

1 Peter 1:2 – Part M

1Pe 1:1 (NKJV) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

Last time we looked at the passive side of sanctification – the part that only God can secure in our lives. There are attributes relative to the character of Christ and the image of Christ that the believer simply cannot produce on their own. If I can say it this way, we are all desperate for God’s grace and help in conforming us to the image of Christ. The one element that we never want to lose sight of is that God is the source of sanctification. God is both the author and the guarantee of sanctification, not the believer. It would be spiritually naïve on our part to think that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and His sanctifying work in the believer’s life is something that just simply may not work. How nonsensical would it be for us to have the notion that the Creator of the universe indwells a believer, but does not have the power to produce godly, long lasting, and Christlike qualities in the believer’s life? God has many more tools in His spiritual arsenal than we can even imagine, and when God uses one of His tools in a person’s life, we can be fully assured that it will achieve its desired result.

So if we see someone who never makes any spiritual progress in their life, but they are constantly declaring that they are saved, then we need to have the discernment to recognize that in all likelihood they simply have never been genuinely saved. I have said it often, but real salvation always makes a real difference. That is an undeniable spiritual reality. However, we live in a spiritual culture of “easy-believism” that just seems intent on making the reality of salvation much more of a one-time event than an ongoing reality in a person’s life. The fallout of that kind of spiritual mindset on the health of the modern church cannot be measured.

So, that brings us to our role in the work of sanctification - the active side of sanctification in which we have both an obligation and a responsibility before God to respond to His Word. At the base level, the believer’s role in sanctification is to be obedient to the Word of God and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I understand that the issue of being led by the Holy Spirit can become very subjective if we are not careful with the Scriptures. In fact, many Pentecostal, Charismatic and Holiness segments of Christianity are much more absorbed with the subjective idea of “*being led by the Holy Spirit*” than they are with the very objective element of simply being obedient to what is the known will of God as revealed in the Scriptures. The subjective element of guidance must have an objective obedience to the Word of God as the foundational premise upon which any leading of the Holy Spirit can be validated.

Just think for a moment of all of the New Testament terms that actually speak about this. Any verb in the imperative mood, any command, and any exhortative passage in the New Testament are not given as options, alternatives, or personal preferences as to whether or not we should actually obey them. There simply are many things in the Christian life about which we never have to pray. Why? It because they are commands to be obeyed and not suggestions to be pondered.

It would be extremely interesting to do a study of all of the verbs in the New Testament that are in the imperative mood – the command mood. They are all verbs that are telling the believer to actively and consciously do something in their life. For instance, we are told the following in [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#),

1Th 4:3 (NKJV) **For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;**

This is clearly something that the believer has to do. [2 Corinthians 7:1](#) says,

2Co 7:1 (NKJV) **Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

Clearly, the exhortation is for the believer to be cognizant of what is displeasing to God. Paul tells the Ephesians “**not to steal**”, “**not to talk foolishly**”, and “**not to lie to one another**”. He is urging and exhorting them personally not to do those kind of activities. This is doctrine, and one of the purposes of doctrine is to cause the believer to draw deductions, to come to the right conclusions, and then to implement those doctrines and truths into their life. It is the believer who has to put into practice what he knows God demands of his life.

Here is the principle - **God will not live the Christian life for the believer**. I have to personally live out the Christian life and to appropriate the truths of God’s Word into my life. Living the Christian life is something that has to be intentional, deliberate, planned, calculated, and purposeful. Anything that we do in life that will be successful has to be done that way. God does not pray for me or read the Bible for me or study for me or be obedient for me or come to church for me. I have a prayer journal that helps remind me each day that I have to pray. I have a systematic way of reading through the Scriptures each day and taking notes in a journal so that I can be reminded of the simple fact that it is critical to my spiritual health that I regularly be in the Word of God. I am fully committed to being an active and regular part of the church to which God has called me. I have a very purposeful and regimented methodology as to how I study and how much time that I actually spend studying.

