

# DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

May 12-16, 2008



May 12, 2008      **Supernatural Change**

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”<sup>1</sup>*

New birth is just the beginning of the Holy Spirit's work in us. Once we are justified, God's Spirit begins to sanctify or make us more holy and God-like. Sanctification may be broadly defined as *“that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.”<sup>2</sup>*

Holiness is not something that rises up ‘naturally’ or spontaneously in us, like a plant rising from the soil after germination. It is not something that is bestowed instantly by a ‘second touch’ experience. Nor is it simply the product of our own human effort and will

Sanctification is something created from within by the power of the Spirit<sup>3</sup>. God uses various ‘means’ in this process: Scripture, fellowship, prayer, sacraments, providentially ordered experiences, etc. And, we are expected to cooperate with God, living as faithful disciples. But the Tri-une God truly deserves the glory for the renovating he does in us.

*“Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,<sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.  
Amen.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 532.

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 3:16; Colossians 1:11

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 13:20-21 (TNIV)

May 13, 2008

**“Off with the Old!”**

*“But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices.”<sup>1</sup>*

Sanctification is a two-step process, the first being the ‘death’ of the old nature.

Jesus said that anyone who wished to be his disciple would have to *“deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”*<sup>2</sup> The cross was an instrument of execution. It signifies the need to die to our old, self-willed human natures dominated by sinful attitudes and behaviours so that we can be raised up to a new way of living in Christ. Paul talks about the ‘old man’ who must be crucified with Christ<sup>3</sup> and of ‘putting off’ old, wretched behaviours that are like a stinking suit of rags.

The analogies drive home a number of truths. First, that there is a need for deep, dramatic change. We are not basically good people who just need a little ‘tweaking’ to make us righteous. We are sinners who need extreme, tear-it-down-to-the-ground makeovers.

Secondly, this is painful. Dying to self, crucifying the old nature, is rarely easy or pleasant. At times it can be terribly hard. But the work is necessary.

Thirdly, we cannot do this on our own. We need God’s help to resist the temptations of the old nature and to be ultimately free. We need the power of the Spirit in the work of sanctification.

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:8-9 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34

<sup>3</sup> Romans 6:6

May 14, 2008

**“On with the New!”**

*“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another.... And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”<sup>1</sup>*

Only God can raise the dead and give new life. While the crucifixion of our old nature is painful and hard, it paves the way for new life that God wants to grow in us. In the passage above, Paul likens this to putting on a new set of clothes – behaviours that reflect the life of the Spirit within us.

In Galatians he talks about this new nature as possessing the ‘fruit of the Spirit’: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. All of these qualities are seen in the earthly life of Jesus and demonstrate that he is replicating himself in the lives of his followers.

Christians are expected to be ‘good’ people. Many may think that we strive to be good in order to win God’s approval and attain salvation. In fact it is the other way around. God graciously loves us and saves us in Christ. He accepts us as we are – but he loves us too much to leave us that way. As soon as we become his, he starts to renovate us into new creatures. Holiness is not the precondition for salvation, but the result of it.

On the other hand, this does not mean that sanctification is an optional extra. As James notes, “faith without works is dead”<sup>2</sup>. A changing life is evidence that we actually possess saving faith. We may be saved through ‘faith alone’, but faith never comes alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:10-14 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> James 2:14-26

## May 15, 2008 **Whole Person Transformation**

*“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>*

When we think of holiness or sanctification, it can be easy to fall into the perception that we are simply talking about moral or behavioural change. In fact the Bible sees it as embracing all of us: intellect, affections, will or body and soul. The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit starts in the ‘heart’ or inner life and therefore must affect all of who we are.

Since the first century<sup>2</sup>, there have always been tendencies to separate the ‘spiritual life’ from other aspects of our lives. Sometimes it has been argued that our bodies are destined to pass away so it doesn’t matter what we do with them. Others reject spiritual discipline as ‘legalism’ and justify living the way they want as ‘freedom in Christ’. Still others simply presume upon God’s forgiveness.

For several decades, pollsters have made the observation that lifestyles and attitudes among professed Christians are not that different from the world at large. While our opinions on moral issues may be distinctive, our actual behaviour often does not match our beliefs. While we know that we should be generous, average giving does not come close to the Biblical standard. While the mark of the Christian is supposed to be love, conflict in churches is infamous.

In our time we desperately need a Holy Spirit revival of holistic holiness!

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> In the Early Church, this was a dimension of a teaching known as Gnosticism.

May 16, 2008 **A Lifelong Process**

*“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.”<sup>1</sup>*

While we are to cooperate with the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and zealously pursue Christ-likeness, we should understand that we will not become perfectly holy on this side of heaven. If anyone claims to have completely put the old nature to death and that they now live without sin, ‘they are deceived and the truth is not in them’<sup>2</sup>.

In some places the Bible exhorts believers to “be perfect”<sup>3</sup>, which might seem to imply that we can be absolutely holy and without sin. However in some instances this refers to the perfect cleansing of our sin-record accomplished by the sacrifice of Christ. In other situations that ‘perfection’ might better be understood as ‘maturity’. In any case the James, who was renowned for his piety, includes himself in the admission that “we all stumble in many ways”.

The encouragement we have is that, when we do sin and confess that failure to God, “he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”<sup>4</sup>. He wants us to pick ourselves up, learn from our failure and continue the process of transformation. We also have the assurance that, when we are translated to heaven, all the ‘dross’ in our character will be purged away and we will be the perfectly holy people God desires us to be.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 12:22-23 (TNIV)

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 1:8

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Matthew 5:48; 19:21; 2 Cor. 7:1; Hebrews 10:14

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 1:9 (TNIV)

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:12-15