THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT
THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY
PART 1

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Though the title of this series is “The Holiness Movement,” we actually will be taking a more comprehensive historical perspective. What is technically called the Holiness movement, as we will see, developed out of the Methodist Church in the middle of the 19th century (the 1800s) in American. It was an attempt to preserve the teachings on holiness of John Wesley (1703–1791), the founder of Methodism. Wesley came up with the new and unique idea of a second transforming work of grace that is distinct from and subsequent to the new birth. This second blessing of entire sanctification is just as powerful and transforming as the first transforming work of grace—the new birth or regeneration. The Methodist Church eventually forsook Wesley’s view of sanctification at the end of the 19th century, but the Holiness Movement continued to champion Wesley’s view. Part of this Holiness tradition led to what is called the Keswick (the “w” is silent) movement. It is the particular form of Holiness teaching found in the Keswick movement that is of most interest to us in our study the next few weeks. The Keswick movement began at the end of the 19th century and in the 20th century became the most common way of understanding the Bible’s teaching on holiness in fundamentalism and most churches in the broader evangelical tradition—Baptist churches, Bible churches, some Presbyterian churches (also many parachurch organizations, such as Campus Crusade for Christ). The Keswick movement, as we will see, has had a profound and lasting effect on evangelical churches, churches like ours (though not ours), right up to our present day.

B. At this point you are probably wondering what exactly is the Keswick movement and what exactly does it teach about holiness. It is basically a continuation with some modifications of Wesley’s view of two entirely distinctive works of grace—salvation and sanctification. If you have been exhorted to “let go and let God,” to completely surrender to the Lord, to make Christ Lord of your life, to live as a spiritual Christian rather than a carnal Christian, to live a life of victory over sin, then you have been exposed to Keswick theology. It is not that some of the ideas expressed in these statements are all wrong, but taken together they are characteristic of a theology of Christian holiness that can do more harm than good. The key problem, as we will see, is that Keswick theology (like Wesley) makes a sharp break between justification and sanctification—that a person can be
justified but not necessarily experience sanctification. This teaching suggests that progress in personal holiness is not necessarily the normal Christian experience, but only comes to those who have a second, distinct experience of sanctifying faith. It promises a victorious Christian life over sin solely through an act of faith that leads to total surrender. We will explore the details of this viewpoint in more detail later in our series.

C. You may have heard of Dr. J. I. Packer. He is a well-known evangelical theologian, writer of numerous books, and former professor of theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. His most famous book is Knowing God. Packer was born in England and was saved when he was a first-year student at Oxford University. He quickly came under the influence of Keswick teaching. Unfortunately, he found that he was not really helped by what he was being taught; instead, he found he was actually hindered in his desire to grow as a Christian. Packer has written about his experiences with Keswick theology in a number of places. In one place he says: “It is not much of a recommendation when all you can say is that this teaching may help you if you do not take its details too seriously. It is utterly damning to have to say, as in this case I think we must, that if you do take its details seriously, it will tend not to help you but to destroy you” (Keep in Step with the Spirit, 159).

D. I myself was saved in a church that taught Keswick theology, but I never actually heard the term Keswick, and I am not sure the pastor of the church never had either. He believed he was simply teaching what the Bible taught about holiness. The Bible that everyone used, the Scofield Reference Bible, taught Keswick theology in its many notes, but, of course, most Christians have no knowledge of that. When I went to Bible college, the same Keswick theology was taught there. Naturally, like all of us, I wanted to know how to become a better Christian, how to grow in Christian maturity, how to make progress in sanctification or holiness. Unfortunately, some of what I was taught about sanctification and holiness was not very helpful and actually misled me. It took me many years to come to a genuine understanding of the Bible’s teaching on holiness. In fact, I was teaching in seminary before I really came to fully understand the truth. It wasn’t that the truth was not out there in the evangelical world, but it was not well represented in the circles in which I moved; it was not readily available. There was no Internet, of course. Most preaching on the Christian radio was Keswick oriented. There were a few books showing the errors of Keswick theology, but very few. The truth of the matter is that the Bible’s true teaching on holiness has been taught clearly since the Protestant Reformations, 500 years ago. But unfortunately the theology of John Wesley, the Holiness movement, and its heirs like Keswick theology obscured the truth for many Christians until fairly recent times, especially in the modern evangelical Christianity. Fortunately, we are now living at a time when many voices have and are exposing the errors of Keswick theology, and much of what we hear and read is very sound. Thankfully there are now numerous sound books and other forms of teaching that can lead us in the proper path to holiness.
E. I can imagine you are saying to yourself, “Why in the world is Bill Combs so worked up about this Keswick theology?” Looking back at my life I can see how much I was hindered in my Christian life by trying to live according to Keswick theology. And my experience has been the experience of thousands of other Christians, maybe some of you. Fortunately, here at CBC you have never been exposed to Keswick teaching in a positive sense, because we don’t teach it. But if you have been in other evangelical churches over the years, or have read much evangelical literature, or have listened to sermons from some well-known preachers, then you are probably familiar with some of the ideas associated with Keswick even though you have never been formally taught about the history and teachings of the movement. For right now I am not going to try and explain Keswick theology any more than what I have said already. Everything, I believe, will be explained in due time. I will ask you to bear with me for a time while I lay some important groundwork that will enable us to more fully comprehend all the issues around Keswick theology.

F. The subtitle I have given to this series, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” is meant to be somewhat humorous. At the same time it accurately describes some of the aspects of the movement. The “good” can mainly be found in the intentions of the Keswick movement. Among those who are considered to be leaders in the movement, there was almost always a genuine desire for holiness, for a closer walk with God. The “bad” is unfortunately to be found in incorrect teachings that were put forth in an attempt to obtain a worthy goal. What resulted has been a mixture of good and bad. As with all movements that involve sinful people, there have been ugly episodes that one would rather not remember.

II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

A. Salvation

1. The term salvation is the most widely used term in our Christian vocabulary and in the Bible itself to express God’s rescue of us from sin and death with all its benefits and blessings. The noun salvation (Greek sōtēria) and the verb save (Greek σῴζω) and their cognates occur more than 150 times in the New Testament. Most commonly we speak of salvation as something that is past, such as, in expressions like, “I was saved…” or “Are you saved?” But in the New Testament salvation is spoken of as not only as a past experience, but also a present and future one:

   a. Past — “He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace” (2 Tim 1:9). “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5)

   b. Present — “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18).

   c. Future — “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Rom 5:9–10).
2. We use the term *salvation* as an umbrella term under which are subsumed a number of other terms that are considered subsets or aspects of salvation. So *salvation* encompasses all the various saving benefits we have in Christ—past, present, and future.

3. Some of these aspects of salvation are past: we have been justified. Some aspects are present: we are being sanctified. Some are future: we will be glorified.

4. Some of these aspects of salvation are experiential and some are nonexperiential. Experiential (or experimental) as applied to salvation refers to an act of God within us. An experiential act is one in which the believer is changed in his or her immaterial spirit/soul. Regeneration (being born again) is experiential. Our immaterial being receives spiritual life. We are no longer dead spiritually. Nonexperiential as applied to salvation refers to an act of God with respect to us. Nonexperiential acts of salvation do no change us internally, in our soul, though they are just as important. They are more judicial or legal or positional. Justification is nonexperiential. I am declared righteous—strictly a legal declaration. Theologian John Murray suggests that we might better grasp the difference between the experiential act of regeneration and the nonexperiential act of justification with this illustration: “The distinction is like that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. That is not what a judge does—he gives a verdict regarding our judicial status. If we are innocent he declares accordingly” (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 121).

B. Justification (past)

1. The word *justify* is a forensic or legal term with the meaning “acquit.” It is the normal word to use when the accused is declared “Not guilty.” It means to “declare righteous,” not to “make righteous.” It is the opposite of condemn. “To condemn”
does not mean “to make wicked,” but “to declare guilty”; similarly, “to justify” means “to declare just.” To be justified means to be acquitted by God from all charges that could be brought against a person because of his sins.

2. “Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 723).

3. One aspect of our justification includes forgiveness of our sins. “However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them’” (Rom 4:5–8).

4. The second aspect of our justification is God imputing the perfect righteousness of Christ to us. God imputes, that is, regards or counts the righteousness of Christ as belonging to us. He credits it to our account. “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:19).

C. Sanctification (past, present, and future)

1. The basic meaning of the term *sanctify* is “to set apart,” “to make holy.” In sanctification the believer is set apart from sin and set apart to God. In justification God *declares* us righteous; in sanctification God *makes* us righteous or holy.

2. Three phases of sanctification:
   a. Past or initial sanctification (I have been sanctified) — The believer is definitively and instantaneously set apart from the dominion of sin. The believer is no longer a slave to sin. “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Rom 6:14, 17, 18). “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). “And by that will, we have been made holy [sanctified] through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10).
   b. Present or progressive sanctification (I am being sanctified) — The believer is progressively being set apart from the power and practice of sin. Throughout this life the believer is progressively becoming holy while sin is being extirpated. “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified” (1 Thess 4:3). “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (Rom 6:12). “Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor 7:1).
c. Future or entire sanctification (I will be sanctified) — The believer is completely and entirely set apart from the possibility of sin, no longer able to sin. The believer is made perfectly holy either at death or the rapture. “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 our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23). “…Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph 5:25–27).

D. Relationship between Justification and Sanctification
1. Though different and distinguishable, they cannot be separated.
2. Progressive sanctification **always** follows justification. Sanctification is not **automatic**, but it is **inevitable**. There is no such thing as a Christian who is justified that is not also being sanctified. “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you [JUSTIFICATION] will carry it on to completion [SANCTIFICATION] until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6)

3. It is this relationship between justification and sanctification that is at the heart of this whole series. The Holiness movement and the Keswick movement that was born out of it makes a sharp separation, almost a total disjunction between justification and sanctification such that they teach it is possible to have justification without sanctification.

**III. THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION**

**A. Martin Luther (1483–1546)** — The Protestant Reformation began with Martin Luther. He was and Augustinian monk, priest, and professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg. On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed his famous Ninety-Five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg. These Theses raised questions for what he thought would be the beginning of scholarly discussion about practices of the Roman Catholic Church with which Luther disagreed, particularly the sale of indulgences. Luther came to understand that the Roman Catholic Church in his day had perverted the gospel of grace into a system of works-righteousness. He is famous for recovering the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

**B.** Luther was followed by other Reformers throughout Europe like Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox. In the 16th century, these men and others recovered the Bible’s true teaching on salvation from the errors of Roman Catholicism, including the doctrines of justification and sanctification. The Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Anglican, and Baptist churches set down their mature thinking in a whole series of doctrinal confessions in order to lay out in detail the Bible’s teaching on salvation. Probably the most famous of these was the Westminster Confession of 1646. Baptist historian William L. Lumkin called it the “noblest of all Evangelical creeds” (*Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 237). It was adopted by English Baptists with necessary Baptist modifications as the Second London Baptist Confession in 1689. This most important Baptist Confession was then adopted, with slight modification, in America as the Philadelphia Baptist Confession (1742). The Second London Baptist Confession was updated by Charles Spurgeon in 1855 and became the basic statement of his theology.

**C.** The Second London Baptist Confession was universally embraced by most regular Baptist churches in 19th century America. The section on sanctification reads (from Philadelphia Baptist confession of 1742):
1. “Those who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having had a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, are then further sanctified in a very real and personal way. Because of the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, and by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them, the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed. The different lusts of the body of sin are increasingly weakened and mortified, and Christ’s people are increasingly quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to practice all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

2. “This sanctification extends throughout the whole person, yet it remains imperfect in this life. Some remnants of corruption live on in every part, and from this arises a continuous war between irreconcilable parties—the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.”

