



THE POWER OF SCRIPTURE IN THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

“9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. 10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. 11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. 12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. 20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”

- John 17:9-23

The Power of Scripture in the Process of Sanctification

I want to provide you with information about the role of Scripture in sanctification, the role of Scripture in sanctification. When I mentioned the idea of sanctification, you know what I mean by that: that's the progress toward holiness, that's spiritual growth, that's becoming increasingly separated from sin and separated unto Jesus Christ. Sanctification begins at our salvation, and it ends or culminates at our glorification. We are justified, declared righteous at our salvation; we are glorified, made fully righteous when we see the Lord face to face. In the meantime, we are being progressively sanctified; that is, we are progressively being separated from sin unto Christ.

The process of sanctification that goes on all our lifelong – and we never arrive at the finish; there's no such thing in this life as perfect sanctification. But the process is dependent upon Scripture. Just as the process of your own growth is dependent upon food, you grow as you eat. And our food is Scripture, the word of God: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." A characteristic of life is growth. Where there is life, there is growth. Where there is growth, there is life. It's not static. And we grow because we live, and we live because we eat; and we eat the word of God. So, the Scripture then is the food that fuels our spiritual growth and our sanctification.

One of the most remarkable statements that our Lord Jesus ever made – and He made an awful lot of remarkable statements as you obviously know. But one of the ones that I think is the most remarkable, among the most remarkable He ever made – there are many revelations that come from His lips about His holy perfection, but it is the statement that He made in His prayer in John 17. It is a brief statement, but it is an emphatic statement. He could have used, really, less words. There are three; He could have used one. But He used three for the sake of emphasis.

What is recorded in John 17 are these three Greek words: egō, hagiazō, emauton; egō, hagiazō, emauton. It's in verse 19, by the way, of John 17, and it is this statement: "I sanctify Myself. I sanctify Myself." Now, you could say that with one verb in a reflexive first-person usage. You could say it with one form of the word hagiazō. When you add the egō, you make the "I" emphatic; and when you add the emauton, you make the "Myself" emphatic. And so,

this is as emphatic as a statement can be made: “I sanctify Myself,” emphasis not so much on the sanctification as on the “I, Myself.”

It is a stunning statement. It is a statement unknown to any human being. It is, furthermore, a statement that He makes to God, to His holy, omniscient Father, and He makes it without any hint of hesitation. He knows He won’t be contradicted. It is a statement that none of us could make. No human being could ever say to God and get away with it, “I sanctify Myself.”

We all know what “sanctified” means; it means “to be separated from sin.” And Jesus was fully separated from sin, as we read in Hebrews 7:26. He was holy, innocent, and undefiled, separate from sinners. There’s no debate in Scripture about His sanctification, His absolute, perfect sanctification, His complete holiness; there is no question about that. But the wonder of the statement is the uniqueness of His claim to self-sanctification.

The indicative tense indicates a continuous reality, “I continually sanctify Myself.” He, according to Scripture, was at all points tempted like we are, yet without sin. And He is saying, “The power of sanctification is within Me. I continually sustain My own sanctification. I continually separate Myself from sin. I continually maintain My own holiness,” though tempted as relentlessly as all of us are tempted. This is a staggering statement. This is a statement that sets Jesus apart from every person.

Now, the essence of His self-sanctification: what is the essence of it? It is found in His own words. Go back to verse 17: “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.” Then down to verse 19: “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth,” or “in the truth” implied.

The essence, then, of self-sanctification on the part of Jesus has to do with the truth. And the truth, according to verse 17, is God’s word. He sanctified Himself by His response to the word of God, and therefore set the model for our sanctification as He prays in verse 17, “Sanctify them in the truth.” Sanctification comes in *alētheia*. Sanctification comes in *alētheia*. It comes in the truth, in the context of the truth, in the realm of the truth, in the paradigm of the truth, in the presence of the truth, and that is to say by means of the truth. The key to sanctification, then, is to know and obey the truth. That is the will and word of God.

