

The Second Blessing in Experience, in Theology and in Scripture

by Aaron Hills

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the second blessing in Christian experience, theology, and scripture, advocating for entire sanctification as a vital aspect of faith.

Scripture: John 17:17, 2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, Hebrews 12:14

Topics: "Sanctification", "Holiness"

Description

Aaron Hills preaches about the concept of the second blessing in experience, theology, and the Bible, emphasizing the need for believers to seek sanctification as a second work of grace after justification. He shares testimonies from various Christian leaders like George Fox, Dr. A. J. Gordon, and J. O. Peck, highlighting their personal encounters with a deeper work of grace in their lives. The sermon delves into Methodist theology, citing statements from bishops, John Wesley, and hymns that affirm the teaching of sanctification as a second blessing. Additionally, the sermon explores the scriptural basis for the second blessing, particularly focusing on Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians and the clear exhortation for believers to pursue holiness and sanctification.

Transcript

Sermon 9

THE SECOND BLESSING IN EXPERIENCE, IN THEOLOGY, AND IN THE BIBLE

1 Thess. V. 23: "And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly."

I. Experience.

George Fox was born in 1624. He was one of the first of the modern apostles of holiness, and founder of the Society of Friends. Here is his luminous testimony concerning his own inner life. "I knew Jesus, and He was very precious to my soul; but I found something within me that would not keep sweet and patient and kind. I did what I could to keep it down, but it was there. I besought Jesus to do something for me, and when I gave Him my will, He came to my heart and took out all that would not be patient, all that would not be kind, and -- then He shut the door."

Could a second work of grace be stated more beautifully or definitely?

Dr. A. J. Gordon, of Boston, wrote: "It seems clear that it is still the duty and privilege of believers to receive the Holy Spirit by a conscious, definite act of appropriating faith, just as they received Jesus Christ ... It is as sinners that we accept Christ for our justification; but it is as sons that we accept the Spirit for our sanctification. The Scriptures show that we are required to appropriate the Spirit as sons, in the same way that we appropriated Christ as sinners."

Dr. Gordon did it, and the blessing made him in many respects the most potent Baptist pastor in New England. He wrote his beautiful book, "Ministry of the Spirit," to lead others into the same experience.

Rev. J. O. Peck, D. D., one of the greatest pastors Methodism has produced in America, wrote: "God never left me a single year without a gracious revival, in which many souls were given as the seals of my ministry. Never had my pastorate been more favored with the Divine blessing than at Springfield; but in the summer of 1872 a deep heart hunger that I had never known before began to be realized. I had not lost spirituality; I longed for; I scarcely knew what. I examined myself and prayed more earnestly, but the hunger of my soul grew more imperious. The result was a consciousness of utter emptiness. Then arose an unutterable longing to be filled. I was prejudiced against the National Camp-meeting Association, but a conviction was borne in on me, that if I would go to that meeting and confess how I was hungering, I would be filled with the Spirit. I went, frankly told my errand, sought the prayers of all, descended to the altar and knelt before the Lord. By simple faith I was enabled to take Christ as my sufficiency, to fill and satisfy my hungry soul. The instant I received Christ as my wisdom, righteousness and sanctification, the stillness and emotionlessness of absolute quiet permeated my whole being. The tempter suggested, the Spirit is withdrawn. As quick as thought I replied: with or without feeling I here and now take Christ as my all in all. At once came the peace of God that passeth understanding, till I seemed filled with all the fullness of God."

Now here is the testimony of the immortal Quaker, and of a modern Baptist and a Methodist divine (all saints of God) to a second work of grace and a second blessing experience. Similar testimony could be obtained from ten thousand other souls. There is, then, a second blessing or a second work of grace in Christian experience.

II. Now, is there such a blessing taught in theology? Let us see if we can get any witness from the accredited leaders and teachers of any denomination.

The bishops of the M. E. Church South in their address to the General Conference in 1894, said: "The privilege of believers to attain unto a state of entire sanctification, or perfect love, and to abide therein, is a well-known teaching of Methodism. Witnesses to this experience have never been wanting in the Church, though few in comparison with the whole membership. Among them have been men and women of beautiful consistency and seraphic ardor, jewels of the Church. Let the doctrine still be proclaimed and the experience still be testified."

