

Wholly Sanctified

by A.B. Simpson

Sanctification is the work of God Himself, a process of separation from evil, dedication to God, and filling with God's Spirit and holiness.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Topics: "Holiness", "Sanctification"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the profound significance of sanctification in the Christian life, linking it to the peace of God and the preparation for the coming of the Lord. He explains that true sanctification is a divine work, initiated by God, requiring believers to separate themselves from sin and dedicate themselves wholly to Him. Simpson illustrates that sanctification involves not only separation from evil but also a positive dedication to God's purpose, allowing Him to fill us with His Spirit and holiness. He encourages believers to recognize their need for God's grace in this process, highlighting that sanctification is a journey of continual surrender and growth in Christ. Ultimately, Simpson calls for a heartfelt response to God's invitation for complete sanctification, leading to a deeper relationship with Him.

Transcript

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

The prominence given to the subject of Christian life and holiness is one of the signs of our times and of the coming of the Lord Jesus. No thoughtful person can have failed to observe the turning of the attention of Christians to this subject within the past quarter of a century and along with the revival of the doctrine of the Lord's personal and premillennial coming. The very opposition which these two subjects have received and the deep prejudice with which they are frequently met emphasize more fully the force with which they are impressing themselves on the mind of our generation and the heart of the Church of God. The only way we can often know the direction of the weather-vane is by the force of the wind, and the stronger the wind blows against it, the more steadily does it point in the true direction. And so the very gales of controversy but indicate the more forcibly the intense interest with which the hearts of God's people are reaching out for a higher and deeper life in Him, and are somehow feeling the approach of a crisis in the age in which we live.

These two truths are linked closely together in the passage above. The former is the preparation for the latter, and the latter the complement of the former. Let us turn our attention, in prayerful dependence upon God and careful discrimination, to the explicit teachings of this passage respecting the scriptural doctrine of sanctification; and may the Holy Spirit so lead us and sanctify us both in our thoughts and spirits that we shall see light in His light clearly, and our prejudices shall melt away before the exceeding grace of Christ and the heavenly beauty of holiness.

I. THE AUTHOR OF SANCTIFICATION, "THE VERY GOD OF PEACE."

This name implies that it is useless to look for sanctification until we have become reconciled to God and learned to know Him as the God of Peace. Justification, and a justification so thoroughly accepted as to banish all doubt and fear and make God to us "the very God of peace," is indispensable to any real or abiding experience of sanctification.

Beloved, is this perhaps the secret cause of your failure in reaching the higher experience for which you long? "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Are there loose stones and radical difficulties in the superstructure of your spiritual life, and is it necessary for you to lay again the solid foundations of faith in the simple Word of Christ and the finished work of redemption? Then do so at once. Accept without feeling, without question, in full assurance of faith, the simple promises, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," and then take your stand on the Rock of Ages and begin to build the temple of holiness.

The expression "the very God of peace" further suggests that sanctification is the pathway to a deeper peace, even the "peace of God which passeth all understanding." Justification brings us peace with God, sanctification the peace of God. The cause of all our unrest is sin. "The wicked are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." But on the other hand, "Great peace have they that love thy law and nothing shall offend them." So we find God bewailing His people's disobedience and saying, "Oh, that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments, then had thy peace been as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." Sanctification brings the soul into harmony with God and the laws of its own being, and there must be peace, and there can be in no other way. Nay, more, sanctification brings into the spirit the abiding presence of the very God of peace Himself and its peace is then nothing less than the deep, divine tranquillity of His own eternal calm.

But the deeper meaning of the passage is that sanctification is the work of God Himself. The literal translation of this phrase would be "the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly." It expresses in the most emphatic way His own direct personality as the Author of our sanctification. It is not the work of man nor means, nor of our own strugglings, but His own prerogative. It is the gift of the Holy Ghost, the fruit of the Spirit, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the prepared inheritance of all who will enter in, the great obtainment of faith, not the attainment of works. It is divine holiness, and human self-improvement or perfection. It is the inflow into man's being of the life and purity of the infinite, eternal and Holy One, bringing His own perfection and working out in us His own will. How easy, how spontaneous, how delightful this heavenly way of holiness! Surely it is a "highway" and not the low way of man's vain and fruitless mortification. It is God's great Elevated Railway, sweeping over the heads of the struggling throngs who toil along the lower pavement when they might be borne along on His Ascension pathway, by His own Almighty impulse. It is God's great Elevator, carrying us up to the higher chambers of His palace without our laborious efforts, while others struggle up the winding stairs and faint by the way. It is God's

great tidal wave bearing up the stranded ship until she floats above the bar without straining timbers or struggling seamen, instead of the ineffectual and toilsome efforts of the struggling crew and the strain of the engines, which had tried in vain to move her an inch until that heavenly impulse lifted her by its own attraction. It is God's great law of gravitation lifting up, by the warm sunbeams, the mighty iceberg which a million men could not raise a single inch, but which melts away before the warmth of the sunshine and rises in clouds of evaporation to meet its embrace until that cold and heavy mass is floating in fleecy clouds of glory in the blue ocean of the sky. How easy all this! How mighty! How simple! How divine! Beloved, have you come into the divine way of holiness? If you have, how your heart must swell with gratitude as it echoes the truths of the words you have just read! If you have not, do you not long for it and will you not now unite in the prayer of our text that the very God of peace will sanctify you wholly?

