Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 6-12-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **6-12-2016**. This week we will read about the confrontation and consequences that King David experienced after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, killing Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, and then taking Bathsheba as his own wife. The second reading is from the letter to the Galatians, which reminds us that faith in Christ is what saves us, not works. The Gospel reading illustrates this truth by recounting the story of the unrighteous woman who showed great love for Jesus, for she had been forgiven much. All three readings weave together the redemptive story line of the gravity of sin, the inability of humans to fix themselves, and the beauty of the Gospel, which is embodied in Christ's righteousness that has been given for our salvation.

Introduction to the First Reading:

King David, the second king of Israel, is famous for a few things. One of his most shining moments was his miraculous defeat of the giant, Goliath (1 Samuel 17). One of his darkest moments was his adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah (2 Samuel 11). To cover up her pregnancy, David brought Uriah home from battle, so that her pregnancy would look legitimate. However, because Uriah was an honorable man, he would not sleep with his wife while his men were still on the battlefield making sacrifices for the nation of Israel. Instead of confessing his sin, David dug himself in deeper, and instructed the army leader to put Uriah in the fiercest part of the battle and to pull back on him, so that Uriah would be killed in battle. The once shepherd boy, turned King, had hit one of the

lowest points of his life. Instead of coming clean, turning to God, and confessing, King David continued to try to deal with his sin on his own terms. This all came to a climax when the prophet Nathan came to tell the king a story as a way to help David come to terms with his sin (2 Samuel 12:1-6). The story was about a man who was extremely wealthy, who had livestock in abundance. One day a traveler came to him, and instead of killing one of his many animals for the meal, the wealthy man took the one and only ewe lamb of his neighbor to make this man's meal. David's response to this story was one of complete outrage and disgust for the insensitivity and injustice of the wealthy man. In fact, David said "this man" should be put to death. Little did he know that "this man" was him!

First Reading:

Note: This includes verses 11-12 that were omitted from the reading.

2 Samuel 12:7-13 NAS95 7 Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 'I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! 9 'Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. 10 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. 12 'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'" 13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.

It can be difficult for us to read passages like this, which recount God's just consequences for sin. But it is necessary to be exposed to the gravity and weight of sin or else we will try to brush it off, marginalizing its destructive effects. Our key character, David, tried to do this, but it didn't work. We have Psalm 32 that recounts David's internal suffering over his sin which had a crushing effect on him. He states, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away . . . for Your hand was heavy upon me" (Psalm 32:3-4).

In addition to the internal weight of sin, Nathan told of the external consequences that would be experienced as a result of his sin. Nathan's predictions came to fruition in a variety of ways. David not only had conflict with Israel's enemies, but conflict plagued his own household. For example, Amnon, one of his sons, raped David's daughter, Tamar (2 Samuel 13). Then, Absalom, David's son killed Amnon. This severe conflict culminated in an overthrow of David's rulership, where Absalom pitched a tent in the sight of all Israel and had sexual relations with David's concubines, thus fulfilling Nathan's prediction that David's companion would lie with his wives in broad daylight (2 Samuel 16:21-22). The gravity of sin and its destructive consequences are seen in an unfolding and

snowballing way in David's life. There was no way for David to fix the problem of sin in his own life. His only hope was to cry out to the Lord for help.

After Nathan's confrontation with David, we have insight from Psalm 51 into what it looks like to be a man after God's own heart, which is the New Testament's description of King David (Acts 13:22). Here are some key thoughts from Psalm 51, David's response to the Lord after Nathan confronted him that can guide our understanding of sin, confession, and forgiveness:

- He confessed his sin and grieved over the way he had betrayed God.
- He recognized that sacrifices and burnt offerings would never "make up" for his sin and that God was not looking for him to do heroic deeds to off-set the guilt.
- The sacrifice that David brought was a broken spirit. He knew that a broken and contrite heart would not be despised by the Lord.
- He turned to the Lord for forgiveness and trusted in God to take away his guilt. He rested in God's character, not his own righteousness.
- He asked God to "create in me a clean heart" so that his righteousness would come from the innermost being and would reflect the character of God. He basically told the Lord to do whatever it takes to make him clean from the inside out.

David's life is an example to us about the gravity and destructive force of sin. We learn from him that sin is a part of even the most promising and stellar people. Even if we have not committed adultery and tried to cover it up by having someone killed, Jesus said that lust and anger in our heart are equivalent to adultery and murder (Matthew 6:21-48). We all have sinned and fall short of God's glorious standards for the life He has given to us (Romans 3:23). Like David, we cannot fix ourselves with our own moral deeds. It is only God's mercy that provides a way of escape from the destructive force of sin in our lives. The next reading elaborates on this point and provides the clear antidote to our sin problem.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In the letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul clarified that a sinner's right standing before God is only achieved through faith in Christ. This passage is one of many in the New Testament that point those who are guilty of sin to the only One who can assuage guilt, namely Christ Jesus. We pick up the passage right in the middle of Paul's defense of his practice not to make the Gentile Christians fulfill the Mosaic Law. The fact that this was a controversial question that needed to be answered in writing allows us, as current day Christians, to have insight into the dimensions of our standing in Christ.

Second Reading:

Note: This includes verses 17-18 that were omitted from the reading.

Galatians 2:16-21 NAS95 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the

Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. 17 "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! 18 "For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. 21 "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

This passage starts out by saying that man is not justified by following the Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus. In the early days of Christianity, there was some confusion over whether Gentiles who became Christians needed to follow the Jewish laws or whether faith in Christ alone was sufficient for salvation. Paul alludes to this controversy in the opening of this chapter and throughout these verses in the reading. At the Jerusalem council, which is recorded in Acts 15, the question about whether Gentiles have to live like Jews was definitively answered with a resounding "no."

This controversy allowed the key doctrine of justification by faith to be introduced into the record books of the Bible. The word "justified" is a term used in a court of law that is pronounced over one who is declared not guilty. As we saw in the previous reading and explanation of David's life, all have been pronounced guilty, for sin is part of the human condition. Paul shared that having right standing before God is not achieved by working really hard to please God ("works of the Law"—16), but by surrendering to Christ by faith ("I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"—20).

In verse 16, Paul pointed out that even he, a Jew, was justified by faith in Christ, not in fulfilling the requirements of the Mosaic Law. In verses 17-18, Paul counteracted the implied argument that if Gentiles are not required to fulfill the Mosaic Law, then they will persist in sin and nullify the work of Christ and not achieve the righteous life that God desires for them. In response to this line of thought, Paul stated that the only thing that the Law does is to point out one's sin; it cannot save the law breaker. If he were to go back and build his faith on fulfilling the Mosaic Law, this would only result in being declared "guilty." He explained that he had to die to the Law so that he might live to God, which meant that the Law no longer hounded him to compliance. His compliance to God's standards was now generated from a new place in his heart—a place of surrender, devotion, and union with Christ. Because of Christ's love, he was now free to love God back and be in right relationship with Him. This freedom from the Mosaic Law did not negate God's grace, it actually celebrated it and relied upon it. For if one can fulfill the Mosaic Law from the heart, Christ's atoning death would be meaningless.

Paul realized the gravity and weight of his own sin and encouraged others to do likewise. He found forgiveness and grace by confessing His need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul's new outlook can be ours as well, as we die to the old way of life that is structured according to handling sin on our own; and instead, live out of the new life that God has placed in every believer in Christ, the life of

relational dependence on our wonderful Savior.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading paints a vivid picture of what it looks like when one encounters the forgiveness of Jesus in a very personal way. The story of the sinful woman who wets Jesus' feet with her tears, wipes his feet with her hair, and pours perfume on his feet provides a display of tender-hearted devotion that should characterize all believers.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 7:36 – 8:3 NAS95 36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38 and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." 44 Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45"You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. 47 For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." 49 Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" 50 And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." 1 Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.

Right before this encounter in Luke, Jesus' authority had been questioned by the Pharisees. The common people were being convinced that Jesus was a prophet from God, but the religious leaders "rejected God's purposes for themselves" (Luke 7:20). Therefore, this story of the sinful woman and Simon, the Pharisee serve Luke's purpose in illustrating a sharp contrast between a receptive heart and a hard heart toward God.

