

A Mind for the Spirit's Work

The Godly Mind

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Well, I'm just so grateful for our musicians, for Larry leading us. You know, with that last song that we sang, you really get a sense of the transcendence of what we do when we gather together around the word of God and when we come together to see the Lord Jesus Christ exalted. These are lofty themes, these are high and holy and majestic revelation that God has given to us to be able to sing of Christ, and what a joy and a privilege it is for us as those that know him, that this Christ of whom we have sung is the one that belongs to us. I am his and he is mine and we are his possession and he belongs to us as well because he chose to enter into that relationship with us, to save us, to sanctify us, and one day to glorify us. These are not trifling matters. These are not superficial things of which we sing. These are deep and lofty and heartfelt glorious things that captivate our souls and captivate our minds, and it's the mind that I want to go to here with what we have to say here today. For those of you perhaps that are visiting and not familiar with our church, we have a Tuesday night study, that's our midweek study, and over the past month at our Tuesday study, we have done a series that we have titled "The Godly Mind." The godly mind and our goal in that study is to help people to think like Christians and to have a mindset toward the world and toward themselves and toward God and toward Christ that provides a way to think, a way to live, a way to respond rightly to God. To think biblically is really what we're after here, is to have a mind that thinks biblically.

So we've done that for the past four weeks or so, but the series is so important to my heart and so important, I think, to those who would want to grow in Christ, that I wanted to bring this final message on Sunday to give the maximum exposure to it and to give the maximum help to you in what we have to say. And just by way of the briefest of overview, what we've said is that a godly mind thinks rightly, first of all, about Christ, and thinks rightly about the sovereignty of God, recognizing that God is a God of Providence, God is at work in everything that ever happens in every detail of your life, in every detail of the motions of governments throughout the world. God is involved in that and that has implications. It means that God is involved even in the problems of your life and for some of you, the problems are so fresh that I trust that that's a balm to your heart as you hear those things, that even in the deepest of sorrows the Lord has a plan, the Lord has a purpose for you that he is most certainly working out to help you, to bless you, to sanctify you in Christ. A godly mind recognizes those things. You see, a godly mind seeing the Providence of God and recognizing the goodness and the love of God for the

souls that he has saved, realizes that he cannot view incidents in life apart from the loving purpose of God, and that gives us hope and that gives us strength. Even in the midst of our tears, even in the midst of our isolation, we realize that God is doing something even if I can't see it on my own. And what's true of an individual life is true of a church as well. Sometimes a church goes through cycles of sorrow and difficulty, but always with a sense that God is at work doing something corporately just as he does individually as well. God is the same God over the individual as he is over a local church and over his worldwide universal church, the true church. So God is always at work. That means that we can have a sense of serenity and confidence and joy as we go forward even if we are feeling that joy with tears running down our cheeks because of the immediate sorrow that we feel living in this broken and fallen world that still affects us as believers.

We said to have a godly mind is to have a mind about the Savior, a mind about the Sovereign. We also said that a godly mind has the right view of sin; that the godly mind sees sin as something to be repented of, something to be rejected, something to separate and to forsake; that this is a godly mind – oh, and I'm about to get animated here – a godly mind understands that sin is not something to be accommodated or loved or cherished and held in a false view of salvation that says, "Well, Jesus died for everything and therefore I can live however I want." Tables should be overturned and people should be cast out with whips who teach and think such things because this is a whole reversal of the purpose of salvation. Jesus Christ came not only to save you from the penalty of sin but to deliver you from the power of sin, and someone who is truly saved, truly redeemed, wants to be free from sin, even though it's a struggle, wants to be separate from sin, rather than using a false view of Christ in order to justify their love of sin, and the godly mind understands that. A godly mind, a godly man, a godly woman, wants to be free from sin, not find a way to accommodate it in their lives. So a godly mind looks at sin and says there is something further for repentance, and at the same time, recognizing when conviction comes upon, to renew faith in Christ. To say, "Oh, I mourn over my sinfulness. I mourn over the way that I am but I remember that Christ came to save sinners just like me; that he has died for my sin; that he has forgiven my sin; that my sin is covered in a precious blood that is satisfactory in the holy throne of God, and that therefore God does not hold my sins against me. He loves me. He saved me. He has redeemed me. He has cleansed me even though I am in the midst of this. So I have forsaken sin and yet I do not fall into a despair over my sin. I look up and I see that Christ has done a work for me, Christ has shown love to me and therefore I can have peace even as I am repenting of my sins."

So there is a mind about the Savior, there is a mind about the Sovereign, there is a mind about sin that goes into a godly mind. You see, this is kind of a comprehensive view of thinking and this is where the Scriptures lead us. All of these things are on the CDs that are out there.

