



FEED MY SHEEP

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Sanctification: Perfectionism & Entire Sanctification

In our last issue, we gave an introduction to the doctrine of sanctification by providing short-version answers to five key questions: 1. What is sanctification? 2. What is the purpose and goal of sanctification? 3. When does sanctification commence and end? 4. How is one sanctified? 5. Who does the sanctifying? In this issue we will discuss perfectionism, a teaching which some associate with sanctification. Others deny it has any biblical validity whatsoever.

Before discussing perfectionism *per se*, it will be helpful to briefly mention the differing views on the doctrine of sanctification. To this writer's knowledge, there appear to be at least six viewpoints on sanctification: the Wesleyan, the Reformed, the Pentecostal, the Keswickian, the Augustinian/Dispensational and the Roman Catholic. ...And then there is the truth.

Since Stone Kingdom Ministries is an independent, non-denominational, teaching ministry, we relish the freedom to be able to examine the works of all the great Christian teachers and writers of the past and present, to compare their tenets and teachings to the Bible, and to help propagate that which is true and discard their misunderstandings. Thus, it is not our purpose to enumerate and explore all the details of the six views. As with all doctrines, we find that no singular view of sanctification contains all truths, but each contains some truths.

In many areas, the six views are in agreement with each other, but yet there are also some sharp contrasts. The Roman Catholic view, of course, is at variance with all the other perspectives on one or more major points. Chief among them is the Romish doctrine of perfectionism. Some non-Catholic views also teach it, but not as Rome does. Before getting too far along in this discussion, it is appropriate to ask—

Who cares?

In other words, why should the average Christian believer be concerned about the details of sanctification? Why not just let the theologians argue about it. It doesn't really concern us and our everyday Christian walk, does it? On the contrary, my friend, it concerns us all very much, and it is very much in our own spiritual and practical self-interest to learn the truth about sanctification. How so?

First of all, the Scripture encourages all believers to **"...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."** (2 Peter 3: 18). A primary way in which we grow in the knowledge of our Savior is by reading and studying His word. After all, He *is* the word made flesh. Moreover, we are told by Paul that **"All scripture... is profitable for doctrine, [and]... for instruction in righteousness."** (2 Tim. 3:16). Christians are admonished to grow, to study, to learn. Becoming complacent about these duties is a quick path to backsliding. Those are some of the reasons why it is in our spiritual self-interest to learn more about sanctification.

It is also in our practical self-interest because our understanding of sanctification (and many other doctrines) will determine and govern our attitudes, our actions, our behaviors -- in short, how we lead our lives. Our correct understanding of doctrine will also determine whether we are free or enslaved. Jesus said the truth will make us free. Freedom applies to many areas: political freedom, religious freedom, social freedom, and spiritual and psychological/emotional (i.e., soul) freedom.

It is a sad fact that numerous false doctrines have enslaved people's minds for centuries — and still do today. When people's minds are controlled, people are controlled. They are not free because they do not know the truth. Those who lust for power recognize this and use it very effectively, especially in the area of religion. A prime

example would be the doctrine of eternal hell fire (which this writer once believed). Within a few centuries after Christ, power-lusting church leaders realized that fear is one of the most powerful human motivators. It didn't take long to figure it out and put it to use. (In fact, the church leaders simply borrowed the idea and technique from the ancient mystery religions of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, etc.)

Here's how it works: if we want to use fear to control people's lives (and thereby make us rich and famous and keep us in power), we simply need to determine what people fear the most. Is it death? No, not if we really think about it. If people realize that death means non-life, no consciousness, no sentience, no awareness of anything; then death may not be a pleasant thought, but it is not sufficient to instill permanent fear in people here and now. What would people fear more than being in a state of non-life? Answer: they fear the pain associated with dying, especially if it is a hideously torturous and agonizingly slow process of dying. That is what people fear more than anything.

