

SANCTIFY THE LORD IN YOUR HEART

By Paul Penno Jr.

March 7, 2012

Can we talk too much about what Christ has done to save us? Should we talk 50% of what He has done, or is doing, and then talk 50% of what we must do to be saved? That 50/50 balance sounds quite reasonable, doesn't it?

Yes, and millions who say they are Christians view the gospel that way. And they are lukewarm in their devotion to Christ!

Paul didn't buy into the 50/50 idea. When he came to Corinth he says, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Wait a moment, Paul! Aren't you unbalanced? Sure, preach the cross—but surely not as "everything"? If you talk too much about what Christ has done to save us, aren't you afraid that your listeners will get lazy and stop keeping the commandments of God?

No, says Paul: "the preaching of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness; but unto us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . We preach Christ crucified. . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1:18, 23, 24). Then he adds in vs. 29, "No one can boast in God's presence." Now if you are saving yourself 50/50, if you are "trusting" to your "sanctified obedience for salvation," if you believe that "sanctification . . . in us . . . [is] part of the means of our salvation," you have plenty to boast about. (I am quoting word for word from an up-to-date publication just came in the

mail produced by scholars who tell us how to be saved).

In contrast, Paul says that Christ saves us 100% and that the believer's part is to LET Him do it, to cooperate with Him, to respond to the constraint of His love, thankful every step of the way that Christ is the one who is his Saviour TOTALLY. Paul sees no co-saviors on the believer's horizon. And if we will listen to Paul preach in Corinth about the cross and believe what we hear him say, our lukewarmness will be finished.

It's the universal problem: how do we TRANSMIT good desires into righteous character? The alcoholic hates himself because he got drunk again; the addict wishes he could be free again; the pornographer despises himself after he has indulged again; the glutton likewise. And the gossip feels polluted after doing it again. "To will is present with me," says Paul, echoing our universal cry of despair, "but how to perform that which is good I find not. . . The evil which I would not that I do. . . When I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom 7:18, 19). Peterson renders the same passage, "The power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions. . . . I don't have what it takes. I can will it but I can't do it. . . I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. . . . Something has gone wrong deep within me. . . . I'm at the end of my rope." Transmission kaput.

That's Romans 7. Now we go on to Romans 8, which says that Christ is the answer. Of course, we've heard that for centuries! But look again—Paul presents Him in a different light than Christians

have seen Him for centuries: Christ is not simply a clever lawyer who gets you out of scrape after scrape, paying your fines for you, substituting His righteousness to “cover” your on-going sins time after time. Verses 1-4 draw back the curtain that has hid the true Christ from view and show Him as the Son of God who became the Son of man in the truest sense, taking upon Himself the same sinful nature that we all inherited from Adam, wrestling with our same problem but conquering it in our own sinful nature. God sent “His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” The point? He took upon Himself a SELF as we each have a self, and He denied that “self.” In other words, He took upon Himself a will of His own that was in conflict with his Father’s will but He totally denied His own will—all the way to the cross whereon He was crucified. Jn. 5:30; 6:38; Mt. 26:39. Believe the truth about Christ, and then you share with Paul, “I am crucified with Christ.” Gal 2:20. Victory!

We have all heard the horrifying stories of people with Alzheimer’s saying and doing things that we could not imagine their saying or doing when they were normal and well. A friend of ours when he developed Alzheimer’s threatened to kill his wife and had to be locked up, and yet we knew him always as a genuine Christian. And we all have known of people who when they have a stroke, act in a bizarre, ornery way, when we have known them previously as being gentle Christians. Sometimes

when under an anesthetic or drug, decent people have been known to use language that is indecent.

