

Jesus Christ our Sanctification

Go and tell My servant David. Thus says the Lord, shall you build Me a house for Me to dwell in? (2 Sam 7:5).

Since the perfectionist revivals of the 19th Century, sanctification has often been seen as a progressive or gradual work in the believer's life. It is sometimes held that we are transformed "from glory to glory", that our mind is renewed slowly and that we overcome sin by stages.

There is no doubt that the Lord has not finished with us when we are born again and that there is a growth in Christ, but is this the biblical meaning of the term *sanctification*? In this chapter we look at the context in which the New Testament uses the term *sanctification* and then look at Christian maturity and growth from a New Covenant perspective.

Topics include:

- Hudson Taylor's testimony.
- The problem at Galatia.
- Scriptures that speak of sanctification.
- The Bread of Life.
- Christian growth and maturity.
- Biblical perfection.
- Mortifying the deeds of the flesh.
- The unconditional New Covenant.
- Biblical exhortations to sons.
- The flesh.

Hudson Taylor

Hudson Taylor came out of the Keswick movement, as did other fine missionaries. Taylor struggled with "process sanctification" for a long time, never feeling that he had arrived or even made progress. The more he followed that course the worse he felt about himself. The Lord finally set Hudson Taylor free by showing him that Christ was his holiness and that he could stop striving and rest in the finished work of Christ. He realised that he was sanctified by faith. In a letter Taylor stated:

I thought that holiness, practical holiness, was to be gradually attained by a diligent use of the means of grace...when my agonies of soul were at their height a sentence in a letter was used to remove the scales from my eyes and the Spirit of God revealed the truth of our oneness with Jesus.

Cambridge

On a weekend in Cambridge, my wife Ruth and I walked past several sites where hundreds of years before people had met to plan the Reformation of England. Many of these fathers laboured and died to help provide a theological, legislative and scientific foundation that has blessed generations and nations to the present time.

It was Sunday so we entered a church and sat down. The preacher spoke of the salvation of Christ. He pointed out that it is entirely by grace. It was very good. But in the middle of the sermon he changed course. He began to say that after we are saved, we must be sanctified by adhering to certain disciplines. He gave a list of devotional rules that we must keep.

We said, "If religious rules cannot save us, then why should we walk in them after being saved? If we trust Christ alone for salvation, then why do we look to ourselves for sanctification? If we cannot

commend ourselves when we first come to Christ, why do we think that after coming to Christ that it is no longer by faith alone, or think that we now have some part?”.

This may immediately raise the issue in some people’s minds, “Does this mean we do not do anything?” What we do is a fruit of our relationship with Christ and not done in the manner of law.

The Galatians

Paul said to the Galatians, “You began well, who hindered you?” (Gal 5:7). The Galatians began in faith, but then tried to perfect themselves by works. When we think that we begin by our own faith and not the faith that Jesus provides as a gift, then we suppose that we continue by our own efforts and not by the sanctification that Jesus provides as a gift.

Sanctification must be taken as a gift and walked out by faith, just as salvation is.

The whole problem in Galatia was that they tried to add to Christ. They did not deem the life and faith of Christ sufficient for sanctification. They thought that after receiving Christ by faith, they must go on and be sanctified by works. This is a common attitude. We are essentially confident in our own flesh (ability).

Christians sometimes hold to a three stage approach to salvation doctrine (*soteriology*), including new birth, followed by baptism in the Spirit, followed by process or progressive sanctification, until we reach a state of perfection, or at least come close to that state.

Such teaching is based on a concept of *personal holiness*, which we attribute to those who fulfil a level of devotional qualities that we deem to be necessary, but we ourselves never seem quite able to achieve. This is law and it takes away our joy, by putting us under a curse.

Then we condemn ourselves, thinking that any temptation or impurity of motive displays a bad heart. So to remedy this we add rules to try to “change our heart”. There is nothing that we can do to change our heart. Temptation is not sin, but it should not point us to further works, but point us to Jesus Christ, who is the source of our holiness and perseverance. When we feel our infirmity we go to Jesus by faith, not to works.

Sanctification is a part of salvation. Jesus comes to circumcise our heart and set us free. This is not achieved by our level of devotion, but by His power and life within us. Jesus said, “Whom the Son of man sets free is free indeed.” (John 8:36).

Fallen From Grace

God’s salvation is complete. It includes the grace to walk a sanctified life. So long as we think that it is up to our performance, we are outside of the gospel of Jesus Christ, or as Paul put it, “You have fallen from grace.” (Gal 5:4). Paul said to the Galatians, “I marvel that you are so soon removed from the grace of God.” (Gal 1:6). Paul was addressing their view of sanctification.

If we live under religious legalism, then we live in torment under a curse: as it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in every aspect of the law.” (Gal 3:10). This does not have to be the Law of Moses. It can be any law we make. Being under a curse means that it is impossible for us to live up to the conditions that we think we must achieve to be right with God. So long as we try to, we are under a curse.

The gospel is *Jesus plus nothing*, His blood plus nothing. Once we add works to the blood of Christ we have departed from the gospel. In Antioch, even Peter and Barnabas were drawn away from the gospel, not eating with those who were uncircumcised (Gal 2:9). If Peter and Barnabas did not recognize that the gospel had been completely compromised, then the same thing could be happening in our day in a different way, without us seeing it.

The Reformation and Galatians

Luther claimed that both our justification and sanctification are gifts in Christ. Just as we are justified by the blood of Christ, so we are sanctified by His blood. The Galatians felt that the blood of Christ was sufficient for forgiveness of sin, but claimed that to be holy they had to keep the Law of Moses. They unwittingly (some knowingly) opposed the gospel stealthily, not a frontal attack against Jesus.

We may not think of circumcision, but may have some other traditions, a whole list of *do's and don'ts*, by which we judge spirituality and judge others. But by judging others our conscience condemns our self, for we too cannot keep our list. Also the world sees that these many traditions and rules are meaningless in regard to real faith and love. They call it hypocrisy and they confuse these laws with Christianity.

The kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom 14:17).

Life, Not Formula

We have made laws for just about every area of our life. *Motivationalism* gives us seven steps to success. We are given principles to a successful marriage. Principles are *the fruit* of a changed heart. They cannot change a heart. We need Jesus Christ and His gospel. America is the biggest formula market in the world and has the most marriage problems in the world. Self-help does not work.

Paul told us not to put ourselves under laws for a successful life. He said that only Jesus Christ can make us free, by His work. The choice is law, method, formula or Christ. Christ is our Shepherd and He fixes our life with His presence without formulas.

Stand fast in the liberty whereby Christ has made you free and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (Gal 5:1).

Foolish Galatians

O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth...This only would I learn of you, Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you made perfect by the flesh? (Gal 3:1-3).

The first point that we see here is that receiving the Spirit is new birth. Paul is speaking here about the beginning of our Christian life. What makes us Christians? We have received the Spirit of God.

But how did we receive the Spirit? Was it by fulfilling certain conditions, or was it by *the hearing of faith*? The *hearing of faith* means Jesus speaking into our heart, to give us His faith. It is an unconditional entrance of faith into our heart, by which we believe and by which our heart is changed. This is *hearing*, the entrance of His word/faith by grace.

Paul is pointing out that the Galatians were not born again by meeting a list of conditions from law, i.e. by their own efforts in the flesh. The Christian life begins by grace without us having anything to contribute to it. Paul then rightly asks, "If that is how you began, why do you think you can continue some other way? Why do you think that you can *sustain* yourself, if you could not *start* yourself?"

This teaches us that we walk the same way that we start, through *the faith of Christ*. Sanctification is given and sustained the same way as justification, by Christ's merits and not by our merits. Just as we are not born by the law, neither do we live or walk by the law. Sanctification is part of the *finished work*, just as justification is. This is our correct biblical heritage as Pentecostal/Evangelicals.

We will find this difficult to understand if we do not have a gospel foundation. If we do not know that repentance is a gift then we will not see that sanctification (continued lived out repentance) is a gift.

Sanctified in Christ

The idea of “progressive sanctification” has some problems. It suggests that we have to achieve it by personal effort. The call of Peter to “be holy, even as He is holy” is answered by faith and not by the flesh (2 Pet 1:16).

Progressive sanctification suggests that the power to walk in holiness is somehow dependant upon us. It suggests that perfection is achieved by what we do, rather than by what Christ did on the cross. The power to walk in Christ is the power of the resurrection. It has nothing to do with a religious exercise.

It suggests that the power to live a sanctified life can be increased. The power of Christ does not increase or decrease. No hungering for more will increase it. The power of God is the new birth and once Christ comes in He stays in and He does not grow or reduce. The faith in us does not change one bit after the moment we are born again. Its freshness also does not change or depend on what we do.

Christ is *always fresh!* His resurrection is immortal. It is always available for us to walk in. We do grow by understanding our faith, but the faith itself does not grow. It is *the faith of Christ* and once we are born again His faith is in us. God’s gifts are without repentance. The quality of that faith has nothing to do with what we do. We must stop living by our own resources.

We are sanctified because we are dead and buried with Christ and that is a constant. It has nothing to do with anything that we can add. Our faith is not based on any other merit. What keeps us from sin? It is Christ in us, who quickens our mortal flesh.

Prince Planet

When we were young *Prince Planet* was a cartoon superhero. He had a large *P* on his chest, which had to be filled with power. Then he fought the enemies of good. As he battled, his power would be used up. He had to make it back to base for a refill of power, or his enemies would defeat him.

A lot of theology is based on a similar misconception of the life of Jesus Christ. This is what causes *burn out*. Christ’s power does not run out. We do not need to be refilled with it. It is trying to get refilled that burns us out. He lives in us. All superheroes are just like *Prince Planet*. Take Popeye for example. Without his spinach he was powerless. Superman could be overcome by kryptonite.

We have unwittingly taken ideas from fiction like this, or from similar concepts presented in our cultures in different ways. Those who made superhero cartoons based them on the myths of the Greek gods. This is just how natural man thinks. Making theology similar to this has not helped. It permeates sanctification, Spirit filling, healing, miracle and spiritual warfare notions. It is opposed to the gospel of God’s grace.

Does that mean that we do not need the word of God? No, we naturally live on it and grow on it. It means that there is no situation we may be in, where the grace of God will not provide the solution, by His power that abides within us, through His grace (Eph 3:20). It means that we do not fight by our own resources, even spiritual resources, but learn to live by His.

...I live by the faith of the Son of God...(Gal 2:20).

Sanctification in Scripture

To arrive at a meaning of the term *sanctification* we need to see how the word is used in the New Testament. So we must go through each verse that uses the word and see how the word is used. This alone can inform our doctrine on the subject.

Acts 20:32 speaks of “them which are sanctified”. Here it means to be a *saint*, which means sanctified by the blood of Christ and members of His body. “Saint” comes from the same Greek root as *sanctified*. Paul addresses some of his epistles “to the saints who are at...” and he names the city.

