

# The Necessity of Sanctification: A Brief Refutation of the Carnal Christian Heresy

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Throughout its history the church has been plagued with two heretical teachings regarding sanctification. One error *confounds* justification with sanctification and thus makes salvation dependent upon faith in Christ *and* good works. This is the heresy of legalism. This teaching in various forms is found throughout church history: the Judaizers of Paul's day, the Ebionites, various church fathers, Roman Catholicism, certain Anabaptist groups and various modern cults. The other main heresy regarding sanctification completely *divorces* sanctification from justification in such a manner that the necessity of sanctification in the Christian life is completely denied. Sanctification is said to be optional for believers. This is the heresy of antinomianism. The ancient form of antinomianism was Nicolaitan Gnosticism. The modern form that plagues "evangelicalism" is dispensationalism.

Classical dispensationalism teaches that repentance belongs to the "dispensation of law" and not "the dispensation of grace." Old style dispensationalists will argue that if repentance and sanctification are required of Christians, then salvation is not by faith in Christ alone but also in works. In such a scheme, professing Christians who refuse to submit to Christ as Lord, and who refuse to lead lives characterized by obedience and holiness, are called "carnal Christians." This heretical teaching has been called "easy-believism" and "the carnal Christian heresy." Sadly, such teaching has led countless thousands of poor souls down the broad path that leads to destruction. Many churches are filled with antinomian, unregenerate professors of Christianity who merely think of Christ as a fire escape from hell--who want the blessings of heaven but who are unwilling to depart from the sinful pleasures of this world. With the current popularity of such teaching a consideration of the necessity of sanctification is in order. First, however, it should be noted that although the Bible teaches the necessity of personal holiness or sanctification in a believer's life, it *never* gives personal holiness a meritorious role in salvation. Sanctification is not necessary in order to be saved but everyone who is saved will be sanctified. In other words, faith without works is dead. It is counterfeit. Christ saves His people from the guilt of sin and from its power.

1. The first and most important reason why Christians are required to be holy is because God is holy. Both Testaments teach that the imperative of personal holiness is founded upon God's holy nature. "For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.... For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44-45; cf. 19:2; 20:7, 26; Ex. 19:6; Nu. 15:40; Dt. 23:14). "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Note, that God's holiness is the ground for holy living. "It is God's holiness that is foundational to His commandments.

And since that is true, those who follow His commandments become holy like Him."<sup>1</sup> As children by adoption we are to imitate our Father's ethical perfection. "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 Jn. 3:3). Jesus summarized His teaching on biblical ethics in the Sermon on the Mount with the statement: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48).

The Bible emphasizes the Lord's holiness above all the other attributes. Once one understands God's holiness he will understand the necessity of holiness in the covenant community. God's holiness refers primarily to two things, both of which are intimately related. First, Jehovah's holiness refers to His uniqueness. God is absolutely distinct from every created thing. God is infinitely majestic and exalted above finite creation. "To who will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him" (Isa. 40:18; cf. 45:5; Dt. 4:35, 39)? Second, Jehovah is infinitely pure. God is perfect morally or ethically. If one wants to know what is good one must find out from God for He is the foundation of morality. "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (Jn. 1:5). There is nothing evil, wicked or unethical in God's nature. He is perfect. The Bible contrasts Jehovah's uniqueness and ethical perfection with the immoral and arbitrary deities of heathenism. "Who is like You, O Lord among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness" (Ex. 15:11)? As Jehovah is ethical, pure separate and unique from the pagan gods He requires His own people to be sanctified and separate ethically from a pagan lifestyle, from every form of evil. Every aspect of a Christian's behavior is to reflect his relationship to God. Believers are not to conform themselves to the world. "As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people. Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty'" (2 Cor. 6:16-18). God's holiness is the perfection and crown of all His attributes. Thus, the angels in heaven proclaim: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:3; cf. Rev. 4:8)! To argue that Christians are not required to be holy is an implicit denial of God's most exalted attribute, His holiness.

