

FALSE PATHS TO PERFECTION

Part 6

The other week we read the official doctrinal view of “entire sanctification” as it is described in the “Statement of Faith” from a major church denomination. The statement claims that entire sanctification “transforms believers into the likeness of Christ” (but apparently not the image of Christ) and is accomplished by God’s grace, through the Holy Spirit, in stages. Those stages are: (1) *initial* sanctification (or regeneration), which is simultaneous with justification; (2) *entire* sanctification—which comes after the person has been brought to a place where he is able to “fully consecrate” his life to God; (3) a continued perfecting work which culminates in (4) glorification. In glorification we are “fully conformed to the image of the Son.” The statement goes on to say:

“We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which **believers are made free from original sin**,*[the sin nature]* and brought into a state of entire devotion [*devotion; consecration*] to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect.

It is wrought by the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit and comprehends in one experience the **cleansing of the heart from sin** and the **abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit**, empowering the believer for life and service.

Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, **is wrought instantaneously by grace through faith**, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.” [Link](#)

First of all, it is religious confusion to say that entire sanctification transforms believers into *the likeness* of Christ but does not fully conform them to *the image* of Christ! If being transformed into the likeness of Christ does not mean being conformed to His image, this fact needs to be duly noted. Entire sanctification should be described as that works which “partially” transforms the believer into the likeness of Christ.

Secondly, please take note of the terms: “made free from original sin” and “cleansing the heart from sin” because they mean the same thing. Cleansing the heart from sin means that God *removes* the fallen human nature from us. This is how the heart is cleansed.

Thirdly, it’s a serious deception to speak of a person as being *entirely* sanctified, as having been *transformed* into the likeness of Christ, as having their hearts *fully* cleansed from sin by *removing* the sin nature, and of being *filled* with God’s holy life of *perfect* love—and then turn around and say this does not mean they are walking in “perfection”. That indeed, reaching perfection in this life is impossible! Under the heading: “Sin, Original and Personal” that same Statement of Faith claims that original sin (the sin nature) continues to exist *with* the new life of the believer *until* the heart is fully cleansed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit:

“We believe that original sin, or depravity, is that **corruption of the nature** of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which everyone is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is averse

to God, is without spiritual life, and inclined to evil, and that continually. We further believe that original sin **continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until the heart is fully cleansed** by the baptism with the Holy Spirit." [Link](#)

Clear enough?

The corrupted and fallen human nature—which we commonly call the “sin nature”—continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate until the heart is fully cleansed (by the baptism with the Holy Spirit). The teaching is crystal clear: at some point in our Christian walk, our sin nature is removed from us.

Next, the article differentiates between deeds that are viewed as “sin” and deeds that are simply the “*residual affects of the fall*”. These residual affects are defined as “involuntary and inescapable shortcomings, infirmities, faults, mistakes, failures, or other deviations from a standard of perfect conduct”.

“We believe that actual or personal sin is **a voluntary violation of a known law of God by a morally responsible person**. It is therefore not to be confused with involuntary and inescapable shortcomings, infirmities, faults, mistakes, failures, or other deviations from a standard of perfect conduct that are the residual effects of the Fall.”

However, such **innocent effects** [of the Fall] do not include **attitudes or responses contrary to the spirit of Christ**, which may properly be called sins of the spirit. We believe that personal sin is primarily and essentially a violation of the law of love; and that in relation to Christ sin may be defined as unbelief." [Link](#)

Wesleyans define sin as: (1) a voluntary violation of a known law of God by a morally responsible person, and (2) attitudes and responses contrary to the spirit of Christ. Involuntary faults, shortcomings, infirmities, mistakes and failures are not viewed as sin but as *inescapable effects* of the original fall. This all sounds good but the fact is, what we’re dealing with here is unbelief. These people don’t believe it’s possible to be “perfect” (without sin) in this life. Therefore, they have re-defined the terms perfect and sin.

