
What Does It Mean to be Sanctified?

by Frank Bateman Stanger

I have some deep concerns about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in its relationship to the deeper life of the Christian. One of my concerns about the sanctified life is in the area of *communication*. The meaning of the Spirit-filled life needs to be communicated to each of us accurately and meaningfully, and then we need to communicate it to others persuasively.

There is a lot of confusion about what it means to be sanctified. Let us not condemn one another because of such theological confusion. We need light, not judgment. We must seek sincerely to learn what is meant by “a second work of grace subsequent to regeneration.” Why do we speak of sanctification as “entire” sanctification? What are the involvements of the Spirit-filled life?

I am also concerned about *centralities* in relation to the Spirit-filled life. I am concerned that when we talk about the Spirit-filled life, the sanctified life, we focus upon the centrality of “the Gift” of the Spirit. We must beware of overemphasizing peripheral things such as “gifts.” Let our focus be first on the central thing.

I am also concerned about the *content* of the Spirit-filled life. We must understand what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be filled with Jesus Christ. We will never know what it means to be entirely sanctified unless we understand what it means to have the mind of Christ, the love of Christ, the desires of Christ, the volitions of Christ and the consecration of Christ. The Spirit-filled life means to model the balanced life of Christ. Such a balance manifests itself in wholeness in every part of one’s being. It means a continuing spiritual maturity. It means sensitivity to sin in every form. It means a concern about injustice and falsehood wherever they rear their ugly heads. The

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content of being filled with the Spirit includes the continuity of Spirit-filled living in all of its manifestations, in all situations.

I am also concerned about the *context* of the Spirit-filled life. I want us to see the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-filled life within the parameters of the Church of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was given to the Church. He was not given to individuals to run away from the Church. The Holy Spirit is a gift to be used within the parameters of the Church, to make it possible for the Church to fulfill its divinely appointed and redemptive ministries. The Holy Spirit belongs to the Church for which Jesus shed His precious blood, the Church which Jesus loves and the Church which someday He will present to the Father without a spot or wrinkle.

A final concern which I mention relates to the *correlation* of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in personal sanctification with all the other ministries of the Spirit both within the person and the Church. The Spirit-filled life is never an end in itself. Being filled with the Spirit makes possible full-orbed Christian experience and unceasing contributions to the Church in the various outreaches of its redemptive functions.

Against the background of these concerns I want to talk with you on the topic “what does it mean to be sanctified?” I am focusing on “sanctification” in the traditional Wesleyan sense of “entire sanctification.” I am referring to entire sanctification as a definite experience of God’s grace through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which is available for the Christian who has already been “born of the Spirit.” Perhaps you have heard of this experience under other names — “the baptism of the Holy Spirit,” “the deeper life,” “Christian holiness,” “Christian perfection,” “the abundant life,” “the victorious life,” “the fullness of the Spirit.”

I am talking about something that is for Christians. We must keep that clearly in mind. If you are an unregenerate sinner, if you have never experienced the forgiveness of your sins, if the Spirit does not bear witness with your spirit that you are a redeemed child of God, I am really not talking to you in this particular message. However, I am praying for you that you will experience initial salvation. May you pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” This message is concerned about something which is for those who have already met Christ and received His forgiveness for sins.

Now before I get into the heart of my message, let me share a few selected verses of Scripture from the writing of St. Paul as recorded

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in the eighth chapter of Romans:

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be. So they that are in the flesh do not please God, but you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if you live after the flesh, you shall die; but if you through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Amen.

In trying to answer the question “what does it mean to be sanctified?” I want to share seven things it does *not* mean, and seven things it *does* mean.

What Entire Sanctification Is Not

First, let’s consider what it does *not* mean to be sanctified.

1) It is *not* initial salvation. It is not the same as “regeneration,” “justification,” the “new birth.” The disciples of Jesus were regenerated and justified persons before the Day of Pentecost. At that time they received a new experience in divine grace — they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

That entire sanctification is different from, and subsequent to initial salvation, is the testimony of the saints across the Christian centuries. John Wesley wrote: “We do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person’s receiving in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, clean heart.”

2) It is *not* any kind of mortal perfection. It does not restore

Adamic perfection — the perfection of man before the fall. It is not angelic perfection which is reserved for heavenly beings. It is not philosophical perfection which strives for a perfect human existence. It is not resurrection-life perfection of which Christians will partake after they experience the resurrection of the body.

