

Practical Sanctification

by A.B. Simpson

Sanctification is the process of crucifying the old and sinful nature, and living a life of love and devotion to God.

Scripture: James 4:5

Topics: "Surrender to God", "Sanctification"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the necessity of practical sanctification, urging believers to confront their carnal hearts and the sinful nature that leads to strife and desires contrary to God's will. He explains that true sanctification involves surrendering the old self to Christ, allowing for a transformative union with Him that produces a new heart and life. Simpson highlights the importance of separating from worldly influences and embracing the love of God as the antidote to selfish desires, ultimately leading to a life filled with grace and holiness. He encourages believers to submit to God, resist evil, and cultivate humility to receive God's abundant grace.

Transcript

"Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"(James 4:5, 6).

Let no one think that because James demands from us the practical outliving of our religion in a very real matter-of-fact way, that he has no sympathy with the deeper experiences of the Christian life and the emotions of true Christian feeling. On the contrary we shall find, as we follow him in his treatment of this subject of sanctification, that he leads us down into the very depths of holy mysticism and the most exquisite touches of divine love. But first he begins at the dark side of the subject and comes to the very root of the matter.

I. THE CARNAL HEART, THE OLD AND SINFUL NATURE.

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" This is the root of all our sorrow and sin, the evil heart. There is no use in trying to put on new garments till you get the old body cleansed. Nor must the cleansing stop at the skin. It must reach the heart and the very marrow of the bones. There is no use in filtering your water with the most improved methods, so long as that old dead horse is up in yonder reservoir. Get him out, and your filtering will be to some purpose. It is no use to apply your medical treatment to mere symptoms, and try invigorating air and

good nourishment, so long as that cancer or ulcer is feeding on the vital organs. Get the root of the evil removed, then your hygiene will be of some value. There is no use trying to get the best sort of captain, engineer and crew for that vessel, if the hull is rotten and worm-eaten. You will founder at sea with the best captain, engineer and crew. You may have the best plan in the world for your building and the best architects, but if your material is poor, it will fall to pieces in your hands, and the ruin will come in spite of all your ingenuity.

So God comes to the deep secret of all our trouble, this fallen nature, this dead heart, "the lusts that war in our members." What is lust? It is the desire and inclination to sin. It is the wrong love of anything, love perverted, love turned from God to self-gratification. The last of the commandments, that seems to sum up the whole spirit and essence of morality, strikes at this evil heart, "Thou shalt not covet." It means thou shalt not desire to do wrong. The principle of all ethics is to reach the will, the choice, the thing in you that desires. You may put a man in a straitjacket and make it impossible for him to do wrong, but if he wants to do wrong, he is as bad as the other man who is free to do it and does it. What God plans is to take away the root principle of an evil heart.

James tells us that this evil desire enters into our very religion, and even our prayers. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." So the great mass of human religion is a matter of sinful desire. It is just an accommodation to man's sinfulness, another method of gratifying his evil heart. All pagan religions are founded on sin, and their public rites are usually of the most obscene and abominable character. Even a great deal of the religion of nominal Christians is an effort to electroplate and gild their sinful desires. The ministry becomes a profession and an open door for ambition, and the strife of ministers for honor is as selfish and sinful as the competitions of the world for political pre-eminence. Religion itself is a convenience to keep people out of hell and make them comfortable through a life of self-indulgence here.

But the difficulty is an evil heart. No matter how it is repressed, until it is taken away, sanctification has not even begun. Sanctification deals with the perverted will, the wrong desire, the evil inclination, the old Adam that is stronger than young Melancthon still. Your best efforts will be baffled until you get him crucified.

This Christ provides for. The first thing to do is to surrender yourself to be crucified with Jesus Christ. Sanctification is not improving your habits by culture, nor is it cleansing your heart; but it is handing the natural life over to death as a useless thing, so bad that you can never make it good, and getting instead something entirely new through union with Jesus; receiving Him to dwell within you, to work through you, to be your Substitute, and to give you His Holy Spirit instead of your old heart.

The beginning of sanctification, therefore, is to see that you are utterly wrong in your desires and choices. The very helm of life is wrong. You must surrender, get out of the way, and die. "Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead," and then let your life be all new and divine. "Crucified with Christ, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." May God help us to see this truth lived out and died out in all our hearts.

II. THE FORBIDDEN WORLD, THE EVIL WORLD, THE WORLD WHICH STANDS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE NATURAL AND SELF LIFE.

Not only are you wrong, but you are encompassed with a world that is wrong, and you must get out of the world as well as out of yourself. This is separation which must always accompany sanctification.

