



GOD'S WORD AND YOUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

"And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth."

- John 17:19

God's Word and Your Spiritual Growth

I want to discuss with you about the role of Scripture in spiritual growth, and this is not only an important subject, but I'm sure it's first because it sets the foundation for everything else since all the other means of grace flow to us out of the Scripture - that's how we know what they are. And there are so many ways to approach this, but I - I want to begin with a statement made by our Lord Jesus Christ - one of the most remarkable statements that He ever made - and there are so many revelations from His lips, and so many about His own holy perfection, so many places where you hear Him speak of His own glory.

But He made one statement in that great high priestly prayer in John 17 in speaking to His Father that is really a stunning statement. It's three Greek words: egō hagiazō emauton - emphatic in the use of those pronouns. In the English, He said this: "I sanctify Myself" - John 17:19 - that is a stunning statement from a human perspective, made not to man, but to God; made to His holy omniscient Father without a hint of hesitation.

Now, we all know that to be sanctified is to be separated from sin. Scripture says of Him that He was holy, He was innocent, and He was undefiled and separate from sinners - Hebrews 7:26. But the wonder of the statement is that He sanctified Himself - it is an indicative tense which carries continuity; that is to say, He is always sanctifying Himself, He is always separating Himself from sin, He constantly separates Himself from sin and sustains His own holiness, though tempted relentlessly at all points as we are - self-sanctification.

Turn in your Bible for a minute to John 17 and look at that particular text and some around it as a starting point for our thoughts tonight. In John 17 and verse 17, He says, "Sanctify them" - that is, those who belong to Him in the world, believers - "sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth." And then down to verse 19: "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth." Twice in verse 17 the word alētheia, the word for truth, is used, and then at the end of verse 19.

We are sanctified in the truth, and He Himself sanctifies Himself, that we may be also sanctified in truth - indicating by the also that He also sanctified Himself in the truth. And right there you have the key to sanctification: it is to know and obey the truth, the revealed will and word of God. Now, obviously, this is characteristic of our Lord, and He repeats it a number of times. Travel a little bit through the gospel of John with me, going back to chapter 4, and we'll do a little bit of a Bible study here for a moment.

Back in John chapter 4 - here come some familiar words of our Lord - verse 34: "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me'" - "It is My daily sustenance to do the will of Him who sent Me." In chapter 5 and verse 19: "Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.'" And down in verse 30: "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."

This is perfect sanctification, to ever and always do the will of God. In chapter 6 and verse 38: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." In chapter 7 verse 18: "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." It is the one who seeks the glory of God, the one who obeys the truth of God, the one who pursues the will of God, who is sanctified.

And it goes on - in the eighth chapter verse 28: "When you lift up the Son of Man, 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. I always do" - verse 29, a key statement - "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." His self-sanctification was perfect obedience to the will of God. And again, one other passage that you can look at more perhaps carefully later, John 14:31: "That the world may know that I love the Father, as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do."

When He was tempted, with what did He reply to the temptation? Scripture, taken out of Deuteronomy, as we remember; He answered every temptation with an affirmation of the truth of the revelation of God in Deuteronomy. “I sanctify Myself,” He said to His Father, with no fear of rebuttal on the part of the omniscient God, who Himself declared, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” What is sanctification? Perfect sanctification is flawless obedience from the heart to the will of God, known and understood perfectly; that’s perfect sanctification.

And our Lord’s own personal testimony to His sanctification was part of a prayer that embraced all of us, in which He said, “Father, sanctify them by Thy truth; Thy Word is truth.” That which set apart the Lord Jesus Christ is exactly what sets apart the believer. All other gracious means of sanctification are necessarily revealed to us in Scripture, so that’s where we have to start. That’s, as I said, the foundation. Scripture, then, is the source of all sanctifying truth. As Paul said to Timothy in his second letter, “It is able to make you wise unto salvation, and to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The apostle John, who wrote these texts under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, understood well the role that truth plays in sanctification, and we learn that from his epistles. Let’s turn to the second and third epistles of John - postcard epistles, about 300 words each, could have been written on one sheet of papyrus - and I want you to notice that John here is writing the first letter to a lady - I believe an actual lady with a family in a church - and the second letter to a man, whom he names as Gaius.

