

# What Is The Second Work of Grace?

## Bible Answers About Denominations

The “second working of grace,” also known as the doctrine of “entire sanctification,” “heart holiness,” and “the second blessing,” owes its origin primarily to John Wesley. From 1725 to 1777, John Wesley, to whom Methodism claims its origin, taught the doctrine that he styled, “Christian Perfection.” In 1777, Wesley completed the final revision of a tract entitled, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.” The same basic material is preserved and published in the book, *The Works of John Wesley*.

While this doctrine is rooted in Calvinism and given birth by John Wesley there are other groups infected by it. Wesley’s influence has gone far beyond the sphere of Methodism, just as Calvin’s has expanded far beyond Presbyterianism. The Church of the Nazarene, which assumed its present form in 1908, is wholly Wesleyan in its theology, even more so than the liberalized modern Methodist church. For the most part, the Holiness and Pentecostal church movements have come out of the seedbed of Wesley’s “sanctification” emphasis. This includes Assemblies of God, Pentecostal and Holiness groups. The very term “Holiness” that is used to describe these groups stems from their preoccupation with Wesley’s theories of the subject.

This alleged “sanctification” is distinct from anything that occurs at the time of conversion, according to the doctrine. It is an alleged “second work of grace,” “second blessing,” that is accomplished by baptism with the Holy Spirit and erases one’s “evil nature,” and renders one sinlessly perfect and incapable of sin. Notice the statement of doctrine from the Nazarene Church Manual:

*“We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin or depravity, and are brought into a state of entire devotement to God, unto the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin, the abiding and indwelling experience of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer to life and service.” (Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, 1968, p. 30 – 31).*

There are some foolish and serious consequences to this doctrine. For example, according to this doctrine, one is first regenerated or converted, and later sanctified. This means that between one’s conversion and the sanctification experience one is at the same time a child of God, but still bears the “image of the devil” in Adam’s sin. The doctrine leaves such poor souls occupying the impossible roles of child of God and child of the devil simultaneously! Secondly, this doctrine holds that when one is sanctified by Holy Spirit baptism, only then is he empowered to life and service. This means that between conversion and sanctification the child of God is a helpless, miserable, spiritual half-breed, incapable of spiritual life or of service to Christ. Third, the alleged “sinless perfection” that results from “sanctification” is a terrible doctrine that plays right into the hands of Satan. If one

sincerely believes that every impulse or desire to sin has been completely erased from one's heart, then this has created a false sense of spiritual security and immunity to sin. This position makes repentance, confession and the need of forgiveness of sins impossible (1 Jno. 1:8-9).

This false doctrine is based upon two other false doctrines: Total Hereditary Depravity (see the tract by that name in which this doctrine is refuted) and the modern doctrine of Holy Spirit Baptism (see also the tract by the name of Holy Spirit Baptism refuting this doctrine). The Bible also clearly teaches the impossibility of sinless perfection.

The Bible repeatedly declares that all men are sinful and in need of a savior (cf. Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:23). Moreover, the New Testament repeatedly teaches that after one has been forgiven of his/her sins by the blood of Jesus Christ, through the obedience of the gospel message, one will continue to sin and need forgiveness. Paul called the Corinthians "sanctified" people (1 Cor. 1:2) and then devoted most of the letter to rebuking their sins.

The apostle John, in anticipating error such as "the second working of grace" wrote the following: "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for {those of} the whole world" (1 Jn 1:8-2:2 NAS).

The context of these verses shows that we are ever in need of the cleansing blood of Christ and an Advocate to plead our cause before the Heavenly Father. The term "if" does not suggest that some might live above sin but rather the term used is in the sense of "when." As Christians we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (2 Pet. 3:18) and this involves our striving to be faithful to Him. That is far different from claiming to be sinlessly perfect in this life.

Nowhere does the Bible provide any evidence for an alleged doctrine of "the second work of grace." Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit works through the word of God to sanctify (set apart) the Christian: "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build {you} up and to give {you} the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32 NAS). The all-sufficient word of God makes one complete (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The word of God sanctifies the Christian. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (John 17:17 NAS).

A life that is sanctified is one that has been consciously devoted to the service of God through faith in Jesus Christ, the confession of that faith, repentance of sins, baptism unto the remission of sins and a daily devotion and dedication to the service of the Lord (Jno. 8:24; 1 Jno. 4:2; Acts 3:19; Acts 2:38; Rev. 2:10).

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