

The Blessing Attained, Gradually or Instantaneously, Which?

by Bishop W. F. Mallalieu

Bishop W. F. Mallalieu explores whether sanctification is attained gradually or instantaneously, emphasizing the power of faith and the immediacy of God's grace.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:11, Psalm 139:23, Isaiah 65:24, Matthew 11:28, John 14:1, Romans 12:1, Philippians 3:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 4:16, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Sanctification", "Perfect Love"

Description

Bishop W. F. Mallalieu preaches about the experience of perfect love and sanctification, emphasizing the need for genuine repentance, surrendering all sins and idols, and fully consecrating oneself to God. He discusses the debate on whether sanctification is gradual or instantaneous, highlighting that God can work in a moment to pardon, justify, and regenerate the soul. Bishop Mallalieu encourages believers to seek sanctification diligently through prayer, obedience, and faith, quoting John Wesley's teachings on the possibility of attaining perfect love instantaneously. He urges believers to expect and receive the blessing of sanctification without delay, as God can work swiftly and decisively in the heart of a sincere seeker.

Transcript

Savior, to thee my soul looks up,

My present Savior thou!

In all the confidence of hope,

I claim the blessing now.

'Tis done! thou dost this moment save,

With full salvation bless;

Redemption through thy blood I have,

And spotless love and peace.

-- Charles Wesley.

O come, and dwell in me,
Spirit of power within,
And bring the glorious liberty
From sorrow, fear, and sin.
The seed of sin's disease,
Spirit of health, remove,
Spirit of finished holiness,
Spirit of perfect love.
Hasten the joyful day
Which shall my sins consume;
When old things shall be done away,
And all things new become.
-- Charles Wesley.

For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. -- Deut. xxx, 11-14.

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. -- Isa. lxxv, 24.

THE question has often arisen and as often been discussed as to whether the experience of perfect love, or sanctification, is gradually or instantaneously attained. Undoubtedly the same principles will apply here as in the case of the sinner's conversion. Some souls are under conviction for their sins for years. They are enlightened by the Spirit, and know the way of duty, and feel the burden of sin, and have desires for deliverance, and they seek to amend their lives and succeed in this to some extent, and they perform many religious duties and observe many of the Divine requirements; but they do not turn to God in genuine repentance; they do not forsake their sins; they fondly cling to some heart-idol; they refuse to consecrate themselves to God's service; they do not renounce absolutely every other hope and refuge, and by faith take Christ as their present and all-sufficient Savior. It seems, to those who observe them and are interested in them, that they are almost Christians, and possibly becoming more so year by year until at last they take the decisive step, and instantly they are converted and saved. It may therefore be said that, in a sense, their conversion has been gradual, while really it has been instantaneous; for it is the work of a moment for God to pardon, justify, and regenerate the soul.

The converted soul does not come at once into all the fullness of the blessing of the gospel. It was a great thing for the Hebrew people to pass from under the galling yoke of Egyptian slavery, to behold a way of

escape opened for them through the broad waters of the Red Sea, while those waters stood like walls of solid crystal as they passed onward to the farther shore. But the wilderness was before them, with its forty years of almost aimless wanderings. True, they might have gone straight up to Canaan, and in a very few days have entered the promised land. It was not for any lack or fault on the part of God. The difficulties were mostly, if not all, of their own making. If they had only trusted and obeyed God; if they had believed Joshua and Caleb; if they had possessed a worthy courage, Moses yes, Moses, would have himself led them into the inheritance of their fathers', and established them in its possession.

So it too often is with the convert. Great things are in store for him. He has escaped from the bondage of Satan; an effectual door of hope has been thrown wide open before him; he has passed out into liberty, but he does not enter at once into the enjoyment of the riches of the grace of God; he does not find his spiritual Canaan. What he might do he fails to do, and, instead of a short and direct passage, he yields to various temptations. He may, perchance, look with regret upon some of the things he has sacrificed for the sake of Christ; he may not be willing to follow his Leader in all things; he hesitates and doubts and fears; he believes in the evil reports of faint-hearted spies; and so, it may be, he wanders in the wilderness for many weary years.

In the meantime he ought rather to breathe the prayer of the poet, and press on to victory:

Lord, I believe a rest remains

To all thy people known;

A rest where pure enjoyment reigns,

And thou art loved alone:

A rest where all our soul's desire

Is fixed on things above;

Where fear, and sin, and grief expire,

Cast out by perfect love,

O that I now the rest might know,

Believe and enter in!