3. “In this war, although the remaining corruption for a time may greatly prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part overcomes. And so the saints grow in grace perfecting holiness in the fear of God; pressing after a heavenly life in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in His Word, has prescribed to them.”

We should note several important points in this understanding of sanctification:

1. Sanctification begins at the moment of conversion with the creation of “a new heart and a new spirit.” That this is some sort of initial sanctification is indicated by the words “are then further sanctified.”

2. The essence of this initial or past sanctification is that “the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed.”

3. The “further” or present sanctification is a process in which the “different lusts of the body of sin are increasingly weakened and mortified” and believers “are increasingly quickened and strengthened in all saving graces.”
4. Present sanctification means that the sinful tendencies in the believer are gradually being mitigated—“different lusts of the body of sin are increasingly weakened”—and righteous tendencies are gradually being “strengthened” so that “the regenerate part [gradually] overcomes.”

5. “Sanctification…remains imperfect in this life” so that within all believers there “arises a continuous war between irreconcilable parties—the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.”

6. Sanctification is not automatic in the life of the believer, but it is inevitable since “although the remaining corruption for a time may greatly prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part overcomes.”

D. This commonly accepted view of sanctification was challenged by John Wesley in the eighteenth century. He in turn influenced a whole host of theological movements, especially in the nineteenth century. Many of these same teachings were propagated in fundamental and evangelical churches and schools. I will attempt to trace the development of these teachings from the time of Wesley to the present day and then seek to evaluate them in light of Scripture.
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PART 2

REVIEW

1. John Wesley came up with a new and unique idea of sanctification. Just as one is saved (justified) by an instantaneous work of grace, so, according to Wesley, one can become entirely sanctified (eradication of sin) by a second transforming work of grace. Just as a person is saved by faith, so a person can also be entirely sanctified (holy) by faith. Wesley’s view of sanctification with some modification was adopted by groups after Wesley.

2. Salvation is the broadest Bible term that expresses God’s rescue of us from sin and death with all its benefits, including justification and sanctification.


4. The truth is that progressive sanctification (spiritual growth) always follows justification. Progressive sanctification is not automatic, but it is inevitable. There is no such thing as a Christian who is justified who is not also being sanctified.

5. The relationship between justification and sanctification is the central issue in this series. The Holiness movement and the Keswick movement that was born out of it makes a sharp
separation, almost a total disjunction between justification and sanctification such that they teach it is possible to have justification without sanctification. And sanctification, if obtained, is done so instantly by faith. The truth is that just as faith is the instrumental cause of justification so justification is the instrumental cause of sanctification.


IV. WESLEY AND HIS SUCCESSORS

A. The doctrine of sanctification, as it is taught and understood in much of contemporary evangelicalism, has been profoundly influenced by the founder of Methodism, John Wesley. He came up with the new and unique idea of a second transforming work of grace that is distinct from and subsequent to the new birth. This doctrine of “Christian perfectionism,” with some modifications, was fully embraced by his followers, especially in America. I will attempt to demonstrate how Wesley’s view of sanctification has been transmitted to our day through the influence of important individuals and movements, particularly Charles Finney and Asa Mahan, Phoebe Palmer, the Higher Life movement, and the Keswick (the “w” is silent) or Victorious Life movement. It is mainly through this last movement, especially in the form propagated by Lewis Sperry Chafer of Dallas Theological Seminary and its sister institutions, that evangelicalism has been most deeply impacted.

B. Wesleyan Perfectionism

1. John Wesley (1703–1791), though ordained in the Anglican Church, developed a distinct doctrine of sanctification that he called “Christian perfection,” “perfect love” (1 John 4:18), “entire sanctification,” “full salvation,” and the “second blessing.” Wesley’s viewpoint, set forth in his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.* Wesley was influenced by the writings of earlier Catholic and Anglican mystical traditions.

2. Of course, Wesley believed that his view was entirely biblical. As early as 1733 he preached a sermon on “Circumcision of the Heart” (Rom 2:29) in which he defined “Christian perfection” as “that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, ‘from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit;’ and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus; the being so ‘renewed in the image of our mind,’ as to be ‘perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect’” (*Works*, 11:367). According to Wesley, Matthew 5:48 commands perfection (“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,” KJV), so it must be attainable in this life (*Works*, 11:390). He also pointed to texts like 1 John 3:9, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin” (KJV). Wesley believed that a sanctified “Christian is so far perfect, as not to commit sin” (*Works*, 11:376) and did not object to describing the sanctified Christian as “sinless” (*Works*, 11:446).
3. This perfection is not absolute but only relative, consisting in freedom from willful sin of known divine law. Wesley refused to call anything sin except a voluntary transgression of a known law. Thus a “perfect” Christian is still subject to mistakes and involuntary transgressions. Sin is limited to willful, intentional sinful acts. Nevertheless, Wesley willingly called the sanctified Christian sinless. Though he believed others in his own lifetime had reached this state of perfection, Wesley never claimed he had, though he urged all Christians to strive for it.

4. This work of entire sanctification happens instantly by “a simple act of faith.” (Works, 11:446). “The crisis of entire sanctification, negatively, eliminates all sinful desires from the heart (e.g., pride, envy, jealously, anger, lust), destroys inbred moral depravity, and delivers from outward transgressions of the law. Positively, entire sanctification effects complete purity of intentions, tempers, and actions, stimulates perfect love of God and neighbor, and restores the moral imago in the soul” (Demarest, The Cross and Salvation, 391). The assurance that one has been entirely sanctified is confirmed to him by the witness of the Holy Spirit (Works, 11:420). At first Wesley believed that no one who had obtained entire sanctification could lose it, but later he changed his mind based on his observation of those he was certain were at one time perfect but later obviously fell from that state. Nevertheless, he believed they could instantly reclaim it (Works, 11:426–27).

5. Though we admire Wesley for his preaching of the gospel and the revival he brought to England; nevertheless, by making a chronological gap between justification and sanctification and by teaching an entire instantaneous sanctification, he and his followers in Methodism and the later Holiness movement obscured the true doctrine of sanctification.

6. The man whom Wesley wanted to be his successor, John Fletcher (1729–1785), strongly defended Wesley’s doctrine of perfectionism. Fletcher became the chief systematizer of Methodist theology. He commonly spoke of the experience of entire sanctification as the “baptism” or “filling of the Holy Spirit.”
C. Charles Finney and Asa Mahan

1. Wesleyan perfectionism was promoted heavily by the founder of the Methodist Church in America, Francis Asbury (1745–1816), but perfectionist doctrine also found its way into other groups outside the Methodist Church. Charles Finney (1792–1875) and his colleague at Oberlin College, Asa Mahan (1799–1889), adopted the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification. Finney is mainly known as the father of modern revivalism. He was trained as a lawyer, but after his conversion in 1821, he prepared for the ministry under a local Presbyterian pastor in New York. Between 1824 and 1832 he conducted revival meetings mainly in Western New York and established the modern methods of revivalism. Today, Finney is not looked upon as an evangelical Christian—at least his teachings are a denial of evangelical Christianity. He denied original sin and that people are sinners by nature (Lectures on Systematic Theology, 249). He believed that regeneration was only a moral change in a person, a change of person’s will, and not a change of character, not the supernatural impartation of spiritual life to a spiritually dead person by the Holy Spirit (Lectures on Systematic Theology, 285). Finney also rejected the penal substitutionary death of Christ for sinners, arguing that it was only a moral influence (Lectures on Systematic Theology, 273). He argued that salvation was strictly up to our own initiative. Finney insisted “that the actual turning, or change, is the sinner’s own act” (Finney, Sermons on Important Subjects, 20). “Don’t wait for God to change your heart. Why should you wait for Him to do what He has commanded you to do?” (God’s Love For A Sinning World, 112). Finney also denied the Reformation view of justification by faith, arguing that the righteousness of Christ is not imputed to the believer (Lectures on Systematic Theology, 385).

2. The leaders of the First Great Awakening like George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards understood the revivals they experienced in the 1740s to be “surprising” works of God, to use Edwards’s expression. Until Finney a revival was viewed as something only God could produce. Revivals were viewed rightly as the sovereign work of God. Revivals in which larger groups of people were converted were simply the intensification of what is normal to biblical Christianity—the preaching of the gospel and prayer with emphasis on the gravity of sin and the need for the Holy Spirit to bring life to dead sinners. They were viewed as being extraordinary in degree and extent, not in nature.

3. But with Finney there is the development of something new—revivalism. Finney believed that “a revival is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense…. A revival is the result of the right use of the appropriate means” (Lectures on Revivals of Religion, 11). Revivals, he believed, could be produced by generating religious excitement. Finney used various “new measures” such as holding revival meetings over protracted periods. As Ian Murray explains: “Seasons of revival became ‘revival meetings.’ Instead of being ‘surprising’ they might now be even
announced in advance” (*Revival and Revivalism*, xviii). Finney made use of the anxious bench at the front of the church that was used as a tactic to pressure sinners to come forward and “pray through” until they found Christ. The assumption was that if a person came to the bench he would be converted. Finney would pray publicly for people present in his audience, whom he identified by name, to repent of specific sins, which he also named. Christians were to be blamed if there was no revival, for, according to Finney, God “has placed His Spirit at your disposal” (*Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 98). “You see why you have not a revival. It is only because you do not want one” (*Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 29).

4. Eventually Finney gave up on most of his revival meetings because he discovered in later years that his early converts turned out not to be long lasting. He turned from evangelism and became a pastor in New York City and later a professor at Oberlin College. He and Asa Mahan became convinced that the problem with Finney’s converts was not they were not really converted but that they lacked the second blessing—entire sanctification. Finney and Mahan enthusiastically adopted the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification. Green notes: “They taught a doctrine of perfectionism made possible by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which empowered and perfected the will of the believer to act in conformity with the will of God. Though not denying Wesley’s emphasis on perfect love as moral perfection, Oberlin theology emphasized perfection of the will—the voluntary and conscious action of Christians” (*Dictionary of Christianity in America*, 892). Like Wesley, Oberlin theology held that there is no sin except in voluntary transgression of known law. This entire sanctification was to be obtained by an instantaneous act of faith. Mahan taught that there were thus two kinds of Christians: a lower kind who had received only justification—the carnal Christian, and a higher kind who had also received sanctification—the spiritual Christian.
5. Mahan encouraged Finney to return to the location of some of his former revivals to try out this new doctrine. Finney went back to Rochester where he had earlier had triumphant revival meetings. But this time he was not as successful, possibly because his listeners did not understand his new perfectionist emphasis. But the idea of revivalism was born. The evangelist has a two-fold mission: he comes into town to preach the gospel to the lost and sanctification to the saved.

6. Though a Finney was not a Methodist, he was influenced by Methodist doctrine of entire sanctification, and he influenced Methodists as they adopted his methods of revival. Finney and the Oberlin faculty gave clearly stimulated the holiness movements with American and British Methodism. An example of this two-way influence is seen in the correlation of entire sanctification and the baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit. While it is true that John Fletcher had made the same connection, Methodists in the early nineteenth century were not expressing entire sanctification in those terms. But with the success of the Oberlin theology, this terminology was quickly adopted by the Methodists, beginning about 1840.

