

Chapter Three

Second Tenet: Gospel Sanctification

The proposition concerning the contention between *authentic Calvinism* and *sanctified Calvinism* is far from being a theory. The reality of the contention has been primarily displayed in the contemporary biblical counseling movement. Dr. Jay E. Adams started the movement in the same year that the Australian Forum opened for business, circa 1970. Adams' biblical counseling construct was based on an aggressive sanctification and the competence of believers to help each other with the word of God. Adams' groundbreaking book that launched the biblical counseling movement was entitled, "Competent to Counsel." The competence of believers was the very antithesis of Reformation theology which was Luther's *cross theology*. A cursory observation of Luther's Heidelberg Disputation makes this assertion a significant understatement. Hence, the two emerging movements were destined for war.

During the 1970's, the Forum's Present Truth Magazine was the most widely published theological journal in the English speaking world, and had a vast impact in Presbyterian circles. Particularly at Westminster Seminary where Dr. Adams served as a professor with the aforementioned Dr. John "Jack" Miller who was the father of Sonship Theology. The Forum, during that time, and to the consternation of Adams, met formally with the Westminster faculty and had a significant impact on Westminster academia—especially Michael Horton to name one. There has been at least four major resurgence movements of Luther's cross theology since the birth of the Reformation, and the last two came from the Seventh-Day Adventist church—the latest being the Forum. That's why Adams didn't like the relationship between the Forum and Westminster—because of the SDA association. However, the fact that this resurgence of authentic Reformed theology was turning the SDA upside down was irrefutable. The movement was known as the "Awakening," and Westminster took note.

The movement was a significant turning point for Westminster theology, primarily during the 1980's.

The dirty little secret is that the present-day New Calvinist revival owes its birth to the Forum, but has relegated any accolades to the closets because of the SDA connection. However, two close associates of the Forum, Graeme Goldsworthy and Jon Zens, enjoy some recognition in the movement—especially Goldsworthy. The information shared here in regard to this contemporary church history is detailed and referenced in “The Truth About New Calvinism” [32]. The majority of that book documents the contemporary history of the New Calvinist movement.

Beginning in the early 90's, war broke out between conservative Calvinists and proponents of Sonship Theology. This is more than interesting because Dr. Miller's Sonship Theology was nothing more or less than Martin Luther's *cross theology*. And of course, the clarion call of Luther's Reformation was “Sola Fide.” The false Reformation gospel has always received a pass based on the assumption that *justification by faith alone* pertained to, well, justification alone. Not so. The crux of Reformation *theology of the cross* is Sola Fide for sanctification also. The Reformers always forget to mention that little detail. In the same way, the Reformers have always received a pass via the assumption that the *total depravity* of man only refers to the unregenerate. No, it refers to the saints as well. At any rate, as discussed in the prior chapter, the “Cross Chart” is a distinct visual illustration of Luther's *cross theology* and was produced by World Harvest Mission which was founded on Dr. John Miller's Sonship Theology.

Something else was founded on Sonship Theology at Westminster as well: an answer to Jay Adams' abominable suggestion that Christians are competent. Remember, that very idea is antithetical to Reformed thought; what is more obvious? A self-described follower of Miller, Dr. David Powlison, developed the curriculum for the counseling wing of Westminster Seminary (CCEF).

And as a result, there was a war on two fronts in Presbyterian circles: theological training and counseling. Furthermore, David Powlison stated specifically that the difference between the two counseling philosophies was... and don't miss this, two different gospels:

“This might be quite a controversy, but I think it's worth putting in. Adams had a tendency to make the cross be for conversion. And the Holy Spirit was for sanctification. And actually even came out and attacked my mentor, Jack Miller, my pastor that I've been speaking of through the day, for saying that Christians should preach the gospel to themselves. I think Jay was wrong on that. I – it's one of those places where I read Ephesians. I read Galatians. I read Romans. I read the gospels themselves. I read the Psalms. And the grace of God is just at every turn, and these are written for Christians. I think it's a place where Jay's fear of pietism, like his fear of speculation, psychologically actually kept him from tapping into just a rich sense of the vertical dimension. And I think Biblical Counseling as a movement, capital B, capital C, has been on a trajectory where the filling in of some of these neglected parts of the puzzle has led to an approach to counseling that is more mature, more balanced. It's wiser. It has more continuity with the church historically in its wisest pastoral exemplars [33].