Of course, Steve Bray, the writer/teacher we have been talking about, isn’t buying that whole argument. On page 76 of his book, The Way To Eternal Life” he says these involuntary, inescapable effects of the fall are actually *carnal traits*—and according to his teaching elsewhere in that book (*See: pp. 50 & 81*), those who manifest such carnal traits have not yet had their hearts cleansed. He says:

“It is not unusual to find “holiness” people **redefining the sanctified life** based on their own experience. They speak of their **carnal traits** as ‘infirmities’. But this will never bring true glory to God. We believe there have been many earnest souls turned away from the life of holiness because of what they see in the lives of those **who profess to possess the gift of holy love**.” [Link](#)

The Way To Eternal Life; p 76

Mr. Bray is no better than the holiness people when it comes to rejecting the possibility of going onto perfection, as the term is defined in the Scripture. In The Way To Eternal Life (See pp. 34 -36) he says:

“Quite early in His ministry we hear Jesus saying to His disciples, **‘Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.’** (Matt. 5:48) Even though they were still carnal and did not understand this heavenly language, He wanted them to realize that New Testament salvation takes people beyond the realm of human nature. Jesus is the one who gave this command so it must not be ignored. Our Lord and Savior would **never give a command that is beyond the realm of possibility**. He definitely instructs us to possess **some form of ‘perfection’**—a perfection that somehow resembles the Father.

And instead of simply **rejecting His Word in unbelief**, let us remember: “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” (Luke 18:27) By living through the Son, **we can become like our heavenly Father in love**, in this world. The glory of God is revealed through His image of holy love. We were created in a way that permits Him to reveal His Glory through our mortal bodies. **We are therefore expected**, in this New Testament age of fulfillment, **to reveal the same glorious life of holy love that Jesus revealed in bodily form...**

...It will also be necessary to **use much caution in how we interpret what it means to be ‘perfect’** like our heavenly Father is perfect. We know that our infinite God is perfect in everything. And we are finite beings with very limited knowledge and capacity. Each one of us will also have individual infirmities until we have received our glorified bodies. He therefore does not expect us to be as perfect in all things as He is. Such “perfection” is not intended for human beings.

But Jesus still says, ‘Therefore you shall be perfect.’ That word ‘therefore’ refers to something that was said **before** this command was given. What does it mean? We will find that **it refers to loving others with the same kind of holy love that God displays toward a sinful world.** [Link](#)

After quoting Jesus’ command to “be perfect”, Mr. Bray says that since Jesus is the one who gave us that command “it must not be ignored”. He further states that since Jesus “would never give a command that is beyond the realm of possibility”, instead of “rejecting His Word in unbelief” we should remember that things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

So far so good.

But *then* comes the downgrading of what Jesus actually commanded. Mr. Bray goes on to say that even though Jesus definitely instructs us to possess “some form” of perfection, we must use caution when interpreting what it means to perfect like our heavenly Father is perfect. He says we know God is infinite and is perfect in *everything*; but that we are finite beings with very limited knowledge and capacity. In addition, he says, each one of us will

continue to have individual (physical) infirmities until we have received our glorified bodies. Therefore, God cannot possibly expect us to be “perfect in all things”. Such perfection, Mr. Bray claims, is not even intended for human beings in this life. So then, what did Jesus actually mean when He said we should be perfect *as* our Father in heaven is perfect? According to Mr. Bray, what Jesus was saying was that we are to love others with the same kind of holy love He displays towards a sinful world.

Holiness people say it’s impossible to be “perfect” because we are (permanently) stuck with all these *involuntary* shortcomings, faults, mistakes and failures that are the effects of the original fall. Mr. Bray rejects this whole line of reasoning and says it *is* possible to be perfect, but not *physically* perfect (ie: perfect in all things). His of the command to be perfect is that the kind of perfection God expects from us is perfect *love*.

I tried to show last week that the Bible *associates* the terms “perfect” and “perfection” with having no *moral* spots or blemishes (just as Jesus had no moral spots or blemishes), with possessing the fulness of God and the fulness of Christ, with being free from all wrinkles, with having no guile and being faultless before the throne; and with bearing the full and complete image of the Lord Jesus.

When the Scripture talks about presenting us faultless and perfect at the Lord’s coming, it’s not talking *imputed* faultlessness and perfection; it’s talking about *actual* faultlessness and perfection. When the Bible says God intends to wash and cleanse a people to the point where they will have no guile or blemish, and no spot or wrinkle, it’s not talking about an invisible legal position; it’s talking about reality.

There will be a group of people who have allowed God to purge them of *all* sin and *fully* conform them to the image of Christ. It matters not what Mr. Bray says, or what holiness people say, or what leaders of the visible Church say. This is the explicit teaching of Scripture and the Scripture will never be broken!

Moreover, the *kind* of perfection these people will manifest goes much deeper than receiving the “gift of holy love” (towards mankind). It’s going to be a perfection that demonstrates the manifold *wisdom* of God—not the manifold love of God—to principalities and powers in heavenly places (*Eph. 3:10*).

