

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

B0910 – March 8, 2009 – The Means & Dimensions Of Sanctification

We want to go into two more areas of sanctification. We looked at the phases of sanctification; there are three phases; positional - which relates to the Abrahamic Covenant, experiential - which relates not to the Abrahamic but to the Mosaic and ultimate - which we're reserving for later. We also looked at the aim of sanctification which is not what most people think, which is to get sin out of my life but that can't be the aim because sanctification was required before the Fall. Before sin entered, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the Book of Hebrews is said to have been sanctified, so yes, now sin is involved but the aim of sanctification relates to something else, namely learning loyalty to God through his word. Now we want to go into the means of sanctification and this gets into a discussion of law and grace. To get into the problem and how we solve the problem we want to visualize any situation in life. Take your pick, and look at that from the perspective of an unbeliever who only has his flesh as a base of operation as a way of handling the problem versus how a believer who operates on the truths of Creation and the Fall resolves the same problem. If there's a problem then obviously somewhere embedded in that problem is the issue of evil, there's frustration, and immediately tactics emerge to cope with the problem. Let's look at the tools, common to all of us, we have to work out the problem. As human beings made in God's image we know that a person has choice. Remember the attributes of man and one of those is human choice. He has a conscience, he has the capacity to love, he has knowledge, he has some strength, energy, we have space, we take up an amount of space, we have a sense of time, we are image bearers of God. We have all these attributes. Now, with the Fall each of us is marred and distorted because of sin. And now Mr. Unbeliever is faced with a problem and all he has to operate on is the flesh. We're analyzing this person through the lens of Scripture; this would not be his

analysis. So we're getting back to presuppositions again, they're inescapable, so we're looking at their situation from the perspective of God's word. They have a problem, evil is involved. They have these tools. What are some expressions of these tools that people normally use to cope with the problem? How do they shield themselves from the pain? Anyone have any suggestions? Escapisms/Anesthetizations?

So far all these mentioned are escapisms and are ways of dealing with a problem perhaps emphasizing passivity. What about an aggressive person, a person who tends to charge right at the problem, what tools do they have to handle it? Maybe they use wealth to solve the problem, maybe they use power or influence. They try to manipulate people and that basically shields them from the problem. Those are the two basic strategies; you can try to escape via passive approaches or you can try to escape via aggressive approaches. Each of these mirrors something we've talked about earlier in the class. The passive tends to be the *licentious* approach and the aggressive tends toward the *legalistic* approach. Paganism basically always deals with problems in one or the other way and they sort of rock between these two modes. We can't get too much on a high horse here because we're fallen to and we can operate in the flesh, so if you look at yourself you'll see these tendencies. If you look at other people, at organizations, at whole nations of people you'll see the tendencies.

One of the greatest examples of licentiousness was the hippie culture of the 1960's. That rebellion was a profound rebellion against authority. It emphasized the individual, the individual's right to rebel and the result was chaos. They were fighting against the powers; legalisms that had, in their opinion, oppressed their rights, and in part they were right. Their solution was to generate chaos and disorder to undo the powers that be. The problem is after awhile people get tired of this approach. What happens after awhile to the licentious person, everything starts falling apart, I want some order around here, it's just a big mess. And that's what happened, they saw the destructiveness of chaos and most later didn't buy into it. So they swung back over here. So it's just like a pendulum swinging back and forth, back and forth, and at any given point you're going one direction or the other and you can never balance out.

To contrast, let's say we have the same problem, same evil involved but this time it's a believer and we want to ask, "What tools does a believer have to solve the problem? This time, now we have God's character, He's in the open box, and we have all these attributes to work with. Let's walk through them and see what difference it makes. If God isn't there, and the Christian faith is a bunch of bologna, there is nothing outside of you and me that correspond to anything like sovereignty. What you ultimately have out there, in the universe, is a mystery of some sort, but that's chaos so you invent this thing called Fate, with a capital F to bring back some semblance of order. It isn't a person because if you say Fate is a person then you're back to a personal God and we can't have that, it might interfere with our lifestyle.