D. Phoebe Palmer
1. Perfectionist teaching among Methodists began to wane in the early part of the nineteenth century, but received a catalyst from a Methodist lay couple, Phoebe (1807–1874) and Walter Palmer. In 1835 Phoebe Palmer’s sister began a weekly prayer meeting known as the “Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness.” In 1837 Phoebe herself received “entire sanctification,” and in 1840 she and her husband embarked on an itinerant ministry that eventually took them throughout the United States, Canada, and the British Isles, spreading their newfound faith. Phoebe Palmer was the most influential woman in the American Methodist Church at a time when the Methodist church was the largest Christian denomination in America. Her book The Way of Holiness (1843) and her periodical
The Guide to Holiness (first called The Guide to Christian Perfection) were influential in identifying these perfectionist teachings as the Holiness movement.

2. Mrs. Palmer simplified and popularized Wesley’s doctrine of entire sanctification. First, she, like other Methodists after 1840, followed the Oberlin Theology and John Fletcher in their identification of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Second, she emphasized that entire sanctification was also an enduement of divine power for service, linking holiness with power. Finally, she devised a simple and shorter method for receiving entire sanctification—her “altar theology.” First, she lifted the Jesus’s words in Matthew 23:19 that “the altar sanctifies the gift,” and connected that with Exodus 29:37, “whatever touches the altar shall be holy.” Therefore, if one places oneself on the altar (Rom 12:1, “present your bodies a living sacrifice”), God would be required to make that one holy—entire sanctification. Thus, entire consecration guarantees entire sanctification. White summarizes: “Her ‘altar theology’ reduced the quest for sanctification to a simple three-step process: (1) consecrating oneself entirely to God; (2) believing God keeps his promise to sanctify what is consecrated; and (3) bearing witness to what God has done. Her theology was adopted by holiness denominations such as Wesleyan Methodists, Free Methodists, Church of the Nazarene, Christian and Missionary Alliance, as well as the Salvation Army and the Keswick movement in England” (Dictionary of Christianity in America, 861).

E. The Higher Life Movement

1. The Higher Life movement was simply a part of the Holiness movement, mostly outside of Methodist circles. The key was the introduction of perfectionist teaching to non-Methodists without using perfectionist language, which they would have found distasteful. The basic theology of the higher life movement “was that while justification by faith brought cleansing from the guilt of sin, sanctification by faith brought cleansing from the power of sin and, consequently, a happy, or higher, Christian life” (Dictionary of Christianity in America, 526).
2. William E. Boardman (1810–1886), a Presbyterian minister, succeeded in opening the doors of non-Methodist churches to Holiness teaching through his ministry and his book *The Higher Christian Life*. Its publication in 1858 marks the beginning of the Higher Life movement. Boardman had been influenced by the writings of Finney and Mahan as well as Phoebe Palmer’s “Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness.” Like all Holiness advocates, Boardman believed in a “full salvation” or “second conversion” that is separated into two distinct parts—justification and sanctification—which are received by two distinct acts of faith” (*The Higher Christian Life*, vi–vii, 94). Later in his life Boardman identified this second work of grace as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Higher Life teachers moved away from the Wesleyan view that sin is eradicated from the believer in the second blessing, preferring to speak of the believer’s dominion or victory over sin that results in deliverance from all conscious sinning.

3. Also instrumental in spreading Holiness teaching outside Methodist circles, especially in Europe, were Robert Pearsall Smith (1827–1899) and his wife, Hannah Whitall Smith (1832–1911). They were both from Quaker homes, though Robert spent much of his early life as a Presbyterian. Both were converted in revivals in 1858, and both claimed the “second blessing” of sanctification in 1867 through Methodist influence. In 1873
they were in England for a series of meetings with William E. Boardman and Asa Mahan that produced large results for the Holiness cause. Robert Smith had very successful meetings on the continent as well. “So overwhelming was the response to his message that he returned saying that all of Europe was ‘at my feet.’” (Dictionary of Christianity in America, 1098). In 1875 Mrs. Smith produced her widely read The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life. In spite of its defective view of sanctification, this is considered a devotional classic and has sold over two million copies.

4. Mrs. Smith’s teachings are a combination of Wesleyan holiness and Quaker concepts of quietism She brought a quietism, and extreme passivity—letting go and letting God—to the second blessing. She describes the “Higher Christian Life” as “an entire surrender to the Lord, and a perfect trust in Him, resulting in victory over sin and inward rest of soul” (The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life, 37). In this state the believer is free from any conscious transgression of God’s law, certainly a “Happy Life.”
THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT
THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY
PART 3

REVIEW

1. John Wesley (1703–1791) departed from the Reformation doctrine of progressive sanctification. Instead he taught it was possible to have a second transforming work grace that is distinct and subsequent to conversion that he called by various names, including entire sanctification, the second blessing, and Christian perfection. This “perfection” consisted in freedom from voluntary transgressions of known law, that is, freedom from intentional sinful acts. By a simple act of faith sin could be eradicated from the believer. This Christian perfection doctrine became a central teaching of the Methodist Church in the 1800s.

2. Charles Finney (1792–1875), though not a Methodist, adopted Wesley’s second blessing theology, making it part of his revivalism.

3. Phoebe Palmer (1807–1874), a Methodist, simplified and popularized Wesley’s doctrine of entire sanctification with her “altar theology” in which she emphasized complete dedication or consecration as the means for attaining the experience.

4. Wesley’s doctrine of entire sanctification was adopted with some modifications outside of Methodist circles. This was called the Higher Life movement. Wesley’s perfectionist language was modified so that the second blessing, sanctification by faith, brought cleansing from the power of sin and, consequently, a happy, or higher, Christian life. Higher Life advocates disliked the view that sin is eradicated in the second blessing, preferring to speak of the believer’s dominion or victory over sin that results in deliverance from all conscious sinning. Leaders in this movement were William E. Boardman (1810–1896) and Robert Pearsall Smith (1827–1899) and his wife, Hannah Whitall Smith (1832–1911).
IV. WESLEY AND HIS SUCCESSORS

F. The Keswick (Victorious Life) Movement

1. The Keswick movement is an outgrowth of a series of breakfast meetings designed to promote Holiness teaching during evangelist Dwight L. Moody’s 1873 London campaign. These meetings were led by Robert and Hannah Smith and included other Holiness leaders like William E. Boardman and Asa Mahan. The spirit of these meetings was continued by the Broadlands conference in 1874 and a meeting at Oxford a few weeks later. An even larger meeting was held at Brighton from May 29 to June 7, 1875. Moody threw his support behind it and said: “Let us lift up our hearts to seek earnestly a blessing on the great Convention that is now being held in Brighton, perhaps the most important meeting ever gathered” (Barabas, So Great Salvation, 23). One of the converts to the Victorious Life at these meetings was Rev. T. D. Harford-Battersby, Vicar of St. John’s, Keswick, a parish in the lake district of northwest England. He organized a conference for July of 1875 that was held in a tent on his church grounds with about three or four hundred attending. Annual Keswick conferences have been held each summer ever since.
2. Robert Pearsall Smith was supposed to lead the first Keswick conference, but shortly before it was to begin, he was forced to drop out due to what was an indiscretion with a young woman in a hotel room. He and his wife returned to America, and he retired from public life. Smith’s place was filled by H. W. Webb-Peploe, a Church of England clergyman. Marsden notes he “dominated the Keswick movement…for almost fifty years and did a great deal to define the Keswick teaching. Especially important was Webb-Peploe’s firm opposition to Methodist-type perfectionism. He and his fellow representatives of the Keswick position objected to the recent Wesleyan views which taught the eradication of the sinful nature in this life” (*Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 77).

Instead, Keswick teaching has generally affirmed a *counteraction* of the old and new natures. However, Keswick did not distance itself from its Holiness roots. Walter Sloan’s 1935 history of the movement, produced under the supervision of the Trustees of the Keswick convention, clearly claims Robert and Hannah Smith as two of Keswick’s earliest leaders and identifies their second-blessing experience as a Keswick one.

3. Keswick teaching was first spread in America through Moody’s Northfield Conferences in Massachusetts. James M. Gray (1851–1935) took over leadership of Moody Bible Institute in 1904 and was influential in establishing Keswick theology at Moody. In 1910 Charles G. Trumbull, the editor of the *Sunday School Times*, became a convert to Keswick beliefs, and he used his editorial energies to promote Keswick teaching in America. He along with his assistant at the *Sunday School Times*, Robert C. McQuilkin (founded Columbia Bible College in 1923), began an “American Keswick” conference in 1913, which permanently settled at Keswick Grove, New Jersey in 1923.

4. Though Keswick teaching agrees with Holiness teaching that sanctification comes as a crisis experience separate from justification (“holiness through faith”), it moved away from the idea that the believer’s tendency to sin is extinguished or eradicated, but, as we have noted, is merely counteracted by the Holy Spirit. Though some who
were associated with the movement (e.g., Moody and R. A. Torrey) continued to use the Holiness terminology “baptism of the Holy Spirit” for the second work of grace, most Keswick teachers have preferred the term filling. This filling produces “a life of victory over conscious sin” (Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 99). James M. Gray argued that the believer’s filling provides power for “a life of victory over every known sin” (*The Holy Spirit in Doctrine and Life*, 59).

5. There are two types of Christians in Keswick teaching. The “average” or “carnal” Christian behaves much like an unbeliever. Keswick conventions are “spiritual clinics” designed to turn the average, carnal Christian into a “normal” or “spiritual” Christian, one who is filled with the Holy Spirit. This transformation from the carnal to the spiritual Christian takes place not by a long struggle but by a simple, single act of faith. “Trumbull argues that the secret to the victorious life is for the Christian to make an unconditioned and absolute surrender to God in faith. One must not strive for spiritual victory; rather one must simply ‘Let go, and let God!’” (Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 398). H. C. G. Moule, probably Keswick’s best theologian, described this state of victory for the believer as “a blessed and wakeful Quietism” (Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 275).
6. It appears that Keswick teaching was the first to describe the second blessing as surrendering to Christ’s Lordship. Barabas explains:

Very many Christians at conversion know almost nothing of taking Christ to be their Master. They take Jesus to take away their sin; to bring them to heaven; to help them when they pray; but they never think of saying that they are no more going to have their own will, and that Jesus must have their will every hour. And there is real need...to put one’s whole life under the management of Jesus. As the divine Potter He cannot shape the human vessel unless it is committed into His hands and remains unresistingly and quietly there. If we are to be used by Him in the performance of His will, the supreme and undivided Lordship of Jesus Christ must be a fact in our lives (So Great Salvation, 112).

Well-known Keswick speaker W. Graham Scroggie observed: “There are multitudes of Christians who do not know Christ as Lord, as Master of the whole life; and if I understand the innermost significance of the Keswick movement, it is to expound this matter and to press it upon those who attend” (The Keswick Story, 173–74)

7. Most evangelical Christians today probably have little contact with writings of John Wesley and most of the movements I have described that followed him, but the writings of many in the Keswick tradition are still commonly available and read. Well-known names associated with Keswick include A. T. Pierson, F. B. Meyer, Andrew Murray, H. C. G. Moule, W. H. Griffith Thomas, C. I. Scofield, J. Hudson Taylor, Charles G. Trumbull, J. Oswald Sanders, W. Graham Scroggie, Robert C. McQuilkin, J. Robertson McQuilkin, Alan Redpath, Ruth Paxson, and W. Ian Thomas.