The apostle Peter said we are to become partakers of the divine nature (*II. Pet. 1:4*), and let me assure you that God’s nature is more than love. However, even the love of God has been twisted and perverted by church leaders, including people like Mr. Bray, for the last 100 years. On page 32 of [The Way To Eternal Life](#) Mr. Bray describes (his view of) the love of God. He says:

“With this in mind, it may be helpful to look more closely at **how God changes our very nature when He fills our heart with His life of love**. It will reveal how love is able to meet all the righteous requirements of the law. First Corinthians chapter thirteen describes this love that surpasses knowledge. Not only does it provide the positive traits of the divine nature, it also **eliminates the negative traits of the carnal nature**.

‘Love suffers long’—it removes all impatience.

‘Love is kind’—it leaves no room for unkindness.

‘Love does not envy’—all jealousy and resentment is banished.

‘Love does not parade itself’—boasting and self-assertion disappear.

'Is not puffed up'—the prideful desire for honor finds no place in the heart.
'Does not behave rudely'—disrespect and foolishness is eliminated.
'Does not seek its own'—all selfish sin dies when self dies.
'Is not provoked'—self-centered anger and fleshly wrath will not be seen.
'Thinks no evil'—brooding over wrongs and uncharitable feelings are gone.
Bears all things'—it does away with a complaining spirit.
'Believes all things'—there is no mistrust within the heart to destroy fellowship.
'Hopes all things'—despair, anxiety and despondency vanish." [Link](#)

Notice, once again, that according to this guy's teaching, when God fills our heart with His life of holy love, all the "negative traits" of the carnal nature are *eliminated*. Hello? Eliminating "all the "traits" of the carnal nature is *the same* as eliminating the nature itself.

Aside from the fact that this is an unscriptural lie—God never "removes" the sin nature from us—it also hinders the person who believes this trash from following the Spirit because there are "holy" feelings that God seeks to give the believer that according to Mr. Bray, have been eliminated.

For example, he says that once you get the "zap" and God eliminates the attributes of your carnal nature, all "impatience" will be removed. The problem with this idea is, there is a kind of *holy impatience* that originates in our spirit and has nothing to do with our sin nature. It's a spiritual feeling God uses to guide us and warn us when something is wrong. Apparently neither Mr. Bray or any of the writers he likes to quote realized that such *spiritual* feelings exist.

You see, if we're born again, there are two sources of feelings in our lives: *spiritual* feelings (which come from the Holy Spirit into our regenerated spirits) and *natural* feelings (which come from our fallen sin nature). Both of these feelings similar enough that they're hard to distinguish at first. But as we mature, we learn the difference between fleshly impatience and holy impatience.

Did you ever find yourself feeling *furious* when you realized a minister you were listening to was preaching gross error? If so, I'll bet your first response to that feeling was to think it's your "flesh" just getting upset. But it's very possible that fury was coming from your spirit man. Don't you think the Spirit of God ever gets furious with people who are deceiving multitudes of His children and sending them to Hell? You bet He does!

Our spirit can receive *all kinds* of spiritual feelings from God, including *negative* ones. We can feel a holy sadness, a holy frustration, a holy anger, a holy impatience or any number of other negative feelings. But people who are being deceived by Mr. Bray's theological errors will never learn *which* feelings are coming from their spirit man and which are coming from their flesh man because like him, they will just assume that all "negative" feelings come from the sin nature!

Indeed, if you listen to people like Mr. Bray you'll never *trust* or *act upon* any feelings you receive that are "negative" (or which you assume are "un-Christ-like"). The result will be that you will never know the reality of what it means to be "led by the Spirit". One example of a spiritual feeling that often comes from God, but which people like Mr. Bray assumes is coming from the flesh, is harshness. On page 26 of his book, [Living Through Christ](#), Mr Bray quotes other writers who speak the same way about God's love. Listen to how they describe the person who has been filled with God's holy love:

"A [fully] sanctified spirit is a **gentle** spirit—one that is **saved from harshness and roughness**...

A gentle spirit is a conquered, melted and subdued spirit. It has been bathed in a heavenly sea of **tenderness**...

Have you fallen in love with the overflowing idea of perfect love? Are your dreams, thoughts, prayers and studies all centered on being lost in God's divine life of love?

What is the sweetness of love? **It is a love that fills and enlarges and overflows the breast with peace and joy**, while living sacrificially for the kingdom of God and His glory. It is love transforming the tongue, **selecting the fittest words** and **sweetening the voice**. [Link](#)

People who get caught up in this deception think they are delivered from all harshness. They become tender and humble and full of compassion. They consider harshness and rudeness negatives attributes of the "carnal" nature, which are opposed to God's love. They often quote Paul's words in Ephesians 4:15—"*...speaking the truth in love...*"—to counter any suggestion that qualities like sarcasm, irony, harshness or ridicule or sharpness could ever come from the Holy Spirit. But the fact is, there is a holy harshness that comes from God and when you feel that holy harshness rising up in your spirit man, God expects you to yield to it!

