

Creatively Dodging Sanctification

Selected Scriptures

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You are aware, as I, that earlier this year, President Obama shocked the nation when he publicly changed his stance on gay marriage – but the most shocking thing about his change of mind, I think, was not the change itself, but the reason that he gave. He told ABC News that, because he and Michelle are both "practicing Christians, when we think about our faith, the thing at the root that we think about is not only Christ sacrificing Himself on our behalf, but it's also the Golden Rule – you know, 'treat others the way you would want to be treated.'" Sadly, Matthew 7:12, the Golden Rule – we studied it a couple of weeks ago – is often used as a cover for sin; both a cover for one's own sin, you'll hear someone saying, listen, you're not treating me the way Christ said, you're not treating me as I want to be treated; and sometimes it's used as a cover for the sins of others, as the President did. So, the Golden Rule, then, becomes a tool, either for personally excusing my own sin, or for avoiding biblical confrontation because it could appear judgmental and unloving. As I thought about that, I was reminded that, sadly, there is a similar trend that is occurring among evangelical Christians – there is a growing tendency to excuse their sin and to downplay the hard work of sanctification. And they do so not under the guise of the Golden Rule, that summary of the Old Testament law; rather, they do so under the guise of being gospel-centered and being grace-centered. As we prepare our hearts for communion this morning, I want us to consider this crucial issue of sanctification.

Start with me in Hebrews 12:14 – the writer of Hebrews says, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." He says, I want you to pursue – the Greek word is to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective. I want you to aggressively pursue two things – notice the second of those two things; I want you to aggressively pursue "the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." The word sanctification, the Greek word, is the word group from which we get the word holy – I want you to pursue real, personal holiness. Now, let me, at the start here, remind you that, biblically speaking, there are two kinds of sanctification – first of all, there is what theologians call definitive, or positional sanctification. This happens at the moment of your salvation – the moment you believed in Jesus Christ, you were, in a moment's time, set apart from sin unto God to be His own special

possession – that's definitive, or positional sanctification. You were set apart – that's what the word sanctify means – you were set apart from sin unto God, it happened at a moment in time, the moment you believed, you became His. But there's a second kind of sanctification that begins with our salvation and continues until we are done with this life; it is called progressive sanctification – it is that process by which the state of our souls is being progressively changed into increasing holiness. Today, when I refer to sanctification, it's to this second kind that I am referring. Let me define it for you – progressive sanctification can be defined as the work of God's free grace by which His Spirit continuously delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, enabling him more and more to die to sin, and to live unto righteousness. Let me put it simply for you – progressive sanctification is that work of God's grace through His Spirit in your heart in which you see an ongoing decline in sin in your life, and an increasing pattern of holiness – that's progressive sanctification; that's what I want you to consider with me this morning.

Now, as we consider this issue, I want to begin by addressing with you today's popular misunderstanding of sanctification. When I was growing up, there were a number of misunderstandings about how you were to be sanctified; one of those was the Keswick, or Deeper Life idea – you just "let go and let God," they said; you don't need to do anything, just get out of the way and let God change you. There was the Wesleyan, or Pentecostal model, in which you were saved, and then subsequent to salvation, there was another experience – a second work of grace, they called it – in which you sort of received this gift of holiness as an experience, and you were catapulted; from one day to the next, you were catapulted into a new level of holiness. Today, those are still around, but there is another flawed view of sanctification that has become, I think, far more popular among evangelical Christians. I'm sure that you have heard of it; if you haven't heard it described by name, you have been influenced by it – it is everywhere today. Although Scripture assumes and demands that every Christian aggressively pursue sanctification, in today's church there is a flawed perspective of the doctrine of sanctification that is sometimes called cross-centered sanctification. This has quickly become one of the most popular views of the day; one of its leading advocates is the popular women's author Elyse Fitzpatrick – but probably the leading proponent of this flawed view is a man named Tullian Tchividjian. Tullian Tchividjian is the grandson of Billy Graham; he's the pastor

of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the church that was formerly pastored by D. James Kennedy before his death. Tchividjian argues that we have misunderstood the real means by which we are made holy – he's written much about this, but in his book *Jesus Plus Nothing Equals Everything*, this is what he writes: "Sanctification is the daily hard work of going back to the reality of our justification. The hard work of Christian growth is to think less of ourselves and our performance and more of Jesus and His performance for us." Now, if he stopped there, you might say that's got some truth to it – but he goes on to explain what he means. He says, "Thinking those things through, ask yourself, how does the finished work of Christ affect my thirst for security, affection, protection, meaning and purpose? How does the finished work of Christ satisfy my deepest daily needs so that I can experience the liberating power of the gospel every day and in every way?" And then he says, "The secret of Christian maturity is to focus less on what we need to do for God and focus more on all that God has already done for us."

