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TRUE AND FALSE SANCTIFICATION BELIEVING THE PROMISES VERSUS MYSTICAL PROCESSING OF THE SOUL

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"For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." (2Peter 1:4)

In theology, the term "sanctification" is most often used to describe how the Christian grows and changes to be more like Christ. Most Christians will be surprised to know that the term is usually used in the New Testament to describe the once-for-all status of those who have been converted by grace through faith. For example consider this important passage:

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
(Hebrews 10:10)

The context is a citation of Psalm 40, which references the will of God in Christ. It is by this that all who believe are sanctified "once for all." Theology has long distinguished between positional and practical sanctification. There are a few cases where the term does refer to growth in the Christian life. But as David Peterson demonstrated in his excellent book on the topic, the vast majority of the passages that use the term refer to the present status of believers.¹ We are sanctified, and that happened once for all by God's saving work of grace in Christ. Peterson suggests that "transformation" would be a better way to describe growth into the likeness of Christ. Peterson writes: "Instead of speaking in terms of progressive sanctification, the New Testament more regularly employs the language of renewal, transformation and growth, to describe what God is doing with us here and now."²

Often the fact that we are sanctified is given as a reason and motivation to live godly lives, not what happens if we do. Peterson again is very helpful:

The call of Scripture is to live out the practical implications of our sanctification by pursuing holiness as a lifestyle. We are to do this by looking back to the cross and forward to the resurrection, when by God's grace we will share His character and life completely.³

We look back to what God has done in Christ and believe His promises of future glory. When we believe the promises of God, He is working to transform us. The Lord's Supper reminds us of what God has done for us through the blood atonement and looks forward to the future consummation at the end of the age. The Bible consistently reminds us of what God has done and His glorious promises.

I agree with Peterson's work on this topic. Yet considering the fact that "usage determines meaning," I have decided to address the topic of Christian transformation using the term "sanctification" as is the norm in the church. This is to avoid confusion and to address the errors of ubiquitous false teachings on the topic. American Christianity, in particular, is at its core pietistic. If a group does not have some version of a higher-order spirituality, the secret to a deeper life, a program for perfection now, or a second blessing doc-

trine, it seems unlikely to make much of a mark in America. This goes back centuries. I have written on dozens of these teachings, warning the church against them. American Christians seem to think that what God has done for us in Christ is rather bland and ordinary unless it is supplemented by some secret discovered by a religious innovator that promises escape from the status of simply being redeemed by the blood of Christ. They typically think we need something more, and bring much harm to the flock and riches or power to themselves as they provide that "something more." Sadly, American error has been exported all over the world in the name of Christ.

False Teachings Do Not Sanctify

In Jesus' prayer for the disciples recorded in John 17, He prays for their sanctification: "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The primary means of holiness is the word of God. We are made holy, once for all, when we believe the truth of the gospel: "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). It is Christ's once-for-all offering of Himself (verse 12) that insured the eternal transformation and glorification of believers. The warnings in Hebrews are directed at those who were tempted to go back to temple Judaism and its continual sacrifices that "can never take away sins" (Hebrews 10:11). The truth of God's word has always been the primary means that God uses to sanctify His people. The corollary is that false teaching does the opposite—it defiles: "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:15). Esau had despised God's promise and became "secular" according to verse 16. False

teaching promotes everything but the true Messianic promise, which is found in Christ alone. That is the only place blessing is found.

False teachings defile the truth which is in Christ and substitute “once for all” as emphasized in the New Testament for secrets, higher order experiences, psychological processes and anything but the finished work of Christ, which is true for all believers. Dissatisfaction with God's provision leads to the “root of bitterness” which defiles. False teachers want more because they take God's glorious provision as inadequate. Many mock the idea that God's promises are not fully realized until eternity. They want it all right now, and so they sell out. Ironically this is usually done in the name of piety.