But since people like Mr. Bray have been perverting the Biblical understanding of God's love for centuries by mis-using First Corinthians chapter 13 as an *all-encompassing picture* of God's love, most of today's Christians would never accept the fact that a holy harshness could not only originate from God, but is a form of His love.

Consider some of the following Scriptural examples, all of which were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Listen to the sarcasm and harshness of the apostle James, as he rebukes those (presumably Christians) whose faith in God has produced no works. He says:

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"

James 2:19-20

The term "O vain man" is equivalent to "fool". So in a very sarcastic way, under the unction of the Spirit, James told these people their faith was no better than the faith of demons. Then he called them *fools* for assuming they could have faith without works. Can you see that when James spoke to his fellow believers in this manner, he was speaking the truth in love? Listen to the harshness of Peter as he describes false teachers:

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.

II. Peter 2:12

In modern language Peter as calling these people irrational animals, born to be caught and destroyed. Can you see that when Peter called these religious leaders animals who were born to be destroyed, he was speaking the truth in love? When's the last time *you* felt led by the Holy Spirit to call some false teacher an animal? Can you even believe it would ever be God's will that a Christian talk that way?

Listen to the rudeness of Stephen, as he stands before the recognized religious authority of Israel in that hour—an authority that was established by God Himself. He says:

You stiff necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit...Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?"

Acts 7:51-52

Can you see that when Stephen told those spiritual leaders they were "uncircumcised in heart and ears", that they always "resist the Holy Spirit", and that they were the children of those who killed the prophets, even though what he was speaking harshly to them, and even though what he said was very harsh (to them), the fact is, he was speaking the truth in love? Listen to Paul, when talking about those who were demanding that the Gentiles be circumcised. He is so frustrated and upset in the Spirit with the evil these people are doing, he says:

And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you.

Galatians 5:11-12

Do you realize what Paul was saying here? He was saying he wished these people—people who believed in Messiah—would *emasculate* themselves! Can you reconcile these words with his command to speak the truth in love? Can you reconcile them with his description of charity in First Corinthians 13?

Can you understand that when Paul said he wished the Judaizers would *castrate* themselves, he was being *led by the Spirit* to talk that way? Do you believe God would ever ask *you* to speak in such a manner. If not, your understanding of God's love has been perverted.

In Second Corinthians chapter eleven, when referring to the fact that the same people who were questioning his apostleship would gladly accept *anyone* off the street who *claimed* to be an apostle, Paul used a ton of sarcasm to make his point. In modern language he said: "...you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly. For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face. To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison.

Consider the sarcasm Jesus employs when the Jews picked up stones and were about to stone Him. He said: "...*Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me*"? (John 10:32) He could have just as easily said it this way: "Sure, go ahead and stone me, but just out of interest, which of my works are you stoning me for?" In other words, He's so confident in his own innocence he is actually mocking them.

Consider how "rude" it was for Jesus to tell the religious leaders of Israel—again, leaders that moved under God's ordained authority—that they were a "brood of vipers" (Matt. 2:34) and "hypocrites" (in Matt. 5:7). Consider how harsh it was for Jesus to look at Peter and say: "...*Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me...*" (Matt. 16:23)

Don't you think that statement totally wrecked Peter that night? Can you see that when Jesus did that, he was speaking the truth in love? Can you accept the fact that He was led by the Holy Spirit to say it? Do you think the Spirit of God would ever lead **you** to look at a fellow believer and say something like that? If not, there may be a problem with your understanding of God.

Consider the sarcasm Jesus exhibits in another place, as He attacks the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. He says: "...*They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*". (Mark 2:17) You can almost picture Jesus holding up fingers with the quotation marks around "righteous" as He spoke to them.

And what about the prophets? They were extremely rude and obnoxious by today's standards. Have you read some of the things God said through the mouth of His prophets in the Old Testament? Man, they were a rough bunch. Even righteous Job uses sarcasm against his friends who were supposed to be "comforting" him, but who were in fact torturing him with their religious clichés. He says to them (in modern language): "*You men are so wise. Who will the people of the earth turn to for wisdom after you are dead?*" (Job 12:2)

In these examples, godly men, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, used sarcasm, irony, rudeness and ridicule to make their point. Indeed, the Bible is full of sarcasm, rudeness and harshness and most of it was inspired by a Holy and Righteous God! But people like Mr. Bray pervert the Biblical understanding of God's character by presenting First Corinthians 13 as an *all-encompassing picture* of that nature. The result is, people who are deceived by this kind of garbage refuse to accept the fact that harshness and rudeness and sarcasm are all part of God's holy nature.