Luke sets up the sharp contrast right at the opening of the story. A Pharisee, who had means, invited

Jesus to a pleasant evening of eating and reclining at a table of equals. In this culture, the table would be set down low to the ground and diners would lay on their side, propped up on one elbow at the table and their feet behind them, away from the table. Hospitality was a high value and varying degrees of fanfare would have been shown in accordance with the status of the guest of honor. It would have been customary to have a bowl of water at the front entrance, where a servant would wash the guest's feet after walking dusty roads to arrive at the home. Obviously, this did not happen. Simon's passive display of honor is contrasted with the sinful woman's active pursuit of Jesus.

The woman who had a bad reputation came in (uninvited and unwelcomed by Simon) and wept at Jesus' feet. Why would someone weep in Jesus' presence? Why would this woman actively seek Jesus out and come unwelcomed into a powerful and judgmental person's home, breaking all social norms and lavishing a display of devotion that was unprecedented? The clue is in Luke's descriptive term for her. She was a sinner. In Jewish society back then, there were different categories of people. The highest castes were reserved for people of good moral repute and coming from honorable families. The people in the lowest caste of society were those who were ethnically not Jewish and those who had dishonored themselves as Jews by sinning in a public way. This woman was a Jew, but had been relegated to the lowest cast of "sinner" by dismantling her reputation in the eyes of respectable people. The shame she would have endured is probably something that would be hard for us as Westerners to comprehend. Her sinful reputation made her part of an untouchable caste, as if her uncleanness would make anyone she touched unclean by association. Somehow, she had enough understanding and possibly even an earlier encounter with Jesus where she had felt loved and forgiven by him, despite her sinner status.

Put in this context, her boldness in approaching Jesus and touching him shows a level of devotion that is beyond being a fair-weathered "fan" of Jesus. This woman overcame a lot of social obstacles to display this level of gratitude to Jesus. Her heart was on trial before the respectable people, for Simon's revealed thoughts show the judgement and scorn that she endured. In some sense, then, Jesus' heart was on trial too, for Simon's expectation is that a prophet would not let an unclean and sinful woman touch him. Respectable people distance themselves from unrespectable people.

But Jesus did not follow this cultural norm. He broke the social rule and praised this woman for her display of love. He defended her tenderness with a clever story that allowed Simon to see that his sense of respectability caused him to be a self-righteous man, blocking him from having a realistic evaluation of his own sinfulness. The short story that Jesus told had 3 characters and a question. Two men owed the same man money. One man owed a little (about 50 days of work) and the other owed a lot (about 500 days of work). Neither of them could pay the moneylender back. Both of them had their debt cancelled. Which one of them loved the moneylender more? The point was made. Jesus had corrected Simon's misevaluation of his own sinfulness and this woman's sinfulness. Both debts of sin were beyond human fixing. Simon sheepishly responded to the question with the right answer, softening the blow of conviction by saying "I suppose." The moral of the story is summed up by Jesus' words: "*For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little*" (Luke 7:47).

Have you ever wept in a "holy" moment? Have you ever lovingly "wiped Jesus feet with your hair," so to speak? Have you ever poured out something valuable to show your love to Christ? Maybe you were gripped with the gravity of your own sin and rebellious heart, convicted that you were not able to fix yourself. Maybe you were overwhelmed with the truth of God's love for you, deeply impressed with His desire to risk His reputation to restore you to Himself. Maybe you were struck with the fact that you are just a small dot on the face of the earth and you are amazed that God cares about you. If you have responded to these prompts of conviction by the Holy Spirit, then you are like the sinful woman, who received Jesus' love and actively pursued him to show him her love. If you tend to brush these promptings away, reminding yourself what a good person you are and priding yourself that you are not as bad of a sinner as most people, then you are hardening your heart and you are in a dangerous place, like Simon the Pharisee. This story can be a turning point for all of us as we allow God to show us places in our hearts that are tender or hard towards him.

The last part of this reading recounts the lives of others who had been touched by Jesus and were devoted to him in various ways. It's almost as if the camera pans out from the focused tender moment of the sinful woman's devotion and flashes a wide-angled lens to plethora of ways others responded to Jesus' lavish love for them. For example, The Twelve (disciples) and the women who traveled with Jesus were giving their lives on a daily basis to share the good news of the kingdom of God. Some of these followers had dramatic experiences of rescue from demons and others were considered more respectable by society. But each of them was denying their old way of life, counting the cost and following Jesus. This is the way of true discipleship.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus said that when we serve people in need, it's as if we are doing it to him. You may have never physically poured perfume on Jesus' feet, but if you have served those around you by listening, caring, meeting needs, sacrificing your own reputation and time, etc., then you have shown your love for Jesus in these tangible ways. How does linking your service to others with your devotion to Christ affect your attitude and motives for service? How can this picture of the woman pouring perfume on Jesus' feet provide you with a renewed focus for the moments of obedience that you are being called to in your pursuit of Jesus?

2. All three readings reinforce key truths to which our lives need to respond if we are to be wise. Review the readings and write out what you learned about each of the following themes and how this impacts your life:

- The gravity of sin
- The inability of humans to fix their sin problem
- Various responses to conviction of sin
- The gift of God's grace, which offers forgiveness for sin
- Various responses to God's grace and forgiveness

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Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/061216.cfm

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 93

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 5-22-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **5-22-2016**. This week examine a reading from

Proverbs and learn something about the Person of Jesus Christ. In the second reading we see how God uses trials in the life of a believer to make them grow in their faith and trust in Him. In the Gospel reading we learn about how Jesus promised His disciples how He would send the Holy Spirit to empower them to accomplish His work and to persevere through the tribulations that He predicted would come upon them.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Proverbs is a Book that provides wisdom from God on a variety of matters. Most of the Proverbs were written by King Solomon. While reading this section of the Bible we have to remember that these biblical principles were delivered to a people bound to the Mosaic Law. Additionally, we must keep in mind that they are general proscriptive principles and not prescriptive in every case. For example, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it." While this is a good and godly principle all of us are acquainted with circumstances of parents who closely followed this principle but yet had wayward children. Proverbs 8 begins with the personification of wisdom, a common theme in this Book. "Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up her voice?"

First Reading:

Proverbs 8:22-31 NAS95 22 "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. 23 From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, When there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills I was brought forth; 26 While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, Nor the first dust of the world. 27 When He established the heavens, I was there, When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, 28 When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, 29 When He set for the sea its boundary So that the water would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth; 30 Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, 31 Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And having my delight in the sons of men."

The reading opens with the idea of the eternity of a certain person, "me" in verse 22. While we can say that God foreknew those whom He also "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29) and therefore knew us as believers in eternity past, the plain sense of these verses points to the eternality of the Person of Jesus Christ. The wording used by the author aligns with what John said about Jesus Christ in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The proverb says about this Person that He was established from everlasting, "From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth" (v. 23a). John said about Jesus, "We was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). The proverb also speaks to the role of Jesus as the creator, while at the same time brings out the unity that exists between the Father God and the Son. Verse 30 says, "Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was

daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him." Colossians 1:16 says, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things have been created through Him and for Him." Yet Isaiah said, "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, "I, the Lord, am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone." Finally, in Genesis 1:2 we see that "the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" during creation. Therefore, the Trinity of God was involved in the creation process, we see a sense of this in today's reading.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The context of the second reading from Romans follows Saint Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone. Today's reading opens with the word "therefore," and as always we need to reflect upon what this word is "there for." In the reading that follows, the "therefore" provides the linkage to Paul's persuasive argument to the Christians in Rome regarding how God had justified them through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul looked back to how "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3) Paul taught how Jesus "was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). Paul's point was that as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we inherit the righteousness of God through our faith in Him, "just as if" we had never sinned at all. Understanding the legal concept of justification is essential because otherwise it makes our salvation the result of our "good" works. Salvation is something which God has stated expressly we cannot earn. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through our faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross we have a new judicial standing before the throne of God, "just as if" we had never sinned. For once we believe God has "removed our sins as far as the east is from west" (Psalms 103:12). Our faith is extremely important in the eyes of God, for God sees us through the righteousness of Christ (Romans 13;14, Galatians 3:27, Job 29:14, Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 3:4).

[Note: Our online readers will benefit by being able to quickly peruse these verses by the verse lookup feature by hovering over each of them. We encourage everyone to study all of the quoted verses used each week in Mass Notes.]