Let's follow this back in the gospel of John to chapter 4, chapter 4, and I'll show you specifically how Jesus related to the truth and why He sanctified Himself. Verse 34 of John 4: "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me.'" There it is, He did exactly what God willed Him to do.

Turn to chapter 5 and verse 17. In verse 17 He says, "My Father is working till now, and I Myself am working," indicating that He worked along in perfect harmony with the Father. And then down in verse 19, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner." He does the will of the Father, He does exactly what the Father does. He is consistent, perfectly consistent with God the Father.

Down in verse 30, He says, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." That is perfect sanctification, to always do exactly what God does, to always do exactly what God wills, to always do exactly what God tells you to do. That is perfect sanctification, to always do the will of God.

In John 6:38 we follow the same thought: "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." He is the model of what sanctification is. Sanctification is always obeying the will of God. He establishes that in chapter 4, chapter 5, chapter 6: "I do what the Father revealed that I should do. I do what the Father has asked Me to do. I do the will of the Father. I do what the Father does. I always do what the Father does."

And when you come into chapter 7, you come to verse 18, He says this: "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." He's talking about Himself. He was self-sanctifying. He was, of His own power, righteous. There was no unrighteousness in Him, because He not only did what the Father told Him to do, He not only did what the Father willed Him to do, He not only worked alongside the Father and did only what He saw the Father do, but He did everything that He did for the glory of the Father.

In chapter 8 you come to verse 28, He says, “When you lift up the Son of Man,” – John 8:28 – “then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.” Verse 29, “I always do the things pleasing to Him. I do what He tells Me; I do what He shows Me. I do what pleases Him; I do what glorifies Him.” And in the fourteenth chapter of John, verse 31, “But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do.”

What does it mean to be sanctified? Jesus said, “I sanctify Myself.” How did He sanctify Himself? By always obeying the will of the Father, always doing exactly what the Father told Him to do, always doing exactly what the Father did, always obeying exactly what the Father asked. Was the Father pleased? The Father said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”

He could stand before the omniscient Father and say, “I continually sanctify Myself,” emphasis on the “I, Myself,” and not get an argument out of heaven. That is one of the greatest statements of the deity of Jesus Christ on the pages of Scripture – perfect sanctification. What is it? Flawless obedience from the heart to the will of God. That’s sanctification.

But if you go back to John 17 – and you’re almost there being in John 14, so turn over a couple of pages – our Lord’s sanctification is a model for us. He says, “I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I’m doing this; I’m doing Your will as a model for them to follow, and to provide a salvation, which will provide them the means by which they can be sanctified the same way, by the truth, in the truth.”

When you talk about sanctification, there are a number of things that contribute to our sanctification. Our prayers do; our worship does; our service does. There are a number of means of grace that are laid out in the Scriptures, but they’re all laid out in the Scriptures. So that, the foundation of all sanctification, is the truth. “It is the Scripture” – 2 Timothy 3:15 – “that makes you wise unto salvation.” It is the Scripture that perfects you.

You know, John really learned his lessons well – John did, the apostle John. He wrote that record, that record about sanctification being modeled in Jesus as His perfect obedience to the

revealed truth of the Father established the pattern. He learned His lessons well. Let's look at them.

Turn to 1 John and see it when he wrote his epistles, how he included this. First John 2, let's look at verses 5 and 6: "But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has been truly perfected." Obedience is the demonstration that we truly love God.

Go back to verse 4, "There are those who say, 'I've come to know Him,' they don't keep His commandments, they are liars, and the truth is not in them. But whoever obeys His word, in him the love of God has been truly perfected. By this we know we're in Him." Verse 6, "The one who says he abides in Him ought himself walk in the same manner as He walked." And how did He walk? He walked in perfect obedience to His Father. He walked keeping God's will, word, truth. He walked obediently – perfect obedience. And we're to walk the way He walked. He's the model. He sets the perfect standard: perfect, constant, continual obedience to God, because He always lived in the truth.

