

Grace and Trust as the Keys to Sanctification / COB / 06.08.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Last week I joked about how God might want to restore my hair, but he could choose several means to bring about that blessing: he could simply allow me to grow hair, he could require a scientific method of restoration, or he might ask me to kiss goats. It really would be up to God to choose the means through which he would bring about the blessing.

- † I don't think the specific blessing of growing hair is mentioned in the Bible, though there are a few verses about losing hair, one of which one of you was kind enough to anonymously write on my garage wall. A more sustainable joke than the head-shaped chia pet. In any case, the same principle holds for biblically described blessings.
 - For example, God can heal us of physical problems. Sometimes he chooses to do this in a way that obviously is a miracle: the disease, even cancer, just disappears. In the Bible sometimes, just as much a miracle, we see God heal someone after someone else prays for that healing. Other times, God heals us through medical science or the strengthening of our immune system. It is up to God to choose the means through which he brings the blessing.
 - As another example, only God can bring people to saving faith. But God gets to choose the means through which he will bring that blessing. In the Bible, God always brings salvation through a combination of the Holy Spirit's work and someone sharing gospel truth. Sometimes it is God himself who shares the truth, but most of the time it is other believers.

- † The same principle is going to hold regarding spiritual growth, what we call progressive sanctification. Only God can renew a person's mind, only God can transform a person's character, it is a miracle, and only God can do it. But God gets to choose the means through which he will bring the blessing.
 - As we will see during this study, there is a lot of grace involved in this process of taking us from spiritual infants to Christ-like spiritual leaders, but there also are action steps God will ask us to take. God will bless us with growth through these activities.
 - On the chart in the slides, the ovals are gifts of grace and the rectangles are action steps God asks us to take. Now even when we have to do something, it is important to remember that God will empower us to do it.
 - Most of all this is going to come down to us having faith enough to trust Jesus every step of the way. Today we will focus on grace and faith – or grace and trust – as the keys to the sanctification process.
 - First, let's pray...

Blood of Christ

- † **[Slide 2: blood/Titus]** Our spiritual growth begins at the moment of our salvation.
 - Titus 3.5-6 NET: "He saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy, through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior."

- When we are saved, we are washed and renewed by the Holy Spirit; and this awakens our spirit, our soul, to new life and new possibilities of goodness and purity. We go from spiritual death to spiritual life, and thus we begin the process of spiritual growth with a renewed nature that seeks after God.

† **[Slide 3: grace/Titus]** And then we continue to grow by God’s gift, by grace.

- Titus 2.14 NET: “He [Christ] gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good.”
- So it is Christ’s work of grace to purify us, to make us into his people experientially, just as we already are legally.
- 1 Thessalonians 4.3 NET: “For this is God’s will: that you become holy...” Or as the NIV says “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.”
- Once we start on this process, we can be assured that it is God’s intention to grow us into the person he intended us to be. As we learned last week, God wants to grow us to be like Christ in character, healed of our emotional and spiritual issues, free from any bondages like addiction or depression, intimate with him and mature in faith and understanding.

† **[Slide 4: 2 Peter]** The letter of 2 Peter begins with this: 2 Peter 1.2-4 NET: “May grace and peace be lavished on you as you grow in the rich knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord! I can pray this because his divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence. Through these things he has bestowed on us his precious and most magnificent promises, so that by means of what was promised you may become partakers of the divine nature, after escaping the worldly corruption that is produced by evil desire.”

- So it is by God’s power that we have everything necessary for true life and godliness, which will come through knowing Jesus himself; we can become like Christ in character, because of our salvation and the ongoing sanctifying grace that is given to us.

† **[Slide 5: indwelling/Romans]** As part of our salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us.

- Romans 8.9 NET: “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him.”
- So all believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit, even those who are young in faith and still a little wayward in their lifestyle, as we see from what Paul said to the young and wayward Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 3.16 NET: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”

† In summary so far, the blood of Christ, our salvation, leads to two further blessings: the beginning of God’s sanctifying work in us by grace and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Submission

† **[Slide 6: submission/ 1 Corinthians]** All of that is a gift. Now we need to make use of the gift, so we move to our first action step.

