

H6

STATEMENT ON SANCTIFICATION

The following Statement on Sanctification was adopted by the 1996 General Council (Indianapolis, Indiana).

The Meaning of Sanctification

The basic idea underlying biblical sanctification is separation, and this separation is first and foremost to the Lord. While the separation is from sin, impurity and all that is unholy, primarily it is a separation to the person, life and characteristics of God in Christ. Dr. A. B. Simpson stated that being sanctified means possessing

the thoughts of Christ, the desires of Christ, the will of Christ, the faith of Christ, the purity of Christ, the love of Christ, the unselfishness of Christ, the single aim of Christ, the humility of Christ, the submission of Christ, the meekness of Christ, the zeal of Christ and the works of Christ manifest in our mortal flesh so that we shall say, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."¹

Christ and Sanctification

The New Testament declares Jesus Christ to be the believer's sanctifier. This teaching derives from four interconnected events: Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

The Son of God condescended to take on human nature so that "both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family" (Hebrews 2:11). As a human person subject to temptation and sin, Jesus became the first person to live a totally holy life (2 Corinthians 5:21). Then, His perfect life was offered up to God in death as a perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 2:17, 18; 9:13, 14, 28). Christ not only died, He rose again to restore humanity to fullness of life (John 10:10). Finally, He ascended to the Father where He is "Head over everything for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Out of His finished work, Christ has made His gracious Holy Spirit available to us, and the Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to our lives. Christ Himself, then, is our Sanctifier and our sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Genuine Conversion

The foundation for sanctification is the union with Christ into which the believer enters at

conversion.

At conversion the repentant sinner is justified (Romans 5:1), and fully pardoned for his sins (Ephesians 1:7). He is sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14), is adopted into God's family (Ephesians 1:5) and is brought under God's favor (Romans 5:2). He also is regenerated, born from above, made alive with new spiritual life (1 Peter 1:3, 23). He is made a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and becomes an heir of eternal life (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Having been united with Christ, the believer is raised up with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-6, Colossians 3:1) and is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). He participates in Christ's death and resurrection by which he is enabled to live in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

He is positionally sanctified. Paul refers to the Christians at Corinth as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:2). The Greek verb is in the perfect tense, indicating a completed past action with continuing results. This means that the Corinthian believers were sanctified through their union with Christ and that this sanctification continued to be their status before God.

In First Corinthians 6:11, sanctification is again coordinated with justification as a definitive act of God. "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." Just as believers were justified once-for-all in Christ, so also believers have been sanctified once-for-all in Christ. This teaching is confirmed both in Acts 20:32 and 26:18, where the texts speak of believers as "those who are sanctified."

The ground for all Christian experience, then, is that significant transformation of an individual that occurs the moment he is united with Christ.

Beyond Conversion

The Call to Holiness

While the believer is sanctified positionally through his union with Christ, Scripture also calls the Christian to holiness and fruitfulness in daily practice through his union with Christ. Peter admonished believers, "Be holy because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews urges, "Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and let us go on to maturity" (6:1). And Matthew, reflecting on the conditions for participating in the Kingdom of God, wrote, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Romans 8:4 tells us that we have been delivered from condemnation so that the righteous requirements of the law actually might be fulfilled in us. Because by His death and

resurrection Christ has broken sin's dominion over us and because in Christ we have life, we are urged to live and walk in the victory which is every believer's birthright in Him.

The Conflict in the Believer

However, the Christian's desire to know, love, and please God does not always result in consistently holy and devout living. The movement from the believer's privileges in Christ to the actual experience of Christ's power over sin and selfishness is not automatic. While the believer is genuinely new in Christ, he is not yet totally new in daily practice.

