Sanctifying Grace

March 22, 2015

Please join me in the Prayer to the Holy Spirit, found on page 48 in your purple worship booklet.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. …

I had a hard time with baseball as a youngster. My parents had me join a Little League team. I tried, I really did. But it all seemed futile to me. I was an outfielder but never seemed to be able to catch the ball, even when it was a hit high right over where I was. It was not until several years later that I had to see the eye doctor. It turned out that I was near-sighted and simply could not see where those balls were. With corrective lenses I was much better able to play games. Only time, along with glasses, would help me progress.

This personal story is sort of like what it means to grow in God’s grace over time. It does not happen all at once.

The title of this talk is Sanctifying Grace. My name is Pastor Stacy (Evans).

1. Over the last two days you have learned that all grace is God’s grace. We experience this one grace in many different ways:

**Prevenient grace** is God’s activity from the moment of our conception to the moment we say yes to God, and beyond.

**Justifying grace** is the gift of God by which we accept for ourselves the relationship God offers through Christ.

**The means of grace** help us celebrate and strengthen our relationship with God.

**Obstacles to grace** are attitudes and actions that hinder our relationship with God and with our neighbors. Through the cross, Jesus Christ has overcome every obstacle.

1. **Sanctifying grace is the gift of God providing the desire and the power to grow in our relationship with God.**

Just as physical birth begins the physical process of growth and maturity, so spirit birth (justifying grace/conversion/salvation/being born again) begins a process of spiritual growth toward spiritual maturity (growth in grace/sanctifying grace).

**Sanctifying grace is the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the heart and life of every believer.**

**Grace is God’s active love – toward you and me.**

**Grace is God’s love in action – toward others and toward the world that God created.**

Our response to grace involves both love and action.

1. **Sanctifying grace is the process of opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us.**

**Sanctifying grace is divine energy transforming our heart and life.** It makes us *ripe* for glory.

VISUAL : Restoring

Imparting

Perfecting

Equipping

**R = Restoring our relationship with God and others**.

We cannot earn God’s love by changing our ways. Rather, *we change our ways* *because God loves us and gives us the grace to make a fresh start*, day by day, hour by hour.

We receive God’s Spirit “bearing witness with our spirit” that we are beloved children of God (Romans 8:15-17). The knowledge of our identity as children of God forms the foundation for all other relationships. In medical terms, one could say that restoration is the process of spiritual growth and the recovery of our spiritual health, since we were once sick with sin.

Recently, I suffered a second heart attack. I did not see it coming. I had had a few signs that something might be wrong, but I was felled like a tree in the forest when it did occur. It took me two months of just putting one foot in front of the other. Then I had a test that showed that I had received some healing. I could begin the systematic process called cardiac rehabilitation. I am by no means finished with cardiac rehab at this point, but in many ways I have been restored to much better health. It takes discipline and determination. So it is also with the spiritual life.

**I = Imparting new life, new light, new strength, and a hew heart**

**Justifying grace** is the moment when **the righteousness of Christ is *imputed* to us**. That is, we are counted as “not guilty” for our sins because of all that Christ did for us on the cross: in this way we experience a change of status before God.

**Sanctifying grace** is the process by which **the righteousness of Christ is *imparted* to us**: the righteousness of Christ becomes a part of us, and we experience a change of heart.

Day by day we become more like Christ in our attitudes and actions (Ephesians 3:14-19).

Having been born again through justifying grace, we grow and mature spiritually through sanctifying grace.

When I was born I did not yet know it but I was regarded by my relatives and my parents’ friends as having the status of being part of the Evans family. It was only years later that I took for myself the identity of being an Evans. At that point what being an Evans was imparted to me. It became part of me.

**P = Perfecting us in the image of God and the likeness of Jesus Christ**

*Conversion is a process*. It happens once, but not all at once. It is a lifelong process of dying to what is evil and rising to what is good and true (meaning, Christ in us).

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to help us grow and to build up the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12-14).

As a Christian matures, her/his life displays certain qualities known as the fruit of the Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22).

*Perfecting us always involves pruning us* (John 15:2). The Bible is clear that every vine and fruit tree that bears good fruit needs pruning, and so do we. A life in grace is a life in process; some of this process is painful. Our lives need pruning so that new growth through the Holy Spirit can come.

