

# Sonship

## Lesson 4

### The Power of the Spirit for Defeating the Flesh and Establishing Righteousness

Jesus has come to set us free from the power of sin and death and free to become righteous -- people who look like Christ -- who pursue justice, love to show mercy, and walk humbly with God; who see righteousness restored in our relationships with one another across the previous divisions and brokenness; who see God's goodness flowing to the nations; who live in light of the hope of the rescue and deliverance of the creation itself. The Gospel is itself God's power for unleashing that life of the Spirit of God in us, to see sin more and more defeated, and growth in true righteousness more and more practiced in all these areas [*Isa 61:1-4*].

How does this work out in practice? There are 'two sides' to this coin of growing in obedience (what the Scriptures call 'sanctification') that go hand in hand. **One side of growth is to see and deal with the sin nature and the overall brokenness of sin in light of the Gospel; the other side is to see and pursue God's righteousness in the light of the Gospel.**

In the following notes when we use the phrase "believing the gospel," this is shorthand for believing that Christ atoned for sin, granted us the status of righteous sons, has empowered us by the Spirit to live out his kingdom righteousness in a redeemed family community together, that he will have the complete and ultimate victory of seeing all things restored, healed and united under his righteous and just Kingship, and has already begun that process with the authority and power over all things to bring that to expression.

#### I. Believing the Gospel gives us the freedom to deal honestly with sin

*1 John 1:5-2:2*

Our identity with Christ - our righteousness in Him as a gift - is what gives us the freedom to relax and see the truth about our sin nature and the brokenness of the world around us. Our standing before God and our hope for restoration is not dependent on whether or not we see sin arise in our hearts or the evidence of the destructiveness of sin on a corporate or cultural level. Our standing and hope on our 'best day' or on our 'worst day' (personal or corporate) is not based on how things are going that day: it is based solely upon Christ's work for us (personally and corporately as his people and for the world as a whole – Col 1:19-20), both his forgiveness and his righteousness on our behalf.

What feeds the fear of being able to deal honestly with sin is an underlying question, a doubt of whether or not God will still meet us: still love us, still bless us, still teach us as his children, still break into the ruin that sin produces in entire nations - even right at that point where sin is being exposed. Does his commitment to being "faithful" to his promises and to us as his people take into account our own stubborn struggle with sin as well as the stubborn rebellion and

mess of the nations? Or will God (rightly so in our minds) see us as unworthy and be angry with us and cast us off? The less we believe that our personal standing and our hope for corporate and global restoration is based solely upon the righteousness that comes through Christ as a gift, and not on ourselves, the more we will be susceptible to these doubts.

These doubts, in turn, can lead us away from “believing Christ” and receiving his righteousness as a gift, and feed the thinking that we have to work hard to bring God a good performance in order for him to delight in us and truly bless us. With this mindset, the exposure of sin will be seen as a hindrance, a major setback, a defeat; something we will tend to cover up. But what God really intends for us is the freedom of knowing we are his loved children by faith in Christ, and that this fundamental relationship will never change, so that even the exposure of sin is not a basis for fear but a further opportunity for growth. To take this one step further - we actually need the continued exposure of sin to take place, so that continued healing and restoration can deepen. In order for us to have this freedom, the work of Christ on the cross must become more and more central to our faith and hope [see “Cross Chart”].

## **II. Believing the Gospel gives us the freedom to deal honestly with the character of our sin nature and the depth of the devastation of sin in the world around us**

A. Even as believers, this sin nature (or ‘principle of sin’) is still at work in our lives

*Galatians 5:16,17     James 4:1     Ephesians 4:22,23*

This is so important to recognize this reality as openly as Scripture does. If not, we can find ourselves shocked, dazed, defeated and confused by the intensity of sinful thoughts, desires, and our own brokenness that emerges as we walk with the Lord, and also by the level of brokenness in others.

B. The character of our sin nature and the damage sin has created on a corporate level is more than we can handle on our own (that’s why we need a Savior):

1. This sin nature is now and always will be totally corrupt [Romans 7:14-20]

There isn’t anything you, or others, aren’t capable of..... Cf. Romans 1-3, and consider David and Peter - both in the garden of Gethsemane and later, with the Galatian gentile Christians - as cautionary examples.

Your sin nature will never get any better. **You** will grow and change, but your sin nature will not. The best defensive strategy is to recognize this so you aren’t defeated by the reality of its presence in yourself or others.

2. This sin nature is self-deceiving and hidden in its character to you [*Jeremiah 17:9*]

That's why you need the Spirit to search you [*Psalm 139:23*]; it's why others see your sin first and you see the sin of others better. If you don't recognize this, you will be all the more susceptible to its control. The most dangerous person is the one who knows he is right but doesn't see himself as a sinner who has been declared righteous - only as a gift of grace.

