Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Sanctification and Sins of the Mind
Scripture: Romans 7:14–25
Code: GTY142

I want you to open your Bible to Romans chapter 7. I want to read verses 14 through 25 as just a setting for the thoughts that are on my heart to share with you tonight. Paul is writing as a believer, as we know. He is writing as a mature and godly man. He is, I suppose, the Christian of all Christians in his time. He is the purest that a man could be under the full influence of the Holy Spirit. And yet, as he looks at his own life, he is overwhelmed by his sin. And he writes this.

“We know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do,* but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do,* I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

“I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.”

In verse 24, Paul likens this to having a corpse strapped to his body, and infecting it with its deadly decay. Very vivid imagery. There is another analogy that I would borrow to describe the condition that we live in as believers. And it comes from the familiar story of Lazarus. You will remember that Lazarus had been dead for four days when the Lord finally arrived at his grave. He had purposely delayed His coming so as to make sure that everyone knew Lazarus was really dead. Our Lord had in mind not healing him, but raising him from the dead as a demonstration of his own deity. Mary and Martha believed that Jesus could heal Lazarus. He had proven that in the years of His ministry. But He didn’t come in time to heal him. He waited until he was dead and dead for days.

Jesus went to Lazarus’ grave and told the mourners to do something shocking, to “remove the stone.” Martha, incredulous, blurted out in perfect King James English, “Lord, by this time he stinketh. He’s been *dead* four days.” Jesus ignored her concern and said with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

The sight of the mourners was a shocking vision because the Bible says he was “bound hand and foot with wrappings, on his face, wrapped up with a cloth.” He was a hopping mummy when he came out of the grave. Jesus said, “Loose him, and let him go.”

As long as the stinking corrupted grave clothes filled with decay and the stench of death clung to him, it was impossible for him to express his new life. He needed to be loosed from the grave clothes.

Lazarus offers us, I think, a graphic illustration of our predicament as regenerate Christians. We have died and we have been raised from the dead. We have been raised in Christ to “walk in newness of life” it says in Romans 6:4. And we joyfully concur with the law of God in that new man, that resurrected man. We love the law of God. We long to obey the law of God, to fulfill the law of God. Yet we are captive. We are mummified, in a sense, by the remnants of our very fallenness, which clings to us even after we’ve come out of the grave. It is as if we are bound in our own grave clothes and we being raised, yet stink.

This is the reality of our spiritual condition. However, ours is a more profound problem that Lazarus’ because Lazarus’ mummy rags came off immediately and they came off easily. Not so with us. In the language of Paul, we have more than just grave clothes, we have a dead body strapped to us permanently, fusing its decay into our resurrected life. Our condition is far worse that Lazarus.

Hebrews 12:1 states it this way. It says “the sin that so easily entangles us.” That word *euperistatos* “so easily entangles,” simple word. It means “it circles us. It holds us captive.” And it does it easily. Sin is all around us. It is in our disposition. It is in our nature. In fact, in chapter 15 of Matthew, there are some familiar words that I think are necessary to understand in this regard and they are words that describe the problem.

Verse 18, “the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man.” In other words, the defilement is in us. It easily encircles us. It easily captivates us.

I read an interesting article on bacteria that told me something I really didn’t want to know. It’s information I would like not to have, but now I have it and now you’re going to have it. And that is this. There is more bacteria in your body than all the people who have ever lived since creation. I know you’re looking at your hands, and your legs, and your feet, and fortunately you have a complex immune system as a mercy of God to protect you from the bad bacteria.

And just as there is a world of bacteria in the physical part, there is a world of sin in the spiritual part. Sin is easily entangling us. It is so pervasive and so subtle that we must be suspicious even of our righteous behavior. We must be suspicious of our prayers. We must be suspicious of our worship.

This cannot be easily dealt with. Legalism won't work because that's all external. Mysticism won't work because that's just machinations of the human mind, and that will be mingled with sin like everything else. Contemplation won't work because a human mind left in a vacuum is more susceptible to the mingling of sin.

