



# SANCTIFICATION: A CHRISTIAN'S LIFELONG JOURNEY TO HOLINESS

*"16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. 18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."*

- Galatians 5:16-26

# **Sanctification: A Christians Lifelong Journey to Holiness**

Our discussion will come out of the book of Galatians, specifically chapter 5. Galatians was written to Christians by the apostle Paul, who were in churches scattered around province in the ancient Roman world called Galatia. They had heard the gospel and believed the gospel, and they had come to salvation in Christ. They had received the Holy Spirit; their lives were transformed. They were walking in the Spirit, they were enjoying the fullness of life in Christ, and then some false teachers came.

And false teachers came and wanted to undermine what they had believed, what had been taught to them by the apostle of Jesus Christ by the name of Paul. And the false teachers told them, “The idea that you can be saved from your sin, forgiven, and enter the kingdom of God through faith alone is a lie. It requires also that you adhere to the law of Moses, namely the external laws of Moses: circumcision, rituals, festivals, feasts, ceremonies. Without those you cannot be saved.” It is as if you have to step into the formal external behaviors of ceremonial Judaism before you can be a believer. Even though they had believed that salvation was by faith alone, they had believed the true gospel and been saved by the true gospel, they began to be confused by the false gospel of the false teachers.

The false teachers also let them know that if they were going to live a holy life, if they were going to honor the Lord with their lives, they could not hope to be sanctified, they could not hope to be more like Christ, they could not hope to grow in grace apart from observing those very same rituals and ceremonies, and even circumcision from the Mosaic economy. So they brought legalism in, and they said, “It’s required for salvation and it’s required for sanctification.” Paul refers to this, if you look back at chapter 3 before we look at our verse in chapter 5, and he says to them in verse 1, “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, who has seduced you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? You know of Christ; you know that His crucifixion accomplished our salvation; who has bewitched you?”

And then he asks them in verse 2, “This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing with faith?” Well, of course, faith alone brought salvation, and faith alone therefore brought the Holy Spirit.

And then in verse 3, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” And there’s the verse that speaks to the issue of sanctification: “You’ve believed, you’ve been saved, you’ve received the Holy Spirit, you’ve begun in the power of the Holy Spirit, and now are you to be perfected by the law? Are you shifting from living in the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, to walking in the law?”

This corrupts the doctrine of salvation, and this corrupts the doctrine of sanctification. We are not saved by any external ceremonies, and we are not sanctified by any external ceremonies. But that is what the false teachers were saying. These false teachers then are proclaiming a false gospel and a false pattern of sanctification. They are threatening the truth of salvation and the truth of holiness as well.

So, Paul has been writing dealing with the effect of their legalism on the doctrine of salvation. That occupied the first four chapters. In the first four chapters, he demonstrates that salvation is by faith alone apart from any external work or, for that matter, any internal work. And now he has shifted to talk about sanctification, and this really kind of begun to capture him back in chapter 3 where he said, “Have you begun in the Spirit and are now made perfect by the law? Have you shifted out of the power of living in the Spirit to external ceremonies? If you have you are confused, you are bewitched, you have been seduced.”

And over in chapter 4, verse 19, we looked at that quite in detail. He says, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.” And the only way Christ is formed in you is by the work of the Holy Spirit on the inside, not by any ceremony on the outside.

So, when we come into chapter 5 Paul starts to deal with the issue of their sanctification, covering salvation by faith alone in chapters 1 through 4. He’s now concerned about sanctification. And we’re down to verse 16 now in this chapter, and Paul gives us the key to the sanctified life, and by that I mean progressive holiness, progressive conformity to Christ, a walking in the way of blessing, walking in spiritual power and fullness; and he says this, verse 16, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.”

The law cannot restrain the flesh. Legalism cannot restrain the flesh. Circumcision, ceremonies, new moons, festivals, feast days, whatever the observances were that once were

enjoined upon the people of Israel to isolate them from the pagan nations around them, had no impact on their hearts; and they will not have any impact on yours as well. To be sanctified you need not go back to the law, it's not about external behavior; you need to walk by the Spirit. That is how you will defeat the desires of the flesh.

Now, this introduces us to a wonderful section from verse 16 to 25, and we'll title all of it "Walking by the Spirit, Walking by the Spirit." This is the message of the apostle Paul to the legalist who says that salvation or sanctification is a result of observing certain external conduct behaviors, ceremonies and rituals. This is not how salvation occurs; this is not how sanctification occurs.