Second Reading:

Romans 5:1-5 NAS95 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Paul taught how through our faith we are justified and "we have peace with God through our Lord

Jesus Christ" (v. 1). Paul taught in Colossians how as nonbelievers we were alienated from God (Colossians 1:21). Interestingly, in that same section of Colossians Paul continued with the concept of rejoicing in suffering (Colossians 1:24), which is exactly what Paul did in verse three of today's reading. Paul said, "we also exult in our tribulations" (v. 3a). He said that the reason we are called to do this is because it builds perseverance which leads to godly character, then onwards to hope (v. 4).

In applying today's reading we may ask how tribulation produces perseverance, character, and hope? Tribulation, a word which literally means "suffering," are any type of tests to your faith. This includes things like health problems, broken or strained relationships, persecution by nonbelievers, financial concerns, and the death of a loved one. If we turn to God during our trials, we can expect to experience growth in our faith as we see how God delivers us through them. God may deliver us from them, or sometimes He may. But regardless, the promise in today's reading is that if when we persist in faith God will use our trials to conform us more perfectly to the image of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 53:1-12).

As I was reflecting upon the ways in which God has worked in my own life (see study question #2), I reviewed some of the thoughts that I had written in one of my prayer journals. In one journal entry dated 9/13/2011 me and my wife had been praying for a man we know to find a godly wife. I am pleased to report that he got married in the summer of 2015 to a very godly young woman whom he met at church. In another entry dated 12/4/2011 I had been praying for God to provide a means for me to pay off a $25,000 surgical bill. In that case God provided through a combination of insurance and provisions through bonuses and my salary at work. As I continued to review my prayer journal I see how God has worked in so many different people's lives. Yet some of the people whom we have been praying continue to struggle. One in particular has had a half-down year long struggle in her life with chronic pain in her back. Perhaps God desires us to continue to pull together as believer to pray for her, and I am confident that He will continue to work in her life.

More recently however, God has been working in a miraculous way in my life. Men frequently don't share the struggles with their wives that they may have in their thought life. We should however share these both with God and when appropriate with a prayer partner of the same sex who would understand. Recently after watching a Christian movie that focused upon how God is able to produce miracles in the lives of people who pray boldly with faith I sensed a calling from God to present to Him a particular struggle that I was having with my thought life. After I was all pumped up spiritually after watching that Christian film, I brought this matter boldly to the Lord in prayer. After a week went by in which I did not struggle with this particular thought pattern, the thought occurred to me that perhaps God was up to something in my life. After a month had gone by I began to understand that God had indeed intervened in my life, and then began to focus upon ways to prevent myself from falling into this particular pattern again. What are some areas in which you are struggling? We encourage you to bring these to God and expect His answer as you persist in prayer to Him. If you feel your faith is weak, pray that God would first give you the faith that you need. Perhaps He will lead you to study a particular book, or meet with a particular person. But do expect God to show up when you come to Him boldly in prayer.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading from John chapter 16 is Jesus' counsel to His disciples about how they will be able to prosper once He leaves the world through His sending of the Holy Spirit. They are to expect great persecution and be "outcasts from the synagogue" (John 16:2). In fact the deception of nonbelievers in world will be so bad that "everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (v. 2b). Jesus promised how then when He went away He would send the "Helper," Who would "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (v. 8).

Gospel Reading:

John 16:12-15 NAS95 12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."

Jesus taught His disciples how the Holy Spirit would "guide them into all the truth" (v. 13b). The prophecy of the Holy Spirit led to the inspiration of our Holy Bible. Peter spoke about this by saying, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). The Word of God is but one of many ministries of the Holy Spirit that we as believers possess. The Spirit also works to draw unbelievers to faith in the Lord Jesus, convict both believers and nonbelievers of their sin, regenerate our spirits making us "born from above" (John 3:3), sanctify us in the Lord, help us in prayer, guide us in understand Scripture, provide us with comfort through His divine power dwelling within us, and provides us with gifts and fruits of the Spirit. Although Jesus' disciples certainly couldn't understand the implications of His prophecy concerning the coming of the Spirit, they spent their lives living out the fullness of all that the Spirit had to offer them even though they endured unparalleled tribulation in their lives.

We too are called to partake of God's divine gift through the ministry offered to us in the Holy Spirit that lives within us. It is this Spirit that empowers us to live lives pleasing to God. In order to take advantage of the Spirit's guidance "into all the truth" mentioned in today's reading, we must endeavor to become students of God's Word in the Bible. Our prayer is that these weekly studies will prompt you to go further in your study of God's word, and "test all things, holding fast to that which is true" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What is something through which you either are suffering, or have suffered in recent years? In what ways have you seen how God produced in you the character qualities noted by Paul of increased faith, perseverance and character?

2. Perhaps one of the most useful ways in which you can learn from the tribulations allowed by God in your life is to journal about your experiences and then look back upon how God used these

circumstances for His eternal purposes and your own good (Romans 8:28). If you have written down anything in past years, retrieve these journal entries and review the changes that have occurred since then. In what ways can you see how God actively used these trials to produce perseverance and character in your life?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/052216.cfm

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Lectionary: 166

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass-Study-Notes-for-Sunday_05-22-2016.pdfDownload

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass, October 27, 2013 – 30'th Sunday in Ordinary Time



It was the classical dark and stormy night as I (Jim) flew the instrument approach into snowy Saranac Lake, New York with two friends nestled warmly in the seat behind me one night in March. As I made the necessary turns and altitude changes, I manipulated the aircraft's radar system downwards such that it revealed the two mountains on either side. These showed up in bright red on the screen, although my passengers were oblivious to the danger. Later they told me that what they perceived was a methodical series of a dozen button presses and knobs being turned followed by the plane emerging from the clouds and being greeted with flashing runway lights welcoming us to New York. As we taxied off the runway, they congratulated me on a great landing and we headed for the terminal to pick up our rental car. As we made our way towards the resort at which we were staying in Lake Placid I settled down for a relaxing drink in the lounge. What a great trip!

Then the terror hit me.

I had forgotten to cancel my flight plan with air traffic control! As I frantically called air control on my cell phone I knew that I was in a lot of trouble. I knew that since this was a flight performed under instrument flight regulations that once I did not report on the ground after a few minutes of signing off from the in-flight air traffic control that search and rescue procedures would have been initiated immediately. The flight service station answered on the first ring and I explained that I had made a huge mistake and had forgotten to cancel my flight plan. In my state of utter shock, I begged for forgiveness and prayed at the same time. The controller explained that the sheriff had indeed been called and had launched a search for the plane. The first place that they looked was in the aircraft parking area where they had already located my plane safely tied down. I knew that I deserved punishment since the typical response to such an infraction would be at a minimum the suspension of my license for a period along with a hefty fine. But the controller said, "Never mind, it's OK. We are just glad that you are safe. Have a good evening."

Have you ever been in a situation where you deserved punishment and even knew it was coming but got off the hook? What if I had acted proudly and told the air traffic controller that it wasn't my fault. Do you think that he would have let me off the hook easily by confronting him this way?

That is what we are going to talk about in our Gospel lesson today. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus told a parable about two people who approached God with completely different hearts. The New International Version entitled this section, "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector" since it was evident from the context of the previous chapters that the first man in this parable today was a member of the group known as the Pharisees. We have frequently discussed this group in past lessons, here's a review of their primary traits. The Pharisees were people who held to a strict interpretation of the Jewish Law but also added requirements known in the New Testament as traditions. Their doctrine evolved over several hundred years until the observance of their traditions became more important to them than obeying a basic interpretation of the Jewish Law. Jesus said in Mark's Gospel regarding the Pharisee's traditions, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9). Jesus summed up his feelings about them by saying several chapters earlier in Luke, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." The Pharisees approached God with a proud heart compared to the tax collector who we will read about in the next parable today.

The Gospel lesson today was a parable through which Jesus illustrated prayer through the contrast of two different types of people, a religious Pharisee and a humble tax collector.

> *9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*
>
> *14 I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18:9-14 NIV*

It was helpful in this study to step back and survey the context of this text. This parable was sandwiched between the parable of the persistent widow (that we studied last week) and an incident in which a group of children who approached Jesus were scolded by the disciples (Luke 18:15-17). The point of the first parable was that believers are always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). The persistent widow expressed grownup, godly faith and never gave up seeking justice. The point of the story of the children coming to visit Jesus was to illustrate the value of possessing childlike faith. Jesus closed the section by saying, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child

shall not enter it." It was useful to understand this context because the parable we are studying today deals with the same subjects addressed in the two surrounding stories, prayer and the condition of a person's heart while praying. It was with these truths in mind that we approached the central text being studied today.

This parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector was a study of contrasts between the proud heart of the Pharisee and the meek heart of the tax collector. Luke began with a summary statement about the condition of the Pharisee's heart. They were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else (v.9). On the other hand, the tax collector referred to himself as a sinner (v.13b). The Pharisee's prayer was nothing more than a boast about his perceived goodness. His prayer was similar to a eulogy which he gave himself! The Pharisees' works were substantial since the Law only required fasting once a year and tithing only upon crops and animals. But his boastful prayer never made it up to heaven to the one who could answer it, though this man never actually asked for anything. It was evident that the Pharisee believed that he obtained righteous standing with God through his religious works or perceived goodness. The tax collector on the other hand perceived that righteousness came only through God's power. His prayer reflected a humble and contrite heart. The deep contrast between the two men in the story illustrated the central truth of the parable. God calls believers to be reconciled to Himself through humble acceptance of their sinful position before Him. They are unable to earn their way to God but must accept Jesus' finished work on the cross in order to be found righteous before Him.

One of the defining doctrines of the New Testament is justification by faith and not by works. The topic of justification is found this in verse 14, "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home *justified* before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." The key word is "justified." This word in the New Testament is a legal term that means "a declaration of one to be innocent or just." A way to remember the biblical application of the word "justified" is the phrase, "Just as if I'd never sinned." When a person is declared just in the eyes of God they are considered righteous such that they don't receive their rightful *penalty* for their sin. The source of a believer's righteousness is foreign, which means that it doesn't come from any of their own works or self-perceived goodness. God's righteousness can only come through the gateway of faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. God has declared the universality of sin. Paul said, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He explained further in Romans that the proper payment for a life of sin was death, meaning eternal separation from God. However, with this bad news he also brought good news, literally the word in the New Testament translated as "Gospel." "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Paul explains that faith in Jesus is the mechanism through which the gift of eternal life is imparted to the believer. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Good works are important in serving the Lord and provide evidence of salvation but they are not the *source* of our justification. Righteous standing before God can only be granted by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Some questions may arise after this very brief study of justification. Some may ask, "Can we just

keep on sinning since we believe and are going to heaven?" Paul answered quite succinctly in the Book of Romans. "1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (6:1-2). What about the role of works in our salvation? The Scripture is very clear that we cannot earn our salvation through our works, but works are very important because it's the method through which we serve the Lord Jesus. Finally, others may inquire, can we *know* that we have received salvation through faith in Jesus, isn't that being presumptuous? The Disciple John said, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may *know* that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emphasis added). Yes, you can know that you have received salvation. The Holy Spirit testifies to this fact. Paul said in Romans, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (8:15-16). Having questions is normal and reveals that a person is really seeking the truth of Scripture. Paul said about this, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you–unless, of course, you fail the test?" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Let's examine the second reading for today from 2 Tim. 4:6-18:

> *6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*
>
> *Skipped verses (9-15): Personal Remarks*
>
> *9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.*
>
> *14 Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. 15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.*
>
> *16 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

This passage comes from the Apostle Paul's last known letter, written to Timothy, his son in the faith. Last words bring a sober realization of one's life and values. Here we see Paul's values being consistent with his message of salvation through faith in God's grace. The first section points to these important truths about biblical Christianity:

$1· Faith is not easy—Paul said he was being poured out like a drink offering (read "sacrifice"). He also likens faith to a fight and a rigorous race. While he feels spent on behalf of his call, he realizes that the sacrifices have been a special offering to the Lord.

$1· Faith is worth it! Paul looks back with satisfaction that he has kept the faith. He is not implying that one can lose his or her salvation. He is marveling that God has kept him faithful in the midst of great opposition.

$1· Faith provides us with hope for the future. Death is not the end of the story. Paul states that there is great reward on the other side for him—specifically a crown of righteousness. Why is this so valuable to Paul? Righteousness, being right with God, is the entrance requirement for heaven. Paul knew that he was not right with God based on his own performance in life. So to think that at the end of his earthly life he would be rewarded by being in right standing with God was a treasure he cherished.

$1· The Lord is righteous in his judgments, which means that his perspective and rulings are the final word and they are right. There will be no arguing with or manipulating the Lord, the righteous judge, at the end of our lives. His say is final. This should give us motivation to get on the same page with Him now, so that we will not be surprised in the life to come.

$1· Faith is equated to longing for Jesus' appearing. We may wonder how these two concepts connect. Longing for Jesus' appearing implies faith, since we long for things we love. Longing for Christ's appearing is an expression of our relational intimacy, affection and value system bent towards Christ. The treasure of a crown of righteousness can be ours as well, if we, like Paul, long for his appearing.

Although verses 9-15 are skipped in the Mass Reading, they are important for establishing Paul as a real person with real relationships, in real messes, expressing real faith. The application for us is that we can be encouraged to know that real Christians have real struggles with circumstances and people that our out of our control, but are very much still under God's control.

The last section tells how Paul got through his struggles and the open opposition he felt against the message of Good News. He attributes his success to the Lord, who stood by his side and gave him strength. This strong trust in the Lord is what allowed him to forgive others who deserted him. He was not compelled to pay anybody back for the wrongs they had done to him. He could let them off the hook because he trusted the Lord to defend him. What a vision for us—to have such deep roots in the Lord that painful offenses and hurts can be released and brought into perspective.

I (Christy) remember a time when I was deeply hurt by an individual who claimed to love me. His

desertion in my time of need left a large wound that I could not, in my own strength, forgive. Up until this point in my life, I had been able to easily forgive others of their offenses. But curled up in fetal position on my bed, crying from the emotional pain that would not go away, I asked the Lord to help me forgive. While the feelings of forgiveness did not happen overnight, eventually, I was able to release this person from the debt that their offense had incurred. I imagine that Paul, too, had to work through feelings of bitterness, resentment and anger, in order to not hold these hurts against those who deserved severe consequences. Like the story of the tax collector, when one sees the great debt that has been forgiven on our behalf, it is difficult to feel justified in withholding forgiveness from others.

Paul ends with a sense that the Lord will rescue him and bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom. So no matter what obstacles or trials we face, we can trust that because we are in Christ nothing can ultimately harm us. No wonder Paul breaks out in praise: "To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen." What a place a deep, abiding rest and assurance that God will take care of His children, no matter what!

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. Justification through faith in God's grace is an important concept. Summarize your understanding of what justification means, why it is necessary for salvation and how one can be assured of their just standing before the LORD.

2. If you recognize that you, like the Pharisee, have been trusting in your good works to get you into right standing before God, take a moment and confess this wrong attitude in your heart to the LORD. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleans us from all unrighteousness."

3. Review the bullet points about biblical Christianity from the discussion on the second reading. Which of the points address a specific question, concern or fear of your life? How does this truth provide you with comfort, hope or direction?

4. In what real relationships and real messes are you finding it hard to exercise real faith? How can Paul's example of fighting the good fight, longing for the appearing of the Lord, and forgiving those who hurt him be an inspiration for you? Take a moment and talk to the Lord about your situation. Ask him to stand by your side and give you strength, so that you too might say—"To him be glory for ever and ever"!

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit this web site:

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/102713.cfm Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading 1 SIR 35:12-14, 16-18

The LORD is a God of justice, who knows no favorites. Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet he hears the cry of the oppressed. The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint. The one who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens. The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal, nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, judges justly and affirms the right, and the Lord will not delay.

Second Reading 2 TM 4:6-8, 16-18

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

> *Skipped verses (9-15): Personal Remarks*
>
> 9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.
>
> 14 Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. 15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

16 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading Luke 18:9-14

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt

themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

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The Role of Weakness in Spiritual Formation



The Role of Weakness in Spiritual Formation

Reflections by Christy Hill, Ph.D.

Who wants to feel weak? Who enjoys bumping up against one's own inadequacies? Why would I desire to get in touch with the many times (a day) I don't live up to my own standards, let alone God's? Isn't the Christian life supposed to make me feel better?

The Apostle Paul may have resisted feeling weak, at first, too. He was a very successful

Jew—even of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, a zealous persecutor of heresy. If you go by strict religious standards, his resume was impressive. But after his conversion to Christ, those things no longer mattered. In fact, he considered them rubbish.[i] But I wonder how long it took him to gain this perspective.

