

# (The Names of Jesus) 13. The Refiner

by A.B. Simpson

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## Transcript

“But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD, an offering in righteousness.” (Mal. 3: 2, 3.) This is the last Old Testament prophetic message respecting the coming Messiah. The first verse tells of two messengers who are soon to appear: one is the forerunner, the other the Savior, the great angel of the covenant who appeared to Abraham and Moses, and who in the Old Testament ages was the manifestation of Jehovah to His people. The special reference is to His purifying work. He is to be distinguished from all former teachers and messengers by His sin-cleansing power. He is to “sit as a refiner and purifier of silver,” and to “purge the sons of Levi . . . that they may offer . . . an offering in righteousness.” Other messengers could bring reformation; but He is to bring regeneration. Others were reprovers of sin; but He brings the power that takes the sin away.

Malachi’s message was echoed four centuries later by John the Baptist as he stood among the thousands who came to him for deliverance from their sins, and he felt his helplessness to grant them what they needed, and longed for a stronger and diviner hand to cleanse and keep. “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but while he said it he knew that the men who came to him to confess their sins would before long be again immersed in sin and powerless to overcome it, and he longed intensely for one who could not only reprove and forgive, but who could renew and radically cleanse the heart from intrinsic evil. And so he added: “There comes one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. . . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” This was indeed the meaning of the glorious name given to the Savior before He came, “JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins,” and this is one of the radical distinctions between the Old Testament and the New. The latter provides for a complete and perfect cleansing and purification of our entire being from the power of evil, such as the law could never bring.

Let us inquire for a little what are the essential differences between the Old and the New Testaments, the Law and the Gospel in the provision they make for our spiritual cleansing.

First, Christ brings us a far higher standard, no less indeed than a divine example. His command to us is, “Be holy; for I am holy. . . . Be therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” He requires of us not only a lofty human character, but complete resemblance to the divine image. “Love one another, as I have loved you.” He has chosen us that we should “be conformed to the image of his Son. . . . Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that

created him. He that abides in Him ought, to walk, even as He walked.

Not only does it unfold a higher standard, but it reveals a deeper, more interior life, a life that reaches even to the heart, the thoughts, the motives, the desires; which requires us to love the Lord with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; to not only abstain from impurity, but from unholy thought and feeling; not only to do right, but to do right from a right motive. The word for purity in the New Testament is singleness of heart, murder is hatred, adultery is evil desire, and the righteousness of the kingdom a radical and divine renewing of the inmost being and all the principles, motives, and aims of life.

Not only so, but the righteousness of the New Testament reaches to all sides of our being and relationships, internal as well as external. The Old Testament had sacred persons, times, and things; but under the New Testament everything is sacred. One day in seven was holy to the Lord; but now, every day should be a Sabbath in its true spirit. One place was His sanctuary; but now every place should be dedicated to His glory. One class of men were separated to sacred priestly functions; but now we are all kings and priests unto God, and expected to be equally holy and near to Him. One class of duties was holier than another; but now everything we do may be done unto His glory, and pleasing in His sight.

And so the standard of New Testament holiness is higher, deeper, and broader than the Old. Therefore, we find some things even in the morality of the former which would not be accepted under the New. Zechariah, the prophet, dying under the hand of Joash, prayed, "Lord, look upon it, and require it." Stephen looked up from the blows of his murderers and cried, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

Second, Christ makes complete provision in His atonement for our cleansing. The offerings of the Old Testament were types of this future provision for the cleansing of the offerer; but the Apostle well says in Hebrews, that they never could make the comers there-unto perfect, but Christ has come with His own blood to make full and final provision for our entire cleansing. It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away our sins. Then said He, "See, I come to do Your will, O God . . . by whose will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. . . . For by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified." It is therefore true that the atonement of Jesus Christ has provided for our entire cleansing from evil and the sanctification of our entire being to God. If this be so, whatever the difficulties may be, it is our redemption right, and if it be so, it is the redemption right of all believers. It is not an exclusive or exceptional distinction which a few saintly ones may claim, but it is covered by the blood of the cross and the "whosoever" of the gospel, and if we are not entering into it as a personal experience, we are to that extent allowing Christ to have died for us in vain and coming short of the full inheritance. Beloved, do you realize that it is your privilege, your purchased right, to be holy, and that for this purpose your Savior shed His precious blood, and you are stabbing Him with a new wound if you let Him die in vain?