Now, if you're thinking with me, you're immediately beginning to think about a number of passages in which we are commanded to work hard at sanctification – what does he do with those? Well, he relegates all of those biblical passages that call for us to work at sanctification as referring to the work of resting, the work of believing, and the work of giving up our efforts at self-justification. So, how does he say, then, we ought to live, in light of this new approach to sanctification? Well, again and again in his book, he uses phrases like this – he says, "I don't fret over things as much as I used to; I'm more relaxed – it's finished! ... So, relax – the gospel tells us to relax! ... God doesn't dwell on your sin the way you do, so relax!" These are all different quotes through the book – "The gospel liberates us to be okay with not being okay!" Now, if all he was talking about were justification, I would completely agree with him – we have been forever declared righteous, shown in the words of Hebrews 4, we have entered into God's rest, we have ceased working as a way to gain a right standing before God, something we could never do. Sadly, Tchividjian and the others who espouse this view are not just referring to our justification – they are making these assertions about the means of sanctification; in fact, here's the most telling quote, listen to this: "The only thing you contribute to your salvation and to your sanctification is the sin that makes them necessary." The only thing you contribute to your sanctification, he says, is the sin that makes sanctification necessary – now, that, my friends, is a

radical redefinition of sanctification – it is out of step with both the biblical and historical understanding of the doctrine of sanctification.

Let me give you a couple of quotes from leaders in church history, and then we will look at the scripture. J.C. Ryle, in his classic 1879 book on holiness, wrote this: "In justification, our own works have no place at all, and simple faith in Christ is the one thing needful. In sanctification, our own works are of vast importance, and God bids us fight and watch and pray and strive and take pains and labor." Let's fast-forward to today; listen to R.C. Sproul, in his excellent book *Chosen by God*, espouse the classic reform view of sanctification. Listen to what he writes: "Sanctification is not monergistic; that is, God's work alone. It is synergistic; our work and God's work – that is, sanctification demands the cooperation of the regenerate believer. We are called to work and grow in grace. We are to work hard, resisting sin unto blood if necessary, pummeling our bodies if that is what it takes to subdue them." You see the difference between the classic, historic understanding of sanctification and the new idea? Tchividjian says that those who don't agree with his view of sanctification are ensnared in a form of what he calls "idolatry and performance-ism" – he says, "They are on a self-morality quest; prideful, anti-gospel, self-rescuing, self-righteous, devoted to obedience simply because they are frightened. Ultimately," he says, "our problem is that we just don't understand the gospel of grace." Now, this flawed view of sanctification has worked its way into everyday Christianity – you'll hear it come out in phrases like this; Christian mothers will say, listen, don't worry if you yell at your kids, it's all grace, so just go ahead and cut yourself some slack. Christian men, stop battling their sin and just relax, because it's all covered. God isn't worried about my sin, and I don't need to either.

You know, it's really – as I thought about it, it's really a reformed version of the old Keswick idea of "let go and let God" – you just let God do it, get out of the way, understand the gospel, and He'll do it. Listen, if we're not talking about a clear biblical command, then go ahead, cut yourself some slack – but if it's disobedience to God's word, then you must never relax, never cut yourself some slack, you must see it as sin, confess it as sin, and according to Ephesians 4:21-24, you must work hard to put off that sinful practice and habit, you must be renewed in the thinking of your mind, and you must work hard to put on the new habits and virtues in its place. Now, if you've been at our church any time at all, you know that I believe in the indicatives of the gospel;

that is, those New Testament statements of what Christ has accomplished for us. We do need to better understand the gospel, we do need to, in a better way, apply the gospel to our daily lives, and we must never, ever get beyond the gospel. I believe with all of my heart that the foundation from which true sanctification grows is a deeper understanding of God's love for us in Christ, and what was accomplished in the cross work of Jesus Christ – you will only pursue holiness if you come to fully understand those things. But listen carefully to me – I believe those things, but striving and working hard to obey my new Father, out of a heart of love for Him, is not legalism, it's obedience, it's biblical sanctification. Tchividjian says that if you feel the weight of the New Testament imperatives, if you feel the weight of those New Testament commands of what you ought to do and ought not to do, then you just don't understand grace, that's your real problem.