He gives us a glimpse of his journey toward recognizing the value of weakness in his life, modeling a mature Christian perspective of the ongoing struggle we have with the flesh and its falleness. He wrestled with God over this topic. Three times he prayed for God to relieve him of a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan. We don't know what this messenger of Satan was, but we do know it "tormented" him and made him feel weak.[ii] But God, who has infinite power and wisdom, ordained that weakness could actually be something good for His children. He said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."[iii]

So what is the value of weakness for spiritual formation? Could it be that we, like Paul, have a tendency to put confidence in ourselves to live the Christian life? Could it be that I have a deeply ingrained success mentality that desires to use Christianity and the spiritual disciplines to help me feel better about myself, without deepening my relationship and dependence on my Savior? So instead of allowing us to live in the delusion that we are better off on our own (autonomy) and that we really need to get our act together in order to be loved by God (work's righteousness), God breaks us of these ingrained beliefs by giving us the gift of weakness and inadequacy. So then when I bump up against my weakness, I can be reminded of my need for a Savior, even as a mature Christian. I can continue to fall in love with my Rescuer, when I realize that His blood covers my sin. I can turn to Him in dependence, not as a last resort, but as a welcomed reminder of my true state of dependence. It would be cruel of God to allow us to live in the lies of autonomy and work's righteousness, which is our natural tendency.

Maturity starts to look a little bit different than the "victorious Christian living" model that feeds our success mentality. Growth in sanctification means recognizing and internalizing the truth of who I am in Christ and relating to God in deeper, more intimate ways. If a thorn in the flesh helps

me to recognize my continual need for a Savior and to turn often to God throughout my day, then it accomplishes a noble purpose. And we can say with Paul, "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."[iv]

I have to admit, I'm not there yet. But I do have to ask the question: Does our doctrine of sanctification address and have room for the daily experience of weakness, inadequacy and failure? Do we teach those we disciple and have influence over the value of recognizing our moments of weakness that come to us throughout the day and allowing it to remind us to turn to God and not depend on self? Do I model a life that is comfortable with my own messiness, so that others may see that God's love is not based on our performance, but on His desire to love us? It is going to take a lot of weakness, failure and inadequacy to undo the false beliefs that we are better off on our own (autonomy) and we have to work hard to gain God's favor (work's righteousness). The message of the Gospel still speaks to us in the ongoing journey of spiritual formation as we embrace weakness and let it do God's noble purposes.

End Notes

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[i] Philippians 3:4b-11 (all Scripture quotations from NIV).

[ii] 2 Corinthians 12:7, 10.

[iii] 2 Corinthians 12:9a.

[iv] 2 Corinthians 12:9b-10.

The Role of Weakness in Personal Spiritual Formation.pdfDownload

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John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection



John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection

By James M. Hill

The Problem: Can Justified Christians Achieve Perfection Through a Sudden Working of the HOly Spirit in Their Lifetimes and Subsequently Live in Sinless Perfection?

Because God is perfectly holy, he cannot have fellowship with unrighteous, fallen people who

descended from the seed of Adam after the Fall (Gen 3:6). Humans, as image bearers of God, lost fellowship with God, but God provided for their salvation by condescending in the form of the God-Man to atone for their sin. God gave new spiritual life to all that repent of their sin and trust in the finished work of the Son of God on the cross at Calvary. Through this spiritual rebirth, God imputed the righteousness of Christ and declared them justified before Him.[1] This treatise examines whether or not God, who declared believers positionally righteous (justified), also provided the means of grace to be instantaneously holy or sanctified. This is what came to be known as John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection. Is God's grace a discrete, stair step affair, with justification as the first measure of grace in the lives of believers, Christian perfection the second, and sanctification everything upwards after the first step? Or is sanctification a lifelong process unable to be totally completed in a believer's lifetime? Does the Holy Spirit impart a second, sudden working of grace such that believers are entirely sanctified, thus eliminating their sinful natures in their natural lifetimes? Are there three levels of people, the lost, the justified, and the entirely sanctified, or just the first two? Can accurate theology be developed or even validated upon the basis of personal experience, or is it a purely scholarly affair?

INTERPETATIONS THROUGHOUT THE CHURCH

Most Reformers and Evangelicals on Sanctification

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) states, "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die until sin, and live unto righteousness."[2] This view of gradually increasing holiness is typical of the Reformers and evangelicals, except for the traditions that arose out of the Wesleyan movement, including the Methodist, Holiness, and Nazarene traditions. Unlike the Roman Catholic doctrine that posits sanctification as the increase of justification, the tradition of the Reformers and evangelicals abides by a solid distinction between the two concepts, "while affirming that the two are inextricably related." [3] Lewis and Demarest summarize this theological position by stating:

In terms of differences, justification is a legal declaration of right standing before God (imputed righteousness), whereas sanctification makes the believer existentially holy (inherent righteousness). Moreover, justification is an instantaneous event, whereas sanctification is a lifelong process. Finally, justification allows for no degrees, whereas sanctification admits of degrees.[4]

One of the keystones of this position is the dual nature of the Christian. On one hand, believers are purified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (1 Corin 6:11). They are accounted positionally righteous before God through faith in Jesus and his sacrificial death (Eph 2:8-9, Heb

10:10). On the other hand they still possess a sinful nature inherited from Adam as a result of the Fall, and don't always do the things that God calls them to.[5] Paul said in Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not."[6] "Christians realize entire sanctification or moral perfection not in this life but in the life to come when they behold Christ (1 John 3:2)."[7] Calvin believed in a lifelong process of sanctification. Demarest and Lewis quoted Calvin as stating, "We teach that in the saints, until they are divested of mortal bodies, there is always sin; for in their flesh there resides that depravity of inordinate desiring which contends against righteousness."[8] Luther held a similar view and made the following statement in *Table-Talk* No. CCLVI:

Original sin, after regeneration, is like a wound that begins to heal; though it be a wound, yet it is in course of healing, though it still runs and is sore. So original sin remains in Christians until they die, yet itself is mortified and continually dying. Its head is crushed in pieces, so that it cannot condemn us.

Both Calvin and Luther denied "any perfection other than imputed perfection." Later Reformers, including the Anabaptists, reacted against an "under-emphasis on holy living." [9] This was likely one of the factors that led to John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, along with his dislike of Calvin's position on eternal security.

John Wesley on Christian Perfection

John Wesley was the seventeenth century founder of Methodism who formulated the doctrine of entire sanctification from 1739 to 1760. "In public address he used the terms "Christian Perfection," "Perfect Love," and "Holiness," as synonymous, though there are differences between them when examined critically."[10] The basis of his theory was that after a Christian become a believer by being spiritually reborn and indwelled by the power of the Holy Spirit, at some point after a period of growth in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ there was an instantaneous act of sanctification. Therefore, even though there was gradual growth in sanctification after the believer was justified by God, after a "final, all-surrendering act of faith in Christ, it reaches an instantaneous completion through the act of the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier."[11] According to Greathouse, the teaching of John Wesley was that this initial work of gradual sanctification may be "cut short in a moment, by faith, when the heart is cleansed from the inward root of sin – pride, self-will, atheism, or idolatry – and perfected in the love of God. As a consequence of this deeper cleansing of the heart the Christian is enabled to grow more normally toward perfected Christ-likeness."[12]

Greathouse's definition of Christian perfection is:

. . . the glorious teaching that through the provisions of the sacrifice of Christ and the personal agency of the Holy Spirit, and on the condition of simple faith, those who savingly trust in Christ may be cleansed from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God and unselfish love for their fellowman.[13]

One would likely never find such a concise definition of Christian perfection among John Wesley's writings. Rather, John Wesley's normally accepted view as rendered by Greathouse developed gradually over the life of his ministry. Wesley said that he developed his unique view on sanctification because he "thought it was scriptural." In the same quote, John Wesley went on to say, "But I still think that perfection is only another term for holiness, or the image of God in man."[14] Wesley's doctrine seems to have very much been driven by his concept of holiness as Christians living out their lives in God's perfect image through his Son Jesus Christ.

John Wesley left some small amounts of room for interpretation of what he meant by perfection. In his sermon and subsequent tract *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he defined Christian perfection by stating, "By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbor, ruling our tempers, words, and actions." Wesley went on to excuse slight misdeeds by "perfected" Christians by saying, "there is no such perfection in this life, as implies an entire deliverance, either from ignorance, or mistake, in things not essential to salvation, or from manifold temptations, or from numberless infirmities, wherewith the corruptible body more or less presses down the soul." With the leeway given, Wesley went on to say, "I do not contend for the term *sinless*, though I do not object against it.[15] In the same tract, Wesley spoke about what he called the "Circumcision of the Heart."