Saint or *sanctified* means to be in Christ. It means new birth. New birth is an instantaneous event. It is not a process. We do not grow into new birth, though there may be a period of being drawn by God towards the day it occurs. But we are either a saint or we are not a saint.

In *Acts 26:18* Paul records Jesus’ words to him, regarding “them that are sanctified by faith that is in Me”. Sanctification is by faith, not our faith, but *the faith that is in Christ*. Both these verses in Acts put sanctification in the context of new birth. They speak of a faith that sanctifies us at new birth and which preserves us in Christ. It is both past tense and a continual preservative in Christ.

Rom 15:16 states the Gentiles were sanctified by the Holy Spirit and the gospel. Again, this is new birth and is clearly Paul’s meaning.

1 Cor 1:2 states “to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...” Sanctification here means to be set apart to God by new birth and to be members of His body.

1 Cor 1:30 tells us that Jesus *has been made unto us* “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption”. Our sanctification is of Jesus just as much as our redemption is. He is our sanctifier. Sanctification here is a person, Jesus. It is not a method or a list of rules.

1 Cor 6:11 speaks of the new birth, “And such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of the Lord God.” This shows that in Paul’s mind sanctification occurred with justification at new birth.

1 Cor 7:14 “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife...”. Paul uses *sanctification* to mean that the marriage is accepted by God, because of the believing wife. The word is used in the same way as *justification* would be used. The marriage is judicially clean. Justification and sanctification are different ways of expressing the same thing. (This does not mean we should marry unbelievers.)

Justification may be seen as a consequence of sanctification. We are justified (*just- as- if-I’d* never sinned), because we have been cleansed through sanctification, washing and renewing of the Spirit. If sanctification was progressive we would be in trouble, because we would not be justified yet! Justification is not to all by the cross, but by faith, meaning new birth and actual cleansing (*Rom 3:28*).

1 Thes 4:3 states, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication.” Here sanctification refers to our life style. It is God’s will that our life reflects the sanctification God granted us and glorifies Him. But life style sanctification does not affect our sanctification in Christ, if we remain in Christ. However, those who are sanctified in Christ will not continue in sin (*Rom 6:1-2*).

1 Thes 5:23 states, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless to the coming of the Lord Jesus.” Here *sanctify* is used in the sense of keeping, sustaining and preserving. Paul commends us to God, the Alpha and Omega of our sanctification, through Christ. This keeping is not just of our spirit, but also of our mind and body.

Sanctification here relates to the *whole* person, which also includes our life style. This is a commendation for us to live as saints. It is not part of a complicated teaching on the “*how to*” of a drawn out process of sanctification. We are to simply look to Him in living His life.

2 *Thes 2:13*, states “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth.”.

At new birth there is sanctification of/by the Spirit, which includes our whole person. It is not just our spirit that is sanctified at new birth. Col 1:22 says we are presented blameless and unreprouvable by Christ in the gospel. This is because His blood also washes our soul and body.

2 *Tim 2:21* states “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified and meet for the master’s use and prepared for every good work.”. Paul is saying here that if a man separates himself from error he shall be useful to God in good works. *Sanctified* here refers to being useful to God in service.

Heb 10:10 “By this testament we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”. This verse shows that we have been sanctified by the blood of Christ and that we cannot add to it. This includes our whole spirit, soul and body.

Heb 10:14 “For by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified.”. This again shows that Christ sanctified us by the offering of Himself. It also shows sanctification is past tense. It is not something in a process.

Heb 10:29 “...the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified...”. This verse again shows that we are sanctified by His blood. It also shows that sanctification is past tense for the believer.

Heb 13:12 “Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”. Again, we see here that we are sanctified by His blood. This is why Luther’s cry “the blood alone” is correct, both for justification and sanctification and why we should add nothing to it.

1 *Pet 1:2* “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus...”. Sanctification here is by the new birth in the Spirit, which causes us to willingly obey, due to our new heart. It is through the blood of Christ.

Jude 1 “...to them that are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ and called...” Here again, we are *sanctified and kept* by the Father through the finished work of Christ and not of ourselves.

These are the verses in the New Testament that use the word *sanctify* or *sanctification*. Not one of them speaks of a progressive work. All of them relate to the new birth and the finished work of the cross and show that we are sanctified by the blood of Jesus alone. We are exhorted to walk in sanctification, since God has freely changed our nature. No works of religious tradition are commended to help us to do this, but obedience through faith alone.

Progressive Sanctification

Progressive sanctification is not a biblical principle. Paul said, “For he that is dead is freed from sin.” (Rom 6:7). This is emphatic past tense. It occurs in new birth in which the Spirit is given, the heart is circumcised and *the body of the sins of the flesh is put off* (Col 2:11). It is then our choice to walk in it. “The body of sin is destroyed”. (Rom 6:6). It is not *being* destroyed. As Egypt was a type of the world, the baptism through the Red Sea separated God’s people from it (1 Cor 10:2).

“Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom 6:11). You are not *dying* to sin, but are dead to sin. You reckon it done and walk in it by faith. “Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin...” (Rom 6:13). Paul did not say “sin a little less next week”. He said, in light of sin being put to death, do not sin.

Progressive sanctification promotes sanctification based on the observance of religious tradition. It builds again what Christ came to destroy – the law. He came to end the Old Covenant of sanctification by works. Only *Christ in you* can give us victory over sin.

Victory over sin is not training the body to overcome the sins of the flesh. It is living and walking by the faith of Christ. That is what we are called to. It is the *holiness of faith*, not of religion. “If any man is in Christ, he is *being saved*?” No. He is not *becoming* a new creation, he is one. Old things are not *passing away*, they have passed away. All things are not *becoming* new, they are new (2 Cor 5:17).

Charles Hodge

Charles Hodge wrote an excellent *Systematic Theology*, following the Westminster Confession and Jonathan Edward’s (Edwardsian) theology. Regarding sanctification he quoted the *Westminster Catechism*: “The work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.”.

Here sanctification is seen both as our starting point of separation, renewal and cleansing at new birth “for the whole man” and as a process of maturity in Christ. We are not against this definition, apart from the way it may be taken in our current day. There is a maturing in Christ, which we do not call sanctification, as the Bible does not call *maturing* sanctification.

The emphasis of the *Catechism* is that sanctification is a work of “*God’s free grace*”. That is, we do not mature or grow in sanctification according to our efforts of religion, but according to the power of Christ within us, which is granted to us by the free merits of Christ’s blood and grace.

Much preaching glorifies what man does and Christ is robbed of His glory. Salvation is entirely a work of Christ and our forgiveness, sanctification and perseverance in Christ are all due to the free grace through His sufferings, shed blood and intercessional ministry today. It is not of us. We pray Christ was more preached in His fullness and glory and not man.

So the *Catechism* is correct, but the *process* part of it is misapplied in our time, to teach that it is of works and not of His free grace and this is why the term *process sanctification* used today is incorrect. The use of the term today often implies works and legalism and is therefore contrary to the gospel of the life of Christ. It is said to be obtained by personal effort, albeit with God’s help.

When we say we are against works, we are not against *works of faith*, but against *works into faith*, or into salvation, or into sanctification. There are *works of faith*, which spring from the love and nature of Christ within us and these include good works, godliness, prayer and those things that are a part of our life in Him. These are not according to man’s prescriptions, such as the Pharisee’s washing of hands and fasting days.

Our sanctification does not mean that we will not be tempted. Temptation will continue in this life. No process, deeper life, discipleship, extra blessing, anointing, or special spirituality will change that. This is why the *Catechism* claims that there is a continuing sin nature in man even after he is born again.

But the Bible claims that sin will not have dominion over the child of God (Rom 6:14). We disagree that man has a sin nature after salvation, but agree that this is no basis for pride, but that without the grace of God we would sin. Therefore we must always watch and always remain dependant on Him.

Hodge continued, "There are a number of ways in which justification differs from sanctification: 1) The former is a transient act, the latter a progressive work.". We disagree with this. Scripture describes sanctification as being made holy in Christ because He lives in us and us walking in that holiness by faith, with thanksgiving for His free grace. There can be no justification without the *full and complete cleansing of sanctification*. Shall God justify what He has not cleansed? No.

Hodge seems to contradict the Catechism that he quoted, where it is said that sanctification is the renewing (*cleansing and separation*) of the *whole man* (not just our spirit) through new birth (Tit 3:5). Nevertheless, what Hodge called a process he ascribed to God's work in us and not to man's work. Hodge's overall emphasis is correct:

Sanctification is declared to be a work of God's free grace. Two things are included in this. First, the power or influence by which sanctification is carried on is supernatural. Secondly, the granting of this influence to any sinner, to one sinner rather than the other and to one more than to another, is a matter of favour. No one has personally or in himself, on the ground of anything he has done, the right to claim this divine influence as a just recompense or as a matter of justice.

So Hodge claims that we walk in sanctification by God's supernatural power alone, by the means of His kindness and that the power to walk in sanctification is not a payment for anything that we have done. That is, we have no claim to it. It is a gift by favour. We fully agree with this. Notwithstanding this, we exhort all strongly to receive Christ and walk in His sanctification.

Sanctification is God cleansing us spirit, soul and body at new birth and causing us to walk in a holy life, separated from sin. It is the promise of the prophets (Is 59:20-21, Jer 31:33, Ezek 36:27). Paul never spoke of a process here. Sanctification is both a position and a life lived, but both through the grace of God, because we are buried with Him in baptism and raised up in newness of life.

In the Old Testament Moses instructed the people to consecrate (cleanse) themselves for three days. Even after this, God said they must not approach the mountain (which is the law) lest they be killed. So their consecration gave them nothing. The law intended to teach that only the blood of Christ can sanctify us and that no religious effort of man can have the slightest effect.

Daily Manna

Before discussing our growth and maturing in Christ we discuss the observance of religious traditions. In the Old Covenant they observed many different ceremonies, but had to repeat them because the activities did not help. The obvious point is that if what we do fixes a problem finally, we should not need to repeat it. We can apply this to a constant call for revival among Christians.

But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance of sin every year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. (Heb 10:3-4).

The same problem occurs today when we think that it is our observance of religious duties that make us right with God, or enables us to ensure some help from Him, or facilitates our growth and maturity in Him. When we feel that we have not fulfilled enough of these duties, or that the efficacy of our last "sacrifices" has worn off, then we must start over again.

This type of worship is according to law. Jesus claimed that it could never work, because we are not able to do enough in this way. This is where we see the difference between the Old and the New Covenant. The New came to do what the Old could never do. Jesus was saying, "I have come to give you what the law could not give you, so you will not need to go over the same ground again and again. It will be done."