Last time we also saw something about a mind about the Spirit within, and what we mean by that is this: that when God saved you, when God did a work in your heart, the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit came to indwell you; that there was a miraculous change inside of you. It's not simply that God took an eraser to your sin and erased sin

and left you the same. God placed his Spirit within you. The Spirit came to indwell you and we said that this was a pledge from God that there is more to come in your salvation. The presence of the Spirit in your life now means that there is going to be a culmination of your salvation in heaven that cannot be missed, that cannot be broken. The Spirit came to indwell you in order to keep you and the changes that he works in your character, the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, Galatians 5, those things that start to manifest themselves in the lives of one truly redeemed, are the mark that the Spirit is in you and that you belong to God and that he owns you and that he is going to complete your deliverance in the end. There is an indwelling Spirit. In fact, Scripture goes so far to say that if a man does not have the Spirit of God, he does not belong to Christ.

So we are comforted by the realization that the Holy Spirit has come to indwell us and, beloved, mark it, part of his work for us is to keep us so that the ultimate promises of God to his redeemed will most certainly be fulfilled. There is not one person who has been saved that will be lost. There is not one person who will ultimately fall away, having been saved, having belonged to Christ and then find themselves in hell in the end. We gladly, joyfully and dogmatically teach the perseverance of the saints, and one of the reasons that the true saints always persevere is because God has placed his Spirit within them to keep them and that's part of the work that has been committed to the Holy Spirit in your life. It is a supernatural thing to be a Christian. This is not a mere...we are not talking about things of mere moral reformation. We are not talking about that which can make you feel happy and you can have your best life now. That has nothing to do with true Christianity or at best, is extremely secondary or tertiary to the whole point. God has eternal purposes in mind when he saves a people. When he saved you, there are eternal purposes of great supernatural import being worked out in your life.

So I come back to where I started, we realize that we are in the presence of a great and holy God and that the principles that undergird Christianity are of wondrous import. They are amazing. They are lofty. They are high. They are noble. And a godly mind seeing these truths from Scripture starts to grasp them, starts to meditate on them, starts to think on them, and they start to take root in the way that he looks at all of life, at the way that she looks at everything that ever happens. And this is part of what unifies Christians, is that these things are true of all true Christians and therefore the things which are driving our minds is the most important principle upon which we base everything that we think, these things we share in common. This is true of the lowliest Christian, the newest Christian. All of these things are true of the youngest babe in Christ as they are of the oldest and longest standing Christian who has been a believer for decades. The same things guide the thinking and take root in the mind of the one who has believed.

Well, all of those things are marvelous and today what I want to do is to conclude this series by addressing, if you're taking notes, you want a title for the message, it's "A Mind for the Spirit's Work." A mind for the Spirit's work. Now, in light of the lofty things that we've said, you might think that there is no struggle to be had in the Christian life. If all of these wonderful things are true, someone new might think, "Well, it must just be a constant source of joy and victory in the life of a Christian." Well, that's not quite the way

that it goes according to Scripture or according to our own experience, and today what I want to show you as we talk about a mind for the Spirit's work is this: I want you to see today what it is that the Holy Spirit does to help us along in our Christian life, what the Holy Spirit does to help us, and I think this is going to be massively helpful to you.

When the Spirit came to indwell you as a Christian, he did not come as a passive resident, he came in order to do a work. He came in order to change you, to be an active director of your life and an active director of who you are and what your character would become. So let's develop that here today, shall we? And with that, I want to recall some basic things about the nature of salvation with what we have to say today, and I just really believe and trust that this is just going to be immensely encouraging to you even as perhaps you are hearing some things for some of you, things that are new, hearing them for the first time.

Let's recall something basic about the nature of salvation. Just go all the way back to the point of your conversion when you put your faith in Christ to deliver you from sin. When God saved you, he did something miraculous that only he could do. He broke the dominating power of sin in your life, we'll look at Scriptures that help you see this, but when God saved you, he did a work and whereas before you were a slave to sin, Scripture says that he has broken that dominating power of sin so that you are no longer bound to serve sin the way that you did before you were converted. Salvation united you with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 1, Paul is praying and he says, "I pray that you would understand something very significant about the reality of your salvation." He prays, "I pray that you would understand that the Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead with miraculous power is the same Spirit that is at work in you. I pray that God would open your eyes so that you could see that, so that you could understand it and be transformed thereby." Salvation unites us with the death and resurrection of Christ.

Turn to Romans 6. In Romans 6:4, Paul is speaking about a spiritual reality and he says in verse 4, he says,

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death,

Don't think about water baptism here. Paul makes it very plain what he's talking about. He's not talking about baptism into water, he's talking about baptism into death. He's speaking about spiritual realities and he says,

4 ... we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Look at it, beloved, when God saved you and brought you to Christ, he buried you into a kind of death, the death of your prior way of life, the death of the prior domination that sin had upon you, and brought you into something that can only be described as a newness of life. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The

old things have passed away, behold new things have come." And if you say, "I don't know what those new things are," that's okay. You can just walk with us through this. We'll bring you up to speed on it. The main thing to see right now, the simple basic principle that we are making is that salvation made you someone new. You were born again. You are a new creation. You are something different than what you were beforehand. At that moment of conversion, prior to that you were the old man dead in sin. Christ saved you. You were converted to Christ. The Holy Spirit came to indwell you and from that moment forward, everything is new.

