

JOHN 2:13-17
SINNER TO SAINT!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to John chapter 2 as we continue our in-depth study of the Gospel of John.

In our last study we saw the first miracle that Jesus did. It was done at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee and Jesus turned water into wine.

And as we have seen, wine was a picture of joy and we saw in our last study of the joy we have in Jesus.

I also think that this is a picture of someone who comes to saving faith and you will see how that all plays out with our study this morning. They do go hand-in-hand!

And as we closed last time, we read in John 2:11-12, **“This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.”**

After this miracle of changing water to wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, Jesus and His disciples traveled to Capernaum, a distance of about 16 miles and maybe a day’s journey.

Capernaum becomes the home base you might say for the ministry of Jesus, and we are told that at this time they did not stay many days in Capernaum, but it is very possible that His family, Mary and his brothers and sisters moved from Nazareth to Capernaum.

And as we will see this morning, Jesus and His men travel from Capernaum to Jerusalem, about 80 miles. The journey may have taken some four days or so if they traveled 20 miles a day.

Let me share this with you because it will lead us to what we will be looking at in our study here in John chapter 2. And what I want to focus on is what is going on in the church today because this is what Jesus addresses here in John chapter 2. It is an interesting article. Let me show you what I mean.

We are told,

Well, America, we are becoming less religious. As the millennial generation moves into adulthood more and more members are displaying less religious fervor. They are sick as business as usual and find the church to be defined by hypocrisy.

About 30 percent of people believe they can find God outside of the church and 20 percent reported feeling that God is missing from church, Barna research found. . . .

Just as followers started getting out of the legalistic churches, legalism was replaced with a focus on church growth. With this, secularism crept into the sanctuaries. What started as an ideological focus of *growth has turned the church into a cash cow*. What blinders are we wearing? Where did we miss it?

George Barna, the founder of the Barna Research Group, unearthed that success is one of the reasons for the mess the church is in.

There are 5 categories that summed it up when pastors were asked: ***“How do they know that their church is successful?”*** The answer was ***“Attendance, giving, number of programs, number of staff, and square footage.”***

[Let me interject here. What I want you to see is that the number of people coming to the church, the amount of money that the church brings in, how many programs you have, how many staff people do you have, and how big is the church building is now the focus. Nothing about growing in holiness, teaching the Word of God, people using the gifts that God has entrusted to them, missionary work, helping others, but it is about how we look and not what we are called to do!]

. . . People are demanding better worship, entertaining sermons, and teachings that are very non-confrontational. Messages on sin are not popular, and so leaders have scaled back.

We've become focused on greed and made man a focus, not God. Another reason organized religion is more divisive is it does not unify. Some believe that no one religion has it 100 percent correct. Some shared that they can pray anywhere, and don't need a domination. Other explained that they will pray to God in their own way, since many of the religious do not live by example. Also formal religion makes many people uneasy.

[Again, look at what he just said. Yes, the church is focused on greed, we see that. Just to give you a few examples: Kenneth Copeland is worth 760 million dollars, Benny Hinn: Net Worth \$42 Million, Joel Osteen: Net Worth \$40 Million, Creflo Dollar: Net Worth \$27 Million. Greed is popular in the church today because leaders are promoting it! But did you also notice that many feel ***“no one religion has it 100 percent correct.”*** That is not true, the Bible is 100 percent correct and when Jesus said that He is the only way, that He is the only truth and no one will come to the Father except through Him, that is exclusive. Any other way is the way that leads to death!]

