

What Every Christian Needs to Know  
Lesson 13  
Salvation From the Power of Sin

**INTRODUCTION**

You have probably heard the phrase, “ignorance is bliss” which has been around for years. It basically means that if you don’t know about something negative or potentially hurtful then you won’t worry about it – you will be happy in your ignorance. That may be true about some things but it definitely is not the case when it comes to Biblical truth. In fact, ignorance in regard to theology can lead to fear and defeat especially when it comes to living the Christian life on a daily basis. Ignorance is not bliss – it could lead to tragic spiritual failure.

In our lesson for today we will explore the very practical issue of living a victorious Christian life. As we have seen in the last 2 lessons, Salvation has several aspects...

- Salvation from the penalty of sin: justification. This aspect looks back at the moment we were regenerated or born again. We were at that instant declared righteous before God (read Romans 3:24, 28). We were saved from the penalty of sin which is an eternity separated from God in hell.
- Salvation from the presence of sin: glorification. This aspect looks forward to the time when we will be with the Lord in perfect and complete fellowship. *The Baptist Faith & Message* describes our glorification in this way, “...the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.”(page 11)

But, what about in the meantime? What happens between justification and glorification? Most of us will spend many years on this earth after we are saved and before we go to be with the Lord – what aspect of our salvation is going on now, in the present? Sin and temptation still exist for the Christian. Do we just struggle and wrestle with it until we go to be with the Lord?

What is going on now is called “sanctification”. Again, to quote from *The Baptist Faith & Message*:

“Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God’s purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person’s life.”(page 11)

Wayne Grudem has a good definition of sanctification...

“Sanctification is a progressive work of both God and man that makes Christians more and more free from sin and more and more like Christ in their actual lives.”(*Christian Beliefs*, page 99)

So, this is the practical, present tense aspect of our salvation. Let’s put the 3 aspects together...

1. We were saved from the penalty of sin – justification.
2. We will be saved from the presence of sin – glorification.

3. We are being saved from the power of sin – sanctification.

Key scriptures: Romans 6:8-14, 22; Galatians 5:16-23; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Philippians 1:6, 2:12-13.

#### **I. SANCTIFICATION IS FOR BELIEVERS ONLY**

The key verses mentioned above are for believers, those who have trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. No unbeliever will ever have victory over sin until he is truly saved.

Lewis Sperry Chafer in his book *Major Bible Themes* states, “Since salvation from the power of sin is God’s gracious provision for those whom He has already saved from the guilt and penalty of sin, this doctrine in its application is limited to Christians.” (copyright 1926, 1953, revised edition 1974; Dallas Theological Seminary, page 189)

#### **II. SANCTIFICATION IS A PROCESS**

Sanctification starts the moment we are saved and continues throughout our lives. At the moment of conversion we are set free from sin (read Romans 6:6-7). Now, this does not mean that we are suddenly sinless and perfect. We are set free from the power of sin in that we do not have to sin.

Read Romans 6:12-14.

When Paul says in verse 12, “do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts...”, he is saying that we have a choice – we can choose not to sin.

Again, to quote Grudem: “This initial break from the power of sin means that Christians are no longer ruled or dominated by sin and no longer love to sin.”(page 99)

Think of it this way: as a believer, you cannot live the way you once did because you are not the same person you once were. Before: dominated by sin; now: no longer do you have to sin.

Since sanctification is a process, we will never be completely free from temptation and sin in this life. As we have said, this passage in Romans is for believers. So, if Paul commands that we not let sin reign or rule over us, then it must be true that there is the possibility that sin, in fact, could rule over us.

#### **III. TWO NATURES AND THEIR SOLUTION**

The believer actually has 2 natures dwelling within him: the flesh and the Spirit.

Read Galatians 5:16-17.

Verse 16 – to “walk” means to live your life. So, we live the Christian life by means of or in the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Notice that he says “you will not carry out the desire of the flesh”. He does not say that you will never be tempted nor does he say that you will achieve sinless perfection. The possibility of sin is always there in the form of the “desire of the flesh”. The victory comes in not carrying out that desire.

Now, what is the flesh? In this context the flesh does not refer to skin, bones and muscle. The flesh is described in verse 17 and 19-21[read] – not a pretty picture. Verse 17 describes the conflict that exists in every believer. Keep this in mind: no matter how long you have been a Christian, the flesh NEVER gets better; you will always have the potential of sinning and the temptation to sin. We can never just go on autopilot or cruise control in the Christian life. This is the power that the flesh can have over us.

In light of this dilemma, how can we have victory? Again, to quote Chafer...

“In such a one this conflict exists, and though he is delivered from the lust of the flesh, it is because he is walking in dependence upon the Spirit.”(page 190) To have victory over temptation we live by faith and in dependence on the Spirit as Galatians 5:16 teaches.