II. THE NATURE OF SANCTIFICATION.

What does this term "sanctify" mean? Is there any better way of ascertaining than tracing its scriptural usage? We find it employed in three distinct and most impressive senses in the Old Testament.

It means to separate. This idea can be traced all through its use in connection with the ceremonial ordinances. The idea of separation is first suggested in the account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis, and there, probably, we see the essential figure of sanctification. God's first work in bringing order, law, and light out of chaos was to separate, to put an expanse or gulf between the two worlds of darkness and light, of earth and heaven. He did annihilate the darkness, but He separated it from the light, He separated the land from the water, He separated the waters of the sea from the vapors of the sky.

And so we see Him in the spiritual realm immediately afterwards, separating His people. He separated the family of Seth from the worldly race of Cain. He separated Noah and his family from the ungodly world. He separated Abraham and his seed from an idolatrous family. He separated Israel from Egypt and the surrounding nations. The very meaning of the word church is "called out or separated" yourself, and to each individual the same call comes still, "Separate yourselves," "Come out from among them and be separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters." "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."

Sanctification then means our voluntary separation from evil. It is not the extinction of evil, it is the putting off, the laying aside of evil, the detaching of ourselves from it and placing an impassable gulf between. We are to separate ourselves not only from our past sins but from our sin, as a principle of life. We are not to try to improve and gradually ameliorate our unholy condition, but we are to put off the old life, to act as if it were no longer ourself, and separate from our sinful self as the wife is divorced from her husband, and as the soul is separated from the body by the death of the body. These are, indeed, the two figures used by the Apostle in describing this separation in Romans. We are to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin just as much as though we were no longer the same person, and the old heart was no longer that true self.

And so with respect to every manifestation of evil, whether from within or from without, to every suggestion and temptation, to every impulse that is not of God, we are to refuse it, to be in the attitude of negation and resistance, our whole being saying "no." We have not to annihilate the evil or to resist it in our own strength but simply by a definite act of will to separate ourselves from it, to hand it over to God and renounce it utterly, to give Him the absolute right to deal with it and destroy it; and when we do so, God al-ways follows our committal with His almighty power and puts a gulf as deep as the bottomless grave of

Christ and a wall as high as the foundations of the New Jerusalem between us and the evil we renounce. We separate ourselves, and God makes the separation good. This is the first decisive step in sanctification, an act of will by which we renounce evil in every form in which it is made manifest to our consciences and brought into the light, and not only evil in its manifestations but the whole evil self and sinful nature from which each separate act has sprung.

And we separate ourselves also from the world and its embodiment of the old natural condition of things and the kingdom of the prince of evil. We recognize ourselves as not of the world even as He was not of the world. We put off, not merely that which is sinful, but that which is merely natural and human that it may die on the cross of Jesus and rise into a supernatural and divine life; for "if any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." And so the Holy Spirit leads us to a deeper separation, not only from the evil but from the earthly, lifting us into a supernatural life in all respects, and preparing us, even here, for that great transformation in which this corruptible shall put on incorruption and this mortal immortality, for as the first man was of the earth, earthy, even before he fell, so shall he give place to the second man who was made a living spirit and who has lifted us up into His own likeness.

What then, beloved, is the practical force of this thought? It is simply this, that, as God shows you your old sinful self and every evil working of your own fallen nature, you are definitely to hand it over to Him, with the full consent of your will, that He shall separate it from you and deliver you wholly from its power, and then you are to reckon it in His hands and no longer having control over you, or, indeed, in any sense to belong to you. And as He leads you further on to see things that might not be called sinful and yet are not incorporated into His life and will, that from these, also, you separate yourself and surrender them to Him, that He may put to death all that is apart from Himself and raise up in a new and resurrection life our entire being. You will thus see you are delivered from the death struggle with evil and the irrepressible conflict with self, your part being simply to hand Agag over with your own hands for execution, and gladly consent that the Lord should slay him utterly and blot out the remembrance of Amalek forever. Beloved, have you thus separated yourself for God to sanctify? Yours must be the surrender. God will not put His hand on the evil until you authorize Him with your glad consent. Like Joab's army of old, He encamps before your city and sends you the message that Sheba must die or the city perish, but your own hands must deliver him over. Have you done so or will you do so? Will you not now with glad consent lay your hand upon the blessed Sin-Offering's head, and transfer your sinful heart, and the dearest idol it has known, to Him "who was made sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him"?

