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**If Our Salvation is Secure,
Why Should We Live Holy Lives?**

Joseph Parle

Professor of Biblical Counseling and Exposition
College of Biblical Studies, Houston, Texas¹

As a professor at a Bible College in Houston, this question is often raised when I am teaching on the subject of the eternal security of the believer. Some students consider this objection to be sufficient reason to discredit the clear biblical teaching of eternal security. Rather than discredit the doctrine of eternal security, this question actually demonstrates the fact that the objectors who use this argument are looking at sanctification from the wrong perspective. This question is indicative of a man-centered generation who constantly asks the question, “What is in it for me?” This question is posed as if the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, eternal salvation, the substitutionary atonement and imputed righteousness of Christ are not enough personal motivation for the believer to live a holy life. However, the motivation for holy living must extend beyond this man-centered logic and return the motivation for sanctification to the appropriate God-centered focus that the Bible teaches. Once eternal security is looked at from God’s perspective, the appropriate motivation for holy living can be ascertained.

God-centered Motives for Holy Living

This work does not intend to duplicate the efforts made by others in this journal and other works to defend the doctrine of eternal

¹ See <http://cbshouston.edu>.

security from a free grace perspective.² This work is not attempting to give believers personal motivation to live holy lives by focusing on the personal benefits of holy living. Instead, this work is intending to uncover the appropriate God-centered motives for living holy lives in light of the character of God. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it will focus on some of the most important God-centered motivations for holy living: the glory of God, the holiness of God, the love of God, the grace of God, the judgment of God, the return of Christ and reward at the future kingdom of Christ.

The Glory of God

Several passages in the Bible teach the importance of living in order to reflect the glory of God (Isa. 43:7; Mat. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:20, 10:31; 2 Cor. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:12, 4:16; et al.). As the Westminster Confession has so aptly stated “the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Christians should be committed to progressive sanctification because of their God-given desire to bring glory to His name. As Isaiah 43:7 states, all of the elect have been created for the purpose of glorifying God. This commitment extends to marriage (Eph. 5:27), worship (Psalm 29:2), and everything the believer does (1 Cor. 10:31).

Holy living results in bringing pleasure to God and to man himself. Colossians 1:10 commands Christians to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”³ (see also 1 Thes. 4:1, Heb 13:16, etc.). When Christians walk in a manner worthy of their calling, this pleases God. This should be motivation enough as God has designed man to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). In the course of this process, the Christian

² For an effective defense of this doctrine, see Charles F. Stanley, *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1990). Lewis Sperry Chafer, “The Eternal Security of the Believer Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 106, no. 423. Lewis Sperry Chafer, “The Eternal Security of the Believer Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 106, no. 424. While this article focuses on some God centered reasons to do good works, a more comprehensive list is given by JB Hixson in his article entitled “Some Biblical Motivations for the Christian to Do Good Works” at <http://www.hixson.org/docs/Miscellaneous%20Topics/Reasons%20for%20the%20Christian%20to%20do%20Good%20Works.pdf>.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are taken from the New American Standard 1995 Update translation.

will find his own desires satisfied (Psalm 37:4). For as Lewis has said, God designed man to find his supreme happiness in God alone:

What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they ‘could be like Gods’—could set up on their own as if they had created themselves—be their own masters—invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopelessness (**hopeless**) attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long, terrible story of man trying to find something other than God to make Him happy. The reason why it can never succeed is this. God made us: invented us as man made the engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.⁴

Thus, as John Piper and others have concluded, the chief end of man is to glorify God **by** enjoying Him forever. Once this end is acknowledged man has the appropriate motivation to love God and others. Piper writes, “We were made to see and savor God—and savoring Him, to be supremely satisfied, and thus spread in all the world the worth of His presence. Not to show people the all-satisfying God is not to love them. To make them feel good about themselves when they were made to feel good about seeing God is like taking someone to the Alps and locking them in a room full of mirrors.”⁵ Rather than attempting to motivate people by telling them that they could lose their salvation, or for that matter constantly questioning whether they ever had it to begin with, theologians and pastors should focus on reminding them of their divine-given purpose of glorifying the God who so generously provided salvation in the first place.

The Holiness of God

God consistently commands His covenant people to be holy as He is holy (Lev. 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7, 20:26; 1 Peter 1:16). The New

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity; a Revised and Enlarged Edition, with a New Introduction of the Three Books, the Case for Christianity, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality* (New York,: Macmillan, 1952), 54.

⁵ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 33.

Testament uses the word saint to communicate the holy identity of the elect (1 Cor. 1:2). Jesus set Himself apart so that sanctification for the elect in God's Word would be possible (John 17:19, Eph 5:25-26). As slaves to God, Christians are urged to sanctify themselves (Rom. 6:19-22). According to Hebrews 10:19-25, Christians have been given access to the holy place by the blood of Jesus and are encouraged to confidently live holy lives as a result.