When Christians understand God's holiness they will understand His hatred of evil. Jehovah of necessity hates sin with a perfect hatred; His whole Being reacts against it. "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on wickedness" (Hab. 1:13). "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity" (Ps. 5:4-5). Professing Christians would not be so easily fooled by antinomian heresies if they were taught the truth regarding God's holy hatred of sin and all the workers of iniquity. God hates all doers of evil (Ps. 5:5) and is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11). The idea that God sent Christ into the world to remove the guilt of people's sins so they could continue to live wicked lives; so they could "sin as they please and still have remission" is an insult to God's holiness. When Paul asks the rhetorical question: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1), he answers with an emphatic "certainly not"! "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken,

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<sup>1</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1978), p. 38.

let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29).

2. The second reason that believers are required to be holy is that Jesus Christ is both savior and Lord. The carnal Christian heresy is dependent upon the idea that people can accept Christ as their Savior while at the same time rejecting Him as Lord. People are told that they can receive only part of Christ (as if He were a pie) and that they can continue living in sin. Then when they decide to get really spiritual they can "let Him be Lord." Can Christ be received piecemeal? Does the Bible teach that people can pick and choose to trust in only part of Jesus and still be saved? Such teaching is unbiblical and ludicrous. One must believe in Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures. One must believe in Jesus' atoning work (His humiliation, suffering and sacrificial death) as well as His resurrection. Christ, the victorious Savior, has ascended and sits at the right hand of God the Father. Our Lord's humiliation is the foundation of His exaltation. Then, during the exaltation, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, applies the cross to people of every nation. His humiliation and exaltation are organically connected and cannot be separated. Thus Paul wrote: "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom 14:7-9). A Christ who is not King and Lord over all is a false Christ, a figment of one's imagination. The carnal Christian heresy is an implicit denial of the necessity and power of Christ's resurrection.

Given the importance that Scripture gives to Christ's resurrection and lordship one should not be surprised that Jesus' lordship was an essential ingredient in apostolic preaching. The message of the apostles was "Believe on *the Lord Jesus Christ*, and you will be saved" (Ac. 16:31). Paul said, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus *the Lord*" (2 Cor. 4:5). In the book of Acts the word "savior" appears only twice (5:31; 13:23), while the title "Lord" occurs 92 times. The most commonly quoted Old Testament passages in the New Testament are Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 2:7, both of which speak of Christ's exaltation and lordship. Paul says that Christians are to confess with the mouth "the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 10:9). Can a person honestly say "Jesus is my Lord" when he refuses to submit to His lordship; when he is living in open rebellion against the king's precepts? Reisinger writes, "How in God's name did we come to huckstering off Jesus as some kind of hell-insurance policy, when the Bible announced Him *as Lord* and exalted Him to a throne? The New Testament preachers preached His *lordship*, and sinners received Him as *Lord*. There is not one example of Christ being offered any other way.... God-centered evangelism proclaims the biblical message of the *lordship of Christ* at the outset, not as a second work of grace, or an act of optional consecration later."<sup>2</sup> Real Christians receive Christ as prophet, priest and king; and, as *king*, Jesus rules over us and subdues sin in our lives.

3. The Bible contains many imperatives that require obedience and holiness in God's people. Jehovah said to Abraham, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless" (Gen.

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest C. Reisinger, *Today's Evangelism: Its Message and Methods* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Craig Press, 1982), pp. 25, 27.

17:1). The Israelites were repeatedly commanded "to be holy, for I am Holy" (Lev. 11:44). The covenant people were told by God to listen to, obey, follow and keep all of God's precepts. People under the Old Covenant were saved solely by grace. However, they were saved to be a holy nation. The giving of the law to Israel on Sinai came *after* their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The moral law was given not to save a people but was given to a people already saved. God saved Israel so that they would love, serve and glorify Him by living and worshiping according to His statutes. When Israel affirmed the covenant with God they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7).

The requirement of holiness and obedience to God's word is not something only for the nation of Israel or only for a former dispensation. It also is the duty of every new covenant-era believer. A main purpose of Christ's ministry through Paul was "to make the Gentiles *obedient*" (Rom. 15:18). Paul received his apostleship "for *obedience* in all things" (2 Cor. 2:9). In his first letter to Corinth, Paul reminded the brethren of the importance and necessity of keeping the moral law. "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters" (1 Cor. 7:19). Personal godliness was a top priority for Paul. Thus he instructed Timothy, "For bodily exercise profits a little, but *godliness* is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). Paul says that people are saved *in order to do good works*. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Peter concurs, "To the pilgrims of the Dispersion...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for *obedience* and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:1-2). Paul says that sanctification is essential if one is to serve Jesus Christ. "Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). Therefore, "[l]et everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

One of the clearest passages of the absolute necessity of holiness is Hebrews 12:14: "Pursue *peace* with all people, and *holiness*, without which no one will see the Lord." "In the Greek text *peace* is feminine; *holiness*, or the process of becoming holy, is masculine; the relation pronoun *which* is masculine singular; therefore the verse says that no man can see the Lord without going through the process of becoming holy."<sup>3</sup> The Greek word for "follow" (KJV) or "pursue" indicates an earnest pursuit or a dedicated striving after.