8. Higher Life and Keswick theology is commonly seen in lines of many hymns. The best-known hymn writer reflecting Keswick theology was Frances Ridley Havergal (1836–1879). For instance her hymn Like a River Glorious:
Like a river glorious
Is God's perfect peace,
Over all victorious
In its bright increase.

and Take My Life and Let It Be:
Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

Other examples include Fanny Crosby’s Blessed Assurance:
Perfect submission, all is at rest!
I in my Savior am happy and blessed,

Is Your All on the Altar? by Elisha Hoffman:
You have longed for sweet peace,
And for faith to increase,
And have earnestly, fervently prayed;
But you cannot have rest,
Or be perfectly blest,
Until all on the altar is laid.

Others include Channels Only and Have Thine Own Way, Lord.

V. SUMMARY OF TEACHING
A. All of the previous movements, whose existence can be traced to Wesley’s doctrine of entire, instantaneous sanctification, have a number of elements in common:

1. Justification and sanctification are distinguished from one another as two separate gifts and are each obtained instantaneously by two separate acts of faith.

2. Though this instantaneous sanctification is a complete sanctification, it does not actually bring freedom from all sin but only freedom from sinning or freedom from conscious sinning or freedom from the commission of known sins.

3. This sanctification is not a stable condition, but one that must be continuously maintained moment by moment, and if lost can, nevertheless, be recovered instantaneously.

B. Though John Wesley invented the doctrine of a second, sanctifying work of grace, he never identified it with believer’s acceptance of Christ’s lordship. But as the method of receiving this second work of grace was explained as an act of dedication or surrender by Phoebe Palmer and those who followed her lead in the Higher Life and Keswick movements, eventually those in the latter movement identified this dedication with making Christ Lord of one’s life. But this nonlordship view of conversion was not fully developed until the rise of the Chaferian theology.
VI. CHAFERIAN THEOLOGY

A. Though some of Christians have been exposed to second-blessing theology by way of Keswick teaching directly, most have been more directly impacted through the theology of Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952), especially as his views have been propagated by the seminary he founded—Dallas Theological Seminary. Chafer attended Oberlin College, but his major theological influence came from his association with C. I. Scofield, whom he met in 1901 while Scofield was teaching at Moody’s Northfield Training School. At the Northfield Bible conferences Chafer’s perspective on sanctification was shaped by various Victorious Life teachers he heard there. Later, with the help of W. H. Griffith Thomas, Chafer started Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924, the theology of which was distinctively Keswick (Dictionary of Christianity in America, 238).

B. Keswick theology has continued to teach that the second blessing results in the believer living a life of “uniform sustained victory over known sin” (McQuilkin, “The Keswick Perspective,”153). The same or similar teaching is found in Chafer’s He That Is Spiritual, published in 1918. But, more important, what Chafer shares with Keswick and all second-blessing theologies going back to Wesley himself is a distinction between justification and sanctification as separate works of grace. This can be seen in the writings of Dallas Seminary graduates. For instance, a doctoral dissertation by William D. Lawrence candidly distinguishes between “saving faith” (justification) and “sanctifying faith” (“New Testament Doctrine of the Lordship of Christ,” 90–96).
C. From the time of Phoebe Palmer’s “altar theology” forward, second-blessing advocates have universally argued for the need of a crisis act of dedication or surrender as essential for progressive sanctification. Chafer’s student and Dallas professor of theology Charles Ryrie agrees: “There is perhaps no more important matter in relation to the spiritual life than dedication” (*Balancing the Christian Life*, 75). “Before any lasting progress can be made on the road of spiritual living, the believer must be a dedicated person…. It is the basic foundation for sanctification” (186). Referring to Romans 12:1, he says: “First of all there must be an initial, decisive and crisis presentation. This is represented in the Greek by the aorist infinitive used here and reinforced by the aorist imperative in Romans 6:13b…. Therefore, the presentation of body is a single, irrevocable act of surrender rather than a series of repeated acts of dedication” (79). The diagram below is essentially the same given by Ryrie (187).

![Diagram](attachment:image.png)

D. Until the believer has experienced this single, one-time act of dedication, he may be justified, but there can be no real spiritual progress—no sanctification. This is because (as no one would deny) the ministry of the Holy Spirit is essential to sanctification, or as Ryrie observes: “Control by the Spirit is a necessary part of spirituality” (*Balancing the Christian Life*, 13). And, according to Ryrie, “without initial dedication there can be no real experience of this vital ministry. Thus dedication is a prerequisite for being filled with the Spirit,” allowing the work of progressive sanctification to begin (*Balancing the Christian Life*, 83). This dedication is a once-for-all act, never to be repeated. One should never speak of rededication, only of confession and restoration (82).
E. The Chaferian separation of justification from sanctification can also be seen in its division of Christians into two categories—carnal and spiritual. These categories have been part of second-blessing terminology going back at least to Asa Mahan. During his twenty-eight years as president of Dallas, Chafer began each school year with a week of lectures “on the basic requirement for effective seminary study found in yielding to the Holy Spirit,” which set forth the basic distinction between the carnal and spiritual Christian (forward to *He That Is Spiritual*). The carnal Christian has experienced “salvation” from “the guilt and penalty of sin,” in other words, justification, but he still needs “a distinct form of salvation” from “bond-servitude to sin” (134). “The child of God does not need to yield to temptation” when he reaches the higher plane of the spiritual man (140). Thus, all believers are in the category of carnal Christian until they experience the once-for-all crisis dedication that moves them to the higher plane of spiritual Christian and as a result are initially filled with the Spirit and Christ becomes Lord of their lives. It is at this point that progressive sanctification really begins.

F. This separation of justification from sanctification includes a rejection of Christ’s Lordship in conversion because it is only at the time of the believer’s one-time act of dedication that he submits to the Lordship of Christ.

Until the rise of Keswick theology with its separation of justification and sanctification it was universally believed that to accept Christ as savior also means to accept him as Lord. For example, Paul says in Rom 10:9, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is
Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Both Chafer and Ryrie denied that saving faith includes anything about Christ’s lordship in salvation, with Ryrie going so far as calling what our church teaches, “a false gospel” (*Balancing the Christian Life*, 170).

G. If you have been in our worship service for any time you have seen Pastor Ken put a slide up at the end of his message inviting the unsaved to accept Christ. It has four bullet points:

- Realize that you are a sinner
- Recognize that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins
- Repent of your sins (“I’m going to go Your way, not my way”)
- Receive Jesus Christ into your life

Conversion is as single action of turning from sin in repentance and turning to Christ in faith. Theologian Wayne Grudem defines repentance as “a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ” (*Systematic Theology*, 713). Both Chafer (*Systematic Theology*, 3:376) and Ryrie (*So Great Salvation*, 94–97) deny that unsaved people need to repent of their sins in order to be saved. Turning from sin comes later, at the time of the second work of grace—dedication.

H. With Chafer and Ryrie the biblical doctrine of faith is flattened of most of its content. Since the Reformation, saving faith has been said to consist of three elements: (1) knowledge, (2) assent or approval, and (3) trust. One must know the facts of the gospel, the person and work of Christ. One must assent to the truthfulness of these facts—agree that they are true. Finally, and maybe most importantly, one must trust, that is, commit oneself to the truth of the gospel—one must depend on Jesus personally. But with Chafer and Ryrie, faith is stripped of the element of commitment. Commitment comes later, at the time of the second work of grace—dedication. Amazingly, a disciple of
Chafer and Ryrie, Zane Hodges, who himself was a longtime professor at Dallas Seminary (1960–1987), went so far as to say that “people are not saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross; they are saved by believing in Jesus for eternal life" (“How to Lead People to Christ, Part 2,”10).

I. You might wonder what other evangelicals thought about these ideas. There was a lot of push back beginning in the 1960s. I mentioned earlier that Ryrie had said that the teaching of commitment to Christ as an element of saving faith is a perversion of the gospel and puts one under the curse of Gal 1:6–9 (Balancing the Christian Life, 170). The most important response to and rejection these ideas was by John F. MacArthur in his book The Gospel According to Jesus in 1988. Here is a sample of what MacArthur says:

The gospel in vogue today holds forth a false hope to sinners. It promises them that they can have eternal life yet continue to live in rebellion against God. Indeed, it encourages people to claim Jesus as Savior yet defer until later the commitment to obey Him as Lord. It promises salvation from hell but not necessarily freedom from iniquity. It offers false security to people who revel in the sins of the flesh and spurn the way of holiness. By separating faith from faithfulness, it teaches that intellectual assent is as valid as a wholehearted obedience to the truth. Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners. It is not the same message Jesus proclaimed (15–16).

MacArthur’s book caused a firestorm and brought responses by Ryrie (So Great Salvation) and Zane C. Hodges (Absolutely Free!) a year later. Thankfully, today this Chaferian view of sanctification is more in the minority, but certainly not without its supporters.

J. B. B. Warfield concluded that the teaching of Chafer and those like him “is indistinguishable from what is ordinarily understood by the doctrine of ‘second blessing,’ ‘a second work of grace,’ ‘the higher life’” (review of He That Is Spiritual, 323).
1. All of the movements we have discussed in past three weeks can be traced to Wesley’s doctrine of entire, instantaneous sanctification.

2. Justification and sanctification are distinguished from one another as two separate gifts and are each obtained instantaneously by two separate acts of faith. Sanctification may never take place.

3. Wesley never clearly explains the process that leads up to the sanctifying faith of entire sanctification. He spoke, for example, of the need for fasting and prayer. Phoebe Palmer simplified the process with her “altar theology, arguing that the primary requirement was complete and total surrender or dedication in conjunction with the baptism (filling) of the Holy Spirit.

4. This sanctification does not actually bring freedom from all sin but only freedom from sinning or freedom from conscious sinning or freedom from the commission of known sins.

5. This sanctification is not a stable condition (i.e., the filling of the Spirit), but one that must be continuously maintained moment by moment, and if lost can, nevertheless, be recovered.
6. What this second blessing of sanctification means changes over time from Wesleyan Methodist concept of Christian perfection (entire sanctification, etc.) with its emphasis on the eradication of sin in the believer to the idea of counteraction with Keswick and Chafer brought about by dedication and filling of the Spirit.

VII. EVALUATION OF SECOND-BLESSING THEOLOGY

A. Introduction — In all the movements that I have described, from John Wesley forward, there is without question a genuine desire to promote greater Christian holiness, and that is much to be admired. Certainly, when reading the writings of those identified with just the Keswick movement, for example, one is struck by the godliness and devotion to Christ on the part of these saints. No one can question their godly motives. However, I believe in their quest for holiness they have taken a wrong turn into John Wesley’s laboratory. Though many have lived lives of progressive holiness, they have sometimes sought invalid experiences that the Scriptures do not authorize, and they have incorrectly described their own genuine experiences of God’s grace. More problematic is their promotion of a way of holiness that does not square with the biblical text, which makes it more difficult for many believers to make true progress in their sanctification. We will now look at some key Scripture texts misunderstood and misused by advocates of second-blessing theology.

B. The Relationship between Justification and Sanctification

1. A genuine desire for holiness along with a general dissatisfaction with their own spiritual experience has led many to follow in the steps of Wesley and seek an additional experience beyond their conversion that would deliver them from their daily struggles with sin. They have looked for a Higher, Happy, and Victorious life where one can be at rest, what Barabas calls “the heart rest of those who have learned the secret of perfect and constant victory over temptation” (So Great Salvation, 95). However, this search is inherently defective since it is primarily based, as I have constantly noted the past three weeks, on an unbiblical disjunction between justification and progressive sanctification.
2. In all second blessing schemes, a person is declared righteous (justification) but nothing much is done about actual righteousness in the believer’s life until the second blessing. But justification and progressive sanctification cannot be divided such that a believer may have one without the other. In truth, the believer is progressively being set apart from the power and practice of sin from the moment he or she first believes and receives forgiveness of sins. Sanctification does not wait upon a second act of faith. We are not saved by faiths but by faith.
Throughout this life the believer is progressively becoming holy while sin is being extirpated.