3) It is *not* exemption from temptation nor freedom from ignorance, mistakes and infirmities. Temptation is an inescapable part of the moral probation of our mortal existence. It will not cease until death.

Nor can we expect freedom from ignorance, mistakes and infirmities. Wesley wrote: “A man may be filled with pure love, and still be liable to mistake.” Again he said: “The mind itself may be deeply distressed, may be exceedingly sorrowful, may be perplexed . . . while the heart cleaves to God by perfect love, and the will is wholly resigned to Him.”

In this regard Wesley offers a very meaningful insight into the nature of sin for which a person is accountable. He distinguishes between sin as “the voluntary transgression of a known law of God,” and “involuntary transgression” which is the unintentional transgression of a law of God, presumably unknown. Because no one is free from “involuntary transgressions,” Wesley said that he never would use the phrase “sinless perfection.” However, he declared that “involuntary transgressions cannot properly be classified as sin, since the absence of intention carries with it no personal guilt.”

4) It is *not* an experience in which it is impossible to sin. The removal of the possibility of sinning would dehumanize a finite person. Only God exists in such absolute impeccability. There is a radical difference between *non posse peccare* (not possible to sin), and *posse non peccare* (possible not to sin).

Therefore, entire sanctification is not an experience from which a person cannot lapse. We hear Wesley again: “There is no such height or strength of holiness as is impossible to fall from.” Robert Barclay wrote: “And there remaineth always in some part a possibility of sinning where the mind doth not most diligently and watchfully attend unto the Lord.”

5) It is *not* necessarily the repossession of the outward phenomena of the first Day of Pentecost. Those phenomena were three in number: the sound of a rushing, mighty wind which filled the entire room; the distribution of a tongue of fire to each person in the room; and the ability to bear witness to Christ in languages which those

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receiving the Spirit had not known previously (see Acts 2:1-6).

Some people through the years have made the mistake of thinking that we never enter the Spirit-filled life, that we are never entirely sanctified, unless certain of these phenomena, or all of them, become a part of our own spiritual experience. This is a grossly mistaken notion. E. Stanley Jones reminds us that these outward phenomena were but the scaffolding of the first Pentecost. The scaffolding has been taken down, but the spiritual principle of Pentecost abides. God offers to Christians the fullness of His Holy Spirit.

6) It is *not* an unbalanced, eccentric kind of spiritual experience. The Spirit-filled life is not fanaticism. It is not sentimental weakness. It is not religious exclusiveness. It is not melancholy. It is not emaciation. It is not asceticism. God never called us to be holy in a “hole.”

“Eccentric” means “off-center.” Some persons seem to think — at least they act that way — that the more off-centered, unbalanced, and abnormal they are, the more deeply spiritual they are. I recall visiting a church which had a large sign over the pulpit which read: “Jesus Christ is here. Don’t be surprised at anything.” But I must confess that if Jesus Christ were truly there, I might be surprised at some things if they should occur. Jesus had the Holy Spirit without measure, and He was the most balanced personality who ever lived. Spirit-filled Christianity is normal spiritual experience and activity.

7) It is *not* maturity of life. The crisis of being filled with the Holy Spirit is an experience of purity. The life which follows such a purifying experience is one of maturity. Spiritual maturity is the ever-beckoning goal of the pure heart.

I like John Wesley’s use of the phrase “going on unto perfection.” To me, having one’s heart made pure in love is but the beginning of a continuing life of “going on unto perfection.” Purity leads to maturity. The late Archbishop William Temple spoke of the developing degrees of perfection. He illustrated by noting the difference between the perfection of the immature child and the perfection of the more mature adult. But he pointed out that each is truly perfection at its own particular level of development.

What Entire Sanctification Is

So much then for what sanctification is *not*. We now deal with the other aspect of our subject: what *is* it? What happens when a person is

“entirely sanctified”? Again I am pointing out seven things.

1) It *is* the crucifixion of the carnal mind. The carnal mind is the sin nature within us as the result of the fall. It is inherited from generation to generation. It must be “crucified” if the Christian is to live victoriously over sin.

The carnal mind is not the self viewed as the essence of the human creation. Rather, it is the identification of the self with the sinful and ungodly perversions of the subconscious mind. The self is to be crucified in the sense that sinful and sensate self-centeredness is destroyed, and the basic desires and attachments of the self are cleansed through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul testified to such an experience: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me . . .” (Gal. 2:20). Centuries later Robert Barclay wrote: “. . . The body of death and sin comes to be crucified and renewed . . . so as not to obey any suggestions or temptations of the evil one”

2) It *is* the disciplined control, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, of the human personality. It is the giving of ourselves unto God, as those who are alive from the dead, and the yielding of all our members to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13).