The holiness spoken of in this passage does not refer to an imputed holiness for: (a) the audience consisted of professing Christians who were already supposed to be justified; and (b) the verb pursue (which is present active imperative) indicates a *continuous* vigorous pursuit. This continuous pursuit is inconsistent with justification which is a one-time instantaneous event. Furthermore, the author of Hebrews is *not* saying, "strive after holiness as the meritorious cause of salvation" for the Bible teaches that: (a) eternal life is the free gift of God to undeserving sinners (Rom. 3:24; 4:5; 1 Jn. 5:11); (b) all our good works are tainted with sin and non-meritorious (Lu. 10:17); (c) salvation is of grace and not of works (Gal. 2:16).

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *What do Presbyterians Believe?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965), p. 135.

This passage teaches that those who are justified are progressively made holy (subjectively) in order to be prepared to come into God's presence. John Brown writes, "Without sincere, habitual devotedness to God through Christ Jesus, we can never attain the heavenly happiness; and that for two reasons: (1) Such is the unalterable determination of God; and (2) this unalterable determination of God is not an arbitrary arrangement, but corresponds with the nature of things. A person not sanctified and not devoted to God is entirely unfit for celestial enjoyments."<sup>4</sup> Without holiness no one will come into God's presence. One may be orthodox in doctrine, diligent in helping the poor, perfect in church attendance and zealous in witnessing to others. Yet without personal holiness such a person is spiritually dead and destined for hell. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 Jn. 1:6). There is perhaps no thought within man that is more foolish and pernicious than the idea that men who are not purified, sanctified or made holy in their life after professing Christ should after death be taken into the very presence of God to enjoy His infinite perfections. A person who was not made holy would not enjoy God. Looking into the face of infinite holiness would not be a reward to such a person. Although it is true that Christians are yet sinners until they are perfected at death, sanctification begins on earth the moment a person is born again. Jehovah who is the God of the living will not admit dead members to His eternal kingdom.

What the author of Hebrews stated negatively, Christ (in the Sermon on the Mount) stated positively. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:8). Thus, Jesus, warned His followers: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt. 7:21). To those who refuse to repent and obey God's word He will declare: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Mt. 7:23)! The unclean are not permitted to enter the city of God's glorious presence, "and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27; cf. 22:15 ASV). A thrice holy God who cannot look upon iniquity and who hates all the workers of iniquity will have no fellowship with people who are not walking after the Spirit. Are you walking in accordance with God's holy word or are you walking in the flesh? Are you serving Christ with your whole heart or are you serving your own sinful lusts? "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Gal. 6:7-8). "For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification" (1 Th. 4:7 ASV).

4. The idea that holiness is optional for believers is disproved by the Bible's teaching on repentance. Repentance is never presented in Scripture as optional or for Israel only but is a vital element of the gospel message. "[A]nd that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Christ emphasized repentance in His preaching (Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:14, 15). He warned His disciples, saying, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:5). John the Baptizer (Jesus' forerunner) emphasized the need for repentance (Mk. 1:4; Lu. 3:7-9). He told the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Brood of vipers!

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<sup>4</sup> John Brown, *Hebrews* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1961 [1862], p. 637.

Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt. 3:7-10). Those who reject the necessity of holiness often will argue that repentance is a Jewish doctrine that does not apply to the church (which they erroneously assert is a parenthesis in God's plan). Such teaching is refuted by the apostle Paul himself. Paul said, I "taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, *and also to Greeks*, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ac. 20:21). To the Greek Athenians Paul said, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Ac. 17:30).