Verse 16: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Now that is the command, and we're going to break this passage up. It's going to take us a few weeks to get through it because there's so much here.

But to begin with, we looked at the command in verse 16. I just briefly remind you of it: "Walk by the Spirit, you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." One step at a time. "Walk" is a key word in the New Testament, because it expresses the path of sanctification. It doesn't say "leap" into sanctification, "leap" into the Spirit, "jump" into the Spirit, "catapult" into the Spirit, "run" into the Spirit. It says "Walk" by the Spirit, one step at a time.

Now, Scripture says a lot about walking. It tells us in the New Testament to walk in unity, to walk in purity, to walk in contentment, to walk in faith, to walk in good deeds, to walk in knowledge, to walk in wisdom, to walk in light, to walk in love, to walk in truth, and to walk in separation. The spiritual life of a believer is a walk, one step at a time by the power of the Holy Spirit who is conforming us to Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:18. As we look at Christ's glory and we walk in obedience to Him, the Spirit changes us into His image from one level of glory to the next. That is how you live the Christian life. We do not advocate legalism, externalism; that is simply a formula for hypocrisy. Everything that God wants to do starts on the inside. Now, that is a straightforward command, it's really not hard to understand it: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."

So, you has a believer could say, “Well, that’s simple enough. What does it mean to walk by the Spirit? Well, Paul in Ephesians 5:18 puts it this way: “Be filled with the Holy Spirit.” In other words, give the Holy Spirit control over your life.

In a parallel passage, Colossians 3:16, he says, “Let the word of Christ,” – the revelation of Christ, the Scripture – “dwell in you richly.” Walking in the Spirit is being filled by the Spirit. Being filled by the Spirit is being saturated with the Word of God which the Spirit revealed and which the Spirit illuminates. So, walking by the Spirit is not a mystical experience, it is simply walking in line with the revelation of the Spirit which He has brought us in Scripture and which He illuminates to us as we read Scripture, as we hear it preached and hear it taught. That’s how we are to walk.

In 1 John chapter 2, verse 6, as we pointed out to you last time, it’s even narrowed down more than that. “If you are going to walk the way that God wants you to walk, 1 John 2:6 says, “Walk as Christ walked. Walk as Christ walked.” And I told you last time, He walked in perfect obedience to His Father by the power of the Holy Spirit in Him. That’s the command. That’s how you live your Christian life. You walk by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, expressing His will through the Word and through the illumination of the Word as you read it and hear it preached.

Now that sounds like a pretty straightforward command, and we set out to do that; but it doesn’t take long until we run into point two and point two is the conflict. Let’s go to verses 17 and 18, the conflict. “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit.” So there we immediately are recognizing that in spite of having the Holy Spirit in us there’s going to be conflict, because, “The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you’re not under the law.”

Now I just want to talk a little bit about those two verses and what they declare to us, because this is at the heart of how you view yourself. You go to a doctor because you want a diagnosis of your condition, right? This is a diagnosis of your spiritual condition and mine. This is how it’s set up in us to have this kind of conflict. We’re all in the same situation. The flesh is still there, and the Spirit is there, and therein lies the conflict.

Now look a little more closely at verse 17. “The flesh” – that’s our unredeemed human fallenness; our sin nature is still present – “and its desire is against the Spirit, and the Spirit’s desire is against the flesh,” – so these are in opposition to one another. And then that final statement – “so that you may not do the things that you please.”

Now, “the things that you please” are manifestations of your flesh. Okay, follow this: “the things that you please” are the manifestations of your flesh. It’s what you wanted before you were a Christian. It’s just the natural innate longings of a fallen human heart for self-fulfillment, the things that lust and pride develop in the heart and reach out to fulfill. Those desires are what you please. But that verse is saying, “The Holy Spirit is given to you to oppose that so you may not do those things.”

That should be good news to you. The Holy Spirit is in every believer as the Restrainer. The Holy Spirit’s role, yes, to empower you in the direction of righteousness, but also to restrain you from just doing the things that you please. That’s how you lived your life before you were a believer. You did whatever you pleased, and you were going down a path of damnation, because the things that pleased you were sinful things, because they had no recognition of the glory and honor of God. So, the Holy Spirit is given to you to restrain those natural desires.