From the Christian point of view we have God who is sovereign, which means God controls whatsoever comes to pass. Nothing happens without His permission. What's a well-known OT passage that supports this idea? That yes, there are forces in history, many of them dark forces, but they're not just doing whatever they want to do. They have to go before the God of the universe first and get the permission. I'm thinking of one where Satan himself is just itching to tear someone's life to shreds but he has to go get permission from God first. Job, chapters 1 and 2 is a classic instance in Scripture that shows, "Hey, not just anything can happen, there are limits placed on what can happen and those limits are imposed by the sovereign will of God." That brings some comfort because now we know that whatever happens is under His control. That cuts the problem down a little bit.

Let's think about another attribute, take God's omniscience. God knows all things actual and possible. Put that together with sovereignty and how are we going to deal with the problem? When we face these problems we don't know why they're happening, we don't know all the details, you can read the whole Bible and we still don't know all the reasons why. So what difference does it make if I have these attributes and Mr. Unbeliever doesn't have these attributes? I, at least in my heart, am convinced that there's a personal sovereign God behind the universe, that there is a reason for this happening, even though I don't know all the details of why it's happening? Mr. Unbeliever doesn't have that. Isn't that a difference. But what difference does it make? Neither of us know why it's happening? How does it help us? Just looking at these two attributes we can have peace because a) we know God allowed this to come into our lives and He's got it under control and b) we can

trust the character of our God. We don't get peace by Him detailing it all out to us. I let this come in because I want to develop that in your life. I did that because I'm working this thing over here with the angels. Do you see the difference? We're not saying that God shares all of His thoughts with us; we're saying that He has shared enough of His thoughts that He considers it sufficient, and from there we just trust His character. Mr. Unbeliever insists, "No, you show me the whole plan and then I'll sign off on it if I'm satisfied." God says "No, I'll give you enough information, I'll show you enough of My character to where you can trust Me with all the details, that I'm really doing this for the good, but I want you to trust Me, that's the program." See the difference?

That introduces another attribute; we have a God who is loving. Or we can say it this way, God is good and whatever God is doing is good. Now those three attributes start helping us get around the problem. What are we doing? We're containing the problem; this is damage control, that's what's going on here. Satan loves to knock us off balance in a problem so we forget everything we ever learned and react emotionally just like an unbeliever. What God wants us to do is to look to Him. But we have to have content, you just can't make it on a feeling you had two weeks ago. I felt the Spirit or something. That isn't going to cut it, not when you're really in a state of shock over some problem that happens in life, how you felt at youth camp isn't going to help anything. And if you're the kind of person that goes on the basis of your feelings, then you're going to be doubly depressed, because now the feeling is gone.

We have God is sovereign, God is love, God is omniscient. Let's think of some more attributes that are the archetype behind these. Here we have omnipotence. What does that do to the problem? Doesn't that cut it down to size? Most problems seem so big to us because compared to our strength they overwhelm us, but God is omnipotent, therefore He can handle it. Sometimes a problem can just completely wear you out, you become weak, what is omnipotence saying? That God never gets tired? That's more helpful often than saying God can do anything. Yeah, yeah, I know that. But saying God never gets tired, there's something about that that connects to my situation because I am tired. So think of your own phrases for these attributes. Sometimes we struggle with omniscience, something happens in life and "Hey God, do you see what's happening down here." There's a little protection

clause against that arrogance by framing His omniscience this way, God never learned anything. He's not up in heaven accumulating the latest intelligence data about what's happening in your life. He already has all the data and He's not surprised. Try to phrase them in non-religious ways because if you get too religious about it everybody tunes out. That's why when I deal with the attributes I try to get less technical and more down to earth.

Now we come to conscience, because in this situation there's evil. We have a God who is holy, and this introduces a tension, because the frustration with evil is that no matter what our awareness of God is in a situation, even if we deny He exists, somehow He's always there to blame for the evil. Did you ever notice that? He's always the blame for the evil, not a single thanks for the good, but let there be one thing that's wrong and it's God's fault. So let's deal with that, because that's embedded in every problem, the problem of evil. God is holy, so how are we going to reconcile that with the evil? How should we reason? First of all, if we go back to Creation was evil a problem? Was the environment a problem? Before we get on a high horse fussing about all the evil just remember, God didn't create an evil world. Everything was very good. What happened? The Fall. Who did that? We did, we're the problem, not God. We brought the sin and evil into the universe. That's helpful, because if you're not a Christian you don't believe that. If you're not a Christian you can't say that, you have to say finally that evil is part and parcel of the universe, part of what ever has been and will be. On a non-Biblical basis you never escape evil, you can commit physical suicide which is what many people do that see this or you can commit intellectual suicide as existentialism, New Age and mysticism has done but you don't have any real answers.

