

## Sin and the Child of God

In a recent episode of the TV show *CSI*, the main character, Grissom, was called to testify at a competency hearing for a troubled young killer known as the miniature killer. In her hearing Grissom raised the question about whether or not people could really change. He said he wanted to believe they could but was not really sure. The miniature killer assured Grissom that people could change, and that she had changed, but then Grissom found a miniature that showed she was planning another crime. Even as Christians, we sometimes wonder whether we can change or not, we find ourselves stuck in a sin habit that will not go away. We either despair, or we ignore our sins and become hardened to them. Is there hope?

In a previous article, "What it Means to be a Child of God," I wrote about what I had learned from an intensive study called "Sonship." In that course, I learned that we stand before God fully free from the condemnation of our sins and the reputation that those sins would normally give us. We receive a wonderful gift when the righteousness of Christ is credited to us. We do not have to fear our sins anymore! One interesting teaching of Sonship was the notion that true sanctification is not reading more of the Bible and having more quiet times. It is not cutting more things out of your life, nor is it the licentiousness of a free life with no boundaries (Galatians 5:13). Sanctification is a lifelong process of repentance that turns to God in faith.

There is the instantaneous sanctification that occurs by believing in Christ. It immediately sets us apart for God and his purposes, we no longer live for ourselves. We live for the glory of God. However while we are still here in these earthly bodies, we cannot expect that we will live perfect lives (Romans 7:14-20). We are often tempted to deal with sin in our lives by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and reading more, praying more, attending every church activity etc. However, this is a form salvation by works. Think about it. Did you become a believer in Christ and receive his justification by anything you did? Let's look at Galatians 2:20. *"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* He says that the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God not by trusting to keep myself from sin by reading and praying and denying myself certain things. If we do these things to overcome sin, we are acting like a person who is living under the law.<sup>1</sup> It is our need to overcome sin that reminds us that the gospel is for Christians.

You may be asking right now, "Isn't the gospel just for non Christians?" No. It is also for Christians. We also sin, and the good news for us is that we not only have the work of Christ to be saved available to us, but also the work of Christ to grow in our sanctification. In fact, just as the only route to salvation is the work of Christ applied to our lives, so the only route to sanctification is the work of Christ applied to our lives. We cannot overcome sin in our lives by our own strength. All the Bible reading, prayer and fasting does no good if it is seen as the route to sanctification, it is mere ritual. What is needed is genuine repentant faith

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<sup>1</sup> The November December 2008 issue of *Discipleship Journal* has a wonderful article titled "Fallen from Grace" that talks about this more.

that makes humble confession of our sin to God and a few other trusted fellow believers with discretion. We ask God to change our heart attitudes that lead us into our sin. We read the Bible, we pray, and we fast in order to open our spirits to talk to God about these things and to hear from him what he wants from us. He may tell us to get rid of some things in our lives that are hindrances or even enticements to sin (Hebrews 12:1). I once realized God was asking me to lay aside fishing for a year as it had become more important to me than my relationship with my friends. If they got in my way while in the boat with me, I would let them know about it and they would not have a fun time fishing. The year off helped to change my attitude.

As I said before sanctification cannot be obtained by rules and right living. The tongue test I mentioned in the justification article should prove to you that no matter how hard you try, you will fail. All true sanctification comes from the heart with our cooperation through the power of the Holy Spirit. For example, the person that gets angry with their family about getting to church on time needs to ask God to show them the root attitudes that are driving them to sinful attitudes towards their family. They must then have a heart of repentance toward that attitude. If it is a desire for approval or conversely a fear of rejection that drives the problem, then they need to revisit the whole area of justification to see where they are living in the attitude of an orphan. Many sinful attitudes derive from the rejection of the gospel truth of our justification. We need to examine our hearts and confess to God and to others our wrong attitudes. They need to be replaced with the faith that we are loved by God as he says. We have all the benefits of that love that he promises. This is an important component of genuine repentance.

Confession of our sins to people we trust is something we need (James 5:16). We tend to overlook it as we do not want to lower our masks and let others see our warts and smell our bad breath. But believe me, others already know about many of these things, especially our close friends and our spouses. Who better to help us to seek the truth about ourselves than the ones we know and love? Having those that will encourage us not only to do the right things but also to seek the face of God in our struggles is a valuable thing that should be present in our lives. I think that there are two important questions any accountability partner should ask. First they should ask us, "What are you struggling with right now?" The second is, "What is God saying to you about that?"

We can openly share our faults with those we trust, for we know we are accepted in the beloved. Even more important, we can talk to God about these things, our doubts, our fears and our bad attitudes and ask him to redeem our dark hearts for his glory. Our adoption as children of God frees us to be open and honest with God about our need for the gospel to be applied to our hearts. Sanctification then occurs when the Holy Spirit works out his salvation in our lives and shows us the truth of our sonship in Christ. It is then that we will have faith that expresses itself through love. It is the only the thing that matters (Galatians 5:6).