Now it should be good news for you to hear that this is a divine diagnosis of your problem. God understands the conflict in your life and mine. God understands that there is fallen flesh, and it has its desires for what it pleases. And God has given us His Holy Spirit to restrain that, so that our lives are changed. It doesn’t mean that we never sin. What it does mean is we don’t always sin. And as you grow spiritually and become more and more like Christ, sin decreases and righteousness increases. The Spirit of God trains you with the Word of God, so that you sin less, and you obey more; and that’s spiritual growth. That is the basic diagnosis of the heart and soul of a Christian. There is a war going on there between your fallen sinful flesh that wants what it wants, and the restraining power of the Holy Spirit stopping you from going in that direction.

Now look at verse 18: “But if you are led by the Spirit,” – and if you’re a believer; you are – “you’re not under the law.” Here’s his point: “You will not, having been led by the Spirit, you will not come to increasing Christlikeness, you will not come to holiness, you will not

come to sanctification by the law. Don't go back and let anybody make rules on your life that tell you you're going to be holy if you keep these external behaviors. That's not going to do it. You don't want to be under the law."

Now when Paul says you're not under the law he's saying a lot. To be under the law is not a good place to be. Back in chapter 3, verse 10, he says, "If you're under the law you're under a curse, you're under a curse, a divine curse." In verse 22, he says, "If you're under the law you're under sin, you're under the dominance of sin." In verse 23, he says, "If you're under the law you're literally a prisoner. You're kept in custody." In verse 25, he says, "If you're under the law you're under a tutor."

In verse 2 of chapter 4, "You're under a guardian and a manager." Chapter 4, verse 3, "You're held in bondage to the elemental things of the world." Verse 5, "When you're under the law you need to be redeemed; you need to be bought out of slavery." And so, he asks in verse 21 of chapter 4, "Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? You want to be under the law and you know all that?"

The law plays no role in sanctifying you any more than it plays a role in saving you. It is being led by the Spirit. And when Paul's talking about the law, he's obviously not talking about God's moral law, which is merely a radiance of His nature; he's talking about external behaviors and ceremonies.

So, this is how it is in the Christian life. There is a battle going on in all of us between our unredeemed flesh – not yet changed and won't be until we leave this world – and the indwelling Holy Spirit living and moving through our new nature. So, we live in this conflict. The Lord understands it. He saved us, He loves us, He gave us His Holy Spirit, but He understands this is a very real battle.

Now I want to digress a little bit because I think it's so important that you understand yourself, that you have a true sense of your own identity. What is the solution to winning the conflict? Is it an epic spiritual experience in a moment in some kind of esoteric flash from heaven when you leap up several heights of glory and you come to a point of sanctification? No. It is a steady step, step by step, by step walk.

Let me help you to understand this with an illustration. Lazarus had been dead for four days, and when the Lord arrived at His grave His sisters were very disappointed because they wanted the Lord to come when he was just ill, because they knew the Lord could heal him when he was ill. They weren't so sure that He could heal him when he was dead, and especially four days dead. They Jews did not embalm; and a corpse lying for four days would have gone into some serious decay. Jesus purposely delayed coming because He wanted him good and dead, because He wanted to put His power on display. He knew He could heal a dead man from death as easily as He could heal a living man from any disease. But He wanted to put His full power on display.

So, He went to Lazarus' grave and He said, "Take the stone away." Martha, incredulous at that moment, knows that a stench is going to come out, because that would have been the case in four days. She blurts out, in perfect King James English no doubt, "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he's been dead four days," John 11:39.

Jesus ignored her concern and cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" And it's a good thing He said Lazarus, or every grave would have emptied. He had to qualify for it, He had that much power. As John 5 says, He'll raise everybody from the dead, whoever lived, at the end of history.

What did they see when Lazarus came out of the grave? "They saw a man bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face wrapped with a cloth." They must have seen a mummy hopping. "And Jesus said, 'Loose him, and let him go.'" As long as the stinking grave clothes filled with decay and the stench of death clung to him, he did stink, and he was hindered in expressing his new life.

