

## Sanctification Systems - True And False

One of the hallmarks of cults and false religion is a confusion in understanding the differences between *Justification* and *Sanctification*. Even within Christendom the two systems have become so confused that it is arguably now unwise to teach one without teaching the other. The Gospel is being filtered through sanctification rather than Justification.

Justification is an *outside, legal and forensic* work of God for us because of the *substitutionary* work of Christ on the cross. It is a *once only past* act where the penalty of sin is settled forever. It is righteousness *imputed* (credited, reckoned) to the believer, (Rom.4). However sanctification is an *inside* work of the Holy Spirit and is *positional* at salvation and then *progressive*, (1Jn.3:3; Phil.2:12,13; 1Cor.1:2). Sanctification is *imparted* to us *from within* by the Holy Spirit.

*Sanctification* is synonymous with *holiness* and often translated from the same Greek word (*'hagiasmos'*). It means separation *from* sin and the world, and separation *to* God. The problem with some holiness teaching is that justification and sanctification are confused and people begin to strive for a holiness to make themselves feel righteous with God.

It is God's command that we pursue holiness, (Heb.12:14: ***follow***' - '*dioko*' - *to pursue, press after*). Unlike Justification, sanctification somewhat involves our surrender and effort. We are to ***'lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us...'*** (Heb.12:1) However, *no amount of work in striving for holiness can ever make us positionally right with God (justification)*, but rather it conforms us more and more into the image of Christ, (Rom.8:29; Col.3:10).

Over the last 150 years various new forms of sanctification doctrines have been introduced. Many involve a second experience or a point where we are supposedly given a new level of power to live a sanctified life. However the orthodox historical teaching is that we are *positionally* holy at salvation and then *progressively* worked out in us. This teaching is not only clearly seen in Scripture but also in various confessions of faith (Baptist, Westminster, etc), down through the centuries. These confessions made it clear that the Holy Spirit and the Word of God continued to give power over the dominion of sin which was broken at salvation and that it was ongoing - there being a war between the Spirit and the flesh. The Westminster confession of faith stated: *'The dominion of sin is broken, though the presence of sin is not entirely eliminated. Just as Penicillin may break a fever just destroying the dominion of a disease, and yet some time elapses before every trace of the disease is eliminated, so it is with sin....'*

There is a difference between surviving sin and reigning sin. At the new birth we are given a new nature. It *predominates* over the flesh, (Rom.8:9,10). Although the ***'old man is crucified that the body of sin might be destroyed'*** (Rom.6:6; Gal.2:20; ***'destroyed'*** - '*katargeo*' - *rendered inactive, idle, useless*), sin has not been completely annihilated or made extinct. Sin remains in the flesh until the future redemption of our bodies, (Rom.8:21-23). In justification we *have been* freed from the *penalty* of sin, (Col.2:13,14; Eph.1:7); in sanctification we *have been and are being* freed from the *power* of sin, (2Tim.4:18; Rom.6:7,18,22); and in glorification we *will be* free from the *presence* of sin, (Rom.8:21-23; Phil.3:21; 2Cor.5:1-8; 1Cor.15:52-54).

Sanctification/holiness is not limited to any special area of our life but is a total surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and separation from the world and sin. There are no short-cut methods to holiness! Various 'baptisms' or other methods used to gain a pseudo power and holiness are man made methods to produce something that is already promised at salvation. Such methods remove the necessity of striving against sin by the help of the Holy Spirit and the use of Scripture. ***'Be filled with the Spirit'*** (Eph.5:18) is a *command* to be *continuously controlled* (*'pleroo*' - controlled continuously) by the Holy Spirit. It is not an outside filling and it is not an event subsequent to salvation. In the original language of Scripture it is not a matter of us having more of the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit having more of us!

One of the worst things about human methods of sanctification is the spiritual pride and the separation of Christians into 'classes'. Many systems that teach a superior subsequent work of grace inadvertently produce two classes of Christians - those that have it and those that don't. This in itself is a hallmark of the cults. Even renowned holiness writers like Andrew Murray arguably fostered such distinctions with phrases such as: *'Most Christians have not experienced this'* or *'Most Christians have fallen short at this point'*.

Other systems of sanctification teach we have to be 'emptied' and renounce any effort of our own. However, we are not born again to be empty vessels, but rather the written Word of God '*transforms*' (changes) us by '*renewing*', not emptying our corrupt minds, (Rom.12:2). These systems arguably also avoid the inevitable struggle against sin and a reliance on the written Word of God. Sanctification is inextricably linked to the Word!: '***Sanctify them through thy Word...***', (Jn.17:17).

The holiness experience is a *battle*, (Rom.7:23-25). We don't get progressively holy by emotional experiences or any other methods but rather by being in the written Word and separating ourselves from sin and the pollution of the world. The Scriptural words linked with sanctification are fighting terms! - '***mortify***', '***crucify***', '***strive***', '***wrestle***', '***fight***', etc.

*The danger in these methods of so-called sanctification is that it arguably causes Christians to relax in the battle against sin.* It is not a matter of '*let go and let God*'. Sanctification involves surrender to the Holy Spirit and the 'feet' to that surrender is *action*. We are to '***present***' our bodies, (Rom.12:1) and *take up* our cross *daily*, (Lk.9:23; 14:27) and told to '***work out your own salvation***', (Phil.2:12).

Another dangerous system of sanctification was taught by Charles Finney. Finney taught several heresies.\* One was '*Entire Sanctification*': '*Now as entire sanctification exists in perfect obedience to the law of God, and as the law requires nothing more than the right use of whatever strength we have, a state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life on the ground of natural ability.*' This teaching again goes against progressive sanctification as taught down through the centuries and confuses glorification with sanctification, (1Jn.3:2). Even Wesley wrote a book '*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*' yet on his death bed he admitted he had not achieved it.

Perhaps the biggest problem of the modern sanctification 'methods' is that *they detract from the conversion experience by saying that the new birth was not enough.* Yet, did we not receive '***all spiritual blessings***' at salvation? (Eph.1:3).

May we not confuse what God *has done for us in justification* with what God is doing in us in sanctification. Let us not grieve the Holy Spirit and His work with 'experiences' that are not of '*the faith once delivered to the saints*'. May we trust God and His great salvation to combat the presence of sin. Being continuously controlled by the Holy Spirit (Eph.5:18) is not an option but a command that comes with the blessing of salvation.

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\*(Please see the Charles Finney Article on our Website, in the Sovereignty of God Issues Section)