

January 15, 2011

## **WE BELIEVE IN SANCTIFICATION**

### **Romans 6:1-14**

The word “sanctification” is a term that strikes fear into some people’s hearts, even though it is a good Bible word. “Sanctification” means to “set apart”, to be consecrated to God. And it is easy for some uninformed Christians to conjure up all kinds of caricatures of a sanctified Christian that scares them to death. They could believe that to be sanctified you have to go to a church where the men and boys sit on one side of the church and the women and girls on the other, or if you are a woman you must not wear makeup or pants or jewelry, and if you are a man you must have a crew cut and wear out-of-style and ill fitting suits. Or to be a sanctified teenager you must give up your cell phone and i-pod and succumb to an arranged marriage and be miserable for life, and if you are a child that means no TV and no ice cream. And when Janice and I were in New Hampshire we actually had a lady in our church that was raised in a church that practiced some of these things.

Well, beloved, the reason for such misconceptions is that you don’t hear a lot of preaching on sanctification in churches today. But that is unfortunate, because the Bible has much to say about sanctification. The Greek word is found ten times in the New Testament. Five times it is translated “sanctification”, and five times it is translated “holiness”. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, “This is the will of God, your sanctification...” And in verse 7 he says, “For God has not called us to uncleanness, but in holiness”, and it is the same Greek word. And the verb form for sanctification, which is “sanctify”, appears seven times in the New Testament, but it appears 67 times in the entire Bible. We read in Ephesians 5:26 that Jesus gave Himself for us that He might **sanctify** and cleanse us through the washing of water by the Word. And Jesus prayed to His Father for you and me in John 17:17 when He said, “Sanctify them through Your truth, Your Word is truth”. If you are saved today, Jesus Christ prayed for your sanctification. And He is still praying in Heaven, every day, for your sanctification. So there is just no doubt about it - it is God’s unmistakable will for His people to live sanctified, holy lives, set apart for His service and His glory.

Beloved, may I say to you this morning that to a large degree we as God’s church in America have failed in this high and holy calling. I am currently reading a book by David Jeremiah entitled I Never Thought I’d See the Day. In it Dr. Jeremiah addresses a number of areas in our contemporary culture that have experienced dramatic changes over the last few years, changes he never believed he would have seen in his lifetime. And one of those changes was that the church would be so irrelevant. That the church would have such little influence upon the world, but instead, the world would have so much influence upon the church. And in his argument he tells the story of a young Dutch painter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century named Vincent van Gogh. And from all indications, Vincent felt the church had failed him.

Vincent lived a short and tragic life, ending in suicide when he was only 37. In every major endeavor of his life – in painting, in romance, and in his faith – he felt as though he failed. As for his faith, at an early age he felt called to be a missionary. At two different theological schools he failed exams to qualify him for study and was turned away. Later he started doing mission work on his own and was actually endorsed by the local officials where he was reaching out to undesirables. But he wanted to live like those he was trying to reach, and when he moved in to an open shed and began to sleep on a straw bed he was de-frocked for “undermining the dignity” of the clergy. So he just gave up on the first passion of his life, to be a missionary for God.

And life began to spiral downward from there for Vincent van Gogh, until just weeks before he died he painted one of his most famous works, which is an undeniable statement of how he believed the church had lost her influence in the world. It is called *The Church at Auvers*. When you look at the painting you can see how distorted, foreboding and uninviting this church looks, which by the way, was an actual church that he knew from his childhood. You will notice, the foreground of the picture is bright, but shadows darken the church and the ground immediately surrounding it. And something is glaringly missing; the doors. There is no entrance to this church, only a path around each side. It is easy to see the message, isn't it? That church was nothing more than a relic, a shrine, a house for religious fools, with no influence upon its community at all.

But beloved, here is the sobering truth. *The Church at Auvers* is a picture of thousands and thousands of churches in America today. They have no influence on people who are passing by so close to them every day, some with heavy burdens, some without a care, but all headed straight for eternal hell. But here's a part of the tragedy we can't ignore. The church has lost its influence because you and I have lost our influence. For the church is not the building, we are the church. And many of us are no longer salt and light in a tasteless and dark world. There is nothing positive and uplifting in our lives that makes lost sinners want to come to our church and investigate the claims of our Christ. And what's worse, many of us bring reproach on the name of Jesus by our language and our actions at work, or by our rudeness to a retail employee, or by the way we treat our wives and husbands and children in public, or by the way we treat our classmates at school.

But if we are truly born again, it grieves us deeply and we despise it when we act this way. And as Paul we cry out, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Well, beloved, God has good news for you if this is your heart cry today. He has given us clear instructions in His holy Word whereby you can have victory over your sin day by day, by which you can truly be sanctified. So let's take a look at them.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Romans 6. In our text this morning we are going to look first at an **inconceivable idea**, and then we will see a **transforming truth** and

a **perfect promise** that guarantees our sanctification. But first we need to go back and grasp the teaching that leads up to these things from chapter 5. In Romans 5 the apostle Paul presents to us the grace of God in magnificent fashion. God's grace is so much greater than all of our sin!! We were wicked, rebellious sinners, delighting in our sin, reveling in our sin, and then by God's grace He called us to repentance and saved us fully and solely on the merits of His Son Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross was the full and perfect payment for all of our sin. Peter says that Jesus, "bore our sins in His own body on the tree..." (1 Peter 2:24). And in Romans 5:20 Paul exclaims the greatness of this grace when he says, "but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound". Oh, friend, if you have never trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, God's grace is so much greater than all of your sin! No matter what you've done, no matter how guilty you feel and unworthy you feel, Jesus will forgive you completely and wash your soul whiter than snow with His precious blood if you will but turn from your sin and come to Him. For He has already suffered for all of your sins. Come to Him, cast yourself upon His mercy, give Him complete control of your life, and Jesus will save you today. Praise God today for His amazing grace!!

But dear friends, there is a dangerous trap Paul warns his readers about in chapter 6 verses 1-2; a trap that leads many believers to a life of regret and misery and destroys their influence for Christ in this world. And that is **the inconceivable idea that sin is OK**. Look at verse 1 again. Paul is saying here, "Just because God's amazing, abounding grace covers all our sin, does this give us the license to live any way we please, sinning without a care?" And he answers his own question in verse 2 with the strongest words possible in the Greek language. "Certainly not!!" Literally he said, "May it never be!" In fact, the King James Version is even stronger, saying, "God forbid!", though that is a mistranslation of the original language. But the King James translators were trying to make a point. God has called us to sanctification, to a godly life that will glorify Him. And to presume upon God's grace by continuing to willfully sin after you are saved is the highest ingratitude and insult to a loving, holy God that you can ever show. It is saying to God, "So what, God, that You gave Your only Son to die for me. I don't care. I don't have to try to please You by the way I live. Because You are going to forgive me anyway".

Let me ask you something. If you are a parent, does it not break your heart when your child stubbornly rebels against your rules and your discipline? Are you not grieved if you have grown children, and they totally forsake the way you raised them? Does not your soul burn with agitation when you see or hear of another child who treats their parents that way? How, then, can we ever excuse ourselves from living in unchecked sin by saying that it doesn't matter because grace abounds? The fact is, it is impossible to do that. It is impossible to live in habitual, unrepentant sin after you are saved if you are truly a child of God. You say, "How come, preacher?" Well, because of this transforming truth: **the moment we were saved we also died with Christ**.

I want you to do a quick word search with me beginning in vs. 2, and notice the words **died**, **death**, or **crucified**. Look at verse 2. In every verse from verse 2-7 we read that the child of God has died to his old, sinful nature, the nature that we all inherited from the head of the race, Adam. And this death to our Adamic, sinful nature took place the moment we trusted Christ and were saved. “If any man be in Christ he is a new creation. Old things are passed away....” When you trusted Christ, in less than a nanosecond your old, sinful nature died and you received the new nature of God in your soul. Verse six describes this death to your old nature most graphically. Paul says that your old nature, your sinful nature, was crucified with Jesus on the cross. It died! And the purpose was that the body of sin might be done away with. And that means your sin nature died that the power of sin might be done away with in your life. In the NKJV, in your margin you’ll notice that it says the words “done away with” means to “render inoperative”. That is one meaning of the words, but the meaning of the Greek in this incidence is actually “to put an end to”, to “abolish”. It is the same word that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 13:8 when he said that when Jesus returns prophecies will fail. There will be no more prophecies, they will be abolished. He also used the word in saying that when Christ returned knowledge would vanish away. There will no longer be a need for the gift of knowledge. It will cease forever.

And beloved, that’s exactly what happens to the power of sin in your life when you die with Christ. Sin’s power has been abolished in your life, it has been broken forever. Look at verse 7. And the meaning is that those who die with Christ are released from the **penalty** of sin and also the **power** of sin. And you begin to live a godly, holy, sanctified life under the influence of the new nature that is in you, the nature of Christ. That is the reason that I said a few moments ago that it is impossible for a person who is truly born again to continue to live in habitual sin. Because the nature that causes sin is now dead, abolished. So how can something that is dead control anything anymore? But instead, in the life of the Christian there is a new nature, alive and well, the nature of God. And that nature is fueling the growth of holiness, just like the old nature used to fuel the growth of sin. Here’s the way John MacArthur puts it:

“There is no such thing as divine life without divine living. The truly saved person lives a new and godly life in a new and godly realm. He now and forever lives in God’s realm of grace and righteousness and can never again live in Satan’s realm of self and sin. **As the natural, sinful, unregenerate man cannot restrain the manifestation of what he is, neither can the regenerate man.**”

And what the regenerate man is, is a man with the nature of God! And he can’t restrain it.