Third, Christ has not only revealed a higher holiness and purchased for us the right to it; but He has risen again to become for us the living source of that holiness through union with His own person; and He has offered to come to us in His person, and to become to each of us an indwelling life which will literally reproduce in us His own purity and enable us to live among men even as He lived. This is something which the Old Testament saints never knew. God was with Moses and Elijah and the men at Babylon; but God is in the humblest of His saints who sincerely receive Him. This is the mystery hid from ages and generations, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." This is the wisdom of God in a mystery, even

the wisdom . . . which none of the princes of this world knew,â€ Christ â€made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.â€ This is the great provision of the gospel, a living personal Savior, Christ our life. This is our all-sufficiency for every situation and trial and difficulty, â€el can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.â€ This is the source of holy living and holy usefulness, â€He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.â€ This renders our failures inexcusable. This makes our responsibility for a holy life tenfold greater. Beloved, have we recognized that God is meeting each of us with a full divine provision for a life of holiness and victory, and that He holds us responsible, not so much to do it ourselves, as to receive from Him the grace and power that will enable us to do it?

Fourth, the preeminent provision Jesus Christ has made in the gospel for our cleansing is the gift of the Holy Ghost. He sent to us from heaven the third person of the Divine Trinity to take up His abode in our heart, to impart to us the very life of Christ, to teach us, to lead us, to train us in our Christian life, and to carry on the whole work of our cleansing and spiritual perfecting, until the Refiner can see His image mirrored in the silver, and we are prepared to be jewels in the day of His coming. It is to this deeper, quieter, more patient working of the Holy Ghost that the text especially refers. It is one thing to be cleansed from sin, and surely that ought to be true of every Christian, but it is a different thing to be refined by Godâ€™s holy fire until we have been brought into all the fullness of His will and reflect in all things His holy image. It is this thorough work of the Holy Ghost to which God is calling us in these words, where He sits as â€a refiner and purifier of silver,â€ calmly, working and waiting until His purpose is fulfilled.

In the picture given of the Holy Bride as she sits waiting for the coming Lord, it is said in the book of Revelation that it was granted to her to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, or lustrous. It is one thing to have the linen clean: it is another to have it bright and lustrous. You may take your linen from the clothes line, and there is no spot on it; but when you take it from the laundry, it is not only spotless, but lustrous, polished, shining with the gloss of skillful hands, as if it be costly embroidery or lace adorned with all the delicate touches of the needle and the loom, arranged in beautiful order and taste. It is one thing for the gold to be cleansed from the dross: it is another for it to be shaped in all the skill of the silversmithâ€™s art. It is one thing to have sin burned out: it is quite another to have the glory burned in.

And so we read in Daniel, â€Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.â€ The purification is the primary work of sanctification; but the making white is that which John expresses by the word lustrous; it is the refining, the adorning, the completing of the work in the minutiae of detail. This is the work which the Holy Ghost is carrying on in all our hearts as fully as we will let Him. Perhaps He has delivered you from sin; but now He is endeavoring to deliver you from self. There is nothing more truly productive of miseries and failures in Christian life than the spirit of self, even in good persons.

Ask yourself the source of all your cares and worries, and you will find from some thought of self, from some fear about yourself, from some consideration of your interests, rights, wrongs, grievances, or troubles. It will be a haven of rest to you, and a source of great blessing to others, if you will wholly cancel all thoughts of yourself, and will truly say that all your acts and prayers are for others and for your Masterâ€™s cause. The moment you begin to live this life you will enter into perfect peace and you will find that God has taken up your cause.