It is the habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writing, is termed holiness, and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit; and, by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus the being so renewed in the image of our mind as to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. . . . In what sense are they perfect? Observe, we are not now speaking of babes in Christ, but adult Christians. ***But even babes in Christ are so far perfect as not to commit sin*** (emphasis added).[16]

How then did Wesley define sin? In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley stated, "But does not the Scripture say, 'A just man sinneth seven times a day?' It does not. Indeed it says, 'A just man falleth seven times.' But this is quite another thing' for, first the words, a day, are not in the text. Secondly, here is no mention of falling into sin at all. What is here mentioned is, falling into *temporal affliction* (emphasis added)." Wesley admits that the apostles sinned, but because they sinned does not mean that all Christians have to sin. [17] Wesley's definition of active or overt sin was so telling of his whole theology that it was quoted completely from Carter as follows.

Nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a ***voluntary transgression of a known law of God***. Therefore, every voluntary breach of the law of live is sin; and nothing else, if we speak properly. To strain the matter farther is only to make way for Calvinism. There may be ten thousand wandering thoughts and forgetful intervals without any breach of love, though not without transgressing the Adamic law. But Calvinists would fain confound these together. Let love fill your heart, and it is enough (emphasis added).[18] This is not far from what 1 John 3:4 says, minus the attacks on Calvin, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness."

Did Wesley agree that believers can be tempted, yet without sin? John Wesley made it clear that he

believed so. In the questions and answers section in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he stated a variety of answers to various hypothetical questions. Question 14 was, "But can one that is saved from sin be tempted?" His answer was, "Yes; for Christ was tempted." In response to question 15 regarding the difference between temptation and corruption of the heart, he said, ""A woman solicits me. Here is a temptation to lust. But in the instant I shrink back. And I feel no desire or lust at all; of which I can be as sure, as that my hand is cold or hot."[19]

Wesley found scriptural support for his position on sanctification in various New Testament passages. He interpreted the seventh chapter of Romans not as a description of the experience of an advanced believer as has been taught throughout the centuries, but as that of an unregenerate man. He posited that "entire sanctification" occurred by the eighth chapter and therefore described the experience of a wholly sanctified believer. [20] Orr, et. al., regarding Wesley's position stated, "Thus sanctification is gradual, but entire sanctification is instantaneous . . ."[21] Wesley also looked to 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Other Epistles were quoted by Wesley, such as Ephesians 4:13, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Even though Wesley posited that the context of Romans 7 was that of an unregenerate man, he quoted just a few verses earlier in the previous chapter for support, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom 6:6)." One wonders if Wesley understood that the translators added the paragraph breaks that were not in the original text. He also looked to Galatians 2:20(a), "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live," and sought support in 1 Thess. 5:23, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly . . . ." In this passage "the word *sanctify* is a Greek aorist tense, signifying an act and not a process, as also in John 17:19, 'that they . . . may be sanctified in truth,' or truly."[22] The reasoning is that if Paul didn't think that God was able to accomplish these things during the natural lives of Christians, he wouldn't have written it. In the same light, Wesley also appealed to verses such as Matt. 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," with Hebrews 10:14, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified," along with 1 John 4:18, "perfect love casting out (all) fear. Finally, Wesley made frequent appeals to 1 John 3:9, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."[23]

In the same treatise, Wesley defended his position in light of the writings of St. John in 1 John 1:8-10, the latter which states, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (v. 10)." Again, his reasoning regarding this text was particularly telling of his whole theology. His entire response to the critics was as follows.[24]

(1.) The tenth verse fixes the sense of the eighth: "If we say we have no sin," in the former, being explained by, "If we say we have not sinned," in the latter verse. (2.) The point under consideration is not, whether we have or have not sinned heretofore; and neither of these verses asserts that we do sin or commit sin now. (3.) The ninth verse explains both the eighth and the tenth: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As

if he had said, "I have before affirmed, the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. And no man can say, 'I need it not; I have no sin to be cleansed from.' If we say we have no sin, that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves and make God a liar. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, not only to forgive us our sins, but also to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, that we may go and sin no more. In conformity therefore, both to the doctrine of St. John, and the whole tenor of the New Testament, we fix this conclusion: *A Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin* (emphasis added).[25]

Wesley found proof of the attainment of the second working of grace in 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." Wesley said that additional proof came from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, per 1 Corinthians 2:12, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."[26] In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley clarified the spiritual evidence for the achievement of Christian perfection. In question he was asked, hypothetically, "But how do you know, that you are sanctified, saved from your inbred corruption?" In response, Wesley stated:

We know it by the witness and by the fruit of the Spirit. And, First, by the witness. As, when we were justified, the Spirit bore witness with our spirit, that our sins were forgiven; so, when we were sanctified, he bore witness, that they were taken away. Indeed, the witness of sanctification is not always clear at first; (as neither is that of justification;) neither is it afterward always the same, but, like that of justification, sometimes stronger and sometimes fainter. Yea, and sometimes it is withdrawn. Yet, in general, the latter testimony of the Spirit is both as clear and as steady as the former.[27]

The Early Church on Sanctification

Augustine believed that even though the Christian was accounted positionally righteous before God through justification, their sanctification gradually conformed them to the image of Christ.[28] Greathouse, who seemed to stress the extent to which he thought (wrongly) that Augustine espoused the view, stated:

While Augustine can be cited as an advocate of this truth (Christian perfection), his pessimistic doctrine of Original Sin with its notion of ineradicable concupiscence has been the single greatest foe of the doctrine, especially in Protestantism. Developed in his controversy with Pelagius, this latter idea upstaged Augustine's earlier confidence in the possibilities of grace and became the standard view of most Reformed and Lutheran theologies. ***The permanent residue of Augustine's doctrine in the view that human nature is irretrievable sinful this side of the resurrection*** (emphasis added)**.**"[29]

Augustine seemed to dismiss the possibility of Christian perfection during the natural life. Demarest and Lewis quoted Augustine as saying, "There is not a man living in the present life who is not absolutely free from sin."[30]

Several church fathers held a view similar to John Wesley. Friesen quoted Ignatius as writing, "No man truly making a profession of faith sinneth; nor does he that possesses love hate anyone." "Irenaeus and the Shepherd of Hermas also believed that perfection was possible while Tertullian did not expect perfection until after death." [31]

BIBLICAL TEACHING AND THEOLOGICAL INTERACTION

Old Testament

In the OT the call of the prophets was a "demand for personal righteousness and social justice." This was evident in such passages as Psalm 18:30 stating God is perfect, but with Psalm 18:32, "It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect." God instructed Abraham to be perfect, "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect (Gen 17:1)." Greathouse tied God's requirement "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (Deut 6:5)" with a call to personal holiness. [32] The word translated "perfect" from the Hebrew is *tamiym*. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, even though the root *tamam* indicates "a move towards that which is ethically sound," the fundamental idea is that of completeness. The *Wordbook* goes on to tie NT Pharisaism to the root word, something that the followers of Wesley should take careful note. "Those who make them (claims of perfection) do not profess to be absolutely sinless, but they do disclaim all fellowship with the wicked." It goes on to say, "other than (the) passages referring to God himself, the OT resists claims to ultimate perfection."[33]

The OT contains an important theological construct in the Pentateuch, that of unintentional sin, closely related to the sin of omission. In Leviticus 4 the Lord gave to Moses the process for the sin offering. Verse two states, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: Say to the Israelites: 'When anyone sins *unintentionally* and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands' (NIV, emphasis added)."[34] The concept of unintentional sin is prevalent throughout the Pentateuch. In Leviticus applies the requirement for a sin offering to individual people (4:27, 5:15), leaders (4:22), the whole community (4:13), and the Gentiles alike (15:29). The concept of the sin of omission is also clearly found in the NT (James 2:15-16).