Now can we improve on that fear? Yes, we can. How about eternal pain after you're dead? Supposing we as religious leaders can teach and get the people to believe that "after you die, you are not really dead." Never mind that such a statement is self-contradictory. If we talk fast enough, they'll never notice the difference. Or we could tell them that "yes, your body dies, but the *real* you, your soul, goes right on living, and your soul can feel pain just like your body does." Then we add to that the idea that God gave us (and only us, the church leaders) the authority to determine who goes to heaven (i.e., we have "the keys to the kingdom.").

Furthermore, we then convince our slaves — er, uh, I mean — our *flocks*, that those who don't obey us will go to this place called hell, from which no one can ever escape, in which you can never die and never cease to exist, and which consists of the most horrible, burning, torturous pain imaginable — if we can get the people to believe *that*, then we can easily control them their entire lives, generation after generation.

Lies enslave. False doctrines enslave. The truth will make you free. This one great lie of eternal hell fire has been one of the most effective enslaving doctrines ever taught. It has worked since the early centuries after Christ and it *still* holds millions of Christians' minds (and therefore lives) captive today. Think about it in these modern terms for today's Christians.

If a person believes that the Bible teaches that those who are not "saved" will live eternally in a most gruesome, hideous and torturous state or place called "hell," chances are that person will live constantly in psychologi-

cal state known as schizophrenia. But these people are generally and formally undiagnosed and untreated because there are so many running around in the same condition that it is not considered abnormal! Moreover, if the powers of this world pointed out the schizophrenia of the masses, they would be exposing their own mind-control lies for what they are. Therefore they are pleased to see the masses remain in such a state. They realize Marx was right when he said: "[False] religion is the opiate of the people." It drugs their minds so that they can be easily controlled.

The Bible term for schizophrenia is double-mindedness (*Vid.* James 1:8; 4:8). Why do we label such people schizoid? For the simple reason that for one to believe that the Creator is a loving God and at the same time to believe that He is going to eventually torture — say, 95% of His creatures in an eternal torture chamber, requires one to compartmentalize one's mind. The two concepts are mutually contradictory and to believe both requires two compartments (i.e., double mindedness; i.e., schizophrenia).

Moreover, for Christians who believe in such a "hell" to function in "normal" everyday life, they have to compartmentalize. They have to tuck such horrendous beliefs back in a distant mental compartment. If they didn't, they would find themselves doing nothing but trying to "save" everybody they met everyday, all day long. Those Christians who have more difficulty stuffing the hell doctrine in a distant compartment are easily recognizable in public; they're the lapel-grabbers and Bible-bashers. They can't help it, and in fact, they are less double-minded than those who "keep it in check" at the office, at the factory, in the store, etc....

Now then...having seen how one's belief in an eternal hell fire doctrine affects one's attitudes, behaviors, lifestyle and soul (psychological) freedom; let us now examine the doctrine of perfectionism and apply the same lesson vis a vis the truth shall make you free.

What is perfectionism?

Perfectionism is the idea that man can be perfect and sinless in this mortal body. Since sanctification means our progressive growth toward holiness and God-likeness, some believe that some persons can actually attain perfection in this life, in other words, that such persons can experience "entire sanctification." We do not hold to such a teaching and will presently explain its fallacy. I recall an incident that happened to me in 1977, shortly after I was drawn to faith in Christ (in 1976), which so stunned me that the details are still like yesterday.

I met a man about my age (then about 27) and we

began chatting about politics and political conspiracies. He seemed quite knowledgeable about these topics, but then commented that he wasn't at all worried about totalitarianism coming in America because Jesus was going to rapture him out of the mess before it got too bad. (I also believed in the typical, pre-tribulation rapture doctrine at the time.) When I pressed him how he knew that he was going to be one of the lucky ones to get raptured, he let me know that since he was a "born-again" Christian, he was perfect now.

"What do you mean 'perfect'?" I asked.

"I mean I don't sin," he replied.

