

HOLINESS OF LIFE

A survey of several lines of teaching

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ALL the views on this subject make an appeal to Scripture. It is important, therefore, to give credit for this to those who think differently from ourselves, and to remember also that there are great areas of the truth about this subject in which all are agreed.

We must begin by an attempt to define the subject before us. In the Scriptures, the word 'holiness' seems first to convey the idea of separatedness. This belongs to the very nature of God. In respect to men, things and places, these are considered to be holy in so far as they are separated to God's exclusive use and service. There is a further employment of the word, however, which carries with it a deeper and more inward meaning, namely, that of moral perfection. Such moral perfection, of course, resides in God; therefore moral things, such as men, if they are to be called 'holy' must themselves partake of that same moral perfection. The addition of the two words 'of life' to this subject puts the emphasis on the believer's character and behaviour. Under the title 'Holiness of Life', therefore, we are not considering our holy standing in Christ, to which the Scripture gives the name 'justification', and by which God accepts us as righteous in Christ, but rather are we concerned with those things which belong to Christian conduct, to which the Scripture gives the name 'sanctification'.

Christian thought on the subject of Holiness of Life has varied from extreme Antinomianism on the one hand to extreme Sinless Perfection on the other. In between are the views of the Reformers and Puritans, the views of John Wesley and Chas. Finney, and the views represented by the Keswick Convention for the Promotion of Practical Holiness. In surveying these we shall find some irreconcilable ideas, but these will be discovered to belong mostly to the fringe of the subject. We shall not give any attention to Antinomianism, because of its almost negative relation to the subject. I am hopeful that we may be able to see that there is little or no difference between the Puritan view and the Keswick view. I believe that, rightly understood and keeping our minds alert to the fact that differences of expression are very largely, if not altogether, differences of emphasis, we shall find that these two great historical presentations of the subject are based on the same theological foundation. John Wesley represents some deviation from this theological basis and consequently departs rather seriously in a few of his conclusions. There is a little uncertainty, however, as to what John Wesley's doctrine really was, and in some of his sermons he appears a little inconsistent. Many of those who teach various forms of 'Perfectionism' claim John Wesley as their spiritual ancestor. Finney, who exercised such a great influence in America in the last century, seems to have gone farther than John Wesley would have allowed, and certain 'Holiness' groups have carried the matter to greater lengths still.

Instead of plodding a somewhat monotonous way through the whole length of each of these lines of teaching it will be better perhaps to focus attention on a number of points of cardinal importance.

We will arrange the material in the following manner: I. The sin from

which the believer needs to be sanctified. II. The steps by which the believer comes to be sanctified. III. The extent to which the believer can be sanctified.

I. THE SIN FROM WHICH THE BELIEVER NEEDS TO BE SANCTIFIED

Sin is related to God's law, and so the question arises as to the extent of the law's demands. As early as the fourth century A.D. the erroneous view was expressed that 'ability limits obligation'. The law, it was said, does not require a man to do what he is not 'able' to do. This principle might perhaps have held good in relation to unfallen man, but, in the case of those who are now under the power of sin and are morally and spiritually defiled, the restriction of the obligation of the law to the sinful condition of man means a serious lowering of its standards.

Another account of sin describes it as 'the voluntary transgression of known law'. It is possible, of course, that this definition could be understood to go very deeply, since every moral characteristic in a man is 'voluntary' in the ultimate sense of being related to the will. In this phrase, however, the word 'voluntary' is most popularly understood to mean 'by deliberate choice'. We have in this definition a further limitation of the area of sin, however, in that it is confined to the voluntary transgression of 'known' law. It is held that no breach of an unknown law can involve guilt.

Deeper than these two views of sin is the one held by the Reformers and Puritans. Sin is by them defined as 'the transgression of, or want of conformity to, the Divine law'. Sin is regarded as having reference not only to acts but to states; it is found not only in what a man *does* but in what he *is*. Sin has resulted in spiritual pollution and corruption and has become a ruling principle in man.

