

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD'S GRACE AND THE  
THE BELIEVER'S WILL IN SANCTIFICATION

by

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The relationship between grace and human will has caused divisions among theologians. The problems extend into sanctification because it is a part of salvation. God is sovereign in all of salvation and so He controls what happens in sanctification. The believer has freedom of the will; however, this freedom is not out of the control of God. This is understood when one realizes that all human decisions are made under influences controlled by God. Additionally, such influences are both inward and outward, so that nothing escapes God's control.

In the Old Testament, God's future promises to the Nation of Israel require that He effectively control their will to bring about the promised goal. In the New Testament, sanctification is a part of the plan of salvation. His purposes cannot fail with the individual believer; He has effective influence on the Christian's will. Also the ministry of prayer in the New Testament proves that God can answer prayers even when they affect the will of a saint. Indeed, Philippians 2:13 directly states that God works on the believer's will. Paul as a proper Christian servant thanked God for everything that he had done in the ministry. He gave no credit to himself for choosing to do what was right.

The process of sanctification begins with God's will and is administered to Christians through the agency of the Holy Spirit. His exact methods are mysterious in nature but they must not be denied on that basis. The believer seems to be autonomous in that he is not aware of divine influences. He does not know God's plan for him, and so he makes decisions on the basis of his judgment. These judgments are part of the means through which God accomplishes His plan.

Rewards, at first glance, appear to be based on human merit. However, man cannot truly merit anything from God. Rewards, like eternal life, are gifts of God's grace and are given as the individual begins and walks in faith.

Why God allows sin to be present in the believer's life is not clear. One must trust God, since God has planned the perfect program. God receives the glory and man learns valuable lessons as the program continues.

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## INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of sanctification has received some attention by theologians. Every major theology devotes a section to its study as a part of salvation. Additionally, many have written specific works devoted to the many implications of the doctrine. In these works, both the divine and human elements in the process have received attention. By far, the human element is the dominant aspect in these writings. The relationship between God's sovereignty and the believer's will in sanctification is often overlooked or given minimal attention. Such ideas relative to freedom of will are usually reserved for studies on God's decrees, or election with regard to justification. While they are necessary at those points, consideration also needs to be focused on sanctification as well. Obviously, humans make decisions after becoming a Christian as well as before.

The neglect of such studies leads to a misunderstanding of the grace of God and its application to mankind. Indeed, the errors have already led to logical problems in the process of grace between justification and sanctification. Invariably when grace is misunderstood in sanctification, human merit creeps in and grace is destroyed. An elevation of human will is often a root cause, because the process of God's grace and the human will are inseparably linked.

### Statement of Purpose and Method

It is the purpose of this thesis to present the relationship between God's grace and the believer's will, based on the exposition of various passages of Scripture and logical inferences thereof.

Since issues of human freedom extend beyond sanctification, some background material will also be presented. Also, since sanctification is a part of salvation, other parts of salvation need occasional reference, especially justification. Additionally, some problems that are particularly relevant to this study will also be given special attention.

### Statement of Thesis

It is the thesis of this work that God is sovereign in sanctification in same manner as justification. His will effectively influences the believer's will in sanctification so that His ultimate purposes are accomplished. The process of God's dealings with man are consistently applied with regard to His sovereignty to protect the very nature of grace. There is not a conflict between God's rule and human freedom, if human freedom is defined correctly.

## CHAPTER I

### GENERAL ISSUES IN FREEDOM OF THE WILL

The study of the human will and its relationship to the sovereignty of God is an old theological problem. It has particular significance for the doctrine of Soteriology. It is in this doctrine that the problems are most clearly manifest. Whether or not man may ultimately reject the grace of God has been a hotly disputed item. The meaning of human freedom and responsibility in the light of God's sovereignty has never found total agreement. Theologians of the past have not neglected the problem. Their ideas have been well documented in history.

There have been two basic points of view in the discussion. The first view is particularly evident in Augustine, Luther and Calvin. Their position held that God's sovereignty is not limited in any way by the human will, rather the divine will effects the human will to accomplish it's purpose. Augustine wrote, "It is certain that it is we that act when we act; but it is He who makes us act, by applying efficacious powers to our will."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Augustine, "Saint Augustin's Anti-Pelagian Works," in Vol. 5 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Edited by Philip Schaff. (reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 457.

Clearly Augustine set the stage for later Calvinistic thought when he saw the necessity of grace to free the will in turning to God.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, the opposing position was established early in church history. Pelagius and his followers insisted that God does not intervene and determine the human will. This would, according to their view, negate the idea of freedom.

He (Christ) could teach us the true way; He could set us a Holy example; and He could exhort us to its imitation. But He could not touch us to enable us to will the good, without destroying the absolute equilibrium of the will between good and evil; and to destroy this was to destroy its freedom, which was the crowning good of our divinely created nature.<sup>2</sup>

The issue at stake between the two views is both problematic and important. At the heart of the matter is God's grace. Is grace simply offered to men, or does it accomplish a specific and efficacious purpose? Human responsibility is also involved, for if God ultimately controls the human will then genuine responsibility is called into question. The issue extends beyond justification where these problems are often discussed into the area of sanctification, of which this paper will concern itself. It is the view of this author that God's grace is irresistible in

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<sup>1</sup>David F. Wright, "Augustine of Hippo," Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity, ed. by Tim Dowley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Benjamin B. Warfield, Studies in Tertullian and Augustine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 297.

sanctification. God's sovereignty determines the believer's will so that the divine plan is accomplished in sanctification.

"Sanctification may be defined as the process of acquiring sanctity or holiness as a result of association with deity."<sup>1</sup> In this paper the term will be understood to mean the process of God's grace which begins after justification and continues until glorification. It is the Christian walk by which the believer is conformed to the image of Christ.

The major concern is how this process takes place. Again, the same concerns that deal with man's will in general also greatly effect the process of sanctification. They simply extend themselves to a limited area with it's own unique circumstances. The believer has a different position than the unbeliever. He has a different relationship to the Holy Spirit and different priviledges. However, the same issue of sovereignty and responsibility emerges.

The same problems eventually emerge because the believer makes decisions within a divinely controlled set of circumstances just as the unbeliever. Ephesians 1:11 makes this clear, "who (God) works all things after the counsel of His will" (NASB).<sup>2</sup> While some of the options,

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<sup>1</sup>G. A. Turner, "Sanctification, The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 5, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 264.

