

“Walking With God in Integrity:
The Historical Witness” Part IV

We made a shift in our last session together from the theoretical to the practical and applicational relative to the spiritual life, our walk with the Lord. The issue that each of us face is as a graciously redeemed and adopted people how do we express our love to God in light our duty to reflect the character of God, the life of the Spirit in our being?

Radiating the character of God involves positive action and negative action. There are old, “ten gallon” words for this dual action on our part, Vivification and Mortification, the positive increase of spiritual strength and dying progressively to sin.

Said J.I Packer, “**Sanctification has a double aspect. Its positive side is vivification, the growing and maturing of the new man; its negative side is mortification, the weakening and killing of the old man**” (*A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian*).

We arrived at several points:

- 1) The spiritual life is a marathon, not a sprint; it is a life-long process.
- 2) We must have limited, reachable goals for ourselves. We must endeavor to do what we can rather than too much.
- 3) When we fail, simply start over again. Henry Ford said it well, “Success in progressing from one failure to the next without a loss of enthusiasm”. You may fail, but do not quit!! The chief characteristic of the saints’ life is not how well we are doing, but what we do when we are not doing well.
- 4) The Lord is more interested in the development of our lives as spiritual mirrors than we. Therefore, He brings things into our lives both of negative and positive events to shape and mold us. Pain and disappointments are wonderful surgical tools in the hands of an infinitely wise, all-powerful, and deeply loving friend (Gen. 49:20, Ex. 3:10, Judges 6:3).

- 5) There are several positive ingredients of a maturing Christian walk, though there are no hard and fast rules about frequency, posture, location, or duration. These include Bible reading, meditation, and memorization; prayer; Christian fellowship; attendance to preaching and the sacraments; and expressing faith in service to others.

Mortification: Negative Actions Conducive to Spiritual Growth
Introduction [Three Questions]

- 1) What does it mean that the dominion of sin has been crushed for the believer?
- a) The fact of the end of the dominion of sin.
- “How shall we live who died to sin live any longer in it?”
Rom. 6:2
- “For he who has died has been freed from sin.” Rom. 6:7
- “Death no longer has dominion over you.” Rom 6:9b.
- “For sin shall not be master over you for you are not under law but under grace.” Rom. 6:14
- b) The characteristics of the dominion of sin: Universality, the Absence of Struggle.
1. Perpetual Rebellion; Continuance of Practice
 2. A Despising of Warnings and Convictions
 3. A Contempt for the Ways of God
 4. A Voluntary Relinquishing of Means of Grace
 5. A Resolute Choice to Resist Correction
- c) The meaning of the dominion of sin.
- “The dominion of sin is present when sin exercises control over the will of a man with no opposition from

another principle.”

-John Owen, *Dominion of Sin*

d) The metaphor for the dominion of sin: The Forrest Image.

2) How can the dominion of sin be crushed when the Bible and experience speaks of indwelling sin?

“The *nature* of sin does not change in regeneration or sanctification, but its *status* in us is radically attired.”
Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (1987).

a) The fact of indwelling sin.

“I find then a principle that evil is present with me, the one who wishes to do good.” Rom. 7:21

“Grace changeth the nature of man, but nothing can change the nature of sin.”

—John Owen, *Indwelling Sin*

“When it (sin) is least felt, it is most powerful.”

—John Owen, *Indwelling Sin*

“The man that understands the evil of his own heart, how vile it is, is the only useful, fruitful, and soled believing and obedient person.”

—John Owen, *Indwelling Sin*

“Many men harbor spirit devouring - lusts in their bosoms that lie as worms, at the root of their obedience, and corrode and waken it day by day.”

—John Owen, *On Mortification*

b) The reality of indwelling sin.

“...if you by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh, we shall live.” Rom. 8:13

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin.” Rom. 6:11

“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” Rom. 6:12

“Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead...” Rom. 6:13

“If we would judge ourselves we would not be judged.” I Cor. 11: 30

1. The mind reflects on sin generally, not on the particulars.
2. An enjoyment of secret sins while glorifying God in other ways.
3. A busyness that obscures the observation of sin’s danger.
4. A mental slothfulness.
5. Sin catches the mind by surprise.
6. Sin won’t let the mind rest.

c) The evidence of indwelling sin.

