

# Sanctification

by A.B. Simpson

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*Sanctification is the gift of God's grace, received through faith and surrender, which enables us to live a life of holiness and victory.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:48, John 15:4-5, Romans 7:24-25, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 2:12-13, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:16, 2 Peter 1:4, 2 Peter 3:18

**Topics:** "Sanctification", "Growth in Grace"

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## Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the vital role of sanctification in the Christian life, distinguishing it from regeneration by highlighting that while regeneration gives life, sanctification offers life more abundantly through the indwelling of Christ. He explains that sanctification is not merely an improvement of character but a complete transformation through death to self and sin, allowing believers to partake in the divine nature. Simpson urges that holiness is a command from God, and that true growth in grace comes from recognizing our dependence on Him and actively participating in the process of sanctification. He encourages believers to add to their faith various virtues, ultimately leading to a fruitful and active Christian life. The sermon concludes with a call to diligence in pursuing holiness, promising abundant rewards in the eternal kingdom.

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## Transcript

"Be you holy; for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16.)

"Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18.)

We have already seen what Peter has to say to us about regeneration and the Christian life and calling. Let us now listen to his testimony concerning sanctification and the deeper experiences of our Christian life and growth.

### I. REGENERATION AND SANCTIFICATION

1. Regeneration brings us life, but sanctification brings us "life more abundantly."

2. Regeneration brings us life, but sanctification brings us life that comes out of death; the death-born life which has entered into the crucifixion of Christ, and the power of His resurrection.

3. Regeneration brings us into Christ, sanctification brings Christ into us. "Abide in me, and I in you," implies a twofold relation. "In Him" is to be saved; "in you" is to be sanctified. It is the indwelling life of the Lord Jesus in personal union and manifestation to the soul.

4. Regeneration makes us the subjects of the Holy Spirit's working, but sanctification makes us temples of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. In regeneration the Spirit is working upon us as the builder of the house; in sanctification He has become the resident of the dwelling and enters to abide as our guest, or, rather, as our host, while we dwell with Him in the fellowship of the Spirit.

5. Regeneration comes to us through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior; sanctification comes to us through full surrender and faith in the incoming and indwelling of the Comforter. It is as we yield ourselves to God and give Him the right of way, without a single reservation, that He accepts the offering and makes us His abode.

Now this twofold experience runs through all the personal and public types of the Bible. We see in Jacob the revelation of God at Bethel, through which he became the servant of Jehovah, and then the deeper experience at Peniel, through which he became the prince of God. We see it in Moses, in his first choice of God in Egypt, and then his deeper experience in Midian. We see it in Job and Isaiah; we see it in Simon Peter and the other disciples with their new experience after Pentecost; and Paul seems to give us this chapter in his own experience in the seventh of Romans, through which he passed into the victory of the eighth. We see it very definitely in the passage of the Red Sea and the exodus of Israel, which represents our salvation; and then the crossing of the Jordan and the entrance into Canaan, which represents our sanctification. We see it in the Passover, which marked the first year of Israel's history, the setting out under the blood, even as we step out from the cross of Calvary; and then the equally marked beginning of the second year when the tabernacle was dedicated and anointed, and the cloud came down and entered in as the Shekinah presence of Jehovah in the holy of holies, the latter representing the incoming and indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the consecrated soul. But time and space forbid enlargement. Beloved, have you also entered into the "twofold life"?

## II. SANCTIFICATION -- ITS PRINCIPLES AND PROCESS

1. It is an obligation. God commands us to be holy. We are called to be holy. He will not excuse anybody from holiness. We have no right to call ourselves His children if we continue to live in sin. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." God forbids you to continue in sin. There are no two classes of Christians between which you may choose; there are no options here. Every child of God is called to be holy.

2. The pattern and source of sanctification. "Be you holy; for I am holy." God is our standard, and as His children we must be like Him. No lower standard will pass. We must not aim to be as good as some people; we must not excuse ourselves because we are no worse than others. It is God who is our pattern. "Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

He is not only the pattern, but the source. His holiness is the guarantee of ours. He commands because He gives what He commands. Out of His fullness we receive and shine in His reflected light, even as the planets that shine in the light of the great day star.