But I want you to notice what his emphasis is - 2 John 1: “The elder to the chosen lady and her children, 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 received commandment to do from the Father.”

Five times in that salutation the word *alētheia* – truth – appears; five times. He knew that sanctification was by the truth, and he wanted people walking in the truth, and he rejoiced when they did, because that’s the path of progressive spiritual growth.

Just as a footnote, go back to 1 John 2, and refresh yourself at verse 5: “Whoever keeps His Word” - the Word of God – “in Him the love of God has truly been perfected” - that is, God’s redeeming, saving love is perfected in the person who fully obeys His truth - “By this we know we are in Him.”

And then, verse 6: “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” - that is, as Christ walked. You say you belong to God, you say you are a child of God, then you ought to be marked out as a person who walks in the truth, because that’s how Christ walked. He kept the Father’s Word, perfectly, and if you say you abide in Him, that will not be the perfection of your life, but it will be the direction of your life. How did He walk? Keeping and obeying the Word of God - that’s the pattern we follow.

Back to 2 John for a moment - and so, John says here, “I’m so glad to find some of your children walking in truth.” On the other side of that, verse 6: “This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”

Listen, your spiritual growth yields an ever-increasing weight of glory, which can be forfeited if you are distracted from the truth into deception, into lies. It doesn’t just have an effect upon you here and now; it doesn’t just harm your spiritual development here, therefore your usefulness and your joy; it has a lasting effect on that eternal weight of glory, so that you would actually forfeit something that you had gained. In fact, you are warned that “if anybody comes along and doesn’t abide in the teaching of Christ, don’t let him in your house, and don’t give him a greeting; or you’ll become a partaker in his evil deeds.”

There are warnings from the beginning of the Bible to the end of the Bible to stay away from false teaching because anything that corrupts your pure understanding of the truth halts your sanctification and your spiritual growth. Third John adds to our understanding of John’s preoccupation with this necessary foundation of spiritual

growth; to the beloved Gaius he writes, “whom I love in truth.” Verse 3: “I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you’re walking in truth.”

And then this wonderful statement, which I give to my own congregation so frequently - “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.” That is the supreme joy of the pastor. That is the supreme joy, because it is only as they walk in the truth that they become spiritually mature. Down in verse 8, he says, “Support other ministers, because they’re fellow workers with the truth.” Down in verse 12, he mentions Demetrius, who “received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself” - in other words, he was consistent with revealed truth.

These two little postcard epistles call us to a simple understanding that the foundation of all spiritual progress is related to divine truth, and that’s as it should be. Go to Jude - one more postcard epistle here - Jude is an incredible book hidden in the shadow of Revelation, but never to be overlooked, and in verse 3, Jude says, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation” - stop there for a minute - that, to me, is a fascinating statement. Have you ever tried to write a letter you couldn’t write?

I know as a preacher there are many times I - I started a sermon that I never could finish, because my heart was so directed in another way, no matter how I tried to do what I first started to do I couldn’t do it, and that’s where Jude was; I don’t know how many pieces of papyrus he crumpled up and threw in his trash basket. “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 which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

You know what he’s saying there? He said, “If we don’t battle to protect the truth, we’re not going to have a common salvation, we’re not going to have a common gospel. I would love to just write a letter and celebrate our common salvation, but I’m not sure it’s common” - so what do you do to protect it? Verse 17: “Remember the

word spoken beforehand by the apostles.” Verse 20: “Build yourselves up on your most holy faith.” And so, these three little epistles all agree: the priority is the truth.