But this phenomenon of evil words or acts coming out involuntarily raises the issue of Bible sanctification. Paul prays for us a total sanctification in 1 Thess. 5:23: “The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What does Paul mean? Obviously, the initial experience of conversion or of justification by faith, is good in itself; but it must deepen and extend throughout the mind and heart until there is no hidden portion that is left unaffected, uncleansed. This is why sanctification is a daily work of the Holy Spirit, requiring a daily surrender to Him, until every nook or cranny of the heart is exposed to the merciless light that shines from the cross of Christ, and every egocentric motivation is made painfully distinct, so it can be repented of. A person may die with that process of being sanctified “wholly” still uncompleted; and we trust that person’s soul with the Lord’s mercy in the final judgment. But how could any of us “stand” in the final “great day of the Lord” when Jesus returns if there are sinful dark secrets of evil still left in the heart not yet “sanctified wholly”? Wouldn’t that bring shame on our Savior, like a good Christian threatening to kill his wife, or saying indecent words? Thank God we have a new day, TODAY—a new opportunity to be sanctified!

A pastor preached a sermon on justification by faith. A retired pastor met him at the door, shook hands, thanked him, and said, “Now I want to hear

a sermon on sanctification!” His idea was a common one: justification is only half of the gospel—the other half is sanctification. But he had listened to my friend’s sermon with deaf ears! It was as if he was saying, “If you preach about faith you must balance it with an equal preaching about works!” It was the all-too-common idea that the Epistle of James (2:14-24) gives a needed correction to Paul’s assumed over-emphasis on justification by faith. It’s the idea that the Holy Spirit is warning us with James, “Don’t let Paul carry you away! If you preach too much about justification by faith you will neglect works. Sanctification is about keeping the law. Let’s have both, a BALANCE!” But this common idea misses the biblical truth of justification by faith. There is no conflict between James and Paul; James is not correcting Paul; he is supporting him. Both clearly understand that genuine faith works; it not only produces obedience to the law—faith in its very essence is obedience to the law. It is impossible to have living faith and not at the same time be obedient to all the commandments of God. James is only saying that if the faith is dead, it’s not the real thing, to which Paul says a fervent Amen. If we experience justification by faith, “we have [1] peace with God . . . because [2] the love [*agape*] of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit , . . . [3] we have now received the atonement [reconciliation with God!], . . . as sin hath reigned unto death, [4] even so might grace reign through righteousness unto [5] eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:1-21). All these blessings are wrapped up in the

experience of justification by faith. Which is why a former editor of *The Signs of the Times* once said correctly that all that a person needs to be ready for the coming of Christ is justification by faith. Why? It includes what is commonly thought to be sanctification! He had a correct idea of what faith is, a heart appreciation of *agape*, of what really happened at the cross of Christ. And that WORKS! (The Greek word “power” in Rom 1:16 is our word dynamite).

Some may ask, “How does this great ‘Day of Atonement’ when God calls for a special repentance from His people relate to the subject of sanctification?” It is His final work in the Most Holy Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. Christ Himself as great High Priest in His sanctuary is totally dedicated to bringing an end to the sin and suffering on this earth. Are we not called to understand, to be in full sympathy with Him?

The cosmic Day of Atonement is just what its name says—the Day of final reconciliation (“atonement” means at-one-with). It is not a difficult idea to grasp:

(1) It’s when the alienated heart of humanity is at last fully reconciled to God and His holy law. Not that every human will submit to this work of “at-one-with”; many will refuse to their bitter end. But the Lord will succeed in winning a “remnant” to full oneness with Himself.

(2) They will demonstrate what “all men” could experience if only they would. This “remnant” will at last fully appreciate Christ for what He is. They will “grow up” out of the immaturity of “children” “unto

the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” “speaking the truth in love [*agape*]” (Eph. 4:13-15). Thus as their peers, in principle, they will “judge” all humanity.

(3) Opposed and ridiculed, they will “follow the Lamb [the crucified Christ] whithersoever He goeth. . . . In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14:1-5). This is generally thought of as an impossible chimera. But if it doesn’t happen, Christ will forever remain embarrassed and discredited. He died specifically to achieve this goal.

(4) But this “remnant” will never be conscious that they honor Christ. The more like Him they grow to be through sanctification of the Spirit, the more unworthy will they feel themselves to be. In the final Judgment they will not assume that Christ is inviting them, “Come, ye blessed of My Father.” They will look around expecting Him to call others, not themselves (see Matt. 25:31-40).

(5) Fully at-one with Him, a group will “overcome even as [He] overcame” (Rev. 3:21). His Bride will have “made herself ready” for “the marriage of the Lamb” (19:1-8). Finally—His triumph!

