

“Sanctification Revisited”  
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## INTRODUCTION

I accepted this assignment despite R. R. Byrum’s warning that “any attempt accurately and fully to define sanctification must result in failure” (“Entire Sanctification,” 460).

At the outset, I want to emphasize one word that encompasses the meaning of sanctification. That word is *love*. In the spirit of the doctrine itself, I hope we can remember that sanctification is a loving, growing relationship with God even as we discuss some of the ways it has been understood that have proven divisive and confusing.

Numerous synonyms have been substituted for sanctification although most of the writings I examined primarily used sanctification. Several preferred entire sanctification (for example, Byrum, “Entire Sanctification,” 448; and F. G. Smith, *Sanctification*, 1). I prefer holiness as did Kenneth Jones and other more recent authors.

Kenneth Jones bemoaned the neglect of holiness in our movement and suggested several reasons why it has been “laid on the shelf” (*Commitment*, xi). I’ll briefly allude to these reasons as I describe the doctrine itself.

## **BACKGROUND**

I was asked to restate the historical position of sanctification. At the same time, I want to heed C. E. Brown's conviction: "The writer is one who believes in progress. The changing emphases of the church's teaching seem to him to be merely a reflection of the fact that the enduring church must interpret the eternal gospel in conformity with the changing needs and conditions of the world of our time (*Meaning*, xii). I'll suggest three options or renewed emphases that have grown out of years of researching about, preaching about, writing about and teaching about sanctification.

I also was asked to make Scripture the focal point. The Scripture part was easy because I had access to R. R. Byrum's book *Scripture Readings and Sermon Outlines!* (I didn't have Warner's *Bible Proof of a Second Work of Grace!* Or my dad's list which he once submitted to *Vital Christianity*).

This was a fun assignment. It's been a while since I've gone back to the early Church of God texts. I restricted my examination to the resources in my personal library—over 20 books plus several pamphlets. My comments relate to the sources I read. In terms of time restraints, I decided to limit my references to those who have died. Those of you who are here who have written on sanctification can present your views during the discussion time, giving me more time to cover the topic itself. This is an overview focusing on the central themes of sanctification. I will discuss an alternative viewpoint in one key area but otherwise I'll stick to the majority opinion.

I was sanctified at a Northeast Ohio youth convention as a teenager in the early 1960s. For the past twenty-five years, I've explored just what that meant! I have not

injected anything new into this presentation. Even in terms of my methodology I used in my book *Holy Boldness*, I discovered that C. E. Brown had already incorporated a narrative approach by quoting from a woman's autobiography as a source for understanding sanctification (*Meaning*, 187; Amanda Smith; He also stole my thunder by mentioning Madame Guyon on page 134).

While the doctrine of sanctification is generally traced back to John Wesley who founded Methodism, he actually consulted numerous earlier sources, including the church fathers and Catholic mystics. Brown acknowledged the doctrine's long heritage leading up to Wesley (*Meaning*, xv). Several pages of Brown's *The Apostolic Church* consist of quotations from the church fathers (75-79). He quoted John Wesley extensively (*Meaning*, 58-63). Since our roots aren't as firmly grounded in Methodism as other Wesleyan/Holiness denominations, numerous references to Wesley by Brown and other Church of God authors might be surprising to some.

While Wesley ministered in England, the person who had the strongest influence on the doctrine of sanctification in the United States was Phoebe Palmer, a Methodist. Most Church of God writers, starting with D. S. Warner, adopted her formula of consecration and faith even though they didn't name Palmer as its originator. (Warner, "Experience," 17; F. G. Smith, *Sanctification*, 18-19; C. E. Brown, *Sanctification*, 156, 157). They probably picked it up from its emphasis among Wesleyan/Holiness believers in general rather than directly from Palmer. Mary Cole, who mentioned reading Palmer's book *Faith and Its Effects*, is the exception.

