

Is sanctification a crisis, a process or neither?

Sanctification is not centred upon a crisis or a subjective emotional experience. This notion is based upon Wesleyan perfectionism and is a serious error. When Fletcher called this crisis a 'baptism in the Spirit' it led eventually to further false ideas, such as an experience that leads to holiness and/or power followed by Pentecostal gifts. Holiness & Higher Life teachings, following Wesleyan tradition, also propose that a crisis experience leads to consecration and a death to self, which in turn leads to victory over sin. All of these are based on mysticism where passivity or knowledge results in a crisis of heightened subjective feelings, which are mistaken for spirituality. In the worst cases passive induced crisis experiences have led to extreme physical manifestations and indecent behaviour, as in Azusa Street and the Toronto experience. However, there can be a crisis whereby a person learns Biblical truth, believes it and changes; but such knowledge and repentance should be continual.

There are three aspects to Biblical sanctification. The first is **DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION**, which occurs at the same time as justification. Paul sums this up when he tells the erroneous Corinthians that they 'were washed', 'were sanctified' and 'were justified' and calls them saints (1 Cor 6:11). Though they still had sin, in heaven they were considered as holy and thus able to sit with Christ (Eph 2:6).

The second aspect is **PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION**, which is the process of ongoing growth in Christ in this life. By degrees we are made more like Christ through the discipline of the Holy Spirit in our lives (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; 2 Pt 1:5). Now some reformed Baptists object to this on the basis that the old man is never made any better and there is no processes of holiness. Apart from ignoring clear texts which state that there is progressive growth in holiness (2 Cor 7:1; 1 Jn 3:3), they miss the point entirely. Yes the old nature is corrupt and is being corrupted (Eph 4:22), it never improves, but our growth in Christ is learning to die to that nature and put on the new man, being renewed by the Spirit in our minds (Eph 4:23-24). Over time we learn to deny our old self more and more and put on Christ. This is the process of sanctification and it comes by gaining more knowledge about Christ, learning from our sufferings and failings as applied by the Holy Spirit, continually repenting (changing direction) and being obedient. The old man doesn't change but our mind does.

The third aspect of sanctification is **THE FINAL CONSUMMATION** at the conclusion of our lives, or when Christ calls us to join him in the air (1 Thess 4:17). At this time the work of sanctification is completed when we are instantly perfected in our souls (1 Cor 1:8; Eph 5:27; Phil 1:6; Col 1:22; 1 Thess 5:23) and given a new body like Christ's to contain it (Phil 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2).

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