So, what happens if a believer chooses not to be obedient? What if they choose to live a life that they know is not conforming to the revealed will of God for their life? What about them? Honestly, I do not know about them. None of us are God and so we do not have the freedom to just assume that we know what God will do. I am grateful that He is patient, longsuffering, forgiving, and merciful. However, as a believer, I do not want to find out what God may do in my life if I choose to just live how I want to live and in total disregard for His revealed will for my life. No matter what anyone has told us and no matter what ideas we may have regarding the Christian life, no believer is exempt from obedience and no believer is exempt from the discipline associated with disobedience.

So, the questions that have to be asked by every believer are really very simple questions. “*Do I want to be fully obedient and yielded to God and His perfect will for my life? Do I want God to be glorified in my life?*” These are amazingly important questions with which every believer has to wrestle. If the answer given to those questions is “*Yes*”, then the believer has to understand the Scriptures and the doctrines associated with those Scriptures. If a believer does not understand what the Word of God is saying, how can they expect to glorify God in their life? They cannot just say, “*All I have to do is to look to Christ, and He will live His life in me.*” All of that sounds good, but it is not how the Christian life is actually lived out. This is not minimizing that aspect of the Christian life at all simply because it should be more than obvious that every believer should come to Christ for strength, for wisdom, or for whatever it may be that they need in their life. Every believer needs God’s help, God’s guidance, and God’s control over their life. Every believer needs it every moment. However, it is not Scriptural to

just say, “*Let go and let God.*” Why? It is because God says to the believer, “*You let go! **You** do what I have asked you to do.*” God has given commands that He expects believers to obey and to implement. That is why it is called a command. The New Testament is filled with these kind of imperative exhortations for the believer to live out the truths given to them in God’s Word. The idea of being obedient to the will of God is not some kind of mystical work that the Holy Spirit performs in the believer’s life, but it is a cooperative effort where we as believers actively respond to God’s Word and to God’s Spirit and obey what they have declared to us. Just think for a moment about a passage like [Romans 6:11](#) which says,

Ro 6:11 (NKJV) **Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

It is important to appreciate that this verse is a major turning point in the Book of Romans. It is the first word of exhortation that has been given by Paul. Up to this point in the letter, everything has been doctrinal – every word. Everything that Paul has been saying has been designed to bring the believer out of sin and to enable him to overcome sin in his life, literally, to make sin unthinkable. The normal life for a Christian should be one in which they are progressively growing more and more into the image of Christ, and even though there will be defeats along the way, there will also be substantial spiritual growth.¹ I would be inclined to actually state it more emphatically - that there **MUST** be meaningful spiritual growth for salvation to be something actual in the individual’s life. If meaningful and observable spiritual growth were not the norm for the Christian life, then the very principle of “**sanctification**” would not even be relevant to understand. It would have absolutely no merit or significance if spiritual growth in the Christian life was not really imperative or actual. However to the contrary, the ongoing process of sanctification guarantees that vital and visible spiritual growth will occur.

If we were to look closely at two of the three key verbs in [Romans 6:11-13](#), we would immediately see that they are in the imperative mood, present tense which means that the ideas such as “**do not let sin reign**” and “**do not present**”, are all pointing to a process that must continue in the believer’s life. These verbs point to the fact that sanctification is something that continues throughout a Christian’s life.² Clearly the point is that sin itself, as an entity operating against the believer, is not dead. What the believer does about that sin is that they continue to “**reckon**” themselves to be dead to it and alive to God. That is their continual response to sin. They “**do not let sin reign**” in their life, and they “**do not present**” their members as “**instruments of unrighteousness to sin**”. However, when we come to the verb “**present**” in [Romans 6:13](#), it actually changes to the imperative mood, aorist tense. This is a significant tense change from the present tense to the aorist tense because it signifies two important truths. First, [Romans 6:13](#) is a change from what Paul calls our “**members**” to the whole person – “**present yourselves**”. God wants all of us and not just parts of our life. He literally wants each believer to yield all of their life to Him. Secondly, in Romans 6:13 the aorist tense signifies that this presenting of “**yourselves**” is a very decisive moment in the believer’s life. It is not something that we should consider to be a continuing process. It is a wholehearted and total commitment of oneself “**to God**”. It could be translated as “**but once and for all present yourselves to God...**”³ So, we should think of this one aspect of “**presenting ourselves**” as a very decisive moment in a believer’s life rather than an ongoing process.