Commentary on this follows:

“At the core of a longstanding contention between Jay Adams and the CCEF clan, and later NANC also because of CCEF influence, was disagreement on the gospel. The distinction cannot be clearer—Adams believes that the gospel is for salvation, and then we move on in making disciples by teaching them to observe the whole counsel of God. Powlison, according to Westminster's version of the Forum's *centrality of the objective gospel* which is Sonship Theology, believes the same gospel

that saved us also sanctifies us. Powlison also mentioned the phrase that Miller coined that is the motto of contemporary New Calvinism: *We must preach the gospel to ourselves every day* [Ibid.].

David Powlison, in true Reformed style which often excludes pertinent information; such as, its major tenets synthesizing justification and sanctification, didn't mention to his audience that Adams "attacked" his mentor in the form of a published book. The book was a merciless dismantling of Sonship Theology; so, it stands to reason that Powlison wouldn't make it a point to mention the book. In said book, "Biblical Sonship: An Evaluation of the Sonship Discipleship Course," Adams complains that Sonship fuses justification and sanctification together, and also executed the following paramount contention: Sonship misidentifies the source of sanctification's power as the finished work of justification. This can be seen in Powlison's contention that "grace" is seen throughout the Bible when speaking to Christians, but as we discussed in chapter one, that often speaks to the power of salvation given to believers in full at salvation and appropriated through learning and doing the full counsel of God (the very definition of a disciple [Matthew 28:19,20]), not the continual revisiting of the same gospel that saved us to achieve perpetual justification. Or, if you will, preaching the gospel to ourselves every day. As we shall see further in the following chapters this is far from being a mere matter of semantics—this is a matter of *false gospel* versus *true gospel*.

As the war for truth on these two fronts raged, Sonship went underground. The Sonship nomenclature, by then full of bullet holes, began to represent itself through other names such as "Gospel Transformation." This strain of the Reformed virus that came out of the Forum was the major catalyst for the present-day New Calvinist movement as the other strains were all but wiped out in other venues. Ironically, Calvinistic Baptists who effectively wiped it out in their territory accused the doctrine of being "antinomian" [34]. During this era of stealth, circa 2000-2007, the movement experienced phenomenal growth and was labeled

“New Calvinism” in 2008. But as always in church history, with the resurgence of authentic Reformed doctrine comes divisions and turmoil. Masses of people in the midst of church splits and broken families began to wonder what was going on. The movement’s detractors began to call it “Gospel Sanctification” in, or about 2006 [35]. Sometime later, circa 2010, some started catching on to the fact that Gospel Sanctification and Sonship Theology were the same thing. Many in Presbyterian circles thought that Sonship had been neutralized (as one notable Presbyterian stated: “I haven’t heard anything about that movement in ten years”); not so, it merely changed names.

In both forms, Sonship Theology, and Gospel Sanctification, Dr. Adams has written extensively in contention against the doctrine. But yet, Dr. David Powlison claims that, “It’s wiser. It has more continuity with the church historically in its wisest pastoral exemplars.” Between the book Adams wrote on Sonship and his Gospel Sanctification archives, he accuses the doctrine of fusing justification and sanctification together, mis-identifying sanctification’s source of power, and replacing biblical obedience with contemplationism [36]. Nevertheless, the crux of this chapter focuses on the Reformed misidentification of sanctification’s power source. This is a major tenet of Reformed error as best exemplified in Gospel Sanctification. We will be using Adams’ *Biblical Sonship* book to demonstrate this. According to Adams....

“The heart of the problem with Sonship lies in its concept of [biblical] Sonship. And that is related directly to its view of the gospel. The interrelation of these two factors is uppermost in the teachings of this group. According to Sonship, the problem with most Christians is that they are living as if they were orphans rather than as sons. They are living as if they had never been adopted into the heavenly family. Because of this, they fail to appreciate and appropriate the rights and privileges granted to them by their heavenly Father. That is why they do not grow spiritually, lead powerless and

miserable lives, and are ineffective as believers. Sonship claims that the answer to all such problems is to revisit the fact of one's adoption. It is to realize afresh the meaning of the gospel. In this way, the gospel is what changes and empowers a Christian throughout life.

How is this done? It is done by preaching the gospel to one's self over and over again and by “practice[ing] every day believing the gospel.” This continued experience begins by repentance. One repents of sins, but principally of the sin of failing to recognize and appropriate his sonship [37].