<sup>2</sup>All Bible quotes are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

influences and desires may change for the believer, he cannot step outside of circumstances to consider and finalize decisions. Chafer acknowledges the influences that effect the human race, "Thus the entire human family - both those who are unsaved and those who are saved -- is included, and not one of these is really free from a superior influence."<sup>1</sup> In addition to outward circumstances that effect decision making, there are inward influences upon the will that effect actions. Philippians 2:13 declares, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." This verse will be given special attention at a later point in this paper, however, at this juncture it may be seen from this verse that God does influence the will of the believer. Thus, the Christian's will is influenced both inwardly and outwardly from circumstances that are divinely placed in his life.

In recognizing these Biblical truths, one cannot maintain that the saint's will is independent, uninfluenced or uncontrolled. Rather, the believer chooses from a limited number of options, in a limited sphere of divine controlled circumstances, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This influence is so complete that God's plan is always exactly fulfilled. God's determination is perfectly executed through the saint's choices. His determination is never

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis S. Chafer, Systematic Theology, vol. 1, (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), p. 240.

frustrated. While this definition does not seem to include freedom, it is actually as free as is humanly possible.

The believer's freedom consists of making choices based on what he thinks is best for him at a particular time. These choices fulfill God's determination. The believer does not know God's decree and cannot choose on that basis. The freedom in view is from the human perspective. He views certain options that are before him and weighs the values of each. He is not a machine, he must think and decide. Each time, through God's inward and outward means, that decision is precisely God's decree for him at that time. The believer's freedom does not negate the determination of God in the matter, rather it describes the decision process from the human perspective. The situation differs from the unbeliever in that the basic inclination of the will has been changed at the time of conversion. Shedd writes, "The Holy Spirit regenerates the fallen will instantaneously, and the effect is a new inclining or self-determining of the faculty."<sup>1</sup> So, the believer does not realize the limitations upon the will; He is acting upon his own human volition that is based on a dramatically changed spiritual condition. He does what he wants to do, while behind it all, he is doing all that God has purposed. Caneday summarizes the point,

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<sup>1</sup>William G. T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House), p. 136.



God does not compel us to go against our wills, but He just makes us willing to go. A man in willing is perfectly free, that is he always exercises volition according to the prevailing desire or disposition of his will at any given time. Yet his free acts are determined by the character of his soul.<sup>1</sup>

The Scriptures support such a view of freedom. The account of Israel and their departure from Egypt is one clear example. The Lord told Moses before the event of the Red Sea exactly what Pharaoh would think and do. God accomplished the event through the outward means of the positioning of Israel and also the inward means of hardening Pharaoh's heart. The Pharaoh then made decisions based on the situation before him and the disposition of his heart. He accomplished God's plan while being responsible for his sin. Pharaoh was punished accordingly by his death in the Red Sea (Ex. 14).

This view of freedom is in accord with a strong view of the sovereignty of God. It realizes that God controls the events of mankind, and thus must ultimately determine the activities of individuals. It sees God's Word as not only predicting events of the future, but determining them according to God's own will. There can really only be two final options; man's will as being the initiating cause of events, or God's will as the cause. It must be asserted that God is in charge rather than man. The Bible does not

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<sup>1</sup>Ardel B. Caneday, "The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints from the Life and Epistles of Paul," (Master of Theology Thesis: Grace Theological Seminary, 1978), p. 93.

report a course of history ultimately based on man's choice, simply known beforehand by God. It reports a course of history that is programmed by God. When broken down to its smallest factors it must include specific actions of individuals. The whole of the plan cannot be divinely controlled if the individuals making up the parts have separate and equal sovereignty.

One major problem attends either basic viewpoint. In the view which states that God is in control and that human actions follow his will, there is the problem of human responsibility. How is it that God can hold men responsible when in fact they do His decreed will. The ultimate answer to this question can never be fully understood. "Such a seeming contradiction is harmonized in God, if not in the mind of man."<sup>1</sup> However, a reminder may be offered to put the responsibility into perspective. The evil actions are committed by men rather than God. God cannot do evil or be held responsible for evil. So, while human action follows divine decree, divine responsibility does not necessarily follow human sin. The responsibility is limited to the agent doing the action. Wicked actions are in accord with fallen nature as well as determined decree. The account of Joseph and his brothers reveals this fact (Gen. 45:5-8). Joseph's brothers acted with evil purposes when they sent him to Egypt. But God sent Joseph for a good reason. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup>Chafer, Systematic Theology, 1:249.

this human event which was evil, had a higher purpose in God's planning. Men are responsible for evil, for their motives are evil. But God's plan is perfect and righteous. He is not held accountable for sin. The fact of divine decree and human responsibility is declared in Scripture and should be accepted for this reason alone, Acts 2:23 "This Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."

The major problem attending the view which holds that man's will is not determined by God is that of God's sovereignty. How is it that God can be in control if man's will is independent? Thiessen writes, "God is not limited in the carrying out of His plans, except as He has limited Himself by the choices of man."<sup>1</sup> This position holds that God's decree is based on a knowledge of what man will do, rather than upon His own will. However, Ephesians 1:11 states the opposite and indicates no exceptions to the limits of His will, "who works all things after the counsel of His will." Thiessen's view cannot adequately handle the doctrine of God's sovereignty with such human limitations. Such a view should be rejected because of the clear statements of Scripture.

While the position accepted by this author carries

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<sup>1</sup>Henry C. Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 346.

with it the problem of human responsibility, it should not be rejected on that basis. The Scriptures quoted and others like it, affirm that God can be in total control while holding man responsible. It should not be thought that all relationships with an infinite God can be completely understood.

### Summary

In this chapter it is found that the discussion about the relationship between God's grace and the human will has captured the thoughts of Theologians for centuries. There have been two basic views. One, represented by Augustine sees God's grace as irresistible in character and ultimately controlling man's will. The second, represented by Pelagius, sees grace simply as an offer, with the human will not overcome by the influence of God. The issue is important because it affects the far-reaching doctrine of Soteriology. Sanctification is necessarily included in the discussion since the process of grace continues through the believer's life.

A view recognizing the consistency of sovereign grace should be accepted because God has influence in the believer's life both outwardly and inwardly. A definition of freedom must include limitations. The believer does what he wills, but God is behind everything so that man wills what God decrees.

A major problem is involved in either basic view. The view that understands God's will as dominate faces the problem of human responsibility. While the problem cannot be totally resolved, the Scriptures authority must be upheld. The opposing view faces the problem of the Sovereignty of God. Such a problem, although contested, is insurmountable in the light of Scripture.

## CHAPTER II

### SIGNIFICANT SCRIPTURAL DATA

The final word for any theological doctrine must be determined by Scripture. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to present the important texts which teach that God's will, with reference to his grace, necessarily determines the believers will. The believer's will in sanctification operates according to the plan of God. This shall become evident in the study of the following verses.