It is the truth that saves, it is the truth that sanctifies. It is the truth that makes you wise unto salvation, and the truth that makes you perfect, thoroughly equipped for all good works. Sanctification is the work of the truth; the truth is critical. The obvious implications of this are pretty startling. The more you remove the truth from somebody’s life, the more you inhibit their spiritual development, and nothing can do the work that the truth does.

There is no sanctifying power in human intuition, there is no sanctifying power in insight, there is no sanctifying power in experience; it is all in the Scripture. Only the truth of God revealed in Scripture sanctifies - sound teaching, accurately interpreted, understood, applied - and as you embrace the truth, you progress spiritually. Now, to see that, go back to 1 John chapter 2 - and let me just give you John’s paradigm for spiritual growth here - and this is good, this will be kind of a little test for you; you’ll be able to identify yourself in here somewhere.

Very definitive text; very definitive - I don’t think there’s another text like it in all of the New Testament. It’s 1 John 2:12: “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I am 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, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I’ve written to you, young men, because you’re strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”

This is just marvelous. There’s an opening statement in verse 12: “I’m writing to you, little children” – teknia - that can refer to a child of any age. I - I would be a teknia of my own parents - it’s without regard to your age; it’s not identifying a child chronologically. So, he’s saying, “I’m writing to all of you children, all of you whose sins are forgiven, all the redeemed, all the justified, all the regenerate; and I’m writing you, generally.” But then in verses 13 and 14, he splits us all into three groups - do you see it there?

Fathers, young men, and children - there are stages of spiritual growth here. Now, we know there are at least two stages of spiritual growth in the words of Jesus in John 21, when He said to Peter, "Feed My sheep," and, "Feed My lambs." But here you have three categories of spiritual development. Let's look first of all at little children; kind of start at the bottom, verse 13: "I've written to you, children, because you know the Father."

Here, the word children is different – *paidia* - it refers to children under pedagogical training, children under training in the elemental teaching; ignorance is being eliminated at the most basic level. This is being a spiritual child, not in the sense of being the offspring of God, as it were, but being childish. And what is characteristic of a spiritual child? He says, "You know the Father." Parental recognition - a sort of spiritual da-da, or abba, imma - you know your Father.

This is a sort of salvation confession; you cry, as Paul says, "Abba, Father." The immature child - in the analogy that John is using here - the immature child is attached to mother and father; parental recognition dominates their lives. The attachment is the strong bond. They are dependent, and they are more regulated by trust than by understanding. It has its problems, however, because in Ephesians 4:13 and 14, it says, "Be no more children, because you'll be tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine."

That's why the Lord gave to the church the leadership He gave for the perfecting of the saints till they come to the full stature of Christ. Being a spiritual child is to be immature; it is to be unable to fully have your senses exercised to discern, as Hebrews 5 puts it. It is to be unable to grasp the depth, the meat, of truth, and it is a very - in some ways - exposed place to be. There's not a great will to discern; there's a broad sense of tolerance, very often; I don't need to say much more about that to have you understand that much, if not most, of the evangelical church in America as we know it is in this category.

They celebrate their attachment. They sing all the worship choruses, celebrating their dependence on God - and that's fine. But they have really no will to discern or

to separate, and no criteria; and it has nothing to do with how long you've been a Christian. It has to do with how much exposure you've had to the truth. In fact, it seems to me that churches are being designed for these people as if that's the pinnacle of achievement. You find a church that maybe has a history of doctrine and the teaching of the Word of God, and a new pastor comes in and says, "Let's go backwards."

"Let's reinvent the church, and let's just all be babies again" - self-absorbed, preoccupied with feelings, needs, problems, keep everything shallow, directed at selfish, childish preoccupations, and stunt everybody's growth. But there's a second category here, and that is young men; they are mentioned in verses 13 and verse 14. "I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one" - that's a pretty powerful statement. Verse 14 adds the cause of that: "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong" - why? - "and the Word of God abides in you, and you've overcome the evil one."

