

# HOLINESS:

## SANCTIFICATION and the WORLD

by Philip Brown

Some people seem to imply in their testimonies that when a person becomes entirely sanctified the world automatically loses all of its power of attraction. It is as though entire sanctification is an immunity shot that makes a Christian immune to the disease of worldliness and impervious to worldly temptations. Is this what the Bible teaches?

Romans 12:1-2 is the only passage in the Bible that explicitly connects entire sanctification and the world. After calling the Roman believers to full consecration a second time (see Rom. 6:11-14), Paul gives them specific instructions regarding the world. He says, "Do not be being conformed to this world." We could paraphrase this, "You must keep yourself from becoming like this world." Several things about this verse are helpful for answering our question.

**First, notice that Paul implies that when a person fully consecrates himself to God (and God, in response, entirely sanctifies him), that doesn't mean that the world is no longer an issue.** Entire sanctification does not automatically immunize us from the world's pressure to conform to its way of thinking and living. In fact, the only thing that could free us from that pressure is precisely what Jesus prayed would not happen: "I am not asking that you would take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one" (John 17:17).

**Second, notice that Paul indicates that conformity to the world is a constant possibility.** Paul uses a present tense command—"do not be being conformed" or "constantly keep yourself from being conformed." This means that as long as we are in this world we have to guard ourselves against its constant pressure to choose our way instead of God's way.

Have you ever been to an airport and seen a moving sidewalk? If not, I'm sure you've seen an escalator, and a moving sidewalk is just a flat version of an escalator. The world can be compared to a moving sidewalk: it is constantly moving in the direction of self-centered living. When we get saved, we start to walk against the direction the world is moving. *The problem is we still have that principle of self-centeredness in our lives.* As a result, we find that we have a natural tendency to do things our own way, which is the essence of worldliness. In other words, the world has an ally on the inside of us.

When we fully consecrate ourselves to God, we pledge to live in constant submission to the control of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit takes full control of our lives, He gives us the grace to live moment-by-moment free from the tendency to choose our own way and to choose His way. In other words, the Holy Spirit's controlling presence cleanses our hearts from conscious self-centeredness so that the world no longer has an ally on the inside of us.

But that doesn't mean that the world lets up trying to squeeze us into its mold. Neither does it mean that the Holy Spirit automatically removes all our self-centered (p23)➡



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➔(p20) patterns of thinking and acting. Most of us have developed habits of thinking about life, about people, about things that are self-centered in their orientation. *While entire sanctification does cleanse our heart from conscious self-centeredness, it's not the end of our need to grow in Christlikeness away from worldliness.* It would be wonderful if purity of heart automatically resulted in full Christlike maturity. However, neither the Bible nor the experience of God's people teach us that heart purity is spiritual maturity.

That is precisely why Paul didn't end Romans 12:2 with the first phrase. There is more to it than just avoiding conformity to the world. There is a positive side to this command: *"but be being transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may discern God's good, perfect, and acceptable will."* The two parts of this verse are closely related. We avoid conformity to the world by means of having our mind transformed. Notice that this is a present tense command, too. We must be constantly being transformed by the renewing of our minds to avoid the constant danger of being conformed to this world.

Some people seem to think that we avoid conformity to the world by not doing whatever the world is doing. The problems with this approach are that (1) since the world is constantly changing, a Christian has to constantly change what he is doing so that he isn't being "worldly"; (2) this makes the world the standard against which we measure ourselves rather than God's Word; (3) it is impossible to be consistent with this approach: the world does many things that Christians also do and should do, like wearing clothes, practicing good hygiene, etc.; and (4) most importantly, *the essence of worldliness is not what you do, but why you do it.* According to James 4:3-4, you can be worldly when you are praying, if you are praying with the wrong motivation! Please don't misunderstand me: you can do things that are worldly. But the essence of worldliness is fulfilling self-centered desires rather than God-centered desires.

The Bible teaches us that we avoid conformity to this world by having our minds renewed so that we think about life the way Jesus does. Colossians 3:10 describes this as "being renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created [us]." Since all behavior is the result of thinking patterns, we must think about life like God does if we are to live godly lives.

If we avoid conformity to the world by being constantly transformed by the renewing of our minds, how do we renew our minds? *The answer is simple: we renew our minds through God's Word.* Specifically, we learn how to think about life the way God does by reading His Word. Reading His Word, however, isn't enough. His Word must become part of the warp and woof of

our thinking. That means we must study His Word, memorize it, and meditate upon it, until we have internalized it. You know you have internalized it when you find yourself naturally thinking about a situation in terms of scriptural language and principles. As we internalize God's Word, it will expose areas of unconscious self-centeredness in our lives. When we see these areas, we should not doubt that God has entirely sanctified us. Rather, we should thank Him for showing us where we were not like Jesus and purpose by His grace to have that area of our lives conformed to the image of His Son.

Entirely sanctified believer, do you have a regular program of study and memorization of God's Word? Are you constantly taking steps in the direction of renewing your mind through the Word? If not, you can be sure the "moving sidewalk" of this world will be carrying you away from Christlikeness back toward self-centeredness. Entire sanctification is not an immunization to the world. It is a further empowerment to resist the world's pressure and to become more and more like Jesus. ■

## THE AIM OF OUR MINISTRY continued

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➔(p21) preached? The holiness of God is basic to the call to repentance, for it shows us our need to change. A realization of that holiness also takes us toward entire sanctification, because we will begin to see that sin in the heart is also in contrast to the holiness of God.

But if sanctification seems totally separate from the gospel and unrelated to what believers have experienced, they have heard the wrong gospel! Instead of truly repenting of sin, perhaps they have accepted salvation without seeing sin as any more than humanness, seeking tolerance instead of forgiveness and justification without deliverance.

**Thus, we must lay the foundation of repentance—and, indeed, of the whole Christian life—by showing that human sinfulness is in awful contrast to the holiness of God, and that men and women are themselves to blame for being sinners.** Repentance, then, of willful sin, coming in response to the demands of God's holiness, will put a person on the road toward entire sanctification.

Yes, spiritual leaders have a responsibility to promote the privilege of Christian perfection! If this goal is forgotten, then benefits that are along the road to that goal and on the road beyond it will also be forfeited. That's why holiness is the aim of our ministry! ■

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