

Discrimination of Theories

by Randolph S. Foster

The sermon discusses the various theories of Christianity and the importance of understanding the differences between them, highlighting the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of entire sanctification.

Scripture: Romans 6:6, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:22, 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Randolph Sinks Foster delves into the different theories surrounding the subject of entire sanctification, highlighting the varying beliefs among Christians regarding moral character, regeneration, and spiritual progress. While all evangelical Christians agree on the importance of reformation, justification, and regeneration, there are divergent views on the specific degree of attainment implied in these processes. Some believe in immediate sanctification upon regeneration, while others see sanctification as a gradual process that may culminate before or after death. Despite the disagreements, all theories acknowledge the possibility and necessity of entire sanctification for believers.

Transcript

In discussing the general subject indicated in the preceding chapter, we shall encounter a number of variant and contradictory theories. It will, I am certain, assist to a clearer and more satisfactory discovery of the exact truth if we present a statement of the various theories, and discriminate their specific differences. By this method our readers will be enabled to compare them, determine their relative merits, and choose from among them whatever of truth they respectively possess. In pursuing this course we may seem to commence far behind the immediate object of our treatise.

There is a class assuming the Christian name, but certainly, if entitled to that designation at all, it must be in the lowest possible sense. They hold to the doctrine that man is a spiritual being, and that he is in some sense a responsible agent, so that the moral quality of goodness or sin attaches to him, both on account of what he is subjectively in his affections and objectively in his acts. They hold also to the possibility of progress in moral excellence subjectively and objectively -- in the inward states of the heart and the outward conduct of the life. They do not, however, admit of the possibility of inward renewal or regeneration, by which the sources of the affections, which were radically corrupt, become cleansed and purified.

Next in order we come to the view maintained in common by all orthodox Christians, of whatever name or sect -- the catholic platform upon which they all stand, and whence they unitedly contend for, at least, so

much of "the faith once delivered to the saints," namely, the belief that man has moral character, not only with respect to his actions, but also with respect to his affections, embracing both and equally his outward conduct and his inward nature; and further, that moral and spiritual progress is possible, not only to the extent of reformation from sinful habits, and pardon for previous sin, but also to the extent of an inward change, a radical renewal of the nature itself, by which the sources of the affections become purified, and the man is made, in a certain sense, a new creature.

This is the common ground occupied by all evangelical Christians. Three things are seen to be included in the theory: Reformation, justification and regeneration.

To this grade of moral and spiritual character all evangelical Christians believe it is possible to attain; nay, not only possible, but indispensable to present and final salvation. Nothing short of it entitles to the Christian name or admits into the Divine family. There may be slight variety in the idioms of sects, in the nomenclature of denominations, in the spoken and written parlance of the schools in theology; but in regard to the thing itself there is no difference -- there is entire harmony.

But now, starting from this common center, as to what is the specific degree of attainment implied in justification and regeneration, and as to whether any thing more or beyond is attainable in this life, are several divergent theories, more or less essentially dissimilar, and of very great moment indeed. It will, we are persuaded, subserve a good purpose to state and classify these divergencies, so as to enable us to ascertain precisely what are the various views entertained, and assist us to choose between them. There is a difference in the mode of stating what is precisely the effect of justification and regeneration upon the character of the believer.

Some contend that the believer is as completely and thoroughly sanctified in the moment when he is justified and renewed as he ever can be.

Others hold that regeneration is a renewal of the soul, a quickening, the implanting of a new life, so that it brings forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, has . victory over sin, is enabled to resist corrupt tendencies, and has joy and peace in the Holy Ghost; a change by which the preponderating tendencies are turned toward God, the love of sin destroyed, its dominion broken, and a desire and relish for, and longing after, holiness begotten. It is their belief, however, that, while . the old sinful nature is brought under and broken, it is not dead; that sin remains alive in the members to such a degree as often to taint or corrupt the soul. That the new life is not full. They do not believe that, in the soul thus regenerate, entire sanctification has necessarily taken place, although they do allow that in some instances this may be the case.

Those, of course, who take the former view, assuming regeneration to be synonymous with "entire holiness," do not think that any thing more is necessary or possible. . Having gained regeneration, they conceive that the highest distinctive attainable state is already reached. Those, on the other hand, who take the latter view, that regeneration and entire sanctification are neither identical nor synchronic, but different and distinct, branch off from this common point into various and widely dissimilar opinions. These diversities may be classified as follows:

First. Some believe that, though regeneration does not imply entire sanctification -- is not synonymous with it -- yet it is the highest attainable state during this life; they believe it to be impossible to become entirely sanctified in this world, or until the soul is separate from the body; and further, that in death all believers will thus be made holy. These do not, of course, think that entire sanctification is to be sought for

in this life; or that, if sought ever so diligently, it is to be obtained.

Second. Others still, agreeing with these in the leading idea, that regeneration and entire sanctification are not identical, do hold that regeneration is sanctification begun; and further; that sanctification will be completed just before death, by a ripeness and maturity of the graces implanted in the moment of regeneration, and that death will ensue immediately when this maturity takes place, as the ripened fruit will dislodge itself from the bough; because, being thus fitted for heaven, the soul has nothing to hinder its consummate bliss, and will rise to it immediately. All believers will live until they ripen into this maturity, and not a moment longer. These views, so apparently alike, differ in this: the former hold to a sanctification supernaturally and directly wrought in death, distinct from regeneration, and as a qualification for heaven; the latter believe sanctification to be a simple maturity of regeneration, attained by growth and time, and that then death ensues to release the purified spirit and remove it to its glorious mansion. Though seemingly small, the difference is really considerable and quite radical.

Third. Still another class differs from both the above, holding with them in common that regeneration and entire sanctification are not identical; with the last, that regeneration is sanctification begun, and entire sanctification regeneration matured or ripened into holiness: but differing from them both in this respect, that they believe that this maturity may take place long before death, and be enjoyed during life; that a person may attain to a completely sanctified state, and exemplify and enjoy it in this world. Yet in their estimation entire sanctification in all cases, and necessarily, is distinct only as a point in the progress of regeneration, not as a separate and additional work attained by gradual growth, not by direct agency.

Fourth. But finally: another class, agreeing with all the former that entire sanctification and regeneration are not identical, and with the two last named that regeneration is sanctification begun, differs from them all in that they believe entire sanctification may be an immediate or instantaneous work, and is almost, if not always, a distinct one, to be attained by the agency of the Holy Spirit, through faith, at any time when the requisite faith is exercised, and once so attained is an experience to be enjoyed during life.

In one thing the diversified theories all agree, namely, that there is such a thing as entire sanctification; that it is to be experienced by believers at some time, and by some process, before they are admitted into, and as preparatory for, heaven. They differ mainly as to the time and the manner. Very important points of disagreement indeed, but by no means so important as the points of agreement.

In addition to these points of difference are some other disagreements, as to the precise nature of entire sanctification, also with respect to the means of its attainment, retention, and other kindred subjects; these need not be stated here, as they will naturally come up when we come to treat of these subjects specifically.

The various theories are now distinctly before us. Which is true? Or what is the truth among them all? May the Infinite Spirit aid us each to know the truth; and may he so overrule our prejudices, and so deliver us from the blindness of unbelief, and so inspire us with resolute and heroic purpose, that we may follow the heaven-descended guide, until we come into the brightness of the perfect day.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net