



Volume 9 Issue 2

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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

The Apparent Paradox of Sanctification

How do you overcome sin and live the Christian life? Is defeating sin something God does in you, or do you defeat it by obeying the commands of Scripture? In other words, is the Christian life an exercise in passive trust or active obedience? Is it all God's doing, all the believer's doing, or a combination of both? Those questions are as old as the church, and the varied answers have spawned movements and denominations.

This is not an unusual issue when dealing with spiritual truth. Many doctrines involve seeming paradoxes. For example, Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man; and while Scripture was written by human authors, God wrote every word. The gospel is offered to the whole world, yet applied only to the elect. God eternally secures believers' salvation, yet they are commanded to persevere.

Christians who try to reconcile every doctrine in a humanly rational way are inevitably drawn to extremes. Seeking to remove all mystery and paradox, they emphasize one truth or aspect of God's Word at the expense of another which seems to contradict it. This is precisely how many Christians have handled the doctrine of sanctification. One view of sanctification emphasizes God's role to the virtual exclusion of the believer's effort. This is often referred to as quietism. The opposite extreme is called pietism.

The quietist sees believers as passive in sanctification. A common maxim is, "Let go and let God." Another is, "I can't; God can." Quietism tends to be mystical and subjective, focusing on personal feelings and experiences. A person who is utterly submitted to and dependent on God, they say, will be divinely protected from sin and led into faithful living. Trying to strive against sin or discipline oneself to produce good works is considered not only futile but unspiritual and counterproductive.

One champion of this view was the devout Quaker Hannah Whitall Smith, whose book *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* has been read by millions. In it she writes,

What can be said about man's part in this great work but that he must continually surrender himself and continually trust? But when we come to God's side of the question, what is there that may not be said as to the manifold ways, in which He accomplishes the work entrusted to Him? It is here that the growing comes in. The lump of clay could never grow into a beautiful vessel if it stayed in the clay pit for thousands of years; but when it is put into the hands of a skillful potter it grows rapidly, under his fashioning, into the vessel he intends it to be. And in the same way the soul, abandoned to the working of the Heavenly Potter, is made into a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use. (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1952, 32. Italics in original.)



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How a Christian can fall into sin is a difficult question for the quietist to answer. They are forced to argue that such a person obviously misunderstands the matter of complete surrender, and has taken himself out of the hands of the heavenly Potter. But that flawed answer brings God's sovereignty into question—if the Lord is completely in control, how can a believer take himself out of God's hands?

Pietists, on the other hand, are typically aggressive in their pursuit of doctrinal and moral purity. Historically, this movement originated in seventeenth-century Germany as a reaction to the dead orthodoxy of many Protestant churches. To their credit, most pietists place strong emphasis on Bible study, holy living, self-discipline, and practical Christianity. They emphasize such passages as *“Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2 Corinthians 7:1) and *“Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself”* (James 2:17).

Unfortunately, this unbalanced view often leads to an overemphasis on self-effort to the virtual exclusion of dependence on divine power. As you might expect, pietism frequently leads to legalism, moralism, self-righteousness, a judgmental spirit, pride, and hypocrisy. The quietist says, *“Do nothing.”* The pietist says, *“Do everything.”*

In Philippians 2:12–13, Paul presents the appropriate resolution between the two. He makes no effort to rationally harmonize the believer's part and God's part in sanctification. He is content with the paradox and simply states both truths, saying on the one hand, sanctification is of believers (Philippians 2:12), and on the other hand, it is of God (Philippians 2:13).

The truth is that sanctification is God's work, but He performs it through the diligent self-discipline and righteous pursuits of His people, not in spite of them. God's sovereign work does not absolve believers from the need for obedience; it means their obedience is itself a Spirit-empowered work of God.

Today there is an intense debate within the church about this vital issue. The stakes are high—your view of sanctification informs and directs how you understand your new nature in Christ, how you evangelize others, pursue godliness, govern your heart and mind, how you raise and discipline your children, and how you understand and follow God's commands in Scripture. For pastors and church leaders, your position on this issue will determine how you preach and teach, how you give counsel to troubled hearts, and how you engage in church discipline.

Neither quietism nor pietism represents the biblical path of sanctification. Both are spiritual ditches to steer clear of—they will impede your spiritual progress, and potentially obstruct it altogether. ~ ***Dr. John MacArthur***



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God's High Call for Women

Although women have traditionally fulfilled supportive roles in serving the church and gained their greatest joy and sense of accomplishment from being wives and mothers, the feminist movement has successfully influenced many women to abandon these divinely ordained roles.

Unfortunately, this movement has made headway even in the church, creating chaos and confusion regarding the role of women both in ministry and in the home. Only in Scripture can God's intended design for women be found.

The Old Testament and Women

In the creation account of Genesis 1, God's first word on the subject of men and women is that they were equally created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Neither received more of the image of God than the other. So the Bible begins with the equality of the sexes. As persons, as spiritual beings standing before God, men and women are absolutely equal.