Listen, cross-centered sanctification came along for a good reason, and that was to react against the moralism that was preached from many pulpits – but it has gone too far; it confuses the reality of justification with sanctification. It has even unwittingly fallen into antinomianism – *anti* meaning against, *nomos*, law, against the law – in other words, it doesn't see any usefulness for God's law in the life of a believer. You see, the biblical approach to sanctification is a fine line, and on either side is a pit. On one side is the pit of license, on the other side is the pit of legalism. Let me put it to you this way – if you spend all of your time in the first three chapters of Ephesians, with all of the indicatives of the gospel, all of the wonderful things God has done for us in Christ, and you ignore the second half of Ephesians, you will be given to license, you will be given to live the way you want to live. If, on the other hand, you spend all of your time in the second half of Ephesians, with all of the imperatives – that's where you live, and you ignore the first three chapters, you will become a legalist, a moralist who thinks you can somehow do this. The right balance is the blending of the two, where your imperatives are built on the indicatives, where you understand what Paul says in Ephesians 4:1 – in light of what you have in Christ, walk worthy of your calling. We must live in light of our justification, but we must also aggressively pursue obedience and sanctification.

Imagine, for a moment, that I walked into one of my daughters' rooms, and I said, sweetheart, I want you to clean up your room before you do anything else – now, this is just hypothetical, I mind you. But when I came back an hour later, I discover my daughter sitting in the chair in her

room completely calm, completely relaxed, but there are still mounds of books and clothes all around – again, hypothetically speaking. And I say to her, sweetheart, why haven't you done what I told you to do? And she says, well, you know, Dad, I just didn't want to obey you out of legalism, so I decided that the best way to change my behavior, the best way to really change, was to sit here and think about your unconditional love for me and your grace toward me, and so I've been sitting here meditating on that. I'll give her something to meditate on! You see, whatever her motives, she would still be disobedient! Now, understand what I'm saying – my children don't earn my love, they don't earn a place in my family by their obedience to me; they are my children by birth, and I love them, and even their disobedience doesn't change those realities. But their choices can produce in me, as their father, either extreme pleasure or displeasure – in other words, while their actions cannot change their relationship to me, or my love for them, their actions do change my temporary disposition toward them, and my temporary actions toward them – and the same thing is true with our Father. Hebrews 12 says He scourges every son He loves – we sin, we disobey, He reacts in punishment, He disciplines us. In 1 Corinthians 11, in response to the Corinthians' sin, how did God respond? They were our brothers and sisters in Christ; how did the Father respond to their sin? Paul says, some of you are sick, and some of you have died. You see, cross-centered sanctification may have started with good intentions, but it's gone much too far.

So, if that's not what the scripture teaches, what does the scripture teach about this important issue? Briefly, and in the time we have remaining, I want to give you ten biblical propositions about sanctification. Now, I know you're sitting there thinking, ten? How is he going to do that? Well, here's what it's going to be – I'm going to give you a brief survey of what the New Testament teaches about sanctification. Some of these, I'll frankly just touch on; others of them, I will develop a little more, because they're related to this concern with cross-centered sanctification. If you want to study this more, I've done several series on sanctification; you can go online and study them, but let me give you a summary of what the New Testament teaches about sanctification.

Number one, sanctification is made possible by the work of Jesus Christ. Turn with me to John 17 – this is our Lord's high priestly prayer, and in verse 17, He prays for our sanctification. But

it's not just for His disciples, the eleven, that He prays – notice verse 20; He's not asking just on behalf of them, but also "for those who will believe in Me through their word." That's us – so, Jesus is praying for all of his genuine followers' sanctification. Now, watch what He says in verse 19. "For their sakes I sanctify Myself;" that is, I set Myself apart – not from sin, He had none – He set Himself apart to the task God had given Him to do; I think this is a reference to His whole life, but I think specifically He's referring to His approaching crucifixion. I set Myself apart to this task – why? "For their sakes" – and watch this – in order that "they themselves also may be sanctified." In other words, Jesus was saying, listen, Father, I am going to set Myself apart unto death on the cross in order to make their ongoing personal holiness happen. Listen – if you're a Christian, you have experienced growth; you may be frustrated with where you are, but as you look back, you're not the person you used to be – and to whatever extent you have grown, that was purchased by Jesus Christ at the cross. You see, we never earn sanctification by our obedience or efforts any more than we earn our salvation – it is purchased for us by Christ at the cross. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, Paul writes, "By His doing," by God's doing, "you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us" sanctification. Christ became your sanctification; He is your sanctification; He has accomplished it by His work.

