

Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace ~ Part 5

***"I am Adonai, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. Therefore you are to be holy, because I am holy."* ~ Leviticus 11:45**

***"Following the Holy One who called you, become holy yourselves in your entire way of life; since the Tanakh says, 'You are to be holy because I am holy.'"* ~ 1 Kefa 1:15-16**

In this post, we will continue to explore the work of God I've referred to as "progressive sanctification."

Growing in the Likeness of Yeshua (con't.)

Initial sanctification occurs instantly at the moment of salvation when we are delivered from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Yeshua (see Colossians 1:13). Progressive sanctification continues over time until we go to be with the Lord. Initial sanctification is entirely the work of the Ruach who imparts to us the very life of Yeshua. Progressive sanctification is also the work of the Ruach, but it involves a response on our part so that we as Believers are actively involved in the process.

The progressive nature of sanctification is implied throughout the Brit Hadashah in all those instances where we are exhorted to grow, to change, to put off the deeds of the old man and put on Godlike character, and so on. It is also clearly implied in Sha'ul's own testimony that he had not yet been made perfect and his statement that he had *learned* to be content in all circumstances (see Philippians 3:12-14; 4:11).

Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 explicitly teach the progressive nature of sanctification: ***"Do not let yourselves be conformed to the standards of the 'olam hazeh [this age]. Instead, keep letting yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your minds; so that you will know what God wants and will agree that what he wants is good, satisfying and able to succeed."*** (Romans 12:2)

"So all of us, with faces unveiled, see as in a mirror the glory of the Lord; and we are being changed into his very image, from one degree of glory to the next, by Adonai the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The common thought in both passages is being *transformed* or *changed*. As to the nature of this process, 2 Corinthians 3:18 indicates it is the work of the ***"Adonai the Spirit,"*** while Romans 12:2 indicates it is through the renewing of our minds. This transformation is much more than merely a change of outward conduct. It is a renovation of our inner being, or as someone has said, it is a transformation of the essential man. It means our motives as well as our motivations are being constantly changed, so that we can say with the psalmist, ***"How I love your Torah! I meditate on it all day,"*** and ***"I rejoice in the way of your instruction more than in any kind of wealth."*** (Psalm 119:97, 14)

We as Believers are not passive in this transforming process. We are not like blocks of marble being transformed into a beautiful sculpture by a master sculptor. God has given us a mind and heart with which to respond to and cooperate with the Ruach as He does His work in us. That thought leads

naturally to the Scripture passage that is considered to be the classic statement of the working together of the Believer with the Ruach who is at work within him. The passage is: *"So, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed when I was with you, it is even more important that you obey now when I am away from you: keep working out your deliverance with fear and trembling, for God is the one working among you both the willing and the working for what pleases him."* (Philippians 2:12-13)

In verse 12 Sha'ul urged the Philippian Believers to apply themselves diligently to working out their salvation. He urged them to display the evidences of salvation in their daily lives through their obedience to God's commands and through putting on the godly character traits that Sha'ul elsewhere called the Fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). Here again we see that sanctification or holiness is a process, and a process in which we, as Believers, are very actively involved.

But Sha'ul's strong exhortation to the Philippians is based on the confidence that God's Ruach is working in them. He is working in them to enlighten their understanding of His will, to stimulate in their emotions a desire to do His will, and to turn their wills so they actually obey. Most of all, He gives them the enabling power so that they are *able* to do His will.

Progressive sanctification very much involves our activity, but it is an activity that must be carried out in dependence *on* the Ruach. It is not a partnership with the Ruach in the sense that we each - the Believer and the Ruach - do our respective tasks. Rather, *we work as He enables us to work*. His work lies behind all our work and makes our work possible.

The Ruach can and does work within us apart from any conscious response on our part. We have seen this in the initial act of sanctification when He creates within us a new heart and gives us an entirely new disposition toward God and His will. He is not dependent on us to do His work. But we are dependent on Him to do our work; we cannot do anything apart from Him.

In the process of sanctification (becoming holy or perfect) there are certain things only the Ruach can do, and there are certain things He has given us to do. For example, only He can create in our hearts the *desire* to obey God, but He does not obey for us. We must do that, but only as He gives us the enabling power to obey.

So we must depend on the Ruach to do within us what only He can do. And we must depend on Him just as much to enable us to do what He has given us to do. So whether it is His work or our work, in either case, we are dependent on Him.

We are not just dependent on Him; we are *desperately* dependent on Him. Because we so often equate Messiah-like character with ordinary morality, we fail to realize how impossible it is for us to attain any degree of conformity to Yeshua by ourselves. But if we take seriously the long lists of Messiah-like character traits we are to put on, we see how impossible it is to grow in Messiah-likeness apart from the sanctifying influence and power of the Ruach in our lives.

Consider, for example, the lists of Messiah-like character traits found in Galatians 5:22-23 and Colossians 3:12-15 (I have eliminated the duplications in the two lists):

Galatians 5:22-23	Colossians 3:12-15
• Love	• Compassion
• Joy	• Kindness
• Peace	• Humility
• Patience	• Gentleness
• Goodness	• Forbearance
• Faithfulness	• Forgiveness
• Self-control	• Thankfulness

Those are fourteen positive character traits we are to take on (and there are others in Scripture), in addition to the many negative traits - pride, envy, jealousy, lust, covetousness, selfish ambition - we are to take off. Surely we must say with Sha'ul, ***"Who is equal to such a task?"*** (2 Corinthians 2:16).

Only the Ruach is equal to such a task. Only the Ruach can orchestrate such a diverse and well-rounded development of Messianic character. And yet we are told to clothe ourselves with these Messiah-like qualities. We are to do it; we are responsible. But in Galatians 5:22, Sha'ul called the qualities the "Fruit of the Spirit" - the result of the Ruach's work in our lives. Putting together those two thoughts leads to the conclusion that we are both *responsible* and *dependent*. We are responsible to clothe ourselves with Messiah-like character, but we are dependent on God's Ruach to produce within us His "fruit." We cannot make one inch of progress in holiness apart from the powerful working of the Ruach in us. And He does this, not because we have earned it with our commitment and discipline, but because of His grace.

God in His grace sees us as perfectly holy in Yeshua. God in His grace sends His Ruach to create a new heart within us and to write His Torah on our hearts, thus changing our basic disposition. And God in His grace continues to work in us through His Ruach to transform us more and more into the likeness of His Son.

In my next post, I want to explore if the pursuit of holiness is really for you.