

The Progressive and Corporate Aspects of Sanctification

by John Murray

Sanctification is a progressive and corporate process that takes place over time, governed by the principle of growth and development, and is the goal of which is the fullness of Christ.

Duration: 54:16

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 1:17-18, Ephesians 4:13-16, Philippians 1:9, Colossians 2:19, Colossians 3:14, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Sanctification"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of corporate interaction and intercommunication among believers. He refers to Ephesians 4:30, which speaks about coming together in unity and growing to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The speaker also mentions John 5:26, where Jesus is described as having the power of life in Himself and giving authority to the Son. The sermon highlights the need for believers to grow in knowledge and love, reflecting the image of the Lord and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Transcript

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, do Thou grant unto us that we may ever grow out of the fullness that is in Christ Jesus. O Lord, the enemy should be able to entrap us or weaken us by the unbelief so liable.

O Lord, may we ever know that it is out of His fullness we all receive grace for grace, that His grace is sufficient for us, His strength made perfect in weakness. And thus may we constantly persevere in the assurance that He who has begun a good work will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Forbid, O Lord, that we should ever be lethargic, grant that we may be constantly alert to the great calling of God in Christ Jesus, to the obligations that devolve upon us, to the privileges that accrue from our calling, and to the great hope that is set before us in the gospel.

And all for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now that day I just have read the passage of the Book of Mormon.

I have read it because it was a passage that is thought through with references. We are dealing in the progressive sanctification because in this passage, particularly, the whole body of Calibus is represented as increasing unto its own edification in love. And as you would have noted, there is a variety of figures

drawn particularly from the growth and unity of the human body the progression that through a variety of figures drawn particularly from the growth and unity of the human body the progression of the people of God is represented.

Now, without confining our thought to this particular passage, but nevertheless taking a point of departure from this passage and also coming back again and again to elements which appear in this particular passage, there are two features of sanctification that are of paramount importance. Namely, the first is the progressiveness of sanctification, the progressiveness of it, and then the second, the corporate character of it. So first, a few observations respecting the progressiveness.

In this passage, Ephesians 4, verses 16, the inception of the Christian life is compared to infancy and consequently the law of growth applies in the realm of the Christian life as well as in the sphere of nature. Progression is a principle that governs history and it is so by divine ordination and we must not fail to take account of that principle in the sanctification of God's people. I repeat, we must not fail to take account of that principle in the sanctification of God's people.

A good deal of the deviation from the biblical doctrine in respect of sanctification arises from an impatience, an impatience with what is implicit in process or progression, and that impatience with process or progression is serious reflection upon the wisdom of God. This progression is exemplified in all the characteristic features of the believer. In other words, it applies to every aspect of the fruit of the Spirit.

I shall just illustrate by two particular, first, in respect of knowledge, and second, in respect of love. Respect of knowledge and in respect of love. First, in respect of knowledge, the identity of a believer is really defined by what Paul says in Ephesians 4.24 and Colossians 3.10 that he is created anew after God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

Just as creation in the divine image defined the identity, the specific identity of man at the beginning, just as creation in the divine image defined the specific identity of man at the beginning, so we creation in knowledge, righteousness and holiness defines his identity, his specific identity as a believer. And so knowledge, knowledge is an ingredient in this re-created identity, epignosis, knowledge. But progression applies here.

Peter, I may remind you again of 2 Peter 3.18. Peter enjoins that we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the prominence given to knowledge, to the enlightenment of the understanding In such passages as Ephesians 1.17 and 18, Ephesians 1.17 and 18 and Philippians 1.9, illustrates the principle that it is in proportion to the increase of knowledge or understanding, I say in proportion to the increase of knowledge or understanding that there can be the increase of the fruit of the Spirit in all the ways in which that fruit is described. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. And when we remember passages after passages, that the process consists in reflecting more and more the image of the Lord Himself.

It is to make that process nothing less than magic, to think of it apart from the growing apprehension and adoration of the Lord's glory. I say the growing apprehension and adoration of the Lord's glory. Now here we have something that bears very practically upon the growth of the believer in holiness.

Sometimes we wonder why we ourselves are so laggard in our growth. We sometimes wonder why other people are so laggard in their growth. Well, here is the reason we can apply this criterion.

To what extent are we increasing in the knowledge of God, in the knowledge of Him who is the mystery of God, and in the knowledge of the mysteries of God's revealed world? To what extent are we and others absorbed in the necessity of acquiring more knowledge, respecting that which really constitutes the kingdom of God? Oh, second, just for an example, love. Of course, love. Love is the primary virtue, because as John the Apostle affirms, God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.

But could anything underline the primacy of love more than that? And as the Apostle Paul reminds us, of course, love is the fulfillment of the law, and so the whole law, as Jesus reminds us, is summed up in two commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thou shalt love thine neighbor as thyself. It is well to be reminded of that catalog of virtues with which Peter provides us in the first chapter of his second epistles, 2 Peter 1, 5, following, faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love.