It is easy to see that Dr. Miller merely seized on the rage of that day concerning the “lost Reformation gospel” and put the *biblical sonship* twist on it. But the principle of authentic Reformed doctrine is the same: sanctification by justification; i.e., *sola fide* also applying to sanctification. This fact is exemplified by Adams’ observations in the book that is our present focus:

“The Greek word *huióthesia* (found in Galatians 4:5) means “son-placing” or “adoption.” It is a legal term that defines the status before the law. It declares that the heavenly Father has received a believer into the position of full sonship in the heavenly family. To him, all of the rights and privileges of sonship have been granted. This is a wonderful fact that takes place when one is “justified by faith.” In this act, he is counted (reckoned) perfect on the books of heaven because all of the righteousness of Christ in fulfilling the law is attributed to him as if he had done it. Remember, however, that the transaction is in every sense a *legal* one [Id. p.34].

There is another Greek term that is used in Scriptures to describe the relationship of the believer to his heavenly Father. It is *technon*. This word, in contrast to *huióthesia* (the forensic word that Sonship repeatedly emphasizes), speaks of the warm, affectionate relationship of a child

to his parent. It has to do with the life relationship of the two *after* adoption. It is of significance that the legal force of the former term pervades the thinking of Sonshippers while the intent of the latter term is barely mentioned [Id. p.36].

Biblical sonship speaks to the legal declaration that places us in the family of God as His adopted children. It would appear that Miller simply wanted his own niche, but the application of sola fide to sanctification is exactly the same. Adams continued:

“Sanctification is said to take place by faith alone as justification does. Any effort on the part of the Christian is said to be wrong. The cooperative nature of the human and the divine in sanctification is neglected or dismissed; Sonshippers label the human side of sanctification as works-righteousness. The fact is that no Reformed teacher of any note has ever taught that this cooperative effort is works-righteousness. Rather, human effort in the process of sanctification is always been understood as the result of the Spirit's work in the heart, encouraging and enabling the believer to obey God's commands. These works are denominated as in Galatians 5, “the Spirits fruit.” In Philippians 2:13 Paul states it clearly: “it is God who is producing in you both the willingness and the ability to do the things that please Him.” But note that the *believer* is the one who does them. God does not do them *for* him or *instead* of him [Id. p.42].

As a sanctified Calvinist (see ch.2, ¶2), Adams denies that this is of the Reformed tradition which we will address shortly, but as a summation of Adams' true observations would argue thus far—the truism by present-day New Calvinists that justification and sanctification are “never separate, but distinct” must be rejected with prejudice. This is just a nuanced way of stating the Reformed golden chain: justification is a static legal declaration that starts growing or progressing when someone believes in it. Hence, justification grows, and is then deceptively referred to as

“progressive sanctification” which becomes a synonym or idiom for *growing justification* that progresses towards a final justification. Justification is supposed to be a finished work. In this scenario, justification is the source for sanctification, and Adams has a problem with that:

“The problem with Sonship is that it misidentifies the source of sanctification (or the fruitful life of the children of God) as justification. Justification, though a wonderful fact, a ground of assurance, and something never to forget, cannot produce a holy life through a strong motive for it. As a declaration of forgiveness, pardon, and adoption into the family of God, it is (remember) a legal act. It changes the standing, but not the condition of the person who was justified [Id. p. 34].

On the other hand, *regeneration* (quickening, or making alive; Ephesians 2:5) is the true source of sanctification. Justification deals with guilt; regeneration and sanctification deal with corruption. Regeneration, the true source of sanctification (growing out of sinful living into holy living), provides spiritual life to believe the gospel together with the capability to resist sin, and to obey God's commandments through the Holy Spirit, Whose coming Christians have been “created in Christ Jesus for good works” all of this is of grace making the believer nothing less than God's handiwork (Ephesians 2:10) [Id. p.34].

Moreover, not only is the Christian everywhere in the Bible exhorted to obey God's commands rather than merely repent and believe the gospel, when he fails he is dealt with as a disobedient son with whom God is thereby displeased (Revelation 3:19), who must not only repent and remember God's goodness but also (specifically) must “*do the first works*” (Revelation 2:5). If he fails to do so, all of the preaching of the gospel to himself again (a non-biblical concept that seems to be the slogan of Sonship) will not restore the light of God's countenance [Id. p.35].