Now, Savior, now the power bestow,

And let me cease from sin.

-- Charles Wesley.

O God, what offering shall I give

To thee, the Lord of earth and skies?

My spirit, soul, and flesh receive,

A holy, living sacrifice:

Small as it is, 'tis all my store;
More shouldst thou have, if I had more.
Now, then, my God, thou hast my soul;
No longer mine, but thine I am:
Guard thou thine own, possess it whole;
Cheer it with hope, with love inflame.
Thou hast my spirit; there display
Thy glory to the perfect day.
Thou hast my flesh, thy hallowed shrine,
Devoted solely to thy will;
Here let thy light forever shine;
This house still let thy presence fill;
O source of life! live, dwell, and move
In me, till all my life be love!
-- Charles Wesley.

Is there a thing than life more dear?
A thing from which we can not part?
We can; we now rejoice to tear
The idol from our bleeding heart.
Jesus, accept our sacrifice;
All things for thee we count but loss;
Lo! at thy word our idol dies,
Dies on the altar of thy cross.
-- Charles Wesley.

Lord, in the strength of grace,
With a glad heart and free,
Myself, my residue of days,

I consecrate to thee.

Thy ransomed servant, I

Restore to thee thy own;

And from this moment live or die

To serve my God alone.

-- Charles Wesley.

No sincere soul seeking the full salvation of the Gospel can prayerfully and with real soul-hunger read these hymns of Charles Wesley without being wonderfully helped; and it would not be at all surprising if, while reading them, the blessed experience should be realized.

As we might naturally suppose would be the case, the views of John Wesley are quite as pronounced as those of his brother on this particular point. The question is not concerning growth after the experience of perfect love has been reached. Growth in spiritual things will continue. The soul that is made holy will grow in capacity for service and enjoyment and knowledge to all eternity. The progress is from glory to glory in an environment that will be most helpful. Why, then, doubt the possibility of entering into the experience of perfect love in this life, and then continuing to grow in the knowledge and love of God for unending ages? And why doubt the possibility of attaining this experience instantaneously? Why not accept the teachings of John Wesley, a greater than whom in regard to this subject has not lived since the days of Paul and the apostles. Hear him!

The whole comes to one point: Is there, or is there not, any instantaneous sanctification between justification and death? I say yes. -- John Wesley.

If you press all believers to go on to perfection, and to expect deliverance from sin every moment, they will grow in grace. But if ever they lose that expectation they will grow flat and cold. -- John Wesley.

Why should you be without the blessing any longer? It is His will that, from the time you read this, you should never sin against him any more. Thou needst but one grain of faith, and the mountain shall be removed. -- John Wesley.

Q. But is not this the case of all that are justified? Do they not gradually die to sin and grow in grace, till at, or perhaps a little before, death God perfects them in love?

A. I believe this is the case of most, but not all. God usually gives a considerable time for men to receive light, to grow in grace, to do and suffer his will, before they are either justified or sanctified. But he does not invariably adhere to this. Sometimes he cuts short his work. He does the work of many years in a few weeks; perhaps in a week, a day, an hour. He justifies, or sanctifies, both those who have done or suffered nothing, and who have not had time for a gradual growth, either in light or grace. And may he not do what he will with his own? Is thine eye evil, because he is good?

It need not, therefore, he affirmed over and over, and proved by forty texts of Scripture, either that most men are perfect in love at last -- that there is a gradual work of God in the soul -- or that, generally speaking, it is a long time, even many years, before sin is destroyed. All this we know. But we know, likewise, that God may, with man's good leave, cut short his work, in whatever degree he pleases, and do

the usual work of many years in a moment. He does so in many instances. And yet there is a gradual work both before and after that moment. So that one may affirm the work is gradual; another, it is instantaneous; without any manner of contradiction. -- John Wesley: "Plain Account."

With God, one day is as a thousand years. It plainly follows that the quantity of time is nothing to him. Centuries, years, months, days, hours, and moments are exactly the same. Consequently, he can as well sanctify in a day after we are justified as a hundred years. There is no difference at all, unless we suppose him to be such a one as ourselves. Accordingly we see, in fact, that some of the most unquestionable witnesses of sanctifying grace were sanctified within a few days after they were justified. O, why do not we encourage all to expect this blessing every hour from the moment they are justified? -- Wesley's Works, Vol. IV, p. 451.

