

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION AS TAUGHT IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

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Dayton's exegetical study of entire sanctification as taught specifically in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, arguing from the text that Paul teaches the possibility and necessity of holiness in the present life.

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I. A Problem of Terminology This topic begins with an interesting bit of semantics. The term “entire sanctification” does not occur in Romans at all. However, this is not strange. One of the richest books on holiness in the New Testament, 1 John, never uses the word “holy,” “holiness,” nor “sanctify.” Less technical and more universal words are used to express the same concept. Perhaps a still more striking observation is that the English word “atonement” appears but once in the King James Version of the New Testament, and there the less than ideal translation is corrected in the margin. Yet, redemption is the heart and fiber of New Testament teaching, with atonement in Christ Jesus the core of that redemption.

It is true that there are a few references in Romans which use the words “holy,” “holiness,” and “sanctified.” But, for the most part, they are not used in a very discriminating theological context of Christian experience, and certainly not often in clearly definitive references to a second crisis. The one use of the word “sanctify” is to describe the “offering up of the Gentiles.” One word for “holiness” (*hagiosynê*) is used but once of the “spirit of holiness” (Romans 1:4). Another word (*hagiosmos*) is used twice of the ethical goal in Christian living: “servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Romans 6:19), and “fruit unto holiness” (Romans 6:22). The only other references that include the word “holy” as related to the Scriptures are (Romans 1:2), the law (7-12), the commandment (Romans 7:12), corporate bodies of Jewish and Gentile believers (Romans 11:16), a holy kiss (Romans 16:16), and once in the great appeal for believers to present their bodies “holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1). Apparently our study cannot be a simple running of references in a concordance for words that state clearly in technical theological terms the specific experience which we wish to expound from the book of Romans. The Bible simply is not written on the pattern of a systematic theology—at least not a formal theology of experience not even the book of Romans. It speaks freely of life and is addressed to life’s needs. Therefore, its most pungent statements come not in technical terms for systems of thought, but in practical terms addressed to human needs—often expressed in almost homespun simplicity.

II. Emphasis on Experience and Life This elusive quality in the doctrine of experience is, of course, not limited to the book of Romans. It has always plagued the theorist. It almost seems as though God were turning the key in the door against intellectual sophistication and telling man that the way into the kingdom is not through human wisdom but through divine grace. Socrates was wrong. It was not a charmer to charm away our ignorance that we needed. It was a Savior to take away our sins. And, though man by wisdom knew not God, any man who “will do his will shall know the doctrine” (John 7:17). Faith that works by obedience is the key that unlocks the door. Spiritual things are more than intellectually discerned. The spiritual is broader than theoretical knowledge. Man is too prone to worship his own neat packages of doctrinal creeds. Perhaps God is not willing that our human formulations should appear so air-tight and canonical. In any case, one must be

more than a harmonizer of proof texts to mine the gold of Christian experience and consequent doctrine from Romans, or the rest of the Bible. He must be a humble believer, walking in the light. Then that which is "hidden from the wise and the prudent is revealed unto babes." In common with the ancient fathers and the host of witnesses from more recent centuries, both inside and outside the Wesleyan tradition, we do hasten to affirm that the Bible in general, and Romans in particular, presents a fulness of transforming grace through a perfect work of God that meets man's total need. This is sometimes designated in Scripture as an entire or whole sanctification (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Since the affirmation in Scripture is so clear and strong, we have no hesitation in using the same term wherever the same provision and experience appear.

III. The Term "Holiness" But our method will require more than word study and grammatical exegesis in terms of a specific designation. It is not the term, but the experience and the life that the Scripture stresses. And the experience is of the broadest possible dimensions. Therefore it is couched in a variety of terms. First and foremost, it must be remembered that "holiness" is the principal term used to describe the nature of God. It refers to the balance of His perfections and the sum-total of His attributes. It is His utter self-consistency and the perfect harmony that exists between His inner choices and His outer actions. His holiness always expresses itself in love, and His love always seeks to bring its object to holiness. In God, holiness is absolute and underived. In man, it is relative and derived. Coming from God, it is enjoyed in a relationship with God. And that intimacy, depth, and efficacy of relationship is the deepest fact in man's holiness. As Girdlestone[1] implies, the moral and spiritual qualities in themselves alone do not constitute holiness in man so much as the relationship with God which demands purity and righteousness, and from which these flow. This relationship thus requires and imparts holiness in its proper sense, which Stevens calls "characteristically godliness." He says:

It is evident that hagios and its kindred words are best adapted to represent the New Testament idea. They express something more and higher than hieros, "sacred," "outwardly associated with God"; something more than hosios, "reverent," "pious"; something more than semnos, "worthy," "honorable"; something more than hagnos, "pure," "free from defilement." Hagios is more positive, more comprehensive, more elevated, more purely ethical and spiritual. It is characteristically godlikeness, and in the Christian system godlikeness signifies completeness of life.[2]

IV. Other Terms But the Scripture writers do not highlight a single word which can be separated from normal life, venerated, and made an object of worship instead of a way of life. New Testament sainthood is not something conferred on the exceptional after death. It is a way of life. It is "righteousness," "spiritual mindedness," "freedom from sin," "yieldedness," "living sacrifice," the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," life "in the Spirit" and "that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God." To misinterpret or misapply one term does not destroy the teaching. The Scriptures in general, and Romans in particular, are full of the subject of grace adequate for man's total need.

V. Entire Sanctification The term "entire sanctification" is not the exact equivalent of any of the above terms, but is used to describe the entrance into such an experience of fullness of grace. As sanctification, even in the new convert, is a separation from sin and a dedication to God, so entire sanctification is defined as a complete freedom from sin, and a correspondingly complete dedication to God. The term is used to denote a crisis in the believer's life in which the remains of

“inner sin” or “inherited depravity” are dealt with in a manner which makes possible the scriptural experience of a full righteousness, purity, spiritual mindedness, life in the Spirit, or holiness. This, of course, presupposes definitions of sin and holiness that are sufficiently restricted to make allowance for the imperfections inherent in the human, at the same time that a real transformation is accomplished in the realm of heart, motivation, and the springs of life.

VI. General Survey

It is obvious that in a non-technical, life-centered document such as Romans, the line will not always be clear between first and second crises, or between grace known to the converted as distinct from that of the entirely sanctified. If a survey of the issues fails to spell out every technicality, and to dot every “i” and cross every “t”, at least it is hoped that something helpful can be said as to the scope and general principles of investigation that must be followed for an understanding of the subject.

VII. The Principle of “Totals”

One basic observation is that the Scriptures in general, and Paul in particular, tend to refer to vast totals of experience rather than to particulars that lend themselves to theological definition. That is, the reference is generally to “sin”—not to “acquired guilt,” “inherited depravity,” the “sin nature,” “sin in believers,” or the “remains of sin.” The term refers to sin in its awful completeness. To mention it is to loathe it. Right-thinking people, then, if unconverted, want to be set free from its bondage and guilt and become children of God. If they are converted, they have two interests. They want, on the negative side, to be freed from all “remains of sin” and “sinful attitudes” that survived their conversion experience. To state the positive side of the same crisis experience, they want the life of the Spirit and divine love to so fill them that they, fully renewed in the image of Christ, will be able to serve God with single eye and heart. And, secondly, they want to learn the new skills of Christian living by the power of the Holy Spirit in a manner as different from the old way of sin as possible. This unfolding life in the Spirit is the process of growing in grace and experiencing the continuing transformation that characterizes vital Christians, who “with unveiled face, continually beholding as in a mirror the manifestation of the Lord, are being transformed continually into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18). In this paper we must be alert to emphases in Romans that highlight the second crisis, but we will not be able or willing to take it out of its vital context of a dynamic, expanding experience of Christlikeness.

VIII. “The Righteousness of God” Concept

One of the most misunderstood expressions in Romans is “the righteousness of God.” It is generally thought of in such restricted terms that it loses its meaning. But it is a term almost as big as “holiness,” as used here. There are perhaps two main reasons why Paul uses the term here instead of holiness. Though both terms make God the standard and source of the Christian life, “righteousness” lends itself more to an analysis of the ways in which sin comes into conflict with the life in grace, and the ways in which the conflict can be resolved. Then, too, the comparisons and contrasts in the Epistle were to be with “law” as a means of salvation. The connotations of “righteous-ness” were easier to elaborate in this context than of the more mystical and mystifying aspects of God’s majesty and holiness.

IX. Righteousness As a “Total” Term

“Righteousness” is used in its “total” sense of God’s own “rightness,” in the sense of moral propriety or integrity, and as the standard for His moral creatures. It stands as the eternal opposite to sin and evil. Though there is a sense in which “holiness” is a still broader term, “righteousness” still bespeaks the nature of God as the absolute standard of moral rightness, and the proper source of any worthy human copy of the divine. Hence “righteousness of God,” as used in Romans, is not just a description of God. It is rather a God-kind of righteousness that is communicable. Throughout human history God had demanded righteousness. What kind would satisfy Him? It is the God-kind—that which conforms to God, flows from Him, and meets His demand. Paul throws out the challenge: Whence does it come? From law or by grace through faith?

