:14** “Strive for peace with everyone, and **for the holiness** without which no one will see the Lord.” The apostle is giving an us an imperative, namely, to “strive” and then lists two things which we are to strive after: peace with everyone and a personal holiness. There can be no doubt that we must have Jesus’ holiness imputed to us in order to be justified. But it makes no sense to say this is what the apostle is referring to in Hebrews 12:14. For two reasons: **1)** Imputed holiness or righteousness is not something that we can strive after. It can only be received by faith alone—that is by resting and receiving it by trusting that Christ achieved it for us in His perfect obedience. **2)** Therefore this is a personal and experiential holiness that the apostle is referring to for the very fact that he says to strive after it.

<sup>22</sup> Source: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/i-act-the-miracle> accessed September 9, 2017

<sup>23</sup> There can be no doubt that sanctification shortens the lives of many Christians.

### Not a threat, but a gift

Look at the verse again: “work out your own salvation *with fear and trembling*,” Stop. Why should we tremble? The rest of the verse answers “...for *it is God* who works *in you*, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Why should we tremble? Because the Living God is working in you. Dear congregation: tremble! Not because God’s threatening you, but because He wants you to be in awe, that all your willing and all your working is the result of His willing and His working. When you say no to sin, how did that happen? Because the God who stretched out the seas *worked* victory in your heart. When you endure suffering with thankfulness toward God, how does that happen? Because the God who raised Jesus from the dead *willed* that your heart would not turn bitter. Dear congregation *tremble* at the thought: The Living God who defeated death, and hell and Satan *works* in you. “Your working and willing is His working and willing.”<sup>24</sup> It’s not *just* that God is with you when you feel the exceedingly difficult labor, it is His working that is causing your working. Your working is God’s working. Your willing is God’s willing.<sup>25</sup> The very life of God is at work in your soul.

### You won’t go to hell, but you will suffer horribly

How does this connect to our passage? Look at **v.18**. Jesus prays “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” Now we already know that Jesus prayed in **v.15** that they will be kept from evil one—meaning they will not go to hell. But when they went out into the world, the devil tried to bring hell to them. Let me ask you, how brave would you be if I told you “Ok, here’s your mission: go into the world and preach the message of Jesus Christ. On this mission, I guarantee that you will be imprisoned, whipped, there will be

---

<sup>24</sup> Source: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/i-act-the-miracle> accessed September 9th, 2017

<sup>25</sup> This is why Paul could truly say in **1 Cor. 15:10** “I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” Your action is not determinative in your sanctification, God’s action is. When you disobey, you are to blame. When you obey, God is to be praised. Christianity is the only religion where we get all the blame for everything we do wrong, and God gets all the credit for everything we do right.

riots everywhere you go, you will suffer hunger, you will have to labor day and night, you will be beaten and stoned for doing good, in the end you will be beheaded, *but* you won't go to hell." How brave would you be?

The disciples needed more than the promise of not going to hell. They needed to know that the Father was working in them to work and to will according to His good pleasure. That is what Jesus prayed: 'Father, sanctify them.' God is the actor in your sanctification. Yes you must labor. Yes you must strive. But your laboring and striving is the result of His laboring and striving in you.

### III. The Agents of Our Sanctification

There are two main agents or means in our sanctification: 1) the Scripture and 2) the work of Jesus Christ

#### **Agent 1: The Scripture**

Look at v.17 again. Jesus prays "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." Notice how carefully Jesus puts these words together: Truth is what God sanctifies us with. And that truth is *only* found in God's Word. "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." In other words, your exposure to the Word of God determines your sanctification. Your exposure to the Word of God determines your holiness. Your exposure to the Word of God determines Christ being formed in you.