Church is run too much like a business and we are paying the price. There is nothing wrong with keeping the lights on and wanting to see church growth. “The hierarchical nature of religious groups, several people who think *religion is too much like a business* and others who mention clergy sexual abuse scandals as reasons for their stance,” Pew reported. Church has been secularized. *You walk in some churches, and it feels like you’re in the middle of a rock concert. The teachings are more on prosperity and there is no emphasis on commitment or sacrifice.*

Jonathan Walton, professor of Religion and Society at Harvard Divinity said in an interview with CNN, *“When you have pastors thinking of themselves as CEOs, it’s hard to tell the difference between a pastor and P-Diddy.”*

He also was concerned how the *“American evangelical communities are breaking down and Christians have been quick to embrace franchised, mega-church model.”*

What does the future look like for the church? If young people are not attending, how can the church survive? Culture is changing frantically, and church needs to adapt, but in the midst of it all, it’s important to keep Christ at the center. We can understand the Christian concerns for the church with atmospheric forces of sin waging against us. We are supposed to counter - culture and unhealthy trends.

What would Christ do? Honestly, we don’t know. However, the church is in a state of emergency that needs rescuing and all of us are to blame. We need to admit as believers that we have succumbed to the same snares as the church. We no longer look to God for significance but look at self-aggrandizement.

Maybe we need a Moses to come down to slap us with the Word of God as he did with the 10 Commandments. However, there is good news. We can make a change. Jesus talked about the narrow gate in Matthew 7 that leads to life. “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

The narrow gate is never popular. This is what makes us the salt of the earth and what happens when we as Christians and the church as a whole loses its flavor? Like any other unfinished chapter, we will all find out the ending. . . .

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He kind of jumps all over the place in regard to what we are to do. “***Honestly we don’t know***” are you kidding me? We do know, we just don’t like it. The church needs to be cleaned and I am not only talking about the church but the Temple in which God resides, you and me!

And that is what we will be looking at this morning in a study I have called – ***SINNER TO SAINT!***

I have broken these verses down into four main points and they are,

NOT MY PASSOVER – JOHN 2:13

MERCHANDISING GOD – JOHN 2:14

JESUS CLEANSSES – JOHN 2:15-16

GOD NEVER GIVES UP – JOHN 2:17

So with that as our introduction, let’s begin reading in John chapter 2, beginning in verse 13 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this topic - ***SINNER TO SAINT!***

JOHN 2**VERSE 13**

We are told in Deuteronomy 16:16-17 that, **“three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.”**

Thus, Jesus is fulfilling the Law, He was going up to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast.

And keep in mind that every adult male Jew that lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem was required by Jewish law to attend the Passover. But it was not limited to those who lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem.

This was a big feast and Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world would flood into Jerusalem for this feast.

What I want you to notice in this opening statement, something that I believe the Holy Spirit is trying to show us, that something was wrong. And remember what I have called this verse – ***NOT MY PASSOVER!***

What do I mean by that?

Listen again to what it says. We are told that it was **“... the Passover of the Jews ...”**

Now we might not think too much of what is said, but when God established the Passover, back in Exodus 12:11, we are told, **“... it is the LORD’S Passover.”**

What changed?

Understand that “**the Jews**” was an idiom for the Jewish religious leaders, like the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests and the rest.

And my point is this. The Jewish religious leaders had hijacked this feast and turned it into something that it wasn't about and for that reason Jesus does not say “**... it is the LORD'S Passover**” but that it is “**... the Passover of the Jews ...**”

But why did the Lord not want to associate Himself with this feast any longer? What did the Jewish religious leaders do to corrupt this feast?

Let's read on and see.

VERSE 14

Remember what I have called this verse – ***MERCHANDISING GOD!***

Let me explain what was going on and you will see why Jesus did not want to associate Himself with this feast that the Jewish religious leaders made it into!

Keep in mind that this is going on in the Temple, not the Temple proper or ***NAOS*** in the Greek. The Temple proper contained the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant rested and the place only the High Priest could enter and only once a year, on the Day of Atonement!

That is not what John is speaking of here.

John is speaking of the ***HIERON*** in the Greek, and it speaks of the thirty-three acres that surrounded the Temple. And it is here that the Temple precincts were located and where people could gather in various areas that lead up to the Temple proper, the various courts.

But keep in mind that depending on who you were, you could only go into this area so far. Let me explain.

I will start inward and move outward, away from the Temple proper because this farthest area is the one that we will be looking at, this is where this garbage was taking place.