And undoubtedly he puts love last because love brings, as it were, to a climax the progression. Brings to a climax the progression, which is in add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge, temperance, and to temperance, patience, and to patience, godliness, to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love. Faith, as it has been put, leads to the end, and love brings up the rear.

But Paul reminds us most significantly that love must abound more and more. Philippians 1, 9 Love must abound more. And again, 1 Thessalonians 3, 12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love.

The Lord make you to increase and abound in love, one toward another, and toward all men, even as we toward you. And again, in the same church, 1 Thessalonians 4, 10, He exhorts the believers to abound more and more in love. So, you see, you have abundant witness to this progression in respect of every virtue, of every activity symptomatic of the believer's identity.

Progression must cover the whole of the activities which are characteristic of the believer, and which evade his identity as one recreated anew in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. And so we come back, you see, to Ephesians 4. That very same note appears in that passage so eloquently that we be no longer craves tossed and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the craft of men. There you have the note of knowledge, understanding, that we be no longer babes tossed and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the craft of man, and by the tweedlings of the sea.

There you have knowledge, now love, but speaking the truth in love. There you have the combination of knowledge and love. Speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, interterminate with the endlessness, particularly upon knowledge and love, and our growth from babyhood death to manhood death.

These are the events, particular processes of growth, and these, of course, must complement the one to be loved. Now we come to another, the second dimension of the beginning, namely the corporate character of sanctity. Character of sanctity.

And it is here, of course, that we very frequently fail to take account of our interrelationships, our interrelations in the unity and community of the body of Christ. I write as being presented preponderantly the terms of the individual believer without in any way underestimating the significance of the individual, individual progression. We must bear in mind that influence which appears particularly in the investment in the corporate implication of the whole subject of sanctification.

When I say corporate, I mean that it pertains, sanctification pertains, not simply to the individual, but to the Church in its unity and completeness as the body of Christ. And in reality, the growth of an individual does not take place except in the fellowship of the Church as the body of Christ. There is, of course, in the Scripture a great variety of similitude to express this interdependent interaction.

The Church is compared to a house in which believers are living stones, a bundle, but it's not a heap of stones. That figure appears, you remember, in 1 Peter 2.5, but also in Paul in Ephesians 2.20-22. Ephesians 2.20-22. You might not expect it in Paul, because Paul emphasizes to such an extent the organic character of this unity that you would hardly expect of a house. But he does.

Ephesians 2.20-22. Then, of course, as you remember very well, the Church is compared to a vine, to the branches in the vine. The vine, of course, is Christ himself, but the Church is comprised of the branch. I am the vine, of course, is on a higher level of life, on a higher sphere, the organic sphere of similitude.

And, of course, similarly, in Romans 11.16-24, you remember you have this similitude of the olive trees, similitude of the olive trees. Patriarchs are the roots, Jews and Gentiles are the branches. But, more frequently, more frequently than by any other similitude, the Church is called the Body of Christ after the analogy of the human person.

That's the expression that we call the Body. And what we must bear in mind is this, that however tenuous in some cases may be the connection between a believer and the organized body that we call the Church, that particular believer and the organized body that we call the Church, there is no such thing as a believer. Outside of that organism is called the Body of Christ.

And there is no such thing as progression outside of that organism. We should remember that believers never existed as independent units. In the eternal counsel of God, they were chosen in Christ.

Believers never existed as independent units. In the eternal counsel of God, they were chosen in Christ. And that end, Christo, is the bond of union in the ultimate fount of the all-seeing, in the accomplishment of redemption.

In the historical world, in the accomplishment of redemption, believers were in Christ because they were in him that he died for them and rose again and ascended up to heaven. In the application of redemption, the application that is into the fellowship of Christ, said believers are as expected to act in actual application, called by the Father into the fellowship of Christ. And of course, if we think of the consolation, think of the consolation.

It is with Christ that we will be glorified. And he shall appear. We shall be manifested with him also in glory.

So sanctification itself moves to a consolation that will not be realized for the individual. In his all-seeing, it will only be realized for him as an individual. And the whole body of Christ is complete and presented in its totality without fault.

So again, coming back to the practical sphere, the practical sphere of the duties that revolve upon us and the practice, the praxis of sanctification, there is involved the necessity of cultivating and promoting the sanctification of the whole body, that is, of the whole body of believers, the whole body of Christ. And you can gradually detect the implications for responsibility, privilege, and opportunity. I say for responsibility, privilege, and opportunity.

In order to illustrate, let us think of it negatively, to a point of the calamity of individuals. Thinking of it negatively. If a believer is indifferent, indifferent to the sanctification of others, if he is indifferent to their growth in grace, in love, in faith, in love, that, of course, interferes with his own sanctification, interferes with his own sanctification, because his lack of concern for others is a vice that gnaws at the root of spiritual growth.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Applies, you see. Well, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

And if we do not have concern for the sanctification of others, it is because we do not burn with zeal for the honor of Christ, because the honor of his body is the honor of Christ. The honor of his body is the honor of Christ. You see, it betrays a coldness, a coldness of our zeal for the honor of Christ, if we can shrug our shoulders in the concern of others.

