

SOTERIOLOGY (58)

Christ's work on Calvary is finished, it is complete. It resolves all theological problems. What a tragedy for anyone to reject Jesus Christ and miss out on the appropriation of these wonderful eternal blessings.

Accomplishment #6 - Christ's sufferings and death provide judgment of our sin nature.

Not only did Christ's sufferings and death resolve the problem of personal sin, it also resolved the problem of the sin nature. This is a very important point for us to grasp, as Dr. Chafer says, "As unregenerate men may continue unsaved because of their failure to enter by faith into the truth that Christ died for their sins, in like manner regenerate men may remain undelivered from evil in their lives because of their failure to enter by faith into the truth that Christ died unto their sin nature" (Vol. 3, p. 98).

Sin can be understood in the context of any failure to live up or measure up to the righteous and holy standards of God. Sin nature may be understood as that part of every human being that attempts to lure one into failing to live up to the righteous and holy standards of God. The matter of sin answers the question of what is the violation. The matter of the sin nature answers the question of why the violation.

Every honest believer will admit when he sins that the reason for it is because there was a part of him that wanted to sin. That part was the sin nature. As Dr. Chafer said, "...the truth is not in the one who asserts that he has no sin nature" (Vol. 3, p. 96). (See I John 1:8, 10.)

There are certain passages of Scripture that make it clear that both the personal sin and the personal sin nature were judged by the work of Christ on the cross:

- 1) I Cor. 15:3 - The word "sins," which is plural, refers to personal sins,
- 2) Rom. 6:10 - The word "sin," which is singular, refers more than just to personal sins, but also to the entire sin nature. This point is not so much determined by the word, for the same word is used for sin, but it is determined by the context of Rom. 6, 7, 8, which does reveal that God did pronounce a judgment against the sin nature. (We will discuss this matter further.)
- 3) I John 1:8 - This verse has its primary focus on the sin nature. The word "sin" is anarthrous (without article) which means John has the character and quality of the nature of sin in view. What John is saying is one who says he does not have the character or quality of sin or a sin nature in him is not one living in accordance to truth. Although believers, through a theological ignorance, may in fact misunderstand this important concept, if one were to continually insist that he has no character, no capacity or no nature of sinfulness in him, the truth is not in him and he is not saved. The Spirit of God quickly reveals and exposes the reality of the sin nature and the reality of personal sin. For one to continually deny this truth is to clearly show no such Spirit of truth indwells the individual.

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4) I John 1:9-10 - Primarily these verses focus on the matter of personal sin. Notice the word “sins” in verse 9 is plural. Thus in two consecutive verses John covers all the bases. The testimony of both a sin nature and personal sin is the mark of one walking in truth, in conformity to the Spirit of God. Anything else is a self-deceiving lie.

Now in order for a Christian to live a victorious life, it is critical that he understand, as thoroughly as possible, what exactly happened by Christ’s work on the cross in regard to the sin nature.

We begin by admitting and understanding that whatever the judgment was against our sin nature, it did not eliminate it, eradicate it or destroy it. Again, we cite Dr. Chafer: “...it can never be made too emphatic that this judgment does not consist in that nature being destroyed, nor is its essential power diminished” (*Ibid.*, p. 97). Any believer who is honest will admit the old sin nature is still present and, at times, is powerful.

An excellent illustration of this is found with Satan. The Bible clearly asserts that Satan was judged by Jesus Christ’s work on the cross (Col. 2:14-15; John 16:11). Whatever this means, we know that Satan still has power and is still alive and active in spite of the fact that this judgment has occurred. So it is with the sin nature; it is already judged and condemned but it is still active and still has power to operate. However, it needs to be pointed out that the sin nature can only be activated when the believer chooses to say no to the power of the Spirit of God and say yes to the power of the sin nature.

There are three main enemies of the believer—the world, the flesh and the devil. Obviously the world and the devil have not been eradicated and it is logical to assume that neither has the flesh, which may be understood as being the old man or the sin nature.