(6) Then at last the sacrifice of Christ will have been fully vindicated—He, not they, glorified.

(7) Daniel and Revelation clearly teach that the hour of this great Day of Atonement is NOW.

There is a prayer that Jesus prayed to His Father for us all: “Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

What does “sanctify” mean? We all can agree that there is a difference between the character and the

personality of someone who is “sanctified” and someone who is not. The difference will be evident between theologians also, even they, the best in the world, can be ornery (sorry!).

We want to live in Christian harmony: “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren [and sisters] to dwell together in unity!” Day after day it’s a joy to live. It was possible to live like that as far back in history as King David’s time (Psalm 133). It would be heaven on earth to live that way today!

We of all kindreds, tongues, and people can agree that a “sanctified” person will be what 1 Corinthians 13 describes:

He/she suffers long, is kind, doesn’t envy, doesn’t parade him/herself, isn’t puffed up, doesn’t behave rudely, isn’t provoked [easily, KJV], thinks no evil (that is, doesn’t impute evil motives), bears all things patiently, doesn’t rejoice when someone falls, believes and hopes all good things, and endures all bad things, never breaks down the endurance of being crucified daily (Luke 9:23). This is being “sanctified”!

All this, but not being a wimp or a doormat; Jesus confronted some people very directly even sharply, but always His was a Christlike spirit. Oh, He could stand firm for what He knew is right (read Matt. 23:23-39)! No Christlike, sanctified person can be a wimp.

Father, Father! Please listen to Jesus’ prayer in our behalf—“sanctify [us]”!

Did you know that eating food is a sacred exercise? We read that before Jesus fed the 5000, “He had given thanks,” and again before He fed the

4000 (Jn. 6:11; Mk. 8:6-9). When you pray, you are in the presence of God, otherwise the prayer is sacrilegious. So when we offer thanks for food, we are eating in the presence of God. That is not to diminish our enjoyment of the food, but to enhance it, realizing that it is the gift of God, “who satisfiest thy mouth with good things” (Ps. 103:5). Plenty reason to be thankful! Yes, and for the appetite, too, to enjoy it. Jesus taught this truth in His lesson in John 6: “My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven, and gives life unto the world. . . I am the bread of life. . . . Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (vss. 32-53). What lies back of this is something profound, yet simple. It is the truth that no vegetation, let alone food, would grow on planet earth unless this planet had been redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus. When He died, His blood ran from His wounds into the parched earth beneath, thus sanctifying the soil. Careless, thoughtless “thanks” given at meals leave us perilously near doing what Paul said,—eating and drinking to our own damnation (1 Cor. 11:29). According to this verse, the problem is a failure to “discern the Lord’s body.” According to one wise writer, this does not mean merely eating the Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper. “The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. . . . [This] makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board

becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal, a sacrament” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 660). The ancient Israelites didn’t “discern the Lord’s body” in the manna which the Lord gave them freely: “All ate the same spiritual food, . . . Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased.” “They could not enter in because of unbelief” (1 Cor. 10:3-5; Heb. 3:19). This impacts on four factors in our daily eating: (a) the kind of food we eat; (b) the quantity; and (c) whether we eat “with faith,” or (d) with “unbelief.” The latter can be the hidden source of many ills! Don’t eat what you know God is not pleased for you to take into your body. “Eat what is good,” says the Lord (Isa 55:2). Actually, you’ll enjoy it more!

Yes, “Oscar” will go dark; actors who spend their lives “acting,” seeking to talk and act as though they are somebody else, are immersing themselves in basic fiction; and for them, a life of truth is strange. Just to say something that is 100% true is contrary to their career.

We pity any young person who has known so much adulation. But so many unwittingly alienate themselves from truth, and find themselves spiritually bankrupt for want of truth. The Bible says that God the Father is the “LORD God of truth” (Psalm 31:5, the sacred name of the Eternal One). It’s close to the statement in 1 John 4:8 that “God IS love” [*agape*].

We pity the victims of the fiction industry (monumentally remunerative); but should we as people awaiting the second coming of Christ patronize the fiction? We don’t need to buy tickets

and go to the theaters to imbibe their spirit; we can watch them endlessly on our TV.