3. The secret of holiness is death and resurrection. Peter gives it to us very profoundly in the fourth chapter and the first verse: "Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves

likewise with the same mind: for he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." This thought, this great principle and truth that Christ died, will become a powerful weapon and victorious armor in our experience as we enter into it in fellowship with Him. Sanctification is not the improvement of our natural character, not even the cleansing of our spirit. It is to discover that we are wholly lost and utterly helpless, and to yield ourselves over to Him, to die to self as well as sin, to our natural goodness as well as natural sinfulness, and then receive a new life altogether from Him: Indeed, we are to receive Christ Himself, the risen one, as our new life, and then be as though we had been born out of heaven, and were not the same spirit that formerly lived in sin. Oh, what an inspiration this gives to the new life, to be wholly free by death from the entangling weight of our old habits, memories, and the discouraging sense of our past, and to spring, death-born, into a life of holiness and victory. It is our privilege.

4. Sanctification is the gift of God's grace. We pass over now to the second epistle of Peter to supplement the teachings of the first, and there we are taught in the first chapter and the third verse that, "His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." He has given unto us this higher life. It is not an attainment, but a bestowal. God has provided the robes of the sanctified, and we simply put them on, and claim His efficiency and His complete provision for every spiritual condition and need. It is now awaiting you, beloved reader, if you will simply recognize your need of it, your helplessness to work it out yourself, and in full surrender accept Him for all that you can never be alone. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," and put Him on now.

5. Sanctification comes to us through our being made "partakers of the divine nature." (2 Peter 1: 4.) God is our sanctification. The very nature of God passes into us. It is a divine holiness. Sanctification is not a degree of progress on the old plane, but it puts us entirely upon a new plane, and we pass out of the human into the divine, and henceforth it is not the best that man can be and do, but the best that God can be and do. Therefore, it becomes natural for us to be holy, just as once it was natural for us to be sinful. We act according to the divine nature in us, and our choices, desires, and ministries are spontaneous and free, and obedience is just a luxury instead of a duty.

6. Sanctification comes to us through knowing God, and believing His word of promise. This is very finely brought out by the apostle in the opening verses of his second epistle. "Whereby," he says, "are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature." It is through claiming the promises that we receive the Holy Spirit and the divine nature. We take His Word and present it as a check on the Bank of Grace, and He turns it into the currency of spiritual blessing and actual grace. So again Peter says, He "has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that has called us" not "to glory and virtue," but "by his glory and virtue." That is to say, His glory and virtue, His divine excellency, revealed to us by the Spirit, calls us to the same high and holy character; and as we know Him, we become like Him.

The power by which we appropriate these precious promises and make the gifts of God's grace personal and real is faith. But even this faith is not a struggling effort of our weak will, but the apostle tells us we "have obtained like precious faith." The faith is given, and so from first to last it is all grace. God reaches out to us the fullness of His love and power, and then He puts into our paralyzed hand the energy to reach out and grasp the blessing and make it ours.

7. Once more the apostle's language implies that we enter into this experience of sanctification at a definite moment of time. It is not something into which we gradually drift, but it is a crisis point up to which we come and at which we settle something forever. This is implied in the peculiar Greek tense known to

scholars as the aorist tense, used in this passage, verse 4, "Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." We have no tense in the English grammar corresponding to this. It denotes an act accomplished at a given moment in the past, and quite finished. Therefore, at a given moment we have escaped the corruption that is in the world through evil desire; we were delivered from the world and the flesh by becoming "partakers of the divine nature" and receiving "all things that pertain unto life and godliness." We do not drag through a dreary and endless cycle of vain attempts, but we come up to Jordan, we enter in, we pass over, and we sing henceforth, "I am over in the promised land." Beloved, this is the gospel of holiness according to Peter. Surely, it is good news, it is all divine, it is all freely given, it is all for you. Have you received it? Will you receive it?

