

Sanctification -- What It Is -- Difficult Texts

by J.H. Collins

J.H. Collins explores the concept of sanctification, addressing difficult biblical texts and affirming the possibility of living a holy life through Christ's grace.

Scripture: Romans 3:23

Topics: "Sanctification", "Sin Nature"

Description

J.H. Collins preaches about the importance of surrendering all our cares and burdens to God, trusting Him to turn our sorrows into blessings. He emphasizes the need to understand the Bible in its entirety, ensuring that all passages harmonize with each other and do not contradict the clear teachings of God's Word. Collins addresses common misconceptions about sin in the Bible, providing explanations for passages that may seem to suggest the impossibility of living without sin. He highlights the transformative power of Jesus' blood to cleanse and make us whiter than snow, refuting the idea that Christians must continue to sin throughout their lives.

Transcript

Just to have in His dear hand

Little things --

All we cannot understand,

All that stings;

Just to let him take the care,

Sorely pressing;

Finding all we let him bear

Changed to blessing.

This is all; and yet the way

Marked by him who loves thee best:

Secret of a happy day,

Secret of his promised rest!

-- Frances R. Havergal --

"So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." (Neh. 8:8).

We see that the Bible, as a whole, teaches the duty and privileges of Christians to be entirely holy or sanctified. Now, we know that it is against the plainest rules of interpreting the Scriptures to take a few doubtful passages, and attempt to found a doctrine upon them or to use them as an offset to that which is so often and so clearly set forth in the Word of God. Scripture must harmonize with scripture. Whenever the Bible is properly understood, there can be no conflict, no contradiction within itself.

But are there not some passages which at first sight might seem to some to teach that we cannot live without sin? There are; and it is proper that these should receive some explanation, because some well-meaning people are hereby troubled -- unable to reconcile these passages with the general teachings of the Bible. To name these passages in order: "There is no man that sinneth not." (1 Kings 8:46). This clause occurs in the prayer of Solomon in the dedication of the Temple.

The same prayer is recorded in Second Chronicles, sixth chapter. The preceding clause reads: "If they sin against thee." Then comes, "There is no man that sinneth not." The first clause informs us that there is doubt whether the people sin -- "If they sin," etc. The second clause (if properly translated) informs us that there is no doubt -- "For there is no man that sinneth not." Here the second clause seems not only to contradict the general tenor of the Scriptures, but to contradict the very clause preceding it.

The great commentator, Adam Clarke, says: "The clause in the original language means 'that may not sin,'" and is so translated in the thirty-first verse of this chapter. Hence we read, "If they sin against thee, and there is no man that may not sin," and all is plain and consistent. We quote another: Who can say, "I have made my heart clean; I am pure from sin?" We answer: No one can say, "I have made my heart clean;" but Jesus' blood can make the heart clean; and every one who proves the efficacy of that blood is made whiter than snow.

Another passage: "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Eccles. 7:20). The difficulty here is the same as we have already noticed in the clause of Solomon's prayer. The words "sinneth not" are more properly translated may not sin. Dr. Clarke refers to several places where the same words are rendered "may not sin" -- to wit: 1 Sam. 2:25; twice in 1 King. 8:31-46; and 2 Chron.6:36. Another passage: "For a just man falleth seven times and riseth up again."

This text does not affirm that a just man falls into sin seven times, nor that he falls into sin at all. It only states that he falls seven times; and the context shows that reference is here made to falling into afflictions. As it is said in other portions of the Word of God, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." We put at the foot of the above scripture the character of Job, of whom "The Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (Job 1:8).

Those passages which are found in the book of Job declaring none are perfect are found upon examination to be not the language of inspiration, but only the words of Job's miserable comforters. God

invalidates their testimony. In the last chapter of the book of Job, seventh verse, we find these words: "The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends; for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath."

"There is none good but one, that is, God." (Matt. 19:17). This means none is absolutely good but God not even the angels; but they are good -- certainly they are perfect in their sphere,. So Christians may be good, even perfect in their sphere. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). This text speaks of past, not present, sins. It is, therefore, wide of the mark. It may be said of the redeemed of heaven, all have sinned; but that is quite different from saying all are sinning now. The same may be said of saints on earth.

Romans, seventh chapter, is often cited as the stronghold of those who contend that we cannot be saved from all sin in this life. Here the apostle Paul says, "I am carnal, sold under sin;" says that there is a war in his members, so that when he would do good, evil is present with him; and closes the lamentable scene by crying out: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" We are bold here to state that this is not the apostle Paul's experience as a Christian.