Plainly, the error of substituting justification for regeneration (quicken) is at the heart of the difficulty that Sonship presents to the Christian. It fails to explain what God has done for him in making him a new creation and how he may conform to the will of God. It is the new regenerate life with its new capacity to please God that enables the Spirit Who quickened him to help him grow by His grace. The grace (help) of the Lord Jesus Christ that Paul desires for believers (Galatians 6:18 and elsewhere) is mediated through the Holy Spirit Whom he sent as a counselor like Himself to aid believers [Id. p.36].

Adams goes on to explain other serious problems with Sonship:

“In this section of the *Manual* entitled “Vague Feelings Versus The Truth” (8-16), we read, “The principal way that you grow is by believing.” In it, we also read “The power of bad habits is broken at the foot of the cross. Keep going back and repenting even if you keep doing it [the sinful bad habit].” Elsewhere, we are assured by Sonship that the cross is what Christ *now* does. That is not what the Bible teaches. Indeed, the statement sounds almost like the sacrifice on the cross was not a once for all act ([fn.1] “The Greek word used for the once-for-allness of the cross is *hapax*”). While faith is essential, it is not alone, as James says; “Faith without works is dead.” Sinful habits must be replaced by their biblical alternatives as the latter developed by the Spirit and His fruit [Id. pp.42, 43].

The progress that is encouraged throughout the Bible is stifled by Sonship’s unbiblical insistence on always going back to the beginning. On the contrary, in Hebrews 6:1 “maturity” is envisioned as *leaving* the “elementary principles” and *going on or advancing*, to other things. Indeed, the writer of Hebrews is at cross purposes with Sonship. Rather than going on to maturity, the Sonshipper is taught to return to infancy [Id. pp.38, 39].

Growth, according to Sonship, means taking the backward look, rehearsing over and over again that one has been made a son. Hebrews, instead, tells us that growth comes from moving on, “not laying the foundation” again. It comes from learning new truths from the Scriptures and, by faith and power and wisdom of the Spirit, putting them into practice. There is much talk about faith among Sonshippers, but little or no talk of the works that James says will follow true faith [Id. p.39].

This quotation, “Elsewhere, we are assured by Sonship that the cross is what Christ *now does*” almost sums up the whole problem discussed in chapter two. Adams also notes the blatant rejection of the Hebrew writer’s exhortation to leave the foot of the cross for spiritual maturity. But Adams makes another point that has been previously made in this book concerning the *works salvation by antinomianism* aspect:

“Sanctification is said to take place by faith alone as justification does. Any effort on the part of the Christian is said to be wrong. The cooperative nature of the human and the divine in sanctification is neglected or dismissed; Sonshippers label the human side of sanctification as works-righteousness [Id. p.42].... Since in Sonship the focus is on the past (the legal adoption as sons), the present is sadly neglected from an effort to avoid legalism and works-righteousness, a new legalism has emerged. This legalism stresses a prescribed ritual of preaching of the gospel over and over again to one’s self rather than teaching the ways of biblical, filial obedience. Little or nothing appears in the literature about obedience. A person becomes bound by the ever-occurring ritual of self-confrontation in preaching rather than being free to live for Christ by learning God’s ways and keeping his commandments [Id. p.38].

Adams, though a Calvinist, and like a few other sanctified Calvinists, is a tremendous gift to the church. But as the father

of the contemporary biblical counseling movement, he stands above most men in his contribution to the church in our day. Between 1945 and 1970, the American church had fallen victim to liberalism, Neo-Orthodoxy, and Neo-Evangelicalism. When Adams arrived on the scene in 1970, the church was in the exact state that anti-New Evangelicalism prognosticators said it would be. But authentic Calvinists went to war with Adams and his soteriologically sound counseling in the mid 90's, and by 2008 had won a clear victory. Today, easily 90% of all biblical counseling is based on Luther's Disputation. Biblical counselors in our day do not teach you how to change your life with the word of God, they teach you how to live in the "cross story" while utilizing the maniacal either/or hermeneutic to relegate every other reality to the "glory story." And Adams would be the latter because he believes Christians can actually change. Meanwhile, "biblical" counselors of the *cross story* do not emphasize their wickedness by small measure in failing to disclose the fact that their counseling is not about change:

“There are several problems with that essentially legalistic view of Sanctification, as reflected in the following observations:

- 1) Our flesh cannot get better. In Romans 7:18 Paul wrote, "For I know that NOTHING good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh..." Your flesh cannot be improved. Flesh is flesh, and spirit is spirit.
- 2) Our new nature, on the other hand cannot get better, because it has already been made new and perfect through regeneration. We have been given a "new heart" (new nature, or new spirit), and not a defective one, which would be absurd. This new spirit has been made "one spirit with Him" (1 Corinthians 6:17), such that when we "walk according to the Spirit" (i.e., the Holy Spirit), we also walk according to our own new spirit.