I was reading the other day about a new contemplative method in some movements of spiritual formation called "soaking prayer," soaking. You're supposed to find yourself in a neutral position, thinking nice thoughts about God until you begin to feel His presence. And how do you know when you feel His presence? You get a kind of esoteric buzz. Maybe a gentle breeze goes across your face. And as soon as you get that feeling, you shift into some gear called "soaking prayer" and you soak in the presence. That's not going to do it. You're just going to wallow in the mix.

This is a profound problem that has to be dealt with explicitly the way the Scripture says to deal with it. But let me look a little deeper into the pathology of Paul's experience by having you turn to James chapter 1, James chapter 1 and verse 14. "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." It would be an understatement to say it's popular in our world to blame all that's bad on somebody else, to blame all that's wrong on some other circumstance external to yourself. The Bible doesn't let you do that. Temptation leads to being carried away into sin, and it all starts inside. "Lust conceives, gives birth to sin; and sin brings death. Do not be deceived."

The problem is inside of you. It is a profound reality. Lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, 1 John, pride of life, the complex of lusts, activated, energizing the inner faculties, take over the mind, the emotion, the affection, the will, lock down into memory, and imagination, and sin works in the heart to shape itself, and finally to be manifest on the outside. Sinful behavior starts in the heart. The heart shapes sinful thoughts. All sin is incubated. All sin first desecrates the temple of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6. "You are the temple of the Holy Spirit."

That's why Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it *flow* the springs of life." Nothing is more dangerous to you than your own heart, how you think. Nothing is more damaging to you than sins of the heart because they can't be contained in the heart. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as a man thinks within himself, so he is."

So as we begin to think about sanctification, I want to think about it in its most seminal fashion, and that is that if we're going to see ourselves separated from sin, we have to understand that that separation has to happen deep inside of us before it's going to show up outside of us. Sin is a matter of the heart. It calls for an active immune system to kill its deadly bacteria before they break out in destructive power and bring about death.

And I think it helps us to understand something of the spiritual pathology of this. Many years ago, when I was trying to understand all that I could about sin and sanctification, way back even before I

came to pastor at Grace Community Church, I spent an entire summer studying Romans 6, 7, and 8, and trying to get a grip on the spiritual struggle that was going on in the life of Paul, which is a model for all of us. And I began to read all that I could find of the Puritan writers, because they seemed to have such a clear understanding of sin and it showed up, of course, in that Puritan prayer.

They wrote things like this. “Sin has great power in our unredeemed flesh. It has strong resident influence on our thought, will, emotions, and affections. There is no human part of us not polluted by sin.” Here’s another statement. “Sin is very close. It is not outside waiting to attack us from the world. It is inside. It is the flesh lusting against the spirit, the wretchedness is part of us.” Here’s another quote. “Sin does not exist separate, but mingles itself in all our thoughts, motives, desires, and actions. It tangles itself in everything we think, everything we feel, and everything we do.”

These things are true, and therefore sin should not be underestimated. It steals all that is good. It steals all that is precious. It steals joy, peace, love, usefulness, fruitfulness. It steals answered prayer, fellowship, testimony, unity. One writer said, “There is more evil in the least sin than the greatest catastrophe, calamity, disaster that has ever occurred in the world.” More evil in one sin than the greatest disaster that has ever occurred.

Sin is so pervasive, subtle that we must be conspicuous and suspicious of our own spirituality. We must let it be revealed and suspect the worst. We must humble ourselves in the face of what we think might be our most righteous act, knowing it is not free from sin. So I say all of this to let you know that the only way to deal with sin is to deal with it strongly, is to resist and oppose the first risings of temptation. It has to be dealt with in the heart on the inside. It has to be fought at the point of its incubation, its conception, or it will overpower us, which means that the work of sanctification is a work that God does in which the believer cooperates in his mind.

Sanctification is a work in your thought life. Second Corinthians chapter 1, I want you to look at that for a moment, 2 Corinthians chapter 1. I’ve looked at this verse so many times through the years, and I understand what Paul is saying, but I can’t comprehend that he could say it. It is a stunning verse. Paul is writing this letter to the Corinthian church to defend his integrity. This whole letter is a very difficult thing for Paul to do. He doesn’t like to talk about himself. He doesn’t like to rehearse the blessing of God in his life. He wants to refer to himself as nothing but a clay pot: breakable, homely, replaceable.