#### **IV. GOD’S ROLE IN OUR SANCTIFICATION**

Sanctification is primarily the work of God.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

Also see Philippians 1:6 (read). This verse does not mention the word “sanctification” or “sanctify” but the concept is clearly there. The Lord will perfect us – He started the process (regeneration) and He will finish it (sanctification). He will get us there! How does He do it? As we have seen – He equips us with His Holy Spirit who gives us the power/ability to resist temptation and to live a victorious fruitful Christian life, Galatians 5:22-23(read). The Holy Spirit produces those qualities in us as we walk in faith and obedience.

#### **V. OUR ROLE IN OUR SANCTIFICATION**

If sanctification is primarily the work of God does that mean that we live passive spiritual lives? Do we just sit back, let go and let God? Absolutely not. As we have already seen, we are to live our lives by means of, in the power of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

There are 2 verses which have both roles together, man and God’s: read Philippians 2:12-13. Let’s break it down...

“Work out your own salvation...” – notice that he does not say “work FOR your own salvation.” Neither does it mean that I have to keep working to maintain my salvation, i.e. that I may lose it. Salvation is a work of God, by grace through faith. However, we work out what God puts in. I have to pick up my Bible, read it and study it – He doesn’t shortcut the process for me. I have to be intentional about prayer, worship, Bible Study attendance, service, stewardship, sharing my faith, etc. None of those things happen automatically. There are many commands in the NT that the Lord expects the believer to obey - He didn’t give those commands to Himself!

“with fear and trembling” – why fear and trembling? Is Paul saying that we should be terrified of God, that He will zap us if we mess up? No, it means that we have a healthy respect and reverence for the Lord to the point that we want to please Him in all that we do. We want to be careful to obey Him

because of the relationship that we have with Him. It is the attitude with which I work out my salvation: one of humility in complete reliance on Him for His strength to carry me through.

Then, the balance between God's role and my role in sanctification: "...for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

So, let's pull it together: God begins the good work in me (Phil. 1:6a); I respond by being actively involved in the process (Phil. 2:12); God is at work in me all along the way (Phil. 2:13) and He will perfect me all the way until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6b)!

Now, this all sounds great and it is but...

## **VI. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I SIN?**

Before we answer this question let's review some facts...

1. The Christian still has the flesh within him (Galatians 5:16-17); thus, the possibility of sin always exists.
2. The Christian can be and is tempted to sin.
3. Temptation in & of itself is not a sin – Jesus was tempted (Matthew 4; Hebrews 4:15).
4. When a Christian is tempted, he does not have to sin; he has the power thru the Holy Spirit to choose not to sin (Romans 6:12).
5. The Christian never achieves sinless perfection in this life (1 John 1:8).
6. The Christian cannot and should not say that he has not sinned (1 John 1:10).

So – we return to the original question...what do I do when I sin? With everything we have said, a Christian, through a willful act of disobedience, still commits sin. What then?

Tucked away right in between 1 John 1:8 and 1 John 1:10 is the solution: 1 John 1:9 (read).

The key word is "confess". Now, to confess does not necessarily mean crying, weeping, wailing and beating ourselves up over our sin. Obviously, some healthy guilt is involved or else we would never come to the Lord in confession.

"To confess" in the Greek means "to agree" or "say the same thing as". When we confess our sin before God we are agreeing with Him on 2 things...

- i. Whatever it is that we did is, in fact, a sin. We are sinners by nature and practice. Call it what it is; don't make excuses and don't generalize ("Lord, forgive me for all of my sins").
- ii. Agree with Him that your sin is forgiven based on Jesus' death on the cross for you. Thank Him for His forgiveness according to 1 John 1:9.

Confession also involves repentance – a change of mind and behavior; a commitment to forsake that sin. The key is to acknowledge your sin before the Lord and then continue to walk with the Lord by faith. Nothing more needs to be done – no ritual, no penance, no working it off, etc. God doesn't put

you on the bench for a while or send you to “time out”. You are forgiven – believe it! 1 John 1:9 has been called “the Christian’s bar of soap”.

Additional powerful Scriptures dealing with confession can be found in Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 if you would like to do some further study. Psalm 51 is David’s confession following his sin of adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).

### **CONCLUSION**

“Sanctification is a lifelong process. At times it will seem as if the process is going at a faster rate than you ever thought possible. It’s at these times that you will need to guard against pride...At other times, you will wonder if there is any life inside you at all. When doubts begin to fill your thoughts, pray the prayer found in Mark 9:24: ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’ And, take confidence in Jesus’ statement in John 6:40: ‘For this is the will of My Father, that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.’”

Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs*, page 106