

Session 11

Chapter 8 Our Standing and State Before Christ: Positional and Progressive Sanctification (Part B)

Chapter 9 The Key to Sanctification: Keeping a Fine Balance between Standing and State (Part A)

IV. The Consequence of Not being Proactive in Progressive Sanctification

In the above Ephesians passage, Paul uses the word “stand” (*stēnai*) four times: “Stand against the devil’s schemes,” “Stand your ground,” “after you have done everything, to stand,” and “Stand firm then.”

What does Paul think that the devil is up to?

A. What the enemy always tries to do

1. First, Paul is concerned that the devil tries to knocking down the believers from their standing, that is, their secure position in Christ.¹

What does this mean?

- a. The enemy has always tried to put doubts in what God says.

He asked Eve, “Did God really say?” (Gn. 3:1); the devil began the second temptation of Jesus with this line: “If you are the Son of God . . .” (Matt. 4:6).



- b. He continues to put doubts in the minds of believers, particularly those who are new to the Christian faith and those who carry a lot of hurts from the past:

“You are not saved”; “God won’t forgive you”; “Neither God nor anyone loves you”; No one believes in you; “You are accepted as long as you do a good job.”

2. Another way to understand Paul’s concern is this:

Recall that sanctification is the process by which the believers are increasingly liberated from the power of sin so that, “hav[ing] been set free from sin[. . .], they] can become slaves to righteousness” (Rom. 6:18).

What the enemy wants to accomplish is to hinder the believers from of this process so that they will never reach that optimal state. What does this entail?

¹ Arminians believe that it is possible to lose salvation; this matter is discussed in Soteriology II. The premise of this course, however, is that those who are truly saved will persevere to the end.

- a. First: While the relationship with God is always secure, the affected believers may fall out of fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:6²), resulting in the loss of joy and peace.
- b. Second: Instead of enjoying the freedom available in Christ, they constantly feel guilty and condemned, and are subjected to God's constant discipline, for "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness" (Heb. 12:10).
- c. Third: Ultimately, their lives are unfruitful and ineffective to serve God's purpose since "without holiness (*separation from the pattern of this world*—italic mine) no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14^b).

III. The Means of Sanctification

How can the believers reach a state where they are adequately sanctified (i.e., separated) from the pattern of this world, the devil's schemes, and a debilitating past?

A. The first step



It must begin with understanding and then accepting God's truth.

Jesus says:

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17).

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn. 8:32).

1. Paul says that in order to avoid conforming to the pattern of the world, the believers need to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. But renew the mind with what?
 - a. The Greek word for "renewal" in this context derives from the root word *kainos*, which means "new as to different nature" as opposed to old.
 - b. This is none other than God's unchanging truth found in the Scripture about who He is, what He has done and continues to do for us in Christ, etc.
 - c. Then, we "will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2).
2. Progressively, as a result of obedience to the will of God, believers can possess the sanctified character

B. The second step

² "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth."

The believers are sanctified through prayer.
Prayer offers many benefits to the believers, two of which are experiencing the peace of God and leading an emboldened life.



1. The peace of God.

While the *peace with God* is attained through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, who took the wrath of God in our place (Rom. 5:1, 9), the *peace of God* materializes as a result of engaging in genuine prayers.

Paul writes:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

- a. For instance, when we have fallen momentarily, a prayer of confession can restore our fellowship with Him (1 Jn. 1:9), thereby, restoring the peace of God in our hearts.
- b. In this way, the lies of the devil that try to knock down the believers from their secure position (e.g., “You are not truly saved”) and a deceitful voice from the hurtful past (e.g., “God can no longer love me”) are thwarted.

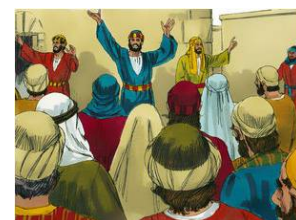


2. Boldness to separate.

Paul, at one point, asks the Ephesians to pray for him in order that he “may declare [the gospel] fearlessly, as I should” (Eph. 6:20).

Luke reports that after the early Christians in Jerusalem prayed, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31).

- a. Certainly, boldness itself is not sufficient to separate oneself from the glamorous pattern of this world, the alluring schemes of the devil and the effects of painful past experiences;



however, it is necessary to make a decisive break from them, especially at the outset of sanctification.

- b. Christ told the parable of the persistent widow (Lk. 18:1-8) and the man who asks his friend for bread at midnight (Lk. 11:5-8) to underscore the importance of “boldness” in the Christian life in general and prayer in particular.

C. The third step

Jesus sanctifies his believers through trials and difficult circumstances.

This is something that Peter, Paul, and James all agree on.

1. The apostle Peter writes:



“Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed . . . for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:6-9).

- a. “You are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your soul” refers to *salvation present*, that is, sanctification (i.e., working out your salvation in the present).
 - b. Trials and difficult circumstances purify the motives and lives of believers so that they will follow Jesus for the right reason.
2. The apostle Paul considered his trial in Philippi, where he was falsely imprisoned and beaten, as God’s way of testing his heart. He writes:



“We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. ³ For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴ On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts” (1 Thess. 2:2-4).

- a. The right motive is to please God, not men.
 - b. When the motive is impure, people will stop working out their salvation at the first sign of inconvenience or difficulty.
3. James also writes:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4).