#### Jeremiah 31:33

In the Old Testament, God directed many promises to the nation of Israel. Some of these promises were conditioned upon the response of the nation - others were unconditional. One such unconditional promise is found in Jeremiah 31:33,

But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord, I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

This verse which was given to Israel illustrates the method by which God accomplishes Spiritual work. It points to the fact that God efficaciously works in the hearts of men. First, it may be noted that God is the one who takes

the spiritual initiative. Without His work, there could not be a guarantee of any spiritual function on the part of the Israelites. Secondly, this spiritual initiative will affect the wills of men. God's will has the ultimate authority in the matter. Their wills shall follow His direction in their lives. Calvin's words support these propositions.

Now the prophet here testifies that it is the peculiar work of God to write his law in our hearts. Since God then declares that this favor is justly his, and claims to himself the glory of it, how great must be the arrogance of men to appropriate this to themselves? To write the law in the heart imports nothing less than so to form it, that the law should rule there, and that there should be no feeling of the heart, not conformable and not consenting to its doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

The spiritual condition of the nation of Israel will not change unless individuals adopt that spiritual change. Thus, what this teaches may also be applied to individuals. The fact that this type of language is used, "on their heart I will write it", indicates that God is certainly not hiding the fact that he can and does change people's wills. "The new covenant will be written deeply into the wills of the Israelites, who will obey it by choice rather than by compulsion."<sup>2</sup> Such a spiritual revival for the nation of Israel must also include sanctification of individuals, for

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations, translated and edited by John Owen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 132, 133.

<sup>2</sup>R. K. Harrison, Jeremiah and Lamentations (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 137.

God's purpose in salvation always extends beyond justification.

Ezekiel 36:26, 27

One other Old Testament passage will be used to reinforce the truth that God effectively moves the human will according to His plan. The verses are Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Once again through another prophet, the same truth is revealed. In this passage, however, it is also seen that the Holy Spirit is the agent for the initiative of the spiritual work. Additionally, the text clearly reveals the process that will happen. It states that the Spirit will "cause" them to walk in God's statutes. The Hebrew verb is from the root נָסַף which means "do or make."<sup>1</sup> It is in a sequence of verbs with God as the subject of each verb. This emphasizes the fact that He will accomplish the work. This process works in such a way that the Israelites themselves will observe the ordinances. "The implanting of God's Spirit within them will transform their motives and empower them to live according to God's statutes and judgments."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 934.

<sup>2</sup>John B. Taylor, Ezekiel (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969), p. 232.



It is a beautiful picture of the method by which God accomplishes spiritual work among men. Later, this fact will be shown in the New Testament as well to prove that such is the normal practice of sanctification.

#### Titus 2:11-14

In Titus 2:11-14, the reader finds the purpose and accomplishments of God's grace. Here God's grace clearly effects the believer's life in sanctification. Verse 11 states that "the grace of God has appeared." This has reference to the first coming of Jesus Christ when he accomplished His work of redemption on the cross.<sup>1</sup> The phrase itself is not speaking about the present and continual work of grace that is on-going in the believer's life. However, this historic work of grace in Christ's work on the cross is the basis for the present work of sanctification which effects believers wills and consequently their actions. Verse 12 teaches that the historic work of Christ on the cross has a continual teaching ministry. The participle for teach ( *παρδεύουσα* ) is from the same stem as pedagogue. "A pedagogue leads children step by step. Thus, grace, too, gently leads and guides."<sup>2</sup> The action is in the present tense, indicating a continual ministry of grace. The

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<sup>1</sup>Homer A. Kent Jr., The Pastoral Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 234.

<sup>2</sup>William Hendriksen, "I-II Timothy and Titus," New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 371.

accomplishments of grace are given in both a negative and positive discription. They are, negatively; to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and positively, to live sensibly, righteously and godly. Thus, the first coming of Christ presently effects the lives of believers in the process of sanctification. But the major question for this discussion is, how does the process work? How can an historical event have meaningful effects on the everyday life of a believer? One must determine if the historical event is simply an offer of spiritual potential that was purchased two thousand years ago, or an event which God effectually uses to accomplish a special purpose in a believer's life. It must be admitted that it is not the intent of the passage to describe the process of the sanctification relative to the believer's will. However, the implications inevitably arise. The accomplishments of grace in verse 12 are either options based on Christ's work or they are necessary results. Verse 14 states "that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." This verse indicates that it was God's purpose in the redemption to create sanctified people. The verb follows *ἵνα* in the greek text showing that purpose is involved. The purpose of God cannot be thwarted by man. What He has sought to do in redemption He has done. Any denial of this fact would question the effectiveness and power of God's plan. He has indeed created a redeemed people.

The evidence of such redemption is necessarily revealed in the godly actions of the redeemed (I John 2:29). If, as it is asserted that the historic work of Christ necessarily affects believers' lives toward godliness as God purposed, then the believer's will must be influenced by God to learn the lessons that grace teach. This does not deny human means, but does necessitate the divine initiation. As Hendriksen writes, "Apart from that Spirit it would be impossible for us to live the sanctified life."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Spirit of God works with the believer, on the basis of the cross, and teaches him to live a godly life. It is an inevitable out-working of the purpose of God.

#### I Thessalonians 5:23,24

Another passage that has particular reference to the process of sanctification is 1 Thessalonians 5:23 & 24. It reads,

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

While these verses have import to the subject themselves, they are also representative of many biblical passages wherein a prayer is made for a sanctifying work on the behalf of another. The very fact that such prayers are made in the Bible acknowledges the fact that God can and does

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<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, "I-II Timothy and Titus," New Testament Commentary, p. 376.

effect the believer's will so that godliness results. A person does not live a godly life against his will, thus if God brings about sanctification, it must involve an influence upon the will. God does not always choose to answer these prayers for sanctification at the time or in the way humanly desired. However, He can if He so determines. It is God's desire that believers be Holy as He is Holy (1 Peter 1:16). God's desire for believers is their moral obligation. God's desire is sometimes distinct from His decree from the human perspective. The point is that God does answer these prayers according to His will, and if so, He cannot be stopped by man.

In verse 23, God is the one who is expected to do the sanctification. He is the one who initiates the work. The grammar of the verse itself emphasizes this fact. "The pronoun rendered 'himself' (αὐτός) stands emphatically at the beginning of the sentence. Only He can work the needed sanctification in them."<sup>1</sup> If the idea that God effectively moves the believer's will be rejected, then God's work would be at the mercy of the human will and such prayers would be weak and practically nonsensical. Hendriksen also sees in this verse that God causes sanctification. "May this God sanctify you, that is, may he separate you from the life

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<sup>1</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, The Thessalonian Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 250.

of sin and cause you to be dedicated to him."<sup>1</sup> Sanctification is not simply an offer of spiritual help from God, rather it is His sovereign working in believers to accomplish His purpose in them.