First there is the *Court of the Priests* and that is where the priests served the Lord. Here is where the priests would wash themselves in the Lavers before they entered the Holy Place to burn incense to God on the golden altar of incense, which stood in front of the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The brazen altar was located here as well as this is where the sacrifices were done to atone for the sins of the people and themselves!

Then, as you moved your way farther from the Temple proper you would have to walk several steps down and you would come to the *Court of the Israelites*. And this area was for the Jewish men. No one else could enter this area. And this is where they would gather for Temple service, but again, just the Jewish men!

As you continue to move out, away from the Temple proper, you walked several steps down and you would come to the *Court of the Women*. Interestingly enough, in this court any Jew could enter but this is as far as the Jewish women could go, they could not go into the Court of the Israelites.

Now before you entered the next Court, as you moved farther out from the Temple proper, you would descend five steps from the Court of the Women, and you came to a level area in which there was erected a five-foot stone barricade that went around the entire Temple enclosure.

Then, after another level space, there were fourteen more steps that descended to the **Court of the Gentiles** also known as the **Outer Court**.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the wall dividing Jews from Gentiles was marked at intervals by stone inscriptions stating that no foreigner (Gentile) was permitted to go any farther.

You see, the Gentiles were outside the covenants of God and were seen as far away from God and below the Jews (the Court of the Gentiles being on the lowest level).

And the Gentiles knew the Jews did not accept them unless they became a Jew, a proselyte.

In fact, in 1871 archaeologists discovered an inscription that was located on the wall separating the Court of the Gentiles from the other Courts in the Temple that Herod built.

This is what the sign said, “***No Gentile may enter within the barricade which surrounded the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.***”

That wall was a visible reminder of the separation that existed between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews, as the covenant people of God were closest to Him.

Please understand that God did not exclude the Gentile, He loved them and thus, the Jews were to be a light to the Gentiles to bring them to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! So God did not exclude the Gentiles, they had a place, even though it was the farthest Court, they did have a place!

In saying all that, guess where all this shady dealing was taking place? It was taking place in the Court of the Gentiles or the Outer Court! That was the witness of God that they were seeing!

So what were they doing that was so wrong?

Keep in mind that during the Passover Jerusalem could swell to over two million people that came to worship God and celebrate this feast.

And sometimes the journey was difficult and as they came to the city of Jerusalem, as they came to the Outer Court, they would encounter these Jewish religious leaders who were ripping them off. They wanted to worship God, and the Jewish religious leaders were – ***MERCHANDISING GOD!*** They were trying to make a profit off of God!

Imagine coming for the Passover, and you bring your sacrifice, and it has to be inspected before it could be offered to God.

And as they inspected these animals in the Outer Court, they would find a spot or blemish on the animal and thus, it could not be offered to God.

“My friend, you are in luck. I have this lamb over here, a little old lady from Bethlehem owned it. Very low milage. I can get you this lamb for \$29.95. But wait, you’re a friend, for you, \$19.95 but that is as low as I can go, I do have a family to feed! I will even throw in a grain offering with this at no extra charge!”

Okay, my view of what was going on, but they were ripping the people off who came to worship God and sacrifice to Him!

Also, if you traveled long distances, you would probably not bring a sacrifice because it could get injured along the way and thus, you could not offer it to God. So they would just come and buy these sacrifices, but again, they paid high prices to purchase them!

There were also the moneychangers doing business And, according to Barclay, they all had to pay the Temple tax, which was the equivalent of about two days wages for a working man – but had to be paid in the special Temple coin. This is why the moneychangers did so much business.

The problem was that they charged high exchange rates for the Temple coinage and like I have said, they would not accept the people's sacrifices they brought many times and thus they sold them their sacrifices at high prices.

They were making a profit off of God and the High Priest was right in the middle of this wickedness, getting kickbacks from them!