### III. SANCTIFICATION AND GROWTH IN GRACE

Now we are ready to grow, and, therefore, it is in the second epistle that the writer advances to these higher experiences and bids us to go on to perfection. Had we attempted to grow before, it would have been distortion. We must have a true life complete in all its parts before we can safely develop it. There must be a good foundation and every wall connected before we can rear the superstructure with safety. Now then, the foundation is laid, and so the apostle adds, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith." (2 Peter 1:5.) Dean Alford has translated this, "Because of this thing;" not "beside," but "because." Just because you are sanctified, therefore, grow. Because you have resources, such a glorious guarantee, and divine supplies, therefore, go forward and make the most of them. But notice even in our growth that the same principle of grace must be recognized all the way through. We are not to grow in character and virtue and strength, but we are to grow in grace. That means we are to grow in the habit of receiving, of being more and more helpless and dependent every moment to the end of life; it is to be all grace to the finish, and the more we grow, the more will it be true, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

This is also finely expressed in the phrase, "Add to your faith." You are not to add to yourself, but to your faith. And what is faith? It is just the power to receive from God something which you yourself cannot do or have independently. Faith is just a hand to take His grace. Therefore, the way to grow is just to take from Him in each new emergency the supply needed for that occasion. Do we want more love? When we come up to some hard place where we are wronged, we are not to struggle to work up love in ourselves. We are not to be discouraged because we do not find the love there. We are not to pump at our dry well until we get worn out and discouraged. But we are to do as you would do with such a well; pour a little water in, and then it will flow freely out. Go to God and take the love from Him. Tell Him you are unloving and helpless, and ask Him to put the heart of Christ into your cold heart, and thus add to your faith His love. And so, if you need courage or patience or joy, no matter what, just draw upon your bank account. Use the faith that He has given to claim the exceeding great and precious promises, and you will get tired asking before He gets tired giving.

And now the apostle gives us a very fine and symmetrical portrait of the graces and features in which we are to grow. First he says, "Add to your faith virtue." This does not mean moral purity, for all this has already been settled in your sanctification; but the word "virtue" is derived from an old Latin root, which means manhood, courage, virility. It is spiritual forcefulness. God does not want us good and amiable weaklings, but men and women that accomplish things; lives that tell for God and the race. He will give us His strength and make us good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and "strong in the Lord and the power of His might."

Next is knowledge. Blind courage is often wild and dangerous. Power without intelligence and judgment is distortion. He wants us not only to have the "spirit of power," but also the spirit of "a sound mind." He will give us His wisdom and knowledge, for "if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it shall be given him." How wise Christ was! How beautifully we find Him always in order, on time, with a ready answer for His enemies and a right message for needy souls -- a pattern of divine wisdom. And so, by faith we may take His Spirit to rest upon us, as "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord," that shall make us of "quick understanding in the fear of the Lord."

Next is temperance. That is self-control, the power of poise, the balanced character, the reserve force that can hold your tongue, and wait in the silence that so often speaks more vitally than words. He will give it through your faith and through His grace, if you are willing to be taught to be silent unto God and let Him mold you.

Next is patience. That is the power to suffer not only that which comes to you from the hand of God, but that, so much harder, which comes to you from the hand of man. This is the fusing process that burns all the ingredients into one living mass of spiritual strength. No character is permanent, no quality is fixed, until it has been proved in the furnace of affliction. But patience is His gift. The savage can meet suffering with stoical indifference, but only the heart of Christ can stand in the judgment hall or the garden of Gethsemane and suffer long and yet be kind. You will come up to your trials and fail at first, but you will find the unfailing One at your side, and if you will lean hard on Him, He will give you His victory; and through each new trial you will add to your faith patience, until patience has her perfect work, and you will stand "perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

Next comes godliness. This is the quality of the Spirit which crowns the character. This is the upper chamber, the observatory, where we look up and out upon the heavens, where we meet and know God, where we commune with Him and worship Him and do all things unto His glory. It is this which gives spirituality and devoutness to the character, and makes saints like Rutherford, McCheyne, Fenelon, and the souls whose very names crush our hearts with sacred veneration. Into this we may grow by faith, for piety is one of the gifts of God; and we can have as much as we can claim and wear as a divine habiliment.

But there is danger even on spiritual lines. We may not become extreme and selfish. The cloister and the cell are not the finishing rooms for holy character, but the slums of sin, the wastes of heathenism, and the dark places of human suffering. It is here we reach the largest circumference of spiritual growth. There is a circle, a vertical circle, that rises heavenward and takes in God and all the heights of devotion and communion; but there is another circle, a lateral circle, that takes in all the length and breadth of loving sympathy and service. And so he adds two more features to this divine portrait: "brotherly kindness" and "charity." The first relates to our brethren, the love we owe to the household of faith. The second relates to the great world beyond, the unsaved, the unhappy, the sick, the poor, the lost, our enemies, the people that we cannot love naturally, but whom God has placed in our pathway to teach us that great and heavenly grace He here calls charity.