In verse 24 Paul's confidence that God will answer the prayer is evident. He definitely affirms that "God will bring it to pass." The verb is *ποιήσῃ* which means, "to do, make, manufacture or produce."<sup>2</sup> It is in the indicative mood with God as the subject. The outcome cannot be in doubt. Such confidence would be absurd if God's power in sanctification were conditioned upon an independant human will.

The God who called can be relied upon to complete what He began in calling them. The primary reference is of course to their sanctification and preservation.<sup>3</sup>

Another verse of Scripture that states the same truth is Philippians 1:6, "For 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." Such confidences by the Apostle Paul were placed in a God whom he realized would move in human hearts according to His will to accomplish His purpose.

<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, "I-II Thessalonians," New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1955), p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>William F. Arndt and Wilbur F. Gingrich, A Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 687.

<sup>3</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, The Thessalonian Epistles, p. 254.

Ephesians 2:10

Another verse that has particular relevance to the subject is Ephesians 2:10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." In this verse both the sovereignty of God and human responsibility are found. God's sovereignty is seen in the words "His workmanship" and "God prepared beforehand". Human responsibility is evident from the phrase, "we should walk in them." The divine work is of interest for this study. First, the Christian life in general is accredited to God's work. A Christian cannot take the glory for his salvation. The glory must be given to God. Secondly, God's purpose in salvation is for the believer to accomplish good works. Believers were created  $\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\omega$  by God for such a person. One must decide then, if God's purpose may be abridged by man. God's purpose in this passage is His decreed will, for the following phrase states that "God prepared beforehand". God's workmanship is such that believers do accomplish good works. "That they should be and will be done by all Christians is certain, for they form part of the eternal plan."<sup>1</sup> For the end result of good works to be sure, it must follow as well that God influences believers through inward and outward means to will the good works. Hendriksen writes it very well,

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<sup>1</sup>Charles R. Eerdman, The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 48.

Now in planting the seed of faith in our hearts, and causing it to sprout and with great care tending it, making it grow, etc., God also in that sense prepared for us good works, for good works are the fruit of faith. Living faith, moreover, implies a renewed mind, a grateful heart, and a surrendered will. Out of such ingredients, all of them God-given, God confects or compounds good works.<sup>1</sup>

God's work in sanctification is sure, it is revealed that good works will be accomplished. Additionally, believers are encouraged in the same verse to walk in them. Thus, God's pattern of sanctification exclaims what will and must happen, while at the same time encouraging it to happen through exhortation. Indeed, He uses His own means to reach His ends.

#### Philippians 2:13

The last two verses in this chapter most clearly reveal the truth sought to be communicated in this thesis. For this reason, they will be given a more complete examination than the previous verses. The first of the two is Philippians 2:13, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure;" this verse is particularly significant in light of the last phrase of v. 12, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." The remarkable union of human responsibility and divine sovereignty is found in this passage. Furthermore, the method by which they work together is revealed.

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<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, "Ephesian," New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1967), p. 124.

A command is given for believers to work out their salvation, this requires human responsibility. The aspect of salvation referred to here must be seen as sanctification rather than the initial aspect, justification. Paul addresses the letter to "all the saints" (v. 1), and it is clear in chapter 2:12 that the writer is speaking of an on-going Christian relationship rather than a new beginning. He is giving Christians instructions about living the Christian life. Thus, these truths must relate to sanctification.

The command of human responsibility is immediately followed by the source for such a huge responsibility. The only way that a believer can possibly accomplish the task of working out his salvation is by God who gives him the will and the action to accomplish it. This does not leave the human will and ability on equal terms with the divine work; rather the human is completely dependent on the divine.

This verse shows that God takes the initiative in sanctification. Believers will to do good only because God is at work in them. God's work in the believer is a continual work. The participle *ἐνεργῶν* is in the present tense and indicates that God's work of initiating the process is normal and continual, not only a past work. Walvoord writes, "It is God who keeps on working, not content with initiating the believer's salvation, but continuing the work of salvation until the process is complete in glory."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John F. Walvoord, To Live is Christ (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Company, 1961), p. 52.



Hutchison also wrote, "Supernatural grace works persistently and effectually in renewed hearts."<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that believers do not have a will, but rather it is subject to the will of God. God must be seen as being at the beginning of the line in the process of good works, thoughts, and desires. His will is sovereign in sanctification rather than the human will.

Some have misunderstood the truth of this verse and continue to let the initiative rest with man in the process of motivation. Michael presents this viewpoint,

An effective divine energy is at work in the community, and if the Philippians only avail themselves of its presence, cooperate with it, and permit it to express itself in their working, the inevitable result will be not only the willing, but also the achieving, by them of the salvation of the community.<sup>2</sup>

Michael makes two mistakes: 1) He attributes this passage to group salvation process rather than an individual process, and more seriously; 2) He allows man the privilege of refusing the efficacious work of God. There are two aspects to the will of God, that which is necessarily effectual and that which is presented as a moral standard, often rejected by believers (This will be discussed later). Michael has confused the two and has rejected God's effectual work in the life of the believer.

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<sup>1</sup>John Hutchison, Lectures on St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1887), p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>J. Hugh Michael, The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians, In the Moffatt N. T. Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), p. 103.

Strauss, also gives another example for the position that God's will and man's will are co-operating on an equal basis. He writes,

We work and God works, It is a mutual effort toward the common goal of glorifying God in our lives. Here is a blending and interacting of God's sovereign grace and power and man's free will. God works in us but we dare not be passive. We work, too, and our work and the exercise of our wills are never at greater liberty than when thus engaged in doing 'His good pleasure'.<sup>1</sup>

While Strauss finds some truths here, he misses the point of the verse. Man works because God works in man to bring him to the point of agreement with His purpose. "In the inward process of salvation, and especially in this 'willing and doing', God does all, and also man does all. But God takes precedence."<sup>2</sup> Again, one must determine in the issue, which will is ultimate, the human will or the divine will. If the divine will, then salvation is completely by God and His grace alone. If the human will, then God's grace is dependent on its independent usage and man can take credit for choosing God's grace. This brings human merit into the process of salvation. Daille rightly condemns such a thought,

Some . . . pretending that it is our will which effects the chief, nay, the whole, receiving or rejecting the operations of God, by its own motions, at pleasure, without grace necessarily having anything to do with it, But the holy apostle, whose writings we are explaining,

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<sup>1</sup>Lehman Strauss, Philippians (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1959), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Rainy, The Epistle to the Philippians (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham), p. 137.

teaches us a very different doctrine, condemning everywhere this presumption, and constantly giving to God the entire glory of our salvation, in all the parts of which it consists.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, both justification and sanctification are completely of God. Man truly works out his salvation. He wills and acts, but only because God initiates the whole process.