And Paul goes on to describe that in verse 5. It's this newness that I want you to grasp right now. He says in verse 5,

5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

You see, beloved, when God saved you, he didn't simply deliver you from the penalty of sin, he didn't simply deliver you from the coming condemnation that awaits all sinners everywhere, it wasn't simply that he said, "Okay, I won't send you to hell after all. You can go to heaven now. Come on, you big knucklehead, come with me." God radically changed you. It wasn't simply that your destination was altered, your whole inner principle of life was changed and that's what Paul is speaking about here. God not only saved you from the penalty of sin – listen – he planted within you a new principle of life and righteousness that would animate your heart going forward after your conversion. He changed you so that the prior domination that sin had over you would be broken; that the prior love that you had for sin would be changed. In place of a love for sin and a helplessness to change your sinful ways, it's suddenly broken by a new love for righteousness, a new hatred for sin, and a new power to enable you to change. This is what God does for everyone that he saves. Oh, beloved, he made you alive to new things that you were previously dead to. He made you alive to Christ. He made you alive to his word. He broke the power of sin and that means something going forward.

Look at verse 14 of Romans 6. It says,

14 ... sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

So there has been something new. There has been a miracle worked on you. Listen, charismatics want to talk about their miracle services and their healing services and all their stage controlled events to try to make it look like a miracle is taking place. There is a miracle that takes place in every Christian's life that has nothing to do with those phony things by imposters. The real miracle in Christianity, the ultimate miracle in your life is not that God suddenly relieved you of back pain. The real miracle is that God changed your whole nature to reorient you toward spiritual things whereas before you were

oriented and loved sinful things, and that is something that you could not have done for yourself. That took a power outside of you acting upon you to change you, and that's what God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit has done for each one that belongs to Christ. If you are a Christian, you are a walking miracle because God changed you in a way that human power could not do. That's what we're seeing here from his word.

So let's anchor that in our mind. Let's make sure that we understand that and that that is settled without question or without debate in your thinking about life, about what it means to be a Christian. This is part of having a godly mind. God made me someone new, okay? That's settled. Now we are going to pivot and talk about something else that goes into informing what it means to have a godly mind.

Here's the thing: from Scripture and from our own sad personal experience as believers in Christ, isn't it true that we also know something further? Yes, my prior love for sin, the prior power that sin had over me has been broken, but do you know what? It has not been completely eliminated. It has not been eradicated. The chains have been broken so that I'm not tied to that prior post that kept me enslaved, but there is still a lingering chain that I am dealing with. And here's the thing: when God saved you, when God saved you, he did not make you instantly perfect. God did not immediately make you perfectly absolutely righteous so that every single motive, thought, word or deed that you have ever done was perfectly for his glory, perfect in its application, perfect in everything that you did. You know that to be true, right? If I hadn't shown you a single Scripture verse, which I haven't yet but I will, you would know if you've been a Christian for any length of time, you would know that to be true. You all know in different ways whether it's the lusts that attack you, whether it's a spirit of anger that crops up in your life, whether it's a lying, thieving thing that, "Oh, what am I doing? I just told a lie," whatever. You realize that there is still sin that comes out of you even though you know that you are new in Christ and that you have been born again. We find both from Scripture and also from our own experience that we still struggle in the Christian life to live righteously even though we are dramatically changed.

Look at Romans 7 as the Apostle Paul speaks of his own spiritual experience as a believer, as a mature Christian. Paul says in verse 19, he says,

19 ... the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 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 says, "There's a conflict going on. In my mind, I want to do everything right. I want to live in perfect righteousness but I find that there is something in me, there is this principle of sin that is also somehow active in me, and that there is a conflict that goes on." And in verse 21 he says,

21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

In my heart, I want to be perfectly righteous but there is another force inside me. There is a remnant of sin that is inside me that makes that difficult and sometimes that principle seems to get the upper hand so that I am not always doing what I would want if it was just left to the best side of my nature. There's a struggle. There are difficulties that we go through. We find that even as confessing believing Christians, that there is a principle, there is something in us that somehow we find ourselves sinning even though we have been dramatically and radically changed.