Number two, sanctification is completely a work of God. Not only was it made possible by the work of Christ, when it actually happens, it is wholly and completely God's work. In other words, let me put it negatively, we cannot produce true biblical change in ourselves. In fact, look here in John 17:17 – "Sanctify them in the truth." This is a prayer from Jesus to the Father; He's saying, Father, I want You to do this in them. I wish I had time to take you through the verses that are here in my notes, where sanctification is attributed to all three members of the Trinity. If you are, in any way, more like Jesus Christ than the day you believed – which, if you're a true Christian, you are – that's because God has done it. You have no power to change who you are – God has changed you. Charles Hodge writes, "The mere power of truth cannot produce holiness of heart and life, nor can these effects be produced by the power of your will, or by all the resources of man. They are gifts of God, the fruits of the Spirit. Paul may plant, Apollos may water, but it is God who gives the increase."

Thirdly, sanctification requires maximum human effort. Now, two and three may seem to conflict with each other – how can it be entirely a work of God and yet demand maximum human effort? You see, sanctification is not something that God accomplishes without your expending any effort. Turn to Philippians 2 – Paul makes this very clear. Philippians 2, writing to this beloved church, he says in verse 12, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only" – in other words, you obeyed when I was there, but you're continuing to obey in my absence, to obey God and His word. And so, I want you – that's the model for what I'm encouraging you to do – I want you to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Now, work out here has to do with trying to obey, trying hard to obey the word of God, that's what it makes clear in context Paul is talking about. He says, in light of that, your desire to obey, your hard work to obey, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." The Greek word translated work out here is used in the Septuagint of cultivating a field, and that's great, that's a great analogy because, think about this, if you've ever been around farming, or if you've played around with gardening yourself, you know that cultivating the ground in preparation for the growth requires maximum human effort. It's hard work – you have to prepare the soil, you have to keep it weeded, you have to make sure it has sufficient water and sunlight and all those things. You have to protect it from the frost, and on and on it goes. But even though you have to expend all of that work, you have no power to make the seed grow – God does that. So, you see how it's a great analogy for sanctification – you and I must cultivate the soil of our hearts; that's the idea behind this word work out. We must cultivate the soil of our hearts, we must plow it deep, we must weed it, we must work hard to uproot those things that displease God, we want to encourage the growth of holiness – but just like the farmer's hard work doesn't produce the growth, neither does our hard work produce spiritual sanctification. Our effort doesn't earn or achieve our sanctification, it is still a work of God's grace – we expend the effort, and as we expend the effort, God does what we could never do; He produces the change.

Number four, sanctification is a slow, lifelong process – in other words, it doesn't happen suddenly, it's not an experience. Don't you wish it were – don't you wish you could just have an experience and boom, be ratcheted up to a higher level of spirituality and holiness? Of course you do, I do too, but it doesn't work that way, so get over it, all right? In the New Testament,

again and again and again, spiritual growth is most frequently compared to what? To physical growth. Now, think about that for a moment – passages like Ephesians 4:15, you are "to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." 2 Peter 3:18, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." In 1 John 2, the apostle John talks about different levels of spiritual maturity, he talks about spiritual children, babes in Christ, then he talks about spiritual young men, then he talks about spiritual fathers – that image of physical growth. Why? Because spiritual growth is like physical growth in that it is a long, slow, tedious, at times almost imperceptible process that requires many years. I wish I could tell you that you could go to bed one night a spiritual infant and wake up the next day a spiritual adult, but it doesn't work that way, it will never work that way, it's never worked that way for anyone, and it won't work that way for you. Just like physical growth, it will be a slow, painful, tedious process.