"What do you mean, you don't sin," I persisted. "You never sin?"

"Never," he replied. "1 John 3:9 says: Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

He emphasized the underlined words as he quoted the verse to me. Being a baby Christian and immature, I didn't know what else to say, so I retorted quite sarcastically: "Well, how about the sin of pride?"

He didn't seem to get it. "Nope," he responded proudly, "I've conquered pride, too."

True story.

Who teaches perfectionism?

We must tread softly here. We do not wish to mischaracterize any particular sect or denomination concerning their teachings. For example, we have noticed over our years of study that sometimes certain sects or denominations are accused of teaching false doctrine "xyz," but yet it is sometimes very difficult to find such actual teaching of "xyz" in the official statements and writings of that church.

Take the charge against Rome that it teaches "salvation by works." We have never been able to find that statement in any Roman Catholic catechism or official pronouncements. Nevertheless, we know it is the case. It is just that they are not so blatantly anti-scriptural as to state it as such. Salvation is by faith, as the Scripture saith, they say. But as Luther and all the Reformers knew, by redefining words, twisting, distorting and adding to it the necessity of works, by the time the teaching is filtered down to and digested by the laity, the net effect of the teaching is "salvation by works," even though those words might not be found as such in official documents of the church.

So it is with perfectionism. Our definition above is a common sense, rational definition based upon the generally understood meaning of the word "perfect." But one is hard pressed to find any church or sect authority to de-

clare that man is capable of that perfection...except perhaps Pelagius, but even he stutter-stepped when it came to definitions, as we shall see.

Pelagian theory

Some of the basic teachings of Pelagius were condemned by the Council of Carthage in A.D. 418, thanks in part to the efforts of his very prolific opponent Augustine of Hippo (a town not far from Carthage in Africa). Pelagius was a great champion of man's alleged free will, as well as being among the first of the "I'm OK; you're OK" crowd.

Specifically, he taught that we all somehow escaped being tainted by the fall of Adam, that we are under no condemnation until we each individually choose to sin. (Personally, I find being under the condemnation of mortality to be a pretty significant "taint" and result of the Fall.) Additionally, Pelagius taught that man's natural powers are sufficient and quite capable of enabling any one to completely obey the law. In other words, man can achieve perfection by his own efforts.

What about God's grace? Well, it's nice to have it, Pelagius believed. It'll help you along; but man is fully competent to attain perfection on his own, thank you. Modern humanists are people after Pelagius' own heart. The real catch in Pelagius' thinking shows up when we examine his definitions. For example, Pelagius believed that the sin from which a man can be completely free is the voluntary transgression of known law. Note that well.

Critical definitions

Rome, too, has taught perfectionism. And again it is by redefinition of words. They say that good works performed while in a state of grace (i.e., just after confessing to a priest and before you can sin again) are perfect works.¹ Moreover, Rome teaches that its adherents can and often do keep the law perfectly in this life.

How in the world can they believe such a preposterous idea? Simple. Redefine the law. They taught that the law for which perfect obedience is required is *not* the original commandments, statutes and judgments of the Old Testament, but that the standard of the law is now lowered to accommodate the condition of man in this life.

Furthermore, they invented two types of sin: mortal and venial. *Mortal* are those sins which are the big ones: murder, rape, kidnapping, adultery, etc. They will land you in hell fire.

Other sins are the lightweights, the *venial* sins, which admittedly all Christians commit, but these no longer carry the condemnation they once did. Isn't that nifty? Don't you wish that you could sit in the place of Christ and make

up the rules like Rome does? In any event, that in a nutshell is Rome's idea of Christian "perfection." Gee, it seems like it would be pretty easy to be "perfect" when you change the meaning of the words *perfect*, *sin*, and *law*, doesn't it?

