

Co-crucifixion in the Battle for Purity

Christian men desire to win the battle in sexual purity yet the majority fails. The statistics are very sobering. In the *average church* half of the men have viewed pornography in the past six months. This is including all age demographics. However, the younger population has a higher percentage than the older generation. According to one poll, statistics for the population as a whole, Christians and non, 70% of 18-24 year olds view porn in a month and 66% of men their 20s and 30s are regular users. Unfortunately, statistics in the secular world usually mirror those in the church on this issue. Sexual lust is a major problem in the church despite all the sermons given on being pure. Men's failure is that they believe purity involves some kind of twelve step program. Others see the solution as controlling and suppressing urges. They prompt themselves to fight lust on their own. These types of living will only keep you in your sin cycle.

Lust is probably the biggest obstacle men face in becoming holy. We all long to be holy. We've read the verse in 1 Peter 1:16 "You shall be holy for I am holy." Many sermons have been given on that verse yet men leave church and continue in their sin pattern. Usually at best there is a change in behavior for a short period of time. But eventually the man returns to his previous sexual lifestyle. Men are falling short of 1 Peter 1:16. How does God enable us to meet His requirement of holiness? Our holiness is not a matter of what we achieve spiritually but it is the grace God provides. Through the grace of God we are looked at by the Father as though we were His holy Son. Thus, God loves us as though we never sinned.

Unfortunately, most Christians do not understand how to be holy by God's grace. Sure many throw the term around a lot but they do not understand the dynamics of it. Consequently, the phrase "by the grace of God" has become a cliché term that gets attached to the end of

commands in order to not sound moralistic or legalistic. I attended a Bible study where the message gave a list of things to do to improve my spiritual health. The speaker, including the other attendees, all said the term “by God’s grace” at the end of each “do this”. For example, “To be holy we need to pray more and forgive more by God’s grace.” However, I do not believe they truly understand God’s grace because the rest of the speech did not match up to it. In the end, the message was a spiritual checklist of “dos and don’ts” to become a better Christian.

Too many Christians have a works-based mentality. It is easy to understand this because it is woven into our very human nature. This is the natural religion of man—I can make myself right with God by my deeds. We like to see holiness as something we attain, something we work towards. However, none of our works will ever get us there. Many Christians think that because they have Jesus in their lives their good works are supercharged and now acceptable before God. However, even in our redeemed state our good works are still tainted with sin. It is not about doing righteous acts that will make us fulfill 1 Peter 1:16. We thus begin to look at holiness as a means of an end. It is not doing that will make us holy. The equation needs to be reversed. It is be holy so that you may live holy. Even after saying this statement Christians will ask me, “What should I do to be holy in order that I may live holy?” Nothing we can do will get us to be righteous or holy. We need to purge this thinking from our minds. We must “be” in order to “do.”

We all understand our initial justification but things seem to fall apart after that. Many Christians embark on an endless pursuit of trying to satisfy God with good works.

Unfortunately, these Christians know they are saved by God’s grace but think they are kept in His care by their good works. We think we earn or forfeit God’s blessings by our actions. We

create a baseline performance to measure ourselves for God's favor. God's grace is not only the means by which we are justified but also the means by which we are encouraged to live holy.

In order to live holy, to live purely, we must get the presuppositional truths of Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20 into our minds and live them out. It is dangerous thinking to believe Christ complements our holiness and spiritual life. Christ is all-sufficient and our entire being. Jesus needs to be your life. I must start believing Christ and my conscience are one. By my union and conjunction with Christ I have no sin on my account. Justification doesn't become just a one-time event but a present day reality. Our Christian walk is the life of Christ within us. Our union with Christ brings us the benefits of His Person and work allowing us to live holy.

Before delving into "be holy in order to live holy" we need to look at why we naturally prefer to live righteously on our own power. Man is optimistic he can improve himself before God. We like to think we can do our best and God will make up for our shortcomings. This can be aptly summed up as "Do your best and God will do the rest." Under this false theology we come to see God as complementing us rather than being our existence. We like to think we can take the fallen Adam and fix him up with duct tape, WD-40, and a hammer and make him presentable before God. The cross works against this mentality by revealing it to be a false source of righteousness.

The cross shows us our helplessness and depravity. It sheds light on our inability to do good works that are acceptable before God. The cross closes in on us so we understand we are crucified with Christ. His story becomes our story. The cross has to kill you before it can make you alive. We must work this principle into our mindset to be holy.

Romans 6:1-14 shows us how we are made holy where we read about justification. Verses 4-6 reveal the extent of our identification with Christ. "Baptized into Christ Jesus" in

verse 3 has many major implications, namely that we are so identified with Christ we become one with Him; we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ. So deep is our identification with Him through our baptism by the Spirit, that His death becomes our death. The Spirit unites us with Christ in His death as verse 5 says “we have been united with Him in the likeness of His death.” His death on the cross becomes our death. In a mysterious way, I was there with Christ on the cross 2,000 years ago. Even though I wasn’t born until 1985 I was hanging on that tree. He took our identity, including our sin, with Him as he suffered. As the soldiers mock Jesus, as the blood pours down, as the humiliation builds on it is me experiencing those things as well. So deep is our identification with Christ and His death that we are dying on that tree as well. We are being conformed to His death.