So we just wanted to review the differences here and how powerful these truths are when they work together in practical day to day problems. We have a vast wealth of resources at our fingertips in these attributes of God.

Having introduced these differences we want to go on to the **means of sanctification**. How do we grow spiritually? Obviously it requires faith, trusting in God, trusting in what God says. But if we're going to trust what do we have to have? Content, there has to be something to believe before I can believe. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. We've

been through the doctrine of revelation at Mt Sinai, and if you'd been there you could have recorded the voice of God. And that gives content to believe. The content we want to discuss first is law and then we want to bring in grace; two terms very important to a balanced doctrine of sanctification are law and grace, because we tend to swing between legalism and licentiousness. If we go to legalism we distort grace and law one way; if we go to licentiousness we distort law and grace another way, and both of these are distortions of the true biblical norm. So obviously what we want to do is to come back to this and say how we can operate so we keep these two in balance. We come back to the law. Let's look first at law; it's the easier of the two. The way I'm using law here is in a very general way, just the revealed will of God, I'm not singling out the first five books of the OT or anything like that. Just what does God say in the OT imperatives, the dos and don'ts of the Mosaic Law? I want to keep you away from the NT at this time because it's easier to see in the OT, the picture is easy, the Ten Commandments, written in stone. We have a law; is there any question about what the law says? No question about what the law says, it's very simple. What happens when we distort the law? How is the law distorted? What do we say when the law is done away with, when the law is minimized. The Greek word for law is *nomos*, and *anti* is against, and that's where we get the word antinomian, against the law. What is antinomianism? It's licentiousness. What antinomianism tries to do is negate the law with grace; it tries to say that the law goes away because of grace.

Let's think about that, forget about the words and go back to these two covenants. Do the do's and don'ts of the Mosaic Covenant given to the nation of Israel go away because God made a promise to Abraham? Which came first? The promise to Abraham? What is the foundation of that promise? Grace is the foundation of that. When God spoke on Mt. Sinai and He revealed the Mosaic Law code, what were the first words out of His mouth? "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt," then he says now I want you to do this, this, this and not that, that, that. So the foundation of the law code is grace. The law is not against grace; the law is there because of grace. If you think of these two covenants in time it clicks with you, because the Abrahamic Covenant sets up the Mosaic Law and is administered as a means to the goal that the Abrahamic promises. The law is a training device, it's a pedagogical revelation of what God's will is, it's to give us a challenge to believe or disbelieve in every area of life, remember how

comprehensive the law was, it dealt with lending, diet, humane treatment of animals, and so on. Are we going to trust God over all these areas?

Let's try to summarize this point. "Elimination of all law in this general sense is antinomianism pure and simple. Antinomianism supports licentiousness in all its forms. There are various versions of this so I'm trying to show you that this tendency is very widespread and it crops up in very unusual areas so watch it. "It can manifest itself in a false mysticism and religious emotionalism where 'something more' than God's own inerrant Word is insisted upon." Does that sound familiar? Of course it does. That's not to say, obviously, it's a relationship with the Lord that counts and He's the God of Scripture. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the idea that when God spoke to Israel and He outlined these do's and don'ts which were His... He's defining a relationship, remember we saw the Father-son relationship, inside that relationship He's outlining what He wants.

Now if some Israelite is sitting there and says "Well, that doesn't really turn me on, that's not a real relationship, I have to go beyond that." What's he saying? What do you mean go beyond that, how do you go beyond that when God comes to you on a mountain and He tells you what He wants you to do? How do you go beyond that? That's what I'm talking about, it's not wrong to have emotions and feelings, but they've got to be ruled by revelation. That's the point. They have to be in subjection to the revealed will of God. That's all we're saying, we're not saying this particular emotion is wrong or that particular emotion is wrong, we're just saying a general principle, that you'll tend to find antinomianism in these religious areas. But religious areas are not the only place.

