

## 12

## Contrasting Views on Sanctification

Charles C. Ryrie

Whereas definitions of sanctification tend to be similar, descriptions of the process of sanctification are quite dissimilar. Most would probably agree that the concept of sanctification "seems to be to set apart an object from ordinary usage for a special (religious) purpose of function, and in particular to set apart for God."<sup>1</sup> Also, most agree that sanctification consists of three aspects: positional, experiential, and ultimate.

Positional sanctification is that position every believer enjoys by virtue of being set apart in the family of God by faith in Christ. It is an actual, not theoretical, position and is not dependent on the state of one's spiritual growth. That is why Paul could reprimand the carnal Corinthian believers and yet address them as "those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1 Cor. 1:2; see also 6:11).

Experiential sanctification concerns the progressive development of holiness in the experience of the Christian. Every

CHARLES C. RYRIE (A.B., Haverford College; Th.M., Th.D., Dallas Theological Seminary; Ph.D., Edinburgh University) is professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas.

biblical exhortation to godly living underscores this aspect of sanctification (1 Pet. 1:16).

Ultimate sanctification awaits the believer's glorification in his resurrection body and the removal of the sin nature (1 John 3:1-3; Jude 24). Every believer is completely sanctified as far as position is concerned and will be completely sanctified ultimately. But each believer's progress in holiness is different at any given time.

Much disagreement, however, surfaces particularly in the theological discussion of the manner and relationships of progressive sanctification. Some of the areas of debate are: (1) the relationship between justification and sanctification, (2) the relationship between God's sovereignty and human activity in the work of sanctification, (3) the question of one or two natures in the believer, and (4) the means of victory in the Christian life. Although some of those areas overlap, the various answers given to those questions distinguish different schools of thought concerning progressive sanctification.

For the purpose of this investigation attention needs to be focused on the differences between three distinguishable viewpoints that have been advanced to answer those four questions. Although labels are never totally satisfactory, they do serve a useful purpose. Those viewpoints can be labeled the Reformed, the Chaferian, and the Victorious Life viewpoints.

In general, the Reformed view of sanctification may be summarized as teaching the gradual extirpation or extermination of depravity. Warfield said that "grace is progressively extirpating it [the old nature] now."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Warfield learned the word *extirpate* from his predecessor, A. A. Hodge, who used it to describe his concept of sanctification.

The orthodox doctrine is that the Holy Ghost, by his constant influences upon the whole soul in all its faculties, through the instrumentality of the truth, nourishes, exercises, and develops those holy principles and dispositions which he implanted in the new birth, until by a constant progress all sinful dispositions being mortified and extirpated, and all holy dispositions being fully matured, the subject of this grace is brought immediately upon death to the measure of the stature of perfect manhood in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

The Reformed view carefully distinguishes itself from the

idea of perfectionism or eradication of the sin nature in this life. Although it teaches that experiential sanctification is a gradual eradication of the old nature, that process is never completed in this life. The believer never arrives at a state of perfection until death.

Sanctification is usually a lengthy process and never reaches perfection in this life. At the same time there may be cases in which it is completed in a very short time or even in a moment, as for instance, in cases in which regeneration and conversion are immediately followed by temporal death. . . . The sanctification of the believer must, it would seem, be completed either at the very moment of death, or immediately after death, as far as the soul is concerned, and at the resurrection in so far as it pertains to the body.<sup>4</sup>

The Chaferian view<sup>5</sup> of progressive sanctification may be summarized by the idea of counteraction of the new nature of the believer against the old, or of the Spirit against the flesh. It involves yieldedness to the will of God, confession of sins, and growing in grace.<sup>6</sup> This view agrees with the Reformed position in denying the eradication of the sin nature and in rejecting the idea that a believer can achieve perfection in this life. But there is more emphasis on human responsibility and activity in the process of sanctification than in the Reformed view. Also the existence and struggle between two natures and the possibility of carnality in the believer are affirmed in the Chaferian view but denied in the Reformed.