X. Imparted Righteousness

Justification obviously speaks of more than an acquittal—the dismissing of charges, or even a forgiveness. It certainly refers to more than calling one righteous when he is not. Its connotations lie in the realm of “being,” at least as much as in the realm of “being considered.” As Paul handles the term in the first five chapters of Romans, this is very clear in the original language. And it becomes clear to all if we realize that there is no term for “just” or “justify” in Paul’s writings that does not come from the same root as the word for “righteous” or “righteousness.” There would be less confusion in English if the word “justify” had never been coined, and if instead the words “make righteous” had always been used. Of course that is what the Latin word “justify” means, except as it is used in the accommodated sense of a human court’s ability to declare a thing so without the power to make it so. It seems that Liddon writes accurately when he says:

There is no place in Scripture in which the Righteousness of Jesus Christ is said to be imputed as distinct from being imparted. When Scripture says that Faith is reckoned to a man for righteousness, it does not thereby say that the Righteousness of Christ is imputed without being imparted. Faith is imputed for righteousness on a common sense and almost a natural principle. Faith is the initial act of all union with God or Christ. Accordingly an all-gracious God does not wait until the sinner has done such or such good works before He receives him into favour; He sees the fruit in the germ, He takes the will for the deed.[3] XI. An Aspect of Holiness

Thus, when Paul has established a “justification by faith,” he has also established, in a true sense, the God-kind of righteousness as received by faith. Once this is posited, it is seen that something of eternal significance has been begun. The term “righteousness” may be caught up in the bigger and warmer term “holiness” as a result of a further crisis in “entire sanctification,” but it is no loss of the one for the sake of the other. Righteousness is simply an aspect or component of the holiness which is a balance of perfections in God and a god likeness in His creatures.

XII. Holiness in the Justification Section

It is most natural that the “justification section” of Romans (3:21-5:21) should sparkle and flash with something more than the minimums of saving grace. It is no wonder that the greatest of the Patriarchs (Abraham) should be the prime illustration of this righteousness by faith, and that chapter 5 should revel in the peace, hope, glory, standing grace, triumph, love of God shed abroad through the gift of the Holy Spirit, abundance of grace, the reign of grace, the reign in life, the gift

of righteousness, justification of life, and the assurance of triumph. It is impossible to keep holiness, or even heaven, out of the justification section, simply because holiness is begun in the first valid experience of saving grace—the new birth, by which we become God’s children partakers of His nature. The God-kind of righteousness is a total that implies a fulfillment not only in a further crisis and a daily life, but also in heaven itself. This is as natural and logical as to see in the birth of a baby a supposition in favor of adulthood, responsible living, and a worthy destiny. Such is God’s provision.

XIII. Dangers in a Narrow View To conceive of justification apart from the grand total of which it is an aspect is to miss the meaning of the word and to throw the door open to heresy. From such narrower approaches come distressing views of the atonement, or of the lack of it, ridiculous teachings concerning sinning saints (holy sinners), and the like. But the broader view coincides perfectly with the bold generalization of the Apostle John that “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

XIV. Holiness Implied in Justification

It is natural then that there should be no sharp break as one approaches the sanctification section (Romans 6:1-23; Romans 7:1-25; Romans 8:1-39). Rather, a practical question is raised and answered about the new life. Shall we who have this gift of righteousness continue sinning? How ridiculous! This would nullify the whole meaning of the righteousness we received, and the way we received it through Christ. The answer to the ethical problem is not involvement in sinning, but a still deeper involvement in redemption. The provision of Calvary was not only an initial and basic restoration from the old life to an acceptance with God. It includes a crucifixion of the old sinful self in the sense of the destruction of sin as a working principle in even the depths of the heart (Romans 6:6). More than a correction of conduct and standing is involved. It is death not just to acts of sinning—but also to the sin nature. He that is dead is emancipated from sin. The appeal to Christian living becomes an appeal to holiness of heart—to an entire sanctification. Hence it is treated in Romans 6:1-11 as freedom from sin. This negative aspect of freedom from sin is followed by the positive idea of a holy life (12:23). Instead of sin, there is a new king reigning over us. It is grace, reigning by our consent. We have become voluntary servants of righteousness unto holiness. Now our fruits unto holiness and everlasting life.