That, beloved, is what we want to talk about today in the context of the work of the Holy Spirit. Remember I told you that this message title is, "A Mind for the Spirit's Work," and here's the thing: if you had perfect power over that sin nature, if you had perfect power over that and you were perfectly aligned with it, you could do it on your own. God didn't do it that way and let me say this, I'm going out of sequence here with things that should wait. You know, sometimes especially younger men, younger women wonder, "Why doesn't God just deliver me immediately from what I'm struggling with here right now?" Maybe you feel like that as an older Christian. You've been dealing with something for a long time, sinful dispositions or tendencies in your life, "Why doesn't God just deliver me from them?" Well, let me say something by way of introduction before we get into this. It's to understand that part of the reason that God let you suffer in your flesh and suffer through these struggles and doesn't give you immediate release from them, two things, one is that he is teaching you that your sin, your sinful nature, your sinful disposition, is far more difficult and it is far more deep than you think. The fact that you don't immediately overcome every sin in your life shows you that sin is a greater power and a greater force in your life than you might otherwise think. If you were immediately delivered from it and everything was perfect going forward from the moment of your conversion, you would have a low regard for sin and a low regard for the work of Christ in your life because you'd say, "Oh, that wasn't so bad." Beloved, when it comes to your sin, if you were just immediately delivered from it, you'd say, "Oh, well, that wasn't so bad." You would have an entirely too high view of yourself and too low of a regard of the work that Christ did to deliver you. The fact that you struggle with sin is an indication God is in part teaching you how bad sin is and how powerful it is. The delay has a teaching function to your mind that is designed to make you appreciate the reality of salvation and how great it is that God saved you because you see by experience the difficulty of it. So you learn something about the depth of your own depraved nature through the struggle, and you learn something about the greatness of the grace of God, that he would save a wretch like you and gladly, freely, graciously forgive you despite who you are. When you know those things by experience, you have a sense of a greater appreciation for the goodness and the grace of God to save you because you start to say, "Not only do I see in Scripture that I did not deserve salvation, I see it in my own life I didn't deserve this." And every single Christian should have that clear in their minds, "I did not deserve to be saved and therefore I am grateful for the salvation freely given to me."

Now getting back on track here with where I wanted to go with this in the first place, in light of this struggle that we have with sin that Paul described in Romans 7, here's the

thing, now we are getting into today's genuine content here: it is at that point of struggle, that point of seeming spiritual defeat that you need to have a mind for the Holy Spirit who is within you. You need to understand the work that the Holy Spirit does in you as a believer in Christ so that you can understand the way forward out of the midst of your conflict. The Holy Spirit does what theologians call a work of sanctification.

Sanctification is a word that means to set apart and what the Holy Spirit does over the course of your lifetime, is he does a work whereby he increasingly over time separates you from your remaining sin, he separates you and conforms you more and more to the image of Christ.

Theologian Louis Berkhof defines sanctification this way, he says sanctification is, and I quote, "that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which he purifies the sinner, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works." Let me say it again: sanctification is that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which he purifies the sinner, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works. We can state it very simply. How can we simplify this? We'll say it this way: when you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit started a work in you that is a process of spiritual improvement. The Spirit is at work to improve you in the Christian life, to make you better than what you were at the start, to make you better than what you are now. The Spirit is at work in order to conform you and to make you increasingly like the Lord Jesus Christ who saved you. You are being made into someone who is meant to be more and more a mirror and a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life and in your character and your conduct. When you were first saved, that mirror is cloudy and that mirror is dirty. There is this remaining sin. There are these old habits that you carry over from the old life into the new, there are patterns of thinking. People that have been trained in secular universities, in philosophies and things like that, have to be completely rewired mentally in order to think biblically. So whether it's spiritual, mental, physical, whatever it may be, the Spirit is at work gradually cleaning the glass, cleaning the mirror of your life so that there will be a clearer image of Christ that shines forth through you and in you than what there would have been at the start, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit in you to accomplish that work and to make that happen and to make that a reality.

So this is what it means and this is wonderful. This is magnificent to know and to understand. It is to realize when you have fallen down and you are in the dirt again, to get up and brush yourself off and to remember something really important, "I am not alone in this struggle. The third person of the Godhead indwells me and is working to change me." Even though the progress seems very slow and the steps of improvement seem small at the time, you realize that the Spirit of God is at work in you in order to conform you to the image of Christ and that means that the process of spiritual growth is not something that is simply left in the power of your incapable hands. There is a greater force, a greater power, a divine power that is at work in every true Christian over time to make them more like Christ and that is why you can have hope even in the midst of seeming defeat after defeat. In the midst of your struggle, the Spirit of God is doing a work. He doesn't do it as fast as you would like, he doesn't do it as comprehensively in the moment as you might like, but what we're going to see is that the Spirit is definitely, certainly at work.

So we're going to break this, what remains of our time here this morning, into two parts: the need for sanctification and the power for sanctification. The need and the power for sanctification and I'm speaking to you as those who... I'm making the assumption that you don't need a whole lot of persuasion in your life that you need to be more greatly sanctified. I'm assuming that you recognize that. Some of you probably don't see it, none of us see it as fully as we could, but this need for sanctification, point 1. What you find as you read the Apostle Paul writing is you find him discouraged by the remaining sin in his life, discouraged at least temporarily. He's recognizing the blackness of sin. So in the passage that I read earlier from Romans 7, look at verse 24. He says in verse 22,

22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

I love God's word. I love Christ. That's what I want most,

23 but I see a different law 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. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

Paul is so tired of the struggle of his own struggle, he says, "This is wretched! I am a wretched man and this existence at the moment, the existence seems to be wretched because of this deep struggle with sin that I am facing."