We will survey a sampling of the many false sanctification doctrines in the church. Many of our readers have either gotten out of these, know people in them, or are currently in groups that promote them. We shall see that the truth is much more simple and accessible than the complex alternatives sold by the false teachers.

Anatomical Sanctification

As a new Christian I read Watchman Nee's books on the Spiritual Man until they were dog eared. I so wanted to be a truly spiritual Christian that I joined a Christian community where everyone gave up their jobs, assets, homes and everything else to live together seeking to be higher order Christians who had truly left “Babylon” behind. Our group was cutting edge when it came to various processes designed to make Christians free and holy. “Once for all” had no place in our teaching. I was a teacher there with a Bible College education, and it was to my shame that I had fallen for many of these errors. From 1975 to 1980 I was in that group trying to be the “spiritual man” that Nee espoused. Nee was far from our only source, there were many teachings and sources.

Nee posited a tripartite human: body, soul and spirit. These three each were divided into composite parts for

the purpose of Nee's doctrine. For example, the soul was “mind, will and emotions.” In this teaching, the body was the main problem because it was so easily attached to the external world where great temptation lurked. We were hoping that by giving up all income and property we could sever ourselves from most of that part of the sanctification problem. Others were stuck in that external world where they carried out the ordinary affairs of life. We had a required weekly day of fasting and required times of prayer.

The soul in this scheme was either drawn to the body by way of various lusts, or to the human spirit which was joined to God and the place of holiness, hope and spiritual intuition. The practices of the group were designed to get us into that place of spirituality where the soul is directed by the spirit (human spirit joined to the Holy Spirit). So we were to minimize the body and get the soul looking inward.

But there were many complications. A book called “Pigs in the Parlor” was used to suggest that demons were still in the mix. The Christian had demons which had gotten a hold on us because of various laws and rules of the spirit world (Nee describes these) that the demons knew about and used against us. The way that worked kept evolving in the group's teachings by promoting such ideas as soul ties, generational curses, occult items such as a five pointed star, and many others. It seemed that the possible inroads for the demons were endless. Manifestations upon interacting with these spiritual entities fueled the idea that we needed more. The prescriptions were often “repeat after me” statements that renounced, broke, repudiated, pleaded the blood, demanding that the demons name themselves, and endless verbal processes to find freedom. Then geography would get in the mix as well as racial heritage. Where one lived and from whom one descended could be the key.

Nothing about this spiritual, anatomical approach was decisive or hopeful. The “positive” side of it was that we hoped to get the soul attuned to

the Spirit infused “spirit” of man and use “intuition” that would be the voice of God leading us along. We hoped that we would “enter the promised land” by following this sort of guidance while defeating the enemies. The wilderness wanderings, in that scheme of teaching, were allegorized to be various demons and curses to be defeated. Inhabitants and places in Canaan were allegorized into various spiritual enemies of God that kept us Christians from our true inheritance. Deliverance teachers claimed that Deuteronomy 7:22 proved that the demons would not leave Christians at once, but little by little as they “took the land.” This misuse of the passage fueled the endless processes that we worked with, hoping to find the “promised land” and be rid of various curses and demons. Of course there was never an end to this because it was obvious to anyone who was honest that we still had problems.

By God's grace I finally saw the folly of all this, repented of it, and got out. I ended up going back to Scripture alone and interpreting it literally, not allegorically. One teaching after another came through our city at that time with the latest new revelation from God that would be the key to victory and the promised land. The once-for-all work of Christ through His blood was of little interest and neither were the eternal promises of God. Whether dichotomy or trichotomy is the correct doctrine, the process of anatomical sanctification is still false. No one can really discern a difference between his or her soul and spirit through introspection.