What this immediately tells us is that victory will not be found in attempting to eradicate or eliminate the sin nature, for the sin nature will always exist until we get to glory. Victory is found by the enabling, indwelling power of the Spirit of God. No one will ever live a victorious Christian life until this theological point is fully grasped. The sin nature is not going to go away. To walk around in some spiritual daze hoping the next the nature won’t give in is to wish for something that will not happen and to live a defeated life. The sin nature will always give in and will always be in existence and it will always try and get the believer to think, do and say what is wrong. Any failure to admit this will result in lacking spiritual victory in one’s life.

Dr. John Walvoord writes: “The secret of victory over the sin nature is not its eradication but the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit who can enable the divine nature to fulfill its longing to walk in the will of God. The Christian remains in a sinful world, possesses a sin nature or ‘the flesh,’ and contends with the devil. These problems are not removed, but there is added to the Christian’s experience the possibility of being filled with the Spirit and not fulfilling the lusts of the sin nature” (*Chafer Edited Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 66).

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It is the Spirit of God that is the critical resource for gaining victory over the sin nature. As Dr. Chafer says, "...the Word of God so clearly teaches that the Spirit of God is given to the Christian as a resource by which he may realize a victory over every foe, including the sin nature..." (Vol. 3, p. 97).

As we have previously stated, the central passage concerning the judgment of the sin nature is Rom. 6:1-8:13. This section clearly relates to the soteriological work of Jesus Christ to the Christian. It carefully explains that Christ's work on the cross gives the believer victory over sin (Romans 6), over law (Romans 7) and gives each believer the potential power of the Spirit (Romans 8).

There can be no question from Romans 6:1-10 that every believer has been emphatically identified with the saving work of Jesus Christ. These verses make it clear that every believer participates in Christ's crucifixion (6:6); Christ's death (6:3); Christ's burial (6:4); and Christ's resurrection (6:4). It is also quite clear from this context that in this intimate identification with Jesus Christ, a major judgment was pronounced on our sin nature and the sin nature is no longer to dominate and, in fact, a victorious life of righteousness is an expectation (Rom. 6:6-10).

Now the practical outworking of this judgment against the sin nature will only come as one yields to the Spirit of God as He directs in the ways of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-19). The more one yields, the more powerful one becomes. The sin nature practically loses its grip on the believer the more the believer walks in the ways of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). The judgment against the sin nature has already occurred. Jesus Christ accomplished this by His sufferings and death. As one yields to the Spirit of God, the practicality of His judgment against the sin nature will be seen in the life.

It needs to be stated that at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, all excuses for not living a victorious life over sin will be rejected. Christ Himself went to the cross to secure this judgment and the Spirit of God was given to every believer to promote righteousness.

For any believer to live a life dominated by the sin nature is to live a life that is contrary to the judicial and practical work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when the believer faces Jesus Christ, he will have no excuse that will be accepted.

Every believer has two options:

- 1) He can, through the power of the Holy Spirit, conquer the sin nature.
- 2) He can, through his own volition, be controlled by the sin nature.

If the believer lives spiritually, he will be highly rewarded when he faces Jesus Christ. If the believer lives sinfully, he will suffer loss when he faces Jesus Christ.

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As Dr. Chafer said, “It may be concluded, then, that in His death, and as a major objective, Christ secured a judgment against the sin nature on the basis of which the Holy Spirit can righteously deliver from the power of that nature, and will deliver, all those ‘who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit’” (*Ibid.*, p. 101).

Accomplishment #7 - Christ’s sufferings and death provide cleansing for the believer .

There is no question that when Christ went to the cross and shed His blood, He secured forgiveness and cleansing for the believer when he sins. It was not just that Christ desired to save the lost by His work on the cross, but He also desired to continually purify the saved. His work at Calvary made it possible for believers to have and maintain intimate fellowship with God. This was another accomplishment of the sufferings and death of Christ.

The central passage of Scripture that deals with this particular accomplishment is I John 1:1-2:2. As Dr. Chafer says, “In this context both the effect of the Christian’s sin upon himself and the effect of his sin upon God are contemplated” (Vol. 3, p. 101).