Gospels

In the Gospels and the rest of the NT, the key concept of perfection revolves around variations of the Greek word *teleioi*. In Matthew 5:48 Jesus said, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The word in the original is the Greek is *teleioi*, and as in to OT, means "complete." Friesen said, "In almost every case where the word 'perfect' is used in reference to people in the New Testament it is a translation of this word *teleios*." He went on to analyze the verse

and concluded that in order to be perfect, the universal call to believers is that they must come follow Jesus.[35] In several of Wesley's sermons he argued how God could command perfection if man were unable to achieve it. In light of a more accurate translation of the Greek, perhaps Wesley should have looked to the concept of completion of God's promises to humanity in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." Or, Phil 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Other New Testament Literature

Paul provided on interesting insight into his own sinfulness in the seventh chapter of Romans. Paul said, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin (7:14)." As stated earlier, Wesley interpreted the seventh chapter of Romans not as a description of the experience of an advanced believer as has been taught throughout the centuries, but as that of an unregenerate man. He posited that "entire sanctification" occurred by the eighth chapter and therefore described the experience of a wholly sanctified believer. An exegetical study of Romans shows that this was not Paul's intention. In 7:22 Paul stated, "For in my inner being I delight in God's law (NIV)." This hardly sounds like Paul reflecting on his sinful past prior to his conversion on the Damascus road.

In 1 Corinthians 2:6, the KJV uses the word "perfect" whereas the NIV renders *teleios* as "mature." This is similar to the NIV rendering of *teleios* in Luke 6:40 as "fully trained." The NIV is a much more accurate translation of the word, since in the longer context of the passage from 2:6 – 3:3 Paul describes the characteristics of mature people, the *teleioi*. "The *teleioi* are involved in a growing process. They are different from natural men and also from immature Christians and these differences are demonstrated by their behavior." In 1 Corinthians 14:20 Paul instructed the people to be adults (*teleios*) in their understanding (from the NIV). Friesen comments, "The *teleioi* are gifted and use their gifts to build up others in the Church. . . . Their concern is for the growth of those within the community and for those who have not yet experienced new life."[36] It is evident from the passages that the idea of perfection from the KJV translation is much more accurately reflected in the concept of spiritual obedience and maturity than sinless perfection.

The prison epistles speak to the concept of *teleioi* in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. In Ephesians 4:13 Paul states, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect (*teleios*) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The NIV substitutes the word "mature." "The verses preceding 4:13 describe a process whereby maturity or perfection may be reached. God has given apostles . . . to the Church so that these person may equip all the saints for the building up of the Church."[37] The KJV rendering of "perfect" in Phil 3:12 illustrates the point even more: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect (*teleioo*) . . ." Here Paul states that he has not yet been made perfect, but is in the process of being perfected, pressing on towards "the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (v. 14)." In Colossians 1:28 Paul says, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect (*teleios*) in Christ Jesus." "Paul believes that he has done a part in bringing others to perfection. He does this by admonishing

and teaching."[38] Clearly, Paul's goal is to utilize his spiritual gifts to so "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corin 11:2c)."

Perhaps the most prominent verse in the Epistles that speaks regarding Wesley's view of Christian perfection is 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Commenting on the verse, Adam Clarke (1760-1832), a prominent Wesleyan minister, theologian, and scholar born in Londonderry, Ireland said the following.

This is tantamount to 1Jo 1:10: If we say that we have not sinned. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and therefore every man needs a Savior (sic), such as Christ is. It is very likely that the heretics, against whose evil doctrines the apostle writes, denied that they had any sin, or needed any Savoir (sic). In deed, the Gnostics even denied that Christ suffered: the AEon, or Divine Being that dwelt in the man Christ Jesus, according to them, left him when he was taken by the Jews; and he, being but a common man, his sufferings and death had neither merit nor efficacy.[39]

Clarke's straw man argument that the passage was written to confront the Gnostic heretics is not justified in light of the historical context of this section of the text. Clark stated the overall purpose of 1 John by, "I therefore consider that which is commonly called the First Epistle of St. John as a book or treatise, in which the apostle declared to the whole world his disapprobation of the doctrines maintained by Cerinthus and the Gnostics."[40] Such a statement is true, except even a cursory examination of the first chapter reveals that the content of this section is more regarding "the fundamental tests of genuine fellowship," and the pericope containing verse nine is concerning "a biblical view of sin."[41] To say that verse nine speaks specifically to the Gnostic heresy is faulty logic from a straw man argument. Albert Barnes, holding to the opposite view, said, "he meant to say that if a man should claim to be perfect, or to be wholly sanctified, it would demonstrate that he deceived himself; and the two statements go to prove that neither in reference to the past nor the present can any one lay claim to perfection."[42] Spurgeon, commenting on the passage in 1 John 5 said, "We understand by this not that believers are perfectly free from sinning, but that they do not sin habitually, willfully, and openly as the unregenerate do."[43]

Wesley often quoted 1 John 3:9 regarding the ability for perfected believers to sin, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.." The word sin in this text is the Greek verb *hamartanein* in the present active infinitive tense. This indicates a continuing action of sin rather than discrete events. The passage literally means, "Born again Christians don't persistently sin in an ongoing manner." Barnes agrees, "If it can be used as referring to the doctrine of absolute perfection at all, it proves, not that Christians may be perfect, or that a portion of them are, but that all are. But who can maintain this? Who can believe that John meant to affirm this? Nothing can be clearer than that the passage has not this meaning." Rather, Barnes says, "This passage must (mean that) they who are born of God, that is, who are true Christians, do not sin habitually and characteristically." [44]

Wesley had a tendency of selectively applying verses to prove his doctrine of perfection. The Book of Hebrews declares in chapter 12, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man

shall see the Lord" (v. 14). Wesley declined to apply this verse to Christians in general, those justified and entirely sanctified. According to the ISBE speaking about Wesley, "The declaration 'without sanctification no man shall see the Lord' (Heb 12:14), does not apply to the saints, 'the holy ones.'"[45] Again we saw Wesley picking and choosing which verses, or portions of verses apply in order to create his doctrine of entire sanctification.

Friesen did an analysis of the concept of *teleioi* in all of the NT uses, including Hebrews. He made an excellent summary in Hebrews regarding his derivation of the meaning of perfection as meaning spiritual maturity and obedience. As we leave the scriptural study section, he note the following summation in his section on Hebrews:

In this letter we see that the *teleioi* are people who are able to move beyond the discussion of elementary doctrines and accept and even teach solid food from God's Word. They are holy people, but they are also in the process of being made holy. This progress is not merely passive growth – the *teleioi* are actively involved in the process of growth. (They) are able to discern good and evil because they constantly practice obedience.

The author couldn't state it any better than that. The concept of perfection in the Bible is that of believers constantly growing and being obedient to the commandments and image of Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest difficulties of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is found in James regarding the sin of omission. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? (2:15-16)." Even if the Christian was perfect in outward behavior and somehow avoid sins of commission, they are often guilty of sins of omission as was shown by God's need to include deliverance for this sin in Leviticus.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual Perfection: A Theology of Experience

We concur with Lindstrom that Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is a "theology of experience."[46] What role does experience play in the development of any theological doctrine? Bett looked at in an interesting way and found that Wesley "founded religion and theology in the fact of experience."[47] Wesley objected to such criticisms, saying "if man is not to go astray it (theology) must be checked by the Bible.[48] It seems logical that theology could be evaluated on the basis of personal experience, but what role does bringing a "pre-understanding" to the biblical text have in developing doctrine in the first place? It is evident that every theologian brings along a certain level of pre-understanding, and Wesley was not different in that regard. Also, unless the theologian remains teachable, an overactive experiential pre-understanding brought to bear upon the text will produce alternative views from an otherwise plain exegesis. Perhaps a red flag for this type of theological development is their mandating of sudden contextual shifts within discrete areas of the

biblical text. Such contextual deviations are evident in Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection. It is evident that Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is indeed a doctrine of experience. More careful exegesis of the relevant verses would have revealed to Mr. Wesley that the central concepts of Christian perfection were that of spiritual growth and obedience, not sinless perfection. Friesen, in his concluding remarks stated, "The *teleioi* are not portrayed as those who have attained absolute perfection. They always strive toward perfection and are not content to settle for less."[49] Perhaps this is the greatest risk of following Wesley's doctrine, that one may cease growing in knowledge and maturity to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Relevance to Life and Ministry

It is very important in ministry to have a clear understanding of the nature and process of sanctification, as well as how the various Christian churches understand the doctrine. First, it is crucial to be able to explain the various sects and denominations of the Christian faith to new believers such that they are not put off by the appearance of divisions in the body of Christ. Even if groups of believers believe in the doctrine of Christian perfection, for the purposes of unity in the body of Christ a certain measure of tolerance must be expressed. It is extremely important to recognize John Wesley's huge contributions to the Christian church in America. This is not to say that we should tolerate false teachings, which Scripture warns about extensively, but Christians must come as a united force against the powers of darkness. In the case of Christian perfection, the belief of this doctrine is nicely balanced by the same denomination's belief in Arminianism. This keeps them continually resisting temptations and striving towards their salvation anyway. Albeit that this comes at the risk of becoming prideful – something which many Christians struggle with regardless of their denomination. Second, as the Wesleyan churches well know, eternal security is a closely related concept. This related doctrine should be preached to proclaim the truth of 1 John 5:13, but along with the warning verses. This will help believers maintain a healthy humility and respect for the power, sovereignty, and grace of God. Believers need to be given an assurance of their salvation in a world filled without almost no certainty in many other areas of their lives. They should be shown that God expects them to persevere under His power, not their own. Believers need assurance that God has gifted them with every resource that they need to accomplish His purposes in their lives. This striving includes a continuous growth towards perfection, but this is not something that will be accomplished until after they die.

