

## SANCTIFICATION III

by Ron Harvey

### INTRODUCTION

We have been looking at the doctrines of salvation and one of the most important concepts of that doctrine is that salvation is a work of God. From beginning to end, from top to bottom, through and through it is a work of God.

It is an exclusive work. That is, he doesn't need any help from anyone. He needs no motivation; he needs no prodding; he needs no outside assistance. He needs no cooperation from sinners; he needs no fortuitous circumstances. After all, he creates and brings about all of the various circumstances of life by his very great power. But in the end it is not circumstances that lead to the saving of a soul, it is the work of God and the work of God alone that saves.

But you might say, "I was fortunate that I was born into a Christian home."

And I say, "You were born into a Christian home by the decree of God. And if he used that influence as a secondary cause then that's his business."

But God saves people out of Christian homes and out of devilish homes. God saves religious people and God saves the heathen. And God saves many of the ignorant of this world and every once in a while God saves a scholar, though the Bible says he has chosen to save not many wise. God saves the poor in great numbers and occasionally he will even save a rich man, though Jesus said,

*"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."* (Mt. 19:24)

Now if you are among the wise of this world or among the rich, there is reason to be greatly concerned about your prospects for salvation, because you think you are in need of nothing when in fact you are as needy as the poor beggar on the side of the road. You take comfort in your worldly wisdom and in your bank account and you may never seek the spiritual comforts of the Lord. But there is hope, because God may even stoop to save such a worm as you, in spite of your worldly comforts, because salvation is God's work and he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion, and, whom he will he hardeneth.

You say, "Mr. sovereign grace preacher, I don't like that."

And I say, Yes, and you also don't like it when God says,

*It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."*

Romans 9:16

And so, whether you like it or not, salvation is a mighty work of God and He saves. He alone saves. And He makes known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy and he merely endures with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.

And so, if you never understand anything else about the Scriptures, understand that God saves by his power and at his discretion, and your understanding will tower above those who reject the sovereign grace of God.

But we also previously touched on the fact that,

God's salvation is an **eternal** work. It originated in the eternal counsels of God when the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit had eternal deliberations and each agreed to participate in the salvation of mankind.

The Father made an eternal election.

*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.*

Eph. 1:4

And when the Father made that eternal election, he presented that general assembly of the elect to his Son as a gift – as an inheritance.

“Here, my Son, here is an inheritance which I have chosen for you. They shall be your loyal subjects in your kingdom. Now, it will require a great work of salvation to transform these vile sinners into serving saints, nevertheless, we will do that work and they shall ultimately worship you and they will be your bride in eternity.”

This idea is set forth in John 6:37.

*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

Now Jesus understood that he himself had a great role to play in the salvation of those elect, and Jesus agreed to suffer and to bear their sins and infirmities and to die in their stead. And in due time, Jesus became a man and he bore the sins of many in his body on the tree. And Jesus performed the work of redemption and he saved his people from their sins. And he imputes to them his righteousness and they are accepted by the Father in Him.

And yet, there is much more to salvation than all of that. There is the whole process of imparting salvation to his people. Not only does he impute righteousness, but he imparts it. And this he does by the majestic and mysterious power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit imparts salvation and holiness to the elect by first regenerating their souls.

Paul says, you “were dead in trespasses and sin. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us, hath quickened us together in Christ.”

God made us alive. Such is the power of God. The Holy Spirit stood at the tomb of our dead spirit and issued the command. “Come forth.” Just as Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus and commanded that Lazarus come forth, the Holy Spirit of God issued his command and our spirit came to life. That spirit that died with Adam’s first sin, that spirit that had no disposition toward God, no understanding; that spirit that was enmity with God. Our spirit came to life in an instant by a gracious miracle of God. It was in that instant that he had mercy on our soul and he caused us to live. He made a new creation and we passed from death unto life.

We saw before, that this one gracious creation at the moment of regeneration made us fully accepted and fully fit for heaven. God needs nothing more from us to add to his work of sheer grace. If we had died in the next moment we would have awakened in the arms of Jesus. And whatever mansion he had prepared for us, we would have been fully prepared to enter – all upon this one creative act of God.

But God has chosen to leave us here in this world for a time and he has more of his grace to impart to us. He has given us the seed of faith, but he shall cause us to grow into a deeper faith. He has given us some knowledge of our sinful condition, but he will make us to know even more. He has shown us some light, but more light will shine in. He has caused us to love Jesus, but he will cause us to love him even more. He has caused us to have an interest in spiritual things, but we shall have a deeper interest. He has given us a fellowship with other believers, but that fellowship will grow more intense and vital.

God’s design for us after regeneration is that we should grow. Not to get taller or to have bigger hands and feet; but to grow in the spiritual graces.

*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*

I Peter 2:1,2

*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust: And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

II Peter 1:3-8

The Bible talks of growing in grace and increasing in knowledge and in various virtues. It talks in terms of abounding in such graces as faith and love. It even talks of abounding in good works.

*And God is able to make all grace abound towards you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.*

II Cor. 9:8

And this idea of increasing more and more in spiritual graces is what we sometimes call progressive sanctification or spiritual growth.