In 1884, the Centennial Conference of American Methodism, which met in Baltimore, re-affirmed the faith of the entire Church in all its separate branches: "We remind you, brethren, that the mission of Methodism is to promote holiness. It is not a sentiment or emotion, but a principle inwrought in the heart, the culmination of God's work in us, followed by a consecrated life. In all the borders of Methodism this doctrine is preached and the experience of sanctification is urged. We beseech you, brethren, stand by your standards on this subject."

Still earlier Bishop Matthew Simpson said: "Sanctification is not regeneration. Methodism differs from Moravianism, in that it does not hold regeneration and entire sanctification to be identical. Sanctification is that act of the Holy Ghost whereby a justified man is made holy." Here, then, is a distinct announcement of sanctification as a second work or grace by the most eloquent bishop the Methodist Church ever produced; made more than thirty years ago.

In 1874 the bishops of the M. E. Church South thus concluded their address to the General Conference: "Extensive revivals of religion have crowned the labor of our preachers, and the life-giving energy of the Gospel in the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of believers has seldom been more apparent among us. The boon of Wesleyan Methodism, as we received it from our fathers, has not been forfeited in our hands!"

This was signed by Bishops Paine, Price, Kavanaugh, Wightman, Marvin, Doggett, McTyeire and Keener.

In 1836, in New York City, Dr. John McClintock, President of Drew Theological Seminary, in the closing words of his centenary sermon, said: "Knowing exactly what I say, and taking the full responsibility of it, I repeat, we are the only Church in history, from the apostles' time till now, that has put forth, as the very elemental thought, the great pervading idea of the whole book of God, from the beginning to the end, the holiness of the human soul, heart and will. It may be called fanaticism, but, dear friends, this is our mission. If we keep to that, the triumphs of the next century will throw those of the past into the shade. There is our mission; there is our glory; there is our power; and there shall be the ground of our triumph! God keep us true!"

Bishop Elijah Hedding, who died in 1852, said in a conference sermon: "It is as important that you (the ministers of the New Jersey Conference) should experience this holy work of sanctification, as it is that the sinners to whom you preach should be converted."

In 1832 the General Conference issued a pastoral address to the Church, in which is the following:

"When we speak of holiness we mean the state in which God is loved with all the heart and served with all the power. This, as Methodists, we have said, is the privilege of the Christian in this life. And we have further said that this privilege may be instantaneously received by an act of faith, as is justification."

In 1824 the bishops, in their conference address, said: "If Methodists give up the doctrine of entire sanctification or suffer it to become a dead letter, we are a fallen people. Holiness is the main cord that binds us together; relax this and you loosen the whole system. This will appear more evident if we recall to mind the original design of Methodism. It was to raise up and preserve a holy people. This was the principal object which Mr. Wesley had in view. To this end all the doctrines believed and preached by the Methodists tend."

This remarkable deliverance was signed by Bishop McKendree, Bedding, Soule, George and Roberts.

Bishop Asbury wrote thus from a bed of sickness: "I have found by secret search that I have not preached sanctification as I should have done. If I am restored this shall be my theme, more pointedly than ever, God being my helper."

At another time he wrote: "Bless the Lord, O ye saints! Holiness is the element of my soul. My earnest prayer is that nothing contrary to holiness may live in me." He wrote to a minister: "O purity! O Christian perfection! O sanctification! It is Heaven below to feel all sin removed. Preach it, whether they will hear or

forbear. Preach it!"

Dr. Adam Clarke was born in 1762; a man of rare scholarship, a delight to John Wesley, and one of the best preachers of the realm. He afterward became a prince among commentators of the Bible. He said: "if the Methodists give up preaching entire sanctification, they will soon lose their glory. Let all those who retain the apostolic doctrine -- that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin in this life -- pray every believer to go on to perfection, and expect to be saved while here below, unto fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ."

What could be a plainer statement of a second work of grace?

John Fletcher, pronounced by John Wesley to be the most apostolic man he had ever met, died in 1785. He obtained the blessing of sanctification after conversion, and lost it several times by not confessing it. He finally learned to keep it, and confessed: "I now declare unto you, in the presence of God, the Holy Trinity, that I am now dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God, through Jesus Christ, who is my indwelling holiness, my all in all."

John Wesley, in 1771, wrote: "Many years since, I saw that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. I began by following after it. Ten years after God gave me a clearer view than I had before how to obtain it; namely, by faith in the Son of God; and immediately I declared to all: We are saved from Sin, **WE ARE MADE HOLY BY FAITH**. This I testified in private, in public, in print, and God confirmed it by a thousand witnesses."