A further discussion of these points would take us too far into the doctrine of sin, but enough has been indicated to show that, according as the underlying doctrine of sin differs, so also will be the differences in the doctrine of sanctification.

John Wesley held to the view that sin was to be limited to 'a voluntary transgression of known law'. In the *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* he refers to what he describes as 'sin, improperly so called', that is 'an involuntary transgression of a Divine law, known or unknown'. He says of this that 'it needs the atoning blood'. Such shortcomings, he acknowledges, 'are all deviations from the perfect law, and consequently need an atonement. Yet . . . they are not properly sins.' A little lower on the page he adds, 'I believe, a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions. Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please: I do not' (*op. cit.*, p. 57). John Wesley held that the perfect Christian, or entirely sanctified believer, is one who completely overcomes sin in this sense.

From Wesley's view of sin it is not a long step back to the earlier and Pelagian view of sin which limited it to human ability. Fletcher, Wesley's close friend and disciple, means this when he writes, 'We shall not be judged by that (the Adamic) law; but by a law adapted to our present state and circumstances.' Charles Finney, whose views may be called 'Christian Perfectionist', bases his scheme squarely on the theory that 'the Bible expressly limits obligation by ability' (*Systematic Theology*, p. 339). He rejects the view that God still 'requires sinners to be, in all respects, what they might have been had they never sinned' (*op. cit.*, p. 357). God's law is adjusted, he says, to the weaknesses and difficulties which men now find in their moral condition: His requirements come down to the level of human

ability. 'The very language of the law', writes Finney, 'is such as to level its claims to the capacity of the subject, however great or small that capacity may be. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Here then it is plain, that all the law demands, is the exercise of whatever strength we have, in the service of God. Now, as entire sanctification consists in perfect obedience to the law of God, and as the law requires nothing more than the right use of whatever strength we have, it is, of course, forever settled, that a state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life, on the ground of natural ability' (*op. cit.*, p. 407).

The Reformed or Puritan view is that any true doctrine of sin must take into account not only the voluntary transgressions but the inbred corruption and pollution of the soul. It is held that the fact that man can now no longer fulfil the demands of perfection which the divine law lays upon him does not release him from such demands. This inability is but an indication and an aggravation of the extremity of his sin. 'Any want of conformity' to the divine law is sin, and any doctrine of sanctification which ignores these deeply rooted defilements is but superficial. Even the tendency to sin, and not merely the desire to sin, is unholiness in God's sight and renders the fallen man guilty and polluted. In the light of this understanding of sin it is clear that sanctification may not be so easily described as 'entire' or 'perfect': it is a work of a deeper kind than these inadequate views of sin require.

It would be true to say that the teaching of Keswick stands firmly on the foundation of the Reformed or Puritan view of sin. Accordingly, its way of thinking of sanctification is of the same kind.

II. THE STEPS BY WHICH THE BELIEVER COMES TO BE SANCTIFIED

It is the unanimous conviction of all schools of thought that sanctification is found in Christ. He it is who is 'made unto us . . . sanctification'. The potency of His cross and resurrection are such that 'we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life' (Rom. vi. 4).

The question with which we have to deal, however, is, How is this potentiality of sanctification realized in the believer's life? Once more, all will agree that it is *by faith*. But what does sanctification by faith mean? Here we come upon answers which, though different in their emphases, are not irreconcilable. The views may perhaps be contrasted by the use of the terms instantaneous and progressive, though neither of these should be too firmly pressed.

(a) *Instantaneous sanctification by an act of faith*

'I believe', wrote Wesley, 'this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently in an instant' (*Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, 1767).

But what is this act of faith? It has been described as if it were a separate and different act from that initial step of faith by which the Lord was received as Saviour. The experience which culminates in, and in turn follows from, this special act of faith, is sometimes referred to as a 'second work of grace', or a 'second blessing'. Wesley says, 'If there be no such second change, if there be no instantaneous deliverance after justification . . . we must be content . . . to remain full of sin till death' (Sermon XLVII, 'The Repentance of Believers', *op. cit.*, p. 391). By a complete misunderstanding of the New Testament, this 'second blessing' is occasionally as-

sociated with what is wrongly called the 'baptism of the Holy Ghost'. It is held that sanctification is to be sought as a distinct and separate blessing from Christ. Certain groups look for special phenomena of spiritual infilling in this connection and hold that one is the sign of the other.