- 1 Corinthians 6.19 NET: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”
 - Paul again assured the Corinthians that no matter how young in faith they might be, no matter how much they might struggle with sin, if they had put their faith in Christ, then they had the Holy Spirit indwelling them, they were in essence now the temple of the Holy Spirit.
 - But he also admonished them to realize that they were no longer their own. They no longer could pursue the sinful pleasures of the flesh, to follow the evil ways of their neighbors, because they now belonged to God. They now had positional sanctification – being separated out for God’s purposes – so now they had to appreciate that and the presence of the Spirit, and learn to live for God.
- † **[Slide 7: Philippians]** Like the Corinthians, we need to learn to live for God. Another way of saying that is we need to learn to submit to Christ. The good news is that God is going to empower us to do this. The sanctifying grace that began with our regeneration makes possible our willingness to submit to Christ’s leadership in our lives.
- Philippians 2.12-13 NET: “So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort– for the sake of his good pleasure– is God.”
 - Paul told the Philippians they should work out their salvation, that is, they should learn to live like saved people, but he also explained that God would bring to them the desire to change and empower them to the effort for change.
- † **[Slide 8: 2 Timothy]** As God grows our desire to be like him, we will be willing to submit to Christ’s leadership in our lives. We will learn to trust and obey Christ in everything. This is our own declaration of sanctification, that for God we will be different, we will be holy.
- 2 Timothy 2.21-22: “So if someone cleanses himself of such behavior, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart, useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. But keep away from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love, and peace, in company with others who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
 - We submit by choosing to chase after Christ and his way of life, turning aside from sin and evil. As our first cooperative step in the sanctification process, we are choosing to trust that Jesus is our example, that God through Jesus wants to show us the best way for a human being to live.
 - We are choosing to trust and obey Jesus, having faith in Christ not only to save us to eternal life, but also to guide us and make us whole in our temporal life. Do you trust Jesus to make you whole and show you how to live?
- † **[Slide 9: Romans]** As we saw last week, if we are to be intimate with Christ, walking with Christ in the light, then we need to be submitting to his will, to be willing to do whatever he wants us to do.
- Romans 12.1-2 NET: “Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice– alive, holy, and pleasing to God– which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God– what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.”

- There are three goals here. One is to submit to Christ, to present our bodies as a sacrifice. God asks us to be willing to sacrifice our desires, our will, our time, energy and effort, basically our entire way of life. We present ourselves as a sacrifice by submitting to Christ's leadership in our lives.
 - Goal number two is to resist the pressure to conform to the world, which suffers from ignorance of, and rebellion against, God's ways. We all know the lure of worldly things is strong, so if we are going to live for God then we will have to resist the temptations, distractions, and fleshly attitudes of the world.
 - The third goal is what makes these other two possible: we are to experience God's work in us, the transformation of the sanctification process, through the renewing of our minds. Only if God renews our minds and thus transforms our characters, will we be able to resist immersing ourselves in worldly things and instead choose to sacrifice for him.
- † **[Slide 10: Chafer/1 John]** 1 John 2.6 NET: "The one who says he resides in God ought himself to walk just as Jesus walked."
- Sometimes we don't want to do what God wants, yet even then we can submit to be made willing. The founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, Lewis Sperry Chafer, wrote, "We make no promise that we will not sin or violate the will of God when we yield to Him. We do not promise to change our own desires. The exact human attitude has been expressed in the words: 'I am willing to be made willing to do His will'" [*He That Is Spiritual*, 92].
 - LeeAnn has taught me this. She might know what God wants from her but not want to do it! So she will pray that God will make her want to do it. She says, "I want to want to do God's will."
- † God asks us to submit to Christ, which begins by making a commitment to follow Christ. It is important for new believers to make this commitment and begin submitting to Christ right away. We come to salvation by faith, but true faith will lead us to desire to follow Christ.
- Some new believers fully commit and deeply submit to Christ right at the time of salvation; this is best for them, because it gets them off to a great start on spiritual growth. For others, the level of submission develops gradually in response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And some people experience a moment of post-salvation crisis which shocks them into a higher level of submission and consecration or dedication for God. The more you can submit now, the easier the growth process going forward will be for you.
- † **[Slide 11: 1 Peter/James]** We will come back to that, but first let's look at another interesting aspect of this, that submission to Christ includes acceptance of God's sovereignty in our circumstances. We must accept the challenges and limitations we face, and be willing to sacrifice and suffer for Christ.
- 1 Peter 2.20-21 NET: "... But if you do good and suffer and so endure [in faith], this finds favor with God. For to this you were called, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in his steps."
 - Suggesting the need to sacrifice and even suffer, Jesus himself said in Matthew 16.24 NET: "If anyone wants to become my follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."
 - Most of us whine in prayer about the hardships we have, but we really should be praying more that God would glorify himself through our suffering. In submitting even to the point of

suffering, we follow the example of Christ; and if we do suffer in submission, this will aid us in becoming more like Christ.