We were dying on the cross in order that our old self may die. The old self was under bondage to sin. Think of the mind as command central and either Jesus or sin is in control (Romans 6:12). When we were under the dominion of sin it was sin that sat on the throne. Unbelievers live unto sin because they are controlled by it. They are bidding unto sin’s desires. These people may think they control their lives but it is sin calling the shots. The old life was characterized by sin, corrupted by sin, and controlled by sin. This old life died with Christ on the cross. Sin as a dictator was overthrown. The cross causes a spiritual revolution in the mind overthrowing sin and installing Christ. I bring to my mind images of tyrants being overthrown such as Mussolini hanging upside down dead in the streets of Rome or Ceausescu being shot to death in Romania. In the same way, sin as a dictator in our life was nailed to the cross and killed. There is a definitive break from sin in the redeemed’s life

Thus, when we sin it is because we choose to do so. Jesus at command central isn’t asking us to sin. When we sin it as if though we are want the old dead sinful self hanging on the

cross to be in control again. We are trying to fulfill the desires of a dead evil dictator. But because sin isn't reigning in the mind we are free from its power. Christ reigns in our lives and we are free to live unto Him. Union with Christ frees us from the penalty of sin, the power sin, and the presence of sin.

Verse 4 declares "we have been buried with Him through baptism into death." The completeness of our death with Christ sets the stage for the new resurrected life. His resurrection gives us a newness of life. While verse 8 does have the final resurrection in view it also refers to our new life that is not under sin's domain and control.

Christ's work on the cross makes us holy. This is how we become holy without doing any works to achieve the status. However, this is a truth that is not experiential (Romans 6:11). It must be reckoned. Verse 11 is not telling us to do something but to realize a truth and believe it. It is a revealed truth expressed by faith.

By our radical identification with Christ, our sins became His and His righteousness became ours (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ's righteousness is ours by our union with Him (Philippians 3:9). Our identification runs so deep with Jesus that we are treated as though we earned Christ's righteousness by ourselves. We do nothing to earn this union and it is by God's grace alone (2 Timothy 1:9). Our initial justification comes by receiving Christ's righteousness through our union with Him. However, victory over sin is not a function of dying with Christ repeatedly but the progressive realization of the implications of having died and risen with Christ. We are continually justified on a daily basis. How many Christians realize this? Many do not go beyond their initial justification. We are called to reckon daily that we are Christ's through His death and resurrection. We are made sons of God through our union with Him. We receive His righteousness, sonship, and resurrection through faith in Him. We are brought out of the realm

of sin into the family of God through adoption by propitiation. It is because of these things we are made holy. This is the “be holy” before you “do holy.”

Paul provides further commentary on Romans 6 in Galatians 2:20 where he writes, “I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” This is the result of our union with Christ; it is an organic union in Christ resides within us. Galatians 2:20 provides the information we need on the other part of the equation, “do holy.” Reading this verse we learn that we cannot rely on our good works but must rely on Christ’s life within us. This verse tells us how to live out our union with Christ.

The Christian life is the result of Christ living it for us. Look at Paul’s words here, “not I, but Christ.” He cannot, nor can we, take any credit for righteousness or holiness. True Christian righteousness and holiness comes from Christ living in us. I am not the source of my Christian life but rather it is Jesus dwelling in me. I am controlled by Him. Christ living in me pushes out the old fallen Adam. Because Jesus fulfilled the Law and lives in me, the life He fulfilled in the Law becomes mine. To attempt to separate Christ’s life from mine will only put me back under the condemnation of the Law. Our faith connects us so closely with Jesus that His life and my life become one. How can we who are controlled by Christ, having our lives being lived by Him, reject it and submit to sexual lust? We must realize that because He lives our life we can live holy. Through faith we are transformed so we overcome the flesh.

We must become dependent on Christ living within us, relying on His righteousness dwelling within us to be new creatures that are holy. To lay your confidence partly on your faith and the other part on good works will cause you to fall into sin. Rather learn to depend on the life Christ is living within you. Unfortunately, there are many in the church who are content to

live a flesh-powered Christian life relying on their own works instead of Christ in them. The goal of everything we do for the kingdom, for others, for God needs to be in union with the life of Christ within us. Unless you are being controlled by Christ you will not attain the Christian life of holiness you desire.

This is why Paul's desire was that they church may know Christ and Him crucified (Philippians 3:10). He saw everything being connected to our union with Jesus and His life in us. Even though he wrote on a number of issues regarding Christian behavior and obedience in his mind there was always a thread running through these messages connecting them to knowing Christ in us. When I reject sexual temptation it is through Christ's life dwelling in me. When I refuse to look at porn it is not because of me looking the other way but Christ's holiness inside of me. As Christians our lives are controlled by our Savior.

If we lose sight of Christ in us then we then begin to rely on our works and resort to flesh-powered living. When this happens in the battle for purity we will see a pattern of increasing frequency in sexual compromises. We must behold His glory and keep Christ our focus. The cross is so sanctifying because it keeps exhibiting to the eye of faith our Savior. God sanctifies us as we behold the glory of the LORD (2 Corinthians 3:18). Christ needs to have preeminence in your life. He should not be reduced to a category of your life or a private experience. It is bad for our spiritual health to place Christ in a one of life's compartment. This truth needs to penetrate all aspects of your life. We need to expose ourselves to Christ's supremacy, vastness, and preeminence so we are taken captive by His glory.

Our identity in Christ is what makes us holy. This truth cannot be turned into generalized statements such as "I love Jesus and have accepted Him". The problem with us is that we want to place Jesus into another compartment of our lives. Jesus just isn't another part of your life but

is your life and every area of it needs to be impacted by Christ living in you. Christ's life in us gives us the holy living we need to overcome sin's temptations. Purity isn't about avoiding certain sins rather it's about knowing who you are in Christ. Too many Christians are relying on flesh-powered living and sanctification to accomplish the path towards holiness. We need to live upon continual daily justification to avoid this trap. Realizing these truths is what will enable Christian men to overcome lust's temptations. Where are you placing your dependence? Is Christ having preeminence and supremacy in everything in your life? There is a song that sings "Hallelujah, all I have is Christ, Hallelujah, Jesus is my life." This aptly sums up the redeemed sinners' new life through union with Christ living in us.