In Genesis 2, there is a more detailed account of the creation of the two equal human beings that reveals differences in their God-given functions and responsibilities. God did not create the man and the woman at the same time, but rather He created Adam first and Eve later for the specific purpose of being Adam's helper. Eve was equal to Adam, but she was given the role and duty of submitting to him. Although the word "helper" carries very positive connotations—even being used of God Himself as the helper of Israel (Deuteronomy 33:7; Psalm 33:20)—it still describes someone in a relationship of service to another. The responsibility of wives to submit to their husbands, then, was part of the plan from creation, even before the curse. The first books of the Bible establish both the equality of men and women and also the support role of the wife (see Exodus 21:15, 17, 28–31; Numbers 5:19–20, 29; 6:2; 30:1–16).

Throughout the Old Testament, women were active in the religious life of Israel, but generally they were not leaders. Women like Deborah (Judges 4) were clearly the exception and not the rule. There was no woman with an ongoing prophetic ministry. No woman was a priest. No queen ever ruled Israel. No woman wrote an Old Testament (or New Testament) book. Isaiah 3:12 indicates that God allowed women to rule as part of His judgment on the sinning nation.

Jesus and Women

In the midst of the Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures, which viewed women almost on the level of possessions, Jesus showed love and respect for women. Though Jewish rabbis did not teach women and the Jewish Talmud said it was better to burn the Torah than to teach it to a woman, Jesus never took the position that women, by their very nature, could not understand spiritual or theological truth. He not only included them in His audiences but also used illustrations and images that would be familiar to them (Matthew 13:33; 22:1–2; 24:41; Luke 15:8–10) and specifically applied His teaching to them (Matthew 10:34ff.). To the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), He revealed that He was the Messiah and discussed with her topics such as eternal life and the nature of true worship. He also taught Mary and, when admonished by Martha, pointed out the priority of learning spiritual truth even over "womanly" responsibilities like serving guests in one's home (Luke 10:38).



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Although men in Jesus' day normally would not allow women to count change into their hands for fear of physical contact, Jesus touched women to heal them and allowed women to touch Him (Luke 13:10ff.; Mark 5:25ff.). Jesus even allowed a small group of women to travel with Him and His disciples (Luke 8:1-3), an unprecedented happening at that time. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and sent her to announce His resurrection to the disciples (John 20:1-18), despite the fact that women were not allowed to be witnesses in Jewish courts because they were considered liars.

In Jesus' treatment of women, He raised their station of life and He showed them compassion and respect in a way they had never known. This demonstrated their equality. At the same time, however, Jesus still did not exalt women to a place of leadership over men.

The Epistles and Women

In the Epistles, the two principles of equality and submission for women exist side by side. Galatians 3:28 points to the equality, indicating that the way of salvation is the same for both men and women and that they are members of equal standing in the body of Christ. It does not, however, eradicate all differences in responsibilities for men and women, for this passage does not cover every aspect of God's design for male and female. In addition, there are many other passages that make distinctions between what God desires of men and what He desires of women, especially within family and within the church.

The Family

While Christian marriage is to involve mutual love and submission between two believers (Ephesians 5:21), four passages in the New Testament expressly give to wives the responsibility to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1). This voluntary submission of one equal to another is an expression of love for God and a desire to follow His design as revealed in His Word. It is never pictured as demeaning or in any way diminishing the wife's equality. Rather the husband is called to love his wife sacrificially as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25) and to serve as the leader in a relationship of two equals.

While husbands and fathers have been given the primary responsibility for the leadership of their children (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21; 1 Timothy 3:4-5), wives and mothers are urged to be "workers at home" (Titus 2:5), meaning managers of the household. Their home and their children are to be their priority, in contrast to the world's emphasis today on careers and fulltime jobs for women outside the home.

The Church

From the very beginning, women fulfilled a vital role in the Christian church (Acts 1:12-14; 9:36-42; 16:13-15; 17:1-4, 10-12; 18:1-2, 18, 24-28; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 1:5; 4:19), but not one of leadership. The apostles were all men; the chief missionary activity was done by men; the writing of the New Testament was the work of men; and leadership in the churches was entrusted to men.



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God's High Call for Women

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Although the Apostle Paul respected women and worked side by side with them for the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 4:3), he appointed no female elders or pastors. In his letters, he urged that men were to be the leaders in the church and that women were not to teach or exercise authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12). Therefore, although women are spiritual equals with men and the ministry of women is essential to the body of Christ, women are excluded from leadership over men in the church.

Men and women stand as equals before God, both bearing the image of God Himself. However, without making one inferior to the other, God calls upon both men and women to fulfill the roles and responsibilities specifically designed for them, a pattern that can be seen even in the Godhead (1 Corinthians 11:3). In fulfilling the divinely given roles taught in the New Testament, women are able to realize their full potential because they are following the plan of their own Creator and Designer. Only in obedience to Him and His design will women truly be able, in the fullest sense, to give glory to God. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

What's in Your Mind, Believer?

