

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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### APOSTOLIC LOGIC: (ONCE MORE) HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE? (Part 1)

Most of you will recognize that the question stated above comes directly from the title of the well-known book written by the late Francis Schaeffer. The *Then* is the operative word. Schaeffer was specifically pointing to the truth as expressed in the teachings of the Protestant Reformers.<sup>1</sup> *Since* we serve a sovereign God who has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, we *ought* to live in that light. But there is another important part of this little syllogism. Before the *then* there must be an *if*. The *then* is the second step that presupposes a proper understanding of the *if* (the first step). Thus the syllogistic steps would look like this: *if this* then *that*. Historically, Evangelical churches in the past have understood the Gospel in the sense laid out by the triple knowledge of the Heidelberg Catechism: Guilt, Grace, Gratitude. However, a profound shift has occurred, not only in our society, but in our churches as well. This can be seen in a number of areas: Seeker churches (the user-friendly model) for instance, intentionally design new and contemporary forms of worship, not in order to be consciously biblical, but to mirror the musical and cultural preferences of the society at large. The innovations do not stop there. These churches do not claim to have rejected historic evangelical theology (they insist most emphatically that they are Bible-believing evangelicals), but they have repackaged it to fit the likes and dislikes of so-called seekers. One area where this is most apparent is in the area of felt-needs – one that especially centers on the self. The glorification of the self, or at least the preoccupation with the self, is obviously appealing to the therapeutic mentality in modern America. As Phillip Rieff has observed, “[The] self, improved, is the ultimate concern of modern culture.”<sup>2</sup> Self-satisfaction, or having a keen sense of self-worth or self-esteem, is *not* what the Bible means by sanctification! Growing in grace does *not* mean learning to love and accept yourself! In order to understand (and experientially come to know) what the Scriptures mean by sanctification, we will have to replace these popular psychological and false notions with Biblical and theological ones. One of my former professors, Sinclair Ferguson, has written, “One of our greatest needs is for the ability rightly to discern some of the directions in which evangelicalism is heading, or, perhaps more accurately, disintegrating. We desperately need the long-term perspective that the history of the church gives us. Even within the period of my own Christian life, the span between my teenage years in the 1960s and my forties in the 1990s, there has been a sea change on evangelicalism. Many *positions* that once were standard evangelical teaching are now, after only three decades, regarded as either reactionary, or even prehistoric.”<sup>3</sup> Robert Wuthnow (who is an evangelical) has noted how Americans have an overt tendency to psychologize life, and this in turn has had a direct impact on how the church functions. “At one time theologians argued that the chief purpose of humankind was to glorify God. Now it would seem that the logic has been reversed: the chief purpose of God is to glorify humankind. Spirituality no longer is true or good because it meets absolute standards of truth or goodness, but because it helps me get along. I am the judge of its worth. If it helps me find a vacant parking space, I know my spirituality is on the right track. If it leads me into the wilderness, calling me to face dangers I would rather not deal with at all, then it is a form of spirituality I am unlikely to choose.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, “the triumph of the therapeutic” has triumphed not only in the culture at large, but also within the professing Christian Church as well. Evangelicals gladly exchanged the language of the Bible and theology for the language of contemporary psychology. What has this to do with sanctification? Cornelius Plantinga shows us the link. “Why retrieve the awareness of sin? Why restate the Christian doctrine of sin?

