

Sanctification Results / COB / 06.01.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** I was thinking this week, if God offered to give me a full head of hair again, would I take it? I think I would. Honestly, my baldness doesn't bother me much anymore, but the one time it does is when I am looking at pictures from my youth, when I had hair. So I think I would say, "Yes, thanks!"
- What if God said he would give me my hair back, but he would use a scientific means to do so? I guess I would weigh the costs of the method with the benefits of the results. Even if I was assured of 100% guaranteed good results, I would not be willing to pour Rogaine on my head for the rest of my life. And it should be obvious that I also am not willing to get transplants or try Hair Club for Men or any of the other treatments out there, since this is how I look. I know God has blessed many with restoration of their hair through these means, but they are not for me. To me the likely results are not attractive enough to encourage me to take the needed action.
 - I will admit I have been tempted, especially when some so-called friends gave me a Chia Pet shaped like a human head!
 - What if God said he would give me back my natural hair, but I would have to do certain things to make that happen. What if God said he wanted to bless me through certain activities, so the more I did these activities, the more hair I could grow? That might be worthwhile, depending on the activities. I would not be willing to eat worms or kiss goats to grow hair, but I would be willing to walk several miles a day or fast once a week, if that would work. I guess I would have to hear what God wanted me to do, then stare at a picture of myself with hair, and see if the result was worth the effort.
- † That's what I want to help you do today, to see that the promised result of spiritual growth is worth the effort. We will learn later what means God uses to bring us spiritual growth, also known as progressive sanctification. I will tell you now, it is not gross like eating worms or kissing goats. Mostly we appropriate God's gift by faith, though he does use some human activities as means of growth also. But today we want to focus on God's promised results and get excited about the blessing God wants to offer us.
- Let's pray and then we will see what we can anticipate for ourselves.

Healing and freedom from bondage to sin

- † **[Slide 2: Romans 6.6-7]** The first promised result of progressive sanctification is healing and freedom from bondage to sin. When we were studying the gospel of John this year, we talked a lot about being saved from the penalty of sin, because Christ paid that penalty for us. We also are saved from the *power* of sin.
- Romans 6.6-7 [NIV]: "For we know that our old self was crucified with him [Christ] so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."
 - So those of us who believe in Jesus are no longer slaves to sin. We can resist temptation, we can break addictions and habits. Because we are believers, sin no longer rules over us, so we can

have moment to moment victory in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Paul said in Galatians 5.16 [NET]: “But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.”

- This should be very attractive to most of us, who have suffered under sinful compulsions. We can be free from addiction and alcoholism. We can be free from sexual lust or materialism. No longer need we obey the compulsion to over eat or spend more than we have. We can resist the pull of gambling or the need to hurt ourselves. If you struggle with a never-ending desire to play video games, surf the internet, watch tv, or exercise, you can be free.

† **[Slide 3: 1 Corinthians 10.13]** This isn't to say you will never feel tempted. Despite being regenerated when we accepted Christ as our savior, and thus having this victory over sin, we will continue to struggle against sin in our lives because we are not yet made perfect experientially. We also are immersed in a sinful world against which we must resist conformity, and we face an active adversary who will try to bring us down. Even Jesus faced temptation.

- But as we experience progressive sanctification, it will reverse sin's effects on our mind, our emotions, and even our desires. So not only will we be healed in the sense of becoming healthy and strong people instead of being ruled by sin, habits, and compulsions, we also will experience healing from our emotional damage or emotional baggage, healing in the way we see things and think about things, healing even in what we desire so that we come to desire the things of God more and the things of the world less.
- And God promises us the provision to be victorious over our temptation. We might feel it, but we can resist it! 1 Corinthians 10.13 NIV: “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”
- In a couple of weeks we will elaborate on how the truth about God and ourselves can set us free and bring us healing! For now, let yourself be excited by the thought that you not only can resist every temptation, you can be free from anything other than God ever controlling you!