I'm not saying it's God's will that we express ourselves in these various negative ways all the time. I am simply calling your attention to the fact that when you are dealing with certain people and certain situations, it's acceptable to be sarcastic and even rude. It's acceptable to expose and rebuke. Not only is it acceptable, many times it is God-ordained. But if our perception of God's nature is distorted, we will never learn how to follow the Spirit. Nor will we ever come to a place of full obedience.

Please take notice of another attribute of the "carnal" nature, which Mr. Bray says is eliminated. When Paul said charity "believes all things", Mr. Bray's interpretation is that there will be no more "mistrust within the heart" of the person that can "destroy fellowship" between believers. This kind of thinking can become very dangerous, very quickly because there is a *holy* mistrust that comes from God, which is designed to keep us safe—and if you assume *all* mistrust comes from the flesh, God will not be able to protect you.

Listen my friends: it's God's will that we mistrust certain people, including certain brethren! It's God's will that we separate from people—Christian or non-Christian, it makes no difference—who are living in sin or spreading false teachings. It's amazing to me how so many of today's Christians are so totally ignorant of the fact that one of the *central* messages of the Bible is the message of *separation*. If you walk trusting everyone you will soon be walking under the power of demon spirits.

The New Testament is *full* of commandments and admonitions to separate from brethren who are unclean spiritually, from brethren who preach false doctrine, from brethren who walk unruly or disorderly, etc.—and that’s not even counting the sinners. The Bible says Jesus was SEPARATE FROM sinners (*Heb. 7:26*) Please consider the following examples. Paul said we are to mark and avoid those (fellow believers) who cause division through the introduction of false doctrines. He also said we are to separate from those who are spiritually unclean.

*Now I beseech you, brethren, **mark them** which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; **and avoid them.***

Romans 16:17

*Wherefore **come out** from among them, and **be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*

II. Corinthians 6:17

Speaking of unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, Paul told Titus not just to rebuke them but rebuke them *sharply*. I wonder how many who listen to these chat sessions are capable of actually “rebuking” other brethren, let alone rebuke them sharply?

*This witness is true. Wherefore **rebuke them sharply**, that they may be sound in the faith.*

Titus 1:13

Do you think Paul “hated” the people who needed to be rebuked sharply? Do you think it was a lack of love that made him give Titus that command? You see, Paul *loved* both the people who were no longer sound in the faith and those who would eventually be affected by them. He knew by the Spirit that the only way to reach the ones who had been deceived, and keep them from hurting those around them, was through a harsh rebuke.

If you walked into a room and heard someone rebuking another believer harshly, would you have enough wisdom to try and discern *the source* of that harshness? Not if you think a fully sanctified spirit is one that has been “saved from harshness and roughness”! Those following the *false experience* of Mr. Bray would automatically assume that person was acting out of their flesh. Paul also said we are to separate from those who walk “disorderly” and those who refuse to walk “according to the tradition” (teachings) he laid down and from those who “consent not to wholesome words”.

*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: **from such withdraw thyself.***

I. Timothy 6:3-5

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye **withdraw yourselves from** every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.*

II. Thessalonians 3:6

How about the apostle John, who is often called the apostle of love? He told a congregation that if someone comes into their midst—even from another church—and does not believe the same doctrine they do, they are not to receive them, eat with them, or wish them well (God speed).

*If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, **receive him not** into your house, **neither bid him god speed**: for he that biddeth him god speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

II John 1:10-11

Do you see this as a harsh word? You should because they *are* harsh words and they came from the Holy Spirit. I tell you truly, if Jesus and the apostles (or any of the Old Testament prophets) came on the religious scene today they would be rejected by the majority of the people in the churches, just as they were rejected by the majority of the people of Israel.

Due to the apostate condition today's churches, if any Biblical figure came back he would have nothing positive to say to today's churches. Indeed, he would have nothing but harsh things to say and those things would be rejected out of hand as being "unchristian".

Mr. Bray and people like him would accuse them of having a bad attitude and he would tell them they need to go back into the wilderness for some more testing until they are ready to let go of all those *carnal* attitudes and live through (his false) Christ, who never raises His voice, who is never harsh or rude, and who is always docile and tender, and who never gets mad.