

Dr. John Church on the question of . . .

Sinless Perfection

The following question, sent in to "The Herald" by a reader, is answered by Dr. John Church. Both the question and the answer have particular interest for Highway readers. Editor

Sometime ago Dr. John R. Rice had an article in **THE SWORD OF THE LORD** on the subject, **The Perils of Teaching Sinless Perfection**. I want to know if you and other holiness preachers believe in and teach sinless perfection?

No, I do not teach sinless perfection and I do not know of any other reputable preacher or teacher who does. We do teach that any real Christian is saved from sin and does not make a practice of sinning. That is, he does not commit wilful, known sin.

According to I John 3:9, a person cannot be born of God and be living in wilful, known sin at the same time. You can no more live in wilful, known sin and be a child of God at the same time than you can be drunk and sober at the same time. Jesus came to save His people from their sins, and not in them or with them.

We do recognize that any person makes mistakes and cannot live a faultless life. While a person may be holy and without blame before God in love, yet he is finite and subject to mistakes, blunders, and short-comings.

We also recognize that a person may commit sins of ignorance. We believe that God has made provision for the blood to take care of such things as that. In the Old Testament God provided the red heifer for the sins of ignorance that people might commit along the way. God still makes provision for our sins of ignorance and other failings. That is one thing that is involved in I John 1:7 where it speaks of the blood cleansing us from all sin. The word "cleanseth" is in the present tense, which means the process is going on all the time. All the time you are walking in the light the blood is keeping you clean. It is somewhat like the tear ducts in your eyes. They bathe and wash your eyeballs continually and keep them clean. If you walk in the light, the blood will keep you clean.

Then, too, the Bible recognizes that any Christian may in some weak, unguarded moment commit one single act of sin. I John 2:1 says, "My little children these things write I unto you that ye sin not." (That is in the aorist tense.) That means not one single sin, and then John says, "And if any man sin, also the aorist tense) we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." In other words, John recognizes that a person may commit one sin, in some weak, unguarded moment, and he points out to us that God has made provision for such an event. We have an advocate and do not have to give up and quit, but can confess such a sin and it will be taken care of by our advocate, Jesus Christ.

We need to see that there is a difference between a momentary break and living in wilful sin day after day.

We do not teach sinless perfection; we do teach Christian Perfection, which means perfect love. It means that we have made a complete surrender to God and have had our hearts cleansed from all sin.

As much as I love and appreciate the earnestness of such men as Dr. John R. Rice, I do wish they would read such books as **A Plain Account of Christian Perfection** by John Wesley, **Wood's Perfect Love**, **Jessup's Foundation Doctrine**, **Hill's Holiness and Power**, and many other such books and find out what we holiness people really believe and teach.

It seems strange to me that a man like Dr. Rice should contend so earnestly for a sinning religion when the Bible plainly teaches that Jesus Christ came to save us from

"If"

FOR MISSIONARIES

If you can hear God's call when those about you
Are urging other calls and claims on you;
If you can trust your Lord when others doubt you,
Certain that He will guide in all that you do;
If you can keep your purpose with clear vision,
Bear lack of sympathy, yet sympathize
With those who fail to understand your mission,
Glimpsing their world-task through the Master's eyes;
If you can work in harmony with others,
Yet never lose your own distinctive aim,
Mindful that even among Christian brothers
Methods and plans are often not the same;
If you can see your cherished schemes defeated,
Yet tactfully and bravely hold your peace,
Not embittered when unfairly treated,
Praying that love and good-will may yet increase;
If you can trust to native Christian brothers
The church you've built in lands across the sea.
Seeing in them, as in your growing children,
The promise of the men they yet will be;
If you can guide these eager weak beginners,
By methods indirect—your life, your prayers,
For failures and mistakes not judge as sinners,
Making their growth in grace your earnest care;
If you can share with humble folk your virtue,
If noble souls are richer for your touch,
If neither slights, nor adoration hurt you,
If all men count with you—but none too much,
If you can fill your most discouraged minute
With sixty seconds worth of patience true—
Yours is the task with all the challenge in it!
You'll be a missionary through and through!

(SENT IN BY REV. K. E. GORMAN)

A NOTICE TO SUNDAY SCHOOLS

It is time to consider DVBS plans for the coming summer. The Bethany Book Store can supply you now with a DVBS kit and information on the course of your choice. We are promoting Gospel Light (Living With Christ: Theme) and Standard (Christ's Way, My Way: Theme); but we can supply materials from other companies as well.

By the way, Gospel Light has both a five-day course and a ten-day course.

Remember that the Bethany Book Store is a Reformed Baptist store. It deserves your business. It needs your business. Support it and watch it grow.

our sins and not in them. I read the article that you refer to in your question, and was amazed that Dr. Rice should quote some of the passages he did in his attempt to prove a sinning religion. He quoted from Romans 3:10-18 and concluded that Christians have to sin. Now any one who is supposed to know as much about the Word of God as Dr. Rice should know that Paul is not talking there about the way Christians live. Paul is pointing out in this passage that we are all by nature sinners.

It would seem that a man of Dr. Rice's intelligence would know how to divide the Word better than that. To quote such passages, out of context, is to do violence to the clear teaching of God's Word. John says, "He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning."