

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: 1b
The Incredible Journey
Of The
Church Age Believer

INTRO: In our last message we said that the journey of the Church age believer begins at the cross. I mentioned that the doctrine that deals with the beginning of this journey is the doctrine of justification. I believe I mentioned another doctrine that takes place just as soon as I am justified. It is the doctrine of regeneration. As soon as we are justified we are regenerated, or as we best know it, we are born again.

These two doctrines are not God's main aim for man. God did not give His Son in death, primarily so that we could be justified and regenerated. My understanding of Scripture is that the main purpose why God sent His Son to die on our behalf is to make us like Jesus. Justification delivers us from the penalty of sin, eternal hell fire. Sanctification delivers us from the power of sin and that is the topic of our message this morning. The Christian life is begun by justification at the cross of Christ but it is continued in sanctification through the cross of Christ.

And so this morning we want to give some time to the doctrine that is the most prominent in the Christian life after one is born again and before one goes to heaven. The journey of the Church age believer is begun when he gets saved and is:

B. Continued throughout Physical Life - Doctrine of Sanctification

1. The dilemma of the Christian

The pilgrim who is delivered from his big bag of burdens of sin experiences great joy. The greater the deliverance the greater the joy. Jesus illustrated this to a Pharisee who was peeved at Him for letting a sinful woman anoint His feet and kiss His feet (Luke 7:36:50). But there comes for the delivered sinner a dark day. He was saved. He felt so free and so clean. And then as he begins His journey onward he discovers a horrible thing. He finds himself to be a sinful person. How can this be? He was a sinner. He was

saved and now he makes the horrible discovery that he is still a sinner. (ill. of young man saved in Prince George.)

When a person is saved it is not all over. The journey has just begun. Some people say, "If it is true that you can know that you're saved then why doesn't God just take you home right then and there? What is the purpose of life then?" Well, I tell you on the authority of the Word of God that you can and ought to know you are saved. I am not saying you can do anything you want to do after you're saved and still go to heaven. But on the basis of 1 John 5:10-13 you can know you are saved.

But after I am saved I will discover that in me, that is in my flesh dwells no good thing (Rom. 7). After we become Christians, we will find that the real battle has only now begun. This is clearly pictured for us in the OT, in Israel's experience. They were redeemed out of Egypt, but between them and victory lay the wilderness, one that they took 40 years to pass through. Were their troubles over when they were delivered out of Egypt? No, they seemed to have just begun. Read Pilgrim's Progress. Were Christian's trials over when his big bag of burdens fell off his back? No! He entered a whole new set of problems. You have become a Christian. Are all your problems over? No. Of course not. No, now the real battle has begun. Why does God leave us in this world after we are saved? To deliver us from the power of sin. To make us like Jesus and that is no small task. God wants us to be conquerors in every area of life.

What then is the dilemma of the Christian? Well it is this, that after he is saved he discovers he is still very much in bondage to sin. Have you discovered this? Listen to the apostle Paul when he discovered this in Romans 7:13-24 (read).

When Israel was delivered out of Egypt they discovered that between Egypt and the promised land lay the wilderness. Egypt is a picture of the world. It is this God wants to deliver us

from. Canaan is a picture of the land of rest in faith. Between the world and the land of rest in faith lies the wilderness the apostle Paul experienced in Romans 7. Israel could easily have passed through the wilderness in 40 days but they took 40 years. Why? The believer can pass from the unsaved life to the life of victory in a short time, but sadly many people spend all their life in Romans 7. They find great comfort that the apostle Paul was like that too. But Paul found deliverance! He found victory! (Rom. 7:25-8:1). How is victory achieved? It is the doctrine of sanctification that will answer this question.

2. The deliverance of the Christian

This morning we are taking a brief look at the doctrine of sanctification. If you are interested in understanding this doctrine more fully you may ask for our Bible study materials on tape on the doctrine of sanctification. But let me briefly define the doctrine of sanctification for you. Our Catechism asks the question like this: What is sanctification? Was ist die Heiligung? The answer is: "Die Heiligung ist wen man fonn der Herrschaft der Sunde frei vird..." To be sanctified is to be freed from the dominion of sin. Sanctification is basically to separate the sinner from the power of sin.

There are several common wrong views of sanctification. The first is that we are sanctified by the suppression of the sin nature. I determine not to do certain things any more. When the desires come I suppress them. To all who try this route they will find that it is like the game where you hit the prairie dogs. You're given a club and every time a prairie dog sticks his head out of a hole you try to hit him. So you swing at one just to find another sticking his head up elsewhere.