We cannot worship God the Old Covenant way. This is what Jesus stressed and what Paul said, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son (meaning the law and the reliance on the flesh), for the son of the bond woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman." (Gal 4:30). That is, Isaac and Ishmael cannot dwell together. A believer cannot live by both grace and law.

Jesus portrayed His life by contrasting it with Israel in the wilderness. He said Israel collected manna every day. But they still hungered. So they had to go back each day to collect manna again. He used this as a symbol of Old Covenant religion. He said that in contrast He is the living bread, so that any one who would eat of Him would *never hunger or thirst again*.

Some have tried to make the New Covenant walk like the wilderness wanderings. They have said each morning we must collect new spiritual manna by observing certain devotional exercises. The problem is this is law. Devotion is from the heart, from relationship. When we make it law, then as soon as we do not fulfil it we have no life. Then we have a "wilderness experience".

So Jesus explained, "It is the Spirit that makes alive. The flesh profits nothing." (John 6:63). This was Jesus' point to Nicodemus. "That which is born of the flesh (what we do under law) is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit (grace) is Spirit (life)." (John 3:6). Jesus was kindly, but brutally, showing Nicodemus that his ministry was no good. Thank God when we are shown such things truly!

Jesus rebuked their religion very abruptly by saying it did not help them. It did not help their sin. It did not solve their problem:

Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead. (John 6:58).

The Old Covenant did not save. It did not meet the need. Just as they collected the manna each day, they repeated their ceremonies each day. But they were not *filled*. When we live Christianity this way, to be refilled spiritually and emotionally, it shows we are in religion. This is not Jesus. The baptism of Jesus is such that it solves the problem. It meets the need. It is of such a quality that it does not need repeating.

"Of His fullness have we all received..." (John 1:16). Some say, "But Paul said he wanted believers at Ephesus to be filled with the fullness of God." (Eph 3:19). Yes, to come to the knowledge of their fullness in Christ. Repetitive religion and tradition kept them blinded to it.

Daily Water Collection

Jesus told the woman at the well that she would have to come daily for that water. Jesus was not speaking of the water in that well. He was referring to her religion, which she relied upon to help, but which obviously was not working. She adhered to the rituals each day, but it did not change her life. She kept having the same problems.

She understood His point and so asked in response, "Should we worship on this mountain or that?" (John 4:20). Jesus said He came to give living water so that she would not have to draw dead water again through the law. Then He said to the disciples, "I have meat to eat that you do not know of." (John 42). This is the same point. "I have life that is sustained by Me and My Father, not by human effort."

Some people think that we need some daily experience to have life. This is modern charismatic religion, just like the woman had. It does not change our life. Then we need another experience the next day. We become junkies. They call this "the river". This is not the river. You can tell because the same issues repeat themselves in their lives. They do not overcome sin. Jesus is the river. Jesus is the living water.

Then Jesus said to the multitude:

Labour not for that which perishes, but for the meat which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give you. (John 6:27).

We used to think that Jesus was speaking here about physical food. This is not what He meant. The food *that perishes* He was referring to was their Jewish religion. He was not speaking of physical bread or meat. He told His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, meaning their religion. The essence of it was hypocrisy, doing the same things when it is evident that we have not changed.

Jesus had just performed the miracle of the loaves. Now He is making His point about their religion, their spiritual sustenance. In response they asked, "Ok, if we do not need all this religious paraphernalia, what are the works of God?". Jesus answered, "This is God's work. That you believe on Him whom He has sent." (John 6:28-29) There is not much work in that. Who would understand that?

This is offensive to self. The first lesson in truth is showing that we have no part in God's gift to us. It is only when God brings down the foundation of self, that He can lay the foundation of Christ. Then He builds on that foundation, through grace and faith. This process can hurt. It is against everything we naturally think. This is the trouble they had in Jesus' day.

There is so much labour in religion. We think "we have to do something". We labour for fresh anointing, but it does not stay fresh for long. The experience soon gets *worms* like the manna, or *leaks out* with the pressures of the day. So we have to observe our religious exercises again. The New Covenant came to change this. We still pray, but our prayer is with joy and power. The difference is faith verses unbelief.

This message of Jesus turned the tide against Him. They saw what He said about their whole system of religion. They wanted their religion and not Him. He said all they did in their religious observances was vanity and flesh. He said the religion was supposed to point to Him so they could come to Him and receive the fullness. But they would not. They would rather trust in what they knew.

It is the same today. Many men would prefer to trust in their animistic mindset, or evangelical traditions and work for their faith or sanctification, which are gifts. We are not saying that we should not pray, worship and petition God with thanksgiving. We are speaking about working to gain acceptance with Him, faith, sanctification, life, power or spiritual protection. These are all His gifts to us. Our call is to walk in them, by walking in Him.

Life Continues

Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again. But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:13-14).

In contrast to their religion, Jesus said he that comes to Him shall *never thirst again*. He shall have a well within forever springing up. The well is in us and keeps *springing up*. It is an everlasting well. It never runs down or runs dry. It is based entirely on Jesus' blood, so nothing we do depletes it or increases it.

This is not complacency, but a genuine supply by the Spirit of joy, love and faith, which are always in us through the merits and gift of Christ. We live by Christ's supply, not by our merits. "The life I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal 2:20).

There's a well of life flowing out from me. It makes the lame to walk and the blind to see. It opens prison doors and sets the captives free. There's a river of life flowing out from me! (Chorus).

This is His baptism. The opposite position for us is to think that His work on the cross was not sufficient and He needs to come down and do it again. Unbelief says, "Who shall bring Christ down?" Faith says, "The word is in my heart and in my mouth." (Rom 10:8). Thank God, His baptism put His living word within us. It is a terrible thing that after all Christ did, we say, "It was not enough, come down and suffer again".

I am the bread of life: he that comes to Me shall never hunger and he that believes on Me shall never thirst. (John 6:33).

When people lack contentment there is something wrong. And songs such as "I am desperate for you" have nothing to do with Christ's salvation. They are opposite to the gospel. We cannot turn Jesus' invitation to those under the law into a perpetual need for those already in the New Covenant. He came to fill us:

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Matt 5:6).

This is said to those who recognize the insufficiency of their religion, to those whose hearts are open, to those who do not take offence.

Come to Me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. (Matt 11:28).

This is said to those who are burdened by the works of the law. We have met so many Evangelicals/Charismatics who have been weighed down by such a burden and who were set free by the gospel.

If any man thirsts, let Him come to Me and drink. He that believes on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (John 7:37-38).

All these verses are in direct contrast to Old Covenant religion.

It is true that circumstances may still weigh us down at times. We are still often pressed without measure. Life is not a bed of roses. We are speaking here about the supply of God's Spirit.

Jesus

Jesus was quite distinct from what people expected. John the Baptist had a programme for his disciples, which included teaching them how to pray and fasting. Discipleship programmes often set these things into a daily routine. Now, if Jesus was holy, then it was expected that He should teach His disciples the same way.

But He did not. He avoided John the Baptist's approach to spiritual life. That is not why He came. Eventually His disciples had to ask Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). He probably did not make a point of "praying with them". He preferred to be with His Father alone. When they asked, He taught them heart attitudes in prayer and did not give them a method of praying or a programme. He did not give a discipleship programme. He gave His life.

He did not tell them what time to get out of bed. He did not tell them how many minutes each day to pray. He ate and drank at people's houses. This is not what they expecting. "John was not like this." We like a programme, a set of laws, so we can fulfil them and be secure that we have done all required. But Jesus came to give *new wineskins* and relationship from the heart with the Father. If He had given a programme He would have defeated His own witness, which was of *Himself*.

We talk of prayer in another chapter. The best way to learn to pray after being filled with the Spirit is to pray. It is a personal relationship. Discipleship programmes are law. We are not called to them. We are called to give our life, through new birth and living in Him.

The Corinthian Babes

There are passages in the Bible that speak of maturity, but before we get to them we look at how we often misunderstand maturity. Maturity is sometimes the opposite of what we think it is and we have frequently inserted our thoughts into scriptures, where they have not been the thoughts of the author.

In 1st Cor 3:1 Paul spoke of *spiritual babes*. We thought that Paul taught that there is a long process from spiritual babyhood to adulthood, whereby we become more and more spiritual and thus climb up to higher levels. This is the exact opposite to what Paul taught.

Paul explained that the Corinthians were babes, not because they neglected spiritual exercises, but because they adopted them. This affected their marriage relationships and brought them into legalism and self-exaltation. Paul's response was opposite to our natural thinking. Their *spirituality* was their problem. They were carnal (not trusting in the spirituality of Christ) and they were divided among themselves, trying to be more spiritual than the other (1 Cor 3:3-4).

Their problem was not that they had not grown enough, but that they had *gone backwards*. They had fallen from that which Christ had already given to them as a free gift. They were trying to do it themselves. They had done exactly what the Galatians had done. They had gone from the spirituality of Christ back to their own spirituality, from simplicity back to complexity, from faith back to works:

But I fear, lest by any means...your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Cor 11:3).

Their problem was the *spirituals*, the false apostles who had a so-called *superior spirituality*. These tried to make a show in the flesh, by being more spiritual and thus showed themselves to be carnal. We study this more fully in the chapter on spiritual gifts. The Corinthians rejected Paul because he was not spiritual, i.e. he did not follow their devotional rules (2 Cor 10:3), which Paul condemned in Col 2:16-23.

We claim that there are spiritual conditions we must meet to please God, but we cannot keep these conditions, laws and *resolutions* and we feel guilty about it. This may be why we sometimes adopt a theology of *trying* and *progressive sanctification*, because it explains and excuses our experience.

If we say that there are conditions that we must meet to be sanctified, when did we ever meet them? The message of Paul in Corinthians is that we should *not* be spiritual, but we should rather *love*. We should love one another fervently, not judge one another by religious standards. In trying to be spiritual, the Corinthians missed what spirituality is: the love of Jesus Christ.

...and be found in Him, *not having my own righteousness*, which is of the law, but that which is through *the faith of Christ*, the righteousness which is of God by faith. (Phil 3:9).

Notice the difference in translations here. The NKJV, "faith in Christ": The KJV, "the faith of Christ". Your faith is not your work. It is of Him. Translations are at times impacted by the translator's theology.

Mind Renewal

Another passage where we have inserted a meaning not intended in the original context is Rom 12:1-2. We have assumed that when Paul spoke of renewing the mind that he was speaking of a long process. We have then associated this with *process sanctification*. But this was not Paul's mind.

In Romans 6 Paul asked "shall we sin that grace that abound?". Again in Rom 9-11 Paul warns the Gentile believers not to be proud. In Romans 12 he has the remedy: we present our bodies in grateful

service and be not conformed to the world. We should not copy the attitudes of pride and self-indulgence seen around us.