1. Sloth and neglect of sin.
2. Loss of fear of God.
3. A complicated view of the gospel.
4. Lack of a serious watchfulness for Satan.
5. Imitation of bad examples.
6. Enjoyment of secret lusts of the heart.
7. Lack of private times with God.
8. An increase of knowledge without obedience.
9. An increase of worldly wisdom.
10. A failure to repent.

d) A metaphor for indwelling sin: the Forrest Image.

3. What is the believer’s responsibility to indwelling sin?

“If you through the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh, you shall live.” Rom. 8:13

- a) The need for the believer’s responsibility.
 - 1. Sin is present in us and toward us.
 - 2. Sin is active, though not total.
 - 3. Sin is active if left alone.
 - 4. If sin is neglected the inner man atrophies.
 - 5. The spirit and the new nature have been given to fight against indwelling sin.

- b) The qualifications to the believer’s duties.
 - 1. It is not to utterly kill, root it out, or destroy it. The issue is to de-prioritize your troubles.
 - 2. It is not to disguise sin.
 - 3. It is not the improvement of a quiet and sedate nature.
 - 4. It is not merely diversion.
 - 5. It is not the occasional conquest of a sin.

- c) The metaphor for the believer’s duty: The Forrest Image.

4) How is the believer to put to death the deeds of the flesh?

“To be Spiritually Minded is Life and Peace”(Rom. 8:6).

“Watch and Pray that You Enter not into Temptation” (Matt. 26:41).

We began our study of the spiritual life stating that there are three important ingredients with numerous ramifications: Know your God, Know yourself, and know your situation. Vivification is about the first of these; Mortification is about the latter of these.

- a) Some General Reflections on Sin in our lives.
- (1) Most people are bothered by the symptoms and consequences of sin, not its causes.
 - (2) Sin is not resolved by avoidance and neglect, nor inadequate, unfruitful remedies.
 - (3) Sin is most often revealed in its fruitful state (i.e., “death” as personal wastefulness), not in its inceptive or casual stage.
 - (4) Sin is rooted in our fallen natures (i.e., disruptive characteristics), but manifested in our social relationships.
 - (5) Sin works in us in subtle and insidious ways. We must become students of ourselves to know how and when we are most liable to it.
- b) Specific Principles for the Mortification of Sin; or, what are some helpful things to do when “sin crouches at the door” of your life.
- (1) Consider the dangerous consequences of sin (guilt of sin, loss of peace and strength, grieving the spirit, wounding of Christ).
 - (2) Load the conscious with the guilt of sin (consider God’s infinite patience and forbearance).
 - (3) Consider the state of one’s self at all times in total depravity and thoughts of one’s vileness. A common characteristic of the circumstance of sin in our lives is that contemplated action is seen as having good potential and this will improve us. Remind yourself that sin never pays long-term positive dividends.
 - (4) Trace the particular manifestation of sin to its root.

The Meaning: The cause of poor behavior is often hidden. Another way to say it is this: that which bothers us is often a fruit of a deeper cause. To make progress we must search out the underlying causes and deal with them.

“Resolved, whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back, till I come to the original cause; and then both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it”. – Jonathan Edwards

“I have concluded to endeavor to work myself into duties by searching and tracing back all the real reasons why I do them not, and narrowly searching out all the subtle subterfuges of my thoughts and answering them to the utmost of my power, that I may know what are the very first originals of my defect, as with respect to want of repentance, love to God, loathing of myself – to do this sometimes in sermons”. – Jonathan Edwards

The Illustration: Add to the forest image another; it is “the river and the canoe” metaphor. When you discover a “tree” in your forest, do not merely deal with it. If you can, try to figure out what triggers this course of action. Imagine the “river” to be your life; the “canoe” the means for searching out your life. Get into your “canoe” and paddle up the “river” of your life and deal with the problem at the deepest cause you can discover. Problems are normally brought to our attention in the fruitful stage, not the causative stage. To root out a problem is to attack the root, not the fruit.

(a) This is no easy task. It requires hard reflection and honesty.