Repentance means that a person has a change of mind concerning God, Christ, self and sin. A person who repents understands that Jehovah is the one and only true God. He is a God of righteousness and holiness that will not tolerate evil. A person who repents is no longer hostile or indifferent regarding Christ but now believes in Him according to the Scriptures. He regards Jesus as the pearl of great price (Mt. 13:46); as someone who must be cherished, served and worshiped no matter what the cost. A person who repents sees sin as exceedingly sinful. Sin is no longer viewed as a light thing but as wicked and defiling; an act of rebellion against God's throne. Repentance is an inward change of mind that leads to a change of life. A person who sincerely repents leads a godly life; that is, he brings forth fruits worthy of repentance. Repentance does *not* save anyone. That is, it is non-meritorious and does not eliminate the guilt of sin (only Christ's atoning death can do that). However, true faith and real repentance are the fruits of regeneration. A genuine Christian cannot exist without them. "[W]herever there is true faith, there is also real repentance. The two are but two aspects of the same turning-a turning away from sin in the direction of God."<sup>5</sup> Just as no one is saved without the instrument of faith which lays hold of Christ, no one is saved without a change of mind concerning Christ and sin. Furthermore, just as one must look at a person's life in order to see if he has genuine faith (1 Jn. 1:6; 2:3, 4; 3:10; Jas. 2:14-16); one must also look at the fruits of repentance to see if genuine repentance has occurred (Mt. 3:8; 7:16-20). Do you have a "godly sorrow [that] produces repentance to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10)? Are you out of a love for Christ and hatred for your sin continually putting off your bad habits and endeavoring after new obedience?

5. The Bible teaches that Christians have been bought with a price-the precious blood of the Son of God. Therefore, believers are not their own, but belong to Jesus Christ. Paul said, "Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8). He instructed the Corinthians to stop sinning with their bodies because Christ bought them. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). If a person is a Christian he belongs to Christ and must serve Him with both body and soul in every area of life. "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may

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<sup>5</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), p. 487.

put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God" (1 Pet. 2:15-16). The professing Christian does not have the option of serving sin and self. "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness" (Rom. 6:16)? Are you a slave of Christ or a slave of sin, self and Satan? You cannot serve two masters. There is no fence-sitting in God's universe. If you are *not* living for Christ then you are living against Him. Paul connects the death of Christ with His ownership of believers in such a way as to render impossible the idea that one can benefit from Christ's sacrifice while repudiating His kingship.

6. The Scriptures teach that people who habitually engage in wicked behavior are *not* Christians. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Paul says, "and such were [past tense] some of you." Many people in the Corinthian church had lived a lifestyle characterized by sinful behavior, but once the people were converted, that wicked lifestyle was put off. Paul says that believers should not even eat with professing Christians who engage in such wicked behavior. "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person" (1 Cor. 5:11). Hodge writes, "A man professing to be a Christian professes to renounce all of these sins; if he does not act consistently with his profession, he is not to be recognized as a Christian. We are not to do anything which would sanction the assumption that the offenses here referred to are tolerated by the gospel."<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon concurs, "If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows the Lord's will, but does not mean to attend to it, you are not to pamper his presumptions, but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved. Do not suppose that the Gospel is magnified or God-glorified by going to the world...and telling them that they may be saved at this moment by simply 'accepting Christ' as their Savior, while they are wedded to their idols, and their hearts are still in love with sin. If I do so, I tell them a lie, pervert the Gospel, insult Christ, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness."<sup>7</sup>

The apostle John repeatedly condemns the idea that someone can be a Christian yet continue in a sinful lifestyle. Christians still have a sinful nature, but it manifests itself in isolated acts of sin, not in continuance of sin. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:3-4). A believer will sometimes fall into sin, but he will not walk in it. The apostle uses present continuous tense verbs five times in chapter three to describe sinful non-Christian behavior. "Whoever commits sin, also commits lawlessness" (3:4).

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 [1857, 59]), p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Spurgeon, in *Today's Evangelism*, pp. 25-26.

"Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him" (3:6). "He who sins is of the devil" (3:9). The person who continually walks in sin is lawless, does not have a relationship to Christ, is of the devil and has not been born-again. Such teaching is clearly incompatible with the carnal Christian heresy.