If you are trying to live the Christian life by suppressing the sin nature you have already experienced the frustrations of failure. It doesn't work. Some teachers who have understood

the high demands of Scripture and have found the impossibility of suppressing the sin nature say, "Sanctification is not by suppression of the sin nature. It is by the eradication of the sin nature." They teach that sometime after a person is born again, the sin nature is eradicated. It is gone. Charles Haddon Spurgeon talked to such a man. He was to have lived a good number of years without sinning already. Mr. Spurgeon said to this man, "Could I speak with your wife about that?" This teaching sounds good but it doesn't work. I don't suppose there is a wife in the world who would agree she had the perfect sinless husband, and vice versa.

So how is man delivered from the power of sin? Man is delivered by grace through faith. This view says it is by the law of the counteraction of faith that man is delivered. The law of gravity demands that everything that has weight must come down. When I was younger I tried to fly but the law of gravity pulled me down to the ground and I hit with a thud. After much experimentation I gave up on flying. But there is the law of aerodynamics that allows man to overcome the law of gravity. I have flown over the Atlantic ocean and the thing that kept me from plunging into the ocean was the law of aerodynamics. I watched the wings of the 747 one time as we took off. I was amazed at how far the wings went up once the weight of the airplane hung on them.

There is something in man that pulls him down into sin like gravity. No amount of suppression or claims of eradication change his downward path into sin. But there is the law of counteraction that can give the saved person victory over the downward pull of sin. It is the exercise of faith.

I want to explain to you now one of the most important principles in the doctrine of sanctification. I did not discover this principle, I was taught by others. But I have developed this principle in a way that might be helpful to you. You may want to get the tape of

this message and go over it again and again until you grasp this great truth.

It has to do with our Christian standing and our state; or our position and our practice. Notice on the back of your outlines a diagram of a torn page. On the one side you have the standing of the believer on the other side you have the state. (Read Rom. 6:1-7). Standing v. 2 we died to sin. v. 5 we have been united in His death. v. 6 our old man was crucified with Him. v. 7 we have been freed from sin.

We have already read Romans 7:13-24, let us just look at our state in several verses. v. 14 I am carnal. v. 15, what I want to do I don't do. What I hate I do. 19, the good I want to do I don't do. The evil I hate, I do.

Can my standing as described in chapter 6 and the state described in chapter 7 both be true at the same time? Yes, they may both true at the same time. But notice in Romans 6:6 that our old man has been crucified (my standing in Christ) in order that the body of sin might be done away with. That is so our state might become like our standing! Before Adam and Eve sinned their standing and state was the same. After they sinned their standing and state were both ungodly. When they got saved in Genesis 3:21 their standing with God was right again but their state was like the Christian's state today. God does not want us to remain in our sinful state. Notice in Romans 6:6 that our old man was crucified that the body of sin might be destroyed, in order that we should no longer be slaves to sin. God wants our standing and our state to become one.

Let me illustrate how He does this in every day life. I smoked cigarettes before I became a Christian. When I accepted Christ I wanted to lay aside this habit. But I could not. It came to the point that this weighed very heavily on me. I realized that this was not pleasing to God. Time after time I would claim John 1:9, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us

our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The battle was long and fierce. The time came when I cast myself on the floor before God and said, "Lord, I've failed so many times and I can't do it." Somehow it seemed like the Lord wanted to hear those words. From that time on I slowly gained the victory. Now before I quit smoking my standing was perfect in Christ but my state was sinful. After I gained the victory over this habit my standing with regard to smoking was still perfect but now my state was right as well. To this very day my standing in Christ with regard to smoking and my state are the same.

That is what God wants to do in my life with every sin in each stage of life. There can be victory and I want to show you the verse in Romans 6 that explains this victory. Romans 6:11 says, "Likewise, you reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." I need to count or reckon on my state as being perfect in Christ by faith until God makes it real in my state. This takes place one sin at a time. This is the road of victory. This is the law that counteracts the law of the flesh which pulls us down. I encourage you to get this message on tape and listen to it over and over until this message sinks down into the depths of your being.

This doctrine of sanctification, being set apart from sin, is the doctrine that affects our life the most in our Christian walk. The church age believer's journey **commences** at justification and regeneration. But that is only the beginning point. The journey is **continued** by progressive sanctification.