Number five, sanctification is a constant war within your soul. Sanctification is a constant war within your soul – this is not something that happens without a struggle or without a fight. Let me put it differently to you; you will never be without conflict in this life. Your soul, from this moment, from the moment that you became a Christian until the day you die, will be in conflict. Galatians 5:17 talks about the battle between the new person that you are in Christ and your unredeemed humanness, or "the flesh," as the Bible calls it. Turn to Romans 7 – I look forward to when we get here in our study of Romans that will begin, Lord willing, in a few months – but I want you to notice what Paul says, this is Romans 7:14. Remember now, when Paul wrote this, it's the end of his third missionary journey, it's around 56 A.D. – Paul has now been a Christian for over 30 years, an apostle and a Christian for over 30 years, and he says in verse 14, "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand, for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate." Why is that? Verse 21 – because there's this principle of evil that "is present in me, the one who wants to do good." My new person "joyfully concurs with the law of God," this new man that I have become, but there is a "different law" in my flesh, that part of me that is still unredeemed – and notice the language – that is "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! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So, then, on the one hand, I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other,

with my flesh the law of sin." He saw this battle going on in his soul, 30 years into his Christian experience – and so will you, so get over the idea that the battle will ever stop. Now, the good news is, as you grow in maturity, it becomes easier to win the battle with temptation, it becomes easier to overcome, you will grow in your ability to live in holiness and to say no to sin. But the battle will never stop, so get the mindset of a soldier.

The battle in your soul will never stop until, number six, sanctification is only complete when you die, or Christ returns. There's no perfection in this life – if I had time, you can jot this down in your notes, Philippians 3:12-14, Paul again talks about this journey he's on, this spiritual journey, and he says, I haven't arrived. I haven't arrived, but I'm forgetting what's behind, and I'm pressing on to what's before. "I press on toward the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus." What's he talking about? He's pressing on to Christ's likeness, He hasn't arrived, He says, I have not yet arrived at perfection, but I keep pushing on. Sanctification will only come to its full completion when you die or when Christ returns, that's why the writer of Hebrews refers to the souls of those who have died and are now around the throne of God as the souls of just men made perfect – that's when it happens, or when Christ returns and we are all changed. So, settle in for a lifetime of struggle.

Number seven – sanctification is a means to an end; in other words, it's not the end in and of itself. You know, sometimes we want to be free from sin because, frankly, we just don't like the way sin makes us feel; we don't like the guilt, we don't like feeling like we're not in control, and we just want to be rid of the sin – for us! God doesn't sanctify us for ourselves; instead, He sanctifies us because He is our new Father, and He wants us to live in keeping with how His household lives. Ephesians 5:1 – Paul says, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children." You have a new adoptive Father; start living like a member of that household, so you'll honor your Father. 1 Peter 1 – as the Father who called you is holy, so you be holy in all your matter of life.

Number eight – sanctification is a renovation of the heart. That's so important – you see, sanctification is not merely a change in your behavior, it's not some form of self-reformation or self-help. Unbelievers can stop certain sins; for example, many unbelievers get tired of their pattern of drunkenness, and they get involved in a secular program like Alcoholics Anonymous,

and they quit drinking. Some who have become addicted to drugs stop that pattern of behavior through secular counseling or through secular treatment centers – that's behavior modification. The difference between biblical sanctification and behavior modification is the same difference between putting on clean clothes or having a clean heart; they're two totally different things. Sanctification is a renovation of who you are. In Matthew 12:33-34, Jesus says, "Make the tree good and its fruit" will become "good" – in other words, don't look at the rotten fruit in your life and start picking that off and stapling good fruit onto the tree; you've got to change the nature of the tree, and that's what regeneration does, and that's what sanctification continues in our lives. It changes the nature, it's a renovation of the heart – this is why you can't do it. You can modify your behavior, if the price is right, but you can't change who you are; only God can do that. Charles Hodge again, the Princeton theologian, writes, "Sanctification, in its essential nature, is not external holy acts, but such a change in the state of the soul that sinful acts become more infrequent and holy acts more and more habitual and controlling." Your soul changes, and therefore your behavior begins to change – this is what sanctification is.