There does not seem to be any scriptural support for a doctrine of 'instantaneous holiness of life'. Says Bishop Ryle, 'The theory of a sudden, mysterious transition of a believer into a state of blessedness and entire consecration, at one mighty bound, I cannot receive' (*Holiness*, p. xv). It is no argument to say that surely God 'could' do this thing. God undoubtedly 'could' do a great many things which He has not done, but we must be guided not by hypothetical speculations about omnipotence, but by what He has indicated of His purpose in Scripture and experience.

(b) *Progressive sanctification by a diligent use of means*

No better statement can be found than that in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chap. xiii.

'I. They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are farther sanctified really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

'II. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part: whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

'III. In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome: and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.'

A. H. Strong puts this view for us in the following words: 'The Holy Spirit enables the Christian, through increasing faith, more fully and consciously to appropriate Christ and thus progressively to make conquest of the remaining sinfulness of his nature . . . The operation of God reveals itself in, and is accompanied by, intelligent and voluntary activity of the believer in the discovery and mortification of sinful desires' (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 871).

These statements affirm that 'holiness of life' comes about by an active process. This progressive sanctification is realized in the believer through the gracious activity of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is He who makes good in the believer's experience that which Christ's death and resurrection have made possible. His work is progressive in proportion as the believer is 'filled with the Spirit' and appropriates the work of Christ by a steadily increasing faith.

In this there is not so much a dealing with 'sins' as with the source of them, that is, with 'the flesh', 'the old nature', or 'indwelling sin'. By the effectual work of the Spirit the 'governing disposition of the soul is made holy' (Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 869). The principle involved is that referred to by our Lord, 'Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit' (Mt. xii. 33).

Sanctification is an effectual work *in* the believer not merely against his sins. It is more than a mere counteraction: it is a change in the believer. The very fact that there is 'growth' in sanctification means that the believer himself is being transformed, not merely that his sins are being counteracted. A theory of mere 'counteraction' could quickly take us back

to the inadequate view of sin as only the 'transgression of known law'. It is an altogether insufficient statement of the case.¹ Whether this inward work of the Holy Spirit is to be described in terms of 'gradual eradication' or not is perhaps a matter for careful definition, but the old nature is to be 'crucified' and the new is to 'live'. Something does recede from domination in the experience of the believer and something does take its place. The 'old man' is 'put off' and the 'new man' is 'put on'. 'The indwelling of the Holy Spirit thus secured by union with Christ becomes the source of a new spiritual life, which constantly increases in power until everything uncongenial with it is expelled, and the soul is perfectly transformed into the image of Christ' (Chas. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 229).

One of the biblical terms descriptive of the spiritual activity of the believer in sanctification is mortification, a spiritual process for which the use of the means of grace is required. Diligence, watchfulness, prayerfulness, thanksgiving, reading of the Scriptures, believing the promises, heeding the warnings — all these are the divinely appointed means of sanctification. All have their efficacy in the blood of Christ and in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

This activity of the believer in sanctification is not by any means to be called 'legalism' as Chas. Finney so unfairly misrepresents it. Legalism belongs to a totally different realm of ideas and indicates an appeal to good works as a ground of merit for the purposes of self-justification. The true believer is no legalist, however; he is all the time standing by faith in the new position which Christ's death and resurrection give to him. That faith, however, compels him to those 'works' which are fruit of it (Jas. ii. 18-24). The 'fruit of the Spirit' is not on any account to be confused with the 'works of the flesh'. The Spirit is the inspirer of *action* in the believer not by a synergistic method in which the Spirit contributes something and the believer contributes something. It is an action to be attributed to both the Spirit and the believer together. God the Holy Spirit works through the faith and action of the believer.

III. THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE BELIEVER CAN BE SANCTIFIED

By now the ground will have been sufficiently cleared for us to see the reason for some of the different lines of teaching on this point. For the purposes of comparison we may place the views into two main categories, (a) Absolute Perfectionism, and (b) Relative Perfectionism; though here again the terms must not be too rigorously pressed.

(a) *Absolute Perfectionism*

On the basis of an externalizing of the nature of sin and a lowering of the demands of the law, some teachers, such as Fletcher and Finney, have held that the believer can reach the state of entire sanctification, or absolute perfection, in the sense that no known sin is allowed in the life. By an appeal to passages of Scripture which speak of perfection it is held that absolute perfection is attainable in this life. Finney asserts that Paul claimed to have reached this perfection. Frequent appeal is made by upholders of this view to the words of I John iii. 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.' But this passage does not teach that the Christian does not sin, indeed if it were consistently applied in the way these teachers want us to understand it, it would prove too much: it would provide evidence against every sinning person that he was not a child of God. The word

¹ Steven Barabas seems to have misinterpreted the Keswick teaching on this point.

'cannot' does not imply actual inability (cf. Lk. xi. 7); it is nearer to 'will not'. A more exact translation would be 'he is not at liberty to sin, because he is born of God.'² In most of the discussion relating to 'perfection' there is either a failure to perceive the true significance of the word in its dispensational context, or, as in the case of Finney, there is a confusion between commands or ideals or prophecies of perfection with its attainment. In Paul's autobiographical reference in Philippians iii. 2-16 we are confronted with the paradox of the 'perfect' man who has still to 'attain'.

Wesley's doctrine of eradication ought strictly to be separated from his doctrine of 'perfection'. 'Perfection' is based on the interpretation of sin which we have already examined. 'Eradication' is an inference from this. If the believer becomes 'all love', that is, all *known* sin is overcome and put away, then, so it is inferred, the root of the matter has been dealt with and the heart has been fully cleansed. It is important, however, to observe that it has been the 'Perfectionism' which has implied the 'eradication', and not vice versa. The 'eradication' contended for is thus discovered to be not nearly so 'radical' as might appear. This ultimately was Wesley's own difficulty. He 'never succeeded in reconciling the doctrine of sinless perfection with his recognition of the fact that real growth in grace manifests itself normally in a deeper sense of sin' (J. Alexander Findlay).

The idea of absolute perfection is impossible to accept, but we must beware of going to an opposite extreme. 'If the doctrine of sinless perfection is a heresy,' says Dr. A. J. Gordon, 'the doctrine of contentment with sinful imperfection is a greater heresy' (*Ministry of the Spirit*, p. 116).

(b) *Relative Perfectionism*

First let it be remarked that this is not a contradiction in terms. 'Perfect' in Scripture means mature and pertaining to an end or purpose.³ Perfection of life is not static but dynamic. In the perfection of the Christian believer there is the paradox of all moral objectives: the more it is attained the more it recedes, and there are still higher places to climb.

The relative perfectionism of the Puritans and of the teaching of the Keswick Convention insists that there is no warrant in Scripture for the belief that the old nature is completely rooted out and destroyed this side of glorification. In the wisdom of God He permits the 'old nature' to survive even in the sanctified believer. It is one of those consequences of sin — like many others of a physical kind — which God has sovereignly permitted to remain. Romans v-viii and Galatians v quite clearly teach the persistence of the old nature, though they also proclaim the victory of the believer through the power of the indwelling Spirit. The grace of God is effectual to put to death the old nature in such a way that it no longer has power to dominate the life even though it remain in the believer as one of the legacies of sin — a legacy from which he will ultimately be delivered in glorification. As to the victorious extent of sanctification, Bishop Ryle affirms, 'Sanctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Ghost, when He calls him to be a true believer. He . . . *separates* him from his natural love of sin . . . puts a new principle in his heart, and makes him practically godly in

² Throughout the Epistle John is speaking of the ideal reality of the life of God and the life of sin as absolutely excluding each other. Birth-from-God and sin are utterly incompatible (Alford). Although Alford protests against what he calls the weakening down of the words here, his meaning of the passage amounts to much the same as that reached by those who do what he technically disallows.

