

## RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SANCTIFICATION

*“if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus; that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness”* (Eph. 4:21-24 NKJ).

In the previous issue, while demonstrating that sanctification is accomplished in our calling, the remark was made that sanctification is commonly confused with growing in grace. In this issue I wish to demonstrate that, and in doing so try to untangle in our minds the important distinctions between sanctification and righteousness. The two are rarely separated in scriptures, cannot be separated in our experience, but they must never be confounded with one another. They are radically different graces. Their confusion may be laid at the feet of men’s dogma and creeds which have created phrases that have been so commonly taken up in our speech and writings that we fail to notice that such language is completely absent from the holy scriptures. Such phrases as “progressive sanctification” and “imputed sanctification” are no more scriptural than the Roman dogma of infused righteousness. The prominence of these unscriptural ideas in our common theological vocabulary may be traced to our failure to take note of the distinction between righteousness and holiness.

We will begin with a brief reference to the Greek words from which these terms are translated. Their counterparts are prominent in the Old Testament Hebrew (and the distinctions are identical), but for the sake of brevity we will confine our study to the New Testament. The Greek noun, *hagiasmos*, with its verb form and modifying forms, is translated variously as sanctification, sanctify, sanctified, holy, holiness, and saints. In addition, there is a synonym, *hosiotes*, which is also translated holiness. The root meaning of these words is separation...to be set apart. It is used of things as well as people, and denotes consecration, being separated out to God and identified with Him, His purpose or work. It is never used in a forensic or imputed sense. It is always actual and experientially executed. It is also absolute. There are no degrees of consecration. One is either fully consecrated to God or not at all.

On the other hand we have the Greek noun, *dikaioisune*, translated righteous, right or just. A slight variation of this word, *dikaioma*, is rendered justification or righteousness, its verb form, justify or to be made right. Righteousness in the scriptures is nothing more nor less than conformity to God’s law. It does not intrinsically relate to holiness or consecration to God. If man were constitutionally capable of keeping God’s law, he might be righteous without being sanctified or consecrated. He is, of course, unable to keep God’s perfect commandment, so he must be sanctified, separate, regenerated, and enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit in order to behave rightly in any degree. Even then he does not perfectly meet the law’s absolute righteousness. Since perfect obedience is God’s requirement for life, the only way a sinner can be saved is by having the righteousness in the perfect obedience of Christ imputed to him. There is a righteousness that is inadequate, such as that of the scribes and Pharisees, which is not a false righteousness, but simply insufficient (Matt. 5:20). It conforms to the law so far as it goes, but comes up short. Nothing less than the perfect righteousness of Christ can save.

### Importance of This Distinction

We are not merely straining out gnats when we insist on separating these two graces in our thoughts. God made the first separation of them at Mt. Sinai when He delivered the Decalogue to Moses in two separate stones. The first tablet contains the first four commandments, which have to do with our consecration to God. There is nothing “moral” or “ethical” about them. They are devotional. They speak of our sanctification, our being separated and holy to God alone. The second tablet, however, has to do with rectitude, righteousness, morals and ethics, our walk and behavior

among men in this present life. He certainly could have inscribed the ten words on one slab of stone. The fact that He did not, is a strong indication that the two sets of commandments are different in nature.

There are very practical reasons this distinction ought be remembered and guarded. It marks out what God alone can do, and has done, in contrast to our responsibilities. Sanctification, in the purely evangelical sense is not something we do, but something God has done. Under the Old Covenant, men and things were often set apart and consecrated to God, which did not effectually put them in union with Christ. So we often have men sanctifying themselves as well as things. But in the New Covenant, the only Person who sanctifies Himself is Christ (John 17:19). For the rest of us, it is God Who sovereignly elects, predestines and calls to Himself (Rom. 8:30, II Thess. 2:13). Christ is active in sanctification, and we are the recipients (Heb. 2:11). We are indeed told to “pursue” holiness, but that does not mean we should try to get it, but to give ourselves fully to what God has done for us. This is also the idea in I Peter 3:15: To “sanctify the Lord in (our) hearts” is to cherish Him. We certainly do not make Him holy. On the contrary, it is He Who has made us holy.