He sees himself as insignificant, as nothing, and to have to defend himself is agonizingly painful. Even the most triumphant experience of his life, a trip to heaven, is something he refuses to talk about. But he is being attacked relentlessly by some false teachers who are tearing up the church into which he poured so much of his life. And to save them from the impact of succumbing to the efforts of the false teachers, he rises to his own defense. They have accused him of a secret life of shame, that all comes out in the language of this letter. They have accused him of being in the ministry for money.

They have accused him of seeking sexual favors from women. They have accused him of falsifying his results in ministry. They have accused him of not having credentials from the apostles. They have accused him of everything.

And his defense is an amazing defense. Verse 12, 2 Corinthians 1. “Our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience.” Let me stop right there and just say this. John Owen said, “Sin is not subdued when it is repressed. Sin is not subdued when it is treated with indifference. Sin is not subdued when it is exchanged for what is conceived to be a lesser sin. Sin is only subdued when the conscience is silent and stops accusing.”

Paul says, “My proud confidence is this - ” and he uses the plural pronoun because he hates to speak only of himself “ - the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom - ” not because of my wise approach to life “ - but because of the grace of God, - ” working in me “ - we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.” Paul says, “Say what you will. Accuse me of whatever you will. My conscience is not accusing me.”

This is amazing. We can become very skilled at covering up our sin. We can become very skilled at misinforming our conscience, creating a kind of morality that sort of dulls the conscience. Because the conscience can only react to our moral convictions, and if they’re weak, then conscience is weakened. We can even decide that a guilty conscience is some kind of a failure to understand how wonderful we really are. Kind of a breach of self-esteem. A lot of ways we can tamper with conscience by misinforming it or by silencing it.

We get very good a covering our sin. Hebrews 3:13 says we can become “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Peter says in 1 Peter 2 we can even “use our freedom as a covering for our sins.” Well, I’m free in Christ. So coming to the point where a fully informed conscience, a sensitive conscience is not accusing allows the apostle Paul, not because of his wise approach to life but because of the grace of God working in him to say that in holiness and in godly sincerity, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

Now if you want a goal for your life, that’s it. That’s where joy is. That’s where peace is. That’s where love abounds. That’s where endurance finds its rest. That’s where you overcome everything. Totally at peace.

But, like Adam and Eve, we work hard to cover our sin. We sew coverings over our iniquities. And so they flourish and we never get to that point. The pain that Paul was suffering was so severe that he refers to it in the 12th chapter here as “a messenger of Satan,” a “thorn in the flesh.” This was the agonizing reality of false teachers tearing his church apart. This is a profound pain because he’s invested so much. His heart is broken. He says to them, “If I love you more, do you love me less? Is this what I get?” But in spite of all the agonies and all the suffering and all the disappointment, there is

a calm in his heart. There is a tranquility in his life of peace because his conscience is not accusing him. This is the joy of sanctification.

Sin wants to energize its impact first in your mind, your emotion, your will, your affection, your memory, your imagination, and then work its way out. So that's where it has to be dealt with. And this is where you have to begin to think about sanctification. Luke 16:15, our Lord said, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts." God knows your hearts.

You know that. It's not about pleasing men. It's about pleasing God, and God knows your heart. You can sing all the songs you want. You can make all the pretenses to love God, to honor God, to thank God, to bless His name, to exalt Him. But if what He sees in your heart is the cultivation of sin, all of that is hypocrisy. Sins are cultivated in the thought life and they are character-shaping sins and they are soul-coloring sins. They work directly against everything that God wants out of your life.

Look, we don't hesitate sometimes to act out before people what we would never let be seen if God were present, if Christ were here. But He knows everything. Psalm 44:21 says, "He knows all the secrets of every heart." And by the way, He is most offended by sin, far more than anyone else. David understood that when he sinned horribly in Psalm 51. He says, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." He couldn't even get past how that sin affected God. So what you are really is revealed in your thought life. "As in water face reflects face - " it says in Proverbs " - so the heart reflects man." You are in reality what your heart is.

I want you to look at an Old Testament saint who was battling this as all believers in the true God, all the redeemed in all ages battled it. His name is Job. Go back to chapter 20. You know the story. Everything went wrong in his life, epic story of disaster on all levels. And Job's friends came along and sat and said nothing for a week, and then they opened their mouths and all wisdom flew out. And they came up with some ridiculous suggestions.