³ It has also an even more important significance of a dispensational or technical kind. See Heb. x. 1. But this is not immediately relevant in this part of the discussion.

life . . . The subject of this work . . . is called in Scripture a "sanctified" man' (*Holiness*, pp. 16, 17).

Can the main lines of Christian teaching on Sanctification be brought together at all?

The differences in the doctrine of sin constitute a deep division, and any view of sin which defines it as only a 'voluntary transgression of known law', and nothing more, cannot be reconciled with that view of sin which sees it to be a settled state as well as a deliberate action. We have already seen, however, that Wesley's view is not altogether limited to the definition given above. He, too, saw that inward corruption is a reality, and in his doctrine of sanctification he was forced to recognize the power of indwelling sin. Wesley's perfection, as we have observed, had to be tempered by the recognition that inbred sin is more and more discovered by the believer as he progresses in holiness.

THE SECOND BLESSING—SO CALLED

One of the major difficulties centres in the understanding of what is meant by 'sanctification by faith'. The problems arise from the notion of instantaneous sanctification and the way this is associated with what is thought to be a 'second work of grace' or a 'second blessing'. But a careful examination of the experience which is described in this way will considerably help us both in the understanding of the experience itself and of its relation to the other factors in sanctification.

To those who came to Christ for salvation but who did not at the time realize the full implications of that action, the awakening to these things is of so outstanding a nature that it is described by them as a 'second blessing'. In one sense it is quite truly a second blessing, and a believer has many such further blessings. But careful discrimination has to be made at this point. The entering into the realization of what full salvation means may come by many stages, it may even be marked by two noticeable and exceptional moments, but the blessing is one and the same. 'Crisis' there certainly can be, though this crisis neither is a necessary feature of sanctification nor is it indicative of some additional grace which God gives over and above that which was bestowed in Christ when the soul first trusted in Him. The real crisis of sanctification is at regeneration and conversion.

In strict theological language it is not correct to speak of some subsequent acceptance of sanctification: sanctification was accepted when justification was accepted. 'Any man', says Dr. Alexander Hodge, 'who thinks he is a Christian, and that he has accepted Christ for justification, when he did not accept him at the same time for sanctification, is miserably deluded.' Thus when the believer is urged to accept Christ for sanctification as he did for justification an inaccuracy of expression is involved. The crisis which is brought before the believer in whom holiness of life has not yet been realized, such as when he is challenged by speakers at the Keswick Convention to entire consecration and an acceptance of Jesus 'as Lord', is no more than a summons to him to reckon himself dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God and to yield himself in active obedience to all the commands of the gospel. There often is at this time of new spiritual awareness a real deliverance from the bondage of some specific sin, and this is frequently authenticated by a sense of the fulness of the divine power and victory.

This awakening, and the acceptance by the believer of the newly-discovered implications of his position in Christ, may well be accompanied by strong emotional effects. These emotional effects, however, are not the sanctification: they are only its accompaniments. Much confusion has

arisen because the 'peace' and the 'joy' that come at such times have been mistaken for the blessing itself.

The 'instantaneous' quality and the appearance of a 'second blessing' are therefore to be rightly understood as marking the beginning of a new experience, but there is not the slightest reason to regard such an experience as in any way inconsistent or inharmonious with the progressive nature of sanctification.

In like manner the 'progressive' character of sanctification is not to be thought of as irreconcilable with some possible element of crisis. In the pastoral ministry it is perfectly consistent to confront believers with the necessity of accepting the demands of their redemption and to die to sin and to live unto righteousness.

