The Gospel – Living in the glory of the Cross and our ongoing failures

In summary we have learned that the chief purpose of God in our salvation is to conform us into the image of Christ and cause us to bear the image in greater degree through the course of our Christian life (Sanctification). This is because God's delights in His own excellency and nature above all other things, and it is therefore the greatest gift that God can give us to make us like Christ and conform us into His image. As we have seen, **sanctification** is that work of God conforming us into the image of Christ progressively over time. We have noted that it is a **cooperative process** where we are also called to **exert effort** and **diligence** to see it come to fruition. **God works** in **sanctification** and **we work**. It is an ongoing **cooperative process**. God's work is primary and **our effort** is **secondary.** Therefore we are called to **God-dependent effort** throughout the New Testament.

As we **look to God in faith** in seeking these virtues, and seek the **filling** of the **Holy Spirit,** we receive power from God both to put off the old nature and to put on the new. This calling to exert effort is what we call **imperatives**. They are commandments, **exhortations** and **admonitions** to obedience. This **dependence** of looking to God for His power is **an exercise of our faith** in God's promises to lead us, guide, us and fulfill His good work in us and through us. And this faith is **belief** in **God's Word** and **based** upon the grace that God has shown us in Christ, through His good work in the Gospel, and the **sufficient grace for us to persevere in faith** to the end of our life that is our possession because of Christ. Not only has God promised that we are now **justified by grace**, through faith in Christ alone, but He has promised to fulfill His good work of **sanctification** in us causing us to **bear His image** in greater degree over time until the Day of Christ when we are finally **glorified**.

Help I am not holy yet!

But how do we deal with our constant failures and shortcomings? There are so many **imperative** calls to virtue and actions in the Bible that I cannot possible fulfill them. There are so many **prohibitions** I regularly seem to break God's good rules for life and sin against Him and others that I love. Since the standard that we strive to achieve in Sanctification is the image and likeness of Christ, we will never actually attain that in our practice in this life. Therefore we will frequently find ourselves falling short of the mark and continuing to **struggle against personal sins**, either **sins of commission** (doing things we shouldn't), or **sins of omission** (failing to do things we should). At times it can be downright despairing to see our own weakness and inept ability to be like Christ in our daily Christian practice. It is not that the divine resources aren't there to help us to be like Jesus, we just seem to fail in our ability to appropriate those resources or we forget they are there or become distracted by the busy world around us.

But we cannot forget the awesome and glorious **free grace of the Gospel** and the **positional holiness** that is already ours in Christ. **God has forgiven all of our sins through faith in Christ** and removed them as far as the east is from the west, put them behind His back, drowned them in the deepest part of the sea, and blotted them from our record. In fact he has so completely dealt with and removed our sins that He can say that we are holy and blameless and free from accusation!

> **Psalm 103:12** - 12 **As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed** our transgressions from us. NASB

Isaiah 38:17 - 17 "Lo, for my own welfare I had great bitterness; It is Thou who hast kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, **For Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back**. NASB
Micah 7:19 - 19 He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, **Thou wilt cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea**. NASB
Isaiah 43:25 - 25 "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; And **I will not remember your sins**. NASB
Colossians 1:21-22 - 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, **in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach** NASB
Ephesians 1:4-7 - 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, **that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons** through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He **freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses**, according to the riches of His grace NASB

And all of this forgiveness and grace come to us, ***"freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."*** We did not earn it in any way, rather we were guilty of hundreds of crimes against God. But He has **freely forgiven us by grace through faith in Christ alone**, it is **NOT a result of works**. By Christ perfect life and death on the cross, He has paid the penalty for our sins in full and merited for us a life of perfect obedience to God's Law on our behalf.

Romans 3:23-24 - 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 **being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ** Jesus; NASB
Ephesians 2:8-9 - 8 For **by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works**, that no one should boast. NASB
Hebrews 10:10, 14 - 10 By this will **we <u>have been sanctified</u> through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ <u>once</u> for all**..... 14 For by one offering **He has <u>perfected for all time</u> those who are sanctified**. NASB

God has also promised to see us through the end of life and perfect that good work in us that He started, and ultimately **raise us up after death with Christ in glory (Glorification)**, never to die again, but to live in His good presence to bless us forever.