In the Chaferian view, the central doctrine concerns the filling of the Holy Spirit. A ministry that is both commanded and repeated, the filling of the Spirit is conditioned on (1) not quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), (2) not grieving the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), and (3) walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). Walvoord stresses the importance of this ministry.

These three Scriptures provide a divinely-inspired outline of the conditions for the filling of the Holy Spirit. While there are many aspects to the spiritual life and experience, all will be found to be related to these simple commands. The importance of these Scriptures as the key to unlocking the truth of the conditions for the filling of the Holy Spirit cannot be overemphasized.<sup>7</sup>

Walvoord further explains that not quenching the Spirit is

equivalent to yieldedness of life, that not grieving the Spirit involves confession of sin, and that walking in the Spirit is the positive aspect of depending on the Spirit day by day. Progressive sanctification "is the main objective of the work of the Spirit and is accomplished by walking by the Spirit."<sup>8</sup> "Walking by the Spirit presumes activity; it is not a defensive stand against the enemy, but a positive approach to the problems of the spiritual life, endeavoring to be active in the will of God as well as resting in His sufficiency."<sup>9</sup>

The Victorious Life view (often associated with the Keswick movement) contains distinctives that mark it off from the other viewpoints. In England the Keswick movement originated not in a period of spiritual vacuum but in a time of fervent spiritual activity. It sought to promote a higher standard of personal holiness among God's people through conferences and writings. That "higher life" involved a life of entire surrender to the Lord and perfect trust in Him. The believer was urged to abandon himself to Christ in a crisis experience and to receive sanctification by faith as a gift of God's love, just as he received salvation by faith.

The five-part outline used in Keswick conventions summarizes well the Victorious Life viewpoint.

(1) Sin in man is seen as exceedingly sinful. It is a ruling principle, a spiritual disease, a moral defilement, an acquired habit, and an indwelling tendency. As directed to Christians, this teaching seeks to move believers from a carnal state that is not normal or God-honoring.

(2) God's provision for sin is not eradication, nor counteraction of the sin nature, but simply Christian growth. The provision of sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit, which is ultimately based on the work of Christ at Calvary. The believer receives sanctification by faith through a crisis act of entire consecration to God.

(3) The consecration of the Christian is both a crisis and a process by which all the aspects of the offerer are put in the hands of God. Negatively it is dying to self; positively it is absolute surrender.

(4) The fullness of the Spirit is an experience that is not shared by all believers (though all have the Spirit, and there is

no "second blessing"). Receiving that fullness involves a definite act of faith that is separable from regeneration (though not necessarily separated from it in time). All believers may experience that fullness through faith and absolute surrender.

(5) Christian service is the outworking of the fullness of the Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

With that general background in mind, it is time to turn to the specific areas of discussion and debate among the three viewpoints.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Strictly speaking, there is little difference between the Reformed and Chaferian views of the relationship between justification and sanctification, though there are some distinctions in emphasis. In the Reformed position justification and sanctification occur simultaneously. A. A. Hodge explained this relationship. "The instant God regenerates a sinner he acts faith in Christ. The instant he acts faith in Christ he is justified, and sanctification, which is the work of carrying on and perfecting that which is begun in regeneration, is accomplished under the conditions of those new relations into which he is introduced by justification."<sup>11</sup>

More clearly, Berkhof wrote:

Justification precedes and is basic to sanctification in the covenant of grace. . . . Justification is the judicial basis for sanctification. God has the right to demand of us holiness of life, but because we cannot work out this holiness for ourselves, He freely works it within us through the Holy Spirit on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to us in justification. The very fact that it is based on justification . . . excludes the idea that we can ever merit anything in sanctification.<sup>12</sup>

The Chaferian view basically agrees with those statements.

