



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 182

The indicative and the imperative – As Paul begins his teaching on the doctrine of sanctification in Romans 6, he does not start by giving us a list of do's and don'ts; rather, he first talks about what God has done (vv. 1-8). Theologians call this “the indicative,” that is, what God has done. Only after expounding the indicative does he instruct believers as to how they are to live (vv. 11-13). Theologians call this “the imperative,” that is, what we are called to do. The indicative (what we are) comes before the imperative (what we are to do); and the imperative is grounded in the indicative. This underscores the difference between positional and progressive sanctification. God has already separated us and cut us away from the world, and in Christ we already are God's children, sanctified and righteous (Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11); and so God is now calling us to live according to this reality. Having given us His Spirit, God is calling us to now walk in the Spirit (Romans 8:4, 9, 11; Galatians 5:16, 25).

Believer's relationship to sin – Reformed theology affirms that due to the fall natural man comes into this world spiritually and morally dead, defiled in body, spirit, mind, heart, emotions and will; having neither the ability nor the desire to seek God and live a life honoring Him (Genesis 6:5; Romans 3:10-18; 1 Corinthians 2:14). Moreover, in Adam all mankind rejected God as their master and thus God gave them over to another master, namely, sin, which was given legal authority over all humanity. Thus man became enslaved to sin, living under the power and reign of sin (Romans 6:20; Ephesians 2:1-3).

At regeneration the Spirit graciously changes the nature of sinful man, raising him from spiritual death to life. In doing so He transforms the sinner's heart of stone into a heart of flesh, enlightens his mind to understand the truth of God, implants new desires for the things of God, and enables him to answer His gospel call. Thus the Spirit effectually draws the person to Christ, who then responds in faith and is saved (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Ephesians 2:1, 4-5). Those whom the Spirit regenerates become new creations, with new minds, desires, beliefs, priorities, and lives (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Thus there has been a radical shift in believers' relationship to sin. Before our salvation we were alive to sin, were the slaves of sin, and willingly did what our master called us to do. However, just as a master loses his authority over his slave when the slave dies, so those who are united to Christ died with Him, their old self was crucified with Him, and thus they died to sin (Romans 6:2, 6-7, 16-18). And as Christ was raised, so they have also been raised in Him to a new life. In Christ we have been liberated from the dominion of sin. Sin no longer has any right over us (Romans 6:14, 22). Instead, we now have a new master, the Lord God; and we are His slaves now, whom we serve willingly (1 Peter 2:16). This is our new nature, dead to sin but alive unto righteousness (John 8:36; 1 Peter 2:24). So in summary, in Romans 6 Paul is saying “know who you are,” and then “be who you are.” This is God's purpose in our sanctification, to make us in practice what we are in position. We are holy, and we are to become holy!

Why do believers sin? As result of Adam's sin and fall mankind inherited not only the guilt due to Adam's sin (Romans 5:18-19), but also a corrupt nature (Ephesians 2:1-3). With His vicarious life and death Jesus Christ paid the full penalty for our sin and satisfied the just requirements of God. Though having been justified in Christ we have been freed from sin's guilt, sin's pollution is still with us.

Though we are new creations in Christ, and though the Spirit has given us a new heart, a new mind, and a new will, that does not mean that we have been completely renewed. The Spirit does not remove all remnants of our fallen nature upon our conversion. And though sin's reign and power have been broken over our lives, the presence of sin is still with us, and will affect us every day and every moment of our life, until it is removed in our glorification. Thus we enter a lifelong struggle with sin, and must never discount its influence in our lives (Matthew 26:41; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 12:1). That is why Luther said that a believer is “simul iustus et peccator,” that is, simultaneously justified and sinner.