Arminian theory

Some Protestant groups followed the same path. While Luther restored the Biblical truth of salvation by faith alone, Calvin is perhaps best-known for his restoration of the truth of God's predestination of all things and the sovereignty of God. Calvin was rediscovering and renewing many of Augustine's teachings. Unfortunately, like Augustine, Calvin did not *fully* comprehend the sovereignty of God. He failed to see that God's mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:13 NAS). Calvin's unmerciful theology was bound to cause a reaction and Jakob Arminius (a Dutchman) came up with what has become a theological middle ground between Pelagianism and Calvinism.

Like Pelagians, Arminians "limit" (in fact, negate!) God's sovereignty by believing man can overrule God by our alleged free will. But if God is really sovereign, then no one overrules Him.² John Wesley was raised in the Anglican faith and his theology, while having strong roots in Reformed teaching, deviated seriously from it at several points. He agreed with the Reformed position of the total sinfulness (depravity) of man and our total dependence upon God's grace.

But he combined those doctrines with the Arminian doctrine of free will. Wesley taught that Christians could be "entirely sanctified" in this life. By this he did not mean that Christians could be delivered from the *possibility* of ever sinning again, but he did believe that Christians could attain to entire sanctification and be delivered from "*voluntary* transgressions of *known* law."

Where have we heard that before? Why it's the Pelagian redefinition of sin now dressed up in Arminian clothing! Nevertheless, Wesley was a devout Christian with a passion for God. He recognized from his own experience and studies of Scripture that those Christians most dedicated to pleasing God occasionally experienced inner rebellion, a systemic spiritual illness, which blunted their zeal and decreased the ability of their will to love and obey God. The cure for this rebellion and spiritual illness, Wesley said, came about in a "second crisis of faith," when "a second work of grace" brought about "entire sanctification." Wesley's view of perfectionism and entire sanctification can be seen in the key points of his sermon "On Perfection."

1. To love God with all one's heart and one's neighbour as oneself.
2. To have the mind that is in Christ.
3. To bear the

- fruit of the Spirit.
4. The restoration of the image of God in the soul, a recovery of man to the moral image of God, which consists of 'righteousness and true holiness.'
5. Inward and outward righteousness, 'holiness of life issuing from holiness of heart.'
6. God's sanctifying of the person in spirit, soul and body.
7. The person's own perfect consecration to God.
8. A continuous presentation through Jesus of the individual's thoughts, words and actions as a sacrifice to God of praise and thanksgiving.
9. Salvation from all sin.

No Christian would doubt that we should all strive for those goals; but perfectionists believe that these can be obtained in this life. Our view is that the perfectionism of Wesley and of those whose movements and sects evolved out of his teaching leads Christians either to pride and arrogance, thinking they have already attained; or to despair that they can even truly be saved, since they continually fall short of perfection. It is a burden too grievous to bear. They are enslaved to guilt and condemnation. They are not free. The truth would set them free.

As mentioned earlier, what filters down to the flock is not always what is clearly understood by the scholars and theologians. Remember, Wesley himself did not truly believe that one could attain "perfection" as the average flock member understands perfection, i.e., absolute perfection. Wesley's *perfection* is redefined. So when we read his sermon point #9: "Salvation from all sin," we must remember that to Wesley "sin" means "voluntary transgression of known law."

The Bible, on the other hand, says nothing of "voluntary" and nothing of "known" law. It simply says "for sin is the transgression of the law." Period. Consider: would we say that I am "perfect" in my obedience to the traffic laws when I cruise down the highway at 70 m.p.h. in a 55 m.p.h. zone? Wesley and Pelagius would say that my obedience is perfect because I was unaware of the law in that stretch of highway and I did not deliberately (voluntarily) transgress the law. Pardon me, Wes, but what sophistry that is! Non-intentional, I'm sure; but that's what filters down to the flock, and they are not free.

(*To be continued.*)

Endnotes

1. Council of Trent, Session v, Canon 25
2. The free will vs. predestination debate is much too deep to attempt to expound here. We have done so at length in our tape album #A-101, *The Sovereignty of God*. \$33 ppd.

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