Let's look at the second letter, and this will be a reminder to those of you who were with us in our study of 2 John. And I want you to see it in this opening four verses, 2 John. The elder John is writing to a lady unnamed called "the elect" or "chosen lady," who has a family, so her children are included.

Notice this, he says, "Whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father." Five times the word *alétheia* appears five times.

Our lives are about the truth, about knowing the truth, in verse 1, "all of us who know the truth, about the truth abiding in us, about walking in truth." Verse 6, "And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments," the same thing. "This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it."

Walking in the truth and walking in obedience to the commandments is the same thing. That's why he warns us that deceivers have gone out into the world, and we have to watch ourselves, in verse 8, because we could lose our reward – not our salvation, but our reward – if we get too close to deceivers, because they direct us away from the truth that sanctifies; and what happens then is tragic. So, verse 9 warns, “If anybody goes beyond, doesn't abide in the teaching of Christ, doesn't abide in the truth, then he doesn't have God; and the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.” So, when you run into somebody like that, verse 10 says, “If he comes to your house and brings this teaching that is not the truth, don't receive him into your house, don't give him a greeting. If you give him a greeting, you participate in his evil deeds.” Stay away from error, because it halts the sanctifying process.

There's no virtue in exposing yourself to error. Truth sanctifies; and sanctification is what we are to be about in this time between our justification and our glorification, progressing in our sanctification, our spiritual growth. And it only happens as we live in the environment of the truth, and respond to that truth and obey that truth, and avoid anything that diminishes our understanding of that truth or perverts that truth.

I think it's pretty clear, then, what the role of the pastor is, what the role of the servant of the Lord, shepherd of God's sheep is. People can't be saved without the truth; they can't be sanctified without the truth. So what do we do? We teach the truth. You show me a place that doesn't teach the truth, and I'll show you a place where true salvation isn't going to happen. I'll show you a place where sanctification is stunted severely.

Look at 3 John – as if that's not enough – and see how well John understood his lesson. This letter – unlike the first of these two postcard epistles, which would have been written on one piece of parchment; they're very brief – this one written to a man; the woman was unnamed, the man is Gaius. Notice how he again features the truth: “The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.” And verse 3, “I was glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, how you are walking in truth.” Verse 4, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.” Why? Because then he knows his people are being what? Sanctified. So important. So important.

You come to Jude, and Jude, in verse 3, says, “I wanted to write about our common salvation, but I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith,” – or, if you will, for the truth – “because certain persons have crept in unnoticed, long ago marked out for condemnation, ungodly persons turning the grace of our God into licentiousness and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus.” And he is worried, Jude is, because he’s not going to have a common salvation if you let go of the truth. So, in verse 17 of Jude, he says, “Beloved, you ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles, remember the truth.” Verse 20, “Build yourselves up on your most holy faith.”

You see, the New Testament ends with these warnings right before the book of Revelation, which then goes right to the end, the apocalypse. So, in John’s two postcard epistles and Jude’s little epistle with three hundred and fifty words or so at the most, one to a lady, one to man, and one general epistle from Jude, the message is clear. It is the last message of Scripture before the book of Revelation; that is to say, it is the last message before glorification. And the message is, there will be false teachers, there will be false prophets; and we can avoid them, and we must avoid them. And we must cling to the truth and fight for the truth, because the truth is critical to our sanctification, which is the purpose God has in mind for us here.

There is no – listen – there is no sanctifying revelation, there is no sanctifying power in human intuition, there is no sanctifying power in human wisdom, there is no sanctifying power in human experience; it is all in Scripture. Only the truth sanctifies. Only the truth sanctifies. As believers live in, walk in the truth, they progress in their Christlikeness. Back to 1 John chapter 2, and I will show you this in very specific terms.