"Elimination of law creates a false interpretation of grace..." One error always begets another one. If you eliminate law, and talk endlessly about grace, grace, grace then what content does grace have? Grace then becomes a laxity in the holiness of God. That's what happens. There are other areas where antinomianism crops up. "It also manifests itself intellectually in the various forms of irrationalism—undisciplined speculation and existential depression." Undisciplined speculation, people that just like to flirt with ideas, they love to express the imagination of their heart, the problem isn't imagination, the problem is the content injected into the imagination is coming from a carnal heart. There's no discipline there, no standard

emanating from God's character and His word, it's just loose. Existential depression, those of you who read Kierkegaard, Sartre or Camus in the 20th century are aware that the theme of existentialism, the fact there's no meaning, no standards, everything is relative; just do whatever. We are a profoundly antinomian... profoundly antinomian century! Nobody wants to be bound by the Scripture. Watch the talk shows, some dear Christian on the talk show says one thing about absolutes and everybody pounces on him or her. Why? Because there's a hatred... a *hatred* for law, i.e. Biblically based law. They always substitute another law, you know, I was born that way, I can't help it, it's in my genes or something so I can do whatever I want because I can't help it.

So antinomianism shows up intellectually. Furthermore, "Antinomianism underlies the frantic search for happiness seen in drugs, sex, and musically-induced ecstasy." The frantic search for happiness is a frantic search because they're not in a relationship with God. So when men aren't happy it's like a vacuum is created and they suck in everything that's around them in order to fill the vacuum that only God can fill, therefore we bring these other things in. The answer is that we are to be taught.

Let's cover 2 Tim 3 because there are some neat things in there about the role of Scripture. We're talking about the means of sanctification, and Scripture plays a vital role. We have the preposterous notion that we can translate the Bible differently. Now we have the TNIV which is the gender-neutral translation of the NIV. What a sick thought. Do you know what the gender-neutral translation of the NIV ultimately is doing? It's very dangerous, very dangerous and is promoted by the largest evangelical church in the United States. It's no liberal thing that's going on; it's evangelicals that are cranking this one out. That's why I've resorted to being a Fundamentalist, I can't any longer identify with that movement, and they've slid off center from biblical Christianity. What gender-neutrality amounts to is that when I see passages of Scripture that bother me, then the way I can get around that is to say it's cultural, so what these translators do is take all the gender specific vocabulary out of the Scripture because that's all cultural and now we're safe again. It's just licentiousness. Well if you can do that, guess what I can do? If you want to play games with gender vocabulary, let's go through Scripture and pick out some more vocabulary and play the same little game. I say morality in society is just cultural. What are you going to do about that, stop

the game, you can't stop the game, you started it, there's nobody here to blow the whistle to stop the game because I want to keep playing it. You gave me a wonderful out, I can get rid of any Scripture I want to, all I have to do is declare it culturally relative. Do you see what a Pandora's Box you opened? But they don't want to do that.

For example, if you're going to say that gender-specific passages are culturally relative, that gives me an idea that as a man I can go out and mistreat all women because the idea that men should respect women is just cultural, they treated women nicely back then, and they honored them, they were mothers, guardians, and looked upon as saviors, so now I don't have to do that because that's culturally relative. So what are you going to say to that one? Don't start the game unless you're willing to play to the final whistle. That's what's happening right now, we've got a bunch of people in the evangelical camp that suddenly want to play a new game, and these poor guys don't even realize what their opening the door for.

2 Tim 3:16, look at what Scripture is profitable for. Scripture is the do's and don'ts, now it's more than that, yes. But right now we're just looking at the role of Scripture in the sense of the Mosaic Law Code. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching," what else, not just for teaching, but "for reproof," there's a function of sanctification, that's how the law is, it reproves us, "for correction, for training in righteousness," it corrects us, and it trains us in righteousness. So does law have a role in sanctification? It sure does. It's a pedagogical training device.