Encouragement for our hope that it is possible to find some synthesis of these various schools of thought is to be found on looking more carefully into some of the writings with which we are concerned. John Wesley continued his note about instantaneous sanctification in the following significant words: 'But I believe there is a gradual work, both preceding and following that instant' (*Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, 1767). It is possible that Wesley's thinking had never very clearly distinguished between 'justification' and 'sanctification', for 'justification' fits in exactly with Wesley's remarks here and seems alone to make sense of them.⁴ It is perhaps too bold to think of Wesley having made such a strange confusion; and perhaps we ought not to suggest it. Leaving this possibility out of our minds for the moment, however, it is not altogether impossible to understand Wesley's 'crisis' in the psychological way we have already described.

In the *Plain Account* the question is put, 'When may a person judge himself to have attained this (Christian Perfection)?' Wesley replies, 'When, after having been fully convinced of inbred sin, . . . and after having experienced a gradual mortification of it, he experiences a total death to sin' (pp. 66, 67). Later on he asks, 'How are we to wait for this change?' To this he gives the answer, 'Not in careless indifference, or indolent inactivity; but in vigorous, universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness and painfulness, in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily; as well as in earnest prayer and fasting, and a close attendance on all the ordinances of God. And if any man dream of attaining it any other way, (Yea, of keeping it when it is attained, when he has received it even in the largest measure), he deceiveth his own soul. It is true, we receive it by simple faith; but God does not, will not, give that faith unless we seek it with all diligence, in the way which he hath enjoined' (*op. cit.*, pp. 68, 69).

Dr. Sugden provides us with the following annotation in his edition of Wesley's *Sermons* (Vol. II, p. 150): 'He (Wesley) believed that it was to be obtained by faith; and if by faith, it might be now. But he also believed that that act of faith must be preceded by a gradual work of grace, through which faith became perfected. Faith can only be strengthened by exercise; and only a strong faith can grasp the fullness of the promises.'

In spite, therefore, of Wesley's emphases which seem at first irreconcilable with other views, we have found that the faith that makes men holy does not lead to the inactivity of Quietism. The Reformers and the Puritans had all along insisted that a holy activity in the power of the Spirit is of the very essence of true sanctification. Here, too, the teaching of the Keswick Convention likewise agrees. It has been said that the teaching of the Convention does not coincide with the Puritans on this point. Nothing is farther from the truth however. Bishop Handley Moule, one of the Kes-

⁴ The fact that some advocates of the Wesleyan view speak inaccurately of 'imputed sanctification' lends support to this surmise.

wick teachers, affirms that the faith that sanctifies is no 'effortless passivity'. 'No will', he wrote, 'is so fully constituted for work as the regenerate and surrendered will. And in this matter of inner sanctification, which lies at the base of true and faithful outward service (2 Tim. ii. 21), the will has abundant work to do, in watching and prayer, in self-examination and confession of sin, in diligent study of the divine Word, in the spiritual use of sacred ordinances, in holy contemplation of Christ, in attention to every whisper through the conscience. But these works will all be done with a view to maintaining and deepening that sacred practical contact with Christ by faith which is the one ultimate secret of spiritual success. They will be helps and guides to faith, not substitutes for its divine simplicity. The temptation of the hour will be met less by direct efforts of the will than by indirect; through, and "in, Him who enableth"' (*Outlines of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 193, 194). It is an illegitimate inference from the truth of sanctification by faith that therefore the believer may 'sit back' and do nothing about it. Says Dr. J. Elder Cumming, "So far from encouraging us to think that the new life of the soul in us will go on of itself, and of necessity, the New Testament continually warns Christians to "give all diligence" to "make their calling and election sure", to "watch and pray", to "give earnest heed" to the things that they have heard, to "hold fast that which they have, that no man take their crown"; and to "fear lest haply a promise being left of entering into His rest, any one should seem to have come short of it". Let every Christian beware of the folly of sitting down in unconcern, and leaving his renewed soul to take care of itself! The "lusting of the flesh" will in that case soon assert itself to his downfall (*Through the Eternal Spirit*, pp. 198, 199).

A SYNTHESIS OF VIEWS

Is there any similar co-ordination or synthesis of views on the further aspect of the extent to which the believer can be sanctified?