The reason is that although traditional Christianity is true, its truth saws against the grain of much in contemporary culture and therefore needs constant sharpening. Christianity's major doctrines need regular restatement so that people may believe them, or believe them anew. Its classic awarenesses need to be evoked so that people may have them, or have them again. Recalling and confessing our sin is like taking out the garbage: once is not enough. But anyone who tries to recover the knowledge of sin these days must overcome long odds. To put it mildly, modern consciousness does not encourage moral reproach, in particular, it does not encourage self-reproach. Preachers mumble about sin. The other traditional custodians of moral awareness often ignore, trivialize, or evade it. Some of the evasions take time and training. As Cornelius Plantinga has observed, schoolteachers no longer say anything as pointed as, "Stop it, please! You're disturbing the class!" For these are judgmental words. Instead, to a strong-armed youth who is rattling classroom windows with his tennis ball, educationally-correct teachers put a sequence of caring questions: "What are you doing? Why are you doing it? How does this make you feel?" The word *sin*, Plantinga adds, now finds its home mostly on dessert menus. "Peanut Butter Binge" and "Chocolate Challenge" are sinful; lying is not. The new measure for sin is caloric.<sup>5</sup> As Christians, we desperately need to recover the language of Scripture and the biblical meaning of such terms as *sin*, *justification*, and *sanctification*. God commands us to "be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). This is not just an Old Testament exhortation. We find the same language in the New Testament. "Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: *Be holy, because I am holy* (1 Pet. 1:15-16). This series aims to be more than just a theological analysis. The power of indwelling sin presents each of us with practical problems that directly affect how we live. At the same time, however, we need more than just good advice that is rooted in how we feel about ourselves. Frank Allred writes, "Without a keen awareness of our sinful condition and our natural helplessness to do anything that is pleasing to God, a life of holiness is impossible. The reason for this is twofold. *First*, as we have just seen, the motivation for holy living springs from a love for God -- love that is borne out of a deep sense of our indebtedness to his grace and mercy. *Second*, our ability to please him depends on our recognition that we can do nothing without daily supplies of his grace. As long as we have confidence in ourselves and in our own ability to do what God requires, we shall make no progress in holiness. The prevailing tendency to go soft on sin, therefore, is a serious hindrance to our understanding of holiness. The idea seems to be these days that to be thoroughly biblical about the depravity of human nature does not commend the gospel nor encourage believers in the Christian life. Once again, the truth is the exact opposite. Only when unbelievers realize their desperate condition will they seek the Lord, and only when believers recognize that nothing good lives in their sinful nature (Romans 7:18) will they seek God's grace to live holy lives. Self-confidence is the enemy of Christian holiness."<sup>6</sup>

- I. ***WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION? SOME IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS.*** Our English word *sanctify* comes from two Latin words (*sanctus*, holy; and *facere*, to make) – "to make holy." What does "holy" mean? The Old Testament word *qādosh* and the New Testament word *hagios* imply separation and consecration. The doctrine of sanctification is concerned with the *pollution* of sin.

**NOTE:** It is important to note that the *guilt* of sin (that state of deserving condemnation or of being liable to punishment because we have violated God's law) is dealt with in justification, though justification and sanctification must never be separated. These are, however, two distinct things. Anthony Hoekema makes these helpful remarks: "The following differences between justification and sanctification should be recognized:

- a. Justification removes the guilt of sin, whereas sanctification removes the pollution of sin and enables the believer to grow in his or her likeness to Christ.
- b. Justification takes place outside the believer and is a declaration made by God the Father about his or her judicial or legal status. Sanctification, however, takes place within the believer and progressively renews his or her nature.

- c. Justification takes place once and for all and is neither a process nor a repeated event. Sanctification, however, as it is usually understood, is a process that continues throughout life and is not completed until after this life is over. Why is it important to maintain these distinctions? *First*, to do full justice to biblical teaching on these Soteriological blessings. Further, to maintain the truth that justification means the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinner wholly apart from that believer's deeds – that, in other words, our justification is based solely on the suffering and obedience of Jesus Christ, and not on our own good works.”<sup>7</sup>

Reformed theologians speak of sanctification in two different senses. *First*, there is what is referred to as **definitive** sanctification. This has reference to the once and for all definitive act of sanctification that is an essential aspect of justification as expressed in texts like 1 Cor. 1:2 and 6:11. We will deal with this in some detail in Rom. 6:2. The *second* sense has to do with **progressive** sanctification, which has both a *negative* aspect and a *positive* aspect, involving *mortification* (putting to death sinful practices), and *vivification* (putting on the new man's practices). Definitive sanctification involves a *change of relationship* as well as *transformation*. Donald Macleod spells this out well: “What we are is radically altered. Our whole being is changed. Our humanness undergoes radical transformation. It is put most dramatically in these New Testament terms: *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation* (2 Corinthians 5:17). If we are in Christ, the *old man* is crucified, the *old man* is dead, the *old man* is done away with. We become new creatures in Christ Jesus.”<sup>8</sup>