XV. Greek Tenses At the crucial points in Romans 6:1-23 it is interesting to note the tenses of the Greek verbs. The provision for this freedom from sin as provided in the crucifixion of Christ is given in the aorist tense, as of a simple occurrence or crisis (Romans 6:6); as is the destruction of sin (Romans 6:6). Likewise the word for dying is in the aorist tense (Romans 6:7-8), and the word for “present” or “yield” in the exhortations for the believer to make a full commitment to God (Romans 6:13 and Romans 6:19). These all lend themselves to the idea of a crisis and are used in a context that appeal to those already converted. On the other hand, the verbs which speak of the process of Christian living are in the present tense, indicating continuity, for example, “living” (Romans 6:11), “reign” and “obey” (Romans 6:12).

XVI. Sanctification Not By Law

Romans 7:1-25 has to re-enact the battle between law and faith (or grace) as a means of salvation. But here it is in the broader context of holiness or sanctification. Grudgingly, it is assumed, the Jew had to admit that justification is by faith (Romans 3:1-31; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-21). But certainly, he would argue, it is law that makes one a better Christian—that sanctifies—that brings to perfection. Paul's answer is clear. No, one's experience is quite the contrary. Law is no more able to restore the fine balance of the inner nature in holiness than it was to clarify our forensic relationships before God. Legalism can but deepen the frustration, failure, and despair of the poor soul that sees a better way and has no power to attain it. Law sharpens the conflict, but it can never resolve it. Only grace, received by faith, can solve the problem.

XVII. Grace For Man's Total Need

Having tested the alternate method for victory, he now places full emphasis again on the totality of grace that is found in the finished work of Christ. Paul does not recapitulate the grace involved in justification. Nor does he seek to draw the limits of what one can have in "only a justified state." Obviously such would be impossible. A child of God can have all that his faith can embrace. And some older Christians still long for particulars which the infant faith of others has claimed early. Things and blessings are not the point, in the narrower sense of the terms. Rather, Paul holds up to view the normal Christian life—full-orbed and free. The argument is not theological insistence on so many trips to an altar. It is the offer of Christian fullness. If one does not have this fullness, let him be assured that it is provided for him. There is but a step of faith between the fully yielded heart and this fulness. This is the scriptural method of preaching entire sanctification. It is not a plea for theological consistency so much as provision for man's total need. Though some knowledge generally precedes the crisis, the theology comes much more naturally and easily after the experience. One needs the experience and life as a basis for analysis and interpretation. Religion and life come first. Theology and rules tend to follow.

XVIII. Totals in Romans 8:1-39 This totality of grace in the normal Christian life is shown first in terms of the triumph of grace in the human personality (Romans 8:1-11). The answer is not in one's own efforts under law. The victorious Christian does not walk after the patterns and inclinations of the human, but he obeys the guidance and prompting of the Spirit (Romans 8:1). Thus a higher power has entered and has gained supremacy. It is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that rules and delivers from the rule of sin and death (Romans 8:2). It was not that the human in itself was bad. God created it. But sin was the real trouble. Man's own struggling could not break sin's power. Nor could any law enable him to keep its requirement. But what law and humanity could not do, Christ did. He condemned to death the villain. Sin is destroyed. Humanity is delivered. Righteousness is then fulfilled in walking after the Spirit.

A. Life After the Spirit This brings up a fundamental question. What is meant by "after the flesh" and "after the Spirit"? Is this an outward pattern of conformity accepted as a goal or required as a law? Indeed not! It is a heart attitude. Paul defines it in terms of a "mindedness." Those who set their minds upon (phroneô), and give priority to the flesh, walk after the flesh. And those who mind the things of the Spirit walk after the Spirit. There are only the two ways. Sooner or later life's values become sorted to the point that a definite pattern is clear. Then one is obviously either spiritually minded or carnally minded. He cannot be both. So he is alive or dead. The carnal must be displaced by a higher principle. And indeed it will be, or the soul perishes. Again, it is the

conflict between two totals: Spirit or flesh—life or death—holiness or hell. Whatever of inconsistencies or contradictions in the human heart may survive conversion, these must and will be resolved upward or downward. One will not permanently remain saved, but not “sanctified wholly.” The mindedness toward the flesh (Romans 8:7) is enmity against God. The enemy will be cast out or it will make a counter attack and recapture the soul.