So, what is the difference between a spiritual babe and a spiritual young man? It is strength. And wherein is that strength born? It is born of the knowledge of the Word of God. The word here for young men is the word for youth - strong, mature - and they're characterized in verse 14 as having the Word of God abide in them; they're strong in the Word. I - I watch this all the time in my own pastoral work; I watch this all the time.

I watch it particularly with young men, because I'm always surrounded by lots and lots of young men, and I watch them go from a loving relationship to God, an overwhelming sense of being attached, and God is their loving Father, to begin to know and understand doctrine, and they go from being children to being strong young men. And you can always sort of mark them out, 'cause they want to go to battle with error. They want to attack the cults.

They want to go in a room, and no longer want to talk about the basics of Christian experience - they want me to answer all the questions about all the aspects of theology they don't understand, and they're getting wired with all that, and they're developing spiritual muscle from all of that. And there is an amazing benefit: "you

have overcome the evil one” – twice, he says it. “You have” - past tense – “overcome the evil one” - with continuing results. That sounds like an overstatement; what does he mean by that?

It’s amazing – overcome - nikaō, from which the word nikē comes, victor - to conquer, prevail, win. Let me tell you something, folks: when you get to being a spiritual young man, and you are strong in sound doctrine, you have triumphed over Satan. You say, “What are you talking about?” Do you understand what the apostle Paul said about Satan and his agents? They are disguised as what? Angels of light. Satan is liar and a deceiver, and so are his agents, and when you know strong doctrine, that’s not a problem anymore; you understand that?

Satan spends most of his time operating in false religious systems, in damning, lying schemes. That’s a pretty potent benefit of knowing the truth - you prevail over the stratagems of the enemy as he endeavors to deceive. I’ll tell you, none of us is perfect - certainly I’m not - but I cannot imagine a scenario in which I would buy in to false doctrine; I can’t imagine it. I will fall to temptation, but I cannot imagine a scenario in which I would buy in to false doctrine. When I see false doctrine, I get aggressive. I don’t get fearful; I don’t become a doubter. I mean, we storm the gates.

In the language of 2 Corinthians - you might want to look at that passage, 2 Corinthians 10 - it talks about spiritual warfare. It’s a really rich passage - I’ve spoken about it before - but it says that we walk in the flesh, we don’t war according to the flesh. What he means there is not that he’s fleshly in the sinful sense; he says, “I’m human, I’m a human being, but I don’t engage in this spiritual war with human weapons.” That’s another text that needs to be understood.

The weapons of our warfare are not human; they are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses, and he talks about these fortresses in the next verse as speculations – logismos in the Greek. He says what we do is we attack fortresses, massive edifices - and the word in the Greek is the same word for fortress, same word for prison, same word for tomb. We are assaulting these things, and what are they? The fortresses in verse 4 are the speculations, the logismos, the ideologies,

the systems of thought, in verse 5, which are “lofty things raised up against the knowledge of God.”

That is, any ungodly idea, any ungodly system, any ungodly philosophy, psychology, religion, etc. We smash those things, and we take the captives, set them free, and bring them captive to the obedience of Christ. You want to know what spiritual warfare is? Spiritual warfare is a battle for the mind, it's a battle for how people think, and what is the one weapon that destroys error? Truth. It's so obvious, Paul doesn't even mention it. It is that great and glorious revelation of God which smashes all other ideologies - back to 1 John.

There's a third level of spiritual growth, and this one is the longing, I think, of certainly all our hearts who have walked with the Lord for a long time. He says, beginning in verse 13, “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 has been from the beginning.” What is this? You've gone beyond an accurate theology. You've gone beyond knowing the doctrines of Scripture, to become enthralled with God - and that's where Scripture will take you.