## **TWO WORKS OF GRACE**

What distinguishes us and the broader Wesleyan/Holiness movement from most other Christian groups is our belief that conversion and sanctification are two separate events in the Christian life. Many Christian traditions collapse conversion and sanctification into one experience believing that sanctification is a process initiated at conversion. Church of God writers never equated the two. R. R. Byrum found biblical evidence for a second work in John 17:17, 20; 1 Thess. 1:1; 5:23; John 15:1, 2; Luke 14:33 and Eph. 5:25-27 (*Scripture*, 36-37). John 17 was a popular text for other authors as well (F. G. Smith, *Sanctification*, 2, 5, 19; Riggle, “Elements,” 120; C. E. Brown, *Meaning*, 108; and F. G. Smith, *Sanctification*, 2, 5, 19). John 17:17 quotes Jesus’ prayer: “Sanctify them in the truth; they word is truth” (RSV).

Florence Roberts who worked in urban missions with alcoholics and prostitutes explained sanctification: “Perhaps my reader does not know the interpretation of that word, “sanctification.” Briefly, it refers to a second blessing, following justification [conversion] or the forgiveness of sins; a second work of grace, whereby the nature becomes purified and kept free from sin by the operation and power of God’s Holy Spirit—now the indwelling presence” (50).

## **HOW SANCTIFICATION IS ACHIEVED: CONSECRATION AND FAITH**

Like John Wesley and Phoebe Palmer, Church of God writers outlined two steps, consecration and faith, which constituted the way to sanctification, with both steps requiring action on the seeker’s part. Kenneth Jones described our role “as co-workers

with God” (*Commitment*, 122). Consecration received the most attention. Both D. S. Warner and F. G. Smith used altar language to describe consecration. Warner spoke of laying himself “on the altar” (quoted in J. W. V. Smith, *Quest*, 53) while F. G. Smith advised laying everything on the altar (*Sanctification*, 19). Smith elaborated in *What the Bible Teaches*: “The seeker must make a complete surrender to the whole will of God, a perfect consecration of time, talents, and all to His service, and himself be sacredly the Lord’s for time and for eternity” (161). However, references to an altar were not evident in later literature.

Not surprisingly, faith accompanied consecration as a consistent theme. Brown wrote: “Likewise, there must be consecration and faith combined in the heart that seeks the glory of entire sanctification” (*Meaning*, 157, see also 448, 464, 465; and Warner, “Experience,” 17). While sanctification required human effort, of course, God’s role is essential (F. G. Smith, *Sanctification*, 18-19). God accepted the consecrated life and rewarded faith.

Sanctification occurred instantaneously on the heels of consecration and faith (Warner, “Second Work,” 13; Blackwelder, 130; Byrum, *Entire*, 462). Mary Cole described sanctification as she and her mother experienced it: “We made a complete consecration for time and for eternity, grasped the promises, and both of us received the experience” (41.) However, the quest for sanctification was not always a quick one. The experience alluded Sarah Smith for several years ( 8).

## SIN

Before we get too far into the discussion of sanctification, a word about the need for sanctification is in order. Sin. Conversion “saves” the person from actual sins that have been committed. Also, most authors contended that individuals are sinful by nature and that sanctification removed this inbred sin that persisted despite conversion. This cleansing of inbred sin occurred at the moment of sanctification. Purity became associated with sanctification because of the emphasis on cleansing the heart of inbred sin. The notion of the elimination or eradication of inbred sin as a result of sanctification is one of the most controversial aspects of the doctrine. Inbred sin is not a term we hear very often today. I can’t even remember the last time I heard it in a sermon.

Actually, the concept derived from the work of Augustine (354 C.E.– 430 C.E.), one of the most influential theologians of the Christian Church. Prior to Augustine, Christians believed in the goodness of human nature. They held that all babies are born innocent. Augustine introduced the idea that, as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden, all humans inherited a sinful nature. In Augustine’s estimation, babies are born with original sin which is transmitted through the passion of procreation. Augustine’s theory of original or inbred sin ultimately prevailed, replacing the earlier view held by the church. Today, most people assume Augustine’s innovation has always been the position of the church.