First John 2 verses 12 through 14, this is the definitive text, the definitive text on the role of Scripture in sanctification and spiritual growth. Verse 12: “I’m writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.” This is a general statement. The word “children,” is *teknia*, general term for “children of God,” without regard to whether you’re young or old. In fact, all of us could be called *teknia*. I am a child of my parents no matter how old I am, I will always be their child. That’s the broad, general, sort of non-chronological sense of this word.

We are all little children; we are all teknia; we're all God's children; we all have been forgiven. So, we know we're talking about believers here, okay? So, we are all children of God, in the broad sense, all saved, all forgiven. It is to us he is speaking.

But then he splits us into three groups, verse 13: "I'm writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you've overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children," – different word – "because you know the Father." He repeats it: "I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who's been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you're strong, the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one." After identifying us all as children of God, in the broad sense, because we're forgiven, he splits us into three categories.

There is another passage in which we are definitively split and that is in John 21 where Jesus says to Peter, "Feed My sheep, and feed My lambs." There He splits us into two: lambs and sheep – the immature and the mature. Here we're split into three: children, young men, and fathers. These are the three stages of spiritual growth. They have to do not with spirituality as opposed to carnality, but with sanctification. They have to do with maturity and growth. Spirituality is simply at a moment being obedient, carnality is at a moment being disobedient. That is absolute. This is a relative idea. Maturity and growth is relative to where you were and where you're going.

So, we're talking here about maturity, and we fall into three categories. First of all, the end of verse 13, "I have written to you, children." This is not teknia, this is paidia, which specifically means "kids," "children under pedagogy," "elementary children." We talk about elementary school, that's where we teach elemental things.

What is characteristic of children is ignorance; that is what is characteristic of children, they are ignorant. And elementary education is a process by which you eliminate ignorance. That's what we're doing with kids in elementary school, we're eliminating their ignorance at a basic level. What is characteristic of them is pretty simple. He says at the end of verse 13, "I've written to you, children, because you know the Father." What is true about a child is parental recognition. "You have known the Father." That is a salvation expression. Romans 8:15, "We cry, 'Abba! Father!'" Again, in Galatians 4:6, "Abba! Father!"

When you become a Christian, when you become saved, you know God, God is your Father, and you depend on God, and you trust God, and you know God loves you; and that's what you know, and that's basically all you know. You are still immature. You recognize whose you are. You recognize who cares for you, who loves you, who gave His Son for you. You have attachment to God; you have dependence on God. It is more regulated by your trust than by your knowledge.

It is characteristic of immaturity to be attached, right? What do we mark out as maturity? When a child grows to a point where they detach, right? Where they're on their own. Where they're responsible. It is characteristic of children, according to Ephesians 4:13 and 14, "to be tossed to and fro, carried about by every wind of doctrine." Why? Because all their ignorance hasn't been eliminated. They're in the process of learning the ABCs, the elements. Hebrews 5:12 and 13 describes children as those who lack discernment. They don't have the criteria to discern, so they need to be protected, because they're really susceptible to error.

Sad to say, there are churches and ministries that major in keeping people at this level, and they're proud of it. They're offering themselves as the models of ministry, and they are filled with the unsaved; and those who are saved are left in spiritual childhood, struggling and unable to discern, knowing little more than God as Father, dependence on Him, trust in Him, but lacking necessary discernment to protect themselves, and lacking the truth that moves them along the path of sanctification. Not being taught the word of God, they're not even sure what God wants. They therefore don't know what to obey since the commands of God are not given to them. It's a sad state to be in; certainly not a condition to celebrate and not one to perpetuate.

Second category is young men, verse 13, middle of the verse, "I'm writing to you, young men, because you've overcome the evil one." Verse 14, middle of the verse, "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you've overcome the evil one."

What's the difference, then, between a spiritual child and a spiritual young man? First, spiritual young men have overcome the evil one. What does that say about spiritual children? They haven't overcome the evil one, they are therefore susceptible to error.