Sanctification is seeing that you are wrong and handing yourself over to Christ by His Holy Spirit to make you right. Separation is pronouncing sentence of death on the world as well as on yourself, and entering into a new world, the world of the unseen, the world of the coming kingdom, the world in which God is supreme, and you are "hid with Christ in God," waiting for the day of manifestation, when your true world shall appear in its fullness and glory.

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4). The true reading here should be "Ye adulteresses." It is not literal adultery James is talking about, but spiritual adultery. It is the adultery of the Bride of the Lamb who is leaving her Husband for the world. She is the wife who is faithless to her Lord by going into the arms of the world. If you are Christ's, you are His alone. He claims you for Himself and He is jealous of any rival. So James tells us here that the love of Jesus is exclusive, that the world must be crucified unto you, and you unto the world, just as the old carnal life is recognized and laid over on Christ Jesus.

What is the world? It does not mean that we must cease eating, working and being good citizens. It means that the love of the world must die, and that we must cease to live for and belong to the present age, and become children of the coming age and the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ which is soon to be revealed.

John tells us all about this forbidden world. "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2: 16). Here is a trinity over against the Triune God.

1. "The lust of the flesh." This means the gratification of your senses, appetites, passions; sensual indulgence for its own sake, whether it be within the law or without the law; the desire to enjoy the pleasures of the senses, and the making of these the aims and motives of your being.

You have to eat to live, but you do not need to live to eat. It is right to take sustenance, and to have a reasonable enjoyment in it, for God gave us our sense of taste. But these are mere circumstances of life and pass quickly away. If they are in any sense the aim of your being, you are a worldling. They are to be but accompaniments. So every appetite and gratification which God in His beneficence has given is always to be a servant, the handmaid of a higher purpose, and not the object and aim for which we live.

2. "The lust of the eye" includes the whole pageant of worldly display whether it be the love of dress, the love of equipage, the love of palatial furniture, the love of beauty. When these become controlling, and especially when centered upon yourself, and ministering to your self-conceit and pride, they are the forbidden world. God makes things beautiful, and we can thank Him for them, but we are not to rest in the thing itself, but rise from everything to God, and make all tributary to His glory and lay them in homage on His altar and at His feet.

3. "The pride of life" is a higher form of worldliness, pride of family, pride of culture, pride of talent or of any personal quality that leads you to make ambition and success in life objects of idolatry. Perhaps today the most dangerous of all is pride of commercial power, for the men that rule the world today are our commercial kings, and the passion that is hardening men's hearts and demonizing human nature is the love of power that money bestows. It is like the pride of Lucifer, and will bring men into close alliance with him. It was this thing that made Nebuchadnezzar call himself a god and set up his image on the plains of Dura. God is letting it be manifested in these last days.

You can have it in your small world just as much as the multi-millionaire in his world. The fire and tinder must both be put out of the way. The world is the tinder. The lust is the fire. God wants to separate us from both by opening up to us His world of love, purity and hope and the coming kingdom where Jesus reigns and is preparing magnificence immeasurably beyond the richest prize that earth can bestow. This will counteract the present evil world.

III. THE ANTIDOTE TO THE LUST OF THE FLESH AND THE LOVE OF THE WORLD IS THE LOVE OF GOD.

Here we reach our text. "The Holy Spirit that dwelleth in us loveth us to jealousy." Here, over against the world and its attractions God shows us another attraction, a higher charm that counteracts and counter-balances the lower. Down through the ages there has come a golden thread of romance that has given its charm to everything beautiful in art, poetry, history and the story of time. That golden thread is just the old romance of love. Whether it comes down to us from Helen of Troy, or Penelope waiting for Ulysses, or the heroines of later times, it is the old, old story; something in the human heart that will give up family, fortune and every earthly thing for the charm of love. If you catch that sacred fire of true-hearted love, and there is always something beautiful in it that seems to have come from heaven, it lifts to heroism, sacrifice and nobility of life such as no other earthly motive can supply.

Now the secret of redemption is just the same old story of love. Long before the ages that story began in the heart of God and the love of Christ. He is the heavenly Bridegroom seeking to win His poor lost Bride, and raise her to His glory and His throne. In the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel He gives us the picture of the love that found her in her blood, and said unto her, "Live"; and then, washing her, arraying her in garments of spotless beauty and adorning her with every precious jewel, He adds, "Thou becamest Mine." Like Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, who went forth to a distant land to find a bride for Abraham's heir, and winning her consent gave to her her splendid trousseau of raiment and precious gems, and then brought her home to her waiting husband, so the Holy Ghost has come forth to call the Bride of Jesus to accept His love and then to prepare her for His coming. His voice throughout the ages is, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider ... forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him." (Ps. 45: 10-11.) The new world of love and hope which awoke in Rebekah's heart gave her strength to forget her father's house and the home of her childhood; just as today many a gentle maiden, awaking to the new charm of the old attraction, can leave the scenes of her girlhood and the home of her earliest and fondest affections, and go forth to brave the perils of the wilderness, the ocean, the military camp, or the toils and hardships of a life of poverty for the sake of one she loves better than all beside; so the love of Christ, when once it takes possession of the soul, is the antidote to selfishness and worldliness, and becomes the master passion of a devoted life. It is to this that the Holy Spirit appeals. His jealous love cannot bear that any inferior claim should absorb our heart or displace the supremacy of Jesus Christ. And so He loves us to jealousy, and is intensely sensitive to the approach of rival attractions and the seducing fascinations of the world. He cannot bear such rivalry. He loves us to jealousy, and His jealousy burns like a consuming fire.