3. The passage that most clearly demonstrates the unbreakable bond between justification and sanctification is Romans 6. B. B. Warfield wisely observed: “The whole sixth chapter of Romans, for example, was written for no other purpose than to assert and demonstrate that justification and sanctification are indissolubly bound together; that we cannot have the one without having the other; that, to use its own figurative language, dying with Christ and living with Christ are integral elements in one indisintegrable salvation” (Perfectionism, 356).

4. The first eight chapters of Romans are divided into two parts: 1–4 and 5–8. At the beginning of chapter 5, Paul summarizes his main point in the first four chapters: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith…” (5:1). So, in chapters 1–4, Paul has explained the doctrine of justification. Then in chapters 5–8, he explains the doctrine of sanctification. In the later part of chapter 5, Paul is clarifying how the law of Moses relates to justification by faith and salvation by grace. He says in 5:20, “The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” The law of Moses did not actually save anybody; it actually made the situation worse. A written code, like the law of Moses, clearly demonstrates that human beings have crossed the line into sin—they trespassed. But the good news, Paul says, is that the grace of God that came through Jesus Christ was more than adequate to overcome all of our sins—“where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”

6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?
6:2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

5. But, unfortunately, there were always foolish people who would misinterpret or purposely twist what Paul said about the grace of God. Paul imagines someone might say that since we have been justified, and since “where sin increased, grace
increased all the more,” then as a believer I can just continue to sin as I did before I was saved, and God is bound to give more grace. So Paul takes up this hypothetical in 6:1, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” “By no means!” Paul says in 6:2. And why is that? Because we **cannot**: “We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” The justified believer **cannot** “live in” sin, which means have a lifestyle of sin—the life of the unbeliever. And why is that? Because, Paul says, we, all justified believers, have “died to sin.” The justified believer **must**, not **should or could**, but absolutely **must** lead a holy life. Sanctification is not **automatic**, but it is **inevitable** according to what Paul says in Romans 6.

6. The justified believer **must** lead a holy life because they have “died to sin” (6:2). Death to sin in Paul’s theology is a decisive separation from the dominion of sin so that the believer no longer **lives** in it. The language “living in sin” is describing a life-style of sin—a habitual practice of sin, such that one’s life could be said to be characterized by sin rather than by the holiness God requires. Death to sin means that we are no longer slaves to sin. It doesn’t mean we never sin; it doesn’t mean we don’t struggle with sin. But it does mean we no longer have a lifestyle of sin. Paul says in v. 6, “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be **slaves to sin**—” and v. 14, “**sin shall no longer be your master**.” Romans 6 is filled with the language of dominion, of slavery to sin. As we know, the unsaved person is a slave to sin. Rom 3:9–18,

> “For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. 10 As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one,’ 13 ‘Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.’ 14 ‘The poison of vipers is on their lips.’ 15 ‘Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.’ 16 ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; 17 ruin and misery mark their ways, 18 and the way of peace they do not know.’”

7. Paul says in Romans 6 the believer **has been**, past tense, has been delivered from this state of slavery to sin that characterizes the unsaved person. Romans 6:17, “But thanks be to God that, though **you used to be slaves to sin**.” The believer, at conversion, has been set on the path to holy living. And this is true for every believer, not just some special group of believers who are consecrated, dedicated, or Spirit-filled. All believers are “slaves to righteousness” (Rom 6:18, “You have been set free from sin and have become **slaves to righteousness**”).
8. Although believers have “died to sin,” that does not mean they are insensitive to its enticements; rather, it means they are once-and-for-all delivered from the absolute tyranny of sin, from sin as a domineering master. Sin’s power as a tyrannical ruler is broken for the believer. The believer is no longer a slave to sin. Paul says in 6:17–18, “But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” A believer must lead a holy life because they are no more a slave to sin but a slave to righteousness. There is no middle ground here, no room for a category of carnal, never to be sanctified, Christians. And why is that? Why is that not possible?—conversion. Conversion ends our slavery to sin because it brings with it the transforming power of regeneration—spiritual life. The dominion of sin is broken, and we receive a disposition or nature that inevitably leads to holiness. The believer is not to wait for a second work of grace for sanctification to begin. They are not to wait for a new faith experience, dedication, or another work of the Spirit to live a holy life. The new believer, every new believer, has died to sin, which means they have been freed from the absolute dominion of sin and set on a path to holiness. The believer’s fundamental direction is now toward holiness. Sin is still a problem—a great problem. The believer needs to grow in holiness, to have sin extirpated, to have it gradually eradicated from his life, but they can never again “live in sin,” that is, have a lifestyle of sin. If we do move in that direction—backslide, fall into sin—and we inevitably do—God will take action to bring the believer back to the path of holy living. The writer of Hebrews says: “They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness” (Heb 12:10).
9. In vv. 3–4 of Romans 6, Paul makes clear that this death to sin took place at conversion, not at some later faith experience of sanctification (e.g., dedication). Paul says: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Since the New Testament knows nothing of unbaptized believers, Paul can use the Roman believer’s own experience of water baptism as a kind of shorthand for the conversion experience as a whole. Water baptism symbolizes our death to sin and the impartation of new spiritual life that leads to holiness. Thus Paul is saying that there is a fundamental distinction between the unbeliever and the believer as a result of conversion that is beyond a change in legal status—justification—but that also affects the person.

10. What Paul is describing in Romans 6 is not a second work of grace but the initial work of grace in the believer, which brings about a transformation so enormous that it can be described as death and resurrection—death to sin and new life in Christ.
This death to sin that Paul describes in Romans 6 is the actual experience of all regenerate persons and fundamentally distinguishes them from the unsaved, who are under the dominion of sin. While the justified person must still battle sin, they are not under sin’s lordship, and their fundamental disposition in life is toward holiness (Rom 6:4). Paul’s point in Romans 6 is that Christ’s death and our union with him secures not only our justification but also our sanctification. As John Calvin puts it: “Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify” (Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3.16.1).

C. Romans 12:1–2 and the Believer’s Dedication

1. From the time of Phoebe Palmer’s “altar theology” forward, second-blessing advocates (Higher Life and Keswick) have universally argued for the need of a crisis act of dedication or surrender as essential for progressive sanctification. For instance Charles Ryrie says, “There is perhaps no more important matter in relation to the spiritual life than dedication” (Balancing the Christian Life, 75). “Before any lasting progress can be made on the road of spiritual living, the believer must be a dedicated person…. It is the basic foundation for sanctification” (186). Miles Stanford is even more emphatic, “God asks us to present our bodies as living sacrifices to Him (Rom 12:1). Until we have done this, there is nothing else we can do” (The Complete Green Letters, 38).

2. Though the Scriptures urge the dedication and continual surrender of Christians to their Lord, and dedication is part of sanctification, the Bible provides no basis for a once-for-all act of dedication to make Christ Lord of one’s life in order to begin the process of progressive sanctification. This is especially true of Romans 12:1–2.

1Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

4. Chapter 12 begins the final section of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Paul shifts his focus from instruction to exhortation, from what we might call the indicative—what God has done for us—to the imperative—what we are to do in response. The
indicative, what God has done for us, is found chapters 1–11, primarily 1–8. The imperative, what we are to do in response, is found in chapter 12 and following. Beginning in chapter 12, it is our obedience, made possible by the transforming power of the gospel, that Paul calls upon believers to render. And in the first two verses of chapter 12, Paul says that our response to God’s grace in our lives should be the presenting of ourselves, the dedication of ourselves to God, which, Paul explains, is really an act of worship. God desires our dedication and that dedication is, in fact, “true and proper worship.”

4. Romans 12:1 is actually a metaphor, which we will see, is a figurative way of illustrating what Paul will say in v. 2. Paul uses sacrificial language to describe the dedication God desires. We are urged “to offer [our] bodies as living sacrifices.” Though Paul says we are to present our bodies, he really means our entire person. The word body is used in a figurative sense to stand for the whole person. The technical term for this is synecdoche, which means “a part for the whole.” Sometimes we use a part of something to stand for the whole of that thing. That is, we refer to the part even though we mean the whole. For instance, you may have heard of this expression: “all hands on deck,” which is a command for all the “hands,” that is, all the crew of the ship, all the sailors, to come on to the deck of the ship or get to the task at hand. One could say, “all sailors on deck,” but here the word “hands,” the part of a person, stands for the whole person. In our text, because of the imagery of sacrifice, Paul quite naturally chose the term “body” because the bodies of animals were commonly sacrificed. But Paul’s emphasis is really on the entire person. God calls upon us to present ourselves to him. This will become much clearer in v. 2.

5. The idea of a one time, once-for-all dedication is falsely extracted from the word “offer” in v. 1 (“to offer you bodies as a living sacrifice”). For example, Ryrie says: “First of all there must be an initial, decisive and crisis presentation. This is represented in the Greek by the aorist infinitive…. Therefore, the presentation of body is a single, irrevocable act of surrender rather than a series of repeated acts of dedication” (79). Ryrie appeals to the fact that the infinitive “offer” is in the Greek aorist tense. Aorist is the technical name for one of the past tenses in New Testament Greek. But no Greek grammar has ever suggested that the aorist tense means once-for-all action though it was once a popular and widespread misconception. This once-for-all idea of the aorist makes nonsense out of countless texts. When Paul told the Corinthians to “honor God with your bodies” (1 Cor 6:20), the aorist imperative “honor” does not mean that the apostle only wanted them to do it one time. Neither does the aorist imperative “preach” indicate that Paul wanted Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2) only once. So, really and truly, in Romans 12:1 there is nothing about the verb “offer” or nothing in the context to make us think that Paul would be calling on us to make a once-and-for all dedication to God. As we will see in v. 2, the context actually suggests just the opposite. Paul tells us to make a dedication; he doesn’t tell us if we are to do it just once or every day.
6. Having said all this, I need to remind you again that in v. 1 Paul has been using a metaphor. Verse 1 is actually a figurative way, a symbolic way of expressing, of illustrating, what Paul will say in v. 2. Verses 1 and 2 are really expressing parallel thoughts. So what does it really mean, then, to offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices? How do we do that? To find out we have to look at verse 2. Verse 2 actually begins with the word “and,” the Greek kai. It’s omitted in the NIV. This “and” is an example of what grammarians call an explicative or explanatory kai. It could be translated “and so,” “that is,” or “namely.” This means that v. 2 is explaining v 1. Verse 2 gives the means or way by which we can carry out the sweeping exhortation of v. 1 to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. Verse 2 is the real substance of Paul’s exhortation. Verse 2 explains to us the kind of dedication God is really looking for.

7. The kind of dedication that Paul calls for in Romans 12:1 is explained in v. 2 as a life-long transformation. We can only offer ourselves” as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” if we “do not conform to the pattern of this world, but [are] transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s].” The aorist tense verb “offer” in v. 1 is explained in v. 2 by the two present tense verbs “conformed” and “transformed,” which stress the progressive, ongoing nature of believer’s participation that is required in his dedication to God. The sacrifice that Paul urges on the Romans in v. 1 is no one-time act. This transformation actually begins with conversion. At that time we received a new nature that motivates and enables us to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God. However, if this sacrifice is to continue to please God in the ongoing trials and temptations of everyday life, the believer must continually be transformed. This ongoing transformation, Paul tells us, is accomplished “by the renewing of your mind.” The believer’s mind needs to be, in effect, re-programmed to bring it in conformity to God’s Word.

