

## Deep-rooted Homosexuality and the Power of Grace

### 7.4 Freedom for holiness [February 24, 2013]

Because God sets sinners free from sin for righteousness, the truly free are able to grow in holiness for the glory of God as **slaves of righteousness** (Rom 6.18). However, both Scripture and experience testify to the challenges with temptation and sin that Christians face continually. Still, hope abides because sanctification is certain and deliverance from homoeroticism is sure.

#### I. Growth in sanctification is certain

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul gives a framework by which to interpret the temptations of converts given their past enslavement in sin.<sup>1</sup> He gives a threefold encouragement for the journey ahead in the time between the comings of Christ: **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God** (6.11b). 1) First, you were washed, cleansed, and therefore forgiven. 2) Second, you were made holy. Coupled with Romans 6.22, this means that in a definitive separation from your sinful past, you have been put on a new path of holiness that leads to eternal life: **now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life**. 3) Third, you were justified; you were declared righteous by God as Judge in anticipation of the open acknowledgment and acquittal that you will receive on the Day of Judgment.<sup>2</sup> These things are true because of the authority of Christ and by the work of the Holy Spirit: **in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God** (6.11b). Therefore what happened in the break with sin is decisive (**you were sanctified**, 1 Cor 6.11), and it leads to a new path of progress in sanctification because, Paul says, this sanctification has an end, which is eternal life (Rom 6.22).<sup>3</sup>

Now we should emphasize that certainty applies not only to the redeemed sinner's attainment of perfect holiness in the blessing of eternal life, but also to the process of sanctification that *God will complete* according to His faithfulness: **Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely...**<sup>24</sup> **He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it** (1 Thess 5.23-24).<sup>4</sup> As we have already seen in 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us that our Lord Jesus will faithfully sustain us to the end by the same power by which He called us into fellowship (1 Cor 1.7-9).

#### II. Deliverance from homoeroticism is sure

Therefore, because God's efficacious call causes the break with sin and produces lifelong growth in holiness, we must conclude that deliverance from the sin of same-sex sex is sure. We

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<sup>1</sup> The text implies that some of the Corinthian Christians were so dominated by particular sins that they were known and identified by them. One example sin among other sexual sins is same-sex sex.

<sup>2</sup> *WLC*, 90.

<sup>3</sup> Its end implies its process; being fruitful indicates progress in sanctification until the ultimate fruit of eternal life is attained.

<sup>4</sup> Some parallels with "by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6.11b) are: God will surely do it, 1 Thess 5.24; He that has begun the work in you will complete it, Phil 1.9; He is working in you to will and to do of His good pleasure, Phil 2.13b. In the language of "lust" it is a great comfort to know that the Spirit lusts against the flesh, Gal 5.16-19, so that we cannot live in sin as we formerly did; what advances we make in holiness are by the sovereign working of the Spirit in spiritual renewal. The indicative is that the Spirit leads those that are not under the law and over whom the law of sin and death no longer has dominion (Gal 5 with Rom 6); therefore, our duty is to walk in the Spirit knowing the promise that we will not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal 5.16); knowing the Spirit's lustful drive that prevents us from doing the things we want to do (Gal 5.17). See *Sovereignty of the Spirit in Spiritual Renewal*.

have fallen from being the image of God male and female in holiness of the truth. Now we are being restored in that image having been renewed with a new man created after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness (Eph 4.23-24).<sup>5</sup> We have been and are being restored. *We have been restored* from carrying out the desires of the body (Eph 2.3), from practicing impurity (Eph 4.19), which includes same-sex sin (Rom 6.19; 1.24), and from corruption through deceitful desires (Eph 4.22). Moreover, this is a process in which *we are being restored* (Col 3.10), being renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator (Col 3.5). So, progressive renewal moves us away from sexual immorality, which includes homosexuality among other sexual sins.<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, what God has done, is doing and what God certainly promises to do is expressed by Paul in the language of the indicative, which is a statement of fact. It is a fact that God has made sinners into saints or holy ones, He will continue to grow them in holiness, and He will perfect them. At no point along the way is this new life explained by Paul to be dependent on man in any sense. As bond slaves to sin, we were unable to submit ourselves to God, but now as those released from sin, we are on a path of new obedience that is the product of God's faithful and powerful working in us. At the same time we must also take note of Paul's language of the imperative, which is the giving of authoritative command or exhortation. As Ridderbos puts it, "...the new life is not to be understood as a transcendent stream of life that pours into man from the outside...and whereby there would no longer be any place for human responsibility and decision."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it is extremely important to note how "the imperative rests on the indicative and that this order is not reversible. For in each case [where Paul speaks of them

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<sup>5</sup> In conditions subsequent to the fall, the original design that a human family be produced through marital intimacy is now altered in such a way that that design is still realized, according to God's will, though some marriages may not result in offspring (with barrenness as a reality) and some people may properly remain single (with the duty of celibacy). Regarding singleness, Hays speaks of the demythologizing of our cultural obsession with sex: we can live lives of freedom, joy, and service without sexual relations; the celibate life is commended; in Scripture sex appears as a matter of secondary importance. Granted, the sexual drive has a valuable place but it must be constrained "either through marriage or through disciplined abstinence" (*Moral Vision*, 390-91). Moreover, "Sexual gratification is not a sacred right, and celibacy is not a fate worse than death" (401). Thus, "The New Testament tells us the truth about ourselves as sinners and as God's sexual creatures: marriage between man and woman is the normative form for human sexual fulfillment, and homosexuality is one among many tragic signs that we are a broken people" (400). See his brief yet comprehensive treatment of the few but decisive references to homosexuality in the Bible (381-389) and his conclusion: "Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval...The biblical witness against homosexual practices is univocal" (389).