Paul is speaking about having the right attitudes:

I beseech you therefore...that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (worship). And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove...the will of God. (Rom 12:1-2).

The being *transformed* simply means *live differently*. The *renewing of the mind* simply means *do not embrace worldly attitudes*. There is nothing said here about a long process. It is a simple exhortation to the Roman believers to prove the will of God by their life style, as an act of gratitude and worship.

We have sometimes said that salvation has two stages:

1. That we *were* saved in the spirit.
2. And are *being* saved in our mind and body slowly.

We have used Rom 12:1-2 to teach on the *process* of mind renewal. Romans 12 was not written with this view. Paul did not mention a process. He simply exhorted the believers on specific attitudes of mind they should have: on kindness, love, service and humility (Rom 12:3-12). So then, this is what we should also exhort from the passage.

Paul exhorted the same in Philippians 2, that we exhibit the same *mind* with Christ, in humility and obedience. Similarly in Eph 4:23, that we walk in the right *attitude* concerning living out who we are in Christ. In none of these passages did Paul speak of a process. They are simple exhortations to Christian living. He is saying, "Since this has been done for you by God, live it out in gratitude."

Paul's appeal to this *new thinking* was not based on training, but on what Christ has done. "If you *are* risen with Christ, set your mind on things above...lie not to one another, seeing that you *have* put off the old man with his deeds and *have* put on the new man, which *is renewed* in knowledge..." (Col 3:1, 9-10). So our mind is already renewed! Think according to the Spirit of Christ within you. The new birth affected our mind and our body. The change is there already. He simply says walk in it.

Often there is little emphasis on the new birth and more on *training* people out of sin. Yet, when we are born again there is a radical change in our whole being. Our mind changes when the Spirit comes in. This is what we need confidence in, not human methods of psychology.

Grace vs. Law

Before we look at biblical perfection and then at Christian maturity, there is a passage in Corinthians we will examine. We need to interpret verses in Corinthians by the overall context of the Corinthian problem. We need to read the whole chapter (2nd Corinthians 3) to appreciate the context.

But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor 3:18).

This *glass* is the gospel shining upon of hearts. This verse is not speaking of a progressive maturity based upon what we do in spiritual disciplines. In this passage Paul is contrasting the *personal spirituality* of the Corinthians through works, with the new birth that comes through the free grace of Jesus Christ.

He speaks of the *letter*, referring to the *works/legalism/self-spirituality* of the Judaizers and Gnostics. His point is, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” (vs. 5). He repeats this, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus Christ.” (4:5; see also 5:12). Rather than being spiritual elitists, we are servants in the free grace of Christ.

Paul speaks of the glory of the Old Covenant on Moses’ face and the glory of the New Covenant in Jesus’ face. The fading glory of the Old points to the greater glory of Jesus. This may be the meaning of “*from glory to glory*” (vs. 18). John Gill points this out as an option in understanding the phrase. We are changed, not by the fading glory of the Old, but by the glory of Christ working in the gospel by His Spirit.

Paul’s point is that *the gospel is the power of God*, in opposition to our spiritual disciplines. This contrast is the subject and purpose of the passage. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there is liberty* from sin. Legalism does not give this liberty from sin or self, or transform our nature.

Paul continued, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, *has shined* in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor 4:6). This is past tense, when we were born again. He is not speaking of a progressive work here.

Paul is contending against the Corinthian’s false spirituality, their false path to enlightenment and for the free grace of Christ that transforms us through new birth.

Gill gave four options for understanding the phrase *from glory to glory*:

1. From the glory of the law to the glory of the gospel. In the context, this is the one we prefer, though we do not have the knowledge of the Hebrew thought and Greek language constructions used in verse 18 to further look into this.
2. From the glory that is in Christ, to a glory derived in believers from Him. Hodge claims Greek fathers preferred this view. This could also be the meaning of *from faith to faith* (Rom 1:17), from His faith to the gospel making it our faith.
3. From one level of glory (grace) in Christ to the next. This is the option that Gill and many others prefer. If so, then it is still by grace and not by law. It is by the Spirit of liberty and God’s commandment that the glory shines in us and continues to more and more.
4. From the glory begun at new birth, to the glory completed in the resurrection. This is true, but does not appear to relate to the context of this particular passage.

Perfection

As we move on to look at maturity and growth in Christ one word we think of is *perfection*. The word *perfection* means different things in the New Testament, depending on its context. It can refer to:

1. Perfection according to the law.
2. Perfection in Christ.
3. An *equipping* in the knowledge of Christ. Here, to perfect means to furnish.
4. Living out our salvation, meaning to make its purpose complete in its goal of love, etc. This means to *fulfil* in our walk the purpose of God’s call, not to perfect in the sense of never to err.

5. The resurrection at the last day.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor 7:1).

Maturation is the work of the Great Shepherd of our souls. It is not achieved by the keeping of religious traditions. Perfection in terms of *living out what God has put in*, is seen in this text, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do...*" (Phil 2:12-13). We ensure that we do not receive the grace of God in vain.

Perfectionist movements have arisen in the past, associated either with Wesleyan concepts or Keswick progressive sanctification. In America, preachers like Moody had similar ideas. They promoted perfection as the end of a daily process of sanctification, which Christians should strive toward.

A common text for this type of belief is Phil 3:7-16. Here, Paul shows that he is not yet perfect, but presses forward that he might attain. Paul meant that he continues in the gospel, counting all else dung, that he might be found in Christ by faith and not in his own righteousness. He had not yet completed running his race. He was pressing in faith towards the resurrection and fulfilling God's purposes.

Some people monitor their spiritual growth by benchmarks: how many hours a day we pray in tongues, how much we do for God and how much we give, rather than by *what He is doing in us*. They are monitoring their "growth" by works. Often, discipleship programmes are constructed in this way. This is not growth. It harms people. It is measuring us by law: "Comparing (lit. *measuring*) ourselves among ourselves." (2 Cor 10:12).

Maturing in Fruitfulness

In Eph 4:12-15, we are "perfected" until conformed to the full image of Christ. *Perfected* here means equipped and the conformity to Christ is maturity. It is a growth in the knowledge of Christ and His finished work. It is His knowledge, granted by His Spirit, which brings us to a mature walk.

Maturity is getting back to the knowledge of how we began, through the simplicity of faith, the simplicity of Christ. We have this when we are born again, but teachings from human method, philosophy and religion complicate the issue and we lose it. This was Paul's lesson in Galatians.

Maturity is learning to *walk in Christ in the same way that we receive Him*, as a gift of faith:

As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, *established in the faith*, as you have been taught, *abounding therein in with thanksgiving*.

Beware lest any man spoil you through *philosophy* and vain deceit, after *the tradition of men*, after *the rudiments of the world* and *not after Christ*. For *in Him* dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And *you are complete in Him*, which is the head of all principality and power. (Col 2:6-10).

We are to *press on by holding fast* to what is given, until the end of the race. We do not allow false teaching to draw us away from our completeness in Christ, but remain steadfast in it. This is maturity, when we are not tossed to and fro by doctrines that teach us to do it ourselves (Eph 4:14).

Uses of "Perfection"

The word "perfect" was used in the *Sermon of the Mount*. Jesus said that if we want righteousness by the law, then we must be perfect even as God is perfect. This sermon should destroy all self-righteousness. Jesus was not giving us a measure to attain to, but showing that we cannot be saved

by the law. This sermon is to lead us to Christ, who fulfils the law in our character and walk by the Spirit, not by self-effort.

This does not mean the *Sermon of the Mount* is now defunct. It shows us the life of Christ that the Holy Spirit lives in and through us in the New Covenant. We do not submit ourselves to it as to a law. We submit ourselves to Jesus Christ, not to law (Rom 7:4).

The same goes for “unless you deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple”. This is perfection by the law. Jesus was showing the extent of the law, that it is not just an outward righteousness. This is fulfilled in new birth, by Christ living in us in the New Covenant. “I live, yet not I.” (Gal 2:20).

On one hand Jesus talks about the requirements of the law and on the other He talks of the gift of God. One is to lead us to the other. This is how He ministered.

The word “perfect” was also used by James: “Allow patience to have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.” (James 1:4). James spoke of trials. We may only hearken to God in trials, as God brings us back to reliance on Him. Our perfection here again *is in Christ*. Trials show what is in our heart. This is not a process, but can occur at any time in our Christian life, whenever needed.

Peter speaks of adding certain things to our faith: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, kindness and love (2 Pet 1:5-10). These things are *in Jesus* who lives in us. His love is already shed abroad in our heart (Rom 5:5). These resources are given us in Christ. Peter said that the purpose is to further our fruitfulness as we make our calling and election *sure*: increase our confidence in it.

Peter is saying that we should put on and walk in what we have in Jesus Christ, by faith. If we are tossed to and fro we doubt and become unfruitful. Peter has the same goal as Paul in his admonitions to maturity (Eph 4:14): *do not be tossed*. Hebrews has the same goal, that having a strong anchor for our souls, we should increase in fruitfulness (Heb 6:7-20, the subject is not losing salvation, but fruitfulness in it.).

Without Spot or Wrinkle

Here we show that verses about our perfection refer to Christ's' finished work and not to a process:

...as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:25-27).

This is the gospel. It shows that we are sanctified by the cross, where Christ *gave Himself*. The *washing of water* refers to the new birth. It is Spirit baptism by the water of the word (Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 1:3, 23). (See also Heb 10:22.) We are presented to the Father perfect, without spot or wrinkle, by His blood. It does not say that we are presented perfect after a process of sanctification.

And you, that were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet *now* has He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, *to present you* holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in His sight: if you continue *in the faith* grounded and settled and *be not moved away* from the hope of the gospel...(Col 1:21-23).

The problem with our traditions on spiritual growth is that they do the very thing Paul admonished against. They move us away from our confidence in Christ to a hope in what we can do. Oh what a disaster. We build again what Christ pulled down. But He does not judge us. He loves us and is merciful and sheds His light upon us in the gospel and heals us of our struggles.

This passage shows we are presented perfect, holy, without blame or reproof in God's sight, not by our coming of age as a church, or our efforts in sanctification as believers, but by the cross of Christ alone. This passage is not speaking of a maturing process, but of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

There is a teaching related to *end-times* that claims that the body of Christ is being perfected slowly and when that is achieved Jesus will return. It is also sometimes stated that if we take certain steps to mature ourselves more quickly, we can set the agenda of when Jesus returns. This is what the Essenes thought.

There does not appear to be any teaching in the Bible that claims that the return of Jesus has anything to do with the church maturing itself. The church has faults and always will have until He comes. They are called *people* – you and me. This is why we must love one another.

Rev 19:7-8 says that the bride *has made herself ready* for the marriage supper of the Lamb. Some have taught that Jesus is waiting for the church to *get ready/fully mature herself* and then He will return. The NKJV says the pure garments given to the church are the righteous *acts* of the saints. It is taught that when we straighten out our acts He will return.