Let's go back to the top circle and the Abrahamic Covenant. What's the basis of the law? Grace in the Abrahamic Covenant. Did God have to Call Abraham out and make promises? He didn't have to say "Abraham, go forth from your land and your country to a land I will show you." He could have just said "Screw the human race." Suppose He had done that. So the fact that God reached out and kept the lines of communication open is due solely to His grace. So is grace necessary? You bet, because if grace isn't there we're not even on speaking terms. We've got to maintain the speaking terms, and you remember we already talked about some of the things we've seen, how at Mt. Sinai He was giving the law, what was happening down below, party time, and God still dealt with these people, Moses still made intercession for them to sustain them. So grace sustains.

Now, we want to go to the other extreme, “Elimination of grace is the opposite pagan tendency,” this is the legalistic route. We went back to this problem set, we said the aggressive person will tend toward works, and when we go through works whose works are they? Our works. If it’s going to be our works what value will we put on our works, high value or low value? High value, so now we’re attributing righteousness to our works. If we value our works on a scale like this, what are we in essence really saying about our capabilities ethically? That we fallen creatures independently of grace, can get the job done, we can produce righteousness. What kind of an arrogant situation is this? So, “To assert that God’s grace is no longer needed for us to meet His righteousness is to assert that His righteousness is within man’s reach.” But if His righteousness is within our reach, what don’t we need that Christ did for us? His death on the cross. That’s not necessary is it, if we really can be righteous, isn’t that a waste, so haven’t we really wasted the whole cross of Christ here? Do you see where these errors lead? You start down this path and before you know it your on the edge of a cliff some place. Ideas have consequences.

“Elimination of grace creates a false interpretation of law where law is seen as a legitimate product of the finite human intellect—man now defines good and evil like God, placing man at the center of all things, man at the helm of the universe. The battle is on to attain security—knocking down Jericho’s walls and stopping the sun as it were—independently of the Creator. We can do it all by ourselves. Legalism destroys dependency upon God by destroying all gratitude for what He needs to do for us.” Think about that. If you think you can do it all you’re tromping all over His grace. So by eliminating grace you eliminate the need to rely upon Him and that eliminates all thanksgiving in the Christian life. Now I just pat myself on the back. Boy, what a great job I’ve done, I did it all by myself and I’m so strong. How arrogant, how unthankful. What, by the way, is the barometer of how well we’re going in our Christian life? How much thankfulness do we find in our heart? That’s a good barometer. If we’re thankful for what He has done, we probably are okay in the area of grace. And when we’re going through life forgetting to give thanks, we’re falling short in our practice of understanding His grace.

Furthermore, once you get rid of grace the primary motivation in living a faithful life before God is erased. What happens on a secular pagan basis to

the guy that's aggressive in his works, he legislates all these new laws to generate security, what finally happens? He runs out of gas, he gets tired, doesn't work any more. Then to get relief from this he swings over here. "It manifests itself in 'self-help technique'" you know I'm angry, I'm depressed this just isn't working so again I bypass grace, pick up a book on anger management and try to once again do it myself. Or it manifests itself in "the frantic search for 'self-esteem.'" My, my, how much we've heard about that. Oh we've got to increase little Johnny's self-esteem, that's the problem. Do you realize what "self-esteem" is a code word for in the Scripture? You can find it in Isa 14, one of the creatures that had the highest self-esteem, you can read all about him. He had a high self-esteem, just read the passage and find out who said it. "Intellectually, it shows up in the various forms of rationalism—in the philosophical and socio-political spheres—that seek to build a utopian civilization through man's efforts alone." Example Communism. We can do it ourselves, we can build the perfect society. Marx and Engels proposed intellectually how to do it, they infected university campus after university campus with it and it's been rigorously applied ever since. What's been the result? Has it brought about a utopia? All a false legalism can produce is oppression. There you have it, those are the two bases.

What do we say then? Going back to our position, we owe everything to our position, He has saved us, He has justified us, He is giving us all kinds of things through the Lord Jesus Christ and they're all of His grace, and they did not come to us because we were such goody-goody people down here and we did everything He told us to do. As a matter of fact, He cut us out of the whole picture because Jesus Christ did it, and He didn't ask for our help. All we would have done is screwed it up.