3. This sin nature is opposed to the life of the Spirit in you and can powerfully (but only temporarily) defeat you [*Galatians 5 / Romans 7 / James 4*]

This is not to say at all that you will be ultimately defeated and can just decide to give in to sin without struggle. It is however, a humble, bold recognition (that only the Gospel allows you to accept) that you will still struggle with sin. It also strips away all pretense of turning repentance into penance, or by assuring God or yourself that your confidence for forgiveness is that you will never sin again. It also explains how sins can be so habitual.

### **III. Believing the Gospel, even in the light of this brokenness of sin, in others and in the world, is the very means for this sinfulness to be overcome**

It is extremely important to understand that though your sin nature is still present, and God is not shy about telling us that in his Word, the good news of the Gospel includes the reality that you have died *to your sin nature* and that *your sin nature is dead in its ultimate power over you* because of your new identity with Christ

A. You are One with Christ, just like you were One with Adam [*Romans 5:12, 18-19*]

You were born in sin and have suffered its effects because of your identity with Adam. In fact, the whole of mankind, all culture and institutions and creation itself has suffered because of Adam's sin

You are now 'free' from the condemnation and power of sin, and are instead born into righteousness and will receive all the effects of it because of your identity with Christ. This applies not only to us individually, but also to us corporately as God's people. In a very practical way this gives us great freedom that though individual members of the body may struggle deeply with sin, this does not defeat the corporate movement of the kingdom through the greater body of Christ.

B. You have both died with Christ to sin and been raised to new life in Him [*Romans 6:1-14*]

Who we were - the 'old self, identified only as a child of Adam, a sinner' - was crucified with Christ - and because of that death, we are free from that identity with sin.

Who we are - the 'new self' with a 'new nature' - created in Christ Jesus to be righteous' - was raised with Christ, and because of that resurrection to God, we are free to identify with righteousness and all the benefits that come from it, including the redemption of the physical world itself.

This is a gift of God. It is the good news of the Gospel. Every time we act out of our sin nature or see the devastating effect of sin around us, God wants us to come and receive his mercy on a deeper level, and learn the freedom of submitting to righteousness.

**If we were under a relationship of 'law' with God (where he judged us according to our deeds) we could never be free from our sin natures - we would always only be receiving punishment, and that would leave us under the power of sin all the time. But we are not under law; we are under a relationship of grace. And because we can come to the throne of grace and receive mercy in our time of need, and because God will not treat us as our sins deserve, but will freely accept us as His very own sons and daughters, through Christ's work on our behalf, and will freely bless us and give us his Spirit, then sin's power will not be our master.**

#### IV. Believing the Gospel for the depth of sin

*Romans 7:14 - 8:4*

Paul's sense of the problem of the sin nature and the answer of the Gospel comes to its fullest expression in Romans 7. This **does not mean** Paul is saying sin ultimately has the upper hand and we just learn to live with it. What he is saying is that the struggle is real, and that when he sees things most clearly he realizes this struggle with sin will always be a part of his life, and as a man who loves God, he hates the presence of sin and feels an inner 'wretchedness' about its presence.

Every true child of God experiences this at different times. When that happens, the important question is this: Do you give up in defeat? Or do you, like Paul, run back to the good news of the Gospel? (For those who are not used to believing the Gospel, but keep striving for a righteousness of their own to offer God, this chapter presents an incredible moral dilemma).

## V. Believing the Gospel for the Spirit to pursue righteousness

*Romans 8:5-17*

Because I am righteous through Christ as a gift (even, or especially in that very area where I just sinned) I can ask for the Spirit's help/blessing to put on righteousness.

Jesus has come to set us free *from the power of sin and death* and free *to become like him, in true righteousness and holiness.*

A. God Himself has several ways in which he summarizes what it means to 'be righteous'

The Ten Commandments [*Exodus 2*]

The 'Two Great Commandments' [*Matthew 22:37-40*]

The 'New Command' [*John 13:34 "Love one another...as I have loved you"*]

So what does 'love' mean? God Himself has summarized righteousness and true love for us this way:

The central, defining, core values of God's 'kingdom', of being 'righteous', of 'loving', of becoming 'like Christ' are summed up for us in Micah 6:8 'He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'

### **To act justly:**

To make sure you personally treat others with all goodness, rightness and justice in every situation of life - as a merchant (*Lev 19:36*), an employer (*James 5:4,5*), a spouse (*Ephesians 5*), a parent (*Eph 5*), a citizen (*Romans 11*), even a homeowner (*Deut 22:8*)

But also to take an active role in helping others whom you see being treated them with injustice. In other words, to do whatever good we can for those who are being oppressed. (*Isaiah 58:10*) The people who are the most vulnerable to injustice, and the ones to whom we are called by God to pay special attention are the widow, the orphan, the immigrant and the poor [*Jeremiah 22:16; James 1:27; Leviticus 19:10, 33,34; Exodus 23:9*].