You live in wonder. You live in love. You live in praise. Your Christian life is no longer defined by your theology; it's defined by your adoration. It's defined by your passion for God. It's defined by your delight in Him. All your biblical knowledge has introduced Him to you, and now you've engaged in a communion with Him that has deepened and deepened and deepened, and you've watched the realities that you know to be true about Him unfold in the marvelous providences of life. You wake up one day, and the thing that you're most excited about isn't your theology anymore; the thing that you're most excited about is your Lord.

And Paul was anxious to keep growing, as R.C. said earlier in that regard; as fine a Christian as he was, the thing that comes out of his heart in Philippians 3 is, “that I may know Him.” It's never enough. I've seen through my life, I've seen His hand of providence on my life. I've seen Him work in the lives of the people in my family. I've seen Him graciously save my children. I've seen Him rescue me from death. When I was about 24 hours from being dead with blood clots - I was telling a friend last night

- and was lying in a critical ward, wondering what was going on – 'cause I was very healthy, and had a little knee surgery from old football injuries.

And there I am in there, and blood clots had gone out of the leg and up, and splattered over both lungs, and I'm laying in there wondering what the purposes of God in this are, and I'm thinking about going to heaven, and it's looking pretty good - in fact, when I recovered, I had just a mild disappointment. It's true; it's really true. But I was laying in that hospital - this just comes to mind from what I was saying last night - the doctor came in, and he saved my life.

Friends sent me to him, he knew what was wrong, he got me in there and saved my life - a godless guy. But over the days that he would come to visit me, he found out I was a preacher and he started talking to me, and when I could talk a little better, we had a conversation. He said, "Now, you can't preach for three months, 'cause you can't stand up or you'll have more blood clot problems, so unless you preach ten minutes" - and I said, "No, I don't preach ten minutes, so I can't do that." I can't clear my throat in ten minutes, that's the problem.

But he said - he said, "I - I'm kind of curious to hear you preach." So, he said, "I want to come to your church. First time you preach - I'll tell you when you can - I'm going to come and hear you." He said, "I haven't been in church since I was sixteen" - he's probably 57 years old. I had planned to start a new series, and I had to postpone it till that first Sunday. The first Sunday, I called him a few days before, I said, "I'm preaching this week." He said, "I'm going to come."

He was on the third row, sitting there - hadn't been in church since he was sixteen years old - and I announced I was beginning a series on Luke, and my first sermon was Luke, the beloved physician. Ckk - just the Lord just knew. You know, that's almost five years ago - he's never missed a Sunday. Within a month, he gave his life to Christ and he's now become a dear friend. Now, look - I mean, I suggested to the Lord that there might have been a plan B to evangelize the guy - it's a little hairy approach for the event.

But, I mean, that's one illustration of the providences of God that unfold; the endearing providences of God that unfold in your life, and you see it, and all of a sudden, it isn't about your theology, it's about your communion. You know, I just grieve for the evangelical church in our country - people who are left in infancy, cheated out of the richness of doctrine, living life by principle, cheated even more out of the depth of an intimate sense of God's personal love and involvement in your life, as all that is true about Him unfolds before you.

Well, that was the introduction - you think I'm kidding? I just want to say three more things, and a few things around the three things, okay? All right. How do we then bring ourselves to a place to submit to this, right? I mean, that's the question. You say, "Okay, we - I don't want to be a spiritual child. I don't want to be left in infancy, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine. I don't want to be ignorant about great truth. I don't want to be ignorant about it because I want to be able to fully glorify God for everything He's done.

I want to appreciate Him in all His fullness. And then I want to go beyond just appreciating the things that are true about Him, and I want to know Him in the fullness that I can. How do I then respond to the Word? What do I do?" I'll just give you three little words, make it simple - cognition - just maybe you'll remember them if I make them sound the same - cognition: it starts with understanding what the Bible says and what it means. The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture; if you don't know what it means, you didn't have the Scripture. So, you start with finding out what the Bible says.

