

Extracts from the Writings of Men

I do not use these extracts to establish what I say, but to illustrate it. Indeed, one of the following extracts shows the consequence of not understanding the biblical principles I have set out.

I start with John Calvin. Calvin, despite his misunderstanding over the law, which he linked so tightly to progressive sanctification, nevertheless could get very close indeed to a biblical view of the believer's sanctification. Take him commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:2. He began with the believer's positional sanctification (not that he used the term):

The term 'sanctification' denotes separation. This takes place in us when we are regenerated by the Spirit to newness of life, that we may serve God and not the world. For while by nature we are unholy, the Spirit consecrates us to God. As, however, this is effected when we are engrafted into the body of Christ, apart from whom there is nothing but pollution, and as it is also by Christ, and not from any other source that the Spirit is conferred, it is with good reason that he says that we are sanctified in Christ, inasmuch as it is by him that we cleave to God, and in him become new creatures.

Calvin then went on to speak of the believer's progressive sanctification (once again, not using the term itself):

What immediately follows – 'called to be saints' – I understand to mean: 'As you have been called unto holiness'. It may, however, be taken in two senses. Either we may understand Paul to say that the ground of sanctification is the call of God, inasmuch as God has chosen them; meaning, that this depends on his grace, not on the excellence of men; or we may understand him to mean that it accords with our profession that we be holy, this being the design of the doctrine of the gospel. The former interpretation appears to suit better with the context.¹ But it is of no great consequence

¹ I disagree. It leads to a tautology. If Calvin was right, Paul would be saying that the Corinthians were positionally sanctified, effectively

Extracts from the Writings of Men

in which way you understand it, as there is an entire agreement between the two following positions: that our holiness flows from the fountain of divine election, and that it is the end of our calling. We must, therefore, carefully maintain that it is not through our own efforts that we are holy, but by the call of God, because he alone sanctifies those who were by nature unclean... As, however, we are called by the gospel to harmlessness of life (Phil. 2:15) it is necessary that this be accomplished in us in reality, in order that our calling may be effectual.²

Gareth Lee Cockerill on Hebrews 10:14:

Christ's own are a 'perfected'... people. This 'perfecting'... will never need renewing or supplementation... Nothing more will need to be done for God's people to be delivered from sin and brought into God's presence... The description of God's people as 'those who are being made holy' emphasises this need for continual participation in the benefits available to Christ's 'perfected'... people. The sanctifying work of Christ is not only definitive (Heb. 10:10), but continuous (Heb. 2:10). Thus the present tense of 'being made holy' is... continuous... the continuous reception of grace from Christ, 'the one who makes holy' (Heb. 2:11). The [inspired writer] does not want his hearers to forget that their continued holiness, expressed in faithful obedience, is totally dependent on the benefits regularly and perpetually received from their high priest seated at God's right hand.³

called to be positionally sanctified. In other words, the second clause adds virtually nothing to the first. I prefer Calvin's second option: The Corinthians, positionally sanctified, were called to be progressively sanctified, called to live out their positional sanctification. And this is a most fitting opening to the letter, with its very strong call throughout for progressive sanctification.

² Calvin remains something of an enigma. Note the complete absence of any mention of the law here. Clearly, although he saw the believer's position in Christ yet, by keeping to medieval teaching on the law, and strengthening it, he was responsible for holding many believers in unnecessary bondage.

³ Gareth Lee Cockerill: *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, William B.Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012, pp452-453.

Extracts from the Writings of Men

This is a highly perceptive comment. The believer's progressive sanctification not only arises out of his positional sanctification, but it is nurtured by the Spirit's continual application of Christ and the benefits of his work – both on the cross and in his present intercession (Heb. 7:25; 9:24). Indeed, this should be extended to the question of assurance: the Spirit's witness to Christ's intercession is a vital part of the believer's assurance (Rom. 8:33-34).

Spurgeon on Hebrews 10:14:

The children of God are here intended, under the term 'sanctified'; they are described as sanctified persons. What does this mean? We usually say there are two meanings to the term 'sanctified'. One is 'set apart'. God has set apart his people from before the foundation of the world, to be his chosen and peculiar inheritance. We are sanctified by God the Father. There is a second signification, which implies not the decree of the Father, but the work of the Holy Spirit. We are sanctified in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit when he subdues our corruptions, imparts to us graces, and leads us onward in the divine walk and life of faith. But the word here, I think, includes both of these senses...