We've dealt with the position, we've dealt with the area of experience of obeying God, submitting to Him, and then we've dealt with the grace issue and the law. Both grace and law mirror those two relationships. Grace tends to show an emphasis on the Abrahamic Covenant, God's sovereign grace, and then down below in the Mosaic Law what He tells us to do and He establishes authority. Another point about this balance is if you don't have law, you don't have authority. Remember, what is the image of God on Mt. Sinai when He speaks law? He's a king, and He's establishing His reign, He's establishing His authority and His authority is expressed in the law. So in an antinomian

age, guess what goes away? Respect. Isn't that true! Where is respect today? The kids are a bunch of brats. Never say they're sorry, never say excuse me. Why? Because they've rejected external authority.

Let's go to one more thing, briefly, another tool for thinking in terms of sanctification, and that is the **dimensions of sanctification**. I want to show something that might help distinguish some concepts of sanctification that get confused. We distinguished between position and experience as the first two phases of sanctification. We also want to distinguish between growth and at any given moment we're obeying or disobeying what we know of God, what I call the existential present. At any given moment I'm obeying Him or I'm rebelling against Him, I'm walking by faith or I'm not trusting Him. It's one or the other at any given moment; we're back and forth all day long. But if you map this out as God works in our lives, hopefully we see a growth curve. This process takes time, this is the long-term growth, there's a lot of time involved here, years and years of time because there's got to be this opportunity to make this decision, and that opportunity to make that decision, hundreds and hundreds of decisions go into this long-term growth dimension. So you want to keep these two dimensions in balance; existential present and long-term growth are both important. The biblical terminology that stresses the existential present is when we say are you in fellowship or out of fellowship, are you in the light or out of the light, are you filled by the Spirit or not, are you walking by the Spirit or not? These are all related to this existential dimension. But that's not the only dimension, some Christians have committed the error of reductionism, bring sanctification down to this solely, that's not right.

If that's the case then what do you do with 1 Tim 3, the requirements for the office of elder? In that passage it says you shouldn't appoint a neophyte to the office of elder, a new believer. Is that saying that new believers are always out of fellowship? Certainly not. Someone can trust the Lord and in the next five minutes be in fellowship and obeying, so it's not implying anything about this person's fellowship. It's simply saying they haven't been in a relationship with God for a long time and they haven't grown much. When you get into the growth over time you have to be careful, you can have ups and downs, periods of growth because you're taking in the word and you're consistent and other times you get out of it, you try to float on your own and you obviously decline. So that line is not a constant uphill climb.

Peter is a good example of that in the NT. Up to the last moments before the cross he's having problems, and we identify with that. How long has he been with the Lord? As long, or longer, than any of the other disciples. Has he grown? Yes, he's grown. Does he still have sin problems? Sure he has. So the balance that we're trying to get here is that growth doesn't immunize us against sin, it does help curb that but you're still going to sin. Growth takes a long time and this is why you have to be patient with people. We're not all on the same growth chart, some of us grow faster, and some of us grow slower. And we can't get too condemnatory of people, "What's wrong with them, when are they ever going to learn, I told you so." And this is dangerous because you're taking your level of sanctification and saying, "Hey, why aren't you up here with me? You're missing the mark." You don't do that to a new believer. Give them some time and some space to grow. If they totally bug out and they're not in the word then they're obviously going to have a problem. They can't make themselves walk by faith, which only grows as we take in the word. On the existential side, if a person gets out of it and starts going into spiritual depression they need some help getting out of that, confess the sin, repent, get back on the road. But it takes time, spiritual growth doesn't occur overnight and there are no shortcuts. It takes diligence but it's expected that we grow.

We've covered these areas of sanctification and we'll just stop at this point because I want to spend a lot of time with the enemies of sanctification, and then have a review the last time. For next time read Ps 35:1-8; 58:6-11; 59:1-6; 83:9-18; 109:6-20; 137:7-9. These are imprecatory Psalms and I want you to read through these slowly and struggle with them some, next week we'll come back and address them in light of sanctification.

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