Wesley exhorted his ministers (according to Tyerman, Vol. 2, p. 565) as follows: "As soon as any penitents find peace, exhort them to go on to perfection." Preach full salvation now receivable by faith." "This is the word which the devil peculiarly hates and stirs up his children against, but it is the word which God will always bless." "Do not neglect to strongly and explicitly urge believers to go on to perfection." "Preach full sanctification, preach it definitely, preach it explicitly, preach it strongly, preach it frequently, preach it constantly, preach it wherever you have an opportunity. Insist on it everywhere. All our preachers should make a point of preaching it constantly, strongly, explicitly. Explicitly assert and prove that it may be received by simple faith. If others grow weary and say little about it, do you supply their lack of service. Speak and spare not. Let not regard for any man induce you to betray the truth of God."

In the Conference of 1765, Mr. Wesley was asked the question: "What was the rise of Methodism?" Ans. "In 1729 my brother Charles and I, reading the Bible, seeing we could not be saved without holiness, followed after it and incited others to do so. In 1737 we saw that this holiness comes by faith. In 1738 we saw likewise that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was our object, inward and outward holiness: God then thrust us out to raise up a holy people."

But some modern holiness-fighting Methodists tell us that during the latter years of his life, Wesley "quietly let drop all insistence upon instantaneous sanctification." This quotation is from a book whose author is a great denominational leader. It is absolutely untrue, as the following quotations from Wesley will show. Six years before his death (1785) he wrote to Rev. Freeborn Garretson: "It will be well, as soon as any of them find peace with God, to exhort them to go on to perfection. The more explicitly and strongly you press all believers to aspire after entire sanctification as attainable now by simple faith, the more the whole work of God will prosper."

To Rev. John Ogilvie, 1785: "God will prosper you in your labors: especially if you constantly and strongly exhort all believers to expect full sanctification now by simple faith."

Sept. 15, 1790, 5 months and 17 days before death, he wrote Robert Carr Brackenburr, Esq.: "I am glad brother D_____ has more light with regard to full sanctification. This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this, he chiefly appears to have raised us up."

Nov. 26, 1790, 3 months and 6 days before his death, he wrote to Adam Clark: "To retain the grace of God is much more than to gain it. Hardly one in three does this. And this should be strongly and explicitly urged on all who have tasted of perfect love. If we can prove that any one of our local preachers or leaders, either directly or indirectly speaks against it, let him be a local preacher or leader no longer. I doubt whether he should continue in the society; because he that could speak thus in our congregations cannot be an honest man."

Wesley wrote to Rev. John Booth, thirty-one days before his death: "Whenever you have opportunity of speaking to believers, urge them to go on to perfection. Spare no pains, and God, even our God, will give you His blessing."

On Feb. 27, 1791, four days before his death, he said: "We must be justified by faith and then go on to full sanctification."

Wesley's loyalty to Sanctification was his ruling passion in old age and in death.

Now look at the Catechisms and Discipline. The Catechism of the M. E. Church South: Question 60. "What is entire sanctification? Ans. Entire sanctification or Christian perfection, is that state in which, his heart being cleansed from all sin, perfected in all righteousness, and entirely devoted to God, the believer loves God with all his heart, mind and strength, and his neighbor as himself."

Question 61. "Can a believer be entirely sanctified in this life? Ans. The believer can and should be entirely sanctified in this life."

The M. E. Church's larger Catechism has this: Question 294: "What is sanctification? Ans. Sanctification is that act of divine grace whereby we are made holy." Question 295. "Can and ought a child of God to be cleansed from all sin in this life? Ans. Yes; the divine command is, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy,' with the promise that if we confess our sins he will cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

That this second work of grace is the teaching of the Catechism of the M. E. Church, no intelligent and honest Methodist can deny.

And Methodist hymns teach the same. "Now, O my Joshua, bring me in! Cast out thy foe, the Inbred sin. The carnal mind remove: The purchase of thy death divide, And Oh, with all the sanctified, Give me a heart of love."

Here is another hymn: "Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit Into every troubled breast; Let us all in Thee inherit Let us find that second rest. Take away our bent to sinning, Alpha and Omega be. End of faith, as its beginning, Set our hearts at liberty."

