

The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration

Lesson 11: The Application of the Gospel

Statement 14. We affirm that while all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are in the process of being made holy and conformed to the image of Christ, those consequences of justification are not its ground. God declares us just, remits our sins, and adopts us as his children, by his grace alone, and through faith alone, because of Christ alone, while we are still sinners (Rom. 4:5). We deny that believers must be inherently righteous by virtue of their cooperation with God's life-transforming grace before God will declare them justified in Christ. We are justified while we are still sinners.

Statement 15. We affirm that saving faith results in sanctification, the transformation of life in growing conformity to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification means ongoing repentance, a life of turning from sin to serve Jesus Christ in grateful reliance on him as one's Lord and Master (Gal. 5:22-25; Rom. 8:4, 13-14). We reject any view of justification which divorces it from our sanctifying union with Christ and our increasing conformity to his image through prayer, repentance, cross-bearing, and life in the Spirit.

I. Some Important Relationships

A. *The Relationship of Justification to Sanctification*

1. Whereas justification is God's legal declaration of our right standing before Him, sanctification is God's work of conforming us to Christ's image through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Justification has to do with our legal standing; sanctification with our ethical living.
2. Whereas justification is instantaneous, sanctification is a lifelong process. Justification makes us holy in principle; sanctification makes us holy in practice.
3. Although distinct, justification and sanctification must be held together like two sides of one coin. Keeping them together helps us avoid two extremes:
 - a) Antinomianism (a.k.a. "cheap grace") – the idea that upon a profession of faith in Christ one can live however they choose and still be saved; God's Law has no rule or regard in their lives.
 - b) Legalism – the idea that one must obey God's Law in order to become saved, remain saved, or be "spiritual." Any notion of earning God's acceptance or approval by autonomous human effort.
4. By holding sanctification together with justification we avoid the error of cheap grace or antinomianism (cf., 1 Jn. 2:3-6). And, by distinguishing between justification and sanctification we avoid all charges of a works-based righteousness.

B. *The Relationship of Faith to Works*

1. Works are to faith what heat is to fire. "Christ justified no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify" (John Calvin).
2. We are created *for* good works, not *by* good works. Our works are the fruit of an abiding relationship with Christ; they are signs of justifying, authentic faith (Jn. 15:1-8; Eph. 2:10; Jm. 2:14-26).
3. God not only declares us righteous but determines to make us so (Philip. 1:6). Though sin is still present in our lives, we're free from sin's domination (Rom. 6). Consequently, progress in our faith, though gradual, is certain (Rom. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 3:18).

II. Sanctification: God's Continuing Work

A. *Autonomy or Dependency?*

1. Sanctification is a divine-human operation prompted, enabled, and ultimately completed by God the Holy Spirit (Philip. 2:12-13; 1 Thess. 5:23; Tit. 2:14; Heb. 13:20-21). God performs the work of sanctification by eliciting our active and passive response. "Without God we cannot; without us God will not" (Augustine).
2. Though all believers are commanded to be holy (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3-4; Heb. 12:1; 1 Pt. 1:15), God initializes and accomplishes everything that is holy in us (Heb. 10:10; 1 Cor. 15:10; Col. 1:29).
3. Behind every New Testament imperative is the presumption of the Spirit's presence in the believer's life (Rom. 8:1-15). After all, "apart from me [Jesus] you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5).

4. Our role in sanctification is both active and passive. Listening, yielding, and trusting God involve us passively (Rom. 6:13, 19; 12:1-2), whereas we are involved actively by mortifying the deeds of our flesh (Rom. 8:12-14, note that it is “by the Spirit” that we act. Cf., also Philip 2:12-13; Heb. 12:14; 1 Thess. 4:3; 2 Pt. 1:5).