Galatians 5:16-17 describes a conflict in the believer between the "flesh" and the "Spirit":

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Romans 8:5-8 discusses this same conflict within the believer:

Those who are living according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace, because the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Thus, the Christian who is controlled by the flesh will continue to respond to the enticements of sin. Paul admits this possibility even when imploring believers in Romans 6:12, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

Additionally, the believer is unable in his own strength to overcome sin, to act righteously in every circumstance, and to serve God effectively. Romans 7:14-21 depicts the ineffectual struggles of an individual who seeks to measure up to the righteous demands of the law of God by his own ability and determination. Though he may affirm the validity of God's laws and want to meet their demands, he finds himself unable to do so.

The Control of the Spirit

The solution to both the unholy inclinations of the flesh and the problem of human weakness is to be found in Christ. Through the Savior's victory over sin at Calvary, we can overcome the flesh. Christ's Resurrection gives us power to live as we ought for God. Christ's

life and power sanctifies the believer, and life and power that is made operative in us by the Holy Spirit.

Holy living, then, results from the control and the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:12 says, “Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.” Instead, we are to live according to the direction and enabling of the Holy Spirit.

The Decisive Aspect

Every Christian, then, must consciously and deliberately yield his life to the Holy Spirit. The word “crisis” in Article 7 of the Alliance “Statement of Faith” is a term that is capable of many interpretations. However, in this context it should be understood as a decisive surrender of one’s self to God (Romans 6:13).²

This turning point in our Christian walk may come about as the result of our concern over some glaring failure. It may be precipitated by a struggle over a particular issue. But as completely as we know how, we will give ourselves to the Lord. Dr. Simpson said,

Through His gracious influence, we present our bodies a living sacrifice, yield ourselves unto God in unreserved consecration, hand over to Him the old life of self and sin to be slain and buried forever, and offer ourselves to His absolute ownership, possession, and disposition, unconditionally and irrevocably. The more definite and thorough this act of surrender, then the more complete and permanent will be the result.³

Dr. Simpson taught that our yielding to Him will only ever “be an imperfect consecration and will need His merits to make it acceptable. But He will accept a sincere and single desire and will add His own perfect consecration to our imperfect act, thus making it acceptable to the Father through His grace.”⁴ Still, it is this yieldedness to the Holy Spirit that allows the life of Christ to operate in us for daily holy living.

A. W. Tozer expressed this idea with an image:

He [the Holy Spirit] wants to be Lord of your life, and He wants to possess you so that you are no longer in command of the little vessel in which you sail. You may be a passenger on board, or one of the crew, but you definitely are not in charge. Someone else is in command of the vessel.⁵

Both of these quotations suggest that the issue in sanctification is who controls the believer’s life, and both Simpson and Tozer call for the kind of radical dedication of oneself to the Lord

described by Romans 12:1: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship.” This verse calls for a decisive act. The same is true in Romans 6:13, “Offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.”

When Paul writes in Romans 6:2, “We died to sin,” he is expressing in unambiguous language the truth that the person who is in Christ has made a definitive breach with the realm in which sin reigns. Furthermore, Paul underscores this once-for-all break with sin by telling us that if we are in Christ, our “old self” has been crucified with him (Romans 6:6). The verb “crucified” is in the aorist tense, indicating a once-for-all, definitive act. Indeed, the main thrust of the entire chapter is to declare that the believer has been transferred through union with Christ to a new and powerful master, who reigns victoriously over sin.

The justified believer not only has died to sin, he also has been decisively and definitely “raised with Christ.” Using the aorist tense, Paul asserts that “God . . . made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions and . . . raised us up with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4-6). Sanctification means not only a decisive break with the enslaving power of sin but also a union with Christ in His resurrection.

However, the believer must appropriate this blessing by reckoning himself to be “dead to sin and alive to God” (Romans 6:11). The word “reckon” is an accounting word. It means that the money is in the bank and we are free to use it. The believer must recognize the freedom that has been achieved for him by Christ and appropriate it.

Believers then must rest in the wisdom, grace, and strength of God’s Spirit. We cannot be the holy, devout people we ought to be in our own strength. We cannot, in ourselves, overcome the pull and power of sin. Sanctified living results from confessing our inability, reckoning ourselves as dead indeed unto sin, and by resting in the ability of the Holy Spirit to make Christ’s resurrection life and power effectual in our character and conduct. Romans 8:4 indicates that in order to “live according to the Spirit” (NIV) we must submit ourselves to Him and depend completely upon Him.