There can be no doubt that there are many passages in the N.T. that speak of an unbeliever having his sins forgiven. The central charge to the unbeliever is to believe (i.e. Acts 16:30-31). However, such a charge is not given to the believer who sins and has already believed. The central charge given to the believer is to confess (i.e. I John 1:9).

A believer who is willing to confess his sin is one classified as walking in the light (I John 1:7). If the believer is unwilling to confess his sin, he is one classified as walking in darkness (I John 1:6).

Dr. John Walvoord says, “The effect of a Christian’s sinning without confession of sin is spiritual darkness. The cure is confession of sin which makes possible his walking in the light, that is, the light of God’s revelation. Walking in the light is not a matter of attaining sinless perfection, but of living within the moral guidelines revealed in the Word of God. This involves a willingness to confess every sin immediately as soon as it is recognized to be sin. Such confession brings a Christian into moral agreement with God and makes possible his fellowship with God. In his continued walk in the light of God’s revelation the blood of Christ continually cleanses believers from all sin” (*Edited Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 69).

It needs to be stressed that walking in the light is not the same as reaching a level of sinless perfection. As Dr. Chafer says, “To walk in the light is in no sense a matter of attaining to sinless perfection; that would be to become the light which God alone is. It is rather to be responsive to the light which God sheds into the heart. It is an attitude of willingness to confess immediately every sin as soon as it is recognized to be sin (Vol. 3, p. 101).

This important passage of Scripture makes it very clear that when a believer sins, fellowship between the believer and God is broken because the believer has made a choice to walk in darkness (I John 1:6).

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However, the moment the believer confesses his sin, forgiveness and cleansing are immediately secured because of the blood of Christ and fellowship is completely restored. Dr. Chafer writes: “Thus it is revealed that both forgiveness and cleansing for the Christian are based on the blood of Christ. That no punishment is inflicted, that no blow is struck, that no word of condemnation is uttered, and that only perfect forgiveness and cleansing are extended from God on no other terms than confession, is due to the truth that Christ is “the propitiation for our (Christians’) sins” (*Ibid.*, p. 102).

One of the great advantages that the believer has when he sins is that he personally has Jesus Christ as his advocate (I John 2:1). The word “advocate” is one that means a pleader or intercessor. G. Abbott-Smith says it refers to “a friend of the accused person, called to speak to his character, or otherwise enlist sympathy in his favor” (*Greek Lexicon*, pp. 340-341).

If Christ had not secured this privilege on Calvary, every sinning believer would be forced to experience full divine judgment against his sin. However, Christ’s work as a believer’s advocate “answers all divine judgment against sin...” (*Ibid.*, p. 102).

When a believer sins, Christ represents him before the Father. “As Advocate He appears in behalf of the sinning Christian and pleads, not the weakness of the Christian, but the sufficiency of His own sacrifice” (*Ibid.*, p.102).

Christ’s work on the cross not only resolves the sin issue for the unbeliever when he believes, but it also resolves the sin issue for the believer when he confesses. Christ’s work not only provides eternal life for the unbeliever, but it also provides eternal fellowship for the believer. It is so important that a believer face his sin and confess his sin, for this is the key to cleansing and fellowship with God.

It is a serious doctrinal mistake to think in terms of Christ’s work on the cross as being beneficial only for the lost. Christ’s work clearly is continually beneficial to the saved. To miss this truth is to walk in darkness; to grasp this truth is to walk in light.

One other point may be observed. If a believer is truly walking in light and is in true fellowship with God, he will be in continual fellowship with God’s people in God’s church .

Fellowship in the local family of God is not an option, it is a proof that one is in God’s family and is truly walking in the light. This very point is emphatically stressed in I John (i.e. 2:9-11). Not only does Christ’s work on Calvary have ramifications for the believer in his relationship to God, but it also has serious ramifications for the believer in his relationship to his fellow believers. As Dr. Ryrie says, “Thus another benefit of His death is that it provides for enjoyment of fellowship within the family of God” (*Basic Theology*, p. 301).