And in chapter 8, verse 23, he says in verse 22,

22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit [the Spirit has come, the Spirit indwells us], even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

He says, "While I am waiting for the ultimate final consummation of my salvation, while I'm waiting for that final glorification that will be mine when I see Christ face-to-face, oh, I groan in the fact that I'm still dealing with sin in this life." And the words are heavy: wretched, groaning.

And those of you that have felt something of that can identify with the groan, can't you? You know something of the sense of disappointment in yourself, something of the shame of sin. Sometimes it's just your own recognition of who you are inside, sometimes others become the witnesses to it. You say, "Oh, that's not who I really am. It's who I am but it's not who I really am." And you feel the weight of that. The Apostle Peter in chapter 2, 1 Peter 2, talks about how the lust of the flesh wages war against the soul.

Here's the thing, beloved, oh, do you need to hear this: the godly mind knows to expect that struggle, knows that this is part of Christian life and it is a part of Christian growth.

The godly mind, let me say it another way, has no false sense of pride about great spiritual attainment in its life, it has no false sense and makes no false claims as the Wesleyans do of, "I have attained a perfection in my spiritual life." The godly mind recognizes there is a struggle with sin within that is real, that is difficult, that is a struggle, that is a painful thing at times, so he's not proud of himself; there is not pride spiritually and saying, "Look at me, look at my spiritual attainment." A godly mind doesn't do that.

A godly mind recognizes that the remnants of sin within us war against this principle of righteousness, this new nature that God has given us, and that there is a conflict that goes on in this life and understands that. It humbles us. It should humble you to recognize that. For all of your love for Christ and for as much as, you know, I mean, look, I mean this well what I'm about to say. You know, I look out at you and I see a bunch of fine respectable people, outwardly very pleasant to be with, people that I love and care about and enjoy being with. But in your own mind you realize that even as I present myself respectably to the outside, I realize that there is a fight with sin that goes on within me and sometimes I lose that battle and the reality of who we really are, you wouldn't want others to know.

Well, the godly mind understands that, understands that there is this principle of sin warring against the principle of righteousness that is inside you and that, beloved, is your need for sanctification. That remaining corruption is not meant to be the permanent mark, that is to be changed, that is to be transformed, that is to be improved. And here's what I want you to see: the message today is not therefore you go out and change it and place all of the weight when you're already staggering under the weight of your sin to say now you also have, you are the final hope that you have that this is going to change. No, this is where knowing the work of the Holy Spirit is so crucial for your life. It is immensely, enormously encouraging, liberating and empowering to know that you are not alone in that battle with sin. The Holy Spirit indwells you in large part to help you in the weakness of your flesh. The Holy Spirit sustains that new life principle so that it increasingly has the upper hand in your character, and the upper hand in your life. It becomes the defining dominating aspect of your character, and so whereas before the corruption seems so great, the Spirit subdues your corruption, increases the work of grace in your heart so that there is an evident growth and pattern of improvement going on spiritually that you could never attain on your own.

Here's the thing that we all need to come to grips with, beloved. This is reality. This is the way things really are. This is what's true for you as a Christian and about the nature of salvation. It pleased God when he saved you not to make you perfect immediately but rather to manifest a work of grace in your life over time. That pleased God to order salvation that way, that you would grow in grace over time rather than have a simple, immediate, perfect deliverance that allowed you to walk on air and to walk on water and to never sin again in your Christian life. The power of sin has been broken but that doesn't mean it has been eradicated. You can think about it this way, suppose somebody attacked the United States, a foreign nation attacked the United States, in our nation's capital when our people are there reigning, ruling, doing the work, they have the principle of rule established because they hold the levers of government. There might be guerrilla

warfare going on, there might be people that are trying to attack but they don't have control, they are just making things difficult. That's how it is with you. The principle of righteousness is the ruling factor in your Christian life but there is a guerrilla warfare that takes place from the remnants of sin within you. God is in control, the Spirit is in control but sometimes there are battles to face, battles to deal with along the way.

So it pleased God not to make you perfect immediately but that you would grow in grace over time. It teaches you – this is also very important – it teaches you the power of sin, it teaches you the power of grace, but it also does this, beloved: as you go through that wrestling process, it teaches you to trust, it teaches you dependence, it purges you of pride and it teaches you to look with trust to the God who is going to sanctify you over time. And it pleases God to see that trust at work in the lives of his children. That's our need for sanctification.