Sanctification Through A Second Work of Grace

A popular approach to sanctification that has been touted at least since the late 19th century is sometimes known as the “let go and let God” approach. In England this was epitomized by an approach to holiness called “Keswick” holiness. David Naselli has done extensive research on this movement and its influences on evangelicalism.⁴ Naselli is careful in his documentation and

explains various distinctions between versions of sanctification based on a second blessing experience that yields a special state of sanctification with various ideas about what type of perfection is promised. His research goes all the way back to Wesley and his version of holiness as a second work of grace that yields perfect love toward God and man that is free from “voluntary transgressions.”⁵ Various versions of perfectionism were developed in the 19th century by American revivalists. Charles Finney’s version of the Pelagian doctrine that teaches moral ability to obey all that God commands through “a person’s autonomous free will”⁶ still draws followers in America.⁷

Naselli’s excellent documentation shows how various versions of sanctification through a second blessing after conversion became prominent in American evangelicalism. The nature of the post-conversion experience is variously defined, but so prevalent that any group lacking a version of it is often deemed “carnal” or lacking spiritual vitality. Whether it is speaking in tongues, total surrender, going from carnal to spiritual, being filled with the Spirit or going through a seminar with the goal of complete dedication to holiness, many versions of the deeper life have prevailed. From Wesley’s perfectionism to the five-fold ministry revelation of the apostles and prophets movement, dozens of versions of the “higher life” have characterized evangelicalism.

It is not hard to convince Christians that we still have problems even though we have turned to Christ through the gospel. This obvious need is filled by more false doctrines that can be described in one article. They all have one thing in common—escape from being an ordinary Christian with the promise of being an extraordinary one through the secret offered by the teachers and preachers of these groups. Thus they divide the body of Christ into the haves and have nots with a special revelation or experience being the difference.⁸ In many ways this goes back to Roman Catholicism’s monastic movement where people took oaths to become higher-order Christians. What

is missed by all of these false ideas is that the New Testament does not teach that the body of Christ is divided into the spiritual elite and the ordinary Christians who lack what the elite have found.

Frankly, the book of 1 Corinthians was written to refute false teachers who claimed a higher spiritual status than ordinary Christians. When I was deceived by the second blessing idea, the teachings that misled me were often gleaned from ironic statements that Paul made in 1 Corinthians that were taken to be literal. Doing so makes Paul appear to be saying the opposite of what he, in fact, teaches. Paul jealously guarded the unity of the body of Christ and the fact that all who are part of Christ’s body have the same status and truly need one another. The elitists say “I have no need of you” (see 1 Corinthians 12:21). Adherents who have supposedly achieved higher status do not take kindly to being corrected by “ordinary” Christians who lack whatever these “super saints” claim to have.

All second blessing doctrines are false because the Bible described all of the redeemed as “sanctified.” David Peterson correctly describes sanctification:

As the gospel is proclaimed and faith is elicited, people are brought together into a sanctified relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As the word of God is applied to everyday life and relationships, believers are built up and sustained in holiness until they share in the inheritance God has for them.⁹

Subtract the idea of a higher order Christian and one would invalidate most of the conferences and seminars of the last 150 years in America! Not to mention people getting on ships to attend the Keswick conferences in England. When I was a new convert, Bill Gothard filled auditoriums to promote his “Basic Youth Conflicts” seminar that amounted to sanctification through legalism and processes that Gothard concocted. Many of the princi-

pal people in these movements, going back to Hannah Whitehall Smith and her husband from the 19th century, ended up hitting the rocks of scandal. The “deeper life” or “higher life” predicated of the leaders and initiates turned out to be the scandalous life.

I was at a Gothard seminar (he ended in scandal) and heard him teach that we should try to jump to the moon and get off the ground rather than jump to the top of a street light and not move at all. However, the idea that aiming for perfection now will make us higher order Christians is a lie. People are not perfected until the resurrection, and telling them they should be often leads to hopelessness, despondency and giving up altogether. I have talked to many who ended up that way. I try to point them back to the very grace of God that saved them through God’s means that will also keep them.