In chapter 20, the familiar testimony from one of his friends named Zophar. This is what he says in verses 12 and 13 about Job. "Though evil is sweet in his mouth *And* he hides it under his tongue, *Though* he desires it and will not let it go, But holds it in his mouth, - " what in the world is he talking about? He's saying Job's got secret evil inside and he rolls it around in his mouth, and savors it, and twirls it under his tongue like candy, like savoring something. That's what he's doing. We can't see it, but he's just enjoying secret sin, just it's a luxury that he's secretly indulging in like rolling candy around in his mouth.

And Zophar was wrong. Job speaks to that. Go to chapter 31 and Job's going to answer. And Job says in verse 1, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin? And what is the portion of God from above Or the heritage of the Almighty from on high? Is it not calamity to the unjust And disaster to those who work iniquity? Does He not see my ways And number all my steps?

If I have walked with falsehood, And my foot has hastened after deceit, Let Him weigh me with accurate scales, And let God know my integrity. If my step has turned from the way, Or my heart followed my eyes, Or if any spot has stuck to my hands, Let me sow and another eat, And let my crops be uprooted."

In other words, if what I'm being accused of, a life of secret iniquity, is true, then let God see it, let God expose it, let God judge. Verse 9, "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, Or if I have lurked at my neighbor's doorway, - " if I've committed some kind of lustful crime. Verse 13, "If I have despised the claim of a male or female slave - " Verse 16, "If I have kept the poor from *their* desire, Or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, Or have eaten my morsel alone, And the orphan has not shared it - " Verse 24, "If I have put my confidence *in* gold, And called fine gold my trust, - " Verse 29, "Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy, Or exulted when evil befell him? No." No.

"I have not allowed my mouth to sin By asking for his life in a curse." Are you suggesting – he says in verse 33 that "I covered my transgressions like Adam, that I've hidden my iniquity"? No. No. And I call on God. "Let the Almighty answer me! And the indictment which my adversary has written." Let God be my judge.

This is a parallel to Paul in 2 Corinthians 1. He searches everything in his heart and his conscience is clear. This is a special man. This man wanted to deal with sin in the most primitive sense on the inside. He was such an amazing man that he even offered, it tells us in chapter 1, he offered sacrifices, special sacrifices to God in case his children sinned on the inside.

In chapter 1, "When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings *according to* the number of them all; for Job said, 'Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' " Wow. He was so concerned about the sins of the hearts of his own children that he offered sacrifices in behalf of them if they had sinned inside. Now when you understand that God identifies Job as the most righteous man on the earth, maybe you know why.

When chapter 1 verse 8 says, "There is no one like him on the earth, he's a blameless upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." Here is a sanctified man. And oh, by the way, the key to his sanctification wasn't looking at the cross of Christ. He would have no knowledge of that. Some would like us to think that that's a kind of a super simplistic approach that is the end all for the battle for sanctification. It is not. Job understood that he had to deal with sin in the heart and the spiritual resources by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit of God were available to him as they are to us.

Now a little more specific. How does the mind sin? Let me just help you with this. There are really three ways the mind engages in sin. First, there are the sins of remembering. One way your mind sins

is by reaching back, cherishing the memory of sins past, bringing back lurid memories of a bygone transgression. Someone who is truly repentant about a sin in the past can still harvest pleasure from that sin once repented of.

I remember baptizing a man at Grace Church who was a homosexual and the Lord wonderfully saved him. His life was changed and he moved into a new circle of friends and he removed himself as far as possible from his former lifestyle, but he admitted to me that the hardest thing he had to face was his own mind retracing all those immoral experiences, and they were many for many, many years. He had indulged himself with so many vile behaviors that he found the struggle was almost unbearable to wash them out of his mind.

The mind can recycle sins, old sins. Sin has a way of impressing itself on us in vivid fashion, vivid sensations that we can't shake easily. You remember when David prayed this, he prayed in Psalm 25, "Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions"? I think he was asking God to do something that he couldn't do. "Do not remember the sins of my youth," because David couldn't forget them.