In what sense are we to understand that Christ has perfected those that are sanctified? Why, just this... The first meaning... is this. The child of God is a priest, and as a priest he is sanctified to enter within the veil... Here is one sense of the text... We who are the priests of God have a right as priests to go to God's mercy-seat that is within the veil... We *are* perfect, for the blood of Christ has been sprinkled on us, and, therefore, our standing before God is the standing of perfection. Our standing, in our own conscience, is imperfection, just as the character of the [old-covenant] priest might be imperfect. But that has nothing to do with it. Our standing in the sight of God is a standing of perfection... In having access to God, perfection is absolutely necessary... How, then, am I to have fellowship with God, and access to his throne? Why, simply thus: 'The blood of Christ has perfected for ever them that are sanctified', and consequently we have access with boldness to the throne of the heavenly grace, and may come boldly in all our time of need. And what is better still, we are always perfect, always fit to come to the throne, whatever our doubts, whatever our sins... We come

Extracts from the Writings of Men

before God in our station, not in our character, and therefore, we may come as perfect men at all times, knowing that God sees no sin in [us]... for in this sense Christ has perfected [us] for ever... Oh! is not this a delightful thought, that when I come before the throne of God, I feel myself a sinner, but God does not look upon me as one? When I approach him to offer my thanksgivings, I feel that I am unworthy in myself; but I am not unworthy in that official standing in which he has placed me. As a sanctified and perfected thing in Christ, I have the blood upon me; God regards me in my sacrifice, in my worship, yes, and in myself, too, as being perfect... Oh how joyful this is! And there is no need a second time to repeat this perfecting. It is an everlasting perfection; it allows a constant access to the throne of the heavenly grace.⁴

Spot on!

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

The New Testament talks about justification, sanctification and glorification; those are the divisions of the term salvation. The New Testament talks about people being justified before God, which means that God regards these people in Christ as guiltless; he forgives them in Christ; they are justified by faith. However, sanctification is not that, but something different. It is that process which is going on within us, and which is making us perfect. Sanctification is continuous, whereas justification is God once for all regarding us as sinless; it is God clothing us with the righteousness of Christ and thereby regarding us as free from guilt. Sanctification is Christ being formed in us, our nature being purged and purified and cleansed and perfected. And then the ultimate state is that of glorification, the state in which you and I, and all Christian people, will be when, beyond this life and death and the grave, we shall stand face to face with God with a perfect resurrected body, entirely free from sin and evil and pollution. There we shall be glorified.⁵

Again:

⁴ Spurgeon sermon number 232.

⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *The Life of Joy: An Exposition of Philippians 1 and 2*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1989, pp165–170.

Extracts from the Writings of Men

The main characteristic of people who are sanctified is that God is in the centre of their lives. That is the first thing we may say about them. Before we get them to say what they do or do not do with regard to a particular action, we must be clear about the central, primary, most vital thing... Sanctification is that which separates us from sin unto God... The essence of sanctification is that I love God in whom I believe and who has been revealed to me, with the whole of my being... Sanctification is a matter of being rightly related to God, and becoming entirely devoted to him... not only separated from the world but separated unto God and sharing his life.⁶

Again:

Justification is only one step, an initial step, in a process. And the process includes not only justification but regeneration and sanctification and ultimate glorification. Justification and forgiveness of sins are not ends in and of themselves; they are only steps on a way that leads to final perfection... Some Christians persist in isolating these things, but they are not isolated in the Scriptures... We cannot divorce justification and forgiveness from other parts of truth... God does not justify a man and leave him there. Not at all! If God justifies a man, God has brought that man into the process... And unless we are giving evidence of being in the process and of being perfected by it, there is but one conclusion to draw – we have never been in the kingdom at all, we must go back to the very beginning, we must repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷

Believers can sing about their present positional and their coming absolute sanctification. They should do so. Don Fortner, for instance, did so, and very sweetly at that:

*Sing, all saints, beloved and chosen,
You for whom the Saviour died.
Claim your gifts and praise the giver:
'You are washed and sanctified'.*

⁶ Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Sanctified Through the Truth*, Crossway, Westchester, 1989, pp77-91.

⁷ D.M.Lloyd-Jones: *Darkness and Light: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:17-5:17*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1982, pp350-351,353.