Just as truly as the human is delivered and the carnal is displaced, so the spiritual is enthroned (Romans 8:9-11). The crux of the matter is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Through Him comes life, righteousness, and even physical enablement. A new monarch makes new reign of righteousness and well-being. This is normalcy for the Christian.

B. Assets of Grace

Having the Spirit of God, we have all that we need (Romans 8:12-25). There is freedom from the enslaving demands of the flesh (Romans 8:12-13). Sonship is not just a name; it involves a power and assurance that makes life vibrant, rich, and secure (Romans 8:14-17). Sonship carries a hope of fulfillment that will eventually cure the ills that now test our faith and patience. All creation will join in the final triumph (Romans 8:17-23). Meanwhile the hope gives motivation and meaning to the present, outweighing the trials and distresses that would otherwise mar our lives (Romans 8:24-25).

C. Adequacy of Grace The utter adequacy of grace is seen in Romans 8:26-39. At the point of our weaknesses we have the Holy Spirit interceding for us and in us (Romans 8:26-27). God’s good providence so shields us that nothing can happen to us but what can be used to our good and His glory (Romans 8:28). He has been working for us since long before we were born. Nothing can stop Him from taking the yielded believer clear through (Romans 8:29-33). Christ is also on our side as both redeemer and Intercessor (Romans 8:34). With all this in our favor, we are invincible in Him (Romans 8:35-39).

XIX. Life of Holiness This life in the Spirit then expresses itself in appropriate ethics—a life of holiness (Romans 12:1-21; Romans 13:1-14; Romans 14:1-23; Romans 15:1-33; Romans 16:1-27). It requires more than a reluctant cease-fire. “Brethren” (Romans 12:1, converted people) have to respond to the goodness and saving mercies of God by an appropriate dedication or consecration of themselves. They do not dedicate their sins. Those are already forsaken. Rather, they yield their ransomed powers, their bodies, as living sacrifices, holy and well-pleasing to God. This is the reasonable service of the redeemed. The “presentation” (aorist tense) is decisive action. The “transformation” (present tense) is continuous. Thus the life of holiness is launched with a full consecration to God, which is followed by constant access to His renewing and transforming grace (Romans 12:1-2). From this launching pad of dedication to God, Christian living proceeds to a right attitude toward self (Romans 12:3-8), right attitude toward the brethren (Romans 12:9-16), to a right attitude toward all men (Romans 12:17-21). It involves good citizenship in terms of meeting one’s obligations to government (Romans 13:1-7), justice in private relations (Romans 13:8-10), and holiness in personal living (Romans 13:11-14). It even includes a responsibility to those with whom one differs. It demands a basic unity even in diversity (Romans 14:1-12), a love that softens and sweetens one’s liberty (14:13-15:2), and primary attention to the purpose and example of Christ (Romans 15:3-13).

XX. Holiness Enjoyed and Pursued

Thus, Romans is full to the brim of scriptural holiness as a vital experience and a way of life. But this holiness is not a “thing” or an “it.” Rather it is the attitude of a heart fully renewed and victorious in the love and grace of God. The pattern is God in Christ. It is God likeness, Christlikeness, fullness of life. The enabling power is the indwelling Holy Spirit. The mood is triumph in a perfect Redeemer. The goal is ever-expanding. The heavenly vision becomes clearer. As we see, so we become. There is no static goal for the Christian. The infinite Christ keeps one ever stretching. The finite is captivated by the Infinite. The life has its achievements and accomplishments, but it never loses the joy of the perpetual pursuit (Hebrews 12:14).

XXI. The Crisis Where then is entire sanctification? It is the term used for the crossing over of a born-again Christian from less than a full cleansing, renewal, and fulfillment of heart motivation to such a fullness and singleness of life and purpose in the pursuit of Christlikeness. There is a sense in which the crossing is an inference of one’s presence on the other side of the line. But there are also signposts along the way (as seen in the scriptural terms of crisis experience), and often memories of difficult crossings (as, for instance, when self did not want to die).

XXII. The Christlike Life

Though Romans may not abound in simple proof texts for entire sanctification, it is a gold mine for one whose search is for Christlikeness, fullness of life, and a hope that is secure. This is scriptural holiness. And the gate to the fulness of this experience is called entire sanctification.

(Source: Wesley Center Online, <http://wesley.nnu.edu>)

[1] Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1897, rep. n.d.), p.175.

[2] G. D. Stevens, “Holiness,” *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, II, 400.

[3] H. P. Lidden, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 85.

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