

Restoration to God's Image (Sanctifying Grace) Read within sermon Romans 8:12-17; I John 4:10; John 14:12; II Timothy 1:8-14; I Cor 10:13; John 14:27; John 15:1-17;

As you know we have been studying the concept of grace over the last several months. We reminded ourselves that God courts us. He woos us. He has plans to become friends with us even before we know about him. He wants our YES! God wants us to accept his grace. We call this conversion but we realize that conversion is a process where we need to keep converting throughout our lives. God meets us at conversion and then keeps meeting us at conversion points all life long. Acceptance of God's grace means change, adjusting, staying on God's tracks.

We know the Creator hurls our sins into the ocean. Yahweh forgives us. The Almighty puts our sins behind his back. His blood blots out our wrong actions, our wrong words, and our wrong thoughts. God, in Jesus, makes us without blemish. This is grace. God's wonderful marvelous awesome loving grace. We also looked at the many ways God touches us with grace. There are formal ways and informal ways. There are more ways than we can count. God loves us in more ways than we even realize. Our Savior provides many life giving, life sustaining, and life energizing moments where he breaks through to us and basically gives us a big hug.

We looked at how God stoops to us and how we are to stoop. We also took a look at ourselves and tried to see why we have a hard time accepting God's grace. We feel we have to earn it. We think that there is some catch in something that is free. We think we have to bargain. We also discovered that there are many obstacles to grace and we are the ones who put up the obstacles. We are the ones who get in the way of receiving God's love. We find ways to shoot ourselves in the foot - so to speak. But God loves us anyway. It almost seems that the more we get in the way of God's grace - the more God finds ways to reach us, convict us, help us,

and love us. God's steadfast love endures forever and ever and ever.

Today let's take a look at another aspect of God's grace. God didn't just send his Son Jesus to save us from sin. God didn't just set it up so we could be friends with him. God also keeps working with us. He keeps trying to perfect us. This is called sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace is the work of the Holy Spirit perfecting us in our response to the relationship the Almighty offers us. God has gotten our attention and in sanctifying grace we are seeking ways where we can give God our undivided attention. Sanctifying grace is the equipping process of our maturing into authentic discipleship. It is growing in grace.

It is the process where we exchange our cheap grace for costly grace. It is the process of understanding more and more the gift God has given us. We put ourselves on the line and take a stance on the issues in the name of God. We find that we have Holy Spirit power as we battle temptations. We do good works. We witness. These are our response to the love we experience. Sanctifying grace is the journey toward wholeness that is made possible by the Holy Spirit.

We have talked about the courtship of God. We have looked at the wedding with God. Sanctifying grace is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer between conversion and death. Sanctifying grace is the marriage relationship between us and God.

Romans 8:12-17 tells us, "So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ - if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified

with him."

God in his grace adopts us as his children. This allows God to work with us as a parent teaches and trains their children. This is a rich image. It tells us that we have a relationship with God. It tells us the Creator loves us like a parent who cares for, helps, nurtures, feeds and teaches. Plus learning from God is a lifelong process.

Part of this process of grace is the work of the Spirit rooting out sin in our lives. **I John 4:10** tells us, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

In a very real sense sanctifying grace is like two stacks of books. Imagine one stack represents my good points and the other my bad ones. They represent my strengths and my weaknesses. They represent my sins and my victories over sin. As I mature, learn, and grow, the stack of books representing my sins become smaller and my victories increase. As I develop in the Christian life my mistakes become less costly and my good points, my victories become greater. As I grow in Jesus Christ my faults become less my focus and the will of God becomes more my focus. As I grow in God's grace, my bad habits get put on the alter in front of God as I recognize my own need for change and for help. And the Almighty moves them off the sin stack. Sanctifying grace is the process of maturing in the Christian life.

(Move most books from on stack to another.)

God not only roots out the bad habits, the negative personality traits, and our destructive attitudes, they are replaced with God's ways. So God not only seeks us out, and saves us, he wants to help us become better people.

John 14:12 tells us, "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father."

Now this is radical. Jesus said that his grace

moves us from being sinners to being people of faith to being saints who do God's work. So sanctifying grace is that work of God in us that roots out sin and helps us to represent Jesus.

We could say, unless the grace we are offered and then receive, is not taken in, ingested and changes us, and then shared with others; we just are not living in the Christian life.

Remember the Bible starts with the fact that we are created in the image of God. So sanctifying grace is the work of God in us to help restore us to our original righteousness. The story of salvation is restoration. God has made us in his image and he wants us back as we were. Isn't this exciting? Holy God not only chases after us, and provides a way we can be friends with him. Almighty God stoops to us and shows us how we are to stoop. Even more, our Creator then works in us to make us all we can be as he originally intended!

Let's stop a moment and just think about this. So often I think we just pass over this. We talk about maturing in our Christian life but often it is in the language of "I need to do this better, and I have to stop doing this and so on." But grace is God working in us so we can relate better with the Creator! Grace is restoring us to a state of being that we have never experienced! God does the work to make us better people! Grace is God trying to make us sinless! Grace is God turning us into holy people, without fault or blemish!

It is easy to think that this is impossible. It is, on our own strength, knowledge and willpower. And we so often get in the way of God working in our own lives. We set up an obstacle course that God has to overcome. And the amazing thing is – the Almighty does! The wonderful thing is that despite our sins and our getting in the way of our own best interests, we do mature, grow in grace and become holy. It's because our Creator touches us with his grace. Almighty God not only offers us grace, but his grace perfects us.