### I Corinthians 15:10

Another significant verse relative to the relationship between God's grace and the believer's will in sanctification is 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

In this passage Paul glorifies the grace of God. He refers to his work as an apostle compared to the other apostles and concludes that He worked more than any of them. If it were not for the fact of the grace of God, Paul would appear to be a very conceited man. In verse 9, he looks back to the time when he persecuted the Church, and realizes that God changed him. Now in verse 10 he reviews his work as an apostle. In this verse he attributes God's grace to far more than his conversion - indeed, God's grace is

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Daille, An Exposition of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians, translated by James Sherman, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication), p. 195, 196.

responsible for all the good which he had done. Grosheide notes, "That does not refer to his conversion alone, not even to his vocation to be an apostle; but God's grace appears especially in the work he has been allowed to do."<sup>1</sup>

Paul found it necessary to attribute everything good that he did as a believer to the grace of God. The order of the relationship between God's grace and human activity is clear in this verse. First, he declares, "His grace toward me did not prove vain", "It demonstrated that it was not **κενὴ** , empty, hollow, or without inner substance."<sup>2</sup> God's grace then, actually accomplished a purpose. It produced its desired effect in the life of Paul. That purpose is seen in what Paul did, "but I labored even more than all of them." The second part to the equation is the human activity of Paul. Paul realized that even the fact that he worked was due to God's grace. This gives a fuller definition of what is included in the grace of God. It includes an influence upon the will. Hodge writes, "The grace of God, in this connection, is not the love of God, but the influence of the Holy Spirit considered as an unmerited favour . . . . That is, divine grace has made me what I am."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, NIC (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 353.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, I and II Corinthians, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 641.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Hodge, An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1974), p. 317.

Paul had already asserted in this verse that God's grace was responsible for everything in his life. He pointed out that even his labor as an apostle was due to the fact that God's grace had not worked in vain. But Paul again adds to these truths. He sandwiches his human activity with the grace of God by concluding this verse with another testimony to God's grace. Paul would not take personal credit for anything good which he had done. He writes, "yet not I, but the grace of God with me." The verb is assumed from the previous phrase. The verb was from the root **κοπιᾶω** which means "work hard."<sup>1</sup> This reveals the Spirit's activity within the believer. Paul could not possibly consider the believer's will as sovereign in sanctification in light of this verse. Paul realized that if it were not for God's effective work in his life he would not have done anything for the cause of Christ. Lenski illustrates the relationship in this verse,

It would, however, be a mistake to picture God's grace and Paul's effort as two horses together drawing a wagon, for the two are not coordinate. Paul's effort is, in the last analysis, due to God's grace, and it is put forth only as long as the Holy Spirit rules, guides, and leads him.<sup>2</sup>

Paul's testimony in this verse cannot be viewed as simply an attempt to appear humble while expressing his accomplishments. Rather, it should be understood as an

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<sup>1</sup>William F. Arndt and Wilbur F. Gingrich, A Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 444.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, I and II Corinthians, p. 644.

accurate statement of what actually happens behind a believer's good works. The glory must be given to God's grace, for it is through grace that believers labor in God's work.

### Summary

The text of Scripture is the final word for any theological premise. It has been shown first in the Old Testament that the unconditional nature of God's promises to Israel effect the wills of people. This must logically include sanctification because it is a part of salvation. In order for God to keep His word, He must determine spiritual activity.

In the New Testament as well, sanctification is not simply an option that is offered to believers, but is a part of God's plan accomplished by Him. The purpose of God's grace is to create a people zealous for good works. This purpose includes a refining of the believers will to lead to those works. Also, the fact that prayers are offered in the New Testament relative to Christian growth assumes the fact that God can answer the prayer and effect the change in a believer's will.

Most significantly, it is clearly stated in Philippians 2:13 that God works on the believer's will to accomplish His purpose. He is the one who is ultimately responsible for Christian growth. Additionally, through the testimony of the Apostle Paul, it is seen that God's grace is responsible for all Christian labor. Paul could not find personal merit for his accomplishments.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

The preceding chapter has uncovered many of the points relative to the process of sanctification through the exposition of Scripture. This chapter will coordinate those points to more clearly reveal how the process of sanctification works.

The Holy Spirit is the agent of sanctification. That is, He is the member of the divine Trinity of God that works within the believer to accomplish sanctification. While each member of the Trinity is involved in the process, the Holy Spirit is the "God-provided workman to do the work"<sup>1</sup> (I Peter 1:2, Romans 15:16, II Thessalonians 2:13).

Sanctification is a process in which the Spirit is active throughout, the whole process is dependent upon His work. The believer cannot produce his own sanctification. While human actions are involved, they are the result of the Spirit's working. Showers commented that, "throughout the lifetime of the Christian the Holy Spirit works in him step by step to produce more and more righteousness . . . the believer does not produce the righteousness in himself;

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<sup>1</sup>Emery H. Bancroft, Christian Theology (Bible School Park, New York: Echoes Publishing Company), p. 188.



The Holy Spirit produces it in and for him by His power."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the Holy Spirit is the divine worker in sanctification. Furthermore, His work is the cause of the whole process. As has already been emphasized in this thesis, the Holy Spirit is the initiator of good works. The whole process finds its beginning in the determination of God rather than the believer. So, the Holy spirit is not only the divine worker in offering spiritual power, but He is the one causing the believer to seek to do that which is good. Pieper writes, "the first suggestion and impulse to every good work proceeds from the Holy Ghost. Scripture traces even every good thought to God as its author."<sup>2</sup>

While it may be clear that the Holy Spirit is the divine agent in causing sanctification, it is not so clear how He works with the human will. The believer's will and thoughts cannot be so easily analyzed to determine how influences effect it. It is revealed that the Holy Spirit exerts an effective influence, but the individual cannot specifically know which thoughts or desires were initiated by God. It may be assumed that those which most clearly represent the will of God revealed in Scripture are the ones motivated by the Holy Spirit. It is not totally subjective; Christians should thank God when they have any desire to do good. However, the

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<sup>1</sup>Renald E. Showers, "The New Nature," (Doctor of Theology Disertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1975), p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:15.