For example, Warner wrote: “By the sin of our first parents a vein of evil nature has been transmitted down through all our race” (*Salvation Present*, 74-75). Mary Cole’s view also reflected Augustine’s opinion that sin is directly transmitted from one

generation to the next when she described “that depraved nature, the sin-principle inherited from the fall of Adam” (42). F. G. Smith explained that as a result of the fall of our “foreparents” (his word!), we “have received an evil nature.” However, unlike Augustine, F. G. Smith contended that babies were still born “perfectly innocent” in spite of the nature of sin they possess (*What the Bible*, 150; see also 171-172). *Inbred sin* was the phrase most commonly used to indicate this understanding of innate sin which all humans possessed even after conversion (Warner, “Second Work,” 13; C. E. Brown, *Meaning*, 58; Byrum, *Scripture*, 38; and F. G. Smith, *What the Bible*, 153)

While Augustine’s view of original sin became a key component of the doctrine of sanctification, he would have been horrified at the notion that original sin could be eliminated from an individual through God’s power. He maintained that original sin was a permanent condition of humanity.

While most others did not question Augustine’s position, Byrum did admit that “the doctrine of remaining depravity in the regenerate . . . is not directly stated in the Bible” but he then went on to argue that it “is a general assumption which is to be found in many places. The lack of a direct Scriptural statement of the doctrine, however, is no argument against its validity” (“Entire Sanctification,” 452).

I’m devoting more space to the idea of Augustine’s view of original sin because I believe it’s one of three issues that has led to the demise of the doctrine of sanctification in our movement. (I’ll let you try to guess the others before I get to them!)

C. E. Brown offered a twist on Augustine’s perspective by contending that the death promised to Adam if he ate the fruit was “a death of separation from God. In other words, the loss of the moral image of God.” Continuing the emphasis on separation

from God, Brown contended: “. . . it is an instinct of man’s soul to reach out toward God in loving fellowship and humble obedience. The loss of the image of God planted an opposite tendency in man’s soul, and Adam transmitted that tendency to all mankind (*Meaning*, 77, 78) [I would like to pursue this idea of “losing” the image of God. I’ve always thought Wesleyan/Holiness believers maintained that the image was marred but not missing in humans after the fall.] Here, Brown is maintaining that something is missing, the image of God, rather than something being added as a result of the fall. [Gene Newberry follows Brown’s departure from Augustine on the issue of original sin: “Sin is not a thing, a quantity; rather it is a relationship, a rebellion against God, a refusal of his love.” (72; see also 71)]

Kenneth Jones built on Brown’s alternative view of original sin and rejected Augustine’s understanding by proposing a doctrine of depravity (“Historical Survey,” 10-11). Jones traced this concept to J. Arminius who believed that “depravity is not a positive *thing* within the person, but was rather the absence of a positive, personal, committed relationship with God. It is not a positive depravity, but a ‘depravity’” (“Historical Survey,” 10). Jones elaborated on this understanding in his book *Commitment to Holiness*. According to Jones, we are born deprived of a personal relationship with God (61). He defined sin as a “turning away from God and sins are those actions, attitudes, or dispositions that follow from being turned away from God” (56) He further contended that “sin is not something inside of a person” (56) and that “sin is not a thing and . . . original sin is not an inherited substance” (74). [This view is not unique to Jones. Nazarene theologians such as H. Orton Wiley and Richard Taylor

also maintain this position.] Thus, Jones substituted the phrase innate depravity in the place of innate depravity (62).

I've discussed views of inward sin. Now, I would like to turn to our concern for avoiding worldliness in terms of avoiding sin surrounding us in our society. We've sometimes been embarrassed by the lists of things we were told to avoid in order to maintain outward purity. One of those items was a girdle or corset. Now, I'm not old enough to have heard D. O. Teasley's lecture again women wearing girdles. While it's hard for me to imagine one of the saints talking to women about their intimate apparel, it's also amazing that the argument focused on health issues. To wear a corset or girdle tight enough to conform your body's shape to the fashion of the day (a much smaller waist than now!) resulted in a woman's internal organs being pushed together. Some women could barely breathe, probably causing some of the fainting that was so prevalent among women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Advocating the prohibition of corsets was in the interest of women's health. My point is that perhaps not everything on those lists needs to be thrown out. Maybe the lists themselves need to be cast aside. Sanctification is about love not legalism. Legalism is another reason for criticism or rejection of the doctrine of sanctification. Kenneth Jones advocated "no longer memorizing a set of rules that seems unending" but, instead, going "beyond the rules and seek[ing] to love both God and others as God loves them" (*Commitment*, 4, 5). C. E. Brown concurred: "We drive the drill of reason and conscience through all the hard rocks of legalism into the pool of rich oil which lies in the heart of undivided love and devotion to God as revealed in Christ" (*Meaning*, 149). But, at the same time, there are novels today that Christians should not read and movies that should not be watched.