First, because he does not say so.

Second, because such a Christian experience would not only contradict every other portion of Scripture, but would be absurd within itself. Let us criticize a moment. "I am carnal." We read, "To be carnally minded is death." So, then, this Christian is in a state of death. Next: "Sold under sin." Alas! if this be the condition of a Christian, his religion has done but little for him. "There is a war in my members." The picture becomes more gloomy. We thought it was the work of religion to produce peace. "When I would do good, evil is present with me," "and the evil which I would not, that I do." Worse still -- bound in the fetters of an evil principle that he cannot break. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The allusion here is to an ancient custom of certain tyrants, who bound a dead body to a living man, and obliged him to carry it about until the contagion of the putrid mass took away his life. Who can imagine a more horrible death? But this, we are told, is the experience of St. Paul. This might have been the experience of St. Paul as a sinner, but certainly not as a Christian. The argument which the apostle uses here is carried on by means of a dialogue. He asks certain questions and answers them. In this seventh chapter he personates a Jew, and shows how wretched and hopeless his condition while left to law alone, and what a necessity for such a person as Christ to deliver from the "body of sin and death." The experience of a man in Christ is given in the opening verses of the eighth chapter of Romans: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

O what a contrast! In the seventh chapter there is death and slavery and war and wailing and wretchedness. In the eighth there is pardon and peace and freedom and a song of triumph. We have often heard people excusing sin: "O we all sin; even Paul, he had a thorn in the flesh;" and this seems to be a favorite rallying-point and "dodge," when brought to see their sins. Examine a moment this passage, as found in 2 Cor. 12:7: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

It is evident that thorn here does not mean sin. First, because it does not say so. Second, because he says it was given him. Sin was either born with him, or else was committed by him. Third, because he speaks of its being given him immediately after he was caught up into the third heaven, which would infer,

at any rate, that he did not have sin (thorn) in his Christian career previous to his trance. Fourth, he says he gloried in this infirmity (thorn). We cannot conceive that the apostle gloried in sin.

Fifth, it was given him to keep him humble. It cannot be said that sin, pride, or unbelief, in any of its forms, produces humility. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." (1 John 1:8). The tenth verse explains the eighth: "If we say that we have not sinned." The apostle here was writing in opposition to a sect of people called the "Gnostics," who denied the existence of sin in the world. The verse alluded to is further explained by reading it in its full connection: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I once heard a minister opposing the doctrine of entire sanctification. He first offered prayer asking the Lord to "enable us to walk in all his ways," and then in his sermon he said that we could not walk in all his ways, and quoted: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

There he stopped. If he had only read the next clause _ "and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" -- it would have ruined his sermon; for it is very plain that if we are cleansed from all unrighteousness, there is no unrighteousness left. "In many things we offend all." (James 3:2). The context here shows that the "we" referred to does not mean himself, but the many masters, or teachers, against which he warns his brethren. This is here used by the inspired writer as a figure of speech.

He certainly could not include himself, for he goes on to say: "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men." No one understands that the apostle includes himself in cursing men, though he uses the pronoun we; neither does he include all believers, for it immediately follows the mention of a man who "offended not," as the "we" first mentioned did, from whom, therefore, he is professedly contradistinguished and pronounced a perfect man.

We are told that David committed sins, and he was a man after God's own heart. David did sin most grievously; and while in that state he was not "a man after God's own heart," but under condemnation. Doubtless before he fell he was pleasing to God in all things; and after his repentance he was doubtless restored to confidence and favor with God. But because there was an isolated period of condemnation in David's life, it is no proof that he or any one else was under the necessity of sinning all their days. I close this review with a quotation from Mr. Wesley's "Plain Account of Christian Perfection," page 24: "But the apostles themselves committed sin -- Peter by dissembling, Paul by his sharp contention with Barnabas. Suppose they did. Will you argue thus: If two of the apostles once committed sin, then all other Christians in all ages do and must commit sin as long as they live? Nay, God forbid we should thus speak. No necessity of sin was laid upon them; the grace of God was surely sufficient, and it is sufficient for us at this day."

In the whole Bible there is no excuse made for sin, but the Bible everywhere condemns it, drags it to the light, and makes provision to destroy it. Thank God, there is a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and Jesus speaks to us today in forgiveness as he spoke in the days of his incarnation: "Go, and sin no more!"

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