The Reformed and Chaferian views also distinguish between positional and progressive sanctification. Using the term *definitive sanctification* as an equivalent for positional sanctification, Murray states clearly, "The virtue accruing from the death and resurrection of Christ affects no phase of salvation more

directly than that of insuring definitive sanctification. . . . It might appear that the emphasis placed upon definitive sanctification leaves no place for what is progressive. Any such inference would contradict an equally important aspect of biblical teaching."<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Chafer wrote concerning positional sanctification that it "is a sanctification which comes to the believer by the operation of God through offering of the body and shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>14</sup> "Experimental sanctification," he continued, "instead may depend (1) on some degree of yield-ness to God, (2) on some degree of separation from sin, or (3) on some degree of Christian growth to which the believer has already attained."<sup>15</sup>

Thus both the Reformed and Chaferian views see justification and sanctification as inseparable, though the Chaferian view makes a great distinction between the two operations.

The Victorious Life view, on the other hand, sees justification and sanctification as two distinct gifts of God to be received by separate acts of faith. "Jesus, you know, makes two offers to everyone. He offers to set us free from the penalty of our sin. And He offers to set us free from the power of our sin. Both these offers are made on exactly the same terms: we can accept them only by letting Him do it all. Every Christian has accepted the first offer. Many Christians have not accepted the second offer."<sup>16</sup> In other words, just as one receives Christ by faith for justification, so also one receives Christ by faith for sanctification. Those are two distinct acts.

These three views on the relationship between justification and sanctification can be summarized rather succinctly. The Reformed view considers justification and sanctification inseparable yet distinct, whereas the Chaferian view sees justification and sanctification as distinct, yet inseparable. In contrast to both of those, the Victorious Life view understands justification and sanctification to be separate and distinct.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN ACTIVITY IN SANCTIFICATION

Again the Reformed and Chaferian views are not far apart in

what is taught concerning the relationship between human activity and divine sovereignty. The Victorious Life view is more distinct from the other two.

Warfield's expression of the Reformed view might be called an irresistible sovereignty view.

It happens that the Scriptural doctrine on both matters [the doctrine of free will and the doctrine of Christ within the believer] may be suggested by a single Scriptural phrase, which may stand for us as their symbol: make the tree good that its fruit may be good also. Christ dwells within us not for the purpose of sinking our being into His being, nor of substituting Himself for us as the agent in our activities; much less of seizing our wills and operating them for us in contradiction to our own immanent mind [these phrases express Warfield's understanding of the Victorious Life teaching]; but to operate directly upon us, to make us good, that our works, freely done by us, may under His continual leading, be good also. Our wills, being the expression of our hearts, continually more and more dying to sin and more and more living to holiness, under the renewing action of the Christ dwelling within us by his Spirit, can never from the beginning of His gracious renewal of them resist Christ fatally, and will progressively resist Him less and less until, our hearts having been made through and through good, our wills will do only righteousness.<sup>17</sup>

Though Warfield's view includes human activity, it seems to slight human responsibility because of its emphasis on irresistibility and the almost automatic nature of sanctification. Although it is true that every true believer will give evidence of sanctification (1 Cor. 4:5), it is not true that that is automatic. The believer must act responsibly in obedience to God's commands.

In contrast to Warfield, Murray reflects a more biblical balance between sovereignty and responsibility.

Out of deference to all the stress that falls upon God's agency in sanctification we must not fall into the error of quietism and fail to take account of the activity of the believer himself. The imperatives directed to the believer imply nothing less. Perhaps the most instructive text is Philippians 2:12, 13, a text frequently misapplied. The salvation spoken of is not initial salvation, but that to be attained at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is salvation

as completed and consummated that we are to work out. And this means that our agency and activity are to be exercised to the fullest extent in promotion of this salvation. Hence, the implications: our working is not dispensed with or made superfluous because God works; God's working is not suspended because we work. There is the correlation and conjunction of both. The fact that God works in us is the encouragement and incentive to our working. Indeed, God's working is the energizing cause of our working; if we do not work, the working of God is absent. . . . Yet, the more assured we are that God works in us, the more diligent and persistent we are in our working. Our whole personality is not only drawn within the scope of but also enlisted in all its functions in that process that moves to the goal of being conformed to the image of God's son.<sup>18</sup>