Sanctification Through Self-analysis

Rick Warren has added much confusion and error to the faith by promoting self-discovery and self-analysis as the means of finding purpose and becoming a “purpose driven” Christian. Warren’s relativism has influenced so many churches that it is no surprise that many Christians think of sanctification in terms of self-analysis. For example, Warren writes, “How you define life determines your destiny.”¹⁰ From this unbiblical idea he posits the presence of a “life metaphor” that is likely something that people are unconscious of but is deterministic. I wrote about the biblical and logical fallacies of this in my first book.¹¹

Warren offers his SHAPE plan for the purpose of discovery of one’s gifts. This acrostic stands for spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality and experience. He has a program which amounts to studying self, including one’s past, to find out how to serve God and in the process find fulfillment. An amalgam of mistranslated scripture, wisdom from secular writers and his own human wisdom help the process along. However

nically this is presented, it is still the study of self. What is clear from the Bible is that our calling is determined by God in Christ, not what we were without Christ.

Temperament and personality studies of other types have been popular books and seminars in evangelical churches. There seems to be a lack of belief that God will use His ordained means to change us and use us in His service. Studying self will not help, but hinder our transformation. Frankly, self-analysis in the Bible is about whether we are in the faith, not what details of our previous lives make us different from others:

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? (2Corinthians 13:5)

The issue is our relationship with Christ, not the details of the old self that was left behind when we were converted. What gifts God has given will be evident as we participate in the means of grace and serve one another.

So much mischief has been done by false teachers who bring in categories from pop psychology such as “performance orientation,” or “low self-esteem” that it is no wonder that sanctification is a muddled concept in most Christians' minds. We need to know and believe the promises of God that are true for all Christians and not spend our time in self-analysis based on human wisdom.

Sanctification Through Self-talk

Neil Anderson wrote a book some years ago proposing self-talk loosely based ideas from the Bible as therapy for Christians.¹² The idea is that Christians need to reinforce their identity through citing various “I am” sayings that pertain to statements found about believers in the Bible. Since that book from the early 90's, many other popular teachers have incorporated versions of self-talk therapy into their material.

I refuted Anderson's material many years ago in an article in CIC.¹³ The main problem is not that the Bible lacks teaching about the status and identity of Christians, but that it never prescribes self-talk as a means of sanctification. Frankly this amounts to taking an idea from pop culture and concocting a “Christian” version of it to make people feel better. Sanctification is by faith through grace, like salvation, not through talking to ones' self. It is one thing for Jesus to call His followers “sons of light.” It is quite another for a believer to say “I am the light of the world” which ontologically applies only to Jesus Christ who called Himself the “Light of the world” (John 8:12). Philippians 2:15 says that we appear as lights in a dark world. The light that pertains to believers is derived from Christ. Matthew 5:14 says the disciples corporately are the light of the world. The point is to believe this and act accordingly. Yet Anderson has people saying to themselves “I am the light of the world.”

The therapeutic approach takes admonitions and promises and turns them into sayings to repeat to ourselves to hopefully make us better Christians. It strikes me to be rather ironic that we would believe things we say about ourselves but not believe what Christ says about us. If the self-talk advocates protest and claim they are only telling us to repeat these “I am” sayings to help us believe what God said, then the question is how is self-affirmation making what God says more believable? Besides, God never told us to talk to ourselves in such a manner. This approach is ultimately harmful because it leads to meaningless repetition that is judged to work or not work based on how one feels. The point is to be conformed to the image of Christ, not to merely feel better about self.

Self-analysis becomes endless and ultimately hopeless. As long as we are still in our unperfected state, self-analysis is likely to create despair, not hope. The great thing about God's promises is that they are not contingent on what we think about ourselves or say to ourselves, but upon faith. God's promises are grounded in God's character and

eternal purposes. Hebrews 11:8-12 speaks of Abraham and Sarah believing promises that were never fully realized in their lifetimes. Abraham did not say “I am the father of many nations” to prop up his faith, but believed and obeyed. The various sanctification schemes that are sold to the church usually obscure the truths that we should be learning. They fill up pages of popular books with nonsense that makes one wonder if the authors have gotten bored with the Bible. Rick Warren claimed that most Christians do not need another Bible study because they are not doing what they already know. Clearly the pop teachers of the church do not believe that God's word with His promises has the sanctifying value that it ascribes to itself.