Sanctification means dedication. It is not only to separate from but to separate to. The radical idea of the word is, set apart to be the property of another. And so the complement of this act which we have already partly described is this positive side in which we offer ourselves to God for His absolute ownership, that He may possess us as His peculiar property, prepare us for His purpose and work out in us all His holy and perfect will. This is the meaning of the appeal made by Paul in the 12th chapter of Romans, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." This is the meaning of those oft-repeated expressions where we are spoken of as God's peculiar people, which literally means, a people for a possession. This is the very ground on which the Scriptures appeal to us to walk in holiness, because we are not our own; we are bought with a price and should glorify God in our body which is God's. It is true that God has bought us, but here again His infinite condescension refuses to compel our surrender, and will accept nothing but a voluntary gift. So, gladly constrained by love, we feel it a privilege to belong to

Him and have Him stoop to take us in our worthlessness and be responsible for all the risks of our momentous existence.

This is what the term consecration properly means. It is the voluntary surrender or self-offering of the heart, by the constraint of love to be the Lord's. Its glad expression is "I am my Beloved's." It must spring, of course, from faith. There must be the full confidence that we are safe in this abandonment, that we are not falling over a precipice or surrendering ourselves to the hands of a judge, but that we are sinking into a Father's arms and stepping into an infinite inheritance. Oh, it is an infinite privilege to be permitted thus to give ourselves up to One who pledges Himself to make us all that we would love to be, nay, all that His infinite wisdom, power and love will delight to accomplish in us. It is the clay yielding itself to the potter's hands that it may be shaped into a vessel unto honor, and meet for the Master's use. It is the poor street waif consenting to become the child of a prince that he may be educated and provided for, that he may be prepared to inherit all the wealth of his guardian. How ashamed we may well feel that we ever hesitated to make such a surrender, or that we ever qualified it with any condition but His good and perfect will! Beloved, have you made this full surrender? If so, how gladly your whole being says "Amen" to all that we have said to the blessedness of being only the Lord's! If not, let it be done this moment and at His feet of love prostrate yourself as a whole burnt offering and cry,

"Take my poor heart and let it be,

Forever closed to all but Thee;

Seal Thou my breast, and let me wear

Thy pledge of love forever there."

Sanctification means filling. The literal translation of the old Hebrew word to consecrate is "to fill the hand." It suggests the deepest truth in connection with sanctification, viz., that Christ Himself must be the substance and supply of our new spiritual life and fills us with His own Spirit and holiness. After the most sincere consecration, we are but an empty possibility which He must make real. Even our consecration itself must look to Him for grace to make it faultless and acceptable. Even our will must be purified and kept single and supremely fixed on Him, by His continual grace. Our purity must be the imparting of His life; our peace, His peace within us; our love, the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. Our very faith, which receives all His grace, must be continually supplied from His own Spirit. We bring to Him but an empty hand, clean and open, and He fills it. We are but a capacity and He is the supply. We give ourselves to Him fully, understanding that we do not pledge the strength or goodness required to meet our consecration, but that we take Him for all, and He takes us, fully recognizing the responsibility which He assumes to make us all that He requires and keep us in all His perfect will as we let Him through the habit of a full surrender. What an exquisite rest this gives to the trusting heart and what an infinite grace on His part to meet us on such terms and bear for us so vast a responsibility!

In the upper portion of our metropolis many of our citizens may often have noticed, especially in the past years, a great number of miserable shanties, standing on the choicest sites, perhaps on the corner of a splendid new avenue, looking out on a magnificent prospect, but the house was utterly unworthy of the site. Suppose that a millionaire should want to purchase this site, and that the owner should begin, before giving possession, to repair the old shanty for the new owner, putting fresh thatch on the miserable roof and a new coat of whitewash on the dirty walls. How the purchaser would laugh at him and say, "My friend, I do not want your miserable old wreck of a tenement fixed up like this. At the best it will only be a

shanty when you have done all you can to it and I will never live in it. All I want is the ground, the site, and when I get it I will raze the old heap of rubbish to the foundations, and dig deep down to the solid rock before I build my splendid mansion. I will then build from the base my own new house according to my own magnificent plan. I do not want a vestige of your house, all that I require is the situation."

This is exactly what God wants of us and waits to do in us. Each of us has a splendid site for a heavenly temple. It looks out upon eternity and commands a view of all that is glorious in the possibilities of existence, but the house that is built upon it now is a worthless wreck, it is past improving. Our patching and repairing is worse than waste, and what God wants of us is simply that we give Him the possibilities of our life and let Him build upon them His own structure, that temple of holiness which he will make His own abode and which He will let us dwell in with Him as His happy guests in the house of the Lord forever. From the very foundations, the work must all be new and divine. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and the attitude of the consecrated heart is that of a constant yielding and constant receiving. This last view of sanctification gives boundless scope to our spiritual progress. It is here that the gradual phase of sanctification comes in. Commencing with a complete separation from evil and dedication to God, it now advances into all the fulness of Christ, and grows up to the measure of the stature of perfect manhood in Him, until every part of our being and every part of our life is filled with God and becomes a channel to receive, and a medium to reflect His grace and glory.

Beloved, have we learned this blessed significance of sanctification and taken God Himself as the fulness of our emptiness and fountain of our spiritual life? Then, indeed, have we entered upon an everlasting expansion and ascension, and forever more these blessed words will deepen and broaden in their boundless meaning:

"Thou of life the Fountain art,
Ever let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ab-simpson/wholly-sanctified/>

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