The Chaferian view is very similar to Murray's. Even the Chaferian emphasis on an initial act of dedication in a believer's life is found in Murray. On "present yourselves to God" in Romans 6:13 Murray wrote, "The tense that is used in this instance indicates the once-for-allness of the dedication involved in the presentation of ourselves and of our members."<sup>19</sup> Chafer stated that the theme of Romans 6:1-23 "is sanctification in daily life and by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. . . . There follow two vitally essential responsibilities which rest directly and unceasingly upon the child of God: He is to reckon . . . and he is to yield himself unto God. . . ."<sup>20</sup> When commenting on dedication, Chafer said, "Dedication, if done at all as God would have it, hardly needs to be done over. In other words, dedication is an all determining act and not a process."<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Walvoord wrote on Romans 6:13b: ". . . the exhortation is to present yourself unto God, *parastesate*, in the aorist tense, meaning, 'Present yourself to God once and for all.' A Christian is called upon to make a definite yielding of his life to God to make possible its full blessing and usefulness just as he was called upon to believe in order to be saved."<sup>22</sup>

The difference, then, between the Reformed view and the Chaferian view in this area is principally one of emphasis. Both incorporate the divine and human aspects, though some Reformed writers inject the idea that progressive sanctification is automatic. Both would agree that it is assured, but Chafer and his followers emphasize more the necessity of human responsibility and activity.

The Victorious Life view is quite distinct. Here the emphasis is almost entirely on God's activity in sanctification. The secret of victory is summed up in the phrase, "Let go and let God." Letting go is surrender and letting God is the faith to let Him live His life of victory in the believer. Those are two separate acts, so it is possible to have surrender without victory (though there can be no victory without surrender). This approach tends to promote quietism and passivism. Holiness is not something that needs to be attained. Rather, it is something already obtained by faith, which then is lived out in the life of the believer. Human activity is minimized, though it is necessary to keep on believing and reckoning.

The teachings of Trumbull, one of the early Victorious Life leaders in this country, present this position. "The victorious Christian is one who has gotten into the boat and is living in the rest of faith. He is not holding on to the boat, but letting the boat hold him."<sup>23</sup> "The secret of complete victory is faith: simply believing that *Jesus has done and is doing it all*. Victory is entered upon by a single act of faith, as is salvation. Victory is maintained by the attitude of faith."<sup>24</sup> "True, victory is by faith; but faith must be fed; and faith cannot be fed apart from daily nourishment from the Word of God, and daily time alone with God in prayer."<sup>25</sup> Trumbull advocates the position that sanctification is received as a separate act of faith. His emphasis on letting God "do it all" promotes the concept of quietism. Yet he still emphasizes the necessity of continual believing nourished by the Word and prayer.

#### THE QUESTION OF ONE OR TWO NATURES IN THE BELIEVER

On the question of one or two natures in the believer the Reformed view stands alone in teaching that the believer has only one nature. The Chaferian and Victorious Life views both hold that the believer has two natures.

Warfield's view is that the believer has a single, sinful nature and that grace is gradually extirpating that nature (though never totally eradicating it in this life). The two-nature concept is anathema to him. In rejecting Griffith Thomas's view of two natures, Warfield wrote that Thomas "errs when he says that 'grace does not improve the old nature, it overcomes it.' He errs

when he teaches only that 'it promises hereafter to extirpate it,' but meanwhile, only 'counteracts its tendencies.'"<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, Charles Hodge says:

Regeneration is the infusion of a new principle of life in this corrupt nature. It is heaven introduced to diffuse its influence gradually through the whole mass. Sanctification, therefore, consists in two things: first, the removing more and more the principles of evil still infecting our nature, and destroying their power; and secondly, the growth of the principle of spiritual life until it controls the thoughts, feelings, and acts, and brings the soul into conformity to the image of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

By contrast, both the Chaferian and Victorious Life views regard the believer as having two natures or capacities that are in conflict. "The presence of two opposing natures (not two personalities) in one individual results in conflict."<sup>28</sup>

#### THE MEANS OF VICTORY IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

At the risk of oversimplification, a summary of what each of these viewpoints says about the practical question of how to live the Christian life needs to be given.

