

## **In the World, But Not Of the World (Part 2)**

*“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* (1 John 2:15). As Christians, we are called to love the people in our world and enjoy the pleasures and good gifts God has created in the world. But, we are not to conform to the ways of the world. This is a struggle for Christians seeking to live faithfully. The front line of this struggle attacks our inward lives and desires. Worldliness does not begin out in the world, but in our inward thoughts, emotions, and motives. *“Each one of us is tempted when, by his own desires, he is dragged away and enticed”* (James 1:14).

As a Christian and a pastor, I know this struggle all too well. We yearn to live a *“life that is truly life”* (1 Tim. 6:16). We want to experience the fullness of life that Jesus promises. Yet, we find ourselves too often stuck in the same old patterns. Selfishness, anger, anxiety, lust, and other inward struggles are difficult to defeat. We pray with the Psalmist, *“Answer me when I call to you, O most righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer”* (Ps. 4:1). Sometimes, God miraculously removes selfish desires and sinful patterns of thinking and living. Most often, God does not give immediate relief from the distress of sin and self. Why?

The answer is simply that the Christian life, this side of heaven, is a struggle. Spiritual transformation, holiness, and conformity to the character of Christ, is a long, arduous process. The Bible calls this process of change, sanctification. This is the goal of the Christian this side of heaven. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sanctification as, *“the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.”*

The catechism is masterful and precise in its language. Sanctification is the “work of God’s free grace.” Our salvation (including regeneration, justification, and adoption) is the “act of God’s free grace.” We do not participate in our salvation. Instead, God, by Himself and without our assistance, achieved our salvation in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ more than 2,000 years ago. The Holy Spirit regenerates us, gives us a new birth, enables a saving faith, and gives us the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. We are declared righteous in Christ and we are adopted as children of God. This is all by His grace and His grace alone.

Unlike salvation, we do actively participate in our sanctification as we live the Christian life. Our sanctification, as the catechism says, is the work, not the act, of God’s free gift. Yet, our sanctification depends on God. Without Him, we can do nothing. Yet, the Bible is clear when it says that we are active participants in our sanctification. Practically, when God does not change us or give us immediate relief from any distress, it does not

mean that His desire for us is to live in the distress of sin and self. Instead, He wants us to struggle. He has given us His Spirit and His Word in order that we will participate in the struggle for spiritual change.

So, how do we participate in this spiritual struggle? How are we to allow God to work in us while we wrestle for change? Harry Reader, a Christian pastor, says, “Sanctification is 100% God’s power at work in us, upon which we are fully dependent, and 100% our commitment and devotion to Christ.”

None of us can become more like Christ unless the power of God’s Spirit is working in us. “*For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). Additionally, none of us can change unless we are committed to a relationship with our Lord. Consider Paul’s exhortation, “*...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil. 2:12). To seek inward change without the power of God’s Spirit is self-reliance cloaked in religious garb. However, conformity to the character of Christ, reflecting His love, joy, peace... and the fruit of the Holy Spirit developing and growing in our lives is the double-edged sword, which effects change to a righteous and fulfilling life. This is not a “one or the other” work of God. It is a “both and” work of God in and through us. We are called to struggle and fight against sin training ourselves for godliness while relying on our unique love-relationship with Jesus Christ.

Great Peace in the Lord,  
Eddie