<sup>6</sup> Thus, all those who are on the sin lists are people marked in their bondage to sin by the grip of some particular sin. They are slaves to sin generally and to some particular sin in which they found themselves utterly helpless. Granted, this needs to be qualified in some way because persons in slavery to sin may exchange the dominant practice of one sin for another without being washed, sanctified, and justified. In 1 Cor 6, persons in the grip of sin, practiced some particular sin, and their release from the bondage of sin gave them release from the bondage of that particular sin. To be reformed by the substitution of one sin for another, say by giving up adultery due to social pressures, but taking up pornography, involves a cessation of overt and identifiable adultery. Thus, being in the grip of sin does not necessarily mean that it is impossible for a drunkard, for example, to be rehabilitated without saving grace. Of course, such rehabilitation is difficult. Thus, it is conceivable that those who practice same-sex sex may reach a point in life when they cease that practice. They may or may not experience a change in their desire for same-sex sex (they may or may not continue to practice it in their minds), but if they abandon homosexuality, they can no longer be identified by other human beings as people guilty of same-sex sin. It is possible, though much experience testifies otherwise, that the exchange of one sin for another may affect even the orientation toward same-sex sex. This does not mean that they have escaped the bondage of sin; it means that sin has taken another form in the rule of their lives, whatever that form may be. Thus, the direction of the Cor text is that persons who were x, y, or z are no longer such in their practice and habit of life because they have been washed, sanctified, and justified. Something happened (an indicative) so that they are no longer characterized in their bondage in sin by some particular sin. What happened is not something they did but something that happened to them. They were set free from sin by being washed, sanctified, and justified. This put them on the path of freedom and holiness.

<sup>7</sup> *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* by H. Ridderbos (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 253.

together] the imperative follows the indicative by way of conclusion” (thus, work out your salvation *because* God works in you to will and do His will, Phil 2.12).<sup>8</sup>

What about the struggles that person’s formerly in the grip of same-sex sex may have?

Because of freedom from bondage in sin by union with Christ, when converted, a person that practiced the sin of same-sex sex becomes someone who *used to* practice it; he or she is no longer known as such a person. Therefore, a Christian who was once dominated by this sin cannot properly identify himself as such any longer, and such a Christian has no rightful place in his vocabulary for saying, “I cannot conquer this or any other sin; I cannot free myself from its rule; I cannot escape the temptation to live this way under its authority over me.” No free man can say, “I cannot escape the clutches of x, y, or z.”<sup>9</sup> As J. Edwards states it, “Change of nature is an abiding thing: if one returns to the old and former ways, he is a dog that has returned to its vomit, a swine to its mud; washed, the swinish nature remains,” however, “a cleanly nature may be soiled but it remains.”<sup>10</sup> The soiling of a washed nature means that although the war is won, many battles may be lost along the way. The battle with past and deep-rooted sinful patterns may be extremely difficult. In this regard, Edwards makes the following empathetic comment, “Allowances must be made for the natural temper, which conversion does not entirely eradicate: those sins which a man by his natural constitution was most inclined to before his conversion, he may be most apt to fall into still.”<sup>11</sup> Edwards then makes an important counterbalancing observation: “But yet conversion will make a great alteration even with respect to these sins” and the alteration takes the form of enmity: “he may be still in most danger of these sins, yet they shall no longer have dominance over him, nor will they any more be properly his character... *repentance does in some respects especially turn a man against his own iniquity*, that wherein he has been most guilty and has chiefly dishonored God.”<sup>12</sup> So, conversion involves “Turning from sin to God, not just restrained from sin but turned unto holiness and now an enemy to sin, as he was formerly an enemy to God.”<sup>13</sup> To be sure, being “against his own iniquity” does not remove all temptation and sin, but it does draw a deep line in the sand for spiritual battle.

So, how is this battle with sin to be fought? To that we now turn in our final section for a few foundational answers.

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<sup>8</sup> *Outline*, Ridderbos, 254-55. See also, Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 241-259 where he gives perspective on the indicative and imperative in the teaching of Jesus: “Jesus not only posits the doing of God’s will as a condition and a preparation for entry into the kingdom, but also preaches it as a gift belonging to the salvation of the kingdom proclaimed by him” (246). So, “It is the salvation of the Lord for his people that *he makes them different human beings and writes his commandments in their hearts*, and, because of this, obedience to God’s will can be effectively asked” (247, italics mine). Thus, Edwards can say, “The transformation continues to the end of life, until it is brought to perfection in glory,” *Religious Affections*, 3.7, 270.

<sup>9</sup>...the cross marks the end of the old life under the power of sin (Rom 6.1-4). Therefore, no one in Christ is locked into the past or into a psychological or biological determinism (*Moral Vision*, Hays, 393). Also, God promises the way of escape from every temptation, 1 Cor 10.13.

<sup>10</sup> *Religious Affections*, 3.7, 268

<sup>11</sup> *Affections*, 268; consider how relevant this is to us all!

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 269

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 267