Since the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the question has been asked endlessly: *“What is the role of the law of God in light of the gospel?”* The Apostle Paul found himself asking it (for example, Galatians 3:19: *“What purpose then does the law serve?”* NKJV). He had a profound sense of the place of the Law in the history of redemption and in the covenant purposes of God. But he also answered the question in terms of the life of the believer (for example, in Romans 8:3-4). Ever since, Christians have faced the challenge of walking the thin red biblical line that avoids the dangers of legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other.

The anonymous author of Hebrews was fascinated by the relationship between the Law and the gospel. He explained how the Mosaic administration was like a shadow cast backwards into the old covenant period by the work of Christ in the new covenant (Hebrews 8:5). Now that the new covenant has been forged in the blood of Christ, the old is revealed for what it always was, shadow rather than reality. Now it is “obsolete” (8:13).

Using the word “obsolete” about the Law makes some Christians nervous! So here, first of all, is something to think about: Unless I can say loudly enough for others to hear: *“In Christ, God has made the Mosaic covenant obsolete”* I must cease reading Hebrews, or at least stop reading it before I get to chapter 8, verse 13! The ability to absorb into one's mental and spiritual constitution the full force of what is being said here is surely a hallmark of true New Testament liberty.

The author of Hebrews (a pastoral theology genius if ever there was one) resolves our problem in a remarkable way. The new covenant renders the old obsolete. And one of the ways God renders it so is this: *“I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts”* (Jeremiah 31:33, cited in Hebrews 8:10; 10:16).

How can it be that the old Mosaic covenant at the heart of which lay the law of God can now be obsolete, yet the law of God be written in the heart as part of the new covenant?



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What's in Your Mind, Believer?

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To sense the depth of the Bible's answer to this question, we need to see the role of the Law in the Bible as a whole. That role is revealed in a series of stages. In stage **one**, God made man as his image-bearing son. Into his very constitution and calling, God wrote a transcript of His own character—man was created and called to mimic God in the way he lived.

In stage **two**, God recreated Israel in the Exodus as His image-bearing son who was called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). For this son He re-wrote His law. But things had changed between Father and son. The son was now sinful, and even though he was a prodigal returning from Egypt, he still carried with him its baneful influences.

Essential, then, to understand the big picture of God's law is this: The form the Law took in the Mosaic covenant was never intended to be permanent! In its very nature the Mosaic administration was as collapsible as the tabernacle in the wilderness. Only in the context of the work of Jesus Christ would the diamond of God's will, first written on Adam's heart, and then rewritten in negative form on tablets of stone, shine forth in all its multi-faceted wonder.

In stage **three**, the author of Hebrews says "now" God has made obsolete the Mosaic form of the Law. Christ has fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5:17–20). Moses ascended Sinai and brought down the Law on tablets of stone, but our Lord Jesus has now ascended the hill of the heavenly Zion (see Hebrews 12:18, 22), and has "come down" in the person of the Holy Spirit, who works in our hearts "that the righteous requirement [not just the negative avoidance!] of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4, NKJV).

What does all this mean in practical terms? The Law was written in Adam's heart; Adam and Law were friends. It became his enemy only when he rebelled against it—and in the process became God's enemy and his own worst enemy as well! Now, graciously, with a positive impetus, the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, the very Lord Jesus who kept God's law as the Second Man and Last Adam, indwells us, rewriting God's will in our hearts in letters of grace for the new covenant era. The law of God is our friend again—or, better, we are friends with it because we are friends with Him. Yes, we fail, we sin, and we are not yet finally delivered from the indwelling corruption that always sees and feels the Law as enemy and condemner. But a radical change has taken place. The law of God is once again the delight of God's sons, bringing liberty to us.

So what is the place of the Law in the life of the Christian? Simply this: We are no longer under the Law to be condemned by it, we are now "*in-lawed*" to it because of our betrothal to Christ! He has written the Law, and love for it, into our hearts! ~ *Dr. Sinclair Ferguson*



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If you have a February birthday or anniversary that is not posted here or is listed in error, please e-mail Walt at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner February 2022

Birthdays

Savanna W. (4)
Lavender Verity W. (11)
Tulip Sophia W. (11)
Andy L. (14)

Rita B. (14)
Jacob David K. (24)
Brodie L. (27)
Joseph F. (28)

Anniversaries

Jonathan and April F. (5)
Daniel and Diana K. (11)
Mike and Rose M. (17)

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on the cross!” (Philippians 2:4–8, NIV).

Here the attribute of glory is ascribed to all three members of the Trinity. This glory is then confirmed as a glory that is eternal. It is not something added to or acquired by Jesus at some point in His earthly life and ministry. He held this glory at the beginning and will possess it for eternity:

“Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11, NIV).



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The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.

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Please submit information to the editor by the second Sunday of each month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or it’s leadership.