Philippians 1:6 – 6 For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus**. NASB
John 6:39 - 39 "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that **of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day**. NASB
John 10:27-28 - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and **I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand**. NASB
John 11:25-26 - 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; **he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die**. Do you believe this?" NASB
1 Corinthians 6:14 - 14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but **will also raise us up through His power.** NASB
1 Peter 1:3-5 - 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 **to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable** and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are **protected by the power of God through faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. NASB

Now all of these and many more good promises in the Word are ours because of Christ (2 Cor 1:20). All of this good grace of God is already ours because of Christ and it can never be taken away. Therefore **regardless of how we perform** throughout the Christian life, God's good favor toward us never comes into question, but because we have been **adopted as His children**, He only has good designs for us and promises that everything shall work for our ultimate good (Rom 8:28) and His glory! We shall never come into eternal judgment or experience God's wrath because we stand in God's good grace to us through faith in Christ!

> **John 5:24** - 24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, **has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life**. NASB
> **Romans 8:1-2** - 1 There is **therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. NASB

This does not mean nothing bad will ever happen to us. Indeed in this life we shall face many trials and sufferings and will at times even receive these as corrective discipline from God. But these things will always prove our faith more sure, develop Christ's character in our lives, and bear the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Heb 12:11).

All of these wonderful **promises** are the **indicatives** on which the Christian life of sanctification is built. They are already our possession because of Christ and can never be taken away. But how do we deal with our continuing sins and failures? And why do we feel as if our fellowship with God is broken when we sin? And why do we so often seem to lack the ability to appropriate God's resources and become like Christ?

Well the answer is really clear in the Bible. The way we deal with these things in Sanctification, is the same way we deal with them in Justification, through **repentance** and **faith**. How do we deal with our continuing sins and failures?

> **1 John 1:6-7** - 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 **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**. NASB

See here John instructing us about the Christian life and the **ongoing presence of sin** in our lives. These he says, we cannot deny in verse 6, or we ***"lie and do not practice the truth."*** But in it he gives the remedy for our ongoing sin in verse 7. ***"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."*** Now when John says, ***"walk in the light"*** he means to say that we **live in the light of the Gospel** in our everyday practice. This includes a recognition that sin is an offense to God and that we have repented of sin and are striving to live free from it, because we love Christ who has forgiven us of all our sins. By walking or living ***"in the light,"*** we acknowledge our sinfulness and our ongoing need for forgiveness and divine grace, and our desire to live righteous and holy. He further makes clear how important it is for us to **acknowledge our sins before God and ourselves** in verses 8 through 10 .

> **1 John 1:8-9** - 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. NASB

Here in verse 8, he plainly points out that we have an **ongoing presence of sin in our lives**. This he says that we are to ***"confess."*** We ***"confess our sins."*** And the result of course is divine pardon because of Christ, that God is ***"faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** This ongoing recognition of sin **promotes regular repentance** and an **honest appraisal** of or practical spiritual state, giving us a **clear view** of the process of **sanctification and its progress** in our lives. It also gives us an **assurance of pardon** so that we do not get overcome with despair thinking that God has abandoned us because we know that He forgives us. Confession includes a recognition of divine pardon and we are reminded of our perfect position before God because of Christ! This process of **confession, faith and repentance is the ongoing process of dealing with sin** in the Christian life. We never grow old of hearing that good Word from God that our sins are forgiven. That Gospel assurance of pardon is our constant reminder of God's cleansing through Christ's death and our hope of good things in the

future. This of course is one of the main purposes of taking the **Lord's Table in Communion**. It is to acknowledge and remember that Christ has died for our sins and we are forgiven because of God's great love for us in Him! This is why this ordinance of Communion is a regular ongoing ordinance. We have a **need** of **regular acknowledgment of our ongoing sin**, and an **assurance of divine pardon** for it because of Christ.