Extracts from the Writings of Men

*Sanctified by God your Father,
And by Jesus Christ his Son,
And by God, the Holy Spirit,
By the holy, Three-in-One!*

*One with Christ, beloved, accepted,
Righteous made by God's decree,
Sanctified when God accepted
Us in Christ our Surety!
Sanctified when we with Jesus
Lived, and died, and rose again!
Sanctified by God the Spirit
When by grace we're born again!*

*Holiness is ours in Jesus,
Not by works that we have done,
But by God's free love and mercy –
Yes, by sov'reign grace alone!
By his word, and truth, and promise,
By his righteousness and blood,
Holiness in Christ our Saviour
Makes us fit to see our God!*

*He will sanctify us wholly
In the resurrection day.
Blameless at our Saviour's coming,
Body, spirit, soul shall be!
He perfected once forever,
By his blood, the sanctified!
Spotless, blameless, guiltless, perfect,
Is the Saviour's ransomed bride!⁸*

And W.J.Styles:

*'Twas love divine that sanctified
In Christ that church for which he died;
In him her holiness was given,
Her meetness for the joys of heaven.*

⁸ Downloaded from donfortner.com. Incidentally, Fortner does not hold to progressive sanctification.

Extracts from the Writings of Men

*Jesus beheld her lost estate,
And for her bled without the gate;
There he her suffering Surety stood,
And sanctified her with his blood.*

*And Christ becomes our holiness,
Ruling our hearts by sovereign grace,
And we are sanctified by faith
In what our Lord and Saviour saith.⁹*

*By unction of the Holy One,
We're sanctified to God alone;
The Holy Spirit dwells within,
And crucifies the love of sin.*

*Thrice-holy Lord, to thee we raise
Our grateful songs of lofty praise;
Through cleansing blood and grace divine,
May we in Christ's own likeness shine.¹⁰*

Those who adopt the Reformed system – namely, looking to the law for assurance and progressive sanctification – are almost certain to find that such a system tends (to put it no stronger) to produce a life of bondage to rules and a miserable lack of assurance. I support my claim from the life of William Wilberforce. He certainly is an interesting case in point, a proper curate's egg in this matter.¹¹ On the one hand, he could speak in new-covenant terms: 'True Christians consider themselves not as satisfying some rigorous creditor, but as discharging a debt of gratitude'. Excellent! Yet, as Murray Andrew Pura pointed out, Wilberforce recorded that 'gratitude *and shame* were "the most powerful of all motives... to exert

⁹ Better, we are sanctified by trust in what Christ is and has done.

¹⁰ *Gospel Hymns* number 803. Note the hints of progressive sanctification.

¹¹ In a cartoon which appeared in *Punch*, 9th Nov.1895, a bishop addresses his guest, a curate, at the breakfast table: 'I'm afraid you've got a bad egg, Mr Jones'. Anxious not to offend his august host and employer, the curate obsequiously replies: 'Oh, no, my Lord, I assure you that parts of it are excellent!'

myself with augmented earnestness”¹². In other words: ‘My failure up to now makes me try all the harder. It is failure which really drives me, not gratitude’. So much so, Wilberforce was eaten up by rules. His journal gives the game away: it shows a man plagued with a downright legalistic spirit.¹³ Pura tried to exonerate him in this, at least to this extent: ‘Yet, with all his rules, he remembered to trust his spiritual development more to Christ and less to his own resolve’. I wonder! As Pura himself said, quoting his subject’s actual words:

Wilberforce could write [to] a friend about the centrality of joy in the Christian’s life, a joy which, if barely hinted at in the sin-exposing atmosphere of [his] journal-confessional, marked all his days as a believer: ‘My grand objection to the religious system still held by many... is that it tends to render Christianity so much a system of prohibitions rather than privileges and hopes, and thus the injunction to rejoice so strongly enforced in the New Testament is practically neglected, and religion is made to wear a forbidding and gloomy air, and not one of peace and hope and joy’.¹⁴

As I say, a mixed bag. On the one hand, a clear understanding of the new covenant: the believer is meant to have a life of joy, joy in his assurance and obedience. On the other hand, as Wilberforce confessed, most believers live a life bereft of such experience, existing in an atmosphere of rules, failure and gloom. Sadly, his journal showed that he himself was just such a one. Moreover, he put his finger on one particular cause of anxiety, one which proves a nagging concern to those who advocate the law, and to their hearers who languish under such teaching, and in so doing he showed where his (and others’) trouble lay. He gave an example of what he was talking about: ‘Often good people have been led by the terms of the fourth commandment to lay more stress on the strictness of the

¹² Murray Andrew Pura: *Vital Christianity: The Life and Spirituality of William Wilberforce*, Clements Publishing, Toronto, 2003, p64, emphasis mine.

¹³ Pura *passim*.

¹⁴ Pura p56.