Let's look at what the Spirit actually does in point 2: the power for sanctification. The power for sanctification and I'm just going to give you three kind of introductory elements. Down the road next year, we'll be talking about sanctification in greater depth in our series on systematic theology, and so we'll go back over these things in months to come.

What is the power for sanctification? Subpoint A if you want to take notes that way: is the prayer of the Spirit. The prayer of the Spirit. Into your weakness, beloved, the Holy Spirit provides help and comfort. He intercedes for you. He helps you. That's one of his names from the Gospel of John, the Helper, and what a blessed thing it is for us to contemplate the fact that the third person of the Godhead has come to indwell us and he comes as one who is here to help us, to strengthen us, and we find that part of his work is the prayer of the Spirit. Romans 8:26. In Romans 8:26, he says,

26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness;

Paul has been talking about his weakness in Romans 7. He had alluded to it in chapter 8, verse 23, and now he is supplying that, he is telling us about that which assures us of the ultimate victory. He says,

the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

What Paul is saying is that the Holy Spirit prays for us. The Holy Spirit intercedes before the throne of God in the midst of your struggle, in the midst of your weakness, and somehow in ways that go beyond what we can adequately put into human language, the Spirit of God is praying to God the Father and saying, "God, strengthen this one. Help this one in his weakness." Can you pray for me? Can you pray for me? Happy to pray for you but do you know what? What's really good to know is that the Holy Spirit himself is praying for us, interceding before us.

S. Lewis Johnson says this about this prayer of the Spirit, he says, "The reference is not to ordinary prayer primarily but to our longing to be released from the corruption of this life, for the glorious liberty we will enjoy in the future as the children of God." He goes on to say – listen to this, listen to what God has given to you in the indwelling Holy Spirit – he says and I quote, "We have someone within, a divine person who prays for us in a divine way and the inevitable result is that the Father answers the prayers. Such is the comfort, assurance and security of the saints, God praying to God and we are the objects of those prayers."

This is magnificent. This is staggering in its grandeur, that God not only saved you when you didn't deserve it, he was so set, he was so purposed on making you into someone like Christ that he sent the Spirit to indwell you, to help you, and part of the ministry that the Spirit carries out in an ongoing way in the life of every believer is this ministry of intercession where he asks God the Father to work, to strengthen, and that the whole Godhead, the whole resources of the infinite Godhead, would come to bear and be at work in you in order to change you from one lesser image of the glory of Christ into a greater image of the glory of Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:18. From glory to glory, God indwells you in the person of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit, part of what he does is he has this perfect ministry of intercession for you, that you would be conformed in the way that God intends you to be conformed during the course of your life to the image of Christ.

Now I ask you, does God answer the prayers of God? Does God the Spirit know how to pray for you? Does he know all of the circumstances and the timing of all of this and that? Does God the Spirit know your weakness? Does God know how God can strengthen you and at the right times to provide you with the help that you need? To ask the question is to answer it, isn't it? So again, we are staggered. We are humbled. We are brought low by the greatness of what God has done for us. God not only has saved you, it's not just that Christ has died for your sins at the cross, that's infinitely magnificent but the work of God in your salvation is greater still so that the Spirit of God comes to indwell you and he prays for you and intercedes for you before the throne of God so that your work of sanctification would not fail; that it will be achieved and accomplished certainly in the end. That's what the Spirit does, he prays for us.

Where else do we find the Spirit's work in the power of sanctification? Well, secondly, we also find it in the word of the Spirit. The word of the Spirit. Turn over to 1 Corinthians 2. The Spirit helps us by opening our mind to God's word. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says,

9 ... "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him."

God has prepared things for you that he intends you to inherit, for you to know, for you to possess.

Verse 10,

10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

It takes an infinite being to understand the thoughts of another infinite person and the Godhead has a perfect harmony in its divine mind and the Spirit knows the thoughts of God the Father and God the Son perfectly, co-extensively, deeply and intimately without any lack of understanding, and it is that Spirit that is at work in you to help you with the word of God, the Scriptures.

Verse 12,

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

Beloved, mark it, mark it: when you read the word of God in your private study, when you hear the word of God taught to you, there is a miraculous, powerful, supernatural dynamic that is at work. The Spirit of God is helping your mind, enlarging its power, and putting thoughts and understanding in your mind to understand and grasp that which you could not do naturally in your own ability. That is why you can meet a humble Christian maybe in another part of the world without much education, and you find that that person who has been a Christian, walking with God, reading the word, is someone who can engage a deep discussion about the things of God with you that far transcends human education. Why is that? It's because the Spirit of God has done a work in his heart to help him understand the word of God.

Over in chapter 2 of 1 John, if you would turn there, 1 John 2. This message should have been a series of its own. 1 John 2, just after Hebrews, James, Peter, you come to 1 John. I'll just read a couple of verses here. 1 John 2:14, he says,

14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

There is this ministry of the word of God in our hearts that helps us to overcome the evil one that is a part of your spiritual growth.