This translation is not in accord with the original Greek. It shows how a translation can be affected by the theology of the translators. The word *acts* is not in the KJV. The phrase *the bride has made herself ready* is drawn from Israeli wedding tradition, but here the clothing is *granted* to her, which the KJV says is *the righteousness of the saints*. That is, we are clothed in purity because of the blood of Christ.

This is what qualifies us for the wedding. The man who was not dressed for the wedding (in Jesus' parable) did not have this clothing. He did not have faith. It has nothing to do with maturity or our works.

It is assumed that the *marriage supper* is after the Second Coming of Jesus. *The marriage supper is the gospel*. It is what He declared in John 6, regarding eating His flesh and drinking His blood for eternal life. He is our supper. There is no point missing the wedding feast now, waiting for the one to come. "He sets a table before me in the presence of my enemies", which means now (Psalm 23).

Revelation 19 depicts gospel themes. It is not a timetable for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We are not waiting for the marriage supper, but we are in it now because we are washed in Jesus Christ. Now we eat of His flesh and drink of His blood, in His communion (fellowship) by faith (Mark 2:19, John 3:29).

Growing in His Fullness

The same assumption about the Second Coming of Jesus has been made in Ephesians 4. It is claimed by some that the passage means that when the church matures to a place of perfection Jesus will return. However there is nothing in the passage where Paul says that this is in his mind:

And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. (Eph 4:11-14).

This passage speaks of the perfecting (*equipping*) of the church, till we all come to a perfect man, to the full image of Christ. The passage is saying that the ministry gifts in the church are used by God to expose to the believers all that Christ has done and thereby bring us in His grace to an acknowledgment of it, so that we walk in its fullness.

The passage is not an “end-times” scenario. It is simply speaking of the unity of the body, the local assembly, building itself up in love, as each member grows with one another, in the knowledge of their joint completeness in Christ. That is, our completeness is not for us alone, but for each member together in love, working in one body in Christ. This is God’s will for each local assembly in Jesus.

Paul states that the purpose of God in this five-fold ministry is that we grow in knowledge, to be stable in it and walk in our fullness in Christ, to where we are *not tossed to and fro* with every false and cunning doctrine of man and thus walk in fruitfulness in Christ’s redemption. Paul did not say in Ephesians 4, or in any other part of Ephesians, that there is an end-times theme to his epistle. He is merely explaining how our growth in Christ works within His body.

Paul states the same in the previous chapter. The intention is that we be filled *through, by or with* (i.e., by means of) the fullness of Christ that already abides in us, by our acknowledgment of that fullness, that we walk in it by faith. Paul is not saying that we should reach out for more, for that would defeat the whole lesson. He is saying that we walk in what we have, being already seated with Christ in heavenly places (2:6).

That Christ might dwell in your hearts by faith...and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:17, 19).

This is a prayer that the saints might abide in Christ and not be moved aside to every false wind of doctrine. It is not saying that we need an extra filling, but that we should be filled with what we already have in Christ through our acknowledgment of it by faith. He means that we should be grounded and settled in Christ’s love (vs. 17).

That the communication (*sharing/working/out living*) of your faith may become effective by the acknowledging of every good thing *which is in* by Jesus Christ. (Phil 6).

This is the same as Peter saying, “Add knowledge, godliness, brotherly kindness and love to your faith.” (2 Pet 1:5). We are acknowledging every good thing of Christ that is in us and are walking in it. But we do not do this by trying to get it. We have it in Christ in us. We now walk in it by faith. *Fullness* is not a quantity, that we say we want more of, but it is a quality. It is the abundant life of the person of Christ.

Growing in Christ is growing in the knowledge of Jesus and being led by our Father and chief Shepherd, as He works in us both the character and fruit that He desires and has planned for us before the world (Eph 2:10). God does this in us through the knowledge of His truth, “Desire the sincere milk of the word that you might grow thereby.” (1 Pet 2:2). By this we escape religious ordinances and men’s teachings and are established in the completeness of Christ’s redemption.

Character

Abraham grew strong in faith, while giving glory to God and not considering the flesh, but what God had said to him. Abraham’s faith did not grow. Abraham grew strong in mind and emotions, in that faith that God had given to him (Rom 4:18-22).

We also develop in character. We grow or mature in our character. We grow in character and in wisdom as we age. We should also grow in character as we yield ourselves to the Lord. This simply means that we obey His word and humble ourselves when corrected.

Hebrews 11 speaks of the heroes of faith. The one ingredient in each of them was obedience. "By faith Noah...moved with fear...built the ark...By faith Abraham...obeyed...not knowing whither he went." (Heb 11:7-8). Faith is not a feeling. It is simply obeying God.

Now no chastening for the present seems joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those that are exercised (trained) thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees (encourage yourself) and make straight paths for your feet (do not run from God's discipline), lest that which is lame (in our character) be turned out of the way (become dysfunctional), but rather let it be healed. (Heb 12:11-13).

We all need character development. We have gifting and character. God will not withdraw His gifting, but we must vigilantly watch over our character in grace. It just means that we humble ourselves. God Himself leads us in this. He exhorts us in it and gives us the grace for it.

Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. (Pr 4:23).

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (1 Pet 5:6-7).

Patience is often used in scripture in relation to our character. Through trials the Spirit brings out patience, conforming our character to the image of Christ (Heb 10:35-39, 12:10-13, James 1:2-8, 1 Pet 1:7-9, 2 Pet 1:5-11). When a *silversmith* purifies silver he burns away the dross. He knows it is ready and pure when he looks into the molten silver and can see his image and reflection in it. This is how Christ deals with us.

Conforming our character to the image of Christ's character is not a process in sanctification, but a work of the Spirit of God in us. Character is important. We make a shipwreck when we rely on our gift and neglect our character. If we do not allow God to renew our character we become unfruitful and destroy our own work, with the same hands we used to build it.

Put on therefore, as elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so do also. And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you are called and be thankful. (Col 3:12-15).

Here Paul says that because we are elect and because we are holy in Christ, therefore put on what we have in Him. We do this by faith. We walk in this by faith. This then works perfectness in character, meaning to wear as a garment what we have already been given in Christ. This is perfectness in the sense that it *completes* the purpose of God, i.e. that we love one another.

This love is expressed in service to one another, as Christ came to serve and not to be served. This should be our character and life style. Service replaces self-centeredness, self-importance, ease and self-pleasing.

The Good Shepherd

God takes the responsibility for our whole salvation. He will never leave us nor forsake us. Rom 8:30 says that those whom He justified He also glorified. This speaks of the resurrection of the body, but it

also shows that God has a programme for our life which He is working out. As Paul said, He will finish that which He started (Phil 1:6). He is the *author* and the *finisher* of our faith (Heb 12:2).

Christ is the shepherd of our souls (1 Pet 2:25). He is the one who guides us. David showed this in the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd.". He leads me. He corrects me. He causes me to lie down and to drink. All these things are too big for us to handle. Our need is beyond our own knowledge. We are "His workmanship." (Eph 2:10). God matures us. We do not do it by applying a list of devotional rules.

And I will set up one shepherd over them and He shall feed them, even My Servant David, He shall feed them and He shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God and My Servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. (Ezek 34:23-24).

The prophet used metaphorical language to represent the New Covenant: *David* His chosen, *Israel* His flock, the *land* His redemption and the *temple* His body. In John 10 Jesus said this was fulfilled, "And when He puts forth His own sheep, He goes before them and the sheep follow Him...I am the good shepherd." (John 10:4).

Hear the word of the Lord, O you nations and declare it in the isles afar off and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him and keep him, as a shepherd gathers his flock. (Jer 31:10).

Here we see also the false shepherds. They do not serve the body, but make the people serve them:

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds; Woe to the shepherds of Israel that feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? (Ezek 34:2).

God pastors our life:

As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. (Ezek 34:12).

The union of the Gentiles with Israel, not in the Second Coming of Christ, but in the church today:

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold...(John 10:16).

The Shepherd heals us body, soul and spirit. Healing here is for the whole man, including everything in Psalm 23, full maturity in Christ:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed. For you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. (1 Pet 2:24-25).

He is our chief Shepherd. Peter's theme is that he and the other apostles were Christ's under-shepherds. There is one teacher, one shepherd, one mediator between man and God, Christ:

Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away. (1 Pet 5:3-4).

Those shepherds today who eat of the flock will not receive a reward, but will receive judgement when He comes. 2nd Peter and Jude show this very clearly. Those who put fear and superstition on people and keep back the keys of the kingdom (the free redemption in Christ) and then exact offerings are thieves and robbers and will be judged for it.

It is plain that maturity is not of us, but it is through the Shepherd whom the Father appointed for this very task. This is why it is a better Covenant with better promises, for we have a reliable Shepherd who cannot fail. "He makes intercession for us, that we might be saved to the uttermost." (Heb 7:25).

Father's Plan

Our heavenly Father is the one who takes care of us, like He does the sparrows (Matt 6:24-34). He is our Pastor. He will not allow us to dash our foot against a stone (Psalm 91). All the Psalms are about Christ's pastoral care of His people, which is why He was afflicted (Psalm 22).

He also corrects us. Heb 12:7-8 shows the correction and pastoring of our Father. He said that no son is without correction, or he is a bastard. Just as your earthly father corrected you, so you have a heavenly Father who knows what to do. We leave our Christian growth to Him. He knows how to deal with us and bring us into situations where we face issues and He changes in us what He wants to.

Go and tell My servant David, Thus says the Lord, Will you build a house for Me to dwell in?...Now thus says the Lord, I took you from the sheepcote...that you should be ruler of My people...I have been with you wherever you have walked...(1 Chron 17:4-8).

We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Will we build His temple? Will we save or sanctify ourselves? Will we make a place for Him to dwell in? God was David's shepherd. He cared for Him tenderly wherever he went. He was successful because God chose Him. Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt because God chose Him. It was not them or their leadership method. It was the sovereignty of God.

Jesus, not Programme

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb 13:20-21).

This passage tells us:

1. God is the one who has a programme for our growth.
2. He achieves this programme by the price He has paid: His blood.

God equips us for every good work through Jesus Christ. We do not do it through our discipleship programmes. God does it by faith. If you have a programme for your perfection and maturity then you are in the flesh. God's programme is the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other programme and no flesh that will glory in His presence. Jesus does not show you a way to do things, rather He *is* the way.

I am the way, the truth and the life...(John 14:6).

We have trouble relating this to daily life without a list of rules. But when we apply our own rules we take it out of His hands. Hebrews 13 shows us that God works in us what He wants according to His Fathering of us and He does this through the blood of His Son and not through our own merits. We relate to this by faith and obedience, not through works.