- James 1.2-4 NET: “My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect effect, so that you will be perfect and complete, not deficient in anything.”

† **[Slide 12: Hebrews]** Sometimes struggle is the means God chooses to bring about our blessing of spiritual health and growth. Every believer will experience God’s work to bring him or her deeper into submission. God is willing to get drastic to help you get free from self-reliance, to stop being wayward and tolerant of your sin.

- The means God uses to sanctify us to the point of submission might even include allowing times of chastening or suffering, so that we will turn to him. God is way more interested in our spiritual health and development than he is in our happiness! If you can come to terms with that, you will understand a lot about God and what he is doing in your life.
- Hebrews 12.5-11 NET: “... ‘My son, do not scorn the Lord's discipline or give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts.’ Endure your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? ...Now all discipline seems painful at the time, not joyful. But later it produces the fruit of peace and righteousness for those trained by it.”
- So... if you can submit fully to Christ now, it will be better for you! Whether you are suffering or not in life right now, it pays to assess in what ways you are being disobedient, and then commit to live more like Christ, as he empowers you to do so.

† When I was a young Christian, I made the terrible mistake of not committing to submit to Christ in all things. I mean, none of us can obey perfectly, but I was not even trying. I committed in some things, but not in others.

- One way I did not commit was in the area of humility. I was proud and arrogant. I thought of myself as God’s man, but I had a sense of entitlement about it, I thought God should bless me, not that I should sacrifice for him. I think that’s the real reason I lost my hair. God took my hair, my chiseled muscle tone, my career path, my happiness, and believe me, he brought me to my knees in submission. Remember what we said the Greek word for worship means? προσκυνέω means to prostrate yourself in an attitude of acknowledged dependence and submissive obedience. God wants us to really worship him, and he will do what it takes to bring us there. God will not tolerate our little rebellions!
- Another way I did not commit was about women. You young people, listen up. It makes me very sad that when LeeAnn and I got married, she could honestly say she was a virgin, but I could not. There is something special about reserving this intimacy for your spouse. And I will tell you that, because I did not submit in this area of life, I opened up the door to demonic work. Lust and women became a bondage that consumed my mind and ruled my life for several years, and it was a very painful process God took me through for deliverance. Any area of life in which you don’t submit to Christ will become a great vulnerability for you, with painful consequences.
- None of us can be perfect, but we can be committed to submit to Christ. We might slip up, but we will stop tolerating our cussing, gossip, white lies, and breaking the law when we drive. We will not tolerate sin any longer!

† You have a choice to make. Do you want to be God's people experientially, being made healthy and whole, reflecting his character and representing him well? Or do you want to live like the unsaved, mired in sin, weak, ineffectual in ministry, intimidated by life's challenges. Today is your day to make the choice to commit to submit to Christ! If you do, this will be one of the most important days of your life!

Conclusion

† **[Slide 13: chart]** God provides us with spiritual growth, with transformation, with a progressive sanctification, as a gift of grace. But the means he chooses for providing that gift includes some action steps. Today we talked about some truths we need to believe, but we also saw that we need to submit to Christ as our leader, master, king, head of the church, indeed as God the Son!

† So, our action steps for this week are as follows:

1. Make sure you believe in the true gospel! There are copies at our resource table in the lobby.
2. Believe in the biblical promise, the biblical vision, of spiritual growth. God wants to do a miracle in you, he wants to heal you and develop you into the person he designed you to be. If you were not here last week, listen to the sermon online at the church's website [cotobible.com]. You want to buy into the vision God has for you.
3. Believe the Holy Spirit indwells you. It is a biblical promise that can bring you hope and help you stay in the light with Christ.
4. Commit to submit to Christ in every area of your life all the time. Pray this commitment to God, write it down and keep it somewhere, and then tell your friends about it and ask them to encourage you and hold you accountable. If you learn something in the Bible, commit to putting it to action in your life right away!

† Let's pray...