Now, the growth in holiness in a Christian's life can be painfully slow at times. Many times it's like Chuck Swindoll's book title says, three steps forward and two steps backwards, or sometimes even two steps forward and three steps backwards. But over the long haul, beloved, if you are truly born again, the new nature of Christ within you will gradually rise forth and shine on the outside of you. You will become more and more like Jesus and you will become more and more committed to serving Him. And if you don't then something is fundamentally wrong with your commitment. Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote, "Holiness starts where justification finishes, and if holiness does not start, we have the right to suspect that justification never started either". And may I say that on judgment day there will be many who say, "Lord, Lord, I walked an aisle and I prayed a prayer and I got baptized", and Jesus is going to say, "Depart from me, I never knew you". For that prayer was not a prayer of true commitment, and there was no death with Christ to the old life, and no resurrection to the new. There was no change. Sin still ruled. Like MacArthur said, salvation is not just a **legal transaction** it is also a **miraculous transformation**.

But let me repeat again the **transforming truth** about sanctification. We can live sanctified lives, because when we were saved **we died with Christ**. Our old nature that caused us to sin has been abolished, and we have the new nature of God that lives within us and produces holiness.

Now, we cannot conclude the message today without addressing one question that I'm sure is exploding in some of your minds. Because you are saved and you know you are saved. You have God's perfect peace of salvation in the depth of your soul that nothing can shake. And you are thinking, "But why am I still so weak at times? My sins are ever before me, like David said. And I know like Isaiah said that even my best works are still filthy rags in God's eyes. So, if my old nature is dead why is sin so overpowering in my life at times, and how can I overcome it?"

Well, please listen carefully and I will tell you. **You and I still sin after we are saved because we listen to and obey a powerless voice**, the voice of Satan. Satan whispers in our ears, tempting us to sin. But what is he whispering to? He is not whispering to a sin nature that he can dominate like he once did when we were lost, for that nature is now dead. He is whispering to the same nature that he whispered to on the mountain of temptation, the nature of Jesus. And when he tempted Jesus to sin, Jesus commanded, "Get behind me, Satan", and Satan fled like a scalded dog. Friends, when you sin as a Christian, it is because you are cowering down to a toothless tiger, who roars ferociously, but devours only those who lie down and let him.

Turn in your Bibles for a moment to Colossians 2:13-15. Verses 13-14 of this passage tells us that when we were saved we were made alive in Christ and forgiven for all of our sins. They were nailed to the cross with Jesus and the debt was paid in full. Hallelujah! But notice the blessing of verse 15. Verse 15 says that Jesus not only paid the debt for our sins at the cross, but that He also disarmed principalities

and powers, making a public spectacle of them. What is he talking about? He is talking about disarming all of the demonic powers of hell, including the prince of hell, the devil. And the words of the original means that Jesus stripped Satan of all his power at the cross. He has no authority over you and me anymore. That is why Paul could write, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Beloved, please listen to me! God did not set you up to fail in the Christian life! When Jesus died for your sins, He set you up to win when you die but also to win right here and now! For what glory does God get from a child of His over whom the devil still has control? Who forever stumbles and falls into sin? No glory on this earth! The only glory He receives from that child is when he enters into Heaven solely by the blood of the Lamb. But God’s will for you and for me is that we bring Him glory with every thought, every word, every action, every breath. That’s what sanctification is all about.

So preacher, if God has really set me up to win in this life, if He has really given me power over the devil and all of the imps of hell, how can I flesh this out? How can I live a holy, sanctified life? Well, God has given us two commands which, if you will obey, will enable you to do it. They are simple and they are right there in the Word for us to read and remember. The first command is, **reckon yourself as dead**. Look at verse 11. The word “reckon” means to consider. Just consider what God says about your old nature is true. Consider, or believe, that your old nature is dead and has no authority over you. Believe that Satan has no authority over your new nature, but rather, you have all authority over him. Believe that God has set you up to win! You will never defeat the devil in your life until you believe that you can.

So you must **reckon yourself as dead**. But then you must **present yourself as alive**. Look at verse 13. Every day we get up we go to God and say, “Lord, today I present myself to you, everything that I am. I present my hands, my feet, my tongue – everything – I present my entire body to You as Your instrument of righteousness. Now, please take me and use me for your glory”. This is exactly what Paul says again in 12:1. “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”. And beloved, when you reckon yourself as dead, and then present yourself as alive, do you know what God does? He makes you a **perfect promise**. Look again at verse 14. Brothers and sisters, you can take that promise to the bank of Heaven! Sin shall not have dominion over the child of God who understands his power over sin and who presents himself completely to God as His instrument in His hands. And that child will bring great glory to God, and just like the writer of Hebrews said about Jesus, God will give that child the oil of gladness above all of his companions.