What is Satan? He is disguised as an angel of light. He spends his time deceiving people. He spends his time confusing the undiscerning. And you cannot overcome the evil one who 99.9 percent of his efforts are spent in lies and deception, you can't do that unless you're strong in the Word. If you become strong in the Word, you have overcome the evil one. It doesn't mean you're sinless. The evil one isn't the problem in sin, you're the problem and I'm the problem. It's the flesh, not the devil that makes us sin.

The contrast between sin and righteousness in Galatians is not a contrast between the Spirit and the devil, it's a contrast between the Spirit and what? The flesh. So, spiritual young men overcome the evil one. Why? Because they're strong. How did they get strong? "The word of God abides in you." There you see very clearly what takes you from spiritual infancy and vulnerability to spiritual strength: the word of God. You know what it is.

It's just appalling to me that churches are being designed, designed to keep people at stage one: keep everything shallow, direct it at childish preoccupations, stunt everyone's growth. It's hard for those who want to get out of that condition to find a place where they can become strong, and the word of God can abide in them.

"But when you are strong in the truth," – two times he says it, once in verse 13, once in verse 14 – "you have overcome the wicked one," overcome, nikaō, from which the word Nike comes. It means "to triumph," "to conquer," "prevail," "win." "You have overcome the evil one, who is a liar and a deceiver, because you're strong in the Word. You've grown up out of your maturity. You are no longer victimized by error."

It's wonderful to see these kinds of people; I'm surrounded by them all the time. Our church is full of these kinds of people. They want to go out and battle error; they want to go out and fight the cults; they want to champion the cause of the truth. It's wonderful to be in that condition, because it eliminates so much potential destruction in your life. I'm pretty sure that I would never abandon the faith. I'm pretty sure that I'm not going to buy somebody's lie about God, or Christ, or the gospel, because the word of God abides in me. And it's wonderful to be surrounded by people like that, triumphing over that. That doesn't mean we're sinless, because that's the flesh. But it does mean that we have prevailed over the deceiver.

But that's not the end of spiritual growth. The third and the most mature is the fathers, and he says, "I'm writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning." Verse 14, "I've written to you, fathers, because you know Him who is has been from the beginning." Who's that? That's the eternal God, right?

Do you know what the highest level of spiritual development is? The highest level of sanctification is not to know doctrine, but to know the eternal God. You've gone beyond the doctrine, and you see the one who's revealed there. This is where you live in wonder. This is where you live in worship. This is where you're more concerned about loving God, adoring God, worshiping God, than pronouncing your theological accuracy. Your life all of a sudden is not defined by your theology, it's defined by your adoration, it's defined by your worship.

Spiritual young men can be a little tough to deal with. This is where your biblical knowledge is deepened. This is where your biblical knowledge is not all you have, but you have seen the hand of God and the power of God and the grace of God and the mercy of God and the goodness of God through the experience of your life that has enriched your understanding of God. You've seen the powerful presence of God in your suffering, the providence of God in your life, and you have grown in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And in the words of Paul, you've come to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. The word has done its work year, after year, after year; and God has made Himself known in your life. But divine truth is the source of sanctification.

Now, that's the introduction. Now I want to give you an outline, okay? It is not just information that we're after here. The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay, okay? There are people who sit under the teaching of the word of God and just destroy their lives, walk away. Some Christians sit under the teaching of the word of God; some Christians teach the Bible, teach it well, teach it accurately, and fall into horrific, scandalous sin; and one wonders whether any sanctifying process was going on in the gathering of all this information. And so, we have to approach this issue, I think, from several levels. Let me just give you a little outline of what you can work with.

First of all, sanctification by the word of God demands cognition – okay? – cognition: knowledge, knowledge and understanding of what the Bible means. That's where it starts.

Since sanctification is by the knowledge of God, we are called to renew our minds. This is repeated against and again in the New Testament, that we are sanctified by the renewing of our minds. All that means is, the premium is on your brain to start with.

It's not mystical. It's not mystical. You must know the truth. You must know what Scripture says and what it means by what it says. The meaning of Scripture is the Scripture, as I've said to you. The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. You don't have the meaning; you don't have the Scripture. It's not the words, they're not magic; it is the accurate interpretation of those words that is the Scripture.