So why do we feel as if our fellowship with God is broken when we sin? This is because our natural human tendency when we sin is to see our **guilt** and then feel **shame** as a result. But for the Christian, Christ has borne our guilt and shame and cleansed us from it completely (Rom 3:21-24, 5:19-21, 2 Cor 5:21, 1 Pet 3:18). So we simply have a need to be **honest with ourselves** and **acknowledge it before God**, and be reminded of His divine pardon because Christ, and respond to His grace in repentance. This act of faith, looking to Christ for forgiveness in confession, motivates us through love to God to be renewed again to striving for His holiness because we long to please Him in every way, **NOT** as a **means** to forgiveness, but **as a result** of having already been forgiven.

And why do we so often seem to lack the ability to appropriate God's resources and become like Christ? This is because it is our **natural tendency** is to be **self-reliant** and fix everything ourselves. But sin is an enemy that only Christ can conquer, indeed He already has conquered sin and overcome it completely, rendering it powerless to ultimately destroy us and incur God's wrath. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13), that is, death. But we can only appropriate this power through faith in Him. And **Christlikeness** is something that **the Holy Spirit is creating in us by faith**, through the Word. A key part of the Sanctification process is training our minds to think according to the Gospel and have **our minds renewed** again and again that God has accepted us in the Beloved One, and completely removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. Although there is much effort to be exerted in Sanctification, the **primary effort**, and **most difficult** to maintain, is **renewing our minds** continually with the truth of the Gospel maintaining that war against the world, the flesh and the devil by faith.

> **Ephesians 4:20-24** - 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and **that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self**, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. NASB
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> **Colossians 3:5-11** - 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and **have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him** 11 — a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. NASB

This is why Paul tells us that the **chief work of faith** is in **believing the Gospel** and renewing and focusing our thoughts on the heavenly truth of Christ's person and work and how it relates to our everyday life.

> **Colossians 3:1-4** - 1 If then you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above, where Christ is**, seated at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth**. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Having seen all of these struggles of Christian life, and in light of all of the divine resources to make us like Christ, we simply have to realize our human frailty and weakness and humble ourselves before our loving God and Father and look to Him for strength and help to be who He

has called us to be, and live in a manner worthy of Lord. Let us not forget how eager He is to help us and make us like Christ and see us live a life fully pleasing to Him.

> **1 Peter 5:6-7** - 6 **Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God**, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 **casting all your anxiety upon Him**, because He cares for you. NASB
> **Hebrews 4:15-16** - 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, **that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need**. NASB

Let us remember that He is compassionate toward us, knowing our weaknesses fully, and always ready to heal and to help us. In the Gospel, God has ceased from His anger toward us and adopted us as His beloved children. Now He works everything for our good and does the unspeakably glorious work of making us **like Christ** and causing us to **bear His image**.

The tension of holiness

We live in the tension of **resting in faith** and **working toward holiness**, it is our **everyday struggle**. Our position in Christ is perfect before God, (both justified and sanctified forever), but our practice is ever and always being conformed in this life to the image of Christ. We are becoming like Christ through the Word, by the Spirit. It is God's work and He has allowed us the privilege of participating in it with Him. As we have seen, **sanctification** is a **cooperative process** where we are also called to **exert effort** and **diligence** to see it come to fruition. **God works** in **sanctification** and **we work**. It is an ongoing **cooperative process**. God's work is primary and **our effort** is **secondary.** Therefore we are called to **God-dependent effort** throughout the New Testament. But we live in the **tension** of always striving to be holy like Christ, and yet never quite attaining it in this life. This is the **nature** of the Christian life. An ongoing recognition of this truth will help you have a **clear vision of the path and trajectory of your life** and help keep you from falling into depression and guilt when you continue to struggle with sin. We cannot forget the good news of the Gospel and the glorious perfection before God that is already our possession because of Christ. And at the same time we are striving to be like Him in all that we do. We do everything for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31) and make it our aim to be fully pleasing to Him (2 Cor 5:9). So we strive to renew our minds with happy truth of the Gospel, **resting in it by faith**. Yet at the same time **we are at war** with the world, the flesh and the devil. This is the great tension of holiness in the Christian life. We must therefore equip ourselves with the weapons of war and with the battle plans ever before us, arm ourselves to fight the good fight of faith and watch as our God destroys Christ's enemies before our eyes.