Sanctification Through Curse Breaking

A persistent teaching that spans decades in evangelicalism is the idea that Christians are cursed for various reasons. The corollary to this is that the sources and causes of the curses must be identified and broken for Christians to gain victory and well-being. We have published a number of CIC articles about various versions of these false teachings.¹⁴ What amazes me is that the truth that Christians are blessed is so clear and obvious that it makes no sense for any Christian to believe these false teachings. But millions of books have been sold purporting to reveal the secret to identifying and breaking curses.

Having spoken with many people who have contacted us over the years concerned about curses, I know what drives people to the false teachers. They assume that various symptoms prove the presence of spiritual curses. Often the symptoms are sanctification issues. Sometimes they are symptoms of demonic activity or physical manifestations that are apparently spiritually caused. People are often desperate for a spiritual expert who can break the curse that causes the symptom, hoping for emotional and spiritual well-being as the result.

When I tell people that blessing and cursing in the Bible are relational issues and not to be diagnosed by examining symptoms they are often shocked. Many will not believe me. I have even had people, upon being shown what the Bible says about being blessed by faith in Christ, demur from hearing more about that as they pursue the search for a curse-breaking shaman. One person reported to me that he spent a lot of money on deliverance counselors and found no relief. I told him that faith in Christ through the gospel was the only way to true blessing and that such blessing could not be removed by any occultist no matter what they did. Balaam was hired to curse Israel but could not do so because God had blessed them (Numbers 23:20).

Sanctification through curse breaking (one by one) is akin to occultism. The curses that supposedly cause various sin problems are usually secret. People claim that “words of knowledge” will identify that cause and make it possible to break a curse using the right words. So incantations and occult knowledge are dressed up as wisdom from God and prayer to hide the obvious paganism behind the teachings. Decades ago I wrote about some of the occultism I had heard about from those who were at Christian meetings:

I have spoken to Christians who were eyewitnesses to Christian meetings in which people were amazed by prophets who could describe the contents of a person's pocket to him (ESP), see spiritual truths and specific predictions revealed in the accidental occurrences of nature (augury - soothsaying), determine one's spiritual ministry by touching or examining hands, palms or fingers (palm reading), learn special or secret things about a person through examining metaphysical “colors,” unapparent to others that they claim surround the individual (aura reading), and make claims of soul travel in both time and space.¹⁵

Finding out which ancestor was the cause of a spiritual curse is a very common reason why Christians seek hidden knowledge. Christian sanctification is not a subset of pagan occultism; it is a relationship with God through Christ. Holiness is a gift of God through Christ, not the result of manipulating the hidden world of curses and spirits.

Sanctification Through Deliverance from Demons

I receive more emails about demons and deliverance than about any other topic. The topic is particularly popular today because even the Roman Catholic Church is again getting involved in exorcism. Deliverance counselors are in big demand, and some who have contacted me told me about how expensive it is to pay for their services. They hope that I can help them because of an article I wrote more than 15 years ago about my experiences with deliverance ministry and why I got out of it.¹⁶ I have been contacted by self-described non-Christians who are looking for help from demonic attacks. Christians often see demonic influences as possible causes of sin problems in their lives.

Those who teach deliverance claim to have secret knowledge about the ways of demons that supposedly can be used against the demons. Many teach that there are “soul ties” from past sexual sins that have created open doors for current demonic influences. Some tie present demonic activity to past memories or influences of previous occult activity. There are endless possibilities presented as the cause of the activities of demons (so they say) in the lives of Christians. Following a common pagan belief, deliverance teachers claim that one must learn the names of demons in order to have power over them and make them leave.