Sanctification is a completed, finished, absolute work accomplished in God’s regeneration and calling. If any church more than others in the New Testament gives cause to be considered carnal and un sanctified, it is the church at Corinth. Yet they are addressed as “saints” (holy ones), and declared to be sanctified (I Cor. 1:2; 6:11). This is a blessed truth that excludes any boasting on our part, and makes it impossible for one Christian to suggest himself to be holier than any other.

The doctrine of progressive sanctification, whether it be by stages in post conversion experiences or by gradual non-crises improvement, is predicated upon the unscriptural dogma of an incomplete and imperfect work of grace in regeneration. “We are still sinners by nature” we are told. “God has only planted an imperfect holy principle in our hearts that is being gradually improved, but will not be perfected until the end of this mortal life.” But that is not what the Bible says. The Bible tells us that we have been born of God, have the seed of God in us, and therefore cannot continue to sin (I John 3:9, 5:18). We have been made partakers of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4). The “new” man has been created according (in conformity) to God in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24). That is why the Bible calls believers *saints*, not sinners! Progressive sanctification, therefore, slanders and depreciates the radical and perfect work of God in regeneration. Then it arrogates to men the capacity to improve on what God has imperfectly done!

The doctrine of imputed sanctification is fashioned entirely out of the thin air of wrong presuppositions and defective human logic. Ignoring the enormous mass of scripture testifying to a new creation, born from heaven of the Holy Spirit, men stubbornly insist that believers are still wretched sinners in heart, and incredibly wicked. Because the scriptures invariably call these new creatures saints, the assumption is made that such holiness is merely imputed. Not a shred of scripture exists for such a doctrine. Imputation and sanctification are never found in the same sentence...not even in the same context. Sanctification is not a legal and forensic pronouncement, but the actual work of divine regeneration and Holy Spirit calling.

Righteousness, on the other hand, is clearly imputed. That is because, although the new creation, the inner man, is created in righteousness and true holiness, the outer man (the body) is still a vehicle of sinful lusts. The believer, in his heart and soul, desires, longs for, hungers and thirsts for, absolute righteousness. But because of the weakness of his flesh he is yet unable to *walk* perfectly before God. His righteousness is imperfect. Except the perfect righteousness of Christ be imputed to him, he would still go to hell, striving with all his strength to do what is right. He would still come up short. The sinless Son of God, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, God’s Lamb, The Eternal Rock of Ages, the Man Christ Jesus, is Surety for all our shortfalls. Our hope is not in

our sanctification, any or all of our imperfect works, but in Him, His blood and righteousness.

**Growing in Grace**

Does the word of God, therefore, indicate the possibility, if not the necessity, of some sort of post-conversion improvement in the believer? Indeed it does! It is not called progressive sanctification, but growing in grace (Eph. 4:13-15, II Pet. 3:18). There are countless other passages that enjoin us to mortify sin, to employ the members of our bodies to serve righteousness, and to pursue a right and godly walk. The burden of New Testament exhortations to believers is for them to live better lives than they have in the past.

How can such an improvement be made? The inner man is created like God in righteousness and true holiness. That cannot be improved. The outer man, the fleshy body, is untouched in redemption, “dead because of sin (Rom. 8:10). It is flesh, declared vile (Phil. 3:21), and cannot be made spiritual. Sinful flesh cannot be improved. So what grows, what improves?

The whole man grows in grace. God intends us, by the Spirit of Christ in the inner man, to mortify, bring under subjection, the body of flesh, and make it a servant to righteousness (Rom. 8:13).