Q. Is this death to sin and renewal in love gradual or instantaneous?

A. A man may be dying for some time, yet he does not, properly speaking, die till the instant the soul is separated from the body; and in that instant he lives the life of eternity. In like manner he may be dying to sin for some time, yet he is not dead to sin until sin is separated from his soul: and in that instant he lives the full life of love. And as the change undergone when the body dies is of a different kind, and infinitely greater than any we had known before, yea, such as till then it is impossible to conceive; so the change wrought when the soul dies to sin is of a different kind, and infinitely greater than any before, and than any can conceive till he experiences it. Yet he still grows in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God, and will do so, not only till death, but probably to all eternity.

Q. How are we to wait for this change?

A. Not in careless indifference or indolent inactivity, but in vigorous universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness and painfulness, in denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily, as well as in earnest prayer and fasting and a close attendance on all the ordinances of God. And if any man dream of attaining it any other way (yea, or of keeping it when it is attained, when he has received it even in the largest measure), he deceiveth his own soul. It is true, we receive it by simple faith. But God does not, will not, give that faith unless we seek it with all diligence in the way which he hath ordained.

This consideration may satisfy those who inquire why so few have received the blessing. Inquire how many are seeking it in this way, and you have a sufficient answer.

Prayer especially is wanting. Who continues instant therein? Who wrestles with God for this very thing? So "ye have not because ye ask not," or because "ye ask amiss;" namely, "that you may be renewed before you die." Before you die! Will that content you? Nay, but ask that it may be done now, today, while it is called today! Do not call this "setting God a time." Certainly today is his time, as well as tomorrow. Make haste, man-make haste! Let

"Thy soul break out in strong desire

The perfect bliss to prove!

Thy longing heart be all on fire,

To be dissolved in love!"

-- John Wesley: "Plain Account."

Certainly sanctification (in the proper sense) is "an instantaneous deliverance from all sin," and includes "an instantaneous power then given, always to cleave to God." Yet this sanctification (at least, in the lower degrees) does not include a power never to think a useless thought, nor ever speak a useless word. I, myself, believe that such a perfection is inconsistent with living in a corruptible body: for this makes it impossible "always to think right." While we breathe, we shall, more or less, mistake. If, therefore, Christian perfection implies this, we must not expect it till after death. -- Wesley's Works, Vol. VI, p. 718.

Every one, though born of God in an instant -- yea, and sanctified in an instant -- yet undoubtedly grows by slow degrees, both after the former and the latter change. But it does not follow from thence that there must be a considerable tract of time between the one and the other. A year or a month is the same with God as a thousand. If he wills, to do is present with him; much less is there any necessity for much suffering. God can do his work by pleasure as well as by pain. It is therefore, undoubtedly our duty to pray and look for salvation every day, every hour, every moment, without waiting till we have either done or suffered more. Why should not this be the accepted time? -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. VI, p. 764.

After meeting the Society, I talked with a sensible woman, whose experience seemed peculiar. She said: "A few days before Easter last I was deeply convinced of sin; and in Easter week I knew that my sins were forgiven, and was filled with 'joy and peace in believing.' But in about eighteen days I was convinced, in a dream, of the necessity of a higher salvation; and I mourned day and night, in agony of desire, to be thoroughly sanctified, till, on the twenty-third day after my justification, I found a total change, together with a clear witness that the blood of Jesus had cleansed me from all unrighteousness." -- Wesley's Journal, June 23, 1761.

"But does God work this great work in the soul gradually or instantaneously?" Perhaps it may be gradually wrought in some; I mean in this sense, they do not advert to the particular moment wherein sin ceases to be. But it is infinitely desirable, were it the will of God, that it should be done instantaneously; that the Lord should destroy sin "by the breath of his mouth," "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." And so he generally does; a plain fact, of which there is evidence enough to satisfy any unprejudiced person. Thou, therefore, look for it every moment! Look for it in the way above described; in all those good works whereunto thou art "created anew in Christ Jesus." There is no danger; you can be no worse, if you are no better, for that expectation. For were you to be disappointed of your hope, still you lose nothing. But you shall not be disappointed of your hope; it will come, and will not tarry." -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. I, pp. 390, 391.

Can the reader at this point give any good and sufficient reason why the blessing may not this very moment be received? It can not be purchased with silver and gold; all precious gems of earth and ocean can not buy it; neither can it be gained by long days of toil and self-denial; sleepless vigils will not avail; good works, though all one's goods should be given to the poor, and one's body should be given to be burned, will not suffice; nor will fasting, and tears, and forms of prayer, bring the blessing. The way is open the conditions are easy; a child may comply with them. Why not, then, believe and enter into rest?

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