

The Necessity of Human Effort in Sanctification

Review: Thus far in our study of Sanctification
God is Holy. Human beings are sinful.

God's multifaceted work of salvation includes not only eliminating the legal claims against humans as sinners against God's law but also cleansing them from their polluted condition due to sin to enable and to assure that they will live holy lives.

Internally he, in conjunction with the new birth, by the working of the Holy Spirit cleanses the conscience and beautifies the person so as to assure that outward transformation WILL occur, manifest in outward conduct.

Having already seen that sanctification is a work of God, this session considers how this outward work of living in holiness comes about with reference to human effort. When it comes to the outworking of sanctification, is there an active role for followers of Christ?

It is not uncommon for people to think that the outworking of sanctification is either automatic or achieved merely by a response of faith in a moment of crisis. Not a few well-known theologians have held this kind of position on sanctification. A number of them would affirm that holy living is about "letting go and letting God." Accompanying a flawed view of sanctification in many of these cases has also been a flawed view of salvation wherein faith has been reduced to mere mental assent. Persons living in carnality have been assured that they are "saved." They simply have not embraced the next level of salvation which is sanctification or "Lordship." It is extremely important that we see what is clearly set forth in these texts in this session.

The Scriptures teach that living in holiness demands human effort. The outworking of sanctification is synergistic. Sure, God is at work and God has made provision for us to live in holiness. We will look at these provisions in future session. The fact that God is at work in our sanctification, however, is not an excuse for us to be passive. Rather, it is good reason for intensity of effort on our part. Because God is at work, believers are to work as well.

2 Corinthians 7:1 –

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Since we have these promises, beloved . . .

To what promises is Paul referring?

I will make my dwelling among them

I will be their God

they shall be my people

I will welcome you

I will be a father to you and you my sons and daughters

And these promises assure God's children of what relational disposition of God to them?

LOVE (beloved)

The promises of God provide motivation. They are the basis of a response on our part to which Paul calls believers. What is that response?

We cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit.

Who is doing the work to whom? WE are doing the work to OURSELVES.

And when we carry out this task, what are we further accomplishing?

We are bringing holiness to completion.

What further driving force within us provokes within us this pursuit?

The fear of God.

So there are actually three tasks that the believer has from the passage that he must carry out to pursue holiness.

1. Cleanse ourselves from every defilement inside and out.

If your eye causes you to sin, what are you supposed to do? Pluck it out. If your hand causes you to sin, what are you supposed to do? Cut it off. Cease sinning and break patterns of sin. Develop and cultivate in your life patterns of godliness.

2. Know the promises of God. Be conscious of them. Why? because they motivate the pursuit of holiness.

3. Deepen your appreciation of what it means to be loved by God. Again, this motivates action and strengthens resolve to pursue holiness.

4. Grow in the fear of God. Study God's attributes and meditate upon them. Bring yourself before God in humility, adoration, and exaltation.

Psalm 146:1-2

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

Philippians 2:12-13 –

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Who works in you?

What does he do in you?

So what should you do? Should you wait for God to do something? Are you the glove and God the hand? Are you the puppet and God the one who operates the strings?

Will and work for his good pleasure. BECAUSE God is at work in you, you WORK out what he is doing. Ascribe the glory to God, but don't just stand there.

Work in fear and trembling. Similar to 2 Corinthians 7:1, the fear is the worship of God. It overwhelms the sinner that God would do such a marvelous thing. At the same time the fear of God motivates to humility and bold determination.

Hebrews 12:1 –

Therefore . . . let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of faith . . .

Who is exhorted to lay aside weight and sin? Who is exhorted to run? Who is told to look to Jesus? US!!!

2 Peter 1:3-7 –

What does Peter have in common with Paul in 2 Corinthians 7 and Philippians 2?

Promises

Power – God's work

Motivation – for this very reason

Action—make every effort to supplement faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love.

Conclusion

Read Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 82-83.

The emphasis on our own effort is not to say we should pursue holiness in our own strength or with our own strategy. Moving forward we will begin to examine the provisions God has made which enable us to work out holiness as well as the strategy for doing so. For now, let us own that our effort is essential.

We are not saved by our own efforts, but having been saved, our efforts are essential to the good works in which we are called to walk.