And keep in mind that the people were well aware of what was going on. Think about this for a minute. *“Rabbinical literature tells us that inspectors spent eighteen months on a farm to learn to distinguish between clean and unclean animals. They even learned to identify an animal that would one day become unclean, even if it was clean at the time! The inspectors had a good thing going. If they did not approve an animal, it would not be approved. Extortion was common behind the whole thing! Sarcastic commentators in those days dubbed the temple the ‘Bazaars of Annas.’ They knew the high priest actually sold franchises for money-changing booths and animal’s sales.”* (R. Kent Hughes, John, p. 67)

And as bad as that was, keep in mind that it was Passover and Jerusalem, and the Temple area was filled with people. And in the Court of the Gentiles, it was also filled with many Gentiles who came to witness this and look at what they were seeing!

Before we come down hard on these Jewish religious leaders and what they are doing, don't you see that happening in the church today?

We absolutely do. Look at the merchandising that is going on as they sell all kinds of Christian products and their aim is to make a profit because in some circles, Christianity sells!

Think of a book and I will go back a few years, but many of you may remember the book – ***THE PRAYER OF JABEZ!***

The Bible story is awesome, but the writer took it to unbiblical conclusions and he and the book distributor made lots of money. All kinds of products came out of this book, why, because it sold and thus, show me the money!

Listen to what the Bible has to say regarding Jabez and his prayer.

We are told in I Chronicles 14:9-10, **“Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, ‘Because I bore him in pain.’ And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, ‘Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!’ So God granted him what he requested.”**

It truly is a wonderful prayer but what happened is that the health, wealth and prosperity teachers got a hold of this and the book that came out on this, and used it to make more money, obtain more things, you just need to repeat this prayer for 30 days and wow, you will have it all!

Over 4.4 million copies of the book were sold and out of that we have, not only the book – the prayer of Jabez, we also have: The Prayer of Jabez Journal, The Prayer of Jabez Devotional – for adults and for children, we have three different children’s versions of The Prayer of Jabez, there is The Prayer of Jabez for Women, there is The Prayer of Jabez music CD, we have coins, keychains, prayer mugs, and the list goes on with The Prayer of Jabez on it.

You know what that is? It is marketing! It truly is making a profit off of God. And again, there is nothing wrong with the prayer but the idea of praying it every day for 30 days and maybe God gets tired of hearing it and just gives in and gives it to you, I don’t know, but it is not Biblical!

I wonder how many seekers who come to God’s house today and see all of the greed and emphasis on money and simply leave and write Christianity off?

Maybe you feel I am being a little harsh on this issue. Maybe you feel I am not being fair. Maybe you don't agree with me. I guess you don't have to.

But what you do need to look at is how Jesus responded to these Jewish religious leaders who were – ***MERCHANDISING GOD!***

Look at what Jesus does!

VERSES 15-16

As Jesus sees what is going on in the House of God, He praises them for the work that they are doing, right?

Absolutely not!

What we do see is that when Jesus sees what is going on He makes a whip and drives these people who were making a profit off of God out, turning over tables!

I know, not the Sunday School picture we have here of Jesus, a kind of Casper milk toast guy! He was not!

He had righteous indignation over what was taken place! He drove them out!

I am sad to say but as some see what Jesus did here, they feel that He lost His temper, He got angry and thus, He sinned.

Now, if you think that through, logically, if Jesus let His anger grow so He blew His top and started turning over tables and whipping these guys, then He sinned!

And, if Jesus did sin, then He could not be the perfect sacrifice for us!

Let me say this. Anger, in and of itself is not a sin. Why? Because there is such a thing as righteous anger. That is what we see here with Jesus, "**Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.**"

That is a quote out of Psalm 69:9.

Please understand that Jesus was not defending His own honor or coming against those who had done Him wrong. He had a righteous anger, and a righteous anger is always seen when someone else is being wronged, or when someone else is being treated unjustly and you rise up to defend them.

What Jesus saw, what He was angry about was that the Temple, His Father's House, had been defiled. He was acting to correct that!

And yes, it is possible to be angry and not sin, that is what Paul said in Ephesians 4:26, **“Be angry, and do not sin . . .”**

Let me give you an example.