The Reformed emphasis gives the impression that the sovereign God of the universe will bring the believer to maturity in His own time and that the believer has little to do with that process. Some within the Reformed position do emphasize the struggle and fight and the place of human responsibility in the process of sanctification. Overall, however, the words *sovereign*, *automatic*, and *extirpation* seem to characterize this view.

The Victorious Life teaching stresses surrender, faith (i.e. letting go and letting God), and the suppression of the old nature. One receives Christ by faith for sanctification just as one received Him by faith for justification. "We are to use our wills in all this. Mere passivity is fatal. We are to use our wills to believe. We are not to work in order to have victory, but we are to work because we have it. Then we can go out in the dynamite, the omnipotence, of God himself in victory, with sinful desires taken away. Not temptations taken away, but the sinful response in our heart taken away."<sup>29</sup>

Chafer and his followers emphasize the filling of the Spirit as the key to Christian living. To be spiritual requires the filling, and Chafer made famous three conditions for experiencing filling. The first he labelled "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God," and it had to do with sin in the believer's life. Sin is what grieves the Spirit so it must be confessed. The second he placed under the heading "Quench not the Spirit," which concerned the yielded life. The third was "Walk in the Spirit," which referred to a believer's constant dependence on the Spirit.

Steering a careful course in relation to sovereignty and human responsibility, Chafer wrote, "Though the will be moved upon by the enabling power of God, spirituality, according to God's Word, is made to depend upon that divinely-enabled human choice; Romans 12:1, 2; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19 and 1 John 1:9 being sufficient evidence."<sup>30</sup>

That is the same viewpoint Walvoord has taught throughout his ministry, and it is, in this writer's judgment, correct both biblically and theologically.

NOTES

1. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. "Sanctify, Sanctification," by Philip E. Hughes, p. 470.
2. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Perfectionism*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford U., 1931), 2:584.
3. A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1928), p. 521.
4. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), p. 534.
5. This label serves to distinguish that position espoused by Lewis Sperry Chafer in his treatment of the doctrine of sanctification (see *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. [Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1947], vol. 6; and *He That Is Spiritual*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967]). This is also the official position of the Dallas Theological Seminary ("Doctrinal Statement," Article ix).
6. Chafer, *Theology*, 6:285.
7. John F. Walvoord, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1943), p. 219.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
10. See Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation* (London: Revel, n.d.); and Herbert F. Stevenson, *Keswick's Authentic Voice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959).
11. Hodge, p. 522.
12. Berkhof, p. 536.
13. John Murray, "Sanctification (the Law)," in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (New York: Holt, Reinhardt, & Winston, 1962), p. 229.
14. Chafer, *Theology*, 7:279.
15. *Ibid.*, 7:280-81.
16. Charles G. Trumbull, "What is Your Kind of Christianity?" cited by Warfield, 2:567.
17. Warfield, 2:602.
18. Murray, "Sanctification," pp. 232-33.
19. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:228.
20. Chafer, *Theology*, 6:253.
21. *Ibid.*, 6:255.
22. Walvoord, p. 197.
23. Charles G. Trumbull, "Resting on the Facts," in *The Victorious Christ* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1923), p. 119.
24. Charles G. Trumbull, "The Period of Victory," *Ibid.*, p. 126.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
26. Warfield, 2:584.
27. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), 3:221.
28. Chafer, *Theology*, 2:347.
29. Trumbull, "Resting on the Facts," p. 122.
30. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, p. 67, n. 1.