

John Meine, Student

by Alexander Whyte

The sermon emphasizes the importance of sanctification in becoming a deep divine and living a holy life.

Scripture: Romans 6:22, 2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:15

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Alexander Whyte preaches about the importance of sanctification in the life of a divine, drawing inspiration from the deep friendship between Samuel Rutherford and John Meine, as well as the influence of Barbara Hamilton. The sermon explores the process of sanctification as the work of God's grace, renewing the whole person after the image of God, enabling one to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. Whyte emphasizes the need for a deep study of one's own heart and a continuous pursuit of sanctification to become a truly great divine, following the examples of Rutherford, John Duncan, Thomas Boston, and other saints.

Transcript

If you would be a deep divine I recommend you to sanctification.' Rutherford.

Old John Meine's shop was a great howf of Samuel Rutherford's all the time of his student life in Edinburgh. Young Rutherford had got an introduction to the Canongate shopkeeper from one of the elders of Jedburgh, and the old shopkeeper and the young student at once took to one another, and remained fast friends all their days. John Meine's shop was so situated at a corner of the Canongate that Rutherford could see the Tolbooth and John Knox's house as he looked up the street, and Holyrood Palace as he looked down, and the young divine could never hear enough of what the old shopkeeper had to tell him of Holyrood and its doings on the one hand, and of the Reformer's house on the other. The very paving-stones of the Canongate were full of sermons on the one hand, and of satires on the other, in that day. 'He was an old man when he came to live near my father's shop,' John Meine would say to the eager student. 'But, even as an errand boy, taking parcels up his stair, I felt what a good man's house I was in, and I used to wish I was already a man, that I might either be a soldier or a minister.' The divinity student often sat in the shopkeeper's pew on Sabbath-days, and after sermon they never went home till they had again visited John Knox's grave. And as they turned homeward, old Meine would lay his hand on young Rutherford's shoulder and say: 'Knoxes will be needed in Edinburgh again, before all is over, and who knows but you may be elect, my lad, to be one of them?'

Barbara Hamilton, who lived above her husband's shop, was almost more young Rutherford's intimate friend than even her intimate husband. Barbara Hamilton was both a woman of eminent piety and of a high and bold public spirit. And stories are still told in the Wodrow Books of her interest and influence in the affairs of the Kirk and its silenced ministers. The godly old couple had two children: John, called after his father, and Barbara, called after her mother, and Barbara assisted her mother in the house, while John ran errands and assisted his father, Rutherford and the little boy had made a great friendship while the latter was still a boy; and one of Rutherford's fellow-students had made a still deeper friendship up-stairs than any but the two friends themselves suspected. Twenty years after this Barbara Hume will receive a letter from Samuel Rutherford, written in the Jerusalem Chamber at Westminster, consoling and sanctifying her for the death of his old friend William Hume, lately chaplain in the Covenanters' army at Newcastle.

By the time that Rutherford was minister at Anwoth, and then prisoner in Aberdeen, John Meine, Junior, had grown up to be almost a minister himself. He is not yet a minister, but he is now a divinity student, hard at work at his books, and putting on the shopkeeper's apron an hour every afternoon to let his father have a rest. The old merchant used to rise at all hours in the morning, and spend the early summer mornings on Arthur's Seat with his Psalm-book in his hand, and the winter mornings at his shop fire, reading translations from the Continental Reformers, comparing them with his Bible, singing Psalms by himself and offering prayer. Till his student son felt, as he stood behind the counter for an hour in the afternoon, that he was like Aaron and Hur holding up his father's praying and prevailing hands.

There have always been speculative difficulties and animated debates in our Edinburgh Theological Societies, and, from the nature of the study, from the nature of the human mind, and from the nature of the Scottish mind, there will always be. John Meine's difficulties were not the same difficulties that exercise the minds of the young divines in our day, but they were anxious and troublesome enough to him, and he naturally turned to his old friend at Anwoth for counsel and advice. When Rutherford came in to Edinburgh, there was always a prophet's chamber in Barbara Hamilton's house ready for him; and when the winter session came to a close her young son would set off to Anwoth with a thousand questions in his head. But Aberdeen was too far away, and, though the posts of that day were expensive and uncertain, the old merchant did not grudge to see his son's letters sent off to Samuel Rutherford. Samuel Rutherford knew that John Meine, Junior, was not shallow in his divinity, young as he was, nor an entire stranger to sanctification, else he would not have written that still extant letter back to him:--'I have little of Christ in this prison, little but desires. All my present stock of Christ is some hunger for Him; I cannot say but that I am rich in that. But, blessed be my Lord, who taketh me as I am. Christ had only one summer in His year, and shall we insist on two? My love to your father. And, for yourself, if you would be a deep divine, I recommend you to sanctification.' What with his father and his mother, his books, his acquaintance with Rutherford and Hume, and, best of all, his acquaintance with his own evil heart, young John Meine must have been a somewhat deep divine already, else Rutherford would not have cast such pearls of experience down before him.

A divine, according to our division of labour, is a man who has chosen as his life-work to study the things of God; the things, that is, of God in Christ, in Scripture, in the Church, and in the heart and life of man. John and James and Peter and Andrew ceased to be fishermen, and became divines when Christ said to them 'Follow me.' And after seventy years of sanctification the second son of Zebedee had at last attained to divinity enough to receive the Revelation, to write it out, and to be called by the early Church John the Divine.

But what is this process of sanctification that makes a young man already a deep divine? What is sanctification? Rutherford had a deep hand in drawing up the well-known definition, and, therefore, we may take it as not far from the truth: 'Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.' That, or something like that, was the recipe that Samuel Rutherford sent south to John Meine, student of divinity, with the assurance that, if he followed it close enough and long enough, it would result in making him a deep divine. I wonder if he took the recipe; I wonder if he kept to it; I wonder how he pictured to himself the image of God; I wonder, nay, I know, how he felt as he submitted his whole man--body, soul, and spirit--to the renewing of the Holy Ghost. And did he begin and continue to die more and more unto sin, till he died altogether to this sinful world, and live more and more unto righteousness, till he went to live with Knox, and Rutherford, and Hume, and his father and mother in the Land of Life?

'Did he begin with regeneration?' Dr. John Duncan, of the New College, asked his daughter, one Sabbath when she had come home from church full of praise of a sermon she had just heard on sanctification. Dr. Duncan was perhaps the deepest divine this century has seen in Edinburgh; and his divinity took its depth from the same study and the same exercise that Rutherford recommended to John Meine, Dr. Duncan was a great scholar, but it was not his scholarship that made him such a singularly deep divine. He was a profound philosopher also; but neither was it his philosophy. He was an immense reader also; but neither was it the piles of books; it was, he tells us, first the new heart that he got as a student in Aberdeen, and then it was the life-long conflict that went on within him between the old heart and the new. And it is this that makes sanctification rank and stand out as the first and the oldest of all the experimental sciences. Long before either of the Bacons were born, the humblest and most obscure of God's saints were working out their own salvation on the most approved scientific principles and methods. Long before science and philosophy had discovered and set their seal to that method, the Church of Christ had taught it to all her true children, and all her best divines had taken a deep degree by means of it. What experimentalists were David and Asaph and Isaiah and Paul; and that, as the subtlest and deepest sciences must be pursued, not upon foreign substances but upon themselves, upon their own heart, and mind, and will, and disposition, and conversation, and character. Aristotle says that 'Young men cannot possess practical judgment, because practical judgment is employed upon individual facts, and these are learned only by experience, and a youth has not experience, for experience is gained only by a course of years.'

'A truly great divine,' was Jonathan Edwards' splendid certificate to our own Thomas Boston. Now, when we read his Memoirs, written by himself, we soon see what it was that made Boston such a truly great and deep divine. It was not the number of his books, for he tells us how he was pained when a brother minister opened his book-press and smiled at its few shelves. 'I may be a great bookman,' writes Rutherford to Lady Kenmure, 'and yet be a stark idiot in the things of Christ.' It was not his knowledge of Hebrew, though he almost discovered that hidden language in Ettrick. No, but it was his discovery of himself, and his experimental study of his own heart. My duties, the best of them, would damn me; they must all be washed with myself in that precious blood. Though I cannot be free of sin, God Himself knows that He would be welcome to make havoc of all my lusts to-night, and to make me holy. I know no lust I would not be content to part with to-night. The first impression on my spirit this morning was my utter inability to put away sin. I saw that it was as possible for a rock to raise itself as it was for me to raise my heart from sin to holiness.'

But the study of divinity is not a close profession: a profession for men only, and from which women are shut out; nor is the method of it shut off from any woman or any man. 'I counsel you to study

sanctification,' wrote Rutherford, the same year to the Lady Cardoness. And if you think that Rutherford was a closet mystic and an unpractical and head-carried enthusiast, too good for this rough world, read his letter to Lady Cardoness, and confess your ignorance of this great and good man. 'Deal kindly with your tenants,' he writes, 'and let your conscience be your factor'; and again, 'When your husband's passion overcomes him, my counsel to your ladyship is, that a soft answer putteth away wrath.' And lastly, 'Let it not be said that the Lord hath forsaken your house because of your neglect of the Sabbath-day and its exercises. I counsel you to study sanctification among your tenants, and beside your husband, and among your children and your guests. Your lawful and loving pastor, in his only, only Lord,--Samuel Rutherford.'

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