Intimacy with God

† **[Slide 4: Proverbs 3.32]** The second promised result of progressive sanctification is intimacy with God. God calls us into fellowship with Christ, and we can have intimacy with God, under his specified conditions.

- Proverbs 3.32 NET: “For one who goes astray is an abomination to the LORD, but he reveals his intimate counsel to the upright.” We saw last week that God wants to make us upright, and here we see that this will result in us understanding his intimate counsel!
- **[Slide 5: 1 John 1.3-9]** 1 John 1.3-9 elaborates [NET]: “If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.”

† We always are righteous in God's sight once God has justified us – that is, declared us righteous – because of our faith in Christ; but our relationship with God can be strong or weak depending on whether we are attending to that relationship.

- Remember, to sin is to turn away from God. That has to hurt our relationship, our sense of intimacy with him. In that moment, you are choosing to walk with evil, not God.
 - When we are walking in the light with God – when we are seeking to be with him through obedience and confession of our sins – then we enjoy an intimacy with him, and are more discerning of his voice.
 - **[Slide 6: John 14.21]** In 2 Peter, there is a passage that says pursuing certain qualities will ensure we come to know Jesus intimately. Similarly, in John 14.21, Jesus promises to reveal himself to us: “The person who has my commandments and obeys them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will reveal myself to him.”
- † As you grow intimate with God, you will better know what he wants you to do, have more confidence in your security as his adopted child, and enjoy blessings inherent in walking with God, communing with him, moment by moment.
- Do you know the feeling when a song lifts your heart and helps you be excited about life? Have you ever gazed out at nature or worked with your hands and had a feeling of total contentment? Have you ever spent time with someone who always was an encouragement, who always lifted your spirits, helped you through problems, helped you see the promise in life? Walking in intimacy with God will bring tremendous blessings to your attitude, mood, courage, sense of security, and more. It’s something to which we can look forward with joy!

Christ-likeness

- † **[Slide 7: 3rd promise]** The third promised result of progressive sanctification is that we can become like God in character.
- Last week, we reminded ourselves that we were created in the image of God, so that we could reflect his character and represent him well. Only one person ever has lived as the perfect image of God, do you know who? That’s right, Jesus. As the divine Son of God in the flesh, he had a pure human nature and always chose to honor God the Father rather than sin. So as we become like Christ, we also will become like the image of God we were created and saved to be.
- † What would it mean to you, to be like Christ, what would have to change for that to be true of you?
- For one thing, we will learn to stop committing acts of sin, since Jesus never did anything wrong. Harsh words, sex outside of marriage, lustful thoughts, drunkenness, lying, stealing, cheating, taking advantage of people... we will shun all these things and learn to be more upright with integrity.
 - The apostle Paul liked to make lists of good and bad things. These lists are not exhaustive – they don’t contain every good or bad thing imaginable – but they give us some good examples to consider.
 - **[Slide 8: Galatians 5.19-21]** One such list of things we should avoid is in Galatians 5.19-21 NET: “Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!”