Concerning our lives in this present world, believers are a composite of body (the outer, visible man), soul and spirit (the inner, hidden man of the heart). Eternal redemption, wrought by Christ according to God’s election and predestined purpose, is focused on the heart, the inner man alone. The body is not redeemed. It is indeed the vessel of the soul and, as such, the temple of the Spirit for this present time. There is a sense in which we sanctify it (set it apart to serve God instead of sin), but it is marked out to perish. When the Bible speaks of our walk, our behavior, it has reference to the whole man, body, soul and spirit. We live, walk, act, work, in our mortal bodies. We are enjoined to walk worthy of our **calling** (Eph. 4:1), i.e., bring our **righteousness** more in keeping with our **sanctification**. It is the whole man, therefore, which is said to grow in grace, become more conformed to Christ. It is indeed a process in which we are renovated in our thinking, our understanding, transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2), renewed in the spirit of our minds (Eph. 4:23). Growing in grace is the process in which our bodies are brought under the discipline of Christ by His Spirit in the inner man, *“that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the width and length and depth and height...to know the love of Christ that passes knowledge: that we may be filled with all the fullness of God”*. (Eph. 3:17-19) - C. M.

**GRACE BIBLE CAMP**

Thursday Evening November 2 – Sunday Morning November 7, 2000

**GRACE CHURCH OF BENTLEY, 681 ROCK HILL RD., BENTLEY, LA**

NO CHARGES for meals, dormitory lodging, R.V. Hookups. Bring linens if you wish dormitory lodging. **Note:** Dormitory beds are limited. First come, first served. But if beds are exhausted when you arrive and you cannot afford motel lodging, we will find lodging for you. No one turned away! Some must leave early, making more beds available on Saturday evening.

**MOTELS**

**Pineville:** (14 miles from Camp) Day’s Inn (800)-325-2525. **Alexandria, McArthur Dr.** (about 18 miles from Camp) Holiday Inn (800)-787-8336; Hampton Inn (318) 4887-8530; Travelodge (800)-255-3040; Rodeway Inn (800) 228-2000; **Alexandria, I-49** (about 21 miles from Camp) LaQuinta Inn (800) 687-6667; Howard Johnson Express (800) 446-4656; Super 8 Motel (800)848-8888.

**AGENDA**

|                 |                               |                 |                               |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| <u>Thursday</u> |                               | <u>Saturday</u> |                               |
| 5:00 P          | Supper                        | 7-8:30 A        | Beverages, Rolls, Cereal      |
| 6:30 P          | Prayer                        | 8:30 A          | Group Devotionals             |
| 7:00 P          | Ira Campbell, Natchitoches LA | 9:00 A          | Barney Bryant, Carthage TX    |
| 8:00 P          | Charles Leiter, Kirksville MO | 10:00 A         | Gilbert Barr, Simmesport LA   |
| <u>Friday</u>   |                               | Brunch          |                               |
| 7-8:30 A        | Beverages, Rolls, Cereal      | 3:30 P          | Questions & Discussion        |
| 8:30 A          | Group Devotionals             | 4:15 P          | Peter Hutchinson, Beaumont TX |
| 9:00 A          | Gib Johnson, Cookville, TX    |                 | Supper                        |
| 10:00 A         | Brian Bravo, Ponchatoula LA   | 7:00 P          | Prayer                        |
|                 | Brunch                        | 7:30 P          | Charles Leiter                |
| 3:30 P          | Questions & Discussion        | <u>Sunday</u>   |                               |
| 4:15 P          | Johnie Carter, McArthur AR    | 7-8:30 A        | Beverages, Rolls, Cereal      |
|                 | Supper                        | 8:30 A          | Group Devotionals             |
| 7:00 P          | Prayer                        | 9:00 A          | Mark LaCour, Baton Rouge LA   |
| 7:30 P          | Charles Leiter                | 10:00 A         | Charles Leiter                |
|                 |                               |                 | Brunch Adjourn                |

*Grace Bible Camps are sponsored by Grace And Truth Enterprises in conjunction with Grace Church of Bentley and other sister churches in the region. A cordial welcome to preachers, men, women, youth, children, whole families...any and all wishing to come aside for a few days of soul refreshing encouragement in the word of God and Christian Fellowship.*