Sunday than on its spirituality'.¹⁵ Clearly, Wilberforce, for his assurance and sanctification, was going to the law *via* the Puritans, and not going to Christ in the new covenant. I say this because the leading commandment of the ten for law men is the fourth, the one they almost invariably use to 'prove' whether new-covenant theologians are antinomians. This is nonsense!¹⁶

Reformed sabbatarianism, the insistence that believers should keep Sunday as 'the Christian sabbath', a doctrine and a practice which has come down through the Puritans, has held many believers in bondage during these past centuries, turning them into knowing, helpless hypocrites – as it does to this very day. For all their talk of delighting in the sabbath, when they come to produce their casuistical works sabbatarians tell a very different story. Most would-be sabbatarians seem to live a life of constant torment as they grapple with a myriad of ever-changing problems of what they can and cannot do each week.¹⁷ And this is only the tip of the legal iceberg.

And where did it end up in Wilberforce's experience? Indeed, where did *Wilberforce* end up? Let Pura tell us:

Wilberforce... was acutely aware that his own sin and depravity were constantly drawing him up short of the mark... He read a great deal of the Puritans, men like John Owen, Richard Baxter, John Flavel, John Howe... Jonathan Edwards [and others – such as Thomas Hooker, John Bunyan, Philip Doddridge] and they passed these beliefs on to him. Along with these doctrines, they passed on a lack of assurance concerning eventual salvation. Wilberforce believed he was saved by the grace of God, yet, in practical terms, like John Bunyan's characters in *Pilgrim's Progress*... there could be no lasting certainty of this until he had 'crossed the Jordan' and was actually dwelling in God's presence in heaven. The Calvinistic Puritans looked to prove their election to salvation to themselves by their spiritual fruit...¹⁸ This battle for assurance lasted right up to Wilberforce's death... The

¹⁵ Pura p60.

¹⁶ See my *Sabbath Questions*.

¹⁷ See my *Sabbath Notes*.

¹⁸ This was their vital mistake in this assurance – see my *Assurance*.

Extracts from the Writings of Men

evangelicals [and the Puritans] had [stated]... that faith... could and did exist alongside doubts and fears about one's salvation. The actual proof of one's faith was seen to be in the slow change of a Christian's character. The evangelical teaching has also come about in reaction to... self-confidence about one's salvation which could lead to antinomianism.¹⁹ Donald Lewis states: '[The evangelicals'] caution about religious experiences and about religious certitude led them to emphasise the importance of self-doubt and self-questioning'. Thus, Wilberforce's drawn-out and agonised struggles over the state of his soul.²⁰

Finally, let me turn from that sad catalogue to sweeten the taste with another morsel from Spurgeon, this time preaching on Galatians 3:22:

The way of salvation by grace... is the best promoter of holiness in all the world... Salvation by grace promotes good works far better than the teaching of salvation by works ever did, for those who hope to be saved by their works have generally very scanty works to be saved by, and those who put works aside altogether as a ground of hope, and look to grace alone, are the very people who are most zealous to perform good works... Law!²¹ There is no power for holiness in it! Law drives our spirits to rebellion, but love has magic in it. Has God forgiven me? Did Christ die for me? Am I God's child? Has he forgiven me, not because of anything I did, but just because he would do it, out of love to my poor guilty soul? O God, I love you. What would you have me to do? There speaks a man who will perform good works, I warrant you, sir: and while he will tread under foot with the deepest detestation any idea that he can merit anything of God, he is the man who will lay himself out, as long as he lives, for the honour of that dear Lord and Master by whose precious blood he has been redeemed. The law does not furnish me with a constraining principle, but the gospel does. The law treats me like a mere hireling, and a hireling can never serve with the zeal which is born of love... Oh yes, the doctrine of salvation

¹⁹ The old bogey man. There were real antinomians, it is true, but...

²⁰ Pura pp69-70.

²¹ As the context makes clear, Spurgeon is clearly speaking about the law of Moses.

Extracts from the Writings of Men

by grace, by teaching men to love, transforms them, and makes new creatures of them... People... whereas they resolved to be good, and to give up vice, and to practice virtue... never did it till they believed in Jesus; and when they believed in him, love to him made service easy, and sin hateful, and they became new creatures in Christ Jesus, by the Spirit's power. There is the pith of it all. If you want to get rid of the guilt of sin, you must believe in Jesus; but equally, if you would be rid of your lusts, you must believe in him; for from his side there flows not merely blood but water – blood to take away your criminality, and water to take away tendencies to sin – so that henceforth you shall not serve sin, or live any longer therein.²²

²² Spurgeon's sermon number 1145.