

Exegesis

by Daniel Steele

The speaker disputes the theory of successive acts of sanctification and the second blessing theory of entire sanctification, arguing that they are not supported by scripture.

Scripture: Matthew 8:2, Romans 3:24, 2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 1 John 1:7

Topics: "Sanctification", "Holiness"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the concept of successive acts of sanctification, emphasizing the continuous present cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ, contrasting it with momentary and finished cleansing. He argues that the New Testament Greek supports the idea of successive persons being cleansed over time as believers grasp their full heritage in Christ. Steele challenges the belief in gradual sanctification, advocating for a decisive and instantaneous cleansing of spirit, soul, and body through specific acts of holiness.

Transcript

To sustain his theory of successive acts of sanctification "up to light," our brother quotes 1 John 1, 7: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." This is his exegesis: "It is not something finished in the past and left behind; but a perpetual present, 'cleanseth,' empowereth now." This distinction between a continual and a momentary and finished cleansing is doubtless founded on the Greek tenses. Though this fact is not expressed by the author it is by many others. It is supposed that John used the present tense to denote repeated cleansings or "empowerings" of the same believer. But it is more reasonable to suppose that the successive cleansings relate to successive persons all along down the ages, as each believer apprehends by faith his full heritage in Christ. There is abundant confirmation of this position in New Testament Greek. In Matt. x, 8, "Cleanse the lepers," the present tense cannot mean a series of purifications of the same leper, but the instantaneous cleansing of each successive leper met by the twelve apostles. In Matt. viii, 2, 3, the aorist tense is used: "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus ... touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." This use of the present to denote a momentary act on a series of persons is seen in Rom. iii, 24: "Being justified [present tense] freely by his grace." Here continuousness of the decisive act of pardon of one is not implied, but the forgiveness of many in succession. In Westcott and Hort's text, Matt. xxviii, 19, the present tense of "baptizing" is used to denote successive individuals. In Rev. xiv, 13: "Blessed are the dead who die [present] in the Lord." This cannot signify continuous dying, but a succession of dying saints. Says Professor Joseph Agar Beet: "A gradual process is not necessarily implied in the present participles

of Heb. ii, ii, 'For both he sanctifying and they being sanctified are all of one,' nor in x, 14, 'By one offering he hath perfected forever [provisionally] them that are being sanctified.'" Says the same erudite scholar, now at the head of a Wesleyan School of Theology: "It is worthy of notice that in the New Testament we never read expressly and unmistakably of sanctification as a gradual process, or, except, perhaps, Rev. xxii, 11, of degrees and growth in holiness." The exception reads thus in the Revised Version: "He that is holy, let him be made holy still." Says Alford: "The saying has solemn irony in it; the time is so short that there is hardly room for change; the lesson conveyed in its depth is, 'Change while there is time.'"

The reader will note that Professor Beet leaves no basis in the New Testament for the successive sanctifications of the same person in this life to stand upon. What does he say about sanctification after death? He says that while "salvation is expressly said in Rom. v, 9, 10, to await completion in the future even for the justified, this is never said of sanctification." This is not the declaration of an intense and bigoted partisan "clinging to the skirts of Wesley," but of a liberal and independent annotator who widely differs from Wesley's teachings respecting the nature of holiness, and takes an agnostic position respecting the time of the entire annihilation of "the inward forces of evil," whether at death or after death. Our author has found out that this will be when the saints are raised and glorified. But he gives us no proof texts. He asks: "What is the truth, what the error, concerning the second blessing theory of entire sanctification as commonly taught?" This is his answer: "We are not of those who deem it altogether erroneous or altogether correct." After exhibiting himself as thus standing on the fence he jumps off on the negative side and fights the affirmative tooth and nail, declaring that "the whole second blessing experience, as commonly taught," that is, as removing depravity, "had no place or trace in the Bible." He then quotes several commonly cited proof texts and declares that there is not the slightest suggestion in them of the peculiar doctrine to maintain which they have been so strenuously laid hold of." To this we reply that they all imply, first, that the persons addressed as saints, brethren, and believers have not attained perfect holiness, and, secondly, by the use of the aorist tense, this perfected holiness may be obtained by a definite and decisive act." As He which called you is holy, become [, aorist imperative, setting forth the completeness with which this holiness is to be put on -- Alford] ye yourselves [not by imputation, in a proxy] also holy in all manner of living " (1 Peter i, 15). Thus persons who are addressed as the elect and begotten again and in sanctification of the Spirit are exhorted to become holy by a decisive act, not by an indefinite series of acts.

"The God of peace himself sanctify [aorist] you wholly " (1 Thess. v, 23). The brethren to whom the Gospel came "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" are presented in prayer as subjects for a decisive and instantaneous entire sanctification. He employs a once-used Greek word for "wholly," found nowhere else in the Greek Bible, to express his conception of the thoroughness of this cleansing. He then specifies the three components, spirit, soul, and body, as being preserved "entire" (a twice-used word in the Greek New Testament). In what part depravity could be lurking after this prayer should be answered and the purifying fire had descended is beyond my comprehension. The prayer grasps a decisive and instantaneous purgation. The same remarks apply to 2 Cor. vii, 1. Being already sons and daughters unto God, they are now commanded to cleanse themselves of all filthiness which finds expression through the body, and of all that inheres in the spirit even when disembodied, pride, unbelief, envy, etc. This cleansing is once for all, since the aorist is used. Moreover, a period of preservation afterward strongly implies that it is now in this life and not at death or the resurrection.

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