Here is another that teaches the doctrine of sanctification as a second work of grace as plainly as language could do it: "Speak the second time be clean, Take away my inbred sin; Every stumbling-block remove, Cast it out by Perfect love."

In an unabridged Methodist hymnal there are over fifty such hymns.

And what is more, here is the ministerial vow, copied from the M. E. Discipline of the year 1900, Par. 151:

"1. Have you faith in Christ?

"2. Are you going on to perfection?

"3. Do you expect to be made perfect in this life!

"4. Are you earnestly striving after it?"

Every Methodist minister must answer these questions in the affirmative in order to enter the ministry. It is a vow that has irrevocably committed every one of them to advocate sanctification as a second work of grace subsequent to regeneration. I once heard the statement made in a public address that a Methodist minister who fights holiness as a second work of grace stands perjured before three worlds.

We have thus far proved that the second blessing of sanctification is a matter of experience; and is taught, at least in Methodist theology. But some of us are not Methodists. We are anxious to know whether the second blessing is taught in the Bible. If so, that settles it. Let us, then, consider:

III. The second blessing in the Scripture. There are about one hundred passages in the New Testament that teach it most distinctly. But we will confine ourselves to Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians.

1. Notice what kind of people they were to whom he wrote. That they were noble Christians is clear from the first chapter, for:

(1) They were members of "the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." People did not join the church in those days for business or social advancement. It often cost them their lives. The church was not filled with hypocrites or worldlings, but with sincere and devout Christians, and to such the apostle was writing. (Chap. i., vs. 1.)

(2) Paul gave "thanks to God always for them all." He was not thanking God for heathen, but for followers of Jesus. (vs. 2.)

(3) "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (vs. 3.) They had the three Christian graces -- faith, hope and love; and derived them from their union with Christ.

(4) In the fourth verse he called them "brethren beloved." Paul never used that term of any but Christians.

(5) He declares that he knew their "election." (vs. 4.) This he could not have known of sinners.

(6) The next verse declares that the Gospel came to them in "much assurance." They did not have "a guess-so," but a "know-so" salvation. This is more than a good many church members have today.

(7) "They became imitators of the apostle and of Christ." In all my travels over the world I have never met any sinners who picked out the best Christians and Jesus to imitate; so I conclude they were genuine followers of the Lord.

(8) "They were examples to all that believe in Macedonia." (vs. 7) This is no description of unbelievers.

(9) "For from you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord," through all Achaia, and every place. They must have been, then, a most earnest and aggressive body of believers.

(10) They had "joy of the Holy Spirit." (vs. 6.) No sinner ever had that, or ever will.

(11) They had "turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God." (vs. 9) Oh, what grand churches we should have today, if all the members would abandon their idols -- tobacco, lodges, cards, theatres, dancing, avarice, selfishness and unhallowed lusts, and serve the living God with all their heart. But that is the very kind of Christians these Thessalonians were.

(12) "They were waiting for Jesus from heaven." (vs. 10.) No sinners want to see Jesus come; that is the last thing any of them desire.

Such were these Thessalonians to whom Paul wrote. Who will dare to say that, measured by any Gospel standard, they were not Christians of an exalted type of piety, and a deep experience of grace?

2. Notice now what Paul wrote to them.

(1) In the second chapter and tenth verse he claimed for himself an experience beyond justification: "Ye are witnesses and God also how holily and righteously and unblamably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe." That is Christian perfection.

(2) From the sixth verse to the ninth verse of the third chapter he rejoiceth that the members of that Thessalonian church had not backslidden but were still his joy and comfort. Yet in the tenth verse he declares that he is "praying night and day exceedingly that he may see their face and perfect that which was lacking in their faith." It is not difficult to see to what he was referring. They had exercised faith for justification, but not for sanctification: for, he says in the thirteenth verse. "To the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness." In other words, he longed to see them that he might lead them into the experience of sanctification, or holiness.

(3) This is still more apparent from what follows. Only three verses later (chap. iv., vs. 3) he writes: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification. That each one of you may know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification." (vs. 4.) "For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification." (vs. 7.)

Notice how this is all connected together as a logical and rhetorical whole. "I desire to see you and perfect your faith, to the end ye may be unblamable in holiness: FOR this is the will of God even your sanctification: FOR God hath called us unto sanctification." This is so interlocked and dove-tailed and glued together that it cannot be pulled apart, or wrenched from its meaning.