And cognition is essential. This, then, is the discipline of putting the truth constantly into your mind. Any lack of knowledge retards and hinders sanctification. Any misunderstanding of Scripture eliminates that part of Scripture from one's bank of truth on which sanctification can be built. Any unbiblical paradigm for sanctification is useless; it cannot restrain the flesh, it cannot inform the mind, it cannot strengthen the will, it cannot empower us. You can take legalism and mysticism, you can take pragmatism and sacramentalism and all kinds of religious paradigms – even what I call demonism, chasing demons around as if getting rid of certain demons and pronouncing judgments on them is a means of our sanctification – you can try all of that; it accomplishes nothing.

The only way you'll ever be sanctified is to know what the Bible teaches. You cannot confuse childlike faith with childish understanding. Childish thinking about Scripture accomplishes nothing. Superficiality and shallowness retards people. And I know there are some of you here at Grace Church who are new, and you're beginning to realize that Scripture is filled with rich, profound, powerful truth. You're now discovering this after years of sitting in some shallow place, after years of being a spiritual child, not because you wanted to be, but because you didn't know.

You know, you take one generation after the apostles, just one generation after the apostles – we call them the church fathers – these people were so disciplined in the knowledge of the word of God they were writing treatises, they were writing profound theological apologies or defenses of the Christian faith. Now they were writing letters of immense depth and insight. And here we are almost two thousand years later celebrating our superficiality in the evangelical world. Here we are in the Christian church in a time when the largest and the

most influential churches, the fastest growing churches are built on shallowness; and the church has become like a Christian comic book, or at most, a kind of a People magazine version of Christianity.

If then, we are to be what God wants us to be and to be sanctified, we have to be not only counter-cultural in the world's sense, but we have to be counter-cultural in the church's sense. Many, many people – I run into them all the time – are struggling with their churches. They're struggling with the immaturity of their churches. They're struggling with the fact that their churches are content to deal on a superficial childish level; and when they bring it up, they become problems in their church.

Sound doctrine has become a threat to the evangelical movement today because a kind of anti-intellectualism prevails, and it produces a shallow, self-indulgent, theologically-indifferent church that just wants to feel good about its infancy – if it is alive at all. In fact, it is this environment, over the last fifteen-twenty years, that I believe has led to the resurgence of the writings of the Puritans. I think people are desperate for depth. I think people want to grow. God's people want to grow. And where are they going to go? For the most part, they have to find authors that are dead, that have been dead a long time, to find any depth. They have to travel into the past.

And I'll tell you this, folks, listen to this: the greatest and most faithful theologians of our day cherish the great theologians of the past; and the more a person reveres the great theologians of the past, the more careful students of Scripture they are. You see, we're producing today the kind of stuff that goes along with the childish church. J.P. Moreland said, "The mind is the soul's primary vehicle for making contact with God, the mind." And he said, "It plays the fundamental role in the process of maturation and spiritual formation."

You take a course on spiritual formation today at some schools and they'll take you up into a mountain, and they'll tack you to a monk for two weeks who will teach you how to contemplate your navel and mystically ascend. That's not how you are sanctified. Spiritual formation, spiritual maturation comes through the mind.

Bishop Moule wrote, "Lord and Savior, true and kind, be the Master of my mind; bless, and guide, and strengthen still all the powers of thought and will. While I ply the scholar's task,

Jesus Christ, be near, I ask; help the memory, clear the brain, knowledge still to seek and gain.” That’s why Jesus said – you remember when He was talking to Mary and Martha, and one wanted to serve, “Martha, Martha,” and Mary sat down. and He said, “You have chosen the better part, sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning.”