An in verse 27, he alludes to the Spirit with the word "anointing." 1 John 2:27, he says,

27 As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you [the Spirit is dwelling within you, he abides in you] and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

We covered this verse years ago when we went through 1 John. Let me just say this in the context just to summarize it very briefly here: the Spirit of God abides in you in a way that makes the word of God, the Scriptures, the revealed word of God, it makes it alive to you and makes it a transforming agent in your life. That's part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It's not simply a matter of intellectual mental comprehension that we do here when we gather together to study God's word, there is a dynamic of the Spirit doing a work inside you and enabling your understanding to grasp things and to shape your affections and desires in response to it. The Spirit stimulates that in you. He guides you into the truth, he gives you the desire and the capacity to understand the word of God.

Summarizing what the theologian, A. A. Hodge, said back in the 19th century: the Spirit of God opens your mind to the excellence of divine truth. He renews your affections so that you see how excellent it is and then you desire to pursue it. What does the Spirit of God do? Not only does he pray for you, he does a work in you in which he takes the word of God and makes it alive, relevant, penetrating, transforming, lovely, excellent to you in a way that gives you a grasp of spiritual truth. Going from elementaries to intermediate to more advanced things along the way, this is what the Spirit of God does for you. He leads you through the word of God into spiritual growth.

Let me ask you a question, prove this to you, those of you that are true Christians. This should encourage you to think this way. You see this in your own experience. Isn't it true that you have more insight into the word of God now than you did when you were first converted? If you have been growing as a Christian at all, isn't it true that you could look back five years ago and say, "Wow, I see things differently now. I understand and grasp spiritual truth in a way that wasn't true five years ago." Isn't that true of you? Isn't there anchored in your understanding things of principles of conviction that you were waffling on before? That's the ministry of the Spirit of God. That's what he does. He brings you to a point where there are convictions that are settled and so that you are not so tossed here and there by the waves of changing doctrine around you. That's a work of the Spirit of God.

And beloved, let me say this. I'm very grateful to have each one of you in the room here today as you're listening. Understand this and I always hesitate to say things like this because I'm not too good at what I do I guess, I don't know. This is why it is because the Spirit uses the word of God in your life to change you and to conform you to the image of Christ, this is one of the primary ministries that he has in the life of every true believer. Beloved, that is why it is so good for you to be here this morning hearing God's word taught to you. That's why it is so important for you to make being under the systematic regular teaching of the word of God a surpassing priority in your life, not something that's done casually and indifferently depending on whether it fits with your schedule or

not. You make the word of God a priority because that is where the Spirit does so much of his work. It's not a matter of gathering socially. It's not a matter of, "Oh, I have to be here because the church doors are open." No. No, it's so much more than that. It's saying, "We gather together to hear God's word taught and do you know what happens then? The omnipotent Spirit does a great work in the hearts of those who believe and I want to be a part of it."

So as you are thinking about life for the coming new year, I encourage you to count where the priority of God's word is in your heart, understanding that this isn't a plea for better attendance, this is the avenue of the blessing of God and the work of the Spirit of God in your heart. Would we want as many people as possible under the sound of God's word? Yeah, but do you know what? It isn't about numbers. It's not about the numbers. So when we say come and be under God's word, it's not because we want attendance so that the number next week is bigger than the number this week. That has nothing to do with it. The point is that we would desire the blessing of God on your life that comes through his word and the sanctification that the Spirit does is something that he does through the word of God and we would want you to have that benefit. The blessing that comes from a close walk with God informed by his word, that's the ministry of the Spirit in your heart.

Well, let's wrap this up and just see, thirdly, and I'll just state it more broadly: the ministry of the Spirit. What is the power for sanctification? It's the prayer of the Spirit, it is the word of the Spirit, it is the ministry of the Spirit. The indwelling Holy Spirit, beloved, continually works to help you. In Philippians 2, you can turn there, Philippians 2, beginning in verse 12, and I cannot tell you how thankful to God I am that each one of you are here. Philippians 2:12, Paul tells his readers,

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Beloved, here's what that verse is telling you: you have a responsibility to apply yourself to the things of Christian life, that's true, but the reason that you apply yourself to them is based on a knowledge of the work of the Spirit. You apply yourself because, for this reason, because God is at work in you. The Spirit of God is doing a work in your life and so go and put yourself in the realms where the Spirit works so that that work would be more advanced, it would be more pure, it would be more full.

Here's the thing, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ: the Spirit of God works in your heart in a way that you cannot see, you can't hear it, you can't touch it, you can't feel it. He is working in an unseen way but based on what God has said in his word, we know this: the Spirit shapes your heart so that you will most certainly grow as a Christian. That's what he does. That's what he's in the business of doing, if I can put it that way. He is in the business, it is his ministry to make people more like Christ. And God, the Spirit desiring the glory of Christ, having assigned to him the ministry of glorifying Christ,

takes the people of Christ and shapes them and molds them so that they will be more like him. The greatest glory that Christ can never have – well, I don't want to say it that way. One of the great ways for Christ to be glorified by the Spirit is for the Spirit to produce in his people people that look like him. Christ is the measure of his own glory and the more we reflect him, the more that we glorify him.