There are clothes that are not modest. Rather than maintaining lists of absolute prohibitions, perhaps we should stress seeking the discernment of the Holy Spirit in whatever we do. Lists smack of legalism which has no place in our theology.

But, what about expanding our understanding of nonconformity to the world beyond specific items of clothing (neck ties or corsets!)? What about war and other issues of injustice such as gaining wealth at the price of increased poverty for others, what about racism and sexism? Our belief in sanctification should lead us to address social sins in our society. We have a theology that mandates our engagement against these evidences of “worldliness” but we don’t generally appropriate it. Those who have confronted societal sin generally haven’t recorded their views. Addie Wyatt is an exemplary example who comes to mind. She has devoted her life to challenging racism, sexism and classism and is, no doubt, the most prominent person in the Church of God known for her work to achieve social holiness. Church of God adherents who work for justice generally have not based their actions on a theology of sanctification although the emphasis on holy living and the relationship between holiness and behavior (J. W. V. Smith, *I Will Build*, 86, 87) provides the opportunity to make this connection.

Worldliness sometimes manifests itself in other churches as well as our surrounding culture. One example is the decision by the Southern Baptist Convention to deny ordination to women. We need to respond to this cultural understanding of the inferiority of women that has seeped into this denomination and influences our own churches by proclaiming our theological heritage which contends sanctification and its benefits are equally available to women as well as men or as Lilly McCutcheon put it: “God is an equal opportunity employer” (2). Rather than accommodating ourselves to

the sin in other churches, we need to remember, as Mary Cole pointed out, that Acts 1:14 documented the presence of women at Pentecost while Acts 2:4 reported that all those present began “speaking as the Spirit gave utterance” (86). Our basis for women preaching is grounded in the experience of Pentecost.

## **PERFECTION OR MATURITY?**

The idea of perfection, sometimes understood as sinless perfection, is the third aspect of sanctification (along with inbred sin and lists of prohibited worldly activities) that has caused numerous problems in trying to explain and live out our understanding of sanctification. John Wesley himself was not always clear in his explanation of perfection so the issue definitely is not unique to us.

The word translated *perfection* in our New Testaments can also be translated as maturity. This is a more accurate term. We should speak of maturity with respect to sanctification rather than perfection. When some believers, such as my dad, spoke of perfection, they understood it to mean that a sanctified person never sinned again. Sanctification, to them, was instantaneous but did not include a growth component or allow room for maturing. On the other hand, Benjamin Reid contended: “the Spirit leads us along a growth path to greater understanding, increased insight, and deeper experience.” He further emphasized: “There must be a going on and growing on and flowing on in the Spirit” (56-57). Boyce Blackwelder briefly summarized: “The baptism of the Holy Spirit involves both crisis and growth. Grace is not static but is always dynamic” (131). The instantaneous aspect of sanctification, rather than signifying the end point of the Christian life, is the beginning of a life-long experience of growth.

While not always clear in his statements about perfection, it is obvious that Wesley stressed love of God and love of neighbor as evidence of Christian perfection. What is perfect once an individual is sanctified is the relationship with God and neighbor which is characterized by love. Jones summarized Wesley's perspective: "John Wesley thought of Christian perfection as perfect, growing love . . . . He thought of holiness in terms of an unbroken relationship with Christ, rather than as the achievement of a certain moral standard" ("Historical Survey," 4). ["Holiness theology is basically relational theology" (Newberry, 73)]

Jones urged us to "recover Wesley's understanding of holiness as perfect love," a love that "may be imperfectly expressed, but it is perfectly pleasing to God" ("Historical Survey," 14; see also *Commitment*, 137). He quoted Rom. 5:5: "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" to illustrate this love and its source (*Commitment*, 137).