You drive by an abortion clinic and as you do, you get angry. You are angry at how they are taking advantage of women and lying to them and then the murdering of their children. There is nothing wrong with that type of anger.

What would be wrong is to go into that abortion clinic and harm those that are working there.

Why?

Because the Bible tells us that God will deal with this. Paul tells us that in Romans 12:19, **“ . . . ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”**

The Living Bible puts it like this, **“Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it. [Don't take the law into your own hands.]”**

God will deal with it, and it will be right, and it will be fair, and we need to leave that in His hands.

But there is nothing wrong in exposing lies, immorality but not with your vengeance!

Now, can you imagine coming to church to worship God and there is Joe Samz and the ushers saying, *“That will be twenty dollars to get in please! And if you want the good seats, the blue chairs, that is extra!”*

We would be outraged at that but, that in a sense is what was going on in the Temple and Jesus didn't like it back then and He doesn't like it today!

But look at what is going on today. One author gives to us this insight. He wrote, “Kenneth Copeland, who leads the ‘Believer’s Voice of Victory,’ TV show and network, is a giant within the Word of Faith branch of Pentecostalism. Kenneth Copeland Ministries operates on a 1,500-acre campus near Fort Worth, TX, equipped with a church, a private airstrip, and a hangar for the ministry’s \$17.5 million jet and other aircraft. Copeland resides with his wife Gloria in a \$6 million church-owned lakefront mansion.”

That is sad and Jesus again did not like that back then and He does not like it today.

Now some may wonder what the big deal is. If they are talented, gifted, smart enough to make money like that, what is the harm?

The harm is this. It is how they are doing it. They are ripping the people of God off, exploiting them. There is nothing wrong in making money, but a religious leader is not to profit off of God!

Let me share this with you from Matthew 21:12-14, and this happens as Jesus cleansed the Temple at the end of His ministry and here in John it was in the beginning of His ministry, but this is what their merchandising of God prevented from happening.

We are told, **“Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer,” but you have made it a “den of thieves.”” Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.”**

These Jewish religious leaders were getting in the way of God touching people’s lives and what was going on back then, is happening today.

The church is to be a place where people can come to be healed, where blind sinners can come to see, spiritually speaking. Those that are crippled by sin can be healed and walk with God. But we can let this garbage come into the church and since God is not working, we have to manufacture what they think God is doing. They pump people up, they get them to do all kinds of bizarre things and they say this is of God, but it is not!

Remember, this is an important lesson that the Holy Spirit is showing us. Why do I say that?

Because Jesus ended His earthly ministry, the last week before He was crucified, doing the same thing that He did here in John chapter 2 at the beginning of His ministry, cleanse the Temple. (Matthew, Mark and Luke speak of Jesus doing this at the end of His ministry)

Why these two bookends on His ministry?

Because He wants the House of God to be a place where people can freely come and worship God, be touched by God, be healed by God and not have their pockets emptied of their money or their faith!

I hope you feel that you can freely come here and worship God. That you never feel pressured to give.

And if you want to give to God, you can, but it is your choice. No one is forcing you.

I think many times we lose focus of what the church is to be about. Let me give you a few points to show you my heart's desire for this church, this body of believers, and see what is going on in many churches today and it seems like they have lost the focus!

The first point is this - ***The Church is to be a house of prayer!***

How important that is. We can have a potluck and fill the church and we can have a prayer meeting and there are a handful of people that come. That is not good. It does not stop me from having prayer meetings every Saturday morning, or the women twice a month on the first and third Tuesdays of every month, or prayer after men's study on Sunday evenings, or women's pray after their study on Wednesday mornings! Prayer is important and it is not based on how many come, but how many are missing out coming together as a body of believers to pray!

The second point is - ***The Church is a place where God is worshipped in spirit and in truth!***

We are not to come before God any way that we want. We are to worship Him in Spirit, we must be saved, and in truth, according to the Word of God. Many today have made Jesus into a good buddy and they lose sight that He is Almighty God, and He deserves our worship!