While the Scriptures do not say that a decisive surrender to the Lord and a conscious appropriation of the victory over sin that is ours in Christ *must* occur subsequent to conversion, this in fact is almost always the case. Today most people initially trust in Christ with very little theological understanding. Moreover, initial salvation frequently is offered by appeals to personal needs. Consequently almost no one is prepared at conversion to yield himself to the Spirit in surrender and faith.

Furthermore, by natural disposition, we want to be our own bosses, to live our lives as we choose. Our pride makes us want to believe we can live as we should through our own

strength and wisdom. But we cannot.

Therefore, Christians must decisively yield their lives, make a radical commitment of their persons to the Spirit. Romans 6:13 calls for such a commitment by saying, “Offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.”

The Holy Spirit fills those who make such a commitment. To be filled with the Spirit is to allow the indwelling Spirit of God to assume control over all areas of our lives; and, as the Spirit fills us, Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Ephesians 3:16-17).

The verb “to fill” with reference to the Holy Spirit, occurs only in the writings of Luke and Paul. In this literature, observes Michael Green, two uses of the verb emerge.

The first use denotes a temporary, often sudden, inspiration or enablement of the Holy Spirit to complete a special task. This usage derives from the Old Testament understanding of the role of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon special persons, such as kings, judges, and most particularly, prophets, to enable them to fulfill God’s appointed task. But the predominant use referred to an empowerment for divine proclamation by the prophets. And it is precisely this understanding that dominates in the writings of Acts where the six occurrences of the verb “to fill” are associated with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 9:17; 13:9; 13:52). Luke applies the verb to the work of the Holy Spirit as an empowerment for gospel proclamation. In each of Luke’s accounts, the filling of the Holy Spirit results in powerful proclamation.

This conforms to Luke’s paradigm text with reference to the Holy Spirit, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). As the Spirit was the source of prophetic inspiration in the Old Testament, Luke sees the coming of the Holy Spirit as the source for powerful witness. When the prophetic Word was proclaimed, the Spirit was present. When the Spirit was absent, the Word was silent. Luke, then, envisions the Holy Spirit as the source of enablement for powerful witness. Examples of this usage occur not only in the Acts texts but also in Luke 1:41 (the case of Elizabeth) and Luke 1:67 (the case of Zacharias). In both instances the consequence of the filling of the Holy Spirit is prophetic proclamation.

But the research of Robert P. Menzies has shown that neither Luke nor the primitive church attributes soteriological significance to the pneumatic gift in a manner analogous to Paul. Paul views the work of the Spirit as extending beyond the proclamation of the Word by attributing to the Spirit soteriological functions. Here the second and more pertinent usage of the verb “to fill” emerges, namely, to denote a dominating or defining characteristic of a person. For example, in Acts 13:10, Elymas is described as a man “full of all kinds of deceit and trickery.” “Full” here does not denote the quantitative idea of “how much;” such as, the

cup is “full” or “half-full” of water. Rather “full” implies a qualitative meaning. In other words, “full” simply means that Elymas’ life is dominated by deceit and selfish cunning. The same usage occurs in Luke 5:12 where Jesus encounters a man “full of leprosy.” The adjective “full” connotes a qualitative meaning rather than a quantitative one. The qualitative rather than the quantitative meaning of “full” applies when a doctor informs a patient that she is full of cancer. He means that the life of the person and that person’s future will be controlled by the disease. So when Luke describes Stephen as “a man full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit” he means that Stephen is a person whose life is defined and controlled by wisdom and by the Holy Spirit.

