

PRESSING ON

Throughout the history of the Church, many definitions and terms have come into the doctrines of different portions of the Church. For example, the Great Schism between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church was caused because each sect of the Church believed in a different term for what was possibly the same definition. Today I want to show the two basic views of Sanctification: the Wesleyan View and the Reformed View. I will also show you the one that I lean towards and why I do so.

Sanctification in the Wesleyan tradition is a secondary work of the salvation experience. One definition that I read of the Wesleyan tradition of Sanctification was "an instantaneous cleansing from Adamic sin, and an empowerment, which Christian believers may receive, by faith, through the baptism with the Holy Spirit."¹ This definition sounds like something that all believers go through. Right? Another definition of the Wesleyan view of Sanctification is:

the state of holiness [that] begins at regeneration and is completed by an instantaneous work of the Holy Spirit (the Baptism of the Holy Spirit) subsequent to regeneration, in which the old Adamic sin nature is actually abolished.²

Both of these definitions can be supported in scripture.

Matthew 5:48 states "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly

Father is perfect."³ This statement seems to support strongly that it is possible to be perfect in this life. Another scripture that supports this definition is I Thessalonians 5:23: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁴ People that hold to this view believe that there can come a point at which the person will not sin. It won't be that he can't sin, rather he will have the power to overcome the sin. In this view, the work of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ are still needed of course, but it is possible to not sin.⁵ It is difficult to reckon with scriptures such as these. Let's also look at the other primary view of Sanctification.

The other form of Sanctification belief is known as the Reformed view. This doctrinal statement holds to the progressive sanctification of the saints. The sanctification process begins at regeneration (or salvation) and continues throughout life, but is never fully completed during life on earth.⁶ There are several scripture passages that seem to support this view as well. Two primary scriptures that I feel support this view well are I John 1:8-9 and Philippians 3:12-14. We will be looking at Philippians later on. Let's look at I John 1:8-9 now. The passage reads:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.⁷

This passage would seem to say that it is impossible to be without sin on the earth and that we aren't being truthful with ourselves if we think so. Let's now look at our text for today that seems to support a reformed view of sanctification.

In Philippians 3, Paul is speaking to the church at Philippi. In verses 1-9, Paul warns against the Judaizers. He also used himself as an example of worldly confidence. Because of all the things that he was (Roman, Jew, pharisee, etc) he had much to boast in. In verse eight, Paul puts all these great accomplishments from his past behind him saying they are failures for Christ.⁸ Then in verse twelve, Paul begins the discourse which is our text:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Verses 12-14)

In this passage, several items can be noted that support sanctification as a process. Paul speaks about not having "attained" and "not being perfected." The fact that Paul says that he hasn't arrived should lead you more towards a progressive sanctification view. After all, Paul is one of the foremost servants of God: if he hasn't been sanctified, who will?

Next Paul tells that he forgets those things which are behind him (both good and bad). The process of sanctification does not lead you to pay attention to yourself. It points you toward the goal. The goal in sanctification is the Lord Jesus Christ. To be sanctification is to be a mirror of all that Christ is. Paul says that he presses on toward the "goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Verse 14) This "pressing" is the process of sanctification. It takes day by day deliberate pushing to be closer to the heart of Jesus. Just as Paul pressed on, we press on to become each day closer and closer to what Jesus wants us to be. We learn to hear what God is saying to us better. We become more vibrant. With each passing day things are more alive.

A good example of this can be found in the book The Voyage of the Dawn Treader by C.S. Lewis. At the end of the book, four characters, Reepicheep (a talking Narnian mouse), Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace, have come to the end of the world. Everything becomes brighter and brighter. The water becomes smoother and smoother. Everything becomes more alive.⁹ Just as in the voyage to the end of the world (or heaven) makes everything come alive, so does the journey of sanctification vitalize the life of the Christian.

From looking at these and other scriptures, I believe that there is more merit to the idea of progressive sanctification. That is not to say that it is a perfect model.

However, consider several things. In the Wesleyan tradition, the instantaneous sanctification is supposed to abolish the Adamic sin nature entirely at one specific time. If sanctification truly accomplishes this, what does salvation take care of? Jesus died so that the original sin of Adam and Eve could be conquered. As such salvation should "cure" or take care of the sin nature. Also, the Wesleyan tradition relates the idea that at some point "down the road" in the Christian life, the Christian will have the ability not to sin. Wouldn't this be a progressive journey? Wouldn't it be like coming closer and closer to Jesus so that you become so like him that you rarely or never sin? If so, then that would be progressive sanctification. For these two reasons I believe that progressive sanctification is more realistic.

In essence, sanctification is a daily routine that points you toward the goal: Jesus Christ. He truly is the author and finisher of our faith. His means of doing so is through sanctification. So press on to know Jesus better each day. Claw and scratch at the unimportant things around you that get in the way of your relationship with the Lord. Use all that you have within you to put yourself before God. God designed the process of Sanctification to bring you closer to Himself. Let His plans control your life.

NOTES

¹J. Kenneth Grider, Entire Sanctification: The Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1980), p. 11.

²John Jefferson Davis, Handbook of Basic Bible Texts: Every Key Passage for the Study of Doctrine and Theology, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), p. 92.

³Davis, p. 93.

⁴Davis, p. 94.

⁵Millard J. Erickson, Introducing Christian Doctrine, ed. L. Arnold Hustad, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), p. 315.

⁶Davis, p. 94.

⁷Davis, p. 95.

⁸Robert G. Gromacki, New Testament Survey, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1974), pp. 263-64.

⁹Martha C. Sammons, A Guide Through Narnia, (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1979), p. 38.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bavinck, Herman. "Sanctification." In The New Life. Vol. 3. Readings in Christian Theology. Ed. Millard J. Erickson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979.
- Berkouwer, G.C. Faith and Sanctification. trans. by: John Vriend. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1952.
- Berry, George R. The Interlinear Literal Translation of the Greek New Testament with Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1969.
- The Bible. King James Version.
- The Bible. New International Version.
- The Bible. New King James Version.
- Bloesch, Donald G. God, Authority, & Salvation. Vol. 1. Essentials of Evangelical Theology. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978.
- Bridges, Jerry. The Pursuit of Holiness. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1978.
- Carradine, B. The Sanctified Life. Cincinnati: Office of the Revivalist, 1897.
- Davis, John Jefferson. Handbook of Basic Bible Texts: Every Key Passage for the Study of Doctrine & Theology. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.
- Erickson, Millard J. Introducing Christian Doctrine. Ed. L. Arnold Hustad. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992.
- Grider, J. Kenneth. Entire Sanctification: The Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1980.
- Gromacki, Robert G. New Testament Survey. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1974.
- Gundry, Robert H. A Survey of the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970.

Harrison, Everett F. Introduction to the New Testament. 1st
rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964.

Merrill, Stephen M. Sanctification: Right Views and Other
Views. Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1901.

Sammons, Martha C. A Guide Through Narnia. Wheaton, IL:
Harold Shaw, 1979.