A child grows and matures naturally. He does not eat food as a discipline, but as a natural appetite. That is how we grow on God's word. We develop over time as we grow in our Father's house. It is "natural" when we are born again and when He lives in us. We cannot force growth. Father has a plan and we cannot speed it up or slow it down.

Infirmity

Perfection does not mean that we are "humanly perfect". We all see in part and know in part (1 Cor 13:10). We all have character faults. There is none perfect in this sense this side of the resurrection and there never will be. It is not right to expect it of people. Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8). Mercy rejoices over judgement (James 2:13).

We have infirmity as humans, in body, in motives and in thought (Heb 4:14). This does not mean that we have sin. It teaches us to continue to rely on God and not on ourselves. In our weakness we are strong, by faith in Him and not in pride or self-confidence. It teaches us humility. Infirmity will never go in this life. There is no perfection in human life that will remove it. This is why we are called to love one another.

We learn to trust in the Lord and not in ourselves. We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the glory may be of Him and not of us, so we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord (2 Cor 4:5-7). His strength is perfected in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9). We go on in the power of God despite our personal failings and forgiving the personal failings of others.

This is not an excuse for sin, or for covering sin in ministry. He that sins in one or more of the *Three G's*, "gold, glory or girls", disqualifies himself from ministry. It is not a matter of others disqualifying him, exposing him or coming against "the Lord's anointed". (1 Cor 9:27).

For this reason we keep the flesh under. If we cover the sin of a minister of the gospel we are an accomplice to his/her sin. We may also be breaking the civil law. Here we are not speaking about minor imperfections, but immorality and unethical behaviour.

My wife once wrote a letter to encourage a friend about imperfection in the church:

Some people have been misled and it will take God time to convict them about their wrong attitudes and behaviours and some will not listen. The church (every church) has always been like that and it will be until we are clothed in Christ's perfection (resurrection). I cannot assume I am doing it all right either. I am sure I am not, but if I keep my heart open to God He will show me how to do better and be patient with other less-than-perfect people.

Paul said:

It matters very little to me what you think of me, even less where I rank in popular opinion. I don't even rank myself. Comparisons in these matters are pointless.

I'm not aware of anything that would disqualify me from being a good guide for you, but that doesn't mean much. The Master makes that judgment.

So don't get ahead of the Master and jump to conclusions with your judgments before all the evidence is in. When He comes, He will bring out in the open and place in evidence all kinds of things we never even dreamed of—inner motives and purposes and prayers. Only then will any one of us get to hear the "Well done!" of God. (Message Bible, 1 Cor 4:3-5).

Biblical Perfection

There are many sections of scripture that speak of New Covenant perfection and they all relate to the blood of Christ. The word “perfect” is used 12 times in the book of Hebrews in the KJV. The Old Covenant was said to be wanting, the work of Christ already finished is said to be perfect.

Heb 6:1-2 says “Let us (the Hebrew) go onto perfection”, not returning to the foundational (rudimentary) principles. This is not speaking about Christian growth, but of the Jews embracing the fulfilment, the maturity, the completion and the substance of the shadow of the Old Covenant, who is Christ. Christ is the perfection of what the Old Covenant foundational doctrines pointed to. Christ does not do away with the foundational doctrines, but He fulfils and thus perfects them.

The book of Hebrews then continues to show that Christ is that perfection. “For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by which we draw near to God.” (Heb 7:19). This is past tense. The better hope has made us perfect through a perfect High Priest.

The book of Hebrews was written to encourage believers not to go back to the ritual of the Old Covenant types and shadows, but to embrace their fulfilment, who is Christ, by faith. This is what the author means by “let us go onto perfection.” (Heb 6:1). Christ is that perfection, not us.

Heb 9:9, 14 shows that the Old Covenant could not perfect the conscience, but the blood of Jesus did. A Christian does not have a sin consciousness. Our sin has been cleansed. This does not mean that we will never sin, but it certainly will not be often. John wrote to us “that we sin not”, but if we do we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus the righteous (1 John 2:1-2).

Heb 10:14 says, “For by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified.”. His offering has perfected His brethren.

Heb 12:23 says that we have come, “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven and to God the Judge of all and to the spirits of just men made *perfect*.”. This verse is not saying that we are perfected by our works, but by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is the whole point of Hebrews.

Unconditional

A main factor in sanctification is the unconditionality of the New Covenant. This is a main theme in scripture. In the next few sections we explore the unconditional nature of salvation and how God has done it.

We have already seen that the Old Covenant was weak because of man. God looked and there was no man to help and so His own arm brought forth salvation. This salvation cannot be based in any way upon man, or it would not be secure. If any aspect was based on human performance it would not be eternally safe.

Starting back with Abraham, God promised an unconditional covenant of salvation to be fulfilled by Christ. He said, “By *Myself* I have sworn...” (Gen 22:16). Then, when Abraham cut the covenant in Genesis 15, God alone walked through the sacrifices, not Abraham. It was not a covenant of two equal parties, but of a divine unbreakable oath by God to His servant Abraham.

Paul develops this theme in Galatians 3, saying that if God confirmed this to Abraham by a promise, the law, which came 430 years later, cannot disannul the promise and make it of no effect. This shows again that salvation is by promise, which means not of works. If it is by promise, then it is not by law, which means it is unconditional.

God Did

How did God make the New Covenant unconditional? He did what man could not do. He fulfilled both parts of the covenant Himself.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Rom 8:1-3).

God is the one who *condemned sin in our flesh*.

We have traditionally taken this passage in the opposite manner to that intended by Paul. We thought Paul was setting a condition for *no condemnation*, which included two things: that we *walk in the Spirit* and that we *do not walk in the flesh*. We did not know that this change in our lives is what Christ did in the gospel.

We thought that by *walk in the Spirit* Paul meant that we adhere to our discipleship programme. We thought that *do not walk in the flesh* meant that we do not do certain things. So we had two sets of rules. Things we had to do and other things we could not do. We thought that when we fulfilled these then we would have no condemnation. We tried to call this grace, while we were never able to achieve it.

This *two sets of rules* brings us back to Romans 7: "That which I would...that which I would not..."

This interpretation is opposite to Paul's point. The context of Romans 7 is that law brings us under bondage. Paul's solution was the gospel. The answer is not to walk in the flesh, depending on our ability to fulfil conditions by law, but to walk in the Spirit, which means the free grace of Christ through His work: His death and resurrection.

This is another example of how we so often twist the meaning of scripture through a "devotional" interpretation. To *walk after the Spirit* means to live by the grace of God and not by law. It does not mean to *be spiritual* by fulfilling conditions. *To be in the Spirit means to be born again*. Paul said this specifically in vs. 9:

But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of Christ dwell in you. But he that does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. (Rom 8:9).

To be *in the Spirit* is not speaking in tongues nor *doing* anything else. It is Christ in you. It is His life. The condition of being in the Spirit is met by Jesus Christ when He gives us new birth. The human plan for "salvation" (depending on our ability to fulfil conditions) is contrasted with God's plan, His free grace in Christ Jesus.

To *walk after the flesh* means to trust in a *carnal commandment*, which has no power to impart life, but only to testify of our sin and thereby bring death (Heb 7:16). The commandment is called *carnal* because it depends on human ability. There is condemnation for those who walk by the flesh, i.e. by the law. But for those who are in Christ the conditions are fulfilled and the power of sin is broken.

For sin shall not have dominion over you, *because you are not under law, but under grace.* (Rom 6:14).

This is Paul's point and his teaching.

The Body of Sin

God fulfils His conditions by His cross and by implanting in us a new heart. "He works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13), according to the prophets. He "condemned sin in the flesh". He is the one who puts sin to death in our lives. He meets that condition by giving the new birth.

And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin. (Rom 8:10).

In Romans 7, Paul speaks of *the body of sin*, which controlled his life. He cried out for an answer "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" and then answered, "Thank God, through Jesus Christ.". A better way of reading Rom 8:10 is, "If Christ is in you, *the body of sin is dead*."

The J. B. Phillips translation reads, "Now if Christ does live within you His presence means that your sinful nature is dead...". This is the meaning of Paul in Rom 8:10. It is his answer to the sin nature, which he struggled with in the previous chapter. Contextually, this is what Paul is speaking about.

Because Christ condemned sin in the flesh, the body or life and power of sin in the flesh is dead. This is the basis of our sanctification, not what we do.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. (Rom 8:2).

They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. (Gal 5:24).

Our power over sin is not in our religious traditions, or in discipleship programmes. It is only in what Christ did. Grace is our power over sin. "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace." (Rom 6:14). By Christ we are dead to the law, that we might be married to another (Rom 7:4). He did this unconditionally. We had no part in doing it.

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that *the body of sin* might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (Rom 6:6).

This is done unconditionally in the new birth, by the gift of the new nature in Christ. We are quickened by Christ to walk in sanctification by His faith.

New Life is Sure

God has condemned sin in the flesh and now works in us to do His will. It is not our power or doing. He is the one who sets us free. His power sustains that freedom. He quickens our mortal body to live according to His will.

...But the Spirit is life because of (His) righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in you. (Rom 8:10-11).

God said that He would quicken us. This is not about physical healing or the coming resurrection. It is about our body being freed from sin by the presence of Jesus Christ within us. And it says that God does it, not us. Unless God quickens us with His eternal Spirit there is no life.

...even so we also should walk in newness of life. For as we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. (Rom 6:4-5).

This is unconditional. Our old self is crucified through Christ's death, which is nothing of ourselves and we are raised up to new life through the resurrection of Christ, which again is nothing of ourselves. God raises us up in Christ's resurrection, by new birth. This makes it sure.

His life and power continue to quicken us daily to do His will. It is not our "willpower". He puts away our sin and He brings us into new life, fulfilling both parts of our salvation and meeting all the conditions: legally, on the cross, by His blood and in our nature and daily walk by His resurrected life.

Conditionality

In the Old Covenant we often see terms such as "If...then". They go like this, "If you will do this, this and this, then I (God) will do this, this and this.". Deut 28:1-2 is an example. "...If you shall hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe and do all his commandments...the Lord your God will set you on high...".

The condition comes first, then the blessing. The blessings were conditional. The problem was that man did not meet the conditions. This is the very reason for the New Covenant, as Jeremiah said, "I will make a new covenant, not like the old, *because they did not continue in my ways.*" (Jer 31:31...). Replacing this with a New Covenant which also has conditions would be a waste of time.

It would also nullify the blood of Christ. His is not the blood of bulls and goats. His is not the priesthood of Levi. It is not possible for a covenant made in the blood of Jesus to be conditional or in any way thwarted or nullified. In men's eyes we might find this hard to see. But from the perspective of God it is sure.

Paul shows the distinction between the Old and New Covenants in Gal 3:12, "And the law is not of faith: but the man that does them shall live in them.". This means that the man who wishes for the blessings of the law must fulfil the whole law, without failing any single one of the conditions. Paul notes the conditionality of the law in contrast to New Covenant faith.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one who does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them. (Gal 3:10).