This second meaning of the word appears to be a more logical choice for interpreting the “filling of the Holy Spirit;” namely, that it denotes a person who is dominated or controlled by the Spirit. Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 5:18, therefore, comes, first of all, in the form of a command. Paul admonishes every believer to be “controlled” by the Spirit. Secondly, the admonition takes the grammatical form of a present, passive, indicative, meaning that this act of being controlled by the indwelling Spirit is a continuous and/or repeated experience in the life of the believer. Thirdly, the context of the admonition is important. Because the days are evil, that is, under the influence of the spiritual forces of wickedness, believers should understand the purpose and will of the Lord, conduct their lives wisely, and be filled (controlled) with God’s Spirit. So exceptionally great is the summons to life-bearing witness that no believer should begin to fulfill this responsibility without the enablement of the Holy Spirit.

To grasp meaningfully the New Testament teaching on the “filling of the Holy Spirit,” consider the following theological synthesis:

- (1) The filling of the Holy Spirit means the “controlling” or “governing” of the believer by the Spirit. This conclusion is deduced from the meaning of the verb, the grammatical structures and logic of the Pauline admonitions.
- (2) The filling of the Holy Spirit is based upon and/or grounded in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This assertion is based upon the meaning of the verb, “to fill,” as control and as denoting a qualitative rather than a quantitative meaning. Such an understanding makes logical sense of the Pauline admonitions, assuming that the Holy Spirit already indwells the believer but needs to assume lordship. To interpret the filling of the Holy Spirit by means of a quantitative approach overlooks the Holy Spirit as a person. The personhood of the holy Spirit is not divisible. To have the Holy Spirit indwelling in regeneration and yet at the same time not to have the Spirit seems theologically and logically contradictory.

- (3) The filling of the Holy Spirit is based upon a definite decision of the believer to give control of his life to the Spirit. This assertion finds confirmation in the use of the imperative mood. While the Holy Spirit indwells the believer at conversion, uniting the believer with Christ, this does not mean that the Holy Spirit is in control of all the areas of the believer's life. Such control requires a constant yielding and surrendering of our thoughts, attitudes, and actions to the Holy Spirit.
- (4) The filling of the Holy Spirit is directly and specifically related to empowering the believer for effective witness both by word and by life.

Dr. Keith M. Bailey says,

All of us who are Christians are born of the Spirit and we have the Spirit. He is the Giver and the Sustainer of the spiritual life that we have. But there is a world of difference between having the Spirit in his regenerative power and being filled with the Spirit, knowing the endowment of His power. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire purifies the life and brings the glorious power of the risen, living Christ into our own personal experience.⁶

Some use the language of Pentecost to describe this entrance into the Spirit-filled life. Others prefer Pauline terms. These various formulations of truth and outlines containing "steps" may help guide an honest seeker. However, the critical issue is the reality of the person's surrender to the Lord. Our commitment to the Lord is not complete until we recognize His right to exercise continuous authority over all phases of our lives. By whatever means and with whatever terms may be used, the important thing is that believers be led to:

- (1) an understanding of the Christian's position in Christ,
- (2) a comprehension of the holiness and usefulness God promises and provides for His children,
- (3) an awareness of the futility and fruitlessness of living according to self-effort,
- (4) a spirit of humility and repentance,
- (5) a decisive yielding to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and
- (6) a conscious asking for the filling of the Holy Spirit.

The Progressive Aspect

While Romans 12:1-2 urges a definite presentation of ourselves to the Lord, these verses also describe the need for a continuous transformation of our lives. Submission to the Lordship of Christ must impact the way we make choices, react to those around us and act toward the Lord day by day. Consequently, this surrender necessarily will be confirmed again and again.

Ephesians 5:18 speaks of being filled (controlled) continuously with the Holy Spirit.

As we walk according to the Spirit, He will expose areas of our lives that need to be cleansed. He will lead us to make changes in our priorities and relationships. He will purify our motives and will deal with our tendencies to rebellious pride. He will seek to exercise authority over our possessions and ambitions. He will reveal hurts that can be healed, problems that can be solved, and habits that can be broken.

He will lead us to new ministries and greater sacrifices. He will make us active participants in the life and ministry of the church and will gift us for our contributions to the body. He will call us to closer communion with the Lord.