Again, S. Lewis Johnson says this and I quote. Let me preface it with us: there are times I understand because I know it by experience, I know it to be true for you too, your desires for spiritual growth kind of come and go like the waves of the ocean. Sometimes you're hot, sometimes it doesn't seem quite so strong and mighty in your heart. The Spirit is at work even in that to help and here's what S. Lewis Johnson says, he says, "The disposition to be obedient in measure to the word of God is something the Holy Spirit gives us so internally and irresistibly we are wrought upon by the Holy Spirit and we are led, guided and enabled to do the work of God." The Spirit of God does a work to lead us, to guide us, to enable us to do that which God has called us to do. We don't live this Christian life in our own strength and in our own power.

Dr. Johnson goes on to say, "We are responsible to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, that is a command addressed to us. We cannot say before the Lord God, 'Well, I didn't work out mine because I was waiting on the Holy Spirit to work in me.' No, you cannot say that. You are responsible to work it out. That's your responsibility." Incidentally, I'm not quoting here, that refutes the old notion of let go and let God as being the path of sanctification. You can't just let go and be passive in it. Scripture commands you to work it out.

But Dr. Johnson adds this helpful insight and, again let me preface it, like he needs me to help interpret it. Wrapping all of this up together, we started by saying we have been made new but there is this principle of sin that fights against us and we feel the struggle and it discourages us, and you know by too sad personal experience that the moment that you think you're doing well somehow is when you seem to stumble, and you know that and that leads to what Dr. Johnson says there. He says, "But if you say, 'But I am of myself unable to do this, I can't work out my salvation. I am responsible but I lack the power to do it,'" he says, "that is a Christian idea. So what do you do in light of all of this? You are commanded to grow and yet you feel the weight of the struggle, what do you do?" He says and I quote, "You get down on your knees and say, 'O God, I cannot sanctify myself. Through the Holy Spirit, work in me that I may work out my salvation.'"

That's the settled mindset of the godly mind. This is what you say to yourself. This is what you look in the mirror and see. You say, "I will struggle at times with remaining sin. I cannot overcome it by myself and yet in my weak state, I am still responsible to pursue my spiritual growth. This seems to be a contradiction but I'm not downcast. The Spirit is now within me. The Spirit will help me and I trust the Holy Spirit to finish the work that he began." Beloved, that's exactly what God's word says he will do. Philippians 1:6,

6 ... I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Brothers, there may be times where that seems to be a distant goal, a distant reality, it may seem to be receding further into the background the longer your struggle goes on, but take heart. This work of the Spirit is real and it will be finished because God has promised it in his word. And then, when the work on earth is done, when the Spirit has finished and said, "That's enough," he'll call us home to heaven and we will enter into heaven and we will find that the perfection for which we have longed on this earth has now been granted to us and our culmination of our salvation is ours, never to feel the struggle again, never to be panged by conscience again, never to stumble again, perfected in the presence of Christ. God converted us, God sanctifies us, one day God will glorify us, and in that great eternal moment when that occurs, you're going to look at it all and say, "This was worth it and praise be to God, praise be to the Son, praise be to the Spirit who saved me and made sure I reached the final destination."

Father, may it be true for each one. Thank you for the work of the Holy Spirit. Forgive us when we sin. Forgive us when we think and act in ways that are at cross purposes with the work of the Spirit, but we thank you that in the end the Spirit will prevail. You will perfect the work that you have begun in us. We will see Christ face-to-face. We will be with you in heaven forever and ever.

Father, that's true for Christians. Father, for those that are here and they realize that this whole thought of the word of Christ, of struggle, of sanctification, and they realize, "This is all foreign to me. I have no idea," Father, would you use that to convict them that they are outside of Christ and may that conviction cause them to rise and come to Christ and say, "I need this salvation. I need to be delivered from sin. I believe your promise and I ask you to receive me and start this work in me as well."

And God, what you do in the lives of individuals we ask you to do in the life of our body as well; that you would indeed sanctify us corporately. We thank you for the work that you have done over the past six years when this work first started. We thank you that the best is still to come and we ask you, Father, to do that work, not that we as a church or any individual might receive glory, acclaim or recognition, Father, we forsake all of that, we care not what the world thinks of us, we simply ask you to take what is yours, these people that belong to you, take these that belong to you and accomplish what you would desire whatever that might be. We submit to you with glad recognition that we have been saved by precious blood and we are your servants and that's all that matters. Help us to serve you and each other in a way that would glorify Christ as the Spirit empowers us to that end. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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