- As we become more like Christ, we will not desire these evil things as much and we will be able to resist any temptation we do feel.
- † The flip side of that is we will learn to start doing what Jesus commanded, to start living like he did.
- **[Slide 9: Matthew 22.37-40; 28]** In Matthew 28, Jesus commands all his disciples – including us – to go make more disciples, which includes evangelism and teaching. So every one of us should be learning how to share truth in love with non-believers and other believers.
 - Earlier in his ministry, in Matthew 22.37-40 [NET], Jesus said, “...Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”
 - These are the two most basic commands that drive all the Law of the Old Testament, yet they are not easy to do, are they? Love God with ALL of yourself? Love your neighbor AS MUCH as yourself, AS IF loving yourself? Challenging commands, yet Christ did this, and it is God’s goal to grow us into it.
 - There are forty-something “one another” commands in the New Testament, like love one another, accept one another, encourage one another, serve one another, care for one another, forgive one another, pray for one another, be hospitable to one another... and Jesus fulfilled all of them perfectly, and thus so should we.
 - I know it can seem difficult or overwhelming, but as we grow to be more like Christ, these things will come more naturally to us. Evangelism won’t frighten us, worship won’t bore us, serving each other won’t aggrieve us, rather we will come to enjoy doing these things, to want them in our lives.
- † The point is not just to avoid sinning, it is to learn how to really live! God designed us to live a certain way, in order to reach our maximum potential, to provide us with the greatest sense of fulfillment and accomplishment, to give us a sense of purpose and direction, and to experience the most blessings inherent in God’s creation system. We have forgotten how to live like this, but God wants to show us how.
- † **[Slide 10: Ephesians 4.15-16]** The cool thing is that, even though we all become more like Christ, we do not all become the same. Instead, we retain our individual characteristics which God designed into us to be a blessing to the body of Christ.
- Ephesians 4.15-16 NET: “But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love.”
 - So we are all to grow to be like Christ – to adopt his values, his priorities, his lifestyle – but in that process we also grow to perfectly play our own unique part in God’s plan!
 - So, for example, we are all to grow in our ability to serve each other, but one person will serve by singing on the worship team, while another will repair the building, and another will pray fervently over every need. Each will excel in the gifts and abilities that God gave them.
 - And even when we are all called to do the same thing, God will use us in unique ways. God asks us all to develop into teachers, but some will like to preach, others to teach classes, others to teach in small groups, others to teach children or youth, others to mentor one-on-one, others to

teach only in the context of family life, others to share truth while evangelizing. We all become like Christ in that we can teach his truth in love, but we stay unique in how we teach and in which contexts.

- † The thought of being pure and righteous might seem daunting, but that is because we are thinking of trying to accomplish it in our own power. We need to remember that God is the one who is going to transform us, and so our desires, attitudes, and priorities will become the same as his, and he will make us strong and healthy, so that can live the way he designed us to live, which will bring blessings to ourselves as well as to others.

Maturity in faith

- † **[Slide 11: Ephesians 4.11-15]** The fourth promised result of progressive sanctification is that we become mature in our faith. As we discussed last week, we don't want to remain infants in faith, who only understand a little about God and life, and thus are vulnerable to falling into deceptions of the world or of our own flesh. Rather, we want to become mature men and women, who are strong in faith and understanding, who can protect ourselves as well as others.
- † Let's take a look at a key passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians 4.11-15 NET: "It was he [Christ] who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God— a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature. So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes. But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head."
 - **[Slide 12: pastors]** Let's pull some truth out of this. First, let's look at what evangelists, pastors, and other teachers are supposed to do and what everyone else is supposed to do. The evangelists, pastors, and other teachers are supposed to equip all the believers to do the work of the ministry! So it is not my job to teach the young adults group, captain the Christian Service Brigade, or ensure we have juice and coffee for Sunday morning, rather it is my job to equip you all to do those things.
 - **[Slide 13: ministry]** Second, what is the work of the ministry? It is to build up the body of Christ – that is, the church – to the point that we all are in unity about what Scripture says about our faith, purpose, and direction, and that we all know Christ, the Son of God intimately.
 - **[Slide 14: mature people]** Third, how do we build up our church to this point? We build up each individual. We work so that each one of us has a sense of unity in beliefs with the church and knows Christ, and thus each person grows toward maturity...
 - **[Slide 15: steady doctrine]** And the following verses show us what that means: First maturity means we are steadfast in our faith in sound doctrine, not influenced by the false teachings offered through the media, the internet, other individuals, or even other churches. Of course, to be steadfast, we first have to learn sound doctrine and develop our faith!
 - **[Slide 16: live truth in love]** Second maturity means we live out the truth in love, we do those forty-something one-another commands together, we pursue the mission Christ gave us together, and thus we live like Christ did and submit to Christ as the head of the church.