Now Lazarus offers a graphic illustration of our predicament as regenerate Christians. We have been raised to walk in the newness of life. We're still wrapped in the remnants of our fallenness. Even though we are alive from the dead, the grave clothes are still stuck to us: bound in our own grave clothes, raised, new life, but with a stench. This is the reality of your spiritual condition. However, there is a deeper and more profound issue for us than there was with Lazarus. Lazarus' rags came off, they unwrapped him; ours don't. His just material shroud. Once it was removed and disposed of, the stench was gone. The corruption of death no longer clung to him.



Our predicament cannot be so quickly altered. Why? Because it's not a material cloth that clings to us, it is, Paul says, a full-fledged dead carcass, Romans 7:24. We have connected to us the body of this death. In ancient times, to punish a murderer they would sometimes strap the corpse of the one he killed to his body until its decay eventually ate into the killer and took his life. Paul says we have a body of death attached to us.

And we groan, Romans 8, he says in verse 23: "We groan waiting for the redemption of this body." We are not yet what we're going to be, right? It doesn't yet appear what we shall be; but we'll be like Him when we see Him as He is.

So here we are, and we have a new life, a new nature, new longings, new love, new desires. We have the Holy Spirit empowering us and restraining the flesh that is in us, but the flesh is still clinging to us. Sin is present, but it is no longer dominant. It is present, but it is no longer dominant.

To understand that, go back to Romans 6 for just a moment. And we'll look at Romans 6, and then a little later, briefly, Romans 7. But in Romans 6 Paul shows us that sin is present, but not dominant. Back in verse 5, talks about the fact that we have been united with Christ in the likeness of His death. We have also been united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection.

So we've had a resurrection. We're all Lazaruses in that sense, we've all been raised from the dead. Verse 6, "Our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, and we would no longer be slaves to sin." Okay, we're no longer slaves to sin. Sin is no longer master. Sin no longer rules and dominates over us. "For he who has died is freed from sin."

Verse 8, "We have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death is no longer master over Him. For the death that he died, He died to sin once for all; the life He lives, He lives to God. Even consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Yes, but notice verse 12: "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you may obey its lusts." It assumes it's still there. "Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as

instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, you are not under law but under grace.

“What then? Shall we sin because we’re not under law but under grace? May it never be! Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

Then in verse 19 he says, “Present your members” – end of the verse – “as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.” So therein lies the issue. We have died with Christ; we have risen with Christ. We are like Lazarus, but have a dead body still tied to us, and we can’t shake it in this life. We don’t get rid of it until the redemption of our body when we leave this world and enter the Lord’s presence.

Now, please; is Paul saying we are sinless? Is he saying we are without sin? Not at all. What he is saying is that we have this body of death strapped to us, and we must, we must exercise obedience to the Word of God in us, yielding our members as instruments of righteousness.

There are, however, people who think that the Bible teaches we can become sinless. That might surprise you, but it’s a longstanding, very popular, very widespread theology. They think it is possible for a believer to be sanctified to such a level that he literally is free from original sin and depravity, brought into a state of entire devotion to God, and holy obedience and holy love made perfect. That is a direct quote from a statement in the Church of the Nazarene articles of faith. Say it again: “We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God subsequent to regeneration by which believers are made free from original sin and depravity, brought into a state of entire devotion to God, and holy obedience and love made perfect. And you can get to that point in this life.”

They say it is wrought by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which is something that happens subsequent to your salvation, that elevates you out of your fallenness into a level of what they call “Christian perfection and holiness.” It is wrought instantaneously by faith and preceded

by entire consecration. So, if you can get to the point where you can entirely consecrate yourself to God as a Christian by your own will, if you'll just do that in your own strength and your own power consecrate yourself totally to God, you will, in that moment as an act of faith, be elevated, elevated instantaneously into Christian perfection.

Now, some of you may have grown up in this kind of environment where vestiges of this were being taught. For example, you would go to church, and the pastor would speak, and then he would say, "How many of you want to consecrate your life to Christ?" You are believers, you want to rededicate, reconsecrate. That's essentially this theology that's saying, "If you'll just do that, God, by your act of doing that, will take you up to Christian perfection."

And, oh, by the way, in this theology you can lose that Christian perfection – which is a little hard to explain. How does somebody who's been made perfect become imperfect? It's a temporary thing. And in their theology, if you do sin you're not supposed to be able to sin, you're supposed to be above depravity and above sin. But if you do sin, you're back down again. You can have another experience and another elevation to sanctification. But it's consistent with their theology, because that theology, which is Arminianism-Wesleyan theology, believes you can lose your salvation. So just as you can lose your salvation because it's an act of your own free will, you can take yourself in and take yourself out; you can also lose your sanctification, you can take yourself in and take yourself out. God is sort of responding to your desires and your willpower.