Not only that, but - ***The Church is to be a healing place!***

I don't care what is going on in your life. I don't care what you are going through. I don't care what book of the Bible we are studying; God will meet you where you are at. I was talking with Andrew from Faith Comes by Hearing a few weeks back and he was telling me that he was listening to the Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk and he was amazed at how God was ministering to him right where he was at, through the book of Habakkuk! That is how God works and He brings healing into our lives no matter what we are going through if we are willing to listen and obey!

The fourth point is that - ***The Church is to be a place where God's Word is taught faithfully and in truth!***

I hope you feel that way as I teach you the Word of God. That is my heart's desire, and I don't want to misrepresent God, ever. And I know that I am not perfect, only God is, but I do my best, and with the inspiration of God's Spirit as He is leading me in the study of His Word, you would be blessed and grow in the Lord!

And the fifth point is that - ***The Church is to be a place where Jesus is honored and exalted!***

That is my prayer. That in all we do we are not trying to exalt ourselves or draw attention to ourselves but to praise the name of Jesus! We want to honor Him in all that we do and say.

In saying that, let me also say that this not only applies to the church as a whole but to us individually.

How do these verses here in John chapter 2, what we have read so far, relate to us?

First of all, we saw the ***miracle of conversion***, the water into wine, which leads us to the ***work of cleansing***, the cleansing of the Temple.

This is how Jesus works in people, first their salvation, their conversion and then their cleansing; we call it the sanctification process where the Holy Spirit is purging out the garbage from our lives to make us more like Jesus!

And this does fit in with the Passover celebration. Before Passover the Jews would cleanse their homes, they would remove every speak of leaven or anything made with yeast. And this is a picture of cleansing from sin. They were preparing their homes, their lives for the Passover and they wanted the sin removed, symbolically speaking of course.

As soon as we are saved, we are *JUSTIFIED*, or we are right with God because all of our sins have been paid in full. That is a one-time event, again, the moment we get saved!

Also, at the moment we get saved the *SANCTIFICATION* process beings in our lives and it will continue on until we go home to be with the Lord!

Think about that for a minute. Our bodies are the Temple of God, God dwells in us.

Paul put it like this in Ephesians 2:19-22, **“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”**

Remember when Solomon was building the Temple all the stone cutting was done far away from the Temple so that the sound of the hammer or other iron tools could not be heard and then the finished stone was brought to the Temple. (I Kings 6:7)

That is what God is doing with us, it is called the sanctification process where He is chiseling, molding and shaping our lives to be like His.

It is as Peter tells us in I Peter 2:4-5, **“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”**

You may remember the story of the Christian man who lost his job, his wife died, he lost his home, he had nothing, just a horrible situation.

As he was walking down the street one day, trying to figure out what was happening to him, what God was doing, he saw a man who was working on a building, and he was cutting this little stone.

Curious, he asked the man what that was for, what he was doing, and the man responded by saying, ***“I am cutting the stone down here so that it will fit in up there!”*** as he pointed towards the top of the building.

When he heard that he realized that God was working on him down here also, so that he will fit in up there, in heaven.

Folks, that is what God is doing with each of us, may we not resist but surrender to the Master and allow Him to finish His work in each of us.

Listen to what Ray Stedman wrote regarding Paul’s words in Ephesians chapter 2. He tells us,

That is the picture Paul gives us of how God works ***with*** us. He is knocking off our rough edges, shaping us up, getting us ready for placement in His eternal dwelling place. He is building a holy temple - a beautiful, magnificent building. We are His building materials, His building blocks. The process of being chipped and smoothed for His service is often painful, but the result is going to be glorious!

I do not know any way to explain and make sense out of history - including the history of our own lives - other than from this point of view.

Everything that happens in the world, from major wars and upheavals to the minor frustrations in our own everyday lives - is part of the building process of God. He is preparing His people, shaping us, smoothing us, making us just the right shape for His service so that He can fit us into place in His temple, His dwelling place, the church of Jesus Christ.