Holy Spirit's methodology is rather mysterious. Murray accurately writes,

The mode of the Spirit's operation in sanctification is encompassed with mystery. We do not know the mode of the Spirit's indwelling nor the mode of his efficient working in the hearts and minds and wills of God's people.<sup>1</sup>

Showers offers a partial solution to the problem,

The Holy Spirit works together with the new disposition to enable the Christian to do God's will. The new disposition causes the believer to will to do what is right; the Holy Spirit supplies the power necessary to put that will into effect.<sup>2</sup>

The new disposition is a state of freedom from the domination of sin (Rom. 6:7). The old man is dead; now there is a new man through God's power (Col. 3:10 & 11). The sinful nature that was dominate in the old man still works in the new man. Now its power may be resisted whereas before it was irresistible. This state of freedom is a different spiritual realm, it includes understanding that is not available to the unbeliever (1 Cor. 2:14). This new spiritual realm depends on the continual working of the Holy Spirit to empower and guide it. Depravity now has less of an impact because of the righteous influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Of course, the problem would then be to decide how the Spirit works with the new disposition. The mystery of

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<sup>1</sup>John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), p. 146.

<sup>2</sup>Showers, The New Nature, p. 200.

the Holy Spirit's methodology is not really solved, simply moved to a different level. The matter is difficult to depict because it cannot be physically seen, and because it is not described in enough detail to give a full understanding. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has so many options available that it would be impossible for finite men to comprehend them all.

To say that the methodology of the Holy Spirit upon the believing will is mysterious does not mean that it does not happen. It simply means that the believer is often not aware of the influences. It was noted earlier that the influences are both inward and outward. Indeed they are so encompassing and complete that one is never really outside of the influence of the Holy Spirit upon one's life. One may seek to identify specific causes of a particular good work, but in reality, each small decision is a part of a great overall plan through which a diverse range of influences have effect. Chafer writes,

When exercising his will, man is conscious only of his freedom of action. He determines his course by circumstances, but God is the author of circumstances. Man is impelled by emotions, but God is able to originate and to control every human emotion. Man prides himself that he is governed by experienced judgment, but God is able to foster each and every thought or determination of the human mind.<sup>1</sup>

It was shown in chapter one of this thesis that there have been two basic approaches to the activity of God's grace relative to the human will. The process described thus far

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<sup>1</sup>Chafer, Systematic Theology, 1:241.

is from the Calvinistic approach. The other basic approach is the Arminian view which understands the process in another light. Shank gives a good example of this viewpoint,

The initiative rests entirely with God, say they. God works within us to cause us both to will and to do His good pleasure. Therefore, say they, our working out of salvation is not our work, but God's; and He cannot fail.

But they overlook the fact that God's work in men is not one of compulsion and constraint. The Scriptures bear abundant testimony that, despite God's gracious work, men do depart from His will and good pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

Shank also writes at another place, "But the Holy Spirit can do nothing for those who refuse His ministry."<sup>2</sup> Shank evidently understands the process to rest upon the human will rather than the divine will. He includes in the process the working of the Holy Spirit with influences and available power for good works, but gives the human will the determination for the result of sanctification.

This viewpoint makes at least two mistakes in its reasoning. First, it does not properly understand God's decreed will and His moral will. Theologians give these aspects of God's will different names. Hodge calls them the Decretive and Preceptive will of God.

He (God) decrees whatever he purposes to effect or to permit. He prescribes, according to his own will, what his creatures should do, or abstain from doing.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Shank, Life in the Son (Springfield, Missouri: Westcott Publishers, 1960), p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1977), p. 404.

Thus, everything that happens whether good or bad is a part of the decretive will of God. It involves everything, some of which is revealed to man, and some of which is secret in the mind of God. For this study, it involves the sanctification of believers - no matter at what rate they progress. The preceptive will of God is the moral standard given to man. It is what they ought to do. It is the guideline from which they will be judged. For sanctification, it is the revealed responsibilities by which the believer is to follow. While man can never falter from the decretive will of God, he often falters from the preceptive will of God.

From the Calvinistic viewpoint in sanctification, it is asserted that even the activities of grace are determined by God.<sup>1</sup> The Arminians seem to deny God the right of an absolute will in the matters of grace and elevate man's will to an equal level. Consequently, when Shank says that "God's work in men is not one of compulsion and constraint",<sup>2</sup> he is right only in one sphere of consideration. He is wrong in seeking to affirm that God has no ultimate and effectual work on believers.

Secondly, and in conjunction with the first, the Arminian position fails to see the secondary means of grace as part of the overall plan. They understand the human

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion. vol. 1, translated by Henry Beveridge. (reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 261.

<sup>2</sup>Shank, Life in the Son, p. 108.

responsibilities involved in the means of grace to be the determining aspect of the process rather than the resulting aspect. When the Scripture commands a believer to follow a particular instruction for sanctification, it is part of God's methodology in accomplishing His plan. When believers disobey the Biblical injunction, they go against His preceptive will but not His decretive will.

To assert that God is sovereign in sanctification does not mean that the believer is not responsible to be obedient in order for sanctification to happen. It is a case where God determines the means as well as the end. One may have assurance that God is working in him only when he finds himself diligently following the means of grace that God offers. It is not the purpose of this paper to explore what the means of grace include, however, the obvious means of grace is the Word of God. Hodge writes, "There can, therefore, be no doubt that the Scriptures teach that the Word of God is the specially appointed means for the sanctification and the salvation of men."<sup>1</sup> The emphasis of this work has been the divine initiative of sanctification. The exhortations given on the human level are actually the dominate aspect in Scripture. Obviously believers should primarily concern themselves with what God has directed them to do. This concern should not be emphasized to the degree that the divine side is not taught. It also should not be

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<sup>1</sup>Hodge, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, p. 468.

presented in such a way that sanctification is viewed as a human meritorious work that God is not ultimately responsible for accomplishing.

Many verses that Arminians would use as proof texts against a Calvinistic position of sanctification actually are not against its viewpoint at all. Believers are exhorted to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18), to walk after the Spirit rather than after the flesh (Gal. 5:16), and not to grieve or quench the Spirit (Eph. 4:30, 1 Thess. 5:19). These are not verses that contradict the belief that the Holy Spirit effectively controls the believer's will, but rather are means through which He does His work. Likewise, the statement, "The degree of our sanctification is the proportion of our appropriation of Christ,"<sup>1</sup> is not wrong as long as one understands that the human appropriation is ultimately dependent on the Holy Spirit's work. Berkhof writes,

The spiritual developement of man is not a human achievement, but a work of divine grace. Man deserves no credit whatsoever for that which he contributes to it instrumentally.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, God's initiative in the matter and human exhortations are not in conflict so long as the whole picture is in view.