I have written several articles proving from Scripture that God delivers those who turn to Christ out of Satan's domain of darkness and places them under the authority of Christ.¹⁷ All who know Christ have access to the throne of grace. Rather than determine what is

or is not from Satan or demons, we can and should take all of our needs directly to God through Christ. We should not interact directly with spirits which have been in their realm for thousands of years and are deceivers, and have our harm as their purpose. Conversely, Christ has authority over all spirits, loves us, and always has our benefit in terms of being conformed to His image in mind. Paul turned his problem with Satan over to God and accepted God's answer (2Corinthians 12:7-10). I have told hundreds of people the same thing for decades: “If you are a Christian go to God about this; if you are not, turn to God in Christ through the gospel.”

We are sanctified through a relationship with Christ and His ordained means, not by interacting with wicked spirits who love the attention and will continually deceive. For some reason people are not interested in that answer and want to know more about demons so that they can get the demons to leave them alone or do what they tell them to do. Even when Jesus gave His disciples the power over demons to demonstrate that the way out was through Messiah who has all power, He told them not to rejoice in power over demons but that their names were enrolled in heaven (Luke 10:20). If our sins are forgiven, then Satan has already lost the battle. Sanctification is grounded in our status in Christ, not our ability to manipulate the world of the spirits.

Sanctification Through Processing the Past

This category is general and covers any teaching that claims to provide help and change based on what happened before we came to Christ. Sometimes this is called “healing of memories.”¹⁸ There are many versions of this with more being invented as history goes on. People assume that whatever is wrong with them is caused by something in their past. Various theories such as the “subconscious mind” or even Jung's theory of the “unconscious” that is linked to a larger cosmic consciousness have been Christianized. One theory claims

that “first memory events” are the key to what might be wrong with different Christians.¹⁹ The possible permutations of such theories are endless. Much popular talk therapy is based on the idea that the past is the key to our present sanctification. The integration of psychology into church ministry has done much harm to many people and obscured what true sanctification is.²⁰

We are not called to process the past but to leave it behind as we serve Christ by His grace and power:

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it [perfection - vs 12] yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13, 14)

Paul then tells his readers to see this as an example for us (verse 15). Our status in Christ and His promises for the future are the key to our sanctification, not what happened in our past lives. Processing the past is utterly foolish unless it involves making reparations (when possible) to people we have robbed or harmed. We need to look forward and not backward. The number of books published by Christians pointing us backward over the last century is innumerable. I used to have many dozens of them in what was my “heresy library” that I dumped because of the need to downsize.

The Bible does not propose processing the past in order to be more like Christ. We die to the old self and live by faith as new creatures in Christ. We remember what happened and that is good because it reminds us of what a glorious work of grace God did when he delivered us from it. Like Israel remembering they were slaves in Egypt so as to understand the significance of God's redemption, we too remember that Christ's blood was shed so that our sins would be “passed over.” We were wicked sinners, but God is a great Savior who rescued us from bondage.

When Process Obscures Reality

There have been so many of these experiences and processes devised by popular evangelicalism in the last several centuries that it is not surprising that the result is despair for many people who had put their hope in them. Since I have written on so many of these I have heard from many readers about their experiences. Most who have believed the new processes have come to the conclusion that they are either demonized, cursed, backslidden or perhaps not a Christian at all. I make it a habit to share the gospel of Christ with such people because many assume they are Christian because of church involvement. The one phrase that I emphasize to them is “once for all.” It seems that the false teachers say nothing about “once for all” in regard to the atoning work of Christ. Yet it is the essential starting point in regard to sanctification.

The Bible says that believers are sanctified and consequently we are addressed as “saints” (sanctified ones). There is a process of transformation that will result in glorification and its outcome is certain for those who belong to the Lord.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

In logic this is called a chain argument which means that the descriptions are true for all who in the group. This means that the outcome for all who are “called” (here describing the effectual call) are also glorified. There is not some endless process with an uncertain outcome as many popular sanctification

teachings imply. Instead there is certainty.