Perhaps He is refining you from your natural life and lifting you into a spiritual life and love. Your affections are, perhaps, merely human, and they are absorbing others for your own gratification rather than for Godâ€™s will and glory, and are keeping you on a lower plane. God wants them transformed and

transfigured into the heavenly love that will be abiding and eternal, the millennial life into which He is leading you already, even before the coming of your Lord. He is crucifying you to your loves and links, that they may be reformed in God and so formed that they may be forever.

Have you ever seen a skeletonized bouquet? The leaves in their natural beauty are soft and green, but fading; in a few hours they will wither away, and their beauty will be dead. But after some skillful woman's hands have touched them, they come forth from the bleaching whiter than the driven snow, delicate, ethereal, as flowers of paradise, every fiber of the skeleton standing out in fine and clear relief, and yet so purified from the earthly and fleshly covering that they are more beautiful than before. Their beauty will never wither. They stand in your vase or cabinet the same through the passing years, the substance of that which you once possessed in a lower form. It is a cold and imperfect figure, yet it expresses something of the refining process through which God is putting our hearts and transforming our earthly loves into heavenly ties that will last forever, not like those dry, skeletonized leaves, but with a deeper love than they had before, a love more calm, more pure, more peaceful, more unselfish, more divine.

Perhaps He is teaching you the higher grace of love and leading you through the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. Some of you know how slowly you get through it. Perhaps you have the longsuffering and kindness, the humility and modesty of the fourth verse. Perhaps you have the unselfishness of the fifth verse, but have you progressed to the "not provoked," to the "thinks no evil"? Perhaps you can bear all things in the seventh verse with a grin-and-bear-it stoicism, but have you reached the next clause, "believes all things, hopes all things"? Do you have the spirit that so refuses to believe evil that there is really nothing to bear, that cuts the sinews of your troubles by ignoring them and refusing to believe them, and by looking at the people that have wronged you with such a loving trustfulness that you will not believe evil of them even if it seems to be true, and if you cannot quite believe that it is not so, you will, like your heavenly Father, say, "It should not be, and I will think of them as if it were not true"?

For my own sake I always try to refuse to believe it if I can, and if I cannot believe good of people at the present, it is an infinite comfort to me to ask the Lord to make it true. Then I believe that He will make it true, and hope for them with that confidence which enables me to count the things which are not as if they were, and henceforth think of the erring one in the light of my hope, in the light of their own future, as though already in heaven and the perfection and glory of the Father's life.

Beloved, that erring brother some day will be brighter than the sun, and you will love him without a recollection of your present grievances against him. Think of this now as if it were so, and so anticipate the future and so rise out of the present that you act under the influence of that which shall be, and you can so labor and pray to make it real.

What about the eighth verse, "love never fails"? You have a great deal of love, and uniformly triumph, but once in a while you sort of claim the privilege of a temporary failure. You do not think it very wrong if you occasionally break down, and so your weak link destroys the entire chain. God is leading you through this to that victory which never fails, to that love which goes forth exclaiming, "Thanks be unto God, Who always causes us to triumph in Christ and makes manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place."

The Refiner may be taking you through the experience of patience, and strengthening you with all might according to His glorious power unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. Perhaps you have the

patience and the longsuffering, but do you have the joyfulness? And so we might take all the lessons, and trace His gentle leading and teaching through the discipline of our spiritual life as He is bringing us closer and closer to His own glorious likeness.

A jeweler once told a lady that he kept the silver in the fire until he could see his face in it; and so the great Refiner sits down quietly, slowly, at the crucible where our hearts are consuming, and waits until He can see His image in our hearts and souls. Then He dismisses the firemen, carries away the ashes, stops the flame, and takes the silver and pours it into the mold of something lovely and heavenly, where it becomes a vessel for His grace and love, or perhaps as flagons to carry His wine and water to His perishing, suffering children, for He is refining and purifying us as silver is tried.

The service of sanctified men and women is immeasurably more precious to God in its most trivial forms than all we can do or give when our hearts are swept by earthly passion or influenced by selfish or unholy motives.

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