Sexual sins, sure, vivid. But not just that. Sins of past exploits of all kinds, accomplishments that produce pride, sins of anger and bitterness toward enemies can be recycled. Savoring in the memory of one's past sins is particularly heinous. There's an interesting verse in Ezekiel 23. The Lord condemns Israel and the Lord condemned Israel by comparing the nation of Israel to a prostitute named Oholibah. And this is the indictment using Oholibah as an illustration of Israel. This is God's charge. "Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt." With reference to Israel, what it meant was Israel sinned by just replaying the sins of past life in Egypt. Remembering your former sins leads to recycling former sins.

I remember some years ago talking to a young couple who had lived sinful lives, lives of fornication, sexual indulgence before they were saved, and came to Christ and then married, became believers, married. And I remember talking to the husband who said to me – I said, "How are you getting along? How's it going?" He said, "It's really hard." I said, "Why?" "I have too many memories of too many sins with too many other women."

Satan will take all of the garbage out of your past and try to drag it back through your mind so that you relive it. And in the modern world in which we live, Satan will put some pornography in there so it doesn't have to be the recycling of your own sins. It can be the recycling of others' sins.

The second way that the mind sins is in scheming, looking to the future. Scripture is full of condemnation of those who plan to sin. Psalm 36:1 talks about the transgressor, the ungodly, the one in whom "there is no fear of God before his eyes." And it says this. "He plans wickedness upon his bed; He sets himself on that path." You can sin by remembering and you can sin by planning the

future.

Psalm 64 talks about those who “devise injustices,” who say, “We are ready with a well-conceived plot.” Proverbs 12:2 says God “will condemn a man who devises evil.” Proverbs 12:20, “Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil.” Proverbs 14:22, “Will they not go astray who devise evil?” Who plan it out. Proverbs 15:26, “Evil plans are an abomination to the Lord.” Proverbs 6, “The Lord hates - A heart that devises wicked plans.”

Proverbs 24, “Do not be envious of evil men, or desire to be with them; For their minds devise violence.” Proverbs 24:8-9, “The planning of sin is folly.” Isaiah 32 says, “For a fool speaks nonsense, his heart inclines toward wickedness: To practice ungodliness and to speak error against the Lord, He devises wicked schemes To destroy *the* afflicted with slander, But the noble man devises noble plans;”

Some people love to dream of the sins they will commit. Premeditated. They long to do sinful things. Their lusts drive them to future planning.

And the third way the mind leads us to sin is in the present. That is present lusting, like in the sermon on the mount, looking on a woman to lust after her, or hating someone, which is in the eyes of God the same as murder. Covetousness might be cultivated in the present in what might seem innocuous like winning the lottery. Or imagining yourself with great wealth, or great power, or great prestige, or dreaming about this person you imagine is going to be your wife or your husband, or about a luxury life, or a luxury vacation, or some kind of adventure, or some kind of fame, or some kind of notoriety, or some kind of prominence. The positive confession prosperity gospel thrives on greed, on the sin of imagining that you have what you don’t have, which is greed.

So lust conceives by recycling the past, by planning the future, and by grasping what appeals about the present. You can have a sincere spirit, controlled, devoted, godly, obedient Christian on one hand, and on the other hand a defeated, weak, struggling Christian. You wouldn’t know the difference because the difference is what’s going on in the mind. Oh, eventually you’ll know because time and truth go hand in hand. Given enough time, the truth will be known. Sin will be conceived and manifest itself.

So what do we do, just in closing? Nothing earth shaking that you don’t know. But let me just tell you what Scripture indicates to us. Number one, first confess and forsake the sin to the Lord. Don’t look inside. Look out. And look to the Lord. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord. You can’t look inside. You can’t go lie somewhere, shift your brain into neutral, try to think positive thoughts about the cross, and think you’re going to find somehow the presence of God landing on you and soak in that and it’s going to have a sanctifying impact. It’s not in you. It’s outside of you. Flee to the Lord and He will have compassion and to our

God and He will abundantly pardon.

If your thought life harbors sins of immorality, sins of anger, sins of vengeance, sins of bitterness, sins of covetousness, sins of bitterness of any kind, confess them to the Lord, repent and ask his forgiveness. And then the second thing, ask Him for the strength to refuse to entertain those thoughts. Again, you have to go outside of yourself. Ask Him for the strength to refuse to entertain those thoughts, to think on things that are true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and of good report. Ask Him to clear your mind, take away the attraction supernaturally. Very basic.