Number nine – sanctification is guaranteed for every believer; it's going to happen. If you're in Christ, that process of making you more holy and more like Christ is happening. The Bible knows nothing of somebody who prays a prayer, walks an aisle when he's seven, and then lives as a spiritual flatline for 25 years and still claims to be a Christian. Listen – where there's life, physical or spiritual, there are signs of life. God saved you, and part of His purpose in saving you was to make you like Jesus Christ. If I had time, I'd take you to Romans 8:29 and following – you remember, Paul says you were "predestined." Don't be scared by that word – what does that mean? You were predestined – your destiny was predetermined by God, and what was your destiny that God predetermined? You were predestined, Paul said in Romans 8:29, to be "conformed to the image of His Son." It's going to happen, because this was the reason God saved you.

Number ten – sanctification requires the diligent use of means. This is crucial, and this flies in the face of cross-centered sanctification. In his classic book on holiness, J.C. Ryle writes this, "Many admire growth and grace in others, and they wish that they themselves were like them. But they seem to suppose that those who grow are what they are by some special gift from God,

and that this gift is not bestowed on them, and they must be content to sit still." But he says, "Growth in grace is bound up in the use of means within the reach of all believers, and as a general rule, growing souls are what they are because they use these means." So, what are the means of sanctification? We discover the two primary means that God uses in our sanctification in one brief verse – turn back with me to John 17, and look at that little verse, verse 17 again, there is a world of theology in this verse. "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." You see it? Two primary means of sanctification in that verse – number one, prayer. Jesus is here praying for our sanctification, and it's appropriate – in fact, we are commanded to pray the same for ourselves. You remember the last petition of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13? "Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." That's a prayer for sanctification, and we're told to pray that all the time – pray for your sanctification.

But it doesn't stop there – look at verse 17 again. The second primary means God uses is the truth. "Sanctify them in," or it can be translated through, or by means of, "the truth." Jesus asks the Father to make those who are already His disciples progressively more holy by using the means of the truth. Now, what is the truth? Well, Jesus defines it in the rest of verse 17 – "Your word is truth." The truth refers to the entire teaching of scripture; the truth – listen carefully – is not some secret, wonderful teaching; it's not some key truth that some Christian leader sells his books to promote; the truth is not merely gaining a better understanding of your justification. The truth is the entire truth of God as it's revealed in God's word. Now, how does God use His word to sanctify you? I wish I had time to develop this but let me just give you a brief sketch. First of all, He creates in you, at conversion, an appetite for God's word – 1 Peter 2:2, "as newborn babes, you long for," you desire, the sincere "milk of the word." You have an appetite for the scripture, so you start reading the scripture, you start studying the scripture, you start meditating on the scripture. As you do that, God the Holy Spirit brings illumination. Ephesians 1 – He opens the eyes of your heart to understand and see the truth, and you see it and it grips your soul, and then, you seek to respond to that truth in repentance and in faith, what you learned in the scripture, and then you seek to apply it, you seek to do it, you plan and discipline yourself to change your habits of thinking and behaving. That's the process laid out in detail in Ephesians 4:21-24 – you put off, you get renewed in your thinking and you put on the new practice. And as you do that, here's the amazing thing, Philippians 2:13, "God is at work in you" to create the

willingness to do that and to actually create the ability to do that. "God is at work in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure." And in the process of all of that, He changes you – you expend the effort, but He changes you by means of the word. Lloyd-Jones writes, "What happens in sanctification is that God takes this truth, this word of His, and by the Holy Spirit opens our understanding of it, enables us to understand it, so that after we have received the truth, and apprehended it, we then proceed to apply it to ourselves, and the whole time, God is enabling us to do that. And as we do that, God changes us." You see, we expend the effort, and God, by His grace, does what we can never do – He sanctifies us, He changes us, as that process takes place. It's not a sprint, it's a marathon – it's the process of growth; just like physical growth, you'll never go to bed a spiritual child and wake up a spiritual father – it takes time. So, the means of sanctification, then, is not simply growing in our understanding of the indicatives of the gospel or of our justification; it's also actively striving to obey the imperatives. That's not legalism, that's biblical sanctification – that's what the church has taught, it's what the scriptures teach.

So, let me ask you this morning, have you slacked off in your struggle with sin, have you gotten lazy, complacent, sort of given in again? You need to recommit yourself to expending maximum effort to disciplining yourself, to use the means God has given us, prayer and the word of God. As Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue ... the sanctification without which no man will see the Lord." Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for the reality of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for what it accomplished. Father, we relish our justification, but may we live in light of our justification in the pursuit of sanctification. May we pursue the sanctification, O God, without which no one will ever see You.

We pray in Jesus' name – amen.