- Wouldn't we want this? Wouldn't we want to be empowered by God, to be useful for God? Wouldn't we want to allow God to bless us with success in his ministry, as his agent, as his ambassador? Wouldn't we want to belong to a church that has unity in belief, purpose, and direction, that is successful in bringing people to faith and then growing them into strong men and women of faith who carry on the mission together while showing love to each other? I've got dreams for this church, that we get there together!
- † **[Slide 17: Hebrews 5.12-14]** Hebrews offers us another view of maturity: Hebrews 5.12-14 [NET]: "For though you should in fact be teachers by this time, you need someone to teach you the beginning elements of God's utterances. You have gone back to needing milk, not solid food. For everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced in the message of righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, whose perceptions are trained by practice to discern both good and evil."
- So mature believers understand the Bible well enough to begin teaching it to others. And mature believers have trained themselves through practice to discern both good and evil.
 - This should be attractive to us! Wouldn't you want to be certain of what was good and what was not in any situation? Wouldn't you like to be so confident and clear in what you believed that you could easily explain it to others to their great benefit?
- † **[Slide 18: 2 Timothy 3.16-17]** Connecting with the idea in Ephesians that God wants to develop your ability to minister to others, 2 Timothy 3.16-17 [NET] says: "Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work."
- Here we get a hint at one method God uses to grow us, by immersing us in scripture so we learn, get trained, and even get corrected and reproofed; but to our point today, we see that we become capable and equipped for every good work God has for us to do.
 - We saw last week that God already has these ministry works prepared for us. We could avoid doing them, but that wouldn't be good right? We would be turning away from God and his plan for us, and that never is the best outcome. We would be living in ignorance and intimidation then, and that can't be attractive.
 - Instead, we could try doing them in our own power, limited by our infantile knowledge and sin-addled perception of spiritual things. That probably would not be too good either, because we would make lots of terrible mistakes and be frustrated and confused.
 - But the third option is to let God equip us so that we can succeed in the work he has for us, and that is by far the most attractive option!

Fruit of the Spirit

- † **[Slide 19: Galatians 5.22-23]** It's not all about doing stuff for God. One way we reflect his character is to rest in him, to yield to him, and allow him to bless us and transform us. One of our women's small groups has been discussing the fruit of the Spirit lately, and it is to the fruit that we now turn, as the fifth promised result of progressive sanctification.

- † After Paul wrote that long list of sins we read earlier, he wrote this in Galatians 5.22-23 [NASB]: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”
 - This is not an exhaustive list, but it give us examples of godly qualities that God wants to build in us to benefit ourselves and those with whom we interact.
 - Note that this collection is fruit *of the Spirit*. It is not fruit of the human achievement. We will talk about this more next week, but this fruit is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the result that comes in those who yield to him. We cannot develop them in our own power, but, as we willingly yield to the Holy Spirit increasingly while we mature in faith, we will see these qualities grow in us.

- † Would you like to have a greater sense of joy, even when life is not ideal? Would you like to have inner peace, freedom from anxiety and stress? Would you like to grow in your capacity to love even the unlovable, just as Christ loves us even when we are unlovable? The Holy Spirit wants to empower these things in you! That should be an attractive thought!

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 20: summary]** You can be free from bondage to sinful actions, sinful desires, addictions, bad habits and bad influences from previous bad choices.
 - You can be confident, emotionally and spiritually healthy, mature in faith and understanding, the kind of person who loves life, can help others, and is looked upon as an example for others.
 - You can shine for God, making an eternal impact in people and their lives. You can make a difference with your life.
 - You can be God’s man, God’s woman, his ambassador, reflecting his character and representing him to others.
 - Is this something you want? Are you ready to do what it takes to experience this incredible transformation? God promises in Scripture that you can become like Christ!
 - Let’s pray for this to happen...

[Slide 21 is for Communion]