END NOTES

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[1] Bruce A. Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), Vol. III, 173.

[2] Ibid., 177.

[3] Ibid., 175, 184.

[4] Ibid., 184.

[5] Ibid.

[6] All verse quotations are KJV unless otherwise indicated. This is necessary to facilitate comparisons to John Wesley's writings.

[7] Demarest, 185.

[8] Ibid., 186.

[9] Robert Friesen, "Christian Perfection," *Direction* 13 (July 1984): 25-32.

[10] James Orr and others, eds., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), s.v. "Sanctification."

[11] Ibid.

[12] William M. Greathouse, *From the Apostles to Wesley: Christian Perfection in Historical Perspective* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1979), 15.

[13] Ibid., 12-13.

[14] Charles W. Carter, *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 521.

[15] John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, London: [1777], n.p.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Carter, 270-271.

[19] Ibid.

[20] John C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Moscow, ID: Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001, orig. 1879), xxii.

[21] Orr.

[22] Orr.

[23] Wesley.

[24] N.B. A Prize will be awarded for any student that can follow this quotation!

[25] Wesley.

[26] Orr.

[27] Wesley.

[28] Demarest and Lewis, 185.

[29] Greathouse, 9.

[30] Demarest and Lewis, 185.

[31] Friesen, 25.

[32] Greathouse, 23.

[33] *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1980), #8552.

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[35] Friesen, 26.

[36] Ibid., 27.

[37] Ibid., 28.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, abridged [CD-ROM], 1 John 1:8.

[40] Ibid., 1 John 1:1.

[41] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible,* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1962.

[42] Albert Barnes, *Albert Barnes' NT Commentary* [CD-ROM].

[43] *Spurgeon Devotional Commentary*, on 1 John 3:1-6.

[44] Barnes, 1 John 3:9.

[45] Orr.

[46] Harold Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification.* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Asbury Publishing, 1981), 2.

[47] Ibid., 3.

[48] Ibid., 5.

[49] Friesen, 30.

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A Quick Look at Justification



A Quick Look at Justification

By Jim Hill

The subject of **justification** was one of the things that the former Catholic priest Martin Luther protested against the Roman Catholic Church when he nailed his thesis to the door of the Cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany. Link: http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html Hence the name for the church that was formed out of this movement, the Reformation, the Protestant church. The entire unity of believers I will call the Christian church, whether they are Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or Anabaptist. There are both believers and unbelievers in all of the churches, and only God knows a person's heart. We cannot be their judge, God has this supreme role. Unfortunately, the official doctrine of many of these churches disagree with what is taught in the Bible.

First, realize that within the various churches there are a wide variety of personal viewpoints. For example, some Roman Catholics have chosen to use birth control, in violation of church teachings.

Also, there is variation in beliefs in the Protestant church, and also the Christian church as a whole. The concept of the Rapture for example, and infant baptism for another. Also, we see the Orthodox Church appointing an openly gay bishop for example, and while many disagree with that, others among the majority of leaders agree. The bottom line is that as Christians, there needs to be agreement upon the fundamentals of the faith. Any difference upon these key points is a different Gospel, which as Christians we are called to condemn.

This brings us to the next point, authority. Who has final authority in leadership of the universe of Christian believers? Is it the church, the church fathers, the church teachings, or is it indeed the Lord God? If you agree that God is the authority, has He vested this authority in an elite group of church leaders? What does God's Word say about this, the Bible? The Bible says that the Christian Church, which is the unity of all of us that believe in Jesus for salvation, is a "priesthood of believers." These believers can come from within any Christian denomination, or possibly even none of them. In 1Peter 2:9 Peter says, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." In Revelation 1:6 John says, "and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Later in Revelation John said:

> And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10)

What sacrifices do these priests offer? Romans 12:1-2 says:

> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Also, 1 Peter 2:5 says, "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

So, all believers are Priests and offer spiritual sacrifices. What about the altar? What does the Bible say about offering physical sacrifices on a modern church altar? Hebrews 7:27 says, "who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."

Once for all, and Jesus said "It is finished" as he died on the cross. A warning is in order here, which is that **anyone forsaking Jesus as their Savior no longer has a sacrifice for sin** (Hebrews Chapter 10 v 26). This is what is taught in the Bible and the Christian Church as a whole. What about the office of High Priest, who fulfills that role now that there is no longer any sacrifice

for sin, which was the main purpose of this role of the Jewish High Priest? Hebrews 4:14-15 says:

> Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

We can show other verses that will tell you that Jesus is our High Priest, and we as believers are priests with our chief purpose to set about fulfilling the **Great Commission** explained in Matthew Chapter 28 v 16-20:

> ***All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***

Now we can come back to the topic of **justification**. The word in the theological construct means in layman's terms, "how you are made right with God." In Romans 3:23 we know that it says "for all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God." All, means everyone, except Jesus of course who is the God of the universe, the creator of it all, our Savior. Another way to look at **justification** is how we can be made right with God, "just as if I'd never sinned." Say that quickly, "just as if I'd never sinner." Justified.

How can we be justified with God? How can our sins be blotted out, forever, and we be made right with God? The Bible teaches, and the Christian church believes, that "for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." John 3:16 Matthew 18:3 says, "unless you are converted, and become as a little child, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

John 3:3 says "you must be born again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Romans 10:13 says that "anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

Now, briefly, let me move to Luther's primary protests. Over the years the Roman Catholic Church adopted a different theology of **justification,** one not taught in the Bible. The theology that developed through church tradition and councils is as follows: (1) Grace comes through receiving of the sacraments, and (2) the sacraments, along with good works are meritorious towards Salvation. The sacraments themselves, and good works, along with Jesus death and resurrection, and dying without any un-confessed mortal sins, results in justification. As Christians, we would call the process of purification occurring after trusting in Jesus, sanctification. The Bible is clear that justification does not come from the works of men. You may ask, what is grace? Grace is "unmerited favor from God." Unmerited means undeserved. The Christian church teaches, as is Biblical, that we are justified by grace, through faith, alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 says this clearly:

> For it is by grace that you are saved, through faith, and that not of works, it is the Gift of God, lest any many should boast.

This is what was taught by Jesus and the Apostles in the Bible. The Catholic Church now officially teaches that the sacraments (works of men) are meritorious towards salvation. But, like I said before, there are many different ***personal*** views within the Catholic Church. The view that a person holds will determine whether they enter Heaven Justified, or made right, before the Lord, or they hear the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew Chapter 7 "away from me, I never knew you." Strong words? Yes, but we have a very loving God who wishes that all come to faith in Him and none to perish in the judgment of eternal Hell.

So, what were our marching orders when Jesus left? The Great Commission, which commands us to make disciples of the Christian Church, teaching, and baptizing. Those three things. Our goal is not to specifically make members of a particular denomination or church, but to the universal Christian church, priesthood of Jesus Christ our Lord. We are to make disciples of Jesus, teach others what He taught us to, and Baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This needs to be the goal of our lives. As Christians, every morning that we wake up we need top ask ourselveshow we are doing on the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Our answer will determine the extent of our eternal blessings in Heaven.

I hope that this clarifies some of the misunderstandings that you may have. For some reason many people are afraid to discuss these very important matters. I have that this is especially true among my Roman Catholic friends and family. The life we spend here on earth is miniscule compared to what we will spend in eternity. We must know the truth, and the truth will set us free.

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