Such is the fullness of the stature of a perfect man in Christ; the ideal up to which God would have us grow under the molding hand of His grace. Such are the seven colors of this sacred prism -- seven, yet one; the white light of faith and grace separated into the sevenfold graces of courage, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity.

There is a fine shade of expression in the beautiful Greek in connection with the word "add." Literally, it means "chorus." It is a technical word, describing the business of the choir leader who harmonized the music at some great concert in all the parts, voices and instruments, until they blended in one magnificent harmony; many, yet one. And so we are to chorus into our Christian life all the graces of the Spirit until they shall blend in symmetrical proportion, and nothing shall be exaggerated, but all shall be in harmony, and the effect of the whole shall be that our lives shall become a sublime chorus of praise, a doxology to the glory of Him, of whom and by whom and for whom are all things.

Once more, we are to give all diligence to this. The Greek word again is forceful. It reminds one of the finger post which they used to place on the amphitheater in the Grecian games at the homestretch, containing one Greek word, meaning, literally, "make speed." They did not place this at the beginning of the course, but near the end, just at the place where the prize was to be lost or won. There the racers were summoned to the last strenuous endeavor. And so it is after we are sanctified and have learned the fullness of Jesus, that God is calling us from on high to the utmost vigilance and diligence, and to make speed, that we "so run that we may obtain." In conclusion, the apostle gives us several strenuous reasons why we should thus make speed.

1. This will save us from spiritual nearsightedness. "He that lacks these things is blind and cannot see afar off." The reason some people never get a vision of God or deeply realize spiritual things is because they live on too low a plane.

2. It will keep us from living too near the edge. "He has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." Some people seem to like to live on the edge of the pit and the wonder is that they do not slip back again. God bids you press on from the borderland of danger into all the strength and breadth of the land of promise. If you do not, you will find yourself back even in your old sins.

3. "If you do these things, you shall never fall"; literally, "stumble." Would you be kept from stumbling? Then press on. It is easier to be holy than to be half sanctified, just as it is easier for the car to run on both tracks than to run with one wheel on the paving stones.

4. This will make your life fruitful and active, "for if these things be in you, and abound, they will make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful"; literally, "idle nor unfruitful." How little some Christians accomplish for God! How wasteful of time and opportunity their precious lives! It is because they live too low. Get filled with the Spirit, and you shall neither be idle nor unfruitful.

5. "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This is the crowning reason for a life of devotion. There is a glorious prize and there is a solemn possibility of missing it. I have seen three different persons land from a great ocean steamer. One landed as a criminal, a prisoner bound with chains, and led away to the Tombs and the dark future of punishment. And so some will reach yonder destination. A second stepped down from the deck on the gangplank, a stranger in a strange land. He was not in danger of arrest, but there were no familiar faces to greet him, and he almost wished he were back in his own country. And some shall reach the eternal port in this way, saved as by fire, but no soul to meet them at heaven's gate; strangers even in the home above. God save you from such a home coming. But I have seen another figure on that deck, his face glowing with pleasure, his eyes sparkling with tears of joy, his hat and handkerchief waving in response to thousands on the shore who were welcoming him home. And as he landed amid the cheers of the musical bands and the shouts of ten thousand voices, they carried him on their shoulders to receive

ovations of honor and the highest rewards that his nation could bestow. He was a public servant and had done his duty and had finished his course with joy. He was coming home to his reward. There shall be such abundant entrance through yonder heavenly gates. Shall they be for you? Shall they be for me? We are making our history now. God help us to write it in enduring letters that shall shine in that glorious day.

The same word translated "chorus," in verse five, is used again in verse eleven, and translated "ministered"; literally, "an entrance shall be chorused unto you abundantly." The things you did and suffered for God, the graces of your Christian life which you put on in the earthly struggle, the souls you led to the Savior -- all these shall meet you there, and like celestial attendants accompany your triumphal march and sing your coronation hymn as they bid you welcome to your great reward. Oh, with such an inspiring hope, let us give all diligence to receive all the possibilities of grace and obtain all the rewards of glory!

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