Anyone who attempts to fulfil conditions must fulfil them all without fail. Thus it is not possible to be justified by conditionality. "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident, For the just shall live by faith." (Gal 3:11).

Paul showed that the Old Covenant was conditional, while the New Covenant is of promise. In referring to the nature of the Old Covenant, Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5: "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgements: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord.". This means that to receive life by meeting conditions, we must meet them all without failing one of them.

A Better Priesthood

The book of Hebrews is about the distinction between the Old and New Covenants:

For there is truly a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw near to God. (Heb 7:18-19).

What was disannulled? Conditionality was disannulled and a dependence upon human performance. It was replaced with an oath and fulfilled in Christ alone.

For the law makes men high priests who have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, makes the Son, who is consecrated forever more. (Heb 7:28).

Under the Old Covenant, the efficacy of Levi's priesthood depended on Levi fulfilling the law himself, which he could not do. And when the Levitical priesthood failed, all the people suffered. Because the Old Covenant depended on the performance of man it was unprofitable and had to be laid aside.

For if the first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, He said, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. (Heb 8:7-8).

God must have a covenant which does not depend on human performance, the meeting of conditions. He had this in mind before He made the worlds. He allowed man to try first to see for himself whether he was able to meet all of the conditions and when man failed, He brought forth His Son.

A Better Covenant

By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament...He is mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. (Heb 7:22, 8:6).

The New Covenant is better because it is sure. It is better because it is established on better promises. It is unconditional, established on Christ's eternal priesthood, which was made by oath and not by the weakness of the flesh. This is why Hebrews says that Christ is our surety. It means that the surety of the New Covenant is based on Christ and not on our performance. It is made sure because its High Priest is sure and He will not fail.

Ezekiel 36

Then *will I* sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols, *will I* cleanse you. A new heart also *will I* give you and a new spirit *will I* put within you: and *I will* take away the stony heart out of your flesh and *I will* give you a heart of flesh. And *I will* put My Spirit within you and *cause you* to walk in My statutes and you shall keep My judgements and do them. (Ezek 36:25-27).

It repeatedly says "I will". Every aspect of this is something that God said He will do. It not once says we will do it. Every passage and promise under the law is conditional. But the New promise does not say, "The man who does these things shall live by them". It says, "I will cause you to keep My statutes.". This is the distinction between the Old and New Covenants. God performs the New Himself.

This text from Ezekiel finishes with "*I will...cause you to walk in my statutes*". God causes us to walk in His ways. "He works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." How does He cause us to keep His statutes? By writing His law upon our heart, by birthing into us His new nature, by raising us up into Christ and by putting His Spirit within us.

And the Redeemer shall come to Zion and to them that turn from transgression in Jacob, says the Lord. As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says the Lord; My Spirit that is upon You (Christ) and My words which I have put in Your mouth, shall not depart out of Your mouth, nor out of the mouth of Your seed (the church), nor out of the mouth of Your seed's seed (from all generations), says the Lord, from henceforth and for ever. (Is 59:20-21).

The New Covenant is entirely of Him. It does not leave us with any credit of our own. God is righteous because of who He is. He does not meet conditions to become righteous. We cannot meet the law's conditions to come to the required level. In the New Covenant He brings us into Himself through Christ, who met the conditions for us.

This promise in Is 59:20-21 is made to Christ and those in Him. "Unto Abraham and his seed (Christ) were the promises made." (Gal 3:16). Is 59:20-21 through Isaiah 60 to 66, is the Holy Spirit speaking to Jesus Christ and us in Him. "I and the children You have given Me are made for signs and for wonders..." (Heb 2:13, Is 8:18). God keeps us to fulfil His promise to Christ.

Exhortations

There are many exhortations in the New Testament. Nothing we say here wipes these aside. God's standard of righteousness has not changed. His law still applies. He is not raising a family of transgressors. But in the gospel God has worked a way that it can be of grace, as He moves into our life and changes the nature and then living in us, without force, works in our heart that which is pleasing to Him.

So to the redeemed, the exhortations in the New Testament, that appear to be conditions, are seen to be *fences of grace* that keep us in the right areas, like fences around a play ground. Not only that, but God's grace moves through those exhortations and provides the faith in the heart of the redeemed to respond and to live by them. "I will cause you to walk in My statutes and to keep them." (Ezek 36:27). He speaks them into our heart and quickens us to follow them.

When we hear exhortations we hear with faith, not as if it were by law. And we respond to them, not as by the works of law, but works or fruit of faith. So Jeremiah said God would write His law upon our heart. This means He puts His nature within us so that we walk in His ways. And John said we do not sin because His seed (nature) remains in us (1 John 3:9). The warnings, exhortations and conditions still exist, but they are fulfilled by the blood of Christ and by His life within us.

Here are a few examples:

By which also you are saved, *if* you keep in memory what I preached to you, *unless you have believed in vain*. (1 Cor 15:2).

Stand fast in the liberty where with Christ has made you free and *be not entangled again* with the yoke of bondage. (Gal 5:1).

If you continue in the faith grounded and settled and *be not moved away* from the hope of the gospel... (Col 1:23).

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, *lest at any time we should let them slip*. (Heb 2:1).

For *if we sin wilfully* after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins. (Heb 10:26).

There are many other scriptures similar to these. Grace does not mean that these should not be preached vehemently. In fact, grace means that we should preach these all the more, knowing that God's power works through them to change the hearts of the slothful and to bring us back to the Father's way. We know that God's people will respond to these and allow God to correct their ways. Therefore, we should preach these boldly to all people.

Exhortations are precious and they should be strongly used in preaching, but people should be made to understand that we do not respond to them by law through our own efforts and works, but that we

should allow God space to work in us and to change our heart and attitude when needed. We should allow the revelation of that word within to move us on in grace.

God uses these exhortations to correct and guide His people in His ways. The word of God is profitable for correction, exhortation and reproof (2 Tim 3:16). A child of God has the nature in Christ that causes him to hear, understand and respond. The credit is not to us, but to the grace of God that works in us, by the Spirit of Christ whom God freely gave to us. Exhortations can do nothing unless God moves in us through them (Heb 6:3).

The exhortations of Christ only cause real change when they are used on the foundation of grace. Grace brings down the pride of man and enables us to hear what God is saying. When man is shown that he has no part in his salvation he is ready to hear God with humility. Only grace can produce the fruit that God is looking for, because only this allows God to do it in us. Only this produces love. Love is *agape* – meaning unconditional. The preaching of the law kills, but the rebuke of grace awakens the soul.

We must be diligent with regards to our faith and we must watch with regard to sin. We must walk in the fear of the Lord and watch not to give the enemy an opportunity. We must work out our salvation with fear and trembling, not taking it for granted, diligently living out the plan that the Lord has for us, knowing that He is leading us and working in us.

We grow in grace. Paul said that he laboured more than all the apostles, yet not him but the grace of God that worked in him (1 Cor 15:10). Grace does not mean that we do less. It means that Christ and His work get the glory and not a humanistic faith.

The Bastard

But the bastard does not respond. He that is not a child of God does not receive correction and does not hear it and has no faith to accept it. The book of Hebrews was written to two types of people:

1. Those who were God's children who would give heed to the things spoken.
2. Those who would draw back to perdition.

We get both types of people in any congregation. The child of God will "look diligently lest any should fail of the grace of God" and keep himself in the love of God and in the gospel, because of the new birth (Heb 12:15).

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not? But if you are without chastisement, wherewith all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons. (Heb 12:7-8).

See that you refuse not Him that speaks. For if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth (Moses), much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaks from heaven. (Heb 12:25).

This was written to the Hebrews, some of whom were in danger of going back to the Old Covenant and forsaking the gospel. They were in danger of refusing to hear the gospel. They were in danger of rejecting the gospel. But the children of God would not reject it and turn away. They are sons, not bastards.

People appear to be born again and yet go away from God. Jesus said, "I never knew you", not, "I knew you, but you left Me." (Matt 7:23). They go away because the work of God in them was not complete. Some people are swept up in the current of revival, but it is not really inside them. They can manifest all sorts of gifts and "taste of the powers of God". (Heb 6:5). Saul did this among those called the prophets in 1st Samuel.

This is part of God's glory. In His house there are all kinds of vessels and He can fulfil His purposes through any person or situation, even if the person is not His child. This means we can never boast in a gift, but only in the Lord. Jesus told His disciples not to rejoice because the demons were subject to them, but because their names were written in heaven.

People can be enlightened to know the gospel to the point that they appear like other believers. Jesus said they are like tares compared to wheat. Tares and wheat look the same, until harvest time when the wheat bears grain. We cannot tell their nature by their look, their confession, by miracles, or by anything but the fruit they bear in the long run. "You know them by their fruit."

They went out from us (from Christ), but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. (1 John 2:19).

The Parable of the Sower

Jesus explained this in Mark 4 in the parable of the sower. In this parable many received the seed of God's word and rejoiced for a season. They had a Christian testimony indistinguishable from a true believer. This is what Jesus meant by "many are called and few are chosen". Many come under the call of the gospel, under the scattering of the seed. The "fishing nets" drag in many, but then God sorts them out. (Matt 13:46).

Those who are born of God receive the word so that it transforms the whole heart. It is not a shallow work that will disappear in time of trial. This is what the new birth is, not froth and bubble, not demonstration or even gifts of the Spirit that are commonly seen outwardly.

And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word and receive it and bring forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty and some an hundred. (Mark 4:20).

As a son we need to pay attention to this exhortation and ensure that God has done a work in our heart to this extent. We are not to attend to these things lightly, but diligently, to ensure that we are sons, not by presuming we are, but by checking to see whether the Lord has done this genuine work within us. Examine the fruit (1 John 2:3). "Faith without works (fruit) is dead, being alone." (James 2:17).

Hebrews Six

Hebrews 6 is often raised in discussions like this. Can a believer lose their salvation? Hebrews 6 is about those people Jesus spoke of in the parable of the sower, who did not receive the word on good ground. They were not sons. Hebrews 6 does not mean that God will refuse to restore the backslider. God will restore any backslider who returns to Him. God never rejects the penitent.

Peter saw all the miracles that Jesus did. He saw Jesus walk on water. Peter himself walked on water. Peter healed the sick and cast out demons and was sent out with the 12 and the 70. He tasted of the powers of the world to come. He claimed that he would never fall away. He would stand with Jesus in His trial and maybe even help Jesus redeem us! This is our view when we think that we play a part. Peter denied Christ and cursed Christ. Yet Jesus restored him.

Man, in his good intentions on repentance, salvation and sanctification, can do no better than Peter. This is why we have a Saviour, Furnisher and Finisher: Jesus.