Emphasizing perfect love rather than perfection helps us avoid the erroneous belief that if one is sanctified, or perfect, then one is sinless. Jones observed that "love can be perfect without being mature. The love of a child can be perfect love though capable of years of maturing" (*Commitment*, 167). "It is the relationship [with God] that is perfect, a relationship of perfect love" (*Commitment*, 119). If the "close personal relationship with God" is diminished, sin is possible. Jones further elaborated: "While God does not make sinning impossible for the sanctified Christian, he does, by his grace, make it possible not to sin" (*Commitment*, 130, 131)

C. E. Brown also related love to sanctification. He spoke of the disciples who were “perfected in love” at Pentecost (*Meaning*, 107). He further stressed that holiness “is a love infused into our hearts by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit and by that same Spirit made perfect, or complete” (*Meaning*, 151). Brown advocated using *perfect love* rather than *Christian perfection* because “it would have been more scriptural, more philosophical, and likewise more acceptable to the general public. It would have relieved the doctrine of an unnecessary load of ridicule and misconception” (*Meaning*, 149). Jones and I (and I’m sure others as well!) agree with Brown.

## **EMPOWERMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Another consequence of sanctification is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The quest for sanctification includes the expectation of power. Linking sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1-2) provided a biblical basis for the association of sanctification and power. References to Pentecost sprinkled the writings I examined (F. G. Smith, *Sanctification*, 157; Blackwelder, 128, 130; Byrum, *Christian Theology*, 457, 466).

Jesus had told his followers before his crucifixion: “And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Jesus’ followers obeyed Jesus’ instructions and approximately 120 women and men, remained in Jerusalem for the “baptism with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). On the appointed day, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4), and people from many countries heard them telling “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11) in their native tongues. C. E. Brown contended: “One of the most

outstanding features of the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit was an enduement of power” (Brown, *Meaning*, 133. See also Riggle, “Power,” 96, 102; and Byrum, *Christian Theology*, 470).

Mother Sarah Smith provides one example of the relationship between sanctification and power. She used the term “man-fearing spirit” to define her timidity prior to sanctification. She reported that when God sanctified her, God “took all the shrink and fear of men and devils out of me.” Sanctification imparted power and confidence: “I was filled with power and the Holy Ghost, and such boldness. All that man-fearing spirit was taken away, and my heart was overflowing with perfect love that was so unspeakable and full of glory.” Others noticed this transformation in her life (9, 11, 26).

The power bestowed by the Holy Spirit was for evangelism and for service (Blackwelder, 131). R. R. Byrum maintained: “The objective results of the baptism of the Spirit, or his work through his work through us, consists principally in his enduing us with gifts and power for service in the kingdom of God” (*Christian Theology*, 471, see also 467). While the written understanding of sanctification referred primarily to service in terms of evangelism, social holiness workers such as Florence Roberts who ministered to prostitutes and those who work for social transformation such as Addie Wyatt, expanded their understanding of power to include showing love for others by addressing both their spiritual and their physical needs.

As some of you know, *holy boldness* is one of my favorite terms relating to sanctification and the Holy Spirit’s empowerment. I have to admit that it was not

commonly used by our authors although I did find one reference in Warner's writings (*Salvation*, 34).

## CONCLUSION

I have provided an extremely brief overview of the doctrine of sanctification within the Church of God, beginning with the fact that it predated the founding of our movement. I've summarized how sanctification is attained and discussed two views of the nature of sin. I've discussed the meaning of perfection as maturity and stressed that sanctification is both instantaneous and progressive. Last, I've related the power of the Holy Spirit to sanctification. I've also highlighted three problematic aspects of the doctrine—the belief in inbred sin, legalism, and a faulty understanding of perfection—and offered alternatives. Throughout, I have stressed that sanctification is about love. We've often managed to make sanctification a complicated doctrine. Whenever this happens, we need to remember that it can be described in one word—*love*.

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