Everything else that we have built in our lives, in our civilization, will one day be blown away in the fires of final judgment. All that will be left is the permanent, eternal structure that God builds out of our lives.

- Ray Stedman

In the world we are living in today, with all that we see going on in our country and in this world, isn't that a great perspective to have? You bet it is! God is using all that is happening in our lives, in this world as a building process. And yes, we don't like the chiseling, we don't like when the Lord chips away a block that doesn't belong there, but in the end, He is making us into His masterpiece! Let Him work.

And yes, He is doing the work in us, and we must surrender to the Master Potter!

The word "*sanctification*" means to be "*set apart*" and God is setting us apart for His use, He is working in us so that He can work through us, He is making us more like Him as I have said.

How does this sanctification process work?

First, we have the *Word of God*, and this is not in any order, all are important. But the Word of God is vital because we need to know what God desires of us. Jesus said in John 17:17, **“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”**

The world has its truth and that truth changes to fit the sin that they want to promote. God’s Word does not change, and it sets us apart from the world system that is against God. It sets us apart because the world is fighting against God and as Christians, we want to follow Him all the days of our lives and do what He has told us!

Maybe you have noticed this, I have. But when we spend time with God in prayer and in His Word, His nature permeates us. And what that does is it causes us to change without our even realizing it.

And please understand that the sanctification process is not just us trying harder, trying to be a better person. Yes, we must walk by faith but please understand that this is the *work of the Spirit of God!* That is the second point!

In I Peter 1:2 Peter tells us, **“... in sanctification of the Spirit ...”**

Here we see the sanctification of God the Holy Spirit working in our lives to perfect us, to make us like Him.

In II Thessalonians 2:13-14 we are told, **“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Religions tell you how you are to live, what you are to do and what you are not to do, but they do not give you the power to accomplish that.

Christianity tells us what we are to do and not do, how we are to live and the Lord, by His Spirit, empowers us to live accordingly!

But change generally takes place as a process and it is a lifelong process.

Martin Luther is credited with having described the growth of a Christian after conversion in this way. *“A person is rapidly declining in health because of a disease, and the doctors do not know its cause. Then the doctors correctly diagnose the disease and prescribe the appropriate medicine. He is not completely healed immediately upon starting to take the medicine. But from that point on, he improves until he is completely well. In the same way, after we experience conversion, there is a decisive turn in our lives, after which the movement is in the direction of holiness rather than sin and death.”* Exactly!

So we have the work of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, and lastly, there is the *fellowship of believers!*

I realize that many don't see this as important, but it is. Iron sharpens iron and let me give you a couple of verses to show you what I mean.

In II Timothy 2:22 Paul wrote, **“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”**

Just as Paul was admonishing Timothy to live a holy life, a godly life, to flee things that will hurt him and dishonor God and to pursue those things that will bless you and honor God, that is what other believers will do in our lives!

In Hebrews 10:24-25 we are told, **“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”**

Paul is saying that we stir each other up and not in a bad way. We stir each other up in doing good things, in service but as we remove ourselves from the body of believers, we are on our own and that is never, never a good thing.

THE WORD OF GOD!

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD!

THE FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS!

And I realize that it can get frustrating because we don't feel like we are growing like we should. And that brings us to our last point – ***GOD NEVER GIVES UP!***

VERSE 17

Listen again to this verse. We are told, **“Then His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.’”**

Sometimes we read Bible verses and we go through them, and we really don't think about them.

These disciples of Jesus recognized what Psalm 69:9 said, and they saw this verse manifested before their eyes!

And notice, they did not get their concordance out, they did not get their phone out to look up the verse, they knew the Scriptures and I think that is important for us to learn and memorize the Scriptures. God's Word is there to minister to us wherever we are at, but you need to be in the Word, and you need to know the Word.

And as much as our Lord has a zeal for His House of Worship, He has a zeal for our lives as well. He wants us to grow, to mature in the faith. He wants to purge that garbage out of our lives!