As we come closer to the end, church discipline will not tighten up to be extreme; but those who “follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth” (Rev. 14:4, 5) will voluntarily hunger more and more for the rock bottom reality of solid truth.

Jesus prays in His prayer to His Father just before His death, concerned for us, “Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

A prayer that the LORD God of truth is happy to hear and answer in the affirmative is one that the Lord may give us an appetite, a hunger, for truth, a yearning for it before we close our eyes in sleep at night; a yearning for it (more than even for breakfast) as soon as we awaken in the morning.

The Father awakened His Son Jesus in the mornings; He will awaken us too, making alarm clocks unnecessary, if we want Him to (see Isa. 50:4, 5).

Moses is spoken of as the servant of the Lord; when the Lord called him, he got up immediately in ready answer; not grudgingly, but eager to know what else the Lord might say to him. Come to the Lord, confess your backwardness spiritually, ask forgiveness, and rejoice in answered prayer! You will hunger more and more for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Have you ever lost your temper in a momentary trial of your patience? Well, poor Moses did. And it wasn't when he was a young man. The tragic mistake came in his old age. Now Moses may not have felt “old age” like people do today for we read

that at the time of his death at the age of 120 “his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (Deut. 34:7).

But it was at the end, not the beginning, of Israel's 40 years of wandering for their unbelief that Moses' patience gave way. Maybe his physical and mental stamina was a bit weakened by then. The “straw that broke the camel's back” in his case was the cynical cry of the rebellious people, blaming him for lack of water. “Listen, you rebels!” he cried out. “Must we fetch you water out of this rock?” (Num. 20:10). Then in his fit of temper, he struck the rock twice with his rod instead of once, thus destroying the accuracy of the ceremony which symbolized the death of Christ.

What Moses had done was to teach that Christ must die twice for the sins of the world, and he took to himself (Moses did) the glory for producing water out of a dry rock. God loved Moses; the man was very special. But his public sin of losing his temper made it impossible for Moses to lead Israel at last into their Promised Land. “Because ye believed me not, . . . ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (vss. 10-12).

It's not only old people, but young people too have this same test of impatience. It seems severe for the Lord to sentence Moses to die for such an apparently “innocent” sin of momentary impatience. But Moses must be a teacher for succeeding generations as well; no matter how high we have been in the favor of God, a sin of impatience is serious. But the root of their sin was not merely being angry (even God sometimes is angry, and

several times Moses experienced “righteous indignation”). The problem, said the Lord, was Moses’ unbelief. “Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, . . .” the Lord said to both Moses and Aaron.

It is impossible for you and me to lose our temper so long as we believe the word of the Lord! Whatever the trial that tempts you to impatience, a choice to believe the promises of God will every time deliver you from sin.

What does the Bible mean when it says that God gave us the Sabbath as a “sign that He sanctifies us”? (Ezek. 20:12). It’s something He does for us, and in us, Sabbath by Sabbath. Have you ever devoted one to fast and pray, to “wait” before the Lord—a day of personal communicating with Him? Here is a suggested prayer for such a Sabbath:

Father in heaven, thank You for inviting me to open my heart to You. And thank You for giving me this day as a special time to learn how you are “sanctifying” me.

Thank You for saving my soul, for giving Your Son to die my second death. Thank You that He did it, that He bore all my iniquities, and has set me free! Thank you for a love that is far greater than my little soul can appreciate—as yet. Please teach my heart to grow in understanding.

As I come to you, I choose to believe two great truths: (1) You ARE—You are real; and (2) You “reward those who come unto You by Christ” (Heb. 11:6). Yes, I believe; but please “help Thou mine unbelief” (Mk. 9:24). You have promised that anyone who prays that prayer “can never perish.”

I lay out my fears, my problems, before You. I choose to turn off the radio, the CD, the TV, and wait to “listen” to what the Holy Spirit may speak to me through the avenue of Your Word, the Bible. I choose not to “faint” if You rebuke me (Heb. 12:5-11).

And I thank you in advance that You will pay attention to my prayer, and grant me the peace of heart and the confidence that I long for so much. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Such a Sabbath will be memorable in your life. You will begin to learn to KNOW the Lord.