The sanctified life does not rob us of our individual and differing human personalities. It does not mean exemption from constant Christian discipline. Rather, it does mean that the Holy Spirit who is in complete control of our hearts and lives directs and assists us in the necessary disciplining of every area of human personality.

3) It *is* the habitation of the Holy Spirit within us and our abiding in the Holy Spirit. It is reciprocal abiding: the Spirit in us and we in the Spirit. The blacksmith thrusts his iron into the fire. After a while it becomes red hot. Then it is difficult to tell whether the iron is in the fire or the fire is in the iron.

Such is the Spirit-filled life of the Christian. And such abiding in the Spirit brings new dimensions to the Christian life — the dimension of purity and the dimension of power. The Spirit-filled individual is made adequate by the Holy Spirit both to be and to do what God intends.

4) It *is* perfect love. This is the term which perhaps best describes what Wesley had in mind when he enjoined such an experience upon “the people called Methodists.” Wesley’s own descriptions of the experience are illuminating and deeply meaningful:

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This it is to be a perfect man . . . even to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God . . . as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ.

It is to be inwardly and outwardly devoted to God. It is loving God with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.

It is pure love reigning alone in the heart and life.

5) It *means* to be filled with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I will send another comforter.” Who was the first comforter? He was. He was going to send another Person just like Himself — the Holy Spirit. We read: “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” If we are possessed by the Holy Spirit, we will be like Christ. We need to keep in mind that it is possible to be under the influence of a spirit which isn’t the Holy Spirit, even though we are tempted to think that all “spirit experiences” are holy ones.

When we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we are becoming like Christ. Sanctification means Christ-likeness. A young artist tried to duplicate the masterpiece of his master. He used everything that was his master’s — his studio, his canvas, his brushes, his paints, his model. However, upon viewing the young artist’s work, a fellow artist responded: “You have everything that is your master’s except his spirit.”

6) It *is* the manifestation of “the fruit of the Spirit” in one’s life. In Galatians 5:22, 23, St. Paul identifies “the fruit of the Spirit” as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, truth, meekness, self-control. There are three fruits for God to feed on — love, goodness, faith. There are three fruits for others to feed on — joy, gentleness, meekness. There are three fruits for one’s self to feed on — peace, longsuffering, self-control.

7) The Spirit-filled life *is* the Christian’s daily life lived under the influence of the active ministry of the Holy Spirit. One of the best ways I know to confirm this truth is to discover in the Scriptures what are the ministries of the Holy Spirit promised to the Spirit-filled person.

Let me illustrate by referring to one chapter in Holy Scripture — Romans 8. In that passage Paul delineates at least 13 ministries of the Holy Spirit to those in whom He dwells: liberation (v. 2), indwelling (v. 9), identification (v. 9), resurrection (v. 11), healing (v. 11), crucifixion (v. 13), guidance (v. 14), acceptance (v. 15), assurance (v. 16), warranty (v. 23), enabling (v. 26), intercession (v. 26, 27), revelation (v. 28-39).

It is glorious to try to contemplate the mighty spiritual influence of all these personal ministries of the Holy Spirit. All of them are offered to us if we will let the Holy Spirit possess us fully.

Holy Spirit, faithful Guide,
Ever near the Christian's side;
Gently lead us by the hand,
Pilgrims in a desert land

Ever present, truest Friend,
Ever near Thine aid to lend

— Marcus M. Wells

Do we need any further incentive to Spirit-filled living?

There may be some who know enough about the sanctified life, who are walking in the light concerning it, who are hungry enough for it, and who are saying, "I want to receive. I want to enter in."

God's good news is that you may enter in now. Once a man was looking for the Master's garden. He had been told how beautiful it was. He said to a passerby: "Do you know where the Master's garden is?" The person replied: "Walk up the road, keep on it until the road narrows into a path. Follow the path until it leads to a gate. Then open the gate, step in, and you are there."

Prayer: O Thou, Holy Spirit, do for us what we need to have done for us most in relation to the marvelous experience of this Spirit-filled life. If we need to dialog, then be with us as we dialog. If we need to enter in, then help us to receive Thy Spirit in all of His fullness. And Father, we want to thank Thee again for Thy gift of Christ and for Christ's gift of the Spirit. Amen. ■