The position may be stated as follows. If 'sinless perfection' be the overcoming of all known sin, then, as we have seen, there is not much difficulty in the conception, though the word should not be used. The Puritan and Keswick teaching on this subject certainly includes such a life of victory over sin. If, however, 'sinless perfection' is understood to mean the complete rooting out of the sinful nature so that it no longer exists in the believer, then this must be denied. But to deny the complete eradication of the sinful or 'old nature' does not commit us to the position of having to give up all idea of the destruction or mortification of the flesh. When we use the abstract noun sanctification we are not speaking of some point reached or some 'object' to which we may give that name. What is connoted by this word is the *sanctifying grace of God in Jesus through the Holy Spirit*. This sanctifying grace goes deep. As we have already observed, it is more than counteraction in the bare sense of that word, a mere checking of the acts of sin; it is a change of the sinner himself, a making of him holy. This grace is an effectual cure for sin. Thus, while there is no 'complete eradication' of the sinful nature, there is a progressive destruction of the power of inbred sin; and the believer, becoming more and more 'transformed', is ushered into the possibility of continuous victory.

In the discussion about 'perfection' and 'eradication' we have to remember that the 'old nature' or 'indwelling sin' is not a material thing of some sort which can be removed by a kind of surgical operation. The carnal mind is the sum of all those desires and thoughts of the sinner which are at enmity with God. In the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit these de-

sires and thoughts of the believer are transformed, by the renewing of the mind (Rom. xii. 1). Slightly changing the figure, this transformation of the believer's desires means that the sinful desires are displaced by a love for God. The beginning of this renewal is to be traced to the act of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, an act of God by which these new desires were first created in the believer. The continuance of this renewal is likewise the act of the Holy Spirit as He strengthens the new life and enables the believer to mortify the deeds of the body and to live unto righteousness.

What is designated by the term 'eradication' is really nothing more than this spiritual renewal. The term itself, however, is a false one and gives rise to many ambiguities: it should therefore be dropped from our theological vocabulary.

I will conclude with the expression of a conviction and the use of a quotation. The conviction is my own: the quotation is from Charles Wesley. If someone with a judicial mind could spend the time to produce a scholarly book on this topic it is my conviction that after certain extravagances had been cleared away it would be found that there was very much more agreement in principle and in practice than sometimes now appears. Young Christians need not be dismayed nor run away from this subject as so many have already run away from the study of eschatology. 'This is the will of God: even your sanctification'.

The quotation is:

*Now let me gain perfection's height;
Now let me into nothing fall!
Be less than nothing in my sight,
And feel that Christ is all in all.*

THE PLACE OF CULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN

THERE was a good attendance at the G.F. Reunion on 17th November when the Rev. Derek Kidner gave an address on 'The Place of Cultural Activity in the Life of a Christian'.¹

Mr. Kidner first considered the question whether cultural activity has any place in a Christian's life. The verdict of the Bible tends to be negative. The book of Ecclesiastes and the story of Cain and his descendants reveal the dangers of culture in a fallen world: there is no recommendation to pursue culture for its own sake, as the aim of the man of God is to complete a task and please a Master. On the other hand, the Bible commends the child's instinct for play and delight, and it is interesting to note that the same Hebrew word is used in Zechariah: viii. 5 and Proverbs viii. 31. This instinct should be guided so that as we grow up we can discern what is good (Hebrews v. 14).

In practice, of course, we are all bound to make 'cultural' decisions in one form of activity or another. We cannot contract out of them. If we do not decide in favour of what is good, we are favouring the evil. Our duty to God is to be the 'salt of the earth' in cultural, as in all other, activities.

Yet, though cultural activity should not, and cannot, be rejected, it is to be subordinated to God's will. The Christian's aim is not self-realization but self-denial. He is called to be not an aesthete, nor indeed an ascetic, but an athlete.

Mr. Kidner then turned to the relation between cultural activity and moral standards. Obviously the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' is un-Christian. Though every sphere of human activity has a degree of autonomy

¹ This talk is available as a tape recording. Apply to the G.F. Secretary.