8. What God wants from us who are the recipients of his grace is not so much a specific act of dedication, but a life of dedication. Paul’s metaphor of dedication is the model for the normal Christian life. What God desires from his children is that they continually resist conformity to this age while they are, at the same time, being transformed into the very image of Christ. This transformation involves the whole person, an ongoing, lifelong transformation that is from the inside out so that the spiritual renewal begun at regeneration continues until the day of glorification. This passage is no doubt using the imagery of dedication, but it cannot and does not support the theology of sanctification through a single, once-for-all act of dedication. It does not teach that sanctification begins and depends upon such a dedication. In truth sanctification begins at the time of justification and is the normal and inevitable result of conversion. Dedication is an ongoing process of transformation that should be taking place every day of our lives.

For this and previous lessons in the series, go to: http://cbctrenton.com/audio-archives
THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT
THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY
PART 5

REVIEW

1. Last week we began our evaluation of second-blessing theologies that started with John Wesley and culminated in the Keswick theology. Keswick theology reached the height of its popularity and influence in the twentieth century and aspects of its teaching are still very much with us today.

2. Last week we demonstrated from Romans 6 that sanctification is the inevitable result of our conversion, in which we died to sin as our master and became slaves to righteousness. When God declares us righteous (justification), he immediately sets out to make us righteous or holy.
3. And, finally, last week we showed that believers do not wait upon a special act of dedication or consecration in order for sanctification to begin. Neither Rom 12:1-2 nor any other text teaches such. God desires a **life** of dedication from the believer that involves resisting conformity to this age while at the same time being transformed by the renewing of our minds into the very image of Christ.

**VII. EVALUATION OF SECOND-BLESSING THEOLOGY**

D. The Carnal Christian—A Distinct Category of Christian

1. Beginning as early as Asa Mahan all the second blessing theologies we have discussed have used the terms *carnal* and *spiritual* to differentiate two categories of Christians: the simply justified believer (carnal) and the one who has also received the second blessing (spiritual). All new believers are carnal, and they remain in that category until they pass into the spiritual category. This distinction became a core principle in Keswick teaching. The “average” or carnal Christian behaves much like an unbeliever. Keswick conventions were “spiritual clinics” designed to turn the average, carnal Christian into a “normal” or “spiritual” Christian, one who is filled with the Holy Spirit. This transformation from the carnal to the spiritual Christian takes place not by a long struggle but by a simple, single act of faith.

2. Lewis Sperry Chafer clearly set forth the Keswick teaching in his book *He That Is Spiritual*. The carnal Christian has experienced “salvation” from “the guilt and penalty of sin,” in other words, justification, but he still needs “a distinct form of salvation” from “bond-servitude to sin” (134). “The child of God does not need to yield to temptation” when he reaches the higher plane of the spiritual man (140). Thus, all believers are in the category of carnal Christian until they experience the once-for-all crisis dedication that moves them to the higher plane of spiritual Christian and as a result are initially filled with the Spirit and Christ becomes Lord of their lives. It is at this point that progressive sanctification really begins.

![Diagram](image)

3. Bill Bright, the head of Campus Crusade for Christ wrote a tract in 1965 entitled *The Four Spiritual Laws*. In that tract there appeared the diagram below, clearly reflecting the idea of two categories of Christians. This served to greatly popularize the view.
3. These terms *natural*, *carnal*, and *spiritual* come from most English translations of 1 Cor 2:14–3:4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KJV</th>
<th>NIV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14<em>But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.</em></td>
<td>14<em>The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15<em>But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.</em></td>
<td>15<em>The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16<em>For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.</em></td>
<td><em>for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Brethren, I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.</em> I have fed you with milk, not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. <em>For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?</em> <em>For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?</em></td>
<td><em>Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.</em> <em>You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?</em> <em>For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?</em></td>
<td><em>I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 KJV, 2 NIV*
4. Beginning at 1 Cor 2:6 Paul contrasts two groups or categories of people: the unsaved, who do not understand the wisdom of God’s plan of salvation in the gospel, and the saved, who do. What divides these two groups is the Holy Spirit. First, we are told in 2:14 that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The “natural man” is the Greek word psuchikos, which the standard Greek lexicon defines as “one who merely functions bodily, without being touched by the Spirit of God” (BDAG, 1100). We are helped here in our understanding of this term by its use in Jude 19: “These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts [psuchikos] and do not have the Spirit.” A psuchikos person does not have the Spirit. And the NIV translators have made this clear with their translation of 1 Cor 2:14, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God…. So we can say that the natural man is the unregenerate man because, as Paul reminds us elsewhere, “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.” (Rom 8:9).

5. Paul says that the natural man “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them.” The natural man, the man without the Spirit, rejects God’s truth; he is openly hostile to it and is unable to see its significance. The reason for this response is made clear in the last part of v. 14: “because they are spiritually discerned.” The phrase “spiritually discerned” does not refer to a kind of interpretation that is “spiritual.” The word “spiritually” is an adverb derived from the word “spiritual” in v. 15. It means “by means of the Spirit,” that is, “by means of the Holy Spirit.” “The things that come from the Spirit of God” can only be “discerned” by means of that same Spirit. But the natural man cannot understand, he cannot discern correctly the significance and implications of biblical truth because he is spiritually defective—he is not equipped for the task—he lacks the one essential ingredient—the Spirit of God. The natural man is spiritually dead; he has no spiritual life. Again, this is all made clear by the NIV translation: “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.” The words “spiritually discerned” in the KJV are more accurately translated “discerned…through the Spirit” in the NIV.

6. In contrast to the natural man of v. 14, Paul says in v. 15, “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” “He that is spiritual” is the translation of a single Greek word pneumatikos. It literally means something like “having to do with the Spirit” (BDAG, 837) But in Paul’s language, “he that is spiritual.” or the spiritual man is simply the person who possesses the Spirit in contrast to the natural man, who does not. Everything in chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians clearly indicates that Paul is looking at two classes of people, and only two. Paul views the Corinthians as “spiritual” people in that they have the Spirit, in spite of their problems. Again, this is all made clear by the NIV translation: “The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things…. “ Though the KJV translation of
pneumatikos in v. 15 as “he that is spiritual” sounds like Paul is referring to a higher class of Christian, this misunderstands the meaning of pneumatikos, which simply means a person who possesses the Spirit (all believers), as the NIV makes clear.

7. In our common Christian parlance, we may speak of a spiritual Christian, or we may say that one Christian is more spiritual than another—the there are different levels of maturity in the Christian life, no one would deny that. But that is not what Paul means by the term pneumatikos. In Paul’s language it is redundant to speak of a spiritual Christian. To be spiritual, to have the Spirit, is to be a Christian, pure and simple. That is why the NIV translates pneumatikos as “the person with the Spirit.”

8. So in 2:14–15, Paul speaks of two categories of people: “the person without the Spirit” (v. 14) and “the person with the Spirit” (v. 15), the unregenerate (“the person without the Spirit”) and the regenerate (“the person with the Spirit”). “The person with the Spirit” is the term pneumatikos, which is unfortunately translated “he that is spiritual” in the KJV. But the term pneumatikos does not refer to a distinct category of Christian who has received the second blessing, who has reached some higher plane of spirituality, who has completely surrendered to God, and who has made Christ Lord of their life. Every believer is pneumatikos because the Holy Spirit indwells every believer.

9. In 3:1 Paul says that he “could not speak” to the Corinthians “as unto spiritual,” that is, pneumatikos, those who have the Spirit. Paul does not say the Corinthians do not have the Spirit, but that because the majority of them are manifesting certain kinds of non-Christian behavior, they do not deserve to be called pneumatikos, people with the Spirit. The Corinthians, or at least a good number of them, are not thinking and acting like pneumatikos, people with the Spirit, but Paul cannot and does not call them psuchikos (v. 14), people without the Spirit, because as believers they do in fact have the Spirit.

10. Sometimes believers act like unbelievers, and, when they do, they are acting carnally, or what the NIV calls “worldly.” The word “carnal,” sarkinos, in 3:1 means “made of flesh,” that is, merely human (BDAG, 914). Because the Corinthians had received the Spirit, Paul cannot call the Corinthians psuchikos (people without the Spirit), even if they were acting that way. He avoids accusing them of not having the Spirit altogether, but at the same time he forces them to face up to their sinful condition by calling them “carnal,” people who are displaying characteristics of the old nature.

11. So we conclude that in 1 Cor 2:14–3:4 Paul has only two categories of people in view: those without the Spirit and those with the Spirit. The carnal Christian is simply a genuine Christian (pneumatikos) temporarily gone astray. Reisinger observes: “I also recognize that there is a sense in which Christians may be said to be carnal but I must add that there are different degrees of carnality. Every Christian is carnal in some area of his life at many times in his life. And in every Christian ‘the flesh lusteth against the Spirit’ (Gal 5:17)” (What Should We Think of the
Carnal Christian? 8). Although a Christian can be called carnal, their whole spiritual life cannot be categorized as such; they cannot be put into the category of carnal Christian because there is no such category. Every single Christian could be called a carnal Christian because every Christian is carnal to some degree, to the degree they are not fully sanctified. But there is no distinct category of carnal Christian. B. B. Warfield reminds us:

The remainders of the flesh in the Christian do not constitute his characteristic. He is in the Spirit and is walking, with however halting steps, by the Spirit; and it is to all Christians, not to some, that the great promise is given, “Sin shall not have dominion over you,” and the great assurance is added, “Because ye are not under the law but under grace.” He who believes in Jesus Christ is under grace, and his whole course, in its process and in its issue alike, is determined by grace, and therefore, having been predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, he is surely being conformed to that image, God Himself seeing to it that he is not only called and justified but also glorified. You may find Christians at every stage of this process, for it is a process through which all must pass; but you will find none who will not in God’s own good time and way pass through every stage of it. There are not two kinds of Christians, although there are Christians at every conceivable stage of advancement towards the one goal to which all are bound and at which all shall arrive (Review of He That Is Spiritual, 218).

E. Filling of the Holy Spirit (and baptism of Holy Spirit)

1. John Wesley never connected his doctrine of entire sanctification with the Holy Spirit. But John Fletcher, the man whom Wesley wanted to be his successor, commonly spoke of the experience of entire sanctification as the “baptism” or “filling of the Holy Spirit.” Eventually, all Holiness advocates identified the second blessing with either the filling or baptism of the Spirit. Keswick theology clearly preferred the term filling. This especially true of Chafer, Ryrie, and those who still promote their form of second-blessing theology. According to Chafer, all new Christians are carnal Christians, who can move out of their carnal state and begin the process of sanctification only through the filling of the Holy Spirit (He That Is Spiritual, 39–40). John F. Walvoord, the successor to Chafer as president of Dallas Seminary, says “the filling of the Spirit is the secret of sanctification” (“Response to Hoekema,” in Five Views on Sanctification, 101).

2. The reason why Keswick and later theologies stopped using “baptism of the Spirit” to refer to the second blessing is because the baptism and filling of the Spirit are clearly distinguished in Scripture, and “baptism of the Spirit” has nothing to do with sanctification, but is an instantaneous act that takes place at conversion. The baptism of the Spirit is clearly described in 1 Cor 12:13, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free…. Spirit baptism is easily understood. The word baptize means “to immerse” when used literally, as in the case of water baptism. Sometimes it means “immerse” in the figurative sense of “being identified with” or “being united with.” For example, in 1 Cor 10:2 Paul says that all the Israelites “were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” that is, the Israelites were “united with” Moses in crossing the Red Sea and the wilderness journey. So according to 1 Cor 12:13, Spirit baptism means
that “we…all,” that is, all believers were united with Christ at conversion. At conversion all believers become part of the body of Christ. We are “immersed” or placed into the body of Christ. Thus, Spirit baptism has nothing to do with sanctification per se.