R.C. Sproul said about this passage:

"Hardly a day goes by that I don't hear someone say, 'Doctrine doesn't matter. What matters is relationships.' If doctrine doesn't matter, then truth doesn't matter, and if truth doesn't matter, our sanctification doesn't matter, because sanctification doesn't come through relationships. Our sanctification comes from the Word of God and from the truth that is poured into our souls, truth that renews our minds, renews our thinking, and renews our lives. That truth in turn, defines

godly relationships. You can't have a godly relationship with being in the truth. You can't even know what a godly relationship looks like without understanding the content of the gospel. Doctrine does matter."<sup>26</sup>

Now don't overhear me. It was one of the Puritans who said one that we might as well throw away our Bibles if we don't have the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup> The Holy Spirit must make the Word of God come alive to us. Even the gospel is a dead letter without the Holy Spirit. However that is not Jesus emphasis here. Here Jesus emphasizing importance of God's Word. The Word of God, and specifically the preached Word of God is what builds up the church.

The church was given birth by the Word. **1 Peter 1:23** "*you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;*"

The church is cleansed by the Word. **Ephesians 5:26** Christ "that he (Christ) might sanctify her, *having cleansed her* by the washing of water with the *word*,"

The church is protected from sin by the Word. **Psalms 119:11** "I have stored up *your word* in my heart, that I might not *sin against you.*"

The church is fed by the Word **1 Peter 2:1-2** "Like newborn infants, *long for the pure spiritual milk*, that by it you may *grow up into salvation*"

---

<sup>26</sup> R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary: John*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), pg. 326

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Henry said: the "word of truth [is] the ordinary means of our sanctification; not [by] itself, for then it would always sanctify, but as the instrument which the Spirit commonly uses in beginning and carrying on that good work;"

—  
Calvin said "The outward preaching of the word, it is true, does not itself accomplish this, for that preaching is wickedly profaned by the reprobate; but let us remember that Christ speaks of the elect, whom the Holy Spirit efficaciously regenerates by the word." John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVIII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 180

The church is renewed by the Word. **Romans 12:2** “Do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewal of your mind*,”

The church is built up by the Word. **Acts 20:32** “And now I commend you to God and *to the word of his grace*, which is able *to build you up*.”

The church is set free by the Word. **John 8:31-32** “If you abide in *my word*, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and *the truth will set you free*.”

The preached word determines the health of the church, because the preached word is what sanctifies.<sup>28</sup> This is why Calvin preached 6 times a week in Geneva. It wasn't because he liked to hear himself speak.<sup>29</sup> He knew that it was the preached word of God that was food that would cause the church to be protected against the onslaught of the world, the flesh, and the devil.<sup>30</sup>

## Agent 2: The Work of Jesus Christ

The second agent or means of our sanctification is the work of Jesus Christ. Look with me at v.19 “And for their sake I *consecrate* myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.” The word *also* gives us a small clue to what's going on. The word *consecrate* is the same word in the Greek as the word *sanctify*. Jesus is saying “And for their sake I *sanctify* myself.” The reason why I think the translators chose a different word is because it is being applied to Jesus differently. Jesus was praying for the disciples to be renewed in their souls after

---

<sup>28</sup> Calvin here points to the facts that there were fanatics in his day who indulged “in much useless prattle about sanctification..who chattered quite foolishly about the truth, and yet disregard the word. Christ expressly says that the truth, by which God sanctifies his sons, is not to be found any where else than in the word.” John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVIII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 179-180

<sup>29</sup> See

<sup>30</sup> “We ought to infer from Christ's words, that sanctification is not instantly completed in us on the first day, but that we make progress in it through the whole course of our life.” John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVIII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 180

the image of God. But Jesus already *was* the perfect image of God (**2 Cor. 4:4**). Jesus is speaking about atonement. In order for Christ to be formed in you, Jesus must remove all your guilty stains. This could only be done through His death on the cross. In the OT the high priests would enter into the holy of holies in the temple and offer a blood sacrifice for both his sins and the sins of the people (**Hebrews 9:7**). Blood represented life. An innocent animal was killed, and its innocent blood was offered to God as a substitute for their guilt. When Jesus came for us, He was both the high priest and the sacrifice. **Hebrews 9:12** “he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”

