

We are over two weeks into the Lenten season, and today is the third message of our Lenten series, “Wesleyan Holiness.”

What have we learned so far? In the first sermon, we learned God wants us to be sanctified, to become more like Jesus so we can mirror his love to the world reflecting his character. This sanctification is not about adherence to rules, an unattainable goal, or a solitary endeavor, but a transformative process driven by God’s grace, focusing on living out our faith through love and service.

Then, last week, we learned about the means of grace: prayer, Scripture reading, Holy Communion, fasting, and Christian fellowship. These practices are not mere religious routines but vital channels through which God’s grace flows into us, strengthening our faith to transform us more into the likeness of Christ.

For our third message today, we are learning about the doctrine of Entire Sanctification (also known as Christian Perfection) as taught by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism.

What is sanctification? Sanctification is the process of growing in holiness. Growing in holiness is the process of transformation of those who experience God’s forgiveness by grace through faith and continue to grow in grace so that they become more and more like Christ and less and less chained to sin and destructive, harmful behaviors.

John Wesley summarized God’s desire for our sanctification as “a desire for love to be not a transient guest but the constant ruling temper of our soul” (On Pleasing All Men). So, when we talk about “entire sanctification,” we don’t mean that we are perfect in knowledge or free from ignorance and make no more mistakes; we don’t mean we are free from temptation either or from the need for further growth. Instead, it is a spiritual, mental, and emotional state where our awareness of God becomes so much greater that we have a deeper understanding of God’s love for us, which in turn moves us to want to please, honor, and serve God with our whole lives as in “the constant ruling temper of our soul.”

Is this possible? Can I experience such sanctification? Jesus thought so as he said in Matthew 5:43-48,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Jesus is talking about how love must be a defining character of a child of God, “But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven...” and then he connects this character trait to sanctification when he said, “Be

perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The meaning of this is that God wants us to experience his fullness in our lives, and the way for that to happen is by learning to act in love.

This is what people notice in you once you start following Jesus; that is, the manner in which you speak, treat others, and overall behavior is your sanctification in plain sight. As God’s love in you moves you, you are not the same person you were because you are becoming the person you are meant to be as you become aware of how much you are loved and how much you can love others, too.

As we learned two weeks ago, the apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonian Christians to pursue sanctification, telling them, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification...” (1 Thessalonians 4:3) Just as Jesus, Paul also states that the call to be “perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect” is not a human invention but a divine mandate.

This brings us to today’s subject, “Entire Sanctification.” For this, turning to 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, we read a prayer of sanctification over the believers, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.”

Paul’s emphasis on sanctification in this letter is recurrent. First, he says it is the will of God for us to be sanctified, and now he is saying that we can be entirely sanctified. Let us keep in mind that he was writing to Christians who were being persecuted and struggling with ethical behaviors. They were not having an easy life nor were they blameless—perhaps just like us? So, he admonishes and encourages them to remain steadfast in their faith amidst adversity and to a life that reflects their new identity in Christ and his teachings.

For this, when he writes, “the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely,” he states that our sanctification is the work of God in our lives and includes the transformation of our thoughts, emotions, and actions. The way these words speak to us today is that this is about aligning our lives with God’s will and purpose for our lives, which means finding our purpose and place in life is not just about believing right but being transformed right. This alignment is what brings us into harmony with God and God’s creation, including our fellow human beings. For example, an act of sanctification is forgiveness; when you are forgiven or forgive someone, that aligns you with God’s love and brings harmony, balance, and peace to your life.

And then Paul also writes, “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.” The way to read this is that God ultimately gives us the desire and the ability to live a life that pleases him. In this sense, entire sanctification is a synergistic process involving our diligence in pursuing holiness and God’s ongoing action in transforming us. In other words, it is God who initiates and guarantees the completion of our sanctification in the lives of those who trust in him and actively pursue him.

This is one of those moments when you can say, “He started it...” and you will not be deflecting blame but stating a fact.

One last point I want to make is referencing John Wesley's sermon "The Circumcision of the Heart" (1733). In this sermon, Wesley used the metaphor of circumcision to describe the real, visible change that occurs within Christians as they grow in holiness, signifying the cutting away of natural inclinations to sin and the purification of the inner being. With this metaphor, Wesley was indicating that sanctification is a real, deep change that happens within us and is evident and tangible—not merely a symbolic one or spiritual talk. He explained that the characteristics of a sanctified (circumcised) heart are humility, faith, love, and hope:

**Humility: An awareness of one's own weaknesses and a dependency on God's grace.**

**Faith: A deep, abiding trust in God—a faith that not only believes in the existence of God but fully relies on his promises and provision.**

**Love: A pure, fervent love for God that overflows into love for one's neighbors. This love is sacrificial, seeking the welfare of others above oneself, and is the essence of true sanctification.**

**Hope: An unwavering trust and confidence in God's redemption and promises about our future.**

In essence, Wesley was teaching that the goal of sanctification is "a right state of the soul," in which we are inwardly changed so that we no longer are just saved or born again but are becoming righteous through the renewing of the mind so that we can be "perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect."

What does all this mean, then? Entire Sanctification begins with surrendering to God, acknowledging that we can't achieve fullness on our own (that is humility). This then moves us to a daily surrendering of our ego, a constant yielding to the Holy Spirit, allowing God to mold, fill, and use us. This yielding is an act of obedience, not from obligation but from a transformed heart, eager to align with God's teachings and wisdom.

Think of it this way: Knowing we are created by God and are loved without limits should lead us to willingly make positive, healthy changes in our lives. And it is in our willingness to be led, corrected, and nurtured by God that we find the path to sanctification. So, don't think of sanctification as a boring, constraining experience but a joyful one where you let go of that which is bad for you to make room for what is best and right for you.

As we reflect on this, let us embrace God's grace to each of us. Let us yield to God's loving work in our lives, trusting that he who began a good work in us will continue until the day Jesus comes again.

Let us pray for the grace to live lives of love-filled obedience, entirely devoted to God, loving him and our neighbors perfectly. For in this, we find the true essence of entire sanctification. Amen.