James teaches the same doctrine from a different perspective when he says "that faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:20). James in contending against antinomian hypocrites says that faith that does not result in good works or obedience is a dead faith. It is not a real saving faith but is merely a hypocritical profession. Genuine faith always results in a changed life. Manton writes, "Bare assent to the articles of religion doth not infer true faith....Well, then do not mistake a naked illumination, or some general acknowledgement of the articles of religion for faith. A man may be right in opinion and judgment, but of vile affections; and a carnal Christian is in as great a danger as a pagan, or idolater, or heretic; for though his judgment be sound, yet his manners are heterodox and heretical. True believing is not an act of the understanding only, but a work of 'all the heart' Acts viii. 37."<sup>8</sup> As Paul says "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:24-25).

7. The Bible teaches that those who are justified are also regenerated and sanctified. Justification refers to God's legal declaration based on the imputation of Christ's righteousness and should never be confounded with regeneration and sanctification, but although they are distinct, they cannot be separated. In other words, justification cannot occur unless a person is regenerated; for true faith cannot exist apart from the new birth. Also, everyone who is justified is sanctified. Regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit in man which changes a person's heart (i.e., the whole human nature). The carnal Christian heresy asserts that a person can be justified while retaining the old nature. According to Scripture that is impossible. However, (contrary to Romanism) regeneration, faith, and sanctification are not grounds for justification. They are non-meritorious and do not contribute one iota to a person's salvation. Christ's merits alone are the ground. Christ "saves His people not only from the guilt of sin, but from its dominating power as well. If a believer is not changed, he is not a believer.... Justification with God is apart from the *merit* of works. That does not mean that justification is apart from the *existence* of works."<sup>9</sup>

The apostle Paul taught that union with Christ in death and resurrection is not only the foundation of justification, but of sanctification as well. Anyone who partakes of the benefits of Christ's death for salvation also must die to sin and walk in newness of life. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism unto death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Manton, *James* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1962 [1693]), p. 240.

<sup>9</sup> John Gerstner, "The Nature of Justifying Faith" in Don Kistler, editor, *Justification by Faith Alone* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), pp. 114-115.

likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.... And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:1-7, 18).

The indicatives of Romans chapter 6 which speak of the reality of a believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection lead immediately to the imperatives of 6:12 and following. Since in chapter 6 a Christian's obligations are based on a historical reality (i.e., something that is true for every believer), one cannot deny the necessity of obedience without also denying the reality of the mystical union which is the foundation for personal holiness. To assert that believers can be justified without also being sanctified is to say that Christ removes the penalty of sin but not the power of it. Such thinking is a denial of the comprehensive nature of salvation which is taught throughout Scripture. Marshall writes, "The Gospel-faith maketh us to come to Christ with a thirsty appetite that we may drink of living water, even of His sanctifying Spirit (John 7:37, 38), and cry out earnestly to Him to save us, not only from Hell, but from sin, saying 'Teach us to do Thy will; Thy Spirit is good' (Ps. 143:10); 'Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned' (Jer. 31:18); 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me' (Ps. 51:10). This is the way whereby the doctrine of salvation by grace doth necessitate us to holiness of life, by constraining us to seek for it by faith in Christ, *as a substantial part* of that 'salvation' which is freely given to us through Christ."<sup>10</sup>

8. The necessity of sanctification is clearly exhibited in the covenant of grace.<sup>11</sup> "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:33). According to Scripture becoming a Christian is not the mere acceptance