Now, this is very old stuff. Martin Luther way back in his day called it the false philosophy of Aristotle adopted by medieval scholastics. Luther said this: "They teach that sin is entirely destroyed by baptism or repentance, and so regarded as absurd that the apostle should confess, 'Sin dwells in me.'" That's the apostle Paul in Romans 7. "As a converted or spiritual man," – they say – "he could no longer have any sin in him. Therefore," – they argue – "he here speaks of himself as an unconverted man." And then Luther said, "But sin remains in the converted man."

B. B. Warfield the great Reformed theologian, in his marvelous book called Perfectionism, traced the modern influence back to John Wesley. It was John Wesley who infected the Protestant world with the idea of entire sanctification. "There was no element" – says

Warfield of Wesley's teaching – "which afforded him greater satisfaction, and there is no element of his teaching which is more lauded by his followers." What defines Wesleyanism is this perfectionism. And wave after wave of this perfectionism, the holiness movement has washed up on the shore of the church through the centuries and has confused people profoundly.

Now, in order to make this thing work, in order to believe that you're actually entirely sanctified and you've been lifted out of your depravity, in order to make that work you have to redefine two things. You have to redefine sin, and you have to redefine sanctification. You have to diminish sin and diminish sanctification. You have to pull them all down to a level where you can pull it off. And that's essentially what they do. I'll give you an illustration of it.

Charles Finney was one of the great purveyors of this Wesleyan theology, and Charles Finney preached basically that salvation is an act of the human will, totally an act of the human will: "You will be saved when you, by your own human will, come to God, and receive and take the gift of salvation." "Sanctification" – he also said – "is an act of the human will, requiring consecration, reconsecration, dedication, rededication." That's where all that comes from.

And to show you how bizarre this was, sin has to be downgraded. If you're going to believe that you're perfect you've got to change your definitions of sin. Here's a good illustration of it.

Out of Finney's ministry, Finney ministered in New York State 1849 to 1879. It's called the "burned-over area." A lot of cults came out of that because of his aberrant theology. There were about fifty little utopian communes that developed in New York under Finney's influence. One of them developed in a little town called Oneida. Some of you look in your kitchen drawer and you'll see flatware with Oneida stamped on it. That was originally made by this little commune of three hundred followers of Finneyism in New York.

Actually, that little utopian commune was founded by a guy named Henry Noyes, who bought into this theology. They started the flatware company as a way to sort of survive. Their little commune would therefore, they thought, have enough money to exist.

What few knew about this little community didn't come out till Finney died in 1879. When it dissolved, the flatware lasted a lot longer than the community lasted, by the way. What was found out when it began to dissolve was that this little commune of – listen – perfected Christians, this little commune of people who has ascended to entire sanctification, practiced communal marriage. So, every woman was available to every man in the entire commune.

Now that's a pretty serious redefinition of sin. But that's an illustration of what was going on; and it went all the way down to involving young girls. So Noyes had basically adopted moral standards of his own preference, and could live in a perpetual orgy and claim to be entirely sanctified.

Now admittedly, that is a very extreme view, but it is an accurate one, it is a true illustration. But in any case and in every case, if you're going to think in this life you're entirely sanctified, you're going to have to change two definitions: sin and sanctification. You can't possibly have God's view of sin and God's view of holiness and believe that. So, what happens to people who get in this system, this downgrading of sin and holiness, is that they're living in a fantasy, and they say, "Sin is only what is premeditated, conscious, and intentional. Anything that's sort of a slipup, unconscious, unintentional, a bad act, is a mistake, but not a sin." All of this is at the expense of a confused and tortured conscience.

People who don't really understand sin, don't really understand holiness, and think they're responsible for whether or not they're sanctified or not. And then when they're told they're sanctified, their conscience is still accusing them, because that's what conscience does; and they live with the torture of their conscience. If you think you're holy, your conscience is telling you you're a liar.

Now there have been some modifications of this kind of thing, but it's been around a long time. What we're learning here in Galatians is the true diagnosis view is, "You're not sinless, you're not holy," and that is the necessary confession to move forward in your sanctification, not to think you're sinless and holy.