Sanctifying grace is **practical**. It **empowers** us

for living. As part of the sanctifying process we are convinced by God that we are pardoned. Our sins really are forgiven. We really are loved. This is not just an intellectual knowledge. This is not just an emotional feeling. We just know! Our head knows it. Our teary eyes know it. Our gut knows it. Our feet know it. Sometimes we may doubt, but as we mature we get to know every waking and every sleeping moment, God pardoned us. Our inner spirit and soul knows it! And we can even boast about what God has done.

Another way sanctifying grace empowers us for life is that we **find purpose**. We strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Can we say with the apostle Paul,

(II Tim 1:8-14) "Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace....For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him....Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us."

As we grow in Christ our purpose for living becomes clearer to those around us, and clearer to ourselves.

Sanctifying grace gives us power to live and to stick to our purpose.

(I Cor 10:13) "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

God doesn't just ask us to follow and then let us do our own thing, or hang us out to dry, or leave

us on our own! Our Savior stays with us and his grace empowers us.

God's grace also gives us **peace** despite what is going on around us and even in us. Jesus promised us a Comforter and told us,

(John 14: 27) "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Jesus knows life is difficult. Jesus knows the Christian life is difficult. But our Savior's grace fills us with peace. Grace helps us set our minds on the Holy Spirit and the things of the Spirit. We find joy. We find love. We are filled with our Creator's characteristics so that we can live life to the fullest while we are being perfected.

Sanctifying grace helps us have a **right relationship** with God and it helps us grow in right relationship. The right relationship to have with God is like the analogy of the vine and the branches. Let's look at John 15, verses 1-17. Notice as we read this passage all that Jesus does for us to restore us to our Creator's image. Notice how our relationship with Jesus is described.

(Read John 15:1-17)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you,

ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.”

In the bulletin are a series of questions. Please look them over this week as you ask yourself, are you maturing, sprouting, learning, becoming more Christlike, growing wiser and being restored into the Creator's image? You may want to ask your self other questions that focus specifically on you.

Is your relationship with God bearing fruit?
Are you replacing yourself in this church?
Are you maturing?
Each year are you loosing one bad habit?
Is God taking a destructive attitude you have and throwing it into the sea?
Are you allowing Jesus to make you a new creation? A new holy person?
How are you changing as the months go by?
Are you having more love for people? Even the difficult people?
Do people around you notice that you are different?
As you graft tighter and tighter to the vine is

your purpose in life clearer?
Do you find that you have more power to live the Christian life?
Are you at peace more minutes of each day?
Is your life full of joy even when things aren't going well?

Only you can answer these questions. But if you cannot see progress in your life I encourage you to ask God to change you. God wants to. Jesus wants sanctifying grace to fill us up to the brim.

Maturity in the life of grace begins by us **discipling ourselves** to be available to the Holy Spirit. We open ourselves to God. Here is one image of how God operates in sanctifying grace. We operate in a paradox. The harder we try to change the less we mature. But the more we let God lead us, the more he can change us.

Imagine being in a car. Before conversion I am driving the car. At conversion I let Jesus get in the front seat beside me. I tend to go where my Creator wants me to go but often go my way. I get to arguing with God. Then as I realize a little more what God's grace really is, I let Jesus drive.

For a while I just let him go where he wants to. But then I start resisting. "I don't want to do that. I never had done that before. You can't be serious that I have to stop this." So I put my hand on the wheel. "I don't want to go that way God!" Or I put my foot on the brake. "No way can I go there!" However, God is patient with me.

Eventually as I mature I learn that my place is in the back seat. I let God be in control instead of trying to take control. This is the sanctification process. The spiritual maturation process.

But then I backseat drive. I give directions to God. When God is taking me east I tell him I want to go south. And when the car stops I make sure I get the keys.

But eventually I realize that I can trust the Holy Spirit's leading. I let her keep the keys. I

discover that the Almighty has a real gift to fixing the dents, maintaining the motor, improving the electronics, and keeping the upholstery clean. Even more, our Creator's wax job is out of this world.

I may even come to the time when I just lay down in the backseat. My trust in this grace gets to the point I don't worry where God is going, or how slow or fast we are traveling, or who we will meet, or what the Creator wants me to do. I just stretch out in the back seat and relax. Life is peaceful and joyful, even if we are in the middle of a tornado.

In a sense, sanctifying grace is learning to stop driving and let Jesus drive our lives. It is learning to lay out in the back seat and relax, as we respond to the Holy Spirit's directives. The harder we try to be perfect, the less perfect we become. Conversely, the more we rest in God's grace that heals us, encourages us, empowers us, and gives us purpose, the more we mature.

I believe that saints are real. I believe I can testify that I've met a number and heard of more. They are not perfect people but they are people who let God change each attitude, each habit, and each sin, one at a time, to God's way. A Christian is one who bears fruit. A follower of Jesus is one who keeps maturing and becomes wiser. A follower of Jesus is one who is being restored into our Creator's image. Almighty God wants to pour out his grace on us in this way. Let's allow him to do just that. Today is a good day to take another step toward a fuller life in Jesus Christ. It's a good day to let God's grace fill us again. Let's bow in wonder and awe at how much God loves us. Please take in the words of one of my favorite songs.

(Spirit Song by Maranatha Singers)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iC7RDZP7tFw>

Oh, let the Son of God enfold you with his Spirit and his love; Let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.

Oh, let him have the things that hold you, and his Spirit, like a dove, Will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs
Oh, come and sing the song with gladness as your hearts are filled with joy.

Lift your hands in sweet surrender to his name
Oh, give him all your tears and sadness, give him all your years of pain, And you'll enter into life in Jesus' name

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Oh, let the Son...