3. The command to be filled with the Spirit is set forth in Eph 5:18, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” Interestingly, until the popularity of second-blessing theologies in the 1800s, there appears to be little discussion of Paul’s words in most of church history. Until the 1800s the only interest in the passage was Paul’s command to “not get drunk.” There was no mention of the filling of the Holy Spirit as an element in the believer’s sanctification. This all changed in the nineteenth century, especially with rise of Keswick theology. The filling of the Spirit is understood to be what enables the counteraction of the natures such that a continual state of victory over sin is obtained.

4. Though our main interest is in Eph 5:18 since this is the text that is universally appealed to in discussions of sanctification, we must briefly note that the filling of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in other places in the New Testament. And we need to know if these other references are related to Eph 5:18. In the Gospel of Luke and Acts, there are 14 references to the filling with the Holy Spirit or being full of the Holy Spirit. These references use slightly different words and grammatical constructions in the original Greek language. Based on the different wording and grammatical constructions, we can divide these 14 references into two categories: what we might call special filling (Luke 1:15; 1:41; 1:67; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 9:17; 13:9) and ordinary filling (Luke 4:1; Acts 6:3; 6:5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:52).

5. An example of special filling of the Spirit is Acts 2:4. On the day of Pentecost we are told the apostles were together and “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” A special filling, like Acts 2:4, is a special act of divine enablement generally related to a verbal proclamation. A special filling is not the result of prayerful seeking; in fact, no conditions have to be met to obtain it, since each one is sovereignly given by God. This special filling in the New Testament is similar to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Old Testament saints to accomplish a divinely given task (cf. Exod 28:3; 31:3;
35:31; Num 11:25; Deut 34:9). One can debate whether these special fillings occur today. My own opinion is that they ended with the apostolic age. Regardless, special filling has no necessary correlation to the sanctification or spiritual growth of the individual; it is never commanded.

6. An example of the ordinary filling of the Spirit is the election of the deacons in Acts 6. We are told, “They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit….” The ordinary filling of the Spirit is related to the spiritual character of the believer. One who is filled with the Spirit displays the fruit of the Spirit. Ordinary filling describes a quality of life, something that is characteristic of the person. The “deacons” in Acts 6 are described as having a lifestyle characterized by “wisdom,” “faith,” and the “Holy Spirit.” The idea is that of a godly believer, someone whose spiritual maturity is apparent to all. This is the same idea found in Eph 5:18. When Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be “filled with the Spirit,” he wants them to keep on exhibiting those qualities that are characteristic of the Spirit, what Paul calls elsewhere “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22–23). This is the natural and normal progress of sanctification as a believer continues in their obedience to God.

7. Let us dig a little deeper into this idea of being filled with Spirit. Clearly, Paul cannot mean in Eph 5:18 that the Ephesians are to be filled with something they do not possess. The apostle is addressing professing believers in Eph 5:18, and all believers are already indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9). All second-blessing theologies that we have discussed suggest that even though the believer is indwelt by the Spirit, this latter ministry is not sufficient to bring about their sanctification. Some new experience of the Spirit is required. Unfortunately, what this does is minimize the divine effects of initial conversion (regeneration) and apply all the transformational qualities of the believer’s salvation to some second work of grace—some special post-conversion experience—the filling of the Holy Spirit.

8. But it is doubtful that Paul is actually issuing a command in Eph 5:18 for a new ministry of the Spirit beyond what has already begun and is being accomplished by the indwelling of the Spirit. Since Eph 5:18 is the only reference to being filled with the Spirit in all of Paul’s epistles, we should be very cautious about making this one command the essential ingredient to the believer’s sanctification. Paul has much to say about sanctification in his letters (e.g., Rom 6), so if the need to “be filled with the Spirit” is an essential aspect of that doctrine, it is difficult if not impossible to explain why he never writes about it anywhere else.

9. I am arguing that there has been somewhat of an overemphasis on Paul’s command to be filled with the Spirit in some circles, but I am in no way attempting to diminish the essential role of the Spirit in the believer’s sanctification. Theologian John Murray, who was adamantly opposed to Keswick theology still, rightly calls the Holy Spirit the “agent of sanctification” (Redemption Accomplished and Applied, 146). He goes on to say:

The mode of the Spirit’s operation in sanctification is encompassed with mystery. We do not know the mode of the Spirit’s indwelling nor the mode of his efficient working
in the hearts and minds and wills of God’s people by which they are progressively cleansed from the defilement of sin and more and more transfigured after the image of Christ. While we must not do prejudice to the fact that the Spirit’s work in our hearts reflect itself in our awareness and consciousness, while we must not relegate sanctification to the realm of the subconscious and fail to recognize that sanctification draws within its orbit the whole field of conscious activity on our part, yet we must also appreciate the fact that there is an agency on the part of the Holy Spirit that far surpasses analysis or introspection on our part. The effects of this constant and uninterrupted agency come within the scope of our consciousness in understanding, feeling, and will. But we must not suppose that the measure of our understanding or experience is the measure of the Spirit’s working. In every distinct and particular movement of the believer in the way of holiness there is an energizing activity of the Holy Spirit, and when we try to discover what the mode of that exercise of his grace and power is we realize how far we are from being able to diagnose the secret working of the Spirit (146–47).

The Spirit works mightily to bring about the believer’s sanctification, but he does so continuously from the moment of regeneration, and this operation does not wait upon the believer to seek a special filling of the Spirit.

10. In order to get at Paul’s meaning in Eph 5:18, we should begin by discussing the imperative “be filled.” This command is in the present tense in Greek, which has a customary force, the idea being to simply continue something that is already begun. The Ephesians are urged to continue to be filled with the Spirit, not to begin to be filled with the Spirit. Because all believers in Christ are Spirit-filled in the sense that all are indwelt by the Spirit, Paul’s imperative is to “Keep on being full of the Holy Spirit.” The command to keep on being filled with the Spirit is most likely another example of what we classified earlier as “ordinary filling.” When Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be “filled with the Spirit,” he wants them to keep on exhibiting those qualities that are characteristic of the Spirit, what Paul calls elsewhere “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22–23). This is the natural and normal progress of sanctification as a believer continues in their obedience to God.

11. We are helped in our understanding by the parallel to Eph 5:18–20 in Col 3:16–17. There Paul says: “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” The imperative “dwell” in Col 3:16 has the same customary force as “be filled” in Eph 5:18—“continue to let the word of Christ dwell in you”—keep on letting the word of Christ dwell in you. The “word of Christ” means “the word about Christ.” To “let the word of Christ dwell within you” speaks to at least an attention to and obedience to the Word of God.
12. Note the parallel between Paul’s words in Ephesians and Colossians:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ephesians 5:18–20</th>
<th>Colossians 3:16–17</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father</td>
<td>giving thanks through Him to God the Father</td>
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</table>

The similarity of language and structure suggests a strong thematic connection between being “filled with the Spirit” and “let[ting] the word of Christ richly dwell within you,” with both resulting in the same things. When the ministry of the Spirit is evident in the life of the believer, it is natural to speak of that one as being “filled with the Spirit.” That filling is seen in certain character traits Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) and certain activities that he describes in Eph 5:19–20. These activities are also associated with “let[ting] the word of Christ richly dwell within you” in Col 3:16–17. These activities in Ephesians and Colossians are not exhaustive, but only exemplary of a holy lifestyle. The filling of the Spirit is no unique spiritual highlight in the life of the believer. Instead, it is the normal experience of the believer as they increasingly strives to live a life that is in obedience to God and his Word. Paul’s exhortation is “to continue” or “keep on being filled with the Spirit.” Paul encourages the Ephesians to keep on acting like Spirit-people, to display those character qualities that are typical of their new life in Christ. There is no scriptural basis for believers to seek a special experience called the filling of the Holy Spirit in order to begin the process of sanctification, rather we should focus our attention on living obedient Christian lives that are increasingly characterized by the Spirit’s presence. Therefore, Walvoord is wrong when he argues that “the filling of the Spirit is the secret of sanctification.” If there is a secret of sanctification, it can be summarized by the word obedience, or, as Paul say in Col 3:16, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.”

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THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT
THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY
PART 6

VIII. THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

A. Explanation of Sanctification

1. Because God is a holy God, he wants his people to be holy. As Peter says: “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (1 Pet 1:15–16). The work of God that makes us holy is called sanctification. The problem we have been addressing the last five weeks has to do with the process of how God makes us holy. In order to understand that process, it is will be helpful to again review the relationship between sanctification and justification. These two aspects of the doctrine of salvation are best understood as double benefits of union with Christ. Theologian Wayne Grudem says: “Union with Christ is a phrase used to summarize several different relationships between believers and Christ, through which Christians receive every benefit of salvation. These relationships include the fact that we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ, and we are with Christ” (Systematic Theology, 841). Union with Christ is commonly expressed in the New Testament with the words “in Christ” or their equivalent. For example:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23).

“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people...” (1 Cor 1:2).

“But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ...” (Gal 2:17).
2. How are justification and sanctification to be distinguished? The word *justify* is a forensic or legal term with the meaning “acquit.” It is the normal word to use when the accused in a courtroom is declared “Not guilty.” It means to “declare righteous,” not to “make righteous.” Grudem says: “Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight” (*Systematic Theology*, 723). As a legal declaration, justification is nonexperiential, meaning that it is an act of God with respect to us. Thus justification makes no internal change within us.

3. Sanctification, on the other hand, is entirely experiential, meaning that it is an act of God within us, with the result that the disposition of the immaterial aspect of our being (spirit/soul) is changed. The basic meaning of the term *sanctify* is “to set apart,” “to make holy.” In sanctification the believer is set apart from sin and set apart to God. In justification God declares us righteous; in sanctification God makes us righteous or holy.

4. As the diagram above seeks to illustrate there are not two acts of faith related to justification and sanctification. That is the error of all the second-blessing theologies we have discussed in this series. We do not believe in order to be justified and then believe a second time in order to be sanctified. The faith of justification is the instrumental cause of sanctification. We are not saved by faiths, but by faith. Faith is certainly required in the sanctification, but it is simply a continuation of the faith imparted to us at conversion. The second-blessing theologies all make an artificial and unscriptural temporal separation between justification and sanctification. They argue that one can be justified, but not sanctified. Certainly not all believers are sanctified to the same extent. Believers can be found at every possible stage of spiritual development.