(4) In the fifth chapter and nineteenth verse we read, "Quench not the Spirit. What has that to do with this subject? Everything. It is the Spirit who sanctifies, as the Word four times declares. Our hearts are cleansed through the baptism with the Holy Ghost. Therefore he that quenches the Spirit defeats the will

of God and prevents his work of grace in the soul.

(5) He says (chap. 5, vs. 22), "Abstain from every form of evil." And what bearing has this upon the subject? Very, very much. Only those get sanctified who abstain from evil and are walking in the light. Start a holiness meeting in any community: it will be the very best Christians who will be the first at the altar to seek holiness. Why? Because they are prayerfully walking with God, and welcome all the light He sends to their hearts. The command is, "Quench not the Spirit and abstain from all evil," and then the prayer. (verse 23.)

(6) "And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire without blame." How much there is in that wonderful prayer for believers!

(a) You can not get sanctification by your own growth or development or by any human doings or deservings. The "God of peace himself" does the sanctifying, and brings the "peace of God that passeth understanding" to the heart.

(b) The verb "sanctify" is in the aorist tense and signifies an instantaneous, completed action. God sanctifies by one of His own almighty acts in a moment of time.

(c) He does it "completely;" holoteleis, as the Greek word is, meaning the whole, to the end of all necessity of our being. The German Bible translates it, "through and through."

(d) The apostle enlarges upon the completeness of it by saying, "May your spirit and soul and body be preserved in this sanctification." The Greek word for "body" means our physical being. The word translated "soul," means the principle of life, and such faculties as we share with lower animals. The word translated "Spirit" means that higher spiritual faculty by which we perceive duty and obligation; by which we know God and our accountability to Him; the faculty which makes us companions and fellows with angels in the spirit-realm. These three compose the whole of our being. From the crown of our head to the sole of our feet there is nothing more of us but our clothes.

So completely may God's grace sanctify and keep us all!

What a wonderful salvation it is! Carnality slain! The old man crucified! His vile affections and lusts all gone! The body having only normal appetites and passions!

The soul having clean thoughts and holy desires! The spirit seeing God and rejoicing in His companionship and presence and love. This is salvation; this is life; the foretaste and beginning of life eternal.

Then, following this wonderful prayer, is a promise; (vs. 24) "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." Calleth to what? In the previous chapter, (4: vs. 7), he has said that God calls us to sanctification. Here he says: "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." Do what? Why, SANCTIFY US. That is what he is writing about, and exhorting to, and praying for. Nothing can be more evident.

A man said, "It took two to sanctify me." "Who were they?" was asked. "Why, it took me and God." "What did God do?" "He sanctified me." "What did you do?" "I let him." That is the truth.

It is God's will that we be sanctified. He calls us to the experience. He will do it for us if we will let Him. If we will consent to obey God absolutely, to do and say and be what God wants of us; if we will put our all

on God's altar, our good things, our soul, body and spirit, mind, heart, will, possessions, influence, reputation, time, talents, -- all, all to be forever the Lord's; if we will consent to walk with Jesus and bear the reproach of holiness in a godless, Christ-hating world, and look up in faith and prayer that will take no denial and claim the blessing by faith, the Holy Spirit will be poured out. The blessing will come; it will not tarry. The willing God will not disappoint his waiting and expectant child.

We have now found that this second blessing of sanctification is not a theory, but a matter of experience and of theology, and that it is unmistakably taught in the Scripture.

In conclusion we now turn back to the fourth chapter and eighth verse, and read it in connection with the third and seventh. "This is the will of God even your sanctification: for God hath not called us unto Uncleanness but unto sanctification." "Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man but God, who giveth his Holy Spirit unto you." Rejecteth what? Sanctification, the blessing he is talking about. The man who rejects it does not simply reject a doctrine of St. Paul, or an opinion of John Wesley, or of Finney, or of Carradine or Morrison. You are not rejecting merely a theory of your poor preacher. You are not dealing with me or any other man. You are dealing with God. You reject God who giveth His Holy Spirit unto you to sanctify you. Do not do it, I pray you. Do not quench that Spirit whose work alone can cleanse your heart and fit you for heaven. The Spirit sanctifies, and without sanctification "no man shall see the Lord." To grieve Him is always perilous; to quench Him and fatally resist him is to consign yourself to the realms of eternal despair.

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