

Salvation—Sanctification (12th)

(Today we continue studying the *experimental* aspect of sanctification in the life of the believer as he lives on earth. Today's podcast involves additional comments on progressive sanctification in preparation for the Christian's growth in grace.)

I agree with Arthur Pink when he wrote, "Nor does the idea of a progressive sanctification, by which the Christian 'more and more dies unto sin,' agree with the recorded experience of the most mature saints." However, the Scriptures teach that the child of grace is to "grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," II Peter 3:18. There are many such like passages that encourage us to develop and mature in the salvation of God. Equally, there are many verses that clearly tell us that the believer will increase in his service in the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, allow me to remind you of the doctrine of progressive sanctification that teaches that the sinner "dies more and more unto sin" as he lives out his life on earth. We quoted Arthur Pink in an earlier podcast whereby he denounced this and quoted John Newton as rejecting the idea of becoming less sinful in his flesh as he grew older. The Strict and Particular Baptist, John Kershaw (1792-1870), in his autobiography, spoke of a godly minister of his denomination, John Hurst, of Bacup, commenting on this view of progressive sanctification. It is as follows:

[A]s to the doctrine of progressive sanctification. He said the old man of sin, as some affirm, does not get better and better, but will remain the old man of sin as long as we are in the body. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these two are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." "What shall ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies," the flesh and the Spirit. The old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, will be the Christian's plague while in this vile body. The new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, will fight against the old man, until grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. *The Autobiography of an Eminent Lancashire Preacher*, p. 37.

Commenting on II Peter 3:18, in his devotional entitled *Through Baca's Vale*, J. C. Philpot wrote the following for "January 2":

Growth is the sure mark of life. We see this in vegetation, in the animal creation, in the growth of our own bodies, and of every other thing in which there is life. Where, then, there is the life of God in the soul, there will be a growth in that life. Paul says to the Thessalonian Church—"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fit, because your faith grows exceedingly" (2 Thess. 1:3); and Peter says, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." There is "an increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10), and "a coming in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). It was for this increasing knowledge of the Son of God that Paul stretched every desire of his soul when he followed after, if that he might apprehend that for which also he was apprehended of Christ Jesus; and thus reaching forth unto those things which were before, he pressed toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12-14). This is not what is called 'progressive sanctification', as if the flesh got holier and holier, for that is still ever "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;" but this is a growth of that "new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." After this growth in grace, this closer conformity to

the image of Christ, should we ever be striving with all the powers of our soul; not satisfied with a low and lean state before God, but with unceasing prayer and supplication, begging of the Lord that we might be “filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that we might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9, 10). Pp. 3-4.

Again in his devotional for “March 19,” commenting on John 3:6, he gave the following:

There is no promise made that we shall be set free in this life from the indwelling and the inworking of sin. Many think that they are to become progressively holier and holier, that sin after sin is to be removed gradually out of the heart, until at last they are almost made perfect in the flesh. But this is an idle dream, and one which, sooner or later in the case of God’s people, will be rudely and roughly broken to pieces. Nature will ever remain the same; and we shall ever find that the flesh will lust against the spirit. Our Adamic nature is corrupt to the very core. It cannot be mended, it cannot be sanctified, it is at the last what it was at the first, inherently evil, and as such will never cease to be corrupt until we put off mortality, and with it the body of sin and death. All we can hope for, long after, expect and pray for, is, that this evil nature may be subdued, kept down, mortified, crucified, and held in subjection under the power of grace; but as to any such change passing upon it or taking place in it as to make it holy, it is but a pharisaic delusion, which, promising a holiness in the flesh, leaves us still under the power of sin, while it opposes with deadly enmity that true sanctification of the new man of grace, which is wrought by a divine power, and is utterly distinct from any fancied holiness in the flesh, or any vain dream of its progressive sanctification. P. 107.

Though I have supplied two devotions by Philpot concerning the erroneous scheme of progressive sanctification, I believe the following also is helpful to give a fuller explanation of what is involved in the struggles and battles of a child of grace in his life of sanctification. This, too, is from his *Through Baca’s Vale*, for “November 25,” regarding Job 28:7:

Growth in grace is not progressive sanctification and fleshly holiness on the one hand, nor a false and delusive establishment on the other. The narrow path lies between these two extremes. On the one side is Pharisaic holiness, on the other Antinomian security; and between these two sharp rocks lies the “path which no fowl knows, and which the vulture’s eye has not seen.” From dashing on either of these rocks a living man is kept only by the mysterious dealings of God with his spirit, and the internal exercises through which he continually passes. A constant acquaintance with his own vileness preserves him from a self-righteous holiness in the flesh; a daily cross and a rankling thorn keep him from careless presumption. His path is indeed a mysterious one, full of harmonious contradictions and heavenly paradoxes. He is never easy when at ease, nor without a burden when he has none. He is never satisfied without doing something, and yet is never satisfied with anything that he does. He is never so strong as when he sits still, never so fruitful as when he does nothing, and never so active as when he makes the least haste. All outstrip him in the race, yet he alone gains the goal, and wins the prize. All are sure of heaven but himself, yet he enters into the kingdom, while they are thrust out. He wins pardon through guilt, hope through despair, deliverance through temptation, comfort through affliction, and a robe of righteousness through filthy rags. Though a worm and no man, he overcomes Omnipotence itself through violence; and though less than vanity and nothing, he takes heaven itself by force. Thus amid the strange contradictions which meet in a believing heart, he is never so prayerful as when he says nothing; never so wise as when he is the greatest fool; never so much alone as when most in

company; and never so much under the power of an inward religion as when most separated from an outward one. Pp. 439-440.

With these caveats set before us, the Lord willing, we plan on discussing somewhat that positive element of progressive sanctification that is referring to the growth of the new man in his labors to perfect “holiness in the fear of God,” II Corinthians 7:1. Nevertheless, our time is up for today. Farewell.