3) Those who deal with Sanctification by zeroing in on so-called “Progressive” Sanctification as the main point of Sanctification are at best in Kindergarten [38].

There is some further allusion to this in Adams’ book on Sonship:

“They do not represent real growth. In fact, at one place Puritan Thomas Brooks is quoted favorably as saying, “Christ in this life will not free any believer from the presence of any one sin, though he doth free every believer from the damning power over every sin” [Id. pp.17, 18].

Puritanism was a large part of the European “second Reformation.” Moreover, Adams’ contentions against Sonship are apt indictments against authentic Calvinism because it’s the same doctrine . Calvin himself stated the following:

“We must strongly insist on these two things: That no believer ever performed one work which, if tested by the strict judgment of God, could escape condemnation; and, moreover, that were this granted to be possible (though it is not), yet the act being vitiated and polluted by the sins of which it is certain that the author of it is guilty, it is deprived of its merit [Calvin Institutes 3.14.11].

As far as Sonship’s idea of *doing the cross*, and returning to it as a source for sanctification, Calvin stated the following:

“Hence we infer, according to the reasoning of Paul, that it was not of works. In like manners when the prophet says, “The just shall live by his faith,” (Hab. 2:4), he is not speaking of the wicked and profane, whom the Lord justifies by converting them to the faith: his discourse is directed to believers, and life is promised to them by faith. Paul also removes every doubt, when in confirmation of this sentiment he quotes the words of

David, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,” (Ps. 32:1). It is certain that David is not speaking of the ungodly but of believers such as he himself was, because he was giving utterance to the feelings of his own mind. Therefore we must have this blessedness not once only, but must hold it fast during our whole lives.

Moreover, the message of free reconciliation with God is not promulgated for one or two days, but is declared to be perpetual in the Church (2 Cor. 5:18, 19). Hence believers have not even to the end of life any other righteousness than that which is there described. Christ ever remains a Mediator to reconcile the Father to us, and there is a perpetual efficacy in his death—viz. ablution, satisfaction, expiation; in short, perfect obedience, by which all our iniquities are covered. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul says not that the beginning of salvation is of grace, but “by grace are ye saved,” “not of works, lest any man should boast,” (Eph. 2:8, 9) [Ibid.].

In addition, Luther stated the following in his Heidelberg Disputation:

“He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ [Thesis 25].

“He, however, who has emptied himself (cf. Phil. 2:7) through suffering no longer does works but knows that God works and does all things in him. For this reason, whether God does works or not, it is all the same to him. He neither boasts if he does good works, nor is he disturbed if God does not do good works through him. He knows that it is sufficient if he suffers and is brought low by the cross in order to be annihilated all the more [Thesis 24].

“The Law says, “do this,” and it is never done.” Grace says, “believe in this,” and everything is already done” [Thesis 26].

The fact that the present-day Neo-Calvinist doctrine is a mirror image of Luther’s Disputation is no accident, and Sonship Theology is based on it in regard to every significant element. And Reformation fundamentals bore the fruit of Europe’s orthodoxy of blood where church discipline kissed the burning stake and the hangman’s noose. A stake and noose that had no pity on the child or the fair damsel. During the European Witch Wars, women became rarer than fine gold in some parts of Germany. A doctrine is known by its fruit.

Now such a doctrine is the foundation of a massive biblical counseling movement that posits the “cross story.” The only change that it seeks is a change of mind that continually endeavors to see our worthlessness before God in deeper and deeper ways while leaving the rest to Puritan Quietism. Such, according to Luther in Thesis 28 of his Disputation, invokes the love of God in greater measure and is foundational to John Piper’s Christian Hedonism in our day. The tension can be seen in the very titles of books: “How to Help People Change” versus “How People Change.” It can be seen in the contradictory messages at the 2006 National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC [39]) annual conference—the last gasp of the supposed “glory story” of biblical counseling. In the Reformed mind, there is no in-between—it’s cross or glory. Behind credentials, pristine offices, and assuring smiles is a false gospel that will not help people, but will replace their present demons with those that are worse than the first ones.

And adoration for murdering mystic despots. They are the “wisest pastoral exemplars.”

God help us.