> **Ephesians 6:10-12** - 10 Finally, **be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might**. 11 **Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm** against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. NASB

And so God calls us to ever and always keep believing with much hope that the victory has already been won by Christ, and we will soon lie down in rest forever in God's glorious presence. For our **faith** is in the solid rock of **God's eternal promise** to us, and **sure evidence** of things not yet seen.

> **Hebrews 11:1** - 1 Now **faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen**. NASB

All of the Gospel promises for temporal blessing and sanctification and perseverance are ours even now. And in the near future our hope of glory will be realized and the tension will be over. But for now we look with eager expectation, **striving for purity** of life, **yet resting** in Him.

> **1 John 3:2-3** - 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, **when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is**. 3 And **everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure**. NASB

Becoming who we are - Pursuing Holiness

Now when the New Testament calls us to the imperatives, they come to us in the form of two specific types of God dependent effort. These we call **mortification** and **vivification**, that is to **"put off"** the old nature of sin and to **"put on"** the new nature of righteousness that is already ours in Christ. These are **acts of faith**, **motivated** by **love for God** and focused on pleasing Him with our whole life as an act of worship to God. We are striving in this way to be like Christ. This matter is of such importance in the Christian life that huge portions of the New Testament are devoted to giving and explaining these imperatives. But these imperatives, as we have seen, are always grounded in the indicatives of the Gospel and our already righteous position before God because of Christ. With this in mind, let us arm ourselves with **a healthy overview of these methods of mortification and vivification**, coming to a well-rounded understanding of how we exert God dependent effort in the process of Sanctification, becoming like Christ.

Be Killing Sin – Mortification

Now that we have been **saved** from the **power** (domination) and **curse of sin** (death), it is our **Christian duty** to continue to **walk in repentance** and forsake the **practice of sin**. We now bear the name of Christ and have been made children of God and have as our obligation and privilege to **put sin to death** in our **daily living** and to **glorify God** by the way we live our life. This **mortification** is to **put sin to death** in our living by the **power of the Spirit**. Mortification is to kill sin, to forsake it, turn from it, flee from it and put a stop to the practice of it in our hearts, minds and daily life. To mortify sin, or put the flesh (sinful nature) to death is an imperative commanded over and over in the New Testament. We Christians are **under obligation** to the Spirit to **kill sin** and eradicate it from our thinking and living.

> **Romans 8:12-13** - 12 So then, brethren, **we are under obligation**, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but **if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live**. NASB

Paul's statement makes it clear that all truly born again Christians are TRULY in the process of ***"putting to death the deeds of the body."*** This is because he presents the contrast of those who are in the flesh and will die, against those who are in fact ***"by the Spirit"*** putting sin to death. The context also bears this out.

> **Romans 8:9-10** - 9 However, **you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you**. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 And **if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness**. NASB

Paul clearly states, ***"you are not in the flesh"*** (v-9). He means, you have been ***"set free"*** from sin and death (v-2), and no longer have your ***"minds set on the things of the flesh"*** but rather on ***"the things of the Spirit"*** (v-5). It is not a suggestion but a **FACT**, Christians are ***"not in the flesh but in the Spirit,"*** because ***"the Spirit of God dwells in you."*** He explains that ***"the body is dead because of sin,"*** but the ***"spirit is alive."*** His meaning is clear, the current **physical and mortal body** that we live in is ***"dead,"*** that is, mortal (able to die) and will ultimately perish and die a physical death. But the human spirit (the essence of our being) of the Christian believer is ***"alive"*** and will never perish but has eternal life with God and will receive an imperishable spiritual body at the resurrection (1 Cor 15:51-54). This is of course what Jesus meant in John 11:25-26.

> **John 11:25-26** - 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; **he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die**. Do you believe this?" NASB