### **To love mercy:**

To be the kind of person who delights in showing compassion for people in need - when we see people in pain, distress or misery, to step in and take action to relieve their need.

This applies to all kinds of need - but God calls us to pay attention to obvious physical need: hunger, shelter, clothing, sickness [*John 3, Luke 10, Isa 58*].

What is so unusual about God's mercy is that it comes from a God of grace: we extend such help even to people who are unworthy or, who deserve just the opposite; we even show mercy to our enemies *[Matthew 5:43 ff, Romans 12:17]*

### **To walk humbly with our God:**

To not pursue this lifestyle from a position of arrogance, superiority or condescension, but from a humble walk with God and a humble walk with others at their point of brokenness and need. That humility will stem first from seeing our own need for, and reception of God's mercy and favor in our lives through the Gospel, so that the deeds of justice and compassion will not be marked by a motivation of making ourselves feel good or important, but they will be done as a true expression of the love of God, with careful concern for the person's true need, and 'quietly' - without drawing a lot of attention to ourselves *[Isa 42:1-4]*

These three traits of justice, mercy and humility are at the heart of God's character. As children of his kingdom, all the promises of the Gospel - his discipline, love and fatherly care will be bent towards shaping our lives as people who are marked by these traits.

Neither God nor your own conscience can accept a lack of growth in these areas and you need to know that you cannot grow without continually being refreshed in the Gospel.

## **B. Seeking obedience in the context of exercising faith in the Gospel and the power of the Spirit**

### **1. Genuine growth requires the exercise of your will in choosing righteousness (God's will)**

- a. As a son/daughter of God you are 'response-able'  
*Galatians 6:7-10 compare Hebrews 12:12-16*

You can and are called to yield yourself to righteousness, because even though sinful attitudes or thoughts or traits may mark your obedience, it is acceptable because it is covered by the righteousness of Christ *[Romans 6:12-14; 1 Peter 2:4-12]*

Remember - these calls to obedience come to people like you and me who still have this struggle with the sin nature. The call to obedience comes with the recognition that this is the case, and with the hope of the Gospel as the answer.

- b. The exercise of your will in choosing righteousness (God's will) is meant to take place through a cooperation with the Spirit's power, received through the believing of the Gospel *[Romans 1:5, Titus 2:11-13]*

1) (Your will) - (Active faith) = Human (fleshly) Power for obedience

God has to teach us what it means to actively walk by faith because we tend to rely upon Him for a time (short or long) and then move towards self-reliance to live the Christian life - to love, to serve, to exercise gifts. When we are confronted with the lack of power to do these things, our need becomes the very opportunity to turn to God and trust his grace in Christ even more.

2) (Your will) + (Active Faith) = Spirit's Power for obedience

Your progress in sanctification is organically connected to your resting in your justification and all the other attending promises of God bringing righteousness to expression. Your need to grow will require you to believe the Gospel more. The "I can't/won't" of the 'flesh' asserts itself; the accusations of the Accuser hit hard; the temptations of the world and the cares of life pull us away. The believing of the Gospel - that we are free in Christ - is the *focus of faith* we need in order to continue to grow. As we learn to actively believe the Gospel - to freely ask for the Spirit; to fellowship with the Father and lose your will to His, we will see increasing freedom to seek obedience

## 2. Action Steps for Obedience

a. Let the law guide you *[Romans 3:31]*

The Law is good. The heart of the Law is about love - to God, our neighbor let the Law flesh that out: widows / orphans / justice / mercy / sex / enemies / spouses / children, etc.

b. Let the gospel empower you *[Galatians 5:1-6]*

Promise vs. Performance

c. Seek the Spirit's wisdom in how to love *[Eph. 3:14-19]*

Sanctification is about learning how to practically love. Look for immediate/practical expressions of that - the 'Kingdom is within you' - it is wherever you are!

d. Let the hope of the gospel determine your outlook on others *[II Cor. 5:16ff]*

Either as new creations, or as potential new creations. Exercise forgiveness as a lifestyle; know that God is in the business of changing people's lives; keep the real enemy in view -- whenever tempted not to love

e. Be full of courage - risk or rust *[Romans 12:1, 2; I Peter 1:13-15]*

Remember: God is with you -- see every command as a call backed by the promise of God's grace to enable you to do his will; remember what Jesus Himself taught us to pray: 'Your Kingdom Come'

f. Learn to endure in love *[Galatians 6:7-10]*

Expect opposition/conflict -- from within and with others; expect trial

All these things are tools in God's hands to make you more mature in the expression of righteousness *[James 1:1ff]*