

The Will of God— Your Sanctification



First Window on the Word

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. . . .
The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it (1 Thess. 5:23-24).*

Just when the born-anew disciple thinks his or her spiritual life couldn't get any better, it does—dramatically. The guilt and power of sin are gone. You are living a miracle already; what more could you ask for? What more could you expect? What more could you absorb?



GREENING POWER



Window on the Word

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom. 12:2).*

You soon discover that the transformation begun in your conversion continues. The Spirit who led you into the transforming Light now coaxes you to bask in its life-giving rays. Old memories are being healed, resentments are being melted. The things of the Lord become sweet as honey. The closer you draw to Christ, the more the hunger for God increases, and the more God satisfies that hunger.

"There is no top to the divine heights . . . no bottom to the divine depths; there is no shore to the ocean of God's perfections," one man said describing this experience. "The soul bathes and drinks and drinks and bathes, and says, 'I know Him better and love Him more. . . . I stand awe-inspired in the presence of the infinite glory, which, though I come nigh, is ever unapproachable; though I bathe my soul in it and am filled, yet its measureless heights and depths and lengths and breadths overwhelm me.'"¹ The Bible's description is "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18, NRSV).

You discover the meaning of 1 Cor. 2:9: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

That scripture is not talking about heaven, or at least not *just* heaven. Rather, the unseen, unheard of, unimaginable blessings barge into our present lives as marvelous encounters with God. As you walk close to Him, you discover deep satisfactions and enriching fulfillments you never dreamed of.

How does this happen? As you walk in the Spirit, He begins to share with you what the apostle Paul called “God’s secret wisdom,” for the “Spirit searches . . . even the deep things of God” (vv. 7, 10).

As the transforming Light radiates Christ’s Spirit into your heart, new spiritual sensitivities are brought to awareness, and the thirst to be more like Christ grows. Submerged longings to be free from every stain of sin burst forth like tulips on an inordinately warm spring day. As the sunflower follows the sun, you are drawn to the transforming Light.

What is going on? Some of God’s saints have called this gradual sanctification. Others insist on calling it growth in grace. I like Hildegard of Bingen’s description. She labeled this phenomenon *viriditas* or “greening power.” This power meant spiritual fertility and growth to her. Hildegard believed that Rom. 12:11 calls us to *viriditas* when it tells us to be “aglow with the Spirit” (RSV).

Recently a botanist found some 600-year-old seeds in the Arabian desert. He watered and nourished them; they sprouted and blossomed! Through sanctifying grace and spiritual growth, God is performing a similar miracle in your heart. Seeds of God’s image long dried out in the barren desert of your sinful heart are being watered, and they are bursting out in the greening power of the Light. Oh, stay close to the Light so those precious seeds of God’s image can blossom in love and selflessness.



THE PROBLEM OF INWARD SIN



Window on the Word

It is God’s will that you should be sanctified. . . . For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life (1 Thess. 4:3, 7).

As you follow the Spirit into the sunrise of sanctifying grace, you become more aware of the love and holiness of God. The closer you get to Him, the more your own lack of love and your own unholy affections show up. This hurts. You are tempted to shrink from the Light because it makes you look bad, embarrassingly bad.

*When I look into Your holiness
When I gaze into Your loveliness
When all things that surround
Become shadows in the light of You. **

*“When I Look into Your Holiness,” by Wayne and Cathy Perrin. Copyright 1981, Integrity Music. Used by permission.

Though you have been born anew, though you have walked away from the acts of sin that plagued your former life, you are now forced to admit that though sin does not *reign* in your heart, it does *remain*.

Inward sin is not something you *do*, A. W. Tozer taught, it is something you *are*. You grieve, for at the deepest level you want to be like Christ. But there's a part of you that treasures lust, or harbors a lurking self-idolatry, or nourishes the "drum major instinct," or thirsts for praise, or protects a touchy ego, or affirms a cultural prejudice, or shelters unworthy motives, or rebels against continual obedience to God. Tozer called these "the hyphenated sins of the human spirit." He named some: "self-righteousness, self-pity, . . . self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love."²

The Spirit of the Lord is so gentle, yet so firm. Faithfully He confronts you with these un-Christlike affections. At first you may dismiss His gentle revelations or try to ignore, mislabel, or sidestep them. But He keeps bringing you back to the mirror of the divine Light, where you can admit that you need to have your very inmost heart cleansed of sin. You are ready to join Charles Wesley in:

*Show me, as my soul can bear,
The depth of inbred sin;
All the unbelief declare,
The pride that lurks within.
Take me, whom Thyself hast bought,
Bring into captivity
Ev'ry high, aspiring thought
That would not stoop to Thee.*³

My pastor used to say in public prayer, "O Lord, show us the worst of our condition." That prayer I scarcely had the nerve to repeat. I preferred the Wesley hymn "Show me, as my soul can bear, the depth of inbred sin." If you pray such a prayer, tighten your spiritual seat belt. You may be in for a jolting ride through some sin-stained slums of your inner world that are as ugly as—well, as ugly as sin.

When that happens, "do not cast away your confidence" (Heb. 10:35, NKJV). Rather, wrap the robe of faith around you, and hold on to God. Recall the wonderful things God has already done for you, instead of sinking into despair over what He has not yet done for you. Never trivialize the miracle of the new birth. You have been born again; you are a child of God. To that truth the Spirit bears witness, as does your changed life.

One of Satan's devices is to so bully the believer who is on the way to sanctification into despair over *remaining sin* that he or she forgets the transformation that put out *reigning sin*. You are not yet all that you will be, but you certainly aren't what you used to be. John Wesley warned that the seeking soul, now conscious of inward sin, may become more ashamed of its most holy duties than former brazen sins.⁴

Keep in step with the Spirit. He will gently lead you to loving submission to God so that you can be cleansed "from everything that contaminates body