J. C. Ryle in his book on holiness also came out around that same time as Finney, 1879, said, "Sudden instantaneous leaps from conversion to consecration I fail to see in the Bible." They

aren't there. He knew what all accurate Bible students know, that justification and sanctification are inseparable; they all happen at the same time; just that sanctification, not some subsequent leap that happens repeated, repeated, repeated times. Sanctification starts at justification and progresses through your life as you become increasingly like Christ, as the Spirit of God who is in you leads you in the path of righteousness and restrains you from sin.

The good news, folks, is, look, the Lord knows you have a conflict, right? He knows that; He understands that. Thomas Watson said this: "Saving faith lives in a broken heart." So important. "Saving faith lives in a broken heart. It always grows in a heart humbled by sin in a weeping eye and a tearful conscience." That's the mark of a truly godly person, not the idea that he's sinless, that he's reached perfection. That's a proud deception and is a slaughter against your own conscience. In this life the conflict will rage.

Hebrews 12:1 says, "The sin which so easily entangles us." Proverbs 20, verse 9, "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from sin'?" No one. First John 1:8 to 10, "If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. We make God a liar and His word is not in us." That's a verse that ought to bring all of that to an end. James 3:2, "We all stumble in many ways." And then back to our text, back to Galatians 5:17, "The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, the Spirit against the flesh. They're in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things you desire, you wish, or things that please you."

We have to understand the true diagnosis of our condition. I can't imagine the horrendous, horrific guilt and disappointment that would live in the heart of someone who believed that Christian perfection, sinless perfection; even eradication is a term they use. The eradication of the sin nature was a possibility, and they hadn't achieved it. I can't also imagine that the work of a conscience in a person who believed he or she had achieved it, thought they had eradicated their sin nature, and then tried to live with the hypocrisy of reality.

In Romans 7, Paul the apostle is going to describe his own understanding of himself. This is how Paul sees himself as a believer, verse 14: "The law is spiritual, I am of flesh. My flesh is still there, it's still bound to sin. Why do I say that? For what I am doing, I don't understand. I'm not practicing what I would like to do, I'm doing the thing I hate. If I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the law, confessing the law is good. I desire the law of God; I love the law of God." He says that earlier back in verse 12.

“But there’s something going on in me.” Verse 17, “So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” There’s the pathology of the Christian. “I love God.” The “I” has been changed. “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live.” “But it’s a new ‘I.’ But this new ‘I’ has to deal with sin which dwells in me.”

And then in verse 18 he says, “I know that nothing good dwells in me,” – that is – “in my flesh,” – he locks it into the flesh – “and I know that because the willing is present, but the doing of the good is not. The good that I want to do, I don’t do. I practice the evil 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.” He distances himself – his new eye, his new person in Christ – from the sin that is still in him.

“I find then” – verse 21 – “a principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law” – or different principle, or different power – “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!”

There is the testimony of a godly man. He’s not going to say, “Holy man that I am. Sin has been eradicated; I’m living in Christian perfection.” Just the absolute opposite. “Who will set me free from the body of this death? Who will detach me from the corpse? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Yes, one day that will come – chapter 8, verse 23 – we’ll have that redemption of the body.

But until then – look at the end of verse 25: “So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.” Does it comfort you to know that God understands the struggle, doesn’t expect perfection, but has provided the Holy Spirit to move you in the right direction?

Now why is sanctification important? Number one: Worship, worship.

Psalm 15: “Don’t come into My presence unless you come with clean hands and a pure heart.” It’s important. You could say, “Well, I don’t worry about sanctification, I’m going to

heaven anyway.” Sanctification is critical, first of all, because you love the Lord, but for worship. Secondly, for witness.

“Let your light so shine, that they may see your” – what? – “your good works and glorify your Father who’s in heaven.” It’s important for your work. Second Timothy 2, “There are vessels unto honor and some unto dishonor.” If you cleanse yourselves you’ll be a vessel unto honor. It’s essential for prayer. Psalm 66:18, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” It’s essential for edification from Scripture. First Peter, Peter says in chapter 2, “Laying aside all evil, as babes desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”

Why is sanctification important? Because you can’t worship, witness, work, pray, or be built up in the faith unless you are in the path of sanctification, walking by the Spirit, becoming more like Christ. And sin is not killed when it is only covered up, when it is exchanged for a different sin. Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.