5. Whereas justification happens instantaneously at the moment of conversion and is thus a past, never-to-be-repeated event in the life of the believer, sanctification is a life-long process. It begins at the moment of conversion and continues throughout the believer’s life. The Bible speaks of three aspects or phases of sanctification. Each one of these is experiential in that each one affects a change within the believer. The first and third aspects are instantaneous, while the second is progressive.

   a. Past or initial sanctification (I have been sanctified) — The believer is definitively (once-and-for-all) set apart from the dominion of sin. This is the aspect of sanctification Paul was describing in Romans 6 when he spoke of the believer being dead to sin at the time of conversion. The believer is no longer a
slave to sin. “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace…. But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Rom 6:14, 17, 18). Definitive sanctification is seen in other texts: “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). “And by that will, we have been made holy [sanctified] through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). This first aspect of sanctification is so closely tied to regeneration that we might think of it as definitive sanctification/regeneration, consisting of a negative side (definitive sanctification) and a positive side (regeneration).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definitive Sanctification</th>
<th>Regeneration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romans 6</td>
<td>“We died to sin”</td>
<td>“All of us…were baptized into Christ Jesus.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Our old self was crucified”</td>
<td>“[We were raised] to walk in newness of life.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colossians 3</td>
<td>“You died”</td>
<td>“[You] have put on the new self.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“You have taken off your old self with its practices.”</td>
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b. Present or progressive sanctification (I am being sanctified) — The believer is progressively being set apart from the power and practice of sin. Throughout this life the believer is progressively becoming holy while sin is being extirpated. “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified” (1 Thess 4:3). “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (Rom 6:12). “Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor 7:1). Most of the New
Testament, hundreds and hundreds of verses, is dealing with this aspect of sanctification.

c. Future or entire sanctification (I will be sanctified) — The believer will be completely and entirely set apart from the possibility of sin, no longer able to sin. The believer is made perfectly holy either at death or the rapture. “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 our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23). “…Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph 5:25–27).

6. Theologian Anthony Hoekema defines sanctification “as that gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, involving our responsible participation, by which He delivers us as justified sinners from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to Him” (Saved by Grace, 192).
7. Hoekema observes that sanctification delivers us from the pollution of sin. But in Keswick theology with its doctrine of counteraction, there is no removal of that which is sinful.

As the diagram above illustrates, sanctification in the Keswick system produces no real change within the believer, nothing in the believer is actually sanctified, nothing in the believer is made holy. The believer receives a new nature or disposition at conversion to go with their old nature, but the process of sanctification renders no change in these natures. Chafer explains: “Having received the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) while still retaining the old nature, every child of God possesses two natures; one is incapable of sinning, and the other is incapable of holiness” (Major Bible Themes, 161). With this scheme one can see how the language of Wesley’s sinless perfection is always present. If the old nature is perfectly counteracted by the new nature, the believer need not sin, indeed, cannot sin.

8. The problem with the this view of sanctification is that it seems to leave a part of the individual—the old nature—untouched by either regeneration or sanctification. If, as Chafer says, the new nature is incapable of sinning, we are left with a part of man that needs no saving. What truly happens in sanctification, as B. B. Warfield explains, is that “God cures our sinning precisely by curing our sinful nature; He makes the tree good that the fruit may be good. It is, in other words, precisely by eradicating our sinfulness—‘the corruption of our hearts’—that He delivers us from sinning.... To imagine that we can be saved from the power of sin without the eradication of the corruption in which the power of sin has its seat, is to imagine that an evil tree can be compelled to bring forth good fruit” (Perfectionism, 368).

9. When Warfield uses the term eradication he does not mean the instantaneous, complete eradication of sin taught by John Wesley, but a progressive and gradual process. Counteraction is an insufficient way of describing the nature of progressive sanctification. The Holy Spirit does much more than counteraction. Warfield continues:

   The Spirit dwells within us in order to affect us, not merely our acts, in order to eradicate our sinfulness and not merely to counteract its effects. The Scriptures’ way of cleansing the stream is to cleanse the fountain; they are not content to attack the stream of our activities, they attack directly the heart out of which the issues of life flow. But they give us no promise that the fountain will be completely cleansed all at
once, and therefore no promise that the stream will flow perfectly purely from the beginning. We are not denying that the Spirit leads us in all our acts, as well as purifies our hearts. But we are denying that His whole work in us, or His whole immediate work in us, or His fundamental work in us, terminates on our activities and can be summed up in the word “counteraction.” Counteraction there is; and suppression there is; but most fundamentally of all there is eradication; and all these work one and the self-same Spirit (Perfectionism, 371)

10. In sanctification the old nature is progressively being eradicated and the new nature is being nourished so that it will ultimately supplant the old. However, ultimate perfection, final and complete sanctification—the total eradication of the old nature and the complete implantation of the new nature—is not, as Scripture makes clear, the believer’s portion as long as he dwells in this mortal body; but it is the ultimate destiny of every believer, for one day “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

11. Sanctification, as we have noted, affects our very nature. But it is not a change of substance but a change in direction, a change in disposition. Whereas the unbeliever has only one direction, one disposition—toward sin and away from God—the believer is now a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17) with a new direction, a new disposition—toward God and holiness. All of this means that for the first time we are enabled to live lives that are pleasing to God. At the moment of justification a sinner is regenerated and their transformation begins: “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). There is no such thing as justification that does not issue in sanctification. Sanctification is inevitable, though it is not automatic; it involves our responsible participation.
12. There is real victory over sin for all justified persons. It begins, as Romans 6 teaches, with the victory over the dominion of sin, which rules the unbeliever. But though it is a real and genuine (actual) victory, it is a qualified victory. There is no “life of victory over conscious sin” as Keswick theology would lead us to believe. Unless sin has been completely eradicated (glorification), sin still indwells the believer and as theologian John Murray reminds us: “The believer ought always to be conscious of it as such. To fail to be conscious of it amounts either to hypocrisy or self-deception. To have sin in us and not be conscious of it is itself grave sin; it is culpable ignorance or culpable ignoring. As long as sin remains in us there cannot be freedom from conscious sin, for the simple reason that in the person who is sensitive to the gravity of sin and to the demands of holiness this sin that remains is always reflected in consciousness” (review of So Great Salvation, 283). Since sin is not completely eradicated it will always produce conflict within the believer. The filling of the Holy Spirit does not lessen this conflict; on the contrary, the Spirit produces the conflict: “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want” (Gal 5:17). This normal conflict within all believers is described by Paul in Romans 7:14ff.

13. It is up to us to “continue to work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling” because we know that “it is God who works in [us] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil 2:12–13). Sanctification is accomplished as we “put to death the misdeeds of the body”; but we cannot do it in our own power but “by the Spirit” (Rom 8:13). God works in us for our sanctification, and we work; but it is only because God works in us that we work (Murray, Redemption: Accomplished and Applied, 149). Sanctification requires our strenuous participation, all the time battling the world, the flesh, and the devil, “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

B. The Means of Sanctification: Four Elements

- Providence
- Fellowship
- Scripture
- Prayer
1. God’s Control of Our Sanctification: Providence
   a. When we speak of God’s providence, we are normally referring to God’s activity in supervising both human actions and human history in order to bring his creation to its predetermined goal and design. Paul says in Eph 1:11, “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.” Though God occasionally uses miracles to fulfill his purposes, these are quite rare, being mainly confined to three specific periods in history: Moses, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and the apostles.

   b. God usually brings his purposes to pass by means of secondary or indirect causation. That is, God uses the normal events in our lives to bring about his plan for us. If we can apply the promise of Phil 4:19 to ourselves, “And my God will meet all your needs,” we, nevertheless realize that God does that indirectly through means. When we need food, God does not create food out of thin air and have it appear in our refrigerator. He supplies us with a job or money or someone gives us food. He uses means, providential means.

   c. In the same way God brings about our sanctification by providential means—the normal circumstances of life. Everything that happens in our lives, whether it is a good providence (a raise at work, having a special prayer request answered positively, or having successful surgery to cure a serious health issue) or a bad providence (finding out you have cancer, loosing your job, or having a family member turn away from Christ) is not accidental but is part of God’s plan for our lives. Paul says in Rom 8:28–30,

   28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

   d. God uses providential means to bring about our sanctification and one of those is suffering. Vance Haver said, “This world is not our home and we lament its sin-wrecked condition, riddled with disease and death and distress. But for the growing of Christian character, it is a proper training ground.” George Whitfield observed, “Suffering times are a Christian’s best-improving times.”

   Rom 8:17, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

   Rom 5:3–4, “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

   2 Cor 12:2–9 “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven…. And I know that this man…was caught up to
paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to
tell…. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was
given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times
I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My
grace is sufficient for you….”

e. God uses providential trials and temptations to bring about our sanctification.

Jas 1:2–4, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you
face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith
produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be
mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

f. These trials and sufferings we endure are all part of God’s discipline. The
writer of Hebrews reminds us: “They disciplined us for a little while as they
thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in
his holiness” (12:10). Our part is to recognize that what is happening in our
lives, these good and bad providences, are ultimately for our good (our
sanctification) and God’s glory. We must learn to submit in humble obedience.
“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my
presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your
salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to
act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil 2:12–13).

2. Our Participation in Sanctification: The Ordinary Means of Grace:

a. Unlike our justification or regeneration, we all have an active part to play in
our progressive sanctification. God has provided us with resources, sometimes
called “means of grace,” that we must use to bring about our sanctification. We
use these in connection with God’s providential working in our lives. God is
not working miraculously to bring about our sanctification, but through means,
ordinary means of grace. We have to be careful not to neglect the ordinary
means of grace.
b. Scripture — Scripture is sometimes called the primary means of grace since without it we would know nothing about sanctification at all.

John 17:17, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

1 Pet 2:2, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

Acts 20:32, “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

2 Tim 3:16–17, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Rom 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Scripture provides us with the norm or standard to identify what is right and wrong. It identifies sins that we must shun and the virtues that we are to embrace. Scripture tells us what holiness looks like. It tells us what resources we have as we battle the world, the flesh, and the devil, and how to use these resources. Therefore, obviously, we must hear, read, study, memorize, meditate, correlate, and apply God’s Word. Most everything we do at CBC is usually centered on Scripture. We must take great pains to take heed to the instruction we receive here at CBC.

c. Prayer — B. B. Warfield concluded: “What is prayer but the very adjustment of the heart for the influx of grace?” (Theology of B. B. Warfield, 503). We are commanded to pray in Scripture:

Col 4:2, “Devote yourselves to prayer.”

1 Thess 5:17 “Pray continually.”

Sanctification is a struggle, a battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Through prayer we receive power to “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). We need God’s help every moment to battle sin and submit to his will. The writer of Hebrews encourages us about the important role of prayer: “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (4:16). In our daily trials and temptations we can easily become depressed and anxious, so Paul reminds us: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and
your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6–7).

d. Fellowship of God’s People — God does not want Christians to live independent from one another but in relationship to each other. As the writer of Hebrews says, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another” (10:24–25). One of the most important things we can do to aid in the sanctification of our fellow believers is to encourage them. Our fellowship with other believers is inexorably tied to Scripture and prayer. We learn and understand about Scripture from our interaction with our fellow believers. Paul says that we are “competent to instruct one another” (Rom 15:14). We pray for our fellow believers and they pray for us.

Let me highlight one way that our fellowship with God’s people is essential to our sanctification. You have heard, I am sure, the expression, “some things are better caught than taught.” There is an application of this to our sanctification as it relates to our fellowship with God’s people, our relationships with people here at CBC. There is no substitute for seeing holiness on display. We need to see what holiness looks like in everyday life. Therefore, we need to be able to say to our fellow believers, “If you want to know what Christianity looks like, watch me.” Paul says: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). “Therefore I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor 4:16). “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice” (Phil 4:16). “Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do” (Phil 3:17).

Paul imitated Christ. Other believers live their lives as Paul did. We keep our eyes on them. In the local church we can and should see sanctification on display.

d. We dare not neglect or despise the ordinary means of grace that God provides for our sanctification.

Take Home Truth: Sanctification is essential to the mission—the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20). The church cannot carry out the mission without sanctified members, without Christians who are becoming holy, Christians who are growing in their maturity.

Helpful Books on Sanctification


Bunyan, John. The Pilgrim’s Progress. 1678.


* Books in Resource Center

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http://cbctrenton.com/audio-archives