3. The danger for the Christian

I invite you to turn with me once more to Matthew 7:13-14. In our last message we saw that the gate to the road of the Church age believer is very narrow or restrictive. Today I draw your attention to the fact that the not only is the gate restrictive but the way, the road or the

pathway to life is also restrictive. The word that describes this path is a perfect passive participle formed from the word *thlibo*. The word pictures a mountain road that goes up a very narrow gorge between to walls. It pictures a road through a narrow canyon. This word is also used of affliction or oppression. The NKJV translates it thus, "difficult is the way that leads to life."

We have already looked at what makes the gate narrow but what is it that makes the way or the path to life narrow or difficult?

First, as salvation is by grace through faith, that is one enters the gate to life by faith so the path to life is by faith. We have looked at that already this morning. The Bible teaches that the just shall live by faith. Not only are we saved by faith we are to live by faith. There is no other way. We do not walk this road by suppressing the evil nature or by denying our evil nature. We are to walk this road by couteracting the evil nature by faith. Yes, salvation is by grace through faith and sanctification is by grace through faith as well.

Second, this road is narrow and difficult because it denys the travelor certain practices. Consider Galatians 6:16-21. Paul is writing to Christians in this passage. They are people who have entered by the narrow gate. Paul informs them that those on the narrow road to life who do not continue to live by faith, walking in the Spirit, and live in sins such as are listed in this passage that they will not reach the celestial city. This way is narrow because one cannot follow the whims and fancies of the flesh. Let me clarify that this passage does not speak of someone who falls into such a sin as is listed here as going to hell. These sins are chosen lifestyles. (Ill. of brother's live-in.)

Now allow me to caution you. Do not add every sin to this list. Some say if a woman cuts her hair she will go to hell. Or they might say if a man has long hair he'll go to hell. Now I agree that

the Bible teaches that men should not have long hair and women should not have short hair. The Bible clearly says so. But I warn us to be very careful what we add to the list of sins that causes a Christian to go to hell. Stick with those things that are clearly taught in Scripture as great moral sins.

What then is the danger for the Christian? The danger is this. The road to heaven is a narrow road. It is a road that is walked by faith and that does not allow one to live a life of sins such as those listed in Galatians 5, Romans 1 or 1 Cor. 6. Constantly the devil is on the lookout to seek to catch us up in some sin, which we might call a lesser sin, by which he might lead us into deeper sin. If you are a Christian he is on the alert to some weakness, some area where he can gain a beach head into your life from which he will begin to destroy you. The danger the Christian faces is to be led off the narrow road altogether and to go to hell after one has known the way of truth.

CONCL: Brothers and sisters and friends, this part of the journey is the most crucial of all. Everything we will have hereafter depends on how we will have lived our life on earth. We will see that later. This life on earth is a time of testing, a time of determining what shall be hereafter.

How is your journey? Is it filled with trials and testings? Peter explains the purpose of trials in life in 1 Pet. 1:6-7. Trials, he says, are to purify our faith. Trials test our faith like fire tests gold.

Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India gives the following account of the purification of gold, "One day we took the children to see a goldsmith refine gold after the ancient manner of the East. He was sitting beside his little charcoal fire. (He shall sit as a refiner: the gold or silversmith never leaves his crucible once it is on the fire.) In the red glow lay a common curved roof-tile; another tile covered it like a lid. This was the crucible. In it was the medicine made of salt, tamarind fruit and burnt brick-dust, and embedded in it was the gold. The medicine does its appointed work on the gold, then the fire eats it, and the goldsmith lifts the gold out with a pair

of tongs, lets it cool, rubs it between his fingers, and if not satisfied puts it back in fresh medicine. This time he blows the fire hotter than it was before, and each time he puts th gold into the crucible the heat of the fire is increased: 'It could not bear it so hot at first but it can bear it now; what would have destroyed it then helps it now.' 'How do you know when the gold is purified?' we asked him, and he answered, 'when I can see my face in it [the liquid gold in the crucible] then it is pure.'"

When will our life of testings be over? When God can see Jesus in us. No matter how difficult our tests may be in this life God means it all for our good. The road the Christian travels is a narrow road. It is not an easy path. It cuts across the grain of what we would wish.

We have looked at how the Church Age believer's journey is commenced, how it continues and next two messages, Lord willing, we will see how it is completed.