And, of course, this indifference of coldness, this indifference to the interests of others, means the absence of that ministry which that person should have afforded these others. It means the absence of the ministry. That, of course, means the impoverishment of these others to the extent of his failure.

And then that, in turn, reacts upon himself, because that impoverishment of others arising from failure in the ministry which he should respect to them, you see, that impoverishment of others reacts upon himself, because then they are not able to afford him that encouragement and edification which they ought to be. So, you see, the endless respects in which there is interaction and intercommunication within the fellowship is called the body. The endless respects in which there is interaction and intercommunication within the fellowship, it is called the body of Christ.

You see that. I did at the beginning of the passage, he never defines for me that, and he gave some apostles, and some evangelists, and some pastors, some evangelists, and some pastors for the work of the men, the edifying of the body, the edifying of the body of Christ. But we have to pursue this at least one step further.

Corporate interaction. We have to pursue it one step further at least. Otherwise, we should completely fail of appreciating what is always in the corporate character.

And that is pointed out by another verse in that same passage, Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4.13. No doubt, we all have puzzled as to the meaning of this, the measure of the stature of the holiness of Christ. We all come in unity of the faith and of the knowledge, and to a perfect man, and to the measure, the stature of the holiness perplexes us, reasonably perplexes us, the genitive measure of holiness, all these terms in continuous construction, genital construction. Now you can see at once how much of a hiatus there would be in our discussion if we did not try to understand something at least of Paul's meaning in that passage, and particularly in that context, so much of his corporate entity.

Now, it is really the focus, the question of the fullness of Christ, Tom Cleola, Tom Cleola, and particularly the fullness, as it belongs to Christ, the fullness of Christ. Now, technically, you are going to agree of fullness you would have to take up all those passages in the New Testament. Fullness, but I'm not going to do that.

I'm just going to draw your attention, Colossians 1, 19 and 20, without entering into it, Colossians 1, 19 and 20, Please the Father, that in Him should all the fullness dwell. Please the Father, all the fullness dwell. And I hope just to be dogmatic and say that that fullness, which is speaking in that instance, is the

fullness that belongs to Christ in His economic capacity, in His economic power, in His economic relationship.

The Father, that in Him should all the fullness dwell. You have the prototype of that all-inclusive in the teaching of Jesus Himself, John 5, 26, John 5, 26, as the Father of life in Himself, the Son also to have life, and has given Him authority, authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Now, that is not ontological.

It is happening apparent from verse 27, He has given Him authority to execute judgment. The Son of Man, the Son of Man being the conceptual, what Jesus is referring to in the preceding verse, is the communication of life to Christ in His mechanical identity and capacity from the Father. Not an ontological communication, but an economical, economic communication.

And therefore, this fullness, Plato, I take it, on very good ground, to refer to the fullness that has taken up its abode in Christ in His messianic office and identity, and will have to be construed as the plenitude, the plenitude of life, of power, of grace, of truth, of wisdom, of knowledge, of goodness, of righteousness, and of loving-kindness belongs to Him in the specific identity that is here at the head of the cottage. Now, if we have that perspective, Plato on the fullness of His life of life, we have, I think, the key, the interpretation of certain facets which at first glance are very difficult to think in particular relation. 3 in the Thessalonians is 1, 23, 3, 19, and 4, 17.

All that needs to be refocused at the present time in view of this particular expression in 4, 13, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So, just take Ephesians 1, 23 first. Ephesians 1, Ephesians 1, well, a better read from verse 22.

Ephesians 1, 22, turn to your Greek testaments, if you haven't yet learned Greek, turn to your English testaments, and have put, referring to the Lord, and have put all things under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body. The fullness of Him fulfills the fullness of the crucial, the crucial point here in the next pieces of this passage is the pleroma there, the pleroma, the top pleroma, the fullness, the point in which we are particularly interested, and it is the curse of debate in the interpretation and application of this passage. Now, you would expect it to refer to *prosona altus*, but it stands in opposition to *prosona altus*, His body.

And that, of course, going back to the church. The church is His body, then, the most natural interpretation would be that His body, top pleroma, stands in opposition to *prosona altus*. That would be the natural construction.

Immediate sequence like that, relative to anything else, stands in opposition to what we immediately proceed. Now, that's the way, finally, that we have to discuss alternative interpretations in order to see, of course, of the evidence, the church, that is the fullness of Christ. And I don't think, if that is the correct exegesis, I must close now, and then we'll bring it on.

If that is the correct exegesis, that is the awareness you can see at a glance, pertinent to anything, to the whole question which we are dealing, of progressive sanctification, and progressive sanctification as it applies to the corporate relationship that pertains within the body of Christ. But that will do for today.

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