B. Doctrinal Differences on Sanctification

1. Does Scripture support two classes of Christians, carnal and spiritual (cf., 1 Cor. 2:14-3:3)?
 - a) Spirituality is always a goal to be achieved, not a quality that is possessed. Nowhere in Scripture are believers commanded to be spiritual, only mature (Eph. 4:13; Philip. 3:13-15).
 - b) Sin, according to John the Apostle, is episodal, not habitual for those truly born of God (1 Jn. 1:8-9; 3:9).
 - c) In every case where sinful patterns are present, they are always condemned, not condoned.
 - d) All converts have been “washed” and “sanctified” (1 Cor. 6:11), yet every Christian is characterized by varying degrees of holiness and sinfulness. Hence, the terms “spiritual” and “carnal” apply, in some measure, to all believers.
2. Must I have a special outpouring of God’s Spirit before growth in Christ begins (a.k.a., Second Blessing)?
 - a) A so-called “second blessing” of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-13, 8:12-17, 10:44-48, and 19:1-7 does not comport with other biblical evidences re: the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life:
 - (1) Luke clearly states that new believers received the Spirit the moment they exercised faith in Christ (Acts 2:38; 5:32; 19:2, 5-6).
 - (2) Acts contains several references where believers did not speak in tongues as evidence of the Spirit’s presence (Acts 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24).
 - (3) Those who did speak in tongues never sought to do so (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-46; 19:2-6).
 - (4) It is likely that Luke records these special signs/evidences of the Spirit to indicate that all four groups of people are united together in Christ (Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, and disciples of John the Baptist) and are not intended to be normative experiences for all/some believers.
 - b) Paul insists that the Christian life of growth commences with our union in Christ and the indwelling/filling/sealing of the Holy Spirit at conversion. The biblical pattern seems to be one Spirit-baptism with many subsequent Spirit-fillings (Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 1:13; 5:18).
3. Is sinless perfection possible in this life?
 - a) Spiritual maturity rather than absolute moral perfection is the focus behind texts used to suggest the possibility of eradication of the sinful nature (1 Cor. 2:6; Eph. 4:13; Philip. 3:15; Col. 4:12).
 - b) The flesh unaided by the Spirit is weak (Mt. 26:41).
 - c) Daily purification rather than perfection is likely what Jesus meant in John 13:10.
 - d) Although sin is present it cannot rule in the life of the regenerate (Rom. 6; 1 Jn. 1:8-10; 3:9).
 - e) James and Paul explicitly state that perfection is not possible (Philip. 3:12; Jm. 3:2).

III. On the Road to Maturity

A. Hindrances to Growth

1. While we’ve overcome blatant sins and obvious moral weaknesses, attitudes of pride, anger, lust, indifference to the poor, and jealousy remain.
2. We may not be lazy or slothful, but we waste an immense amount of time watching television, shopping, or surfing the Internet.
3. Though deliberate idolatry is all but conquered, we spend inordinate amounts of money on ourselves to bring maximal pleasure and convenience without regard to the poor.
4. Lying has all but vanished in our day-to-day interactions with others, yet we find it all too convenient to withhold some truth that might put us in an unfavorable light.

5. We insist that our children obey the laws of the land, yet we mindlessly slip into habits of exceeding speed limits as if no “One” is really watching.
6. We find it easy to judge others while we spend little or no time reflecting on our own lives.

B. Habits toward Holiness

1. Maintain a biblical attitude toward the presence of sin in your life by recognizing that moral failure can be a sign of new life in Christ.
2. Recognize that Spirit-enabled fruit pertains to character (Gal. 5:22-23) and Spirit-enabled gifts pertain to service (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-11; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pt. 4:11). Set up accountability mechanisms to ensure a measure of progress in both.
3. Yield to the clear teaching of God’s Word (1 Pt. 2:2-3).
4. Allow for God’s discipline to shape you (Heb. 12:5-13).
5. Endure hardships as part of God’s means to make you more like Christ (Rom. 8:18; Jm. 1:2-4).
6. Because holiness does not happen exclusively in a vacuum, nurture holiness in Christian community (Eph. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Pt. 2:9).
7. Pursue contentment in your relationships, possessions, and circumstances (1 Tim. 6:6).

C. Personal Application

1. In spite of his maturity in the Lord, or his knowledge of the Lord, Paul longed to grow closer and closer to the Lord (Philip. 3:10). Read Ps. 42:1-2. As a rule, is your daily walk characterized by eagerness to grow closer to Christ? Explain.
2. Read 1 Tim. 1:16. Is it evident to those who know you that your life is an example of divine grace and patience?
3. Read 1 Cor. 2:1-16; 2 Cor. 4:6. Doctrinal knowledge is no guarantee of spiritual comprehension. One could explain the entire Bible and still fall short of spiritual wisdom and understanding (1 Cor. 13:2). When hearing a sermon or reading the Bible, are you listening for what God is telling you?
4. Read Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Philip. 3:12-14; Heb. 12:2-3; 1 Pt. 2:23. Are you more concerned about the speed of your growth than the direction of your growth?
5. What areas of your life are disciplined for the purpose of godliness (1 Tim. 4:7)? What areas need improvement? How do you plan on improving in these areas?
6. Read Mt. 7:7-11 and Jm. 1:5-6. When you pray, do you present your requests to God with a sense of anticipation and expectancy? Explain.