The Spirit will encourage us to depend continuously upon Christ. Paul wrote, “The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20). The admonition of Romans 8:5 to “live in accordance with the Spirit” (“walk in the Spirit” KJV) suggests not only a continuous obedience to the Lord but a deliberate dependence upon His enabling.

Second Corinthians 3:18 speaks of believers being transformed into Christ’s likeness with ever-increasing glory. First Peter 2:2 urges us to desire pure spiritual milk so that by it we may grow up in salvation; and Second Peter 1:5-8 sets out a pattern of development in which goodness is added to faith, knowledge to goodness, self-control to knowledge, perseverance to self-control, godliness to perseverance, brotherly kindness to godliness, and love to brotherly kindness. We are called by Scripture to ever-increasing intimacy with Jesus.

Because spiritual growth is produced in the believer by the Holy Spirit, the believer needs to cooperate with Him through such spiritual disciplines as Bible study, prayer, meditation, Christian fellowship, and worship. A growing child sometimes is frustrated by his inabilities and failures. But the fact that he cannot run as fast as someone else or that he falls and skins his knee does not mean that he does not have life in him or that he is sick. He just needs to keep on eating good food, keep getting proper rest and exercise, and keep growing.

The same is true of our spiritual lives. The path toward spiritual maturity does not totally exclude failure, sin, disappointments, and trouble. But the life of Christ continues to function within us. We learn through our failures and sins to rest more fully in our spiritual resources in Christ and to say “no” to selfish, sinful temptations and to say “yes” to the Spirit who empowers us to walk in righteousness, holiness, and love.

Summary

We are called to be like Jesus (Romans 8:29, 1 John 3:3). Rather than commanding us to imitate Him, the New Testament reveals a truth more profound and dynamic. The New

Testament teaches that the life of Christ can be lived in and through us (Galatians 2:20). Jesus, Himself indwells us by His Holy Spirit and lives out His life in and through us. Christ is the life-transforming power of sanctification. In the words of Dr. Simpson, He [Christ] actually comes into our being and becomes the source and strength of our very life, reliving His own life in us.⁷

He further said,

This is the end to which the Spirit is always working, not to develop in us a character, a set of human virtues and high qualities that we call our own, but to form Christ in us and teach us to live in constant dependence upon Him.⁸

While the doctrine of sanctification is by definition concerned with the life of Christ being formed in us, the same Spirit who gives victory over sin also empowers for service. The seeking Christian should anticipate that the Spirit-filled life will produce both fruit and gifts. They are intended to flourish together.

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¹A. B. Simpson, *Walking in the Spirit*. New York: The Alliance Press (n.d.), 110.

²Dr. Keith M. Bailey has said,

It is the Holy Spirit who is the agent of experiential sanctification. Since holiness is the will of God for all believers, the Holy Spirit places a hunger for holy living in each heart. He makes plain the provision of Christ for their sanctification.

The crisis of sanctification occurs when believers become aware of their need for Christ's provision and appropriate it by faith in His work. Normally, this takes place some time after conversion. Unfaithfulness, carnality, and powerlessness are some of the signs which indicate that one's personality has not yet been brought under the full authority of the Holy Spirit. When the believer deals with the conditions of his heart and trusts fully in Christ's work to make him holy, he may experience the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit within. (*Bringing Back the King*, Nyack, NY: Alliance Centers for Theological Study, 1985, 68-69.)

³*Walking in the Spirit*. Harrisburg, PA, Christian Publications, Inc. (n.d.), 53-54.

⁴Ibid.

⁵*Ten Messages on the Holy Spirit*, 68.

⁶See Christian Publications, Inc. booklet, “The Indwelling of Christ.”

⁷*The Epistles to the Philippians and to Colossians*, Harrisburg, PA, Christian Publications, Inc. (n.d.), 89.

⁸*The Epistles to the Galatians and the Ephesians*, Harrisburg, PA, Christian Publications, Inc. (n.d.), 25.