And I do understand that some of you are feeling hopeless here. You feel like God has had it with you and He is going to just give up if He hasn't already.

Let me be clear on this. He hasn't given up on you. He won't give up on you. He will never leave you or forsake you.

If you are struggling here or even if you are not struggling, here is a verse to encourage you that Jesus will never give up on you.

Paul, in Philippians 1:6 put it like this, **“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”**

Look at what Paul said here. Paul has total confidence that the work that God started in the Philippians, their salvation, He will bring to completion, their glorification. And what Paul says of the Philippian believers he is also saying to us.

Paul, in Colossians 3:4 tells us, **“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”**

Folks, when God saves us, He does so completely and eternally, and you can take that to the bank! Paul didn't say that we ***“might”*** appear with Him but that we will!

Do you doubt that?

Do you think it is too hard for God and He might not complete the work?

Do you think if you don't live up to a certain standard you will be cast out, the work won't be completed?

Listen to what Jesus said in John 6:37, 39, **“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out . . . This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.”**

Also, in John 10:27-28 Jesus said, **“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”**

And Paul tells us in Romans 8:37-39, **“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

And lastly, listen to what Paul said in Romans 8:30, **“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”**

I want to focus on this glorification here because it is the final step of the sanctification process, and it will occur when we go to be with the Lord.

What is interesting here is that Paul states this work, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is in the past tense.

Why does Paul speak of something that has not happened as if it already did? Because that is how sure it is, God will complete the work He started because He foreknew us!

If you are His, He will not lose you – it is a promise – you are already seen as glorified in the Father’s eyes – that is how certain it is, that is how secure we are in our eternal redemption!

Think of it like this, as the nineteenth-century commentator, F. B. Meyer put it, “We go into the artist’s studio and find there unfinished pictures covering large canvases, and suggesting great designs, but which have been left, either because the genius was not competent to complete the work, or because paralysis laid the hand low in death; but as we go into God’s great workshop we find nothing that bears the mark of haste or insufficiency of power to finish, and we are sure that the work which His grace has begun, the arm of His strength will complete.”

The work of sanctification is a work of God, the Holy Spirit, He has begun it and He will see it through to completion.

Don’t disbelieve but believe! God will finish what He has started!

The problem is that many try to make it their own work and then, if they fail, they will forfeit heaven.

It is not a work that we started, God did.

And it is not a work that we finish, God does!

Praise God we can rest in the security of our salvation that is based in Christ! And God does not give up, He finishes what He started!

Let me share this with you. We are told,

One day a mother whose 25-year-old son had turned his back on God was telling me she had given up on her son. After years of praying for him and trying to convince him that he needed the Lord in his life, she was sure that God had written him off. She had decided no longer to pray for him.

It was one of the saddest things I'd ever heard: a parent giving up on a child. I told her how glad I was that God never gives up on us. If he did, you and I would not stand a chance. If I would have had to hang on to God throughout my life, I would be hopeless. The only reason I am who I am today and the only reason I am where I am in my walk with the Lord is that God refused long ago to give up on me.

If it were up to us to stay close to God when things fell apart, we would be lost. Thank God for his assurance in Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

God never gives up. It's the most beautiful assurance we have. Even when we are tempted to let go, God refuses to give up. And because God never gives up on us, we may never give up on the people around us as long as we or they live. Each day offers a new opportunity for grace and for turning back to God.

- <https://bit.ly/3irW3E1>

Praise God that He does not give up on us. Remember what Paul said in I Thessalonians 5:23-24, "**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.**"

That is what God is doing in our lives, cleansing us, not for salvation but our sanctification. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus, but God is still working in us so that He can work through us. He never gives up. He will – ***SANCTIFY US COMPLETELY!***

John began with a miracle of *conversion* (changing water into wine). Then he showed Jesus performing a work of *cleansing* (the cleansing of the temple). This is always how Jesus works in His people: *conversion* first, then *cleansing*.

In other words – ***SINNER TO SAINT!***