(b) There are things hidden deep in your mind that you have purposefully hidden to avoid the pain of it. Reflection over time will generally make these known. This is where a skilled counselor can help. When things got hidden in our memory bank as children, we have adopted a non-confrontative approach to dealing with things. That is often all a child can do; however, to employ the same mechanisms as an adult leads to greater problems in handling social relationships.

- (5) Do not hurry to gain relief for your sin. Think about it before you shrug, delight yourself in your forgiveness, and go your way.
- (6) Act quickly against the first temptations toward a sin. Learn by self-study how and when you are susceptible to solicitations. Deal with them immediately; do not delight in them though we all have a natural tendency to do so.
- (7) Allow God to speak peace rather than assuming you have it. A lot of lessons are missed in hurray. Do not claim a verse and claim more than you should have.
- (8) Be attentive to temptation. Learn the circumstances of solicitation. Solicitation is not evil inherently; it is the signal of the approach of what can turn into evil.

To quote a line from Calvin Coolidge, a former president”

“The Lord gave us two ends-
one to sit on
and the other to think with.
Success depends upon which one we
use the most.”

- (9) Ask yourself what you have learned from your failure. Say to yourself, “How did this happen to me?” “What were the circumstances that accompanied this in the first place?”

“Resolved, after afflictions, to inquire, what I am the better for them, what good I have got by them, and what I might have got by them.” —Jonathan Edwards

- (10) Because complexity complicates and simplicity simplifies, take on only one or two trees at a time. Too many “trees” leads to frustration and defeat; too many “canoes” rides in the “river” of your life makes for frustration.

(a) As an individual pick a “tree” and work on it. Search out its root, learn the circumstances of its troubling present, fight against it with prayer and Bible reading, good company, and resolve.

(b) Pick a tree as a couple and work on it together. Discuss it, find out how it got started in the first place, search for ways to minimize its impact, and hold each other accountable.

(c) At work pick a tree that needs addressing.

Conclusion: A Summary: Vivification and Mortification.

- A. The right weapons in the mental struggle with sin. Though there are things we can do in our walk with the Lord, it seems to me that it can be summarized in the title of the hymn, “Trust and Obey”. We must fill our minds with good things in order to act correctly before the Lord. Correct doctrine leads to correct behavior; incorrect doctrine leads to license.

1. Whole-hearted trust
2. Faith
3. Obedience
4. The presence of right thoughts; a recognition of some basic truths.
 - (a) God's sovereignty
 - (b) The effects of sin
 - (c) The love and kindness of God
 - (d) The wonder of Calvary
 - (e) The reality of indwelling sin

B. Thoughts from a fellow “tree” cutter and “canoer”.

1. Progress in spiritual things comes from two realizations: the realization that God has made provision (“if you *by means of the Spirit...*”) and that we must cooperate with Him in the endeavor (“if *you...*”).
2. It is a life-long process; there are no short cuts; it is hard work to talk to yourself.
3. It is the path to a contented life; the struggle with sin is a good one for all of us.

I came across a quotation from Calvin Coolidge; it speaks to the issue of perseverance.

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent.

Genius will not: unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts...

C. A life motto.

“Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.” —Jonathan Edwards

D. Final thoughts.

“The road to success is not straight
There is a curve called failure...
A loop called confusion...
Speed bumps called friends...
Red lights called enemies...
You will have flats called jobs

But...

If you have a spare called determination...
An engine called perseverance...
Insurance called faith...
A driver called Jesus..
You will make it to the place called success!”

-Unknown Author

“The Bottom Line”

FACE IT, Nobody owes you a living
What you achieve or fail to achieve in your lifetime
Is directly related to what you do or fail to do.
No one chooses his parents or childhood
But you can choose your direction
Everyone has problems and obstacles to overcome
But that too is relative to each individual
NOTHING IS CARVED IN STONE
You can change anything in your life if you want to
badly enough.
Excuses are losers:
Those who take responsibility for their actions are the
real winners in life.
Winner’s meet life’s challenges head on

Knowing there are no guarantees and give it all
they've got.

And never think it's too late or too early to begin

Time plays no favorites and will pass whether you act
or not.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE

Dare to dream and take risks... compete

If you aren't willing to work for your goals don't expect
others to.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF.

-Unknown Author

How do we accomplish this?
(Final Session)