

PENTACOSTALISM IN THE CHURCH

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Perhaps one reason why the subject of sin is being downplayed in the church today is because Pentecostal (holiness) teaching on sin has been espoused by preachers and elders. Examples of it include a desire for “positive preaching” and “positive worship services” where a celebration atmosphere dominates the assemblies. One writer suggesting as a way “to live more spiritually” by worshiping “positively” wrote, “‘Positively’ refers to worship as praise, honor, and eager surrender rather than the browbeating of God’s people.”¹ Bible topics like discipline, marriage-divorce-remarriage, worldliness, drunkenness, drugs, denominationalism, abortion, fornication, lying, cheating, stealing, cursing, the judgment, and especially hell can never be discussed in such “positive” worship services. Since other Pentecostal traits are showing up in the service of quite a number of congregations like hand clapping, arm waving, and testimonials, it ought not come as a shock to find the Pentecostal (holiness) doctrine on sin entering along with these other expressions of error.

What is the Pentecostal (holiness) doctrine on sin? The idea that “sanctification” removes both the desire and the ability to commit sin. II Corinthians 1:15 where Paul mentioned “a second benefit” is misconstrued to mean “sanctification” as already described instead of the benefit of a second visit from an inspired apostle with all that would bring by way of example, education, exhortation, and edification. What need exists among such “sanctified” Pentecostals to hear sin discussed, exposed, and corrected? They would rather shout, speak gibberish, wave their arms around, do a “holy” dance, and play/listen to rock-concert-level instrumental music. The farther afield from Bible preaching some churches of Christ get the more nearly some are mimicking the Pentecostals.

What is sanctification? Guy N. Woods gave a concise answer: “The noun ‘sanctification’ is related in origin to the words ‘holy’ and ‘holiness,’ the basic meaning being *separation* from that which is material and sinful. The prominent idea in sanctification is separation for a sacred purpose. The holiness of God, for example, results from his total separation from all evil; accordingly, man is sanctified or holy if the life is dedicated to God rather than to the world and worldly things.”² He went on to say, “It is an action of deity in that the system, whereby men may be delivered from the world and its evil influences, originated with God; and it is also said to be an action of men who must appropriate the

blessing through faith and obedience...it is not simply or solely an action wrought by him upon us.”³

God does not through “a second blessing” or “sanctification” remove both the desire and the ability to commit sin. Even before Paul wrote to the Corinthians about “a second blessing” in II Corinthians, he had already written “to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” in I Corinthians 1:2. How could Paul bestow some kind of “a second blessing” on the Corinthians when he wrote of himself, “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (I Cor. 9:26-27)?

It is not possible for people to be sinlessly perfect, but it is possible for people to be faithfully obedient to God’s revealed will, the Bible. John wrote, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just 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” (I John 1:7-10). More preachers need the courage of their convictions to preach against sin. More elders need the resolve of their accepted responsibility to “feed the flock.” Finally, more Christians need to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (II Pet. 3:18).

ENDNOTES

1Rubel Shelly, “10 ways to live more spiritually” in *LoveLines*, 28:1 (January 2, 2002), p. 2.

2Guy N. Woods, *Questions and Answers*, Vol. II (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1986), pp. 187-188.

3*Ibid.*, p. 188.

Questions

1. How does a lack of Bible preaching and teaching on challenging topics downplay sin?
2. How would a lack of familiarity with the nature and expression of sin hinder being separated from the world?

3. What passage of scripture proved positively that Paul did not believe nor teach the Pentecostal position on “sanctification”?

4. Discuss the difference between being perfect and being faithful.