

The Doctrine of Sanctification 11. Its Author

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Transcript

The Doctrine of Sanctification

11. Its Author

God Himself is the alone source and spring of all holiness. There is nothing of it in any creature but what is immediately from the Holy One. When God first created man, He made him in His own image, that is, "in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24 and cf. Col. 3:10). The creature can no more produce holiness of himself than he can create life: for the one he is just as much dependent upon God as he is for the other. How much less, then, can a fallen creature, polluted and enslaved by sin, sanctify himself? More easily could the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots, than a moral leper make himself pure. Where any measure of real holiness is found in a human heart its possessor must say with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). Sanctification, then, is the immediate work and gift of God Himself. No greater delusion can seize the minds of men than that defiled nature is able to cleanse itself, that fallen and ruined man may rectify himself, or that those who have lost the image of God which He created in them, should create it again in £ themselves by their own endeavors. Self-evident as is this truth yet pride ever seeks to set it aside. Self-complacency assumes that obligation and ability are co-extensive. Not so. It is true that God requires and commands us to be holy for He will not relinquish His rights or lower His standard. Yet His command no more denotes that we have the power to comply, than His setting before us a perfect standard implies we are able to measure up to the same. Rather does the one inform us that we are without what God requires, the other should humble us into the dust because we come so far short of the glory of God. But so self-sufficient and self-righteous are we by nature it also needs to be pointed out that, the very fact God promises to work in His people by His grace both indicates and demonstrates that of themselves they are quite unable to meet His demands. Ponder for a moment the following: "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:31), "I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me" (Jer. 32:39,40), "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; and I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes" (Ezek. 36:26, 27). In those blessed assurances, and nowhere else, is contained the guarantee of our sanctification: all turns upon God's power, grace, and operations. He is the alone accomplisher of His own promises. The Author of our sanctification is the Triune God. We say "the Triune God," because in Scripture the title "God," when it stands unqualified, is not used with a

uniform signification. Sometimes "God" refers to the first Person in the Trinity, sometimes to the second Person, and sometimes to the Third. In other passages, like 1 Corinthians 5:28, for instance, it includes all the three Persons. Each of the Eternal Three has His own distinctive place or part in connection with the sanctification of the Church, and it is necessary for us to clearly perceive this if we are to have definite views thereof. We have now reached that stage in our prosecution of this subject where it behooves us to carefully trace out the particular operations of each Divine Person in connection with our sanctification, for only as these are discerned by us will we be prepared to intelligently offer unto each One the praise which is His distinctive due. In saying that the Author of sanctification is the Triune God, we do not mean that the Father is the Sanctifier of the Church in precisely the same way or manner as the Son or as the Holy Spirit is. No, rather is it our desire to emphasize the fact that the Christian is equally indebted unto each of the three Divine Persons, that his sanctification proceeds as truly from the Father as it does from the Holy Spirit, and as actually from the Son as it does from either the Spirit or the Father. Many writers have failed to make this clear. Yet it needs to be pointed out that, in the economy of salvation, there is an official order observed and preserved by the Holy Three, wherein we are given to see that all is from the Father, all is through the Son, all is by the Holy Spirit. Not that this official order denotes any essential subordination or inferiority of one Person to another, but that each manifests Himself distinctively, each displays His own glory, and each is due the separate adoration of His people. It is most blessed to observe there is a beautiful order adopted and carried on by the Eternal Three through all the departments of Divine love to the Church, so that each glorious Person of the Godhead has taken part in every act of grace manifested toward the mystical Body of Christ. Though all Three work conjointly, yet there are distinct Personal operations, by which they make way for the honour of each other: the love of the Father for the glory of the Son, and the glory of the Son for the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus it is in connection with the subject now before us. In the Scriptures we read that the Church is "sanctified by God the Father" (Jude 1), and again, "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12), and yet again, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit" (2 Thess. 2:13). Each Person of the Godhead, then, is our Sanctifier, though not in the same manner. This same cooperation by the Holy Three is observable in many other things. It was so in the creation of the world: "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24), where the reference is plainly to the Father; of the Son it is affirmed "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3); while in Job 26:13 we are told, "By His Spirit He bath garnished the heavens." So with the production of the sacred humanity of our Redeemer: the super-natural impregnation of the Virgin was the immediate effect of the Spirit's agency (Luke 1:35), yet the human nature was voluntarily and actively assumed by Christ Himself: "He took upon Him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7 and cf. "took part" in Heb. 2:14); while in Hebrews 10:5 we hear the Son saying to the Father, "a body hast Thou prepared Me." Our present existence is derived from the joint operation of the Divine agency of the blessed Three: "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?" (Mal. 2:10); of the Son it is said, "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth" (Col. 1:16); while in Job 33:4 we read, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the Breath of the Almighty hath given me life." In like manner, the "eternal life" of believers is indiscriminately ascribed to each of the Divine persons: in Romans 6:23 it is attributed to the bounty of the Father, 1 John 5 :11 expressly assures us that it "is in the Son," while in Galatians 6:8 we read, "he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." By the Father we are justified (Rom. 8:33