In connection with the subject of sanctification, it is very interesting to notice that in Paul's treatise on this subject in the seventh of Romans, he represents it under the figure of the marriage union. The believer is represented under the image of a wife unable to obey and please her former husband, and finally slain by him for her disobedience. That old inexorable husband was the law. As she lay bleeding and lifeless at his feet, lo, another passed by, a form of loveliness, gentleness and grace. It was Jesus, the Risen One, and as He passed, He touched her and raised her from the dead, and then took her to His bosom and made

her His Bride, and now He says, "Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Rom. 7:4.) Holiness is just the fruit of a marriage to Christ. Just as spontaneously as the offspring comes from the union of two loving lives, just as naturally as the fruit grows from the living vine; so the faith, the holiness, the patience, the good works of the believer, all spring from the love life of the Lord. They are not put on by effort, but they are put forth by vital energy, and prompted by the motive power of life and love. It is to our love that the Holy Spirit appeals. It is by love that He works the work of grace within us. It is the "expulsive power of a new affection" that drives out the world. Just as that selfish girl when her heart is won is willing to give up her little world of indulgence and flattery, and sacrifice luxury, comfort, home, friends and every earthly prospect for the one she loves, suffering for him, toiling for his children, and sharing all the hardships of his life with infinite delight, so the love of Christ is the motive power that lifts us above selfishness, ambition, and the power of the present age, and makes it a joy to suffer and serve in the interests of so dear a Master, and for the hope of so great a recompense. Would you, therefore, dear friend, know the secret of living above the world and bring forth much fruit? Open your heart to the love of Christ. Yield to the approaches of His wooing and learn to live in His love. So shall your being be filled with the fruits of the Spirit,

And all your life be lost in love,

A heaven below, a heaven above.

IV. THE PLACE OF GRACE IN THE LIFE OF HOLINESS.

"He giveth more grace." That is, the more inexorable His love and jealousy in holding us up to the highest standard, the more abundant is His grace in enabling us to meet it. Grace gives what love demands, and love is always asking more.

Strange as it may seem, Christ needs our love and claims our tenderest devotion. But our dull, cold hearts oft feel unable to respond, and we cry, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust." But it is here that grace comes to our relief, and the Holy Spirit undertakes to supply the love on our part as well as to reveal the greater love on His. Do you want a tenderer devotion? Take it from Him by faith through grace. Do you want a moving sense of His love, a joy in prayer, a love for His Word, a delight in His service, an experience of deep and tender joy? "He giveth more grace." "Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." He does not expect us to produce it from the soil of our old natural heart. It must come from heaven, and His grace is waiting to supply it just as fully as you realize your need and are willing to claim His fulness. Lord, give us grace to take the "more grace" from Thee.

V. THE SECRET OF RECEIVING.

How shall we maintain the attitude through which we shall be enabled to meet the expectations of His love and to receive the fullest measures of His grace?

1. Submit yourselves to God. Unconditional surrender is the first condition of sanctification, a yielded will, a spirit prostrate at His feet, crying continually, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" This is the condition of all deeper blessing.

2. We must be as positive against evil as we are passive in the hands of God. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." There is danger that in cultivating the habit of self-renunciation at a certain stage in our

spiritual experience we may lose that will power which is necessary for strength of character. The true attitude is an everlasting "yes" to God, and an inexorable "no" to evil. For the inevitable experience of the life of holiness is temptation, and the secret of victory is a fearless courage and an inflexible will quite as much as a victorious faith.

3. The habit of humility. "He giveth grace unto the humble." "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." As the valleys receive the fertilizing streams, so it is the lowly heart that claims the more abundant grace of God, and the habit of constantly discounting ourselves is but the reverse side of the faith that always counts upon God.

4. Nearness to God, the life of communion, intimacy with our heavenly Father. This is the very essence of the life of holiness. "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you." It is thus we walk with God, until dwelling in His fellowship we catch by intuition His very thought and walk spontaneously in His steppings. So may He make "you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

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