And then a second phase in this. The negative side, avoid evil attractions. Don't expose your mind to activities, to images, to conversation, to associations and relationships that provoke evil thoughts. Do like Job. Make a covenant with your eyes, or with your ears, or with whatever sensations lead you into evil thoughts and get serious about it.

In the language of Jesus, if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out. Throw it from you. It's better for you that one of the parts of your body perish than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off. Throw it from you. It's better for you that one of the parts of your body perish than for your whole body to go into hell. That sort of axiomatic statement is to say sin is so deadly that you are better off to be maimed than to give it a place. Deal with sin radically. That's the importance of that analogy.

Don't expose yourself to those things that cultivate. That's the negative. The positive side, obvious, feed on the Word of God. Psalm 119:11, "Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You." The Word insulates the mind. The Word strengthens the heart. The Word occupies the soul, fortifies it against evil thoughts. Saturation with the Word, saturation with the Word.

And out of that I would just add one other element, and that is this. Cultivate the love of Christ. Cultivate the love of Christ. Where is your treasure? Wherever your treasure is, that's where your heart will be. If Christ is your treasure, that's where your heart will be. Focus on Christ. Yes on His sacrificial death for you. Yes on the glory of His resurrection. But not just on what He did, but who He is. And if you study the Word of God, He's the theme of it all. Saturate yourself with Scripture so that Christ becomes so magnificent, so glorious that He's all you want. He's all you desire. And He captures all your love.

David couldn't separate that from Scripture. His love for God was connected to his exposure to Scripture. That's why he said, "Oh, how I love Your law. It is my meditation all the day." And then four verses later, he says, "I have restrained my feet from every evil way." These are means of grace, which we're all familiar with. They're outside of us. Go outside of yourself. Confess to the Lord your sin and ask for His strength to stay away from the things that lure you. Go outside of yourself and feed on the Word of God, and let it do its sanctifying work in you and generate and increasing love for

Christ.

My prayer for you would be the prayer that I would have for my own heart, that I would be able to say, “Our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity we have conducted ourselves in the world.” What a place to be. And by the way, remember that you’re not alone. “It is God who is at work in you, to will and to do of His own good pleasure - ” while you’re “ - working our your salvation with fear and trembling.” Philippians 2.

And oh, by the way, there is something God does to help in a special way when we’re struggling in our sanctification. Let me close with this. Here’s what He does. “ ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor faint when you’re reproved by Him; For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” Sanctification brings righteousness, which produces peace.

Many years ago a student said to me, “Will I ever, will I ever get victory over sin?” And I said, “Yes. You will. Progressively, as you mature in the truth and as you grow in grace, you will experience victory over sin.” But I said, “I have to tell you something. You will get better, but you will feel worse.” It seemed disappointing to him, so I needed to explain myself. “The more you become like Christ, the more you see victory over sin, but the more you become like Christ, the more you hate the sin that remains. So you become better, feel worse.”

There’s a lifelong sadness in sanctification. There’s a peace. There’s a joy. There’s a settled satisfaction. There’s a gratitude to the grace of God for a clear conscience. But at the same time, there’s an increasing sadness about what still remains. And when you’ve done this for a long time, heaven becomes sweeter and sweeter, not because you’re tired of traffic, not because of mundane things. Not even because you’d like to see what a gold gate looks like, or a pearly gate. But because you’re weary with the battle and that’s what makes heaven attractive.

Father, we come to You now with thankful hearts that we don’t have to flounder in some kind of struggle without knowing where we need to go and what we need to do. It is a captivating and stunning realization that You, the infinitely complex, infinitely transcendent, incomprehensible God of the universe have given us a revelation that is so simple and so practical that it is the simple means of grace with which we can apply to bring honor to You. Send us down that path. Give us a measure

of joy as we become more and more like Christ, as we press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling, the high calling is when we will be like Him. That’s the goal in the end. And that’s the goal even now.

Conform us to our Savior we pray, and we ask this humbly in His name. Amen.

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