Verses like these, which are intensely present throughout the entire New Testament, simply reveal that the believer has an active role of obedience to play in the process of sanctification. Hopefully, we all should agree that it would be foolish on our part to think that a believer can constantly be disobedient to the Word of God, but then have some great expectation that they can just say a little prayer and get a great outpouring of divine guidance. Why would God consider giving guidance to a believer if they are not willing to obey the commands and exhortations that He has already given? That is why the subjective element of being led by the Holy Spirit has to be undergirded and reinforced by objective obedience to the Word of God.

The believer does not need to be deciding each day if they are going to be obedient and fully committed to Christ or not. Yet, this is precisely where many believers seem to struggle. It is like they are always debating with God about doing what they want to do versus doing what they know He wants them to do. If I can be gracious in saying this, God is not going to change His demands on the believer's life. God always has our best as His goal. God's will is always the very best for every believer's life. There are no exceptions to this. Many Christians are not really convinced of this truth because if they were their lives would be lived radically different than they are. So, if we say that we truly love God and truly want to live our life for His glory, why are we always debating whether or not we will be yielded to Him? It is not always possible to identify exactly when this decisive and critical moment may occur in a believer's life, but it is a very vital decision that should eventually be embraced in the believer's life.

In very unmistakable terms, this section of Scripture communicates to believers exactly what they must do in order to live victoriously over sin. Paul says that they are to “**reckon**” certain things to be true. The word “**reckon**” means that the believer accepts what God has said about them as actually being true, and therefore they are compelled to live in the light of what they know to be true.⁴ Believers are to “**reckon**” themselves to be dead to sin (v11), they are to resist sin (v12), and they are not to yield the various members of their body to sin (v13). These are all activities that the Word of God calls on the believer to embrace and implement in their life. They are truths to be received into their heart and life and truths that they are to become totally convinced of relative to their importance. However, this is not just a matter of human thought or reason. To the contrary, it is the Holy Spirit that actually stirs up and builds confidence in the spiritual truths that are being presented.⁵ This is the sanctifying effect of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the believer.

The goal is to bring our practice into alignment with our position. So, the believer must grasp the realities that have been forged for him by Christ in His redemptive work. Many believers know the truth of God's word intellectually, but they have yet to grasp, affirm, and appropriate those truths into their lives. Unless the truth of God's Word is appropriated by faith in the believer's life, it simply remains dormant in its effect. It is not that God's Word is ineffective or inactive, but rather that the believer's response to it is ineffective and inactive. In every area of the believer's walk, they are called on to respond to the truths of God's Word that they know. The input of the Holy Spirit is always present, but the believer is the one responsible for their actions. If this were not the case, then there would be no need for any spiritual exhortations. An exhortation is something that the believer has to do personally.

When Paul charges the believer “**to reckon**” certain things to be true in their life, the tense of the verb is in the present tense. It could be rendered as “**reckon and keep on reckoning**”. Simply stated, there are certain essential, indispensable, and core truths of which every Christian should constantly be

reminding themselves, and the idea of reckoning themselves to be “**dead indeed to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus**” is one of those truths. It is a somewhat strange, but liberating truth that believers are to be both dead and alive at the same time. It is not that sin is no longer present, but merely the idea that a believer should not respond to sin any more than a dead man would respond to sin. In order to be successful in the Christian life, it is imperative to understand that what and how a man thinks in his heart is what he ultimately becomes. So, at the deepest level there should be both an ongoing desire and determination to intentionally live a life of “**obedience**”.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Barnhouse 116.

² Morris, 256.

³ Morris, 258.

⁴ MacDonald 1702.

⁵ Preachers, 115.

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