Now sometimes if you want to understand the nature of something, it is helpful to consider what that something isn't. And we have invested some time in discussing what sanctification is not.

We have seen that sanctification is not a means to gaining acceptance with God. We are already accepted by God upon our regeneration and our resulting conversion and justification. God has already declared us righteous by the very perfections of his Son Jesus and we cannot become more righteous in his eyes. What little improvement we can make in spiritual growth during this life can never add to nor improve on his perfection. And when you appear at the pearly gates, you will offer the righteousness of Jesus himself as your full and complete ground of salvation and so great will be his righteousness that you will be embarrassed to even mention any of your own accomplishments.

So overwhelming will be his righteousness that anything you have to offer will be of no import whatsoever. When you are standing in judgment before Almighty God, Christ's righteousness will be everything to you and your own righteousness will not seem relevant at all. And it will not be relevant.

God will say, "Look, I accept the very righteousness of my Son on your behalf and his righteousness entitles you to eternal fellowship with me and to heaven and all its pleasures and all its glory."

Now, do you think you will then interrupt God and say, "But wait, God, don't give me all that without first considering my righteousness. Let's evaluate my spiritual growth to see if I really deserve to be included in your heaven."

**Example: What if the jury said, "Not Guilty," and the Defendant spoke up and said, "But wait, let's look at some more evidence."**

So you see, we are fully accepted by God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ himself and his work, and nothing we ever do shall make us more accepted or more fit for the glories of heaven.

The work of regeneration was sufficient in itself to make us alive and to make us fit for heaven. It is the work of regeneration and not sanctification that crosses us over the divide from death to life. Regeneration is that great work that makes us accepted in Christ and from which all other parts of the salvation process flow. If God did not make us alive by regeneration, then we would never have faith, nor repentance, nor acceptable works nor any of the other spiritual

improvements which are normal and natural for regenerate persons.

And we might then ask, “Why does God then not take us to heaven the moment we are made alive in regeneration?” He certainly could do so and we would be as fit for heaven as we ever could be.

Last time we discussed several reasons why God leaves us in this world after we are made fully fit for heaven. And we won’t take time to revisit those many uses that God makes of his saints in this life.

But, I would suggest that perhaps He does take many people to heaven immediately after regeneration. Such is the great grace of our God. How many millions and billions of dying infants has God saved in regeneration when they had no ability to believe or to make a decision for Christ or even to be cognizant of their spiritual condition? You see God doesn’t need the decision to assist him in saving a soul. All he needs is his own saving power and the righteousness of Christ to substitute for the sinner.

I think it was Spurgeon who suggested that perhaps an overwhelming percentage of the saved multitude in heaven will be those whom God has saved and taken to heaven in infancy.

And then there are those who God made alive just before their death and they barely had time for any spiritual improvements.

**Example: Hanging beside Jesus on a cross of his own, there was a thief who was being put to death for crimes which he had committed. And he had one foot in hell when the Holy Spirit made his soul alive and he said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” And Jesus said, “Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.”**

That man had no time for further spiritual attainments. But his regenerate soul was just as fit for heaven as you and I will ever be.

But the Bible says, “Grow in grace.” And while we are still on this earth, the Bible says grow.

And this would suggest first that,

It is our duty to grow.

It is a command. Whether or not we should gain anything eternal by it, Peter wrote, “Grow in grace.” And if the Scriptures say, jump off a high building then you should jump. And if Jesus says, deny yourself then you should deny yourself – not that denying yourself is necessarily for your benefit. But you deny yourself because your master said, “Deny yourself.”

And if he says, “Turn the other cheek,” then you should turn the other cheek because you are commanded to do so.

And if he says, “Take up your cross,” then you take up your cross because it is commanded.

And we are commanded to “grow in grace.”

It is our duty to grow in all the spiritual graces because we are commanded to do so. We don't ask, “But what do I get out of it?” We don't expect to improve our position in Christ. We simply seek to obey and the Scriptures say, “Grow in grace.”

But, not only is it our duty to grow spiritually,

It is our great privilege to grow.

Shall we always be weak and beggarly? Shall we always be far removed from the full measure of God's grace?

If God should grant us spiritual growth, then we should count it the greatest of all privileges; for he doesn't grant growth to all and he doesn't grant it in the same measure to all. And if he should grant us growth in the smallest of doses we should count it a high privilege and a great blessing.

It is by God's sovereign grace that we grow

Look at Ephesians 3:14 where Paul is encouraging the Ephesian believers to grow up into the fullness of God. And I want you to notice that Paul asked for four things for these believers:

- That they would be strengthened (v.16)
- That Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith (v.17)
- That they might be able to comprehend the love of Christ (v.18)
- That they might be filled with the fullness of God (v.19)

Paul said, I want you to be strengthened (v.16) and to have greater comprehension (v.18) and to be filled with all the fullness of God (v.19). This is a pretty good description of spiritual growth. And Paul said, “I want this growth for you Ephesian saints.”