Many years ago, as a kid, I started reading the books of the Bible repetitiously. I'd read the same book every day for months, because I knew I needed to know what it said. And when I preach, typically I explain the Bible with the Bible, and the reason I explain the Bible with the Bible, 'cause that's the way I read the Bible, and I remember starting in 1 John, and I said, "I'm going to read this thing every day for 30 days," and at the end of 30 days, I said, "This is so good I'm going to read it every day for 90 days."

And many days I read it over and over and over and over, and I knew what was in 1 John; I knew everything that was in 1 John. If you said, you know, "Where does it say if we confess our sins?" First John 1 verse 9, left-hand page, right-hand column, halfway down - visualized, you know - I could see it. And then I went to the gospel of John, and I read seven chapters every day for months, and then the second seven every day for months, and then the final seven every day for months, and I began to see how that 1 John connected to the gospel of John.

And then I went to Philippians, and then I went back to another gospel, and within a couple of years - two or three years - it all came together, and *analogia Scriptura* overwhelmed me, that the Bible is its own interpreter. Sanctification begins with renewing your mind - does that sound familiar? You've got to know it. There's no premium on ignorance in sanctification. You're not going to get there by holding your hands up, swaying back and forth, and singing a 7/11 chorus - you know, same words, seven words, eleven times - you don't get there that way; not going to happen.

It's about understanding truth, so that you can obey it, and praise God for it, as His Son did. The discipline of putting the truth constantly in your mind is critical. You have a bookstore over there; get yourself over there and get everything you can get and read that great material that explains the Word of God to you. Those are gifted, called, illuminated teachers of the Word of God. There isn't any other way to get there without that. Lack of knowledge retards spiritual growth, it retards sanctification, and there isn't any way you can make it up.

There is no way to retard the flesh, to restrain the flesh, except in a true paradigm of sanctification. Legalism won't get you there. Mysticism won't get you there. Chasing demons won't get you there. Pragmatism won't get you there. Sacramentalism won't get you there. The thing that gets you into the ongoing sanctifying process is taking in the truth. Don't confuse childlike faith with childish thinking. And I know this: some of you have come to realize that the Scripture is far deeper and wider and higher than you ever imagined.

You have perhaps recently discovered some profound insights and understandings, and you are now discovering that you have been sitting under shallow teaching for years and years and years. And some of you have a very high frustration level in your local church; you're pleading with somebody to feed you the Word of God. And we're living in a time when the largest and most influential church is, the fastest growing churches are, shallow. They're like Christian comics - at worst - at best, it's People magazine.

And you're struggling in your church, because superficiality prevails; a self-indulged, theologically indifferent church, trying to feel good about itself without ever growing in the knowledge of the truth. Somebody said to me one time, "You just read all those dead guys, don't you?" I don't read all the dead guys, but I read a lot of dead guys, and the compelling reason I read the dead guys is because the living guys are so messed up. Let me tell you something: the greatest theologians of our day cherish the greatest theologians of our past.

J.P. Moreland wrote, "The mind is the soul's primary vehicle for making contact with God, and it plays the foundational role in the process of maturation and spiritual formation" - 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." Listen to this: "Help my memory, clear my brain, / knowledge still to seek and gain." Cognition; cognition.

"Martha, Martha" - Mary, you chose the better part, right? Luke 10 - sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening. Second word: cognition to conviction. This is what you want to do: as you learn the Bible, you want to begin to develop conviction. These are the things that you believe. Your life is a product of what you believe; what you really believe is true is how you live, or endeavor to live. As the truth takes over your mind, you know what's going to happen? Because you know it's the truth of God, it's going to produce principles that you do not desire to violate, and isn't that what sanctification is about?

It's about being compelled to obedience. Second Corinthians 4 is a text that I'll spend just a moment to attach - 2 Corinthians 4, Paul is talking here about all his – well, he talked about it a lot of times in 2 Corinthians, but here also, he's talking about how tough life was. Verse 8: "Afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." I don't know too many Christians in America like that - you know any Christians in America that are afflicted, crushed, persecuted and struck down? We've pretty well managed to avoid that.