Hebrews 6 (just like Heb 10:26) says that if someone leaves Christ then there is no repentance outside of Christ. There is no repentance (no remission of sins) in Judaism or in Buddhism. By this we mean *effectual repentance* to eternal life and transformation. There is only effectual repentance in

Jesus Christ. So, if the Hebrews were to leave Him and go to Judaism, they would not find repentance and salvation there. There is no other sacrifice for sin.

Some say that God did not accept Esau, though he sought repentance with tears (Heb 12:17). Esau did not seek repentance (*change of mind*) for himself, but from his father: that his father might change his mind about giving Jacob the blessing. He did not care about the birthright, but wanted Isaac to change his mind about blessing Jacob.

Saul did not seek repentance. These are examples of the reprobate, who are sorry for their sin for a season, but they go right back to it again. They do not change, though they exhibit sorrow. Judas Iscariot was of this nature. Peter said they are like a pig that returns to the mud after being washed (2 Pet 2:22).

They are not born of God's Spirit. These people may speak in tongues and prophecy, as Saul did. They might have financial miracles and cast out devils, like Judas did. They may even come out of some outward sins for a time; "be washed". But then they return to it.

It is wrong to say that anyone cannot be restored. There is no one who cannot be restored. The unforgivable sin is refusing the gospel, which is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. We know people who have backslidden into Islam, returning to the Mosque and have been restored by the Lord and been used by Him. These are trophies of His grace. Jesus came to save. People face different trials and circumstances and we do not know their hearts. God does.

Mortifying

We are told by Paul to mortify, put to death, the sinful deeds of the flesh. This does not mean to punish the flesh, but it means not to allow its sinful excesses. It does not mean that we must fast and deny sleep. It means cut off sin.

Paul always told the saints to do this in light of the fact that Christ had put to death the body of sin through their new birth. Paul's admonition is simply that we walk in what Christ has already done for us. We do not need more power to do this. We do not need to die to self to do this. All this is already done in the new birth. We are simply admonished to live out who we are in Christ.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience: In the which you also walked some time, when you lived in them.

But now you also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him. (Col 3:5-10).

Paul does not mention a process here. This is just something he tells us to do. This is something we do because Christ lives in us and changes our nature. We mortify the deeds of the flesh because Christ has set us free. Seeing sin for what it is causes us to lose taste for it. The Holy Spirit shows us that all forms of immorality are uncleanness and we turn away from them.

It does not mean that we will not be tempted. We are tempted when we are led away by our own desires (James 1:14). God said He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13). We are told to keep our flesh under, which means to control its passions according to the will of God (1 Cor 9:24-27).

If we sin, it does not mean that we are not Christian. The prodigal son came home. He was always a son, which is why he came home. Sin does not make a son not to be a son. He will be disciplined, but he remains a son. The Father never forsakes His children. Jesus took away our sin. God's children will always come home. They will always come out of sin.

In the whole New Testament there is not one case of someone losing their salvation. "Peter I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail. And when you are restored, strengthen the brethren, feed My sheep." (Luke 22:32). This is the case with every child of God.

Self Satisfied

A *self-satisfied* Christianity is not evidence of Jesus Christ. To say that we are children of God and have no need of others, no need to improve ourselves, to be kind, to care, to be courteous, to share, no need to give diligent attention to the admonitions of Paul or of Jesus should be foreign to us. We should give diligence in the factors below:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour. For we are members one of another. Be angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. (Eph 4:1-3, 25-32).

Be therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and has given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becomes saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

For this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God...For you were sometimes darkness, but now are light in the Lord: walk as children of light; for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth; proving what is acceptable to the Lord...

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil...And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Giving thanks always for all things to God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. (Eph 5:1-21).

In all these things that we do, we do not give credit to ourselves, but to God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil 2:13).

The Struggle

There is a struggle for believers. The world is against the truth and, therefore, it is also against those who stand with Christ. We are tempted. The enemy of our souls delights to bring us down. Our mind can take us away from God's truth. In all these God gives us the victory. But there is not a continuing and daily battle with sin. Some say, "But we still have a struggle with sin. That which I would, I do not and that which I would not, that I do." The problems with this are:

1. It is not the gospel.
2. It robs us of the life of joy.
3. It gives us an excuse to sin.

There are two places where Paul speaks of a struggle with sin and neither of them is in relation to the gospel. First, in Romans 7, he speaks of his plight without the grace of Christ, under the power of the law. 1 Cor 15: 56 explains that law is the power of sin.

The second is Gal 5:17, when he said that the flesh struggles against the Spirit. Many have claimed that this is normal Christian life. Paul never spoke of a struggle with sin in his own life after salvation, even though he listed all his struggles in 2nd Corinthians 12, including false brethren, persecutions and cares.

Galatians 5

In Galatians 5, Paul spoke of the same thing he spoke of in Romans 7: being under the law and not in Christ. He starts the context in Galatians 5 by saying, "Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; *you are fallen from grace.*" (vs. 4). This was the position of many in the Galatian church and it is in this context that Paul is speaking. He is not speaking of normal Christian life.

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: *so that you cannot do the things that you would.* (Gal 5:17).

This is the key phrase; *so that you cannot do the things that you would.* They were not able to resist sin. This is not speaking about eating an extra piece of cake. Paul said they were yielding to sin and then he listed the sins, or works of the flesh. This is not normal Christian life.

I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel. (Gal 1:6).

The Galatian condition gave them a particular problem. They had given themselves over to the law and had therefore fallen from grace. They were walking in the flesh (self-dependence) and therefore they had a battle with sin. It is only by the grace of Jesus Christ that we can live in the Spirit. "Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfil the desires of the flesh." (Gal 5:16). This means walk in the grace of Jesus Christ and not in the law.

In Gal 5:17, Paul is not speaking of normal Christian life, but the life into which the Galatians had fallen, being bewitched by false teaching (Gal 3:1). When people hold up Gal 5:17 as normal Christian life, they put others into bondage. We have been set free from sin in Jesus Christ. We have also been set free from sin consciousness – from all feelings of guilt – to walk in the comfort and joy of the Lord.

There is *not* a struggle between our spirit and our flesh. Paul is speaking here about law and grace. These are contrary one to another. We cannot walk in law and in grace. All through Paul's epistles he

makes this same point, over and over again. The law is not of faith. Ishmael cannot dwell with Isaac, the seed of promise. They are contrary world views.

The works of the flesh are the works of those who live under the law and are in bondage to it. The law is the power of sin. The fruit of the Spirit are the works of the faith of Jesus Christ who lives within us. In the mind of man there is a struggle between law and grace. In all of Paul's epistles he wrote to address this. Law is self, self-made, self-righteousness, self-help. Grace is Christ-centred and is life. It is the anointing that breaks the yoke. "Shouts of grace grace unto it." (Zech 4:7).

Teaching that there is a struggle between the body and spirit of man, or between their old and new natures, brings others into bondage to sin, which is exactly what Christ came to set us free from. It goes against all of Paul's doctrine. People go on thinking that they have to fight a battle that Christ has won. They go on thinking that they are not yet set free, but that they must struggle slowly and be "saved" slowly.

We must depend on the grace of God and on His life within, or sin will reign once again, because without Christ there is no life. So we stand on guard against sin, but this does not mean that we struggle against a sin nature. We must abide in the vine (Jesus), which means remain in the gospel of Christ. "Abiding" is not some kind of spiritual exercise. It is remaining in the faith. Abide means to stay.

It is amazing how much we have read Paul, *without reading Paul*. We do not read the words as he meant them in his theology in his epistles. We read Paul without following his arguments and then we apply different meanings to the words that he used. What is the point of reading the Bible if we do it this way?

The Flesh

Some have said we were saved at new birth, we *are being* saved by gradual deliverance from sin and we *will be* saved when Jesus comes and changes our body. This may be our experience and we thank God for any person set free from sin, even if it was gradual. But it is not the truth. Jesus told the woman, "Go and sin no more."

It has been said that we can sin with our flesh, but that it is all right because we are saved in our spirit. They say we are a spirit and so what we do in our body does not matter. Some Corinthians said this and Paul's answer was clear: "Meats for the belly and the belly for meats. But God shall destroy both it and them (that say this). Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord: and the Lord for the body." (1 Cor 6:13). We are a whole person. We *are what we do* in our flesh.

Sin is sin, whether in the mind, flesh or spirit. All sin defiles. They say, "Paul said it was *sin in him* and not he himself who sinned." (Rom 7:17). But it was still affecting Paul. He was still in captivity to it and needed salvation.

By *flesh* we may mean different things. When the Bible refers to the flesh, it may be referring to the sinful nature that has been crucified with Christ and is not a problem to the Christian. In some contexts, when it refers to "walking in the flesh", it means walking according to the law, i.e. trusting in the efforts of the flesh. But, if by *flesh* we mean our body as born again believers, then that is not evil. It is redeemed and has dwelling within the first fruits of the Spirit.

People like to blame their flesh, as though it is evil. This is an antichrist Greek doctrine. God is not against flesh. God made it. He made the world. He pours His Spirit upon all flesh. We are not *piously miserable*. The problem is the heart. Are we tempted in the flesh? Yes, but if our heart is right that temptation is not a problem. The problem is not the flesh or the devil, it is sin. God defeats sin in our life by Jesus Christ. When we hate the flesh we are mixed up and have the wrong enemy.

It is not Christian to divide the flesh from the spirit, as though the flesh were evil. Watchman Nee did this. This is the negative side, where people put the flesh down. Some have a mixture of the negative and the liberal, excusing sin, but also fasting as compensation for their sin. Dividing between flesh and spirit is Greek dualism. The word spoken by God divides between spirit and soul, meaning it discerns the motives and intents of a man. It reads man and reveals to him his heart (Heb 4:12).

Love making in marriage is not evil. Food and drink are not evil. "God gave all things for us richly to enjoy." (1 Tim 6:17), in love and care for others. It is a doctrine of demons to deny what God gave (1 Tim 4:1-2). It is wrong to punish and deny the flesh and it is wrong to indulge the flesh in sin. The Bible says that Christ is raised up in our flesh. It says that Christ quickens our mortal flesh. The whole life is sanctified, spirit, soul and body, by the presence of Christ, not by religious spiritual disciplines.

Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh. (Col 2:23).

These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires. (Col 2:23 [NLT]).

Will-worship (worshiping one's will power through abstinence of normal life) does not quench the desires of the flesh, but brings it under law and the power of sin. It is self-worship. It makes law god. It is idolatry.

The grace of Christ delivers us from sin, just as Hudson Taylor found. When we say that the New Testament is unconditional we mean that without any conditions attached God makes us a son by putting His Spirit within us and by His own power and grace causes us to walk in His statutes. This was exactly the promise of God through the prophets (Ezek 36).