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<sup>10</sup>Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (1692) as quoted in A. W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> A description of the differences between the Old and New Testament expressions of the covenant of grace are beyond the purview of this study. Calvin's clarification is helpful in avoiding dispensational-heretical notions regarding this passage. He writes: "A question may however be here moved, Was the grace of regeneration wanting to the Fathers under the Law? But this is quite preposterous. What, then, is meant when God denies here that the Law was written on the heart before the coming of Christ? To this I answer, that the Fathers, who were formerly regenerated, obtained this favour through Christ, so that we may say, that it was as it were transferred to them from another source. The power then to penetrate into the heart was not inherent in the Law, but it was a benefit transferred to the Law from the Gospel. This is one thing. Then we know that this grace of God was rare and little known under the Law; but that under the Gospel the gifts of the Spirit have been more abundantly poured forth, and that God has dealt more bountifully with his Church. But still the main thing is, to consider what the Law of itself is, and what is peculiar to the Gospel, especially when a comparison is made between the Law and the Gospel. For when this comparison ceases, this cannot be properly applied to the Law; but with regard to the Gospel it is said, that the Law is that of the letter, as it is called elsewhere, (Rom. vii 6;) and this also is the reason why Paul calls it the letter in 2 Cor. iii. 6, 'the letter killeth,' &c. By 'letter' he means not what Origen foolishly explained, for the perverted that passage as he did almost the whole Scripture: Paul does not mean there the simple and plain sense of the Law; for he calls it the letter for another reason, because it only set before the eyes of men what is right, and sounds it also in their ears. And the word *letter* refers to what is written, as though he had said, The Law was written on stones and was therefore a letter. But the Gospel-what is it? It is spirit, that is, God not only addresses his word to the ears of men and sets it before their eyes, but he also inwardly teaches their hearts and minds. This is then the solution of the question: the Prophet speaks of the Law in itself, as apart from the Gospel, for the Law then is dead and destitute of the Spirit of regeneration."

of some facts regarding Jesus Christ. There is a change in people's inner nature brought about by God Himself which will make them capable of obedience. Matthew writes, "[T]he law shall be written in their hearts by the finger of the Spirit as formally it was written with tablets of stone. God writes his law in the hearts of all believers, makes it ready and familiar to them, at hand when they have occasion to use it, as that which is *written in the heart*, Prov. iii. 3. He makes them in care to observe it, for that which we are solicitous about is said to lie near our hearts. He works in them a disposition to obedience, a conformity of thought and affection to the rules of the divine law, as that of the copy to the original. This is here promised, and ought to be prayed for, that our duty may be done conscientiously and with delight."<sup>12</sup> Calvin adds, "To write the Law in the heart imports nothing less than so to form it, that the Law should rule there, and that there should be no feeling of the heart, not conformable and not consenting to its doctrine. It is hence then sufficiently clear, that no one can be turned so as to obey the Law, until he be regenerated by the Spirit of God; nay, that there is no inclination in man to act rightly, except God prepares his heart by his grace; in a word, that the doctrine of the letter is always dead, until God vivifies it by his Spirit."<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

The Bible teaches that the salvation achieved by Jesus Christ is comprehensive. Jesus is not a fire escape from hell or a heavenly hedonist who goes about handing out tickets to paradise. He came to save the elect from the guilt and *power* of sin. As Paul says, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10). The idea that Christ saves men from the guilt of sin yet leaves them wicked hypocrites brings great dishonor to the gospel of God. "Redemption would be a mockery without sanctification; for sin itself, and not the external wrath of God, is the cause of misery here, and eternal death hereafter. Hence, to deliver the fallen son of Adam from his guilt, and leave him under the power of corruption would be no salvation."<sup>14</sup>

Although the carnal Christian heresy may be a perfect match for our hedonistic, self-centered, relativistic, materialistic, man-worshipping culture, it is a deadly, soul-destroying, blasphemous teaching. It denigrates God by teaching that unholy, unrepentant, self-idolaters have fellowship and favor with the thrice holy Jehovah. It denigrates Christ by teaching that His merits (i.e., His precious blood and life) are ineffectual in changing human hearts. It denigrates the Holy Spirit by teaching that the Spirit of holiness cannot effectually apply Christ's atoning death to the elect. It denigrates the Church by teaching that she comes to the wedding feast with soiled and defiled garments. How can professing Christians adhere to a teaching that says one can be a truly saved person yet not love Jesus Christ. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, Co., n.d.), 4:606.

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 4:133.

<sup>14</sup> R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1985 [1878]), p. 664.

commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 Jn. 2:3-5). "If you love Me keep My commandments" (1 Jn. 14:15).

Once again we must emphasize what the necessity of sanctification does not mean. It doesn't mean that a believer's good works contribute to his salvation. According to the Bible, good works most certainly do not contribute to salvation (cf. Rom. 3:20-31). It doesn't mean that Christians are perfect or sinless. They clearly are not (cf. 1 Jn. 1:8-10). It also doesn't mean that Christians never backslide. Sometimes they backslide grievously. However, it does mean that as a consequence of regeneration, justification and union with Christ believers do have the slavery or power of sin broken in their lives. May God enable us to live a life consistent with this great truth of redemption.

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[HOME PAGE](#)