Hebrews describes it this way: “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). William Lane astutely describes this as “decisive purgation” throughout his commentary on Hebrews.²¹ For example he comments on Hebrews 10:14, “The writer locates the decisive purging of believers in the past with respect to its accomplishment and in the present with respect to its enjoyment.”²² Lane rightly emphasizes the present reality because that is exactly what the New Testament writers emphasized. David Peterson documented this in his book on the topic which I previously mentioned.

The hundreds of books written to promote various secrets to the victorious life, the deeper life, the higher life, the surrendered life, the truly “spiritual” life and so forth always propose a process or secondary experience that is lacking for ordinary Christians. In contrast, the Bible emphasizes what God has done “once for all” and assures believers that He will complete the work He started. The ground for this assurance is the finished work of Christ. Those who get caught up in the processes and secrets of the false teachers lose sight of the solid ground for any sanctification—what Christ has done for us. False teachings hide the reality (if it is believed at all) and cause those under them to be caught in a vortex of confusion that is leading them to nowhere good.

The Simple Truth

Sanctification is true for all who are born of God. The process part of it that is happening now is through means of grace. The once-for-all status of believers is that we “have been sanctified.” We are transformed as we believe God's promises and participate in His ordained means.²³ Because sanctification is true for all believers and future glorification is promised to all believers, the means of grace must be (and are) accessible to all believers.

There is no special secret to how

God works to transform us. As the church was born on the day of Pentecost, those who believed were baptized and gathered in this manner: "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). To gather under these God-ordained means is done in faith. There would be no reason to believe such simple practices would change anyone had God not ordained these practices and given promises with them. God's word sanctifies us (John 17:17). When we practice the Lord's Supper we show that we believe His promises to be with us and to come again so that we may eat with Him in the kingdom of God (Matthew 26:29). We remember His death until He comes (Luke 22:19; 1Corinthians 11:25-26), thus showing faith in the ground of our sanctification: His once for all shed blood. We pray because He promised that He hears us and gives us grace and timely help (Hebrews 4:16).

Anyone can participate in these means, and they must always be accessible to all who are not under church discipline. The false teachings we have surveyed claim some special, elite status and only some can participate. They are for those who know the secret or have obtained a higher order spirituality. They are based on knowledge of secrets that are not clearly taught in the Bible. They are essentially inaccessible by their very claim to be secondary or higher order. True means of grace are accessible to all of God's elect. Participating shows that we do believe the promises of God. Fellowship shows that we need one another, care for one another, and pray for one another. God graciously changes us as we gather in obedience and faith.

Conclusion

The obvious question is why people run to so many false teachings when the truth is so simple? The answer is a failure of faith. This failure happens when the feelings and circumstances of life create doubts that God is going to finish His work and bring us all the way to

glory. The Book of Hebrews was written to people who were in danger of turning back because Jesus our High Priest is in heaven and cannot be seen. Do we believe He hears us and will give us everything we need? The great chapter on faith, Hebrews 11, is about believing God's promises in the face of trials and obstacles. We need to believe God's promises and not turn back. We are not lacking anything that pertains to life and godliness. We must believe God's promises and not falter in our faith because of the inevitable trials. May God give each of us the courage to believe His promises and to stay solid in that faith in the face of so many false teachings that would draw us aside.

End Notes

1. David Peterson, *Possessed By God—A New Testament Theology of Sanctification*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).
2. (Peterson: 136).
3. (Peterson: 136, 137).
4. Andrew David Naselli, *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It's Harmful*, (Bellingham, Wa: Lexham Press, 2017).
5. Naselli, 9.
6. Naselli, 10.
7. I wrote about Finney here: <https://cicministry.org/commentary/issue53.htm>
8. I have used the term "pietism" to describe such movements using one general term: <https://cicministry.org/commentary/issue101.htm>
9. (Peterson 57).
10. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Drive Life*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2002) 41.
11. Bob DeWaay, *Redefining Christianity*, (21st Century Press: Springfield MO, 2208) 131-134.
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