

Beyond Two Works of Grace

By W. T. Purkiser

THEORETICALLY we have always believed that holiness is both crisis and process, the work of a moment and program for a lifetime thereafter. Practically, it is not at all sure that we have realized the meaning of growth in grace. The result has been that many have acted as if entire sanctification were a dead-end road instead of a highway to infinity.

That we who have preached this grace are somewhat at fault will have to be granted. We have been so anxious for all of our people to experience the second blessing that we have failed to say much to and about those who have entered in. The result has been that we have made holiness sound like a destination instead of a starting point, a goal instead of a guide for the journey.

Without Lessening a clear-cut emphasis on the divine work whereby the heart of the believer is cleansed and filled with power and perfect love, we need to give more attention to the divine workings whereby the sanctified are led to ever greater understanding, love, faith, stability, and saintliness. Perhaps Paul's language will help us here where he speaks of being "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" as "the earnest of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:13-14)- the "earnest" being the deposit or pledge of more to follow.

This is the challenge to holy living conversion and entire sanctification. As hard as it may be for us to grasp it, the Bible compares the relationship between Christ and His sanctified people to the relationship between a husband and his wife. "Husbands, love your wives," we read, "even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:25-26).

This simply means that the experience of sanctifying grace at the altar is the wedding. The life which follows is the marriage. There is obviously much more to marriage than the wedding ceremony. And the real value of the ceremony is learned only during the years of companionship and deepening devotion which follow.

The sanctified Christian will fail miserably who does not commit himself to continual growth. One of the fathers of the holiness movement said, "He who thinks himself as much like God now as he ever can be, must certainly have lost sight of the distance between the finite and the infinite. A child may at its birth possess the image of his father, but in physical, mental, and moral status, he is incomparably below his father."

There are several areas in which growth in sanctifying grace must go on. Of one of these we are reminded immediately by Peter's words, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:18). We are to grow in spiritual understanding, in the knowledge of Christ and of God's ways with men.

Some of this understanding comes by experience, the hard but really necessary way. More of it comes through the systematic study of the Word of God, through preaching, and through the reading of devotional books and papers. And a very precious part of it comes directly from the Holy Spirit, part of whose mission is to teach and to guide into all truth.

We may grow in love, sympathy, and compassion. John Wesley wrote in his Plain Account of Christian Perfection, "Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of I. Corinthians."

In what Edwin C. Lewis called "the logic of love" is the

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FALL OF THE MIGHTY

According to Edward Gibbon, famous British historian, the Roman Empire fell because of five reasons: (1) the home, which is the basis of society, had been undermined by rapid increase of divorce; (2) taxes had gone higher and higher, public money being spent largely for "social security" (bread and circuses for the masses); (3) the mad craze for pleasure; (4) the building of gigantic armaments, though the real enemy was the internal decadence of the people; (5) the decay of religion, faith fading into mere formality, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to direct it.

fact that love is capable of being at the same time perfect and yet growing. Indeed, if it does not grow, it is not perfect—for a love which does not deepen in devotion and increase in range is fast on the way to becoming indifference or downright aversion.

Finally, we may grow in that almost indefinable character best described as Christlikeness or saintliness. This is hard to describe but easy to recognize. It consists in a certain radiance of spirit, a serenity of soul, a growing and unselfish interest in others with a desire to help and to share, and a thoughtfulness and consideration for those around us.

It was said that the goal of ancient Christians was "to renounce mediocrity and aim at holiness." These two are one. He who makes both holiness of heart and of life his aim can never be ordinary or mediocre. Saints in fact as well as in name are a rare and precious commodity.

If we fail to see beyond two works of grace, we fall into a very subtle snare of the enemy. We tend to become critical and demanding of others, and lax and careless ourselves. As Irwin Brown wrote in Further Insights into Holiness:

"My observation of actual conditions in Christian life leaves me persuaded that in theory we make allowances for shortcomings in new converts but in practice we are quick to condemn any such conduct. In theory we accept the idea of growth in grace; in practice we make no allowance for it. Our theology seems to break down at the point of experience. This may account for the falling away of many young converts. They not only have to contend with temptations and mistakes but with mistreatment by older Christians. More is demanded of them than they are able to give. Mature Christian conduct is expected of them while they are still infants in Christ. We expect them to digest strong meat whereas they need the milk of the Word."

Along with this there is apt to be the twin evil of complacency and satisfaction with ourselves and our own attainments. We may thank God we are not as other men are without realizing how far short we fall of being the kind of men we ought to be. One sure mark of the immature is the conceit of wisdom beyond what has really been gained.

Thank God for two works of grace that deal with the sin problem, both outer and inner. At the same time, let us not lose sight of what lies beyond. Let us firmly fix in mind that conversion and entire sanctification mark the end of our search for the right road. They mark the beginning of the spiritual journey.

—Herald of Holiness

The King's Highway