Foundation is absolutely necessary. And it makes obvious how important it is to have preachers and teachers who teach you the word. “The Lord has given” – Ephesians 4 – “apostles, prophets, evangelists, teaching pastors, to the church for the perfecting of the saints.” That’s what we do: we mature you; we perfect you, we move you down the path of sanctification by the truth preached. That’s why we’re told, “Preach the word in season and out of season.” Sanctification, then, in the truth requires cognition. You have to know it and know it rightly divided.

Secondly, it leads to conviction. Cognition should produce conviction. It doesn’t always; and this is where the hardening instead of the softening can take place. If your cognition doesn’t become conviction, you’ve somehow halted the process. This progresses from knowing the truth to being compelled against all that opposes it.

Excuse me if I have a conviction. People say, “You have such strong convictions.” What else do you want me to do with the truth? What do you want me to do? This is divine truth. Do you want me to be indifferent to it? It has to lead to conviction.

Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 4, and in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 there are a number of elements here; but let’s just start in verse 8. And this is sort of a little brief bio of Paul: “We’re afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, not destroyed.” Now, you’d think he could avoid that, wouldn’t you? You’d think he could make himself a little more popular.

What are you doing, Paul, to be afflicted, persecuted, perplexed, struck down? Well, it gets worse, verse 10, “always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus.” Verse 11, he says, “We are constantly being delivered over to death.” This is a pretty serious persecution. Verse 12, he says, “Death works in us.” In other words, I’m always on the brink of death.” He’s talking about real physical death. “I’m always on the edge of death.”

Somebody would say to him, “Paul, you know, this is ridiculous. What are you doing? What are you doing?” Verse 13, he tells you. He says, “My problem is I have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written,” – and he quotes here from Psalm 116 – ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ and so we also believe, so we speak.” What’s that? That’s conviction, isn’t it? “I believe it’s true, so I say it; and that’s what gets me into trouble.” It’s a conviction.

You probably have read Pilgrim’s Progress. Anybody read Pilgrim’s Progress, John Bunyan’s great work? Sure. Do you know that John Bunyan spent twelve years in prison? He spent twelve years in prison for preaching the gospel. But he was never held there by the stone, and he was never held there by the steel bars. John Bunyan was held in prison by his conscience and by his conviction. People kept saying to him, “Look, you can get out, you can walk out; just stop preaching. You can walk out, you don’t have to be there,” stinking, rotten place.

It was tearing his heart out because he left his wife and children without a father, without a husband, without a provider. This is what he said. He said, “If I stop preaching, I will make of my conscience a continual butchery and slaughter shop. I’d have to slaughter to my conscience.” And then he said, “I would rather suffer, if frail life might continue so long, till the moss grows on my eyebrows.” That’s a lot of conviction. He wasn’t going to violate his conscience; it was a conviction.

I don’t understand people, but I know people who have the cognition, but they don’t have the conviction. They’ll say, “Oh, yes, that’s true; but we certainly don’t want to impose that on everybody. We don’t have to be hard-nosed about that.” I don’t get that. For me, cognition, the understanding of the truth, leads immediately to conviction. There’s a bridge there that one must cross, or you’ve just jumped into the river.

We learn Scripture truth in the mind to establish what we believe and what we hold with all our will as a conviction. That’s why Paul said, “You know, my conscience is clear.” Second Corinthians 1:12, “My conscience is clear. I’ve lived so that my conscience does not accuse me.” Acts 23:1 he said, “I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience.” He said, “Look, I keep my conscience clear.”

Biblical truth establishes cognition and understanding that must lead to conviction. I cannot understand people who don't move to conviction. If it doesn't become a conviction, it doesn't sanctify. It's when it grips your will, and it's when you will speak the truth whatever the cost, whatever the price. I don't understand any other way to deal with the truth.

But there's a third. Cognition in the mind, conviction in the will, affection, affection in the soul. It goes beyond just conviction for me, it goes to affection. This is necessary for spiritual growth. It has to go here to really move you along.

Psalms 1 really warns us, doesn't it? It warns us not to walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the path of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers. But verse 2 says, "Blessed is the man whose delight," – the word is – "delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night," not because somebody has a gun to his head, not because he has an assignment, not because he has to; because he longs to, loves to. Psalm 19, "The word is more desirable than honey in the honeycomb. It's more valuable than gold, than much fine gold."

And if you look for a minute with me, look at Psalm 119, and let's see the psalmist giving us the illustration here of what it means to have affection for the truth. Psalm 119 verse 24, I'm going to go quick, verse 24: "Thy testimonies are my delight." Verse 35: "Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments, for I delight in it." Verse 47: "I shall delight in Thy commandments, which I love." Verse 48: "I shall lift up my hands to Thy commandments, which I love."

Verse 72: "The law of Thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."

Verse 92: "If Thy Law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction."

Verse 97: "O how I love Thy Law! It is my meditation all the day." Verse 111: "I have inherited Thy testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart." Verse 113: "I hate those who are double-minded, but I love Thy law." Verse 127: "Therefore I love Thy commandments above gold, yes, above fine gold."

Verse 159: "Consider how I love Thy precepts." Verse 161: "My heart stands in awe of Thy words." Verse 165: "Those who love Thy Law have great peace." Verse 167: "My soul keeps Thy testimonies, and I love them exceedingly." Get the picture? That's the affection. It was

Job who said, Job 23, I think it's verse 12, "I have treasured Thy words more than my necessary food. I'd rather know Your word than eat." This is affection.

Turn to 1 Peter chapter 2; this is a good place to sort of wrap up our thoughts, 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 2: "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." You want to grow? You want to grow in respect to salvation: the big picture of salvation, justification, sanctification, final glorification? You want to grow? Then long for the Word the way a newborn long for milk. That's affection. Long for, *epipotheō*, "to crave." It's the word used in the Septuagint, Greek version of the Old Testament, Psalm 42:1, "As the deer pants for the water brook, so pants my soul for you, O God." Pant for the word. The only thing that can quench your thirst is like a newborn baby long for the pure milk, the *gala logikon*, the pure milk of the word.

Setting aside sin, in verse 1, longing to be satisfied, not for curiosity, not for intellectual stimulation, not to win an argument, but for a crying *brephē*, a crying baby, longing to suck with all its strength on its very life supply. I'll tell you what, if the church doesn't provide the word, there's going to be a lot of frustrated, angry, hungry, spiritual children, because this is how you grow. This is how you grow.

Now having said all that, one more immensely critical reality that must be understood, okay? We have the word of God. It functions in cognition, teaching us what we need to know, in conviction, gripping our will, and making us live our lives by that, no matter what the price; then capturing the affection of our hearts, so that we love it more than we love anything else. And in this, sanctification takes place.

However, one more thing needs to be said. Even with the word of God, even with an understanding of the word of God, we would not develop convictions, and we would not develop affection apart from the gift of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:17, Jesus says, "I will ask the Father, He'll give you a Helper who'll be with you, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of truth." You're not going to know the truth, you're not going to be convicted as to its reality, you're not going to have that affection apart from the Spirit of truth, John 14:17. Then again in John 15:26, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me." When the Lord gave us the Holy Spirit at our salvation, He gave us the Spirit of truth, the Spirit who activates the truth

and helps us understand it, the Spirit who ennoble us to conviction, and the Spirit who lifts us to affection.

In the sixteenth chapter of John and the thirteenth verse, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth.” I love that. He will guide you into all the truth, He will help you to understand the truth, He will help you to have conviction about the truth, and He will grant you affection for the truth. It is the Spirit, after all, who sanctifies as we gaze upon that truth. Second Corinthians 3 says, “We’re changed into the very image of Christ by the Holy Spirit.” It is then the Spirit working through the truth that sanctifies. He produces the cognition, He produces the conviction, and He produces the affection.

There really are two heavens, that’s right, two heavens. There is heaven in heaven, and there is heaven on earth. The heaven in heaven is glorification, but the heaven on earth is sanctification; and those who don’t grow miss the heaven on earth.