In addition to this, Christians have the imputed righteousness of Christ which makes holy living possible. The possibility of holy living can be categorized in three terms: positional, progressive and ultimate sanctification. Hebrews 10:10 and 14 are critical passages for evaluating the question of sanctification. Hebrews 10:10 in the New King James version states, "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Hebrews 10:14 states, "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." Hebrews 10:10 describes positional sanctification. This is the one time act in which God sets aside the believer once and for all at the point of conversion. Walvoord points out that this is the most prevalent use of the word sanctification throughout Scripture. All of the approximately sixty-five references to saints fall under this category as well as other important references (Acts 20:32; 26:18; Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb 2:11; 10:10; 13:12; 1 Pet 1:2; Jude 1). In 1 Corinthians 1:2 the Corinthian believers are called saints even though the discussion that follows clearly shows that they are not sinless.⁶

Hebrews 10:14, on the other hand, describes progressive (or experimental) sanctification. This is the act whereby God molds the believer into Christ's image throughout his life. John 17:17 also supports the notion of progressive sanctification, "Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth." Chafer says that experimental sanctification has three relationships: (1) the believer's yieldedness to God; (2) the believer's deliverance from the power of sin through the power of the Spirit; (3) the believer's growth in grace which is a constant development throughout life.⁷ As the present passive

⁶ John F. Walvoord, "Person of the Holy Spirit: Part 10: The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Believer," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 99, no. 395 (1961): 316.

⁷ *Ibid.*

participle in Hebrews 10:14 suggests, this is an ongoing continuous process that will not be completed until the believer receives his glorified body.

Walvoord adds another category: ultimate sanctification. He defines it as follows, “Ultimate sanctification is the expectation of all the work of God in dealing with the believer. Positional sanctification has the promise of issuing in that perfect sanctification which will be the portion of the saints in the eternal state. Experimental and progressive sanctification has its ultimate goal to be realized in the future life.”⁸ Dr. Walvoord derives this category from several passages that point to the eternal state for the attainment of the goal of sanctification (1 John 3:2, Eph 5:27, Rom 8:29, Heb 12:14). According to 1 John 3:2-3, the expectation of ultimate sanctification is a great motivation for holy living. In this passage, John notes that he who has this hope of eventually being like Christ in the glorified state purifies himself.

The Love of God

The love of God is an excellent motivator for sanctification. The Bible consistently affirms that love for God is reflected in obedience to His commandments (cf. Dan 9:4; John 14:15, 21; 1 John 5:2-3; 2 John 6, etc.). True agape love is to look out for the other person’s best interests unconditionally. Human beings express this love to God by placing His interests above their own. The essence of sacrificial discipleship is placing God’s interests ahead of man’s interests in the process of denying oneself, taking up their cross and following Christ (Mat. 16:23-24). For it is the love of Christ that should compel Christians to no longer live for themselves but for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

In this sense, love for God motivates the Christian to live a truly holy life. Rather than seeing holy living as a what’s in it for me scenario, the sanctified saint should look at it as an opportunity to present his or her life as a living and holy sacrifice of worship to God (Rom. 12:1). For this willingness to worship God through every aspect of their lives was what has motivated martyrs of all generations to love God more than their life even in the face of death (Rev.

⁸ Ibid.: 317.

12:11). Thus, the Old Testament and New Testament saints were encouraged to love the LORD God with all their heart, soul and might (Deut. 6:5; Mat. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). For it was this love that enabled them to obey God and love others.

The Grace of God

The grace of God is also a primary motivator for sanctification. Titus 2:11-12 points out that the grace of God is the proper motivation to deny ungodliness and worldly desires in order to live sensible and godly lives. Rather than looking at salvation as an excuse to sin (cf. Romans 6:1), Christians should consider the grace of God to be the appropriate motivation and empowerment to live righteously. According to Paul, this grace is instructive. The word *paideuo* deals with the training or instruction in the disciplinary aspect of life so that an individual can make right choices.⁹ Grace is a teacher of how to live a holy life. Thus it not only has value with respect to justification but it also has immense value with respect to sanctification. This grace is instructive in how to deny the ungodly and worldly lusts that war against the Christian. As a result, the Christian has the motivation to live a self-controlled or temperate life. Not only this, but Christians have the appropriate motivation to imitate the righteous character of God. Finally, grace provides the motivation for true piety that lives as Christ Himself would live.

Consequently, rather than questioning the grace and character of God by consistently threatening the loss of salvation, theologians and pastors should remind the flock of the importance of the grace of God as motivation for holy living. The same grace that justified them should also provide the same grace to sanctify them (cf. Gal 2:21-3:3). Furthermore, the argument that one can lose their salvation based on having committed certain sins nullifies the fact that they never did anything to merit salvation to begin with. If one did nothing to earn salvation, what steps can he possibly take in order to get salvation back once it is lost?

⁹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Übrigen Urchristlichen Literatur*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 603.

The Judgment of God

In this era in which individuals come to church in order to have their ears tickled by a health and prosperity gospel, some Christian preachers fear teaching about the judgment of God so they will not be known as fire and brimstone preachers. However, Christians are consistently commanded to fear God (cf. Eccl. 5:7, Mat. 10:28, 1 Pet. 2:17, etc.). They are commanded to fear Him because the extent of His wrath against sin is so great that He sends unbelievers to hell and His love for the saints is so great that He disciplines those whom he loves.