But I want you to notice the tone of this passage. Paul doesn't beat them over the head with hard commands and harsh requirements. And he doesn't admonish them for being weak and for needing growth. But,

1. Paul got down on his knees and prayed for them.

*I bow the knees to the Father.* (v.1)

Paul recognized that spiritual growth comes from God and by his sovereign good pleasure. Just as regeneration was a sovereign act of God, strengthening and spiritual growth is also according to his good pleasure. And so Paul got down on his knees and asked of God.

Now, what did Paul ask for?

2. Paul asked that God would grant them certain spiritual graces.

*That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory.*

Paul recognized that unless God grant it, there would be no spiritual growth.

3. Paul acknowledged the only power that was capable of bringing these things to pass in the believers – the power of God. (v.20)

We should now begin to understand that spiritual growth, just like regeneration, just like conversion, just like justification, is a sovereign work of Almighty God; and how thankful we should be that it is by his power and by his might that we grow up in him.

What if he left it all up to us? Why, we would never grow. We would remain in a carnal state. We would suffocate in our own carnal thinking and our own carnal way of living and in our own carnal selfishness. But by his grace, and by his great power, according to his great wisdom and sovereign purpose, he grants us growth and we grow into something different from what we were before. And when some time has passed, we look back and we discover that we are quite different from what we were before and quite different from what we would have been without him.

And note that spiritual growth is a mystery. You will never fully understand it. That is because it is a work of the Holy Spirit who works inside of you.

*That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*

(Eph.3:16)

Before we consider the nature of spiritual growth, (that is, “What is spiritual growth?”) we need to briefly discuss some things that are not spiritual growth.

1. The mere passing of years is not spiritual growth.

We tend to equate white hair (or no hair at all) with knowledge and wisdom and spiritual growth. But, we should be quick to understand that mere age is not spiritual growth. Spiritual growth cannot be measured with a calendar. It is true that the older men should be grown up in the inner man and in the Lord, but it is not always so. Sometimes men who fail to grow, become bitter and sour and ungodly. And they have no more spiritual graces than many younger men.

2. The accumulation of knowledge is not necessarily spiritual growth.

There are many unregenerate men who make a lifetime of studying the Bible. They study the Bible as one might study philosophy or economics and it is a form of science to them. And they may study it quite enthusiastically and they may be experts in the letter of the Word, and yet, they are never affected in their hearts. There is not a love for Christ and where there is no love for Christ, there is not a growing love for him. There is no faith in the saving work of Christ

and where there is no seed of faith, there is no growth in faith. Though these intellectuals study the Bible, their minds are not renewed and they are not transformed by the power of God.

And so, the mere accumulation of knowledge is not spiritual growth.

3. Engaging in religious activity is not necessarily spiritual growth.

In many circles, this is the gage of a man's spiritual growth. How many things is he doing? How many activities is he leading? How many ministries? How many hours does he spend in religious activity?

But in the end, this is not necessarily a measure of spiritual growth. The Pharisees were great, religious busybodies. They pretended to love God in their religion from sunup to sundown. And they thought by their self-sacrifice and by their many activities that they were growing up into God. But they were only growing up into their own self-righteousness.

So, we need to be careful that we don't equate spiritual growth with religious activity.

4. Happy feelings is not necessarily indicative of spiritual growth.

Some people are naturally happier than others. Some people wake up each day with a lively and a cheerful spirit and they go around singing and whistling all day. Others wake up with a miserable spirit and they go around with heavy sighs all day. Now the happy man and the miserable man could both be living under the same circumstances and one would be cheerful and the other miserable. Some people are outgoing and expressive and others are inward and very quiet. And observers might suppose that the happier man is the spiritual man and the miserable man is less spiritual. But this might be quite a mistake, for holiness is not to be equated with happiness nor a bubbly personality but rather with other inward qualities such as faith, obedience, humility and love.

5. Miserable feelings is not necessarily indicative of spiritual growth.

Some people view spirituality as a perpetual state of misery. Perhaps these types dwell excessively with the reality of indwelling sin and with their fears and doubts and they think they are more spiritual when they are dwelling on these harsh realities. But, just as happy feelings can be misleading so miserable feelings do not equate to spiritual growth.

6. The extent of usefulness is not necessarily indicative of spiritual growth.

God is sovereign and he uses men as his providence so pleases. God may open a door of opportunity for one and close a door for another. And God's providence is not necessarily a gauge of spirituality. One preacher may have the ear of 8000 people in one service and another man may preach to 20 people and God will determine the extent of each man's spiritual growth. Some of God's most spiritually mature and gifted men may be in isolated places and some who are less gifted and less spiritually mature may be in places of greater exposure. Only God knows

his purposes and we should be careful not to equate the extent of a man's usefulness with spiritual growth.

7. Financial prosperity is not necessarily indicative of spiritual growth.

Many have obtained riches in this world only to find that they are poor in the world to come. On the other hand, temporal riches might very well be a blessing from God upon a spiritual man. But we can't tell. All we can say is that riches are not a measure of spiritual growth. If it were, then we would have deemed Jesus to be spiritually poor for he had nothing at all in this world.

And now we have concluded our preliminary study of sanctification and next time we will begin a study of sanctification proper – that is, the nature of sanctification.