This was what it cost Christ to sanctify you. “And for their sake I *consecrate* myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.” Dear congregation—behold what manner of love with which you have been loved. Not only is it the Father who is working in you to cause your work, and willing in you to cause your willing (Phil. 2:13), but Jesus willing went to the altar and shed His blood to purify you from all sin. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (**John 10:18**)

Is holiness difficult? Yes. Nothing was bought at a higher price than your holiness. **1 Peter 2:24** “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

This is the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ. God provided a way for you to have your sins taken away—to have all your guilt removed. There is no bigger crisis that you face in life than the crisis that is coming on the final day of judgment. “How will you *a sinner* stand before a holy God?” There is only one solution: Jesus Christ. And He offers Himself freely to anyone who would have Him: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24) Come to Christ.

# Application

## Our Doctrine: Sanctification is not moralism

Sanctification is not moralism. Meaning sanctification cannot be reduced to improvements in your behavior. Sanctification is not about getting your life straightened out so that God will finally accept you. I love how the Westminster Confession put it. It says that our sanctification is "...imperfect in this life, [that there are] remnants of corruption in every part; whence arises a continual and irreconcilable war,"<sup>31</sup> Dear congregation, there is a part of who you are that will never get better this side of heaven. Jesus dealt a death blow to your flesh on the cross, and it will not recover. But the old nature is still with you. That old nature is not getting better. No amount of behavior modification will kill it. In fact, there is a way that you can be holy outside of God's will—through moralism. This is what the Galatian church was doing. And Paul told them "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (**Galatians 1:6**) He shows what that different gospel is just a little later in **Galatians 3:3** "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" Their particular issue was circumcision, but this has a broad application. If you are resting or relying on any performance, any duty that you are doing, and secretly thinking "now God will show me favor"—that's moralism.

Jesus was constantly showing how the Pharisees prayed wrongly (**Matt. 6:5**), fasted wrongly (**Matthew 6:17**), tithed wrongly (**Matt. 23:23**), observed the Sabbath wrongly (**Mark 2:27**), honored their parents wrongly (**Mark 7:12**). All these things were good things. They ought to have done them. But they were relying on their performance. 'God because I have done this, therefore I am good.'

It is moralism that Jesus attacks more than any other type of sin. Look through the gospels. Who does Jesus condemn more than any other group? The Pharisees. And here's the problem. Everyone is a Pharisee. There are

---

<sup>31</sup> WCF XIII.2

conservative Pharisees—“I can’t believe those homosexuals—I would never do that.” There are homosexual Pharisees—“I’m gay and proud and way more enlightened than those religious fanatics.” There are drunk Pharisees “Yea I get drunk a couple times a week but not like that guy who gets drunk everyday.” There are Calvinistic Pharisees “Look at those poor Arminians.” There are Arminian Pharisees “Look at those poor Calvinists.” There is the anti-Pharisee Pharisee—“Let them have it Jesus”—all the while secretly congratulating yourself that you are not that self-righteous like them.

We will use any behavior that we are performing in order to look down our noses at others. This is moralism. Moralism is the main sin that you need to be sanctified from. So let me help. God wants you to obey Him. There are over a thousand commands in the NT alone. God desires your obedience, there is no doubt about it. But the main thing that the commandments teach us, is that we can’t obey them perfectly.

Jesus commanded “Love your enemies” (**Matthew 5:44**) How are you doing with that one?

Jesus commanded “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you,” (**John 13:34**) How are you doing with that one?

Jesus commanded “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (**Matthew 5:44**) How are you doing with that one?

These commandments exist to get us to flee to Christ. And it’s that fleeing to Christ again and again that sanctifies us. It’s being brought to the foot of the cross and being reminded that “there is nothing that could ever be uncovered about you...that hasn’t already been covered by the grace of Jesus.”<sup>32</sup> There is nothing you can do to be more loved and accepted by Jesus. He already knows everything you have done, everything that you are doing, and everything that you will do. And He knew those things before He died for you.

---

<sup>32</sup> Paul Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2012), pg. 99