The process of sanctification is just one part of God's great plan of salvation. The issues of divine sovereignty

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<sup>1</sup>Bancroft, Christian Theology, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup>L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941), p. 535.

and the human will are often dealt with in justification, the initial part of salvation. While the two parts are distinct, there are similarities between the two. It has been the contention of this thesis that sanctification is completely by the grace of God and not through human merit. Such a statement is usually readily admitted for justification by evangelicals, but not defined as clearly for sanctification. The method of grace is essentially the same in both. This should not be surprising since both are parts of salvation. Ryle writes,

Both proceed originally from the free grace of God. It is of His gift alone that believers are justified or sanctified at all.<sup>1</sup>

In justification, God elects those who will come to Him by the good pleasure of His will (Eph. 1:5). He draws them through the human means of the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:14). And there is a necessary human response involved, namely, faith (Rom. 3:28). The justification of man is begun by God, and controlled by God even though human responses involving the will are involved.

In sanctification, the process is the same. God determines that sanctification will happen in the believer (Phil. 1:6). He then accomplishes the work through an inward operation upon the will (Phil. 2:13) and through Scriptural exhortation. And, as in justification, there is the necessary

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<sup>1</sup>J. C. Ryle, A Call To Holiness (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 30.



human response, which is faith (Rom. 1:17). Thus, sanctification is by God's grace in similiar manner as justification.

### Summary

In the process of sanctification, the Holy Spirit is the divine agent in accomplishing the work. He is the initiator of the believer's good work and He is effective in His operation.

The relationship that the Holy Spirit has with the human will is mysterious in nature. His methods are varied and believers can not always detect His work. There are some who disagree that the process of sanctification is so determined by God. They hold that the believer's will makes the controlling decision. However, they err by not understanding the will of God and His means of grace.

Believers are responsible for their failure to walk in faith. While they are responsible, they are not sovereign. The whole picture of sanctification must be in view so that its various parts are not misunderstood.

The process of grace in both justification and sanctification are essentially the same. They are both part of salvation and include divine initiative and human response.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DOCTRINE

#### Rewards

One difficulty that arises in the study of the believer's will is the issue of rewards. If God initiates the sanctification process by influencing the Christian's will, then how is it that God grants eternal rewards to the individual for service rendered? How can the believer be given rewards for which he is not ultimately responsible? To completely answer this question would solve the mystery of God's grace. However, there are answers, and they have been offered from various viewpoints.

Some deal with the problem by either rejecting the sovereignty of God in salvation or by not consistently applying the teaching of grace in sanctification. When either of these are the case, Christian good works are understood to be meritorious to the Christian who does them. Such would be satisfactory if Christian works are seen as a means of grace. This, however, is not always the case and a dichotomy between justification and sanctification is established. Here, justification is seen as a free gift of God with no human merit at all. Sanctification is viewed as a process of human merit with rewards as just payment.

Chafer implies such a perspective when he writes,

Salvation is not a reward for the believer's service. Salvation is God's work for us. Rewards are always connected with the believer's works and merit. The rewards are to be bestowed at the judgment-seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).<sup>1</sup>

Such a view, if consistently applied, would divide salvation into two parts, justification by God's grace, and sanctification by man's works. The problem arises when one assumes that the word "reward" demands merit on the part of the believer. There is merit involved in Christian good works, but the merit is traced to God's grace through the work of Christ. When a Christian does a good work, it is through faith, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and thus, a part of God's grace. Caneday rightly evaluates the problem,

The Scriptures never teach the believer to consider his works as earning or meriting anything, but rather that they arise from faith, and if anything is done apart from faith it is sin (Rom. 14:23). Belief is the principle which encompasses all of man's good activity, who is under grace (Rom. 3:27). The believer is taught to consider all his doing of the good pleasure of God as the result of the work of God's grace.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that humans really could merit anything before God is a foolish thought. For this to happen, humans would have to be able to create good works. Good works are thoughts or actions which are in conformity with God's

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis S. Chafer, Salvation (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1917), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>Ardel B. Caneday, "The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints from the Life and Epistles of Paul," (Master of Theology Thesis: Grace Theological Seminary, 1978), p. 115, 116.

revealed will for man. Humans, because of a depraved nature cannot possibly accomplish such a task without God's help. Even the believer, though He is freed from the power of sin, still must do battle with the old sinful nature. He was freed by the grace of God, and he wins battles by the grace of God through His decreed means. These means of grace, are just that, means of grace and not means of human merit. So the believer cannot perform meritorious works unless God is continuously reaching down to help him in his struggle with sin. Dabney cites the folly of believing that man could really merit anything from God,

In the strict sense, then, no work of man brings God in the doer's debt, to reward him. The work which is worthy of this must have the following traits. It must be one which was not already owed to God. See Luke XVII:10. It must be done in the man's own strength; for if he only does it by the strength of Christ, he cannot take to himself the credit of it. "It is not he that liveth, but Christ that liveth in him."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it is established that rewards are not given because they are humanly earned apart from the grace of God. The problem yet remains, why are they given, what is their nature and purpose?

The Christian receives the great reward which is eternal life (Gal. 6:8). This he receives at the end of his journey in this life. Within that great reward, there are rewards for Christian service. This distinction may be seen in 1 Corinthians 3:15, "he himself shall be saved, yet so as

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<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Dabney, Lectures in Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 680.

through fire." It is not clear what these rewards include, although it may be assumed they are blessings which will be appreciated. Ryrie suggests that the crowns spoken of in the New Testament are a part of these special rewards.<sup>1</sup>

Others believe these crowns are just another term for eternal life. Whatever the case, believers receive them depending on the quality of their work (1 Cor. 3:13, 14).

If then, these rewards are given by God to men, they should be understood to be gifts of God's grace. Again, this does not negate human responsibility. Indeed, rewards are incentives for Christians to work hard. They labor, make decisions, and sacrifice greatly. All of this, however, must be seen in a secondary, or instrumental sense, of the working of God. The fact that it is a means in God's plan does not lessen its importance to the believer in the least. The believer is responsible to follow the commands given. When the believer is obedient, he will find himself thanking God; both in time and in eternity when the reward is given.

1 Corinthians 3:5 & 6 clearly show the relationship between human service and divine work.

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

These verses indicate how Christians are servants of God. God is ultimately responsible for the work, while the human

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<sup>1</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 213.

instruments are secondarily involved. In this case Apollos and Paul will receive rewards for their service. And, no doubt, they will thank God for them, not demanding that God owes them anything. God will give those rewards out of His free love and grace which He bestows in the manner that so pleases His will.