You see, *Christian perfection is both instantaneous and progressive*. The Greek root word for *perfect* can also be translated “mature or complete.” People of all ages are “complete” in themselves: a 5 year old is complete as a 5 year old; a person of age 15 is complete as a 15 year old; a person of older years, say 65 years old, can be complete as a 65 year old. But the completeness at all those ages is different for each stage of life.

So, *to be perfected in love* is *both God’s call and God’s promise* – in Christ you can be perfect, mature, and complete today and continue to grow in grace and be more complete, more like Christ next week, next month, next year.

Sanctifying grace is the doctrine of “the more.” God has more love, more power, more peace, and more joy to give us than we have ever experienced before.

The means of grace, then, are means of growth. Sanctifying grace is our deepest joy and our greatest good in and for ourselves and for all of our relationships.

I am in the process of cleaning out many items from the house where I grew up. It turns out that my mother saved EVERYTHING. Several weeks ago I was startled to see that she had saved the first and second grade copy books that people of my age used in elementary school to learn to write cursive. Those first books showed me as a child really struggling to follow the lines of the letters. Later books showed that I had gained more skill, more control over my hands, and the letters were better formed. That was a process of “perfecting” my ability to write legibly.

**E = Equipping us to do the work of Christ in the world – to be the hands and feet of Christ.**

Sanctifying grace is the work of the Holy Spirit empowering us to see and to serve Christ in the least and the lost of our city, state, and world. Read Matthew 25:31-40 about feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, and caring for the sick and the prisoner – these are all essential activities of a Christian.

The Holy Spirit equips us with gifts for ministry (I Corinthians 12:4-5). Every person is gifted, and every gift is needed if the whole will of God is to be accomplished (Romans 12:6-8; I Corinthians 12:7-11).

The Holy Spirit equips us to obey the Great Commandments and the Great Commission.

This is the Great Commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind [and] love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37, 39).

The Great Commission is: “Go … and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-19).

1. **How do we grow in sanctifying grace?**

Growth in grace is a natural process.

**Jesus told us that a life in grace is as natural as the life of a branch connected to a healthy vine (John 5:1-12).**

We abide in Christ (through prayer)**.** Through prayer and worship we open ourselves to God: we become rooted and grounded in love and thus intimately connected Christ (John 15:4).

Christ’s word abides in us (through study). In study we give our minds to God and grow in the mind of Christ (John 15:7, 10; Philippians 2:5-8).

We bear much fruit for God’s glory (through action). In Christian action we give our hands to God and participate in the work of Christ (John 15:8). These works include two different categories:

1. *Works of mercy* (e.g., providing food, water and clothing; see Matthew 25:35 and following)
2. *Works of justice* (e.g., release of captives, freedom for the oppressed, good news for the poor; see Luke 4:18)

We open our hearts to receive grace as a divine gift.

Romans 5:5 says, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” We do not earn or deserve God’s love; we simply open our hearts, through grace, to receive it.

We share grace in the body of Christ (through participating in community). Through participation in the gathered community and small accountability groups, we receive strength and nurture – just like a branch receives life from the vine (John 15:5). *By being part of the body of Christ we come alive in him (Ephesians 2:5), learn what the mind of Christ is (Philippians 2:1-12), and we help one another remain rooted and grounded in God’s love (Ephesians 3:14-19).*

**Through being connected in a deep way with the divine energy that flows from Christ, we can respond by fully participating in the mission of Christ in the whole world. Life in God’s grace becomes our daily walk with God.**

1. **Closing**

For three days we have prayed for the Holy Spirit to come and fill us with the fire of God’s love. Over these three days we have learned that:

**God wants a relationship with us even more than we want a relationship with God.**

**God’s role in sanctifying grace is to fill us with the Holy Spirit and fire. Our role is to open our hearts and walk in the Spirit with Christ every day.**

Small groups are an important means of sanctifying grace for Christ’s disciples: from the time that Jesus called the first disciples to this very day, small groups are an essential means of grace to keep us growing.

In the Emmaus movement, small accountability groups are called group reunions or share groups. When we meet together in a small group we follow the order of sharing found on the group reunion card which you will learn about later. Group reunions are the Emmaus community’s primary means of support on the journey toward spiritual maturity.

All of us who have been through an Emmaus Walk, whether this one or one many years ago, have the opportunity to grow through sanctifying grace. I give you the challenge to do just that!

De Colores!