II. ***THE MOTIVATING FORCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: GOD'S GRACE.*** The Apostle was aware that the grace of God was often an abused doctrine (Romans 3:8, 6:1, 15), especially where Titus was, in Crete. Paul himself had been charged with teaching that grace leads to license, that once you believe that you are saved by grace you can live anyway you wish, since you are no longer under Law. In the passage that precedes our text, the Apostle in 2:11-14 presents the *three* tenses of The Christian Life:

*Past*: “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (v. 11)

*Present*: “teaching us” (v. 12)

*Future*: “looking for the blessed hope” (v. 13).

In other words, God's grace not only redeems us, but it also reforms us and rewards us. “Teaching” in v. 12 in the Gk. is the word for training or disciplining. We are disciplined by grace. Believers who honestly understand the grace of God will not want to live in sin. They will turn from ungodliness and worldly lusts; they will live serious, clean, dedicated lives in this present world. There is no greater incentive for Christian living than the second coming of Jesus Christ. “Looking for that blessed (happy) hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God” is the more accurate translation of v. 13. God's glory dwelt here on earth in the person of Christ (John 1:14), but went back to heaven when He ascended (Acts 1:9). His glory now abides in the believer (1 Cor. 6:19-20). When Christ returns, we shall see His glory and share His glory (John 17:22-24). Paul speaks of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).<sup>9</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** Gene Getz, a remarkable Bible teacher who I encountered many years ago, highlights the need to understand grace by saying: “There is one other important question that must be answered before we go further – how has this grace, this unmerited favor of God, been revealed? If it is available to all men, how has it been manifested? Paul answers this question specifically in 2:14: Jesus Christ *gave himself*. God's grace was certainly obvious in the Old Testament – when He chose Abraham, when He chose the nation Israel to be His own special people, and when He continued to love them and bless them in spite of their disobedience. This, indeed, was God's grace. But it reaches its fullest manifestation when Christ came into the world. Thus John wrote, *The word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory*

of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of *grace and truth* (John 1:14). Jesus Christ was the perfect embodiment of God's grace. He was the sinless Son of God who died on the cross to become the perfect sacrifice for sin. His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension all reveal God's grace. The grace of God, then, has appeared to all men in Christ, both by what He did and by what He said. And that grace continues to be clearly evident to us today through the written record of Christ as we find it in the Bible. Just as Christ taught men who He was and why He came, so the message of the Bible, God's word, continues to reveal God's grace to all people, no matter what their race, color, creed, or position in life. He came to be the Savior of *all men*.<sup>10</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Schaeffer's book, *True Spirituality* (Tyndale, 1971), is, in my opinion, a classic. It also deals with this theme.

<sup>2</sup> Phillip Rieff, *The Triumph of The Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Harper & Row, 1968), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> S. Ferguson, "Repentance, Recovery, and Confession" in *Here We Stand: A Call From Confessing Evangelicals*, eds. J. Boice, B. Sasse (Baker, 1996), p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> R. Wuthnow, "Small Groups Forge New Notions of Community and The Sacred, *Christian Century* (Dec. 8, 1993), p. 1239.

<sup>5</sup> C. Plantinga, Jr., *Not The Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Eerdmans, 1995), p. X.

<sup>6</sup> F. Allred, *The Eclipse of The Gospel* (Grace Publications, 2001), p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> A. A. Hockema, *Saved By Grace* (Eerdmans, 1989), p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> D. Macleod, *A Faith To Live By: Christian Teaching that Makes a Difference* (Mentor, 1998), p. 177.

<sup>9</sup> W. W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on The New Testament* (Victor Books, 1992), p. 662.

<sup>10</sup> G. Getz, *A Profile for a Christian Life Style: A Study of Titus with 20<sup>th</sup> Century Lessons for Your Church* (Zondervan, 1978), p. 141.