### Perfectionism

Another problem evident in the relationship between God's grace and the believer's will is perfectionism. The theory of perfectionism states that believers may reach a state where they have complete victory over sin prior to death.<sup>1</sup> There are differences of opinion among those who hold the view. "Some perfectionists limit this freedom to willful sin. Others limit the freedom from sin, which they conceive of as attainable in this life, to freedom from known sin,"<sup>2</sup> In either case, it must be maintained that perfection does not occur in the believer's lifetime as proposed by the advocates of this theory. Both Scripture and experience teach that Christians struggle with sin and often fail as they go through their Christian lives. 1 John 1:8 teaches Christians to admit that such is the case, "If we

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<sup>1</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 213.

<sup>2</sup>G. A. Turner, "Sanctification," The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 5, ed. by Merrill C. Tenny (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 266.

say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." In addition, Paul, who is a worthy example of Christian living, admitted that such was the case in his life, "Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect," (Phil. 3:12). Also, as Christians view their own lives and other believers lives, it is obvious that sin is present. It may be concluded then, that such a state is not achieveable in this life.

The real problem, however, is not in proving that perfection is not obtainable, but in determining why it does not happen in light of God's sovereignty in sanctification. If God is in charge of sanctification and does accomplish His will in the believer's life, then why is it that believers do not reach perfection? God is certainly able to accomplish the task. Hodge notes, "All admit that God can render his people perfect before death as well as after it."<sup>1</sup> His power must not be questioned, nor His ultimate control over the wills of believers (Phil. 2:13), it seems that the questioner is left with a dilemma. Indeed, it is another aspect of the age old conflict of a righteous God allowing sin to continue in the world, in this case in the life of His children. It is a problem much bigger than sanctification. It involves many theological and philosophical issues. Miller writes,

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1977), p. 246.



Obviously, the problem of evil (also called the problem of 'theodicy,' meaning, literally, 'justification of God') is not a concern of religious people only. Any sensitive person, whether religious or not, is sure to be troubled by the presence of evil and pain in the world. At the same time it should also be evident why it is in a religious or theological context that this problem receives its most forceful expression.<sup>1</sup>

While the theologian is pressured with the problem, he is not left without Biblical answers, Paul exclaims, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33). This does not give a specific answer to the problem of evil, but it does comfort the believer in knowing that God does have a perfect answer. Certainly, man should not think that he is anymore just or loving than the God of the universe. Nor should he think that any plan for sanctification could be more perfect than the plan that God has established.

This does not assume that God is responsible for the sins of believers in sanctification, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13). It does mean, though, that God determined for sin to be in the believer's life. As part of God's plan, one may be confident that sin was included for good reason.

Although the problem cannot be completely solved, some suggestions may be offered for sins' inclusion into

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<sup>1</sup>E. L. Miller, God and Reason (New York, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 137.

God's plan. The struggles of sin, forgiveness and victory do teach lessons concerning the grace of God that would not be seen in any other way. God's discipline in Christian lives also points to His holiness and to His love for His own. The process of grace to sinful man is a learning, growing process that is very valuable in itself. It is the perfect program because it is the way that God has chosen to operate with His people.

These suggestions do not solve the ultimate difficulty. They do give positive ideas for the reason why God does not completely sanctify Christians in this life. There is a similiar problem in justification as well, why is it that God does not call everyone unto justification? Why are only some elected, while others are passed over and left to continue in their sin. The answers or lack of answers follow the same reasoning. Not all the reasons are revealed, but certain conclusions must be held. God is in control of every aspect of salvation. The freedom of the human will is subordinate to the divine will, and humans are always held responsible for sin. Such conclusions are consistent with revelation.

### Summary

The first problem associated with God's grace in sanctification is rewards. Why does God grant rewards when believers' good works are not intrinsically meritorious? The rewards for Christian service should be seen as part of the great reward, eternal life. They are all gifts of God's grace. The instrumentality that He uses are incentives and they accomplish his purposes. The grace of God is irresistible in sanctification and so the believer cannot merit anything before God. The fact that human responsibility is involved does not negate God's sovereign work, but explains its method.

Another problem for consideration is perfectionism. The real problem is not whether it is achievable, rather, why it is not achievable. If God is in control, why does He allow sin to continue in the believer's life? The problem does not have complete answers. God's plan must be trusted as the best plan, resulting in the most glory for Himself. One may be assured that God is in control in sanctification even though Christians continue to sin.

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between God's grace and the believer's will in sanctification finds its basis in the sovereignty of God. God is in control of all the events of mankind. This control is perfectly executed in the salvation of man. Sanctification is a part of salvation and must be viewed consistently in a process of grace. The grace of God is more than an offer of forgiveness. It is also effective in its purpose. God determines the course of sanctification by His own will. Man is free in that he makes choices relative to his spiritual condition and the options that he views before him at a particular time. These choices may never confound the determination of God. God irresistibly influences the believer's will so that what God wills the believer also wills. The believer is not aware of the whole process nor the determination beforehand. Thus, his decision seems to be uninfluenced.

It has been shown through the exposition of Scriptures that God takes the initiative in any spiritual action. The fact that God makes unconditional promises relative to spiritual activities with man proves that God's will may not be overruled. It is also specifically stated in Scripture that God is at work in the believer "both to will and to work" (Phil. 2:13). This is a clear statement of the method by which God performs the sanctification process. Everything good accomplished by the believer finds its source in God.

The believer must give thanksgiving to God rather than self for the motivation of good works.

The specific methods of the Holy Spirit are often mysterious. The believer cannot always identify which motivations may be attributed to the Holy Spirit at any one time. The mysterious nature of His work does not lessen its effectiveness. The believer does conform to Christ according to God's plan. While God is sovereign in sanctification, man is completely responsible for his actions.

God uses many secondary means to accomplish His plan. The exhortations in Scripture are part of those means. The Christian does not always know the decreed will of God. He does, however, have access to the revealed will of God in the Scripture. He is responsible for following these exhortations which are revealed.

It has also been demonstrated that the issues of rewards and perfectionism are not insurmountable problems relative to God's initiative in sanctification. It is an inconsistent view of the grace of God which sees human merit as ultimately responsible for divine reward. Rewards for Christian service are gifts of God's grace in much the same way as eternal life is a gift of God. God is never placed into the position of owing man any reward. Anything good which man receives from God is completely by God's grace.

God does not bring man to complete perfection in this lifetime. He certainly has the power, but has not

determined to do so. God included sin in His program so that His grace may be manifest in redemption. All of God's reasons are not revealed concerning sin. One may be assured however, that God's plan is perfect and brings the most glory to Himself.

God is the author of salvation from beginning to end. He is a sovereign God and all actions must be attributed to His control. May God be praised by all those who have received His grace.

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