While true believers themselves are not destined for hell, God uses hell as a reminder to believers of their need to fear and obey Him. 1 Peter 4:17 says, “For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” Peter warns of the severity of God’s judgment of the unbelieving world in order to motivate Christians to suffer for God and glorify His name (1 Pet. 4:16). Whereas humans may be tempted to fear men and not God because of His grace, Jesus specifically reminds them of His wrath against sin (Mat 10:28).

Although true believers do not have to fear going to hell, they should fear the judgment seat of Christ. Paul uses this image to remind his Roman audience to avoid judging their brother since they will all appear before God’s judgment seat (Rom. 14:10). He speaks in more detail of this in 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 which says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.” If Paul feared appearing before the judgment seat of Christ despite his consistent obedience to God, Christians everywhere have every reason to fear this event. Paul used this fear in a positive way to motivate himself to proclaim the truth about God.

If this is not enough motivation, one must also fear God’s loving discipline of the saints. The author of Hebrews 12:5-6 quotes Proverbs 3:11-12 by saying, “And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘MY SON, DO NOT REGARD

LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.” The Greek work the author uses is *mastigō* which was the same word used of the scourging Jesus received in John 19:1. Anyone who has studied the extent of this scourging or at least scene Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* knows that this is no slap on the wrist. This verse also expresses that God’s discipline is an expression of His love. According to Hebrews 12:11, this discipline is intended to result in the fruit of righteousness for all who believe. While a Christian should appreciate this disciplining process that brings about progressive sanctification, he or she should also fear it as a good child and obey in order to avoid receiving this earthly temporal discipline.

This discussion of the judgment of God is intended to demonstrate that believers have every motivation to obey God because of His judgment. The future of the unbelieving world is an illustration of God’s wrath against sin. The future judgment seat of Christ ensures accountability for good and useless actions in the future. The present temporal earthly discipline of God is enough short term motivation to encourage the believer to avoid the near occasion of sin.

The Return of Christ

For Christians, the imminent return of Christ is a great motivation for holy living. For premillennial dispensationalists, the rapture is a source of hope that guides their everyday living. For Paul, this hope was sufficient motivation to encourage the fainthearted, help the weak and be patient with everyone (1 Thes. 5:14). The imminent return of Christ was what led Him to say the following, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (1 Thess. 5:23-24). The hope of blamelessness at Christ’s return for the church would provide the motivation for sanctification.

This hope was not only true of Paul but also Peter. He wrote in 2 Peter 3:10-11, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned

up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.” The temporal nature of the material world is sufficient reason to live a holy life. Peter encouraged his audience to be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless because Christ is coming soon (2 Pet. 3:14). The thought that Christ could come at any moment should motivate Christians to live a life that will reflect His glory so that when He comes we will be found doing His work.

Reward at the Future Kingdom of Christ¹⁰

In 2 Peter 1:11, he encourages his audience to live holy lives in order to receive the abundant provision of the kingdom. Christians should live holy lives in light of the opportunity to reign with Christ at His coming kingdom. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus consistently motivated Christians with the opportunity to receive rewards at His kingdom (Rev. 2:10, 3:11, 3:21, etc.). He closes the book by describing the reward that He will bring with him to those who obey His commands (Rev. 22:12). Those who overcame and willingly gave up their life for the cause of Christ were given thrones in the kingdom and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). Rather than being a selfish motivation for holy living, believing in the rewards of God is essential to the Christian faith (cf. Hebrews 11:6). For even when these Jewish believers were suffering the temporal seizure of their property on earth, the author of Hebrews reminded them of the longer lasting reward they would receive at Christ’s kingdom (Heb. 10:34). Paul spoke of the future crown he would receive in Christ’s kingdom as a result of his obedient faith (2 Tim. 4:8). James also promises future reward for victory in the midst of trials and temptations (James 1:12).

Theologians and teachers who do not mention this important doctrine neglect to provide those whom they teach with a major motivation for holy living. It is clear from these texts that Christ and the authors of the New Testament thought that this future hope of reward was important enough to mention on several occasions. Thus,

¹⁰ Although there is some diversity in opinion on eschatology among the writers and readers of this journal, it is outside of the scope of this paper to adequately defend dispensational premillennialism. For a good defense of this view, please see Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend, *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* (Chicago: Moody, 1992). Also see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1964).

in light of this, Christians should look forward to this promised kingdom in which the purpose and promises of God are fulfilled on this earth.

Conclusion

This article was written to argue that if a Christian is seeking motivation for holy living, he must look to God Himself. God's character and His promises prove beyond a reasonable doubt that a salvation received by grace through faith cannot be lost. However, the same character and promise that gives assurance of salvation also provides the motivation for holy living. The two are inseparable. For God's glory, holiness, love, judgment, return, reward and kingdom are more than enough reason to glorify Him through holy living.

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