

Week 21

Salvation From the Power of Sin

Key Verses

Romans 6:6-7 "Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for the one who has died is freed from sin."

+ Introduction

You have probably heard the phrase, "ignorance is bliss." It means if you do not know about something negative or potentially hurtful, you will not worry about it – you will be happy in your ignorance. That may be true about some things, but it is not the case when it comes to biblical truth. Ignorance in regard to theology can lead to fear and defeat in the daily practice of the Christian life. Ignorance is not bliss – it could lead to tragic spiritual failure.

In our lesson for today, we will explore the practical issue of living a victorious Christian life. We know that Christ has saved us from the sting of sin and death, and we also know that a day will come when we can live free from the presence of sin in our glorified bodies. But, what about now? 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?

The time between salvation and glorification is called "sanctification." The Baptist Faith & Message explains it like this:

"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." ¹

Wayne Grudem defines sanctification like this, "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." ²

So, based on Scripture, this is the practical, present tense aspect of our salvation:

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**.

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

+ 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."³

+ 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. As it says in Romans,

ROMANS 6:6-7 *"Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for the one who has died is freed from sin."*

Now, this does not mean that we are suddenly sinless and perfect. It means that we are set free from the power of sin. Continuing in Romans 6, Paul writes

ROMANS 6:12-14 *"Therefore sin is not to reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the parts of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead, and your body's parts as instruments of righteousness for God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under the Law but under grace."*

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."⁴

Since sanctification is a process, we will never be completely free from temptation and sin in this life. 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, you were dominated by sin; now, sin no longer has power over you; you can refuse it.

+ Two Natures and Their Solutions

The believer actually has two natures dwelling within them: the flesh and the Spirit.

GALATIANS 5:16-17 *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want.”*

To “walk” in verse 16 means to “live your life.” So, we live the Christian life 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 in this way:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: sexual immorality, impurity, indecent behavior, ²⁰ idolatry, witchcraft, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” It is 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? Chafer explains, “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.” ⁵ To have victory over temptation, we live by faith and in dependence on the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

+ God’s Role in Our Sanctification

Sanctification is primarily the work of God (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Philippians 1:6 says *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work among you will complete it by the day of Christ Jesus.”* 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? He equips us with His Holy Spirit, who gives us the power and ability to resist temptation and to live a victorious, fruitful Christian life. The Holy Spirit produces those qualities in us as we walk in faith and obedience.

+ 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). In Philippians, Paul explains both roles together, man's and God's:

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13 *"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to [j]desire and to work for His good pleasure."*

"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, or 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 does not shortcut the process for me. I have to be intentional about prayer, Worship, Bible Study attendance, service, stewardship, sharing my faith, and more. None of those things happen automatically. There are many commands in the New Testament that the Lord expects the believer to obey - He did not 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 (Philippians 1:6a); I respond by being actively involved in the process (Philippians 2:12); God is at work in me all along the way (Philippians 2:13) and He will perfect me all the way until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6b)!

+ 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 and 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 through 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?

1 JOHN 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

The keyword in this verse 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 two things:

1. Whatever it is that we did, we acknowledge it as sin. We are sinners by nature and practice. Call it what it is; do not make excuses and do not generalize.
2. We agree with Him that our sin is forgiven based on Jesus' death on the cross. 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. God does not put you on the bench for a while or send you to "time out." You are forgiven – believe it! Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 are powerful passages dealing with confession of sin. Psalm 51 is David's confession following his sin of adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).

+ What Happens When I Sin?

"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. At these times, 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 everyone who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.'*"⁶

- ¹ The Baptist Faith and Message, June 14, 2000, p. 11.
- ² Wayne Grudem and Elliot Grudem. *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009, p. 99.
- ³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, copyright 1926, 1953, revised edition 1974; Dallas Theological Seminary, p. 189.
- ⁴ Grudem and Grudem. *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, p. 99.
- ⁵ Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, p. 190.
- ⁶ Grudem and Grudem. *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, p. xw101.