Without having the right motive, there is no incentive to persevere in faith when trials of many kinds come our way; and without persevering no one can be mature and complete in faith.



4. The promise of God is that “he will not let (the believers) be tempted beyond what they can bear. But when they are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that they can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

D. Other means of sanctification

1. To properly deal with issues stemming from a hurtful past that keeps individual believers from living in freedom, inner-healing ministry by caring and balanced healers can be quite helpful.
2. A genuine and regular participation in Spirit-filled worship can greatly aid one's resolve to persevere in faith, especially in the midst of trials and difficult situations, because authentic encounters with God's presence can be experienced in such settings.



“But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all,²⁵ as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!” (1 Cor. 14:24-5).

3. Belonging to a closed-knit spiritual family where participants can prayerfully share their lives while holding each other accountable to a responsible living can be an important factor in separating themselves from major obstacles³ to sanctification.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 11:24-5).

Discussion¹: Jesus says, “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (Jn. 15:2). The expressions, “cuts off”/“prunes,” refer to (among other things) God sanctifying us through the Spirit.

What has been one memorable (read, *painful*) moment in the past in which God *cut you off/pruned* you so that you may truly be sanctified, thereby bearing lasting fruits?

³ The pattern of this world that contaminates body and spirit; the devil's schemes that try to knock the believers out from their secure position; a hurtful and abusive past that restricts our freedom in Christ.

Chapter 9 The Key to Sanctification: Keeping a Fine Balance between Standing and State (Part A)



Recall that “standing” refers to permanent spiritual state wrought by the work of Christ while “state” alludes to current spiritual state that fluctuates depending on one’s effort to separate oneself from the pattern of this world, devil’s schemes, and a hurtful past that enslaves the present.

A correct understanding of believers’ legal position, on the one hand, and their effort to distance themselves from major obstacles to sanctification, on the other, must be held in a fine balance. If not, it would lead to undesirable and detrimental spiritual conditions such as, licentiousness, legalism, or delusion.

I. When the Legal Position is Emphasized Disproportionally

When the believer’s legal position in Christ is emphasized at the expense of actively participating in progressive sanctification, this may result in spiritual laziness or licentiousness.

A. When the filling of the Holy Spirit in a positional sense is overemphasized

In a positional sense, the filling of the Spirit occurs at the very outset of salvation, as apostle Paul states in Titus 3:5-6:

“[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

This indicates that the believers are already abundantly filled with the Holy Spirit since he has been “richly” (NASB) poured out on them .

1. A danger is relishing in this spiritual position while not participating in activities that would lead to actually experiencing the filling of the Holy Spirit.



The pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle, Jim Cymbala, writes:

“Positional theology is good as far as it goes, such as ‘I am God’s child regardless of how I feel at the moment and what I have done.’ But if we stretch this idea to make statements such as ‘I’m categorically OK with God no matter what I do’ or ‘I am Spirit-filled for the rest of my life,’ we deceive ourselves.”⁴

2. Thus, Paul commanded the Ephesian believers, “Do not get drunk on wine, which

⁴ Cymbala 1997, p. 96

leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).

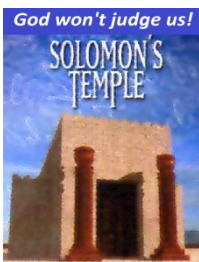
- a. Was the apostle merely reminding them that the Holy Spirit lives in them? No.

While positionally, the “body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in “the believers” (1 Cor. 6:19), the Spirit, who is a person, can be grieved (Eph. 4:30) as well as be quenched (1 Thess. 5:19) when sins are committed and then harbored.

- b. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells them to “speak[] to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, . . .” (Eph. 5:19), in order to be filled by the Holy Spirit.
- c. Luke points to prayer as being a key to being filled.
Regarding the early believers in Jerusalem, he said, “After they prayed . . . they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31).

B. When the believer’s legal position (i.e., standing) is overemphasized

1. The Israelites, as the only people chosen by God, always enjoyed a unique standing before Him; in the midst of them stood the glorious temple that reminded the Jews of their special status before the LORD.
2. So, they couldn’t believe that God might use the Babylonians to punish them for their continuous and blatant idolatry; in other words, the Israelites, regardless of their unfaithfulness, were banking on their legal position before God to avoid punishment.
3. However, God, through Jeremiah, reminded them that nothing was going to stop His impending judgment against the rebellious house of Israel.



Jer. 7:4-7 (NASB): “Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’ ⁵ For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, ⁶ if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, ⁷ then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.”

This is to say, when their actual righteousness lagged tremendously behind their positional (covenantal) righteousness, God disciplined the Israelites.

Discussion¹: Having the right/biblical self-identify from the standpoint of how God sees us in Christ is very important. Is that something we have to earn or that which has already been granted to us?

What are some situations in life where we need to remember our permanent identity and standing in Christ? Why is that important? What can be a drawback when our secure position in Christ is privileged without any follow-up work on our part?

Homework 11

Read over the material covered in the last class and the additional Bible reading (if any). If you have any questions, please note them here and ask me later.

1. What are the three main means of sanctification?
 - Give at least one reference for each.
 - Also share a story in which one of these means was used by the Lord to sanctify you from the ways of the world.
2. What is the difference between position (i.e., standing) and state?
3. Why is it so important to maintain the balance between positional theology and our own efforts (aided, of course, by the Holy Spirit) to be sanctified?
4. What are some dangers when one is emphasized over the other?