But Paul was always going through that; in fact, he was even carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus. He said, "I mean, I just live every day knowing I could die. I identify with my Savior." Verse 11, he says, "We're being constantly delivered over to death." Every day he woke up, he realized one of the plots that was being hatched could come to fruition; he could be dead. "Death is always at work in us." And you stop at this point, and you say, "What are you doing, Paul? Everywhere you go, you offend everybody - everywhere you go.

"You go into town, you don't ask what the hotel's like, you ask what the jail was like, 'cause that's where you're going to stay. You know, as soon as you open your mouth, somebody throws you in there. Jews get mad at you, throw you out of the synagogue. The Gentiles think you're going to cause a disruption. What are you doing?" I love it - verse 13: "I believed, therefore I spoke." Fair enough? It just so happened that what he believed was God's truth. "I believed it, so I spoke it."

That's conviction; that's conviction; and he took that from the Old Testament. He says, "We believe, so we speak. What do you want me to do? What - do I have an alternative? This is my conviction." John Bunyan was in jail for I think 12 years; it wasn't the stone and the steel that held him there. People kept saying to him, "John, you can get out of there - just do what they tell you - stop preaching." This is what he said: "If I did that, I would make of my conscience a continual butchery and slaughter shop."

He said he would rather "suffer if frail life might continue so long till the moss grows on my eyebrows than violate my conviction." Conviction - what you're doing in the

Bible is learning the Word of God to develop a set of convictions that will rule your life, and hold your conscience captive, and activate it when you get near to violating them. That was Paul - 2 Corinthians 1:12 - they were hammering on Paul, calling him all kinds of things, here's his answer.

He says, "Our proud boast is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom - in holiness and godly sincerity, not fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you." "I was true to the wisdom of God, and my conscience doesn't accuse me; say what you will." Acts 23:1, he said, "I live with life with a perfectly good conscience." Acts 24:16: "I do my best to maintain a blameless conscience." Biblical truth establishes cognition in the mind and develops conviction in the conscience.

Third: affection; affection - and my time is gone, so I'll just make a comment or two on this. Take your Bible sometime tonight before you go to bed and read through Psalm 119 and find every place the psalmist says he loves the law of God, he delights in the law of God - it's over and over and over and over again. And read Psalm 19, where he says the law of God is "more desirable than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." And then read Psalm 1, where it says, "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and in it he meditates day and night."

And I will tell you, folks, you can see this progression going on in your life, as you expose yourself to the Word, you begin to understand what it says, it begins to form your conviction, and then it becomes your affection. What did Job say? What - what controlled Job? If you're going to fly apart, he had every reason, don't you think? If you're going to start hollering at God, questioning God, he had every reason. But he said this - Job 23:12: "I have treasured Your Word more than my necessary food."

Paul found his delight in the law of God: "Oh, how I love Your law." Affection; how strong should be that affection? Peter put it this way: "As babes" - 1 Peter 2:2 - "As babes, desire the pure milk of the word, in order that you may" - what? - "grow thereby." And that's where we end. Spiritual growth comes when you have the affection for the Word. What does it mean, "as babes, desire the pure milk of the

word?” It’s not talking about being a spiritual babe there; he’s not contrasting milk and meat, like 1 Corinthians 3.

He’s simply saying this: in the same way that a baby longs for milk, you should long for the word – *epipotheō*, to crave. Psalm 42:1 uses it in the Septuagint: “As the deer pants after the water brook, so pants my soul for You, O God.” You don’t read the Bible as education, you don’t read the Bible as curiosity, you don’t read it as intellectual stimulation, you don’t read it to win an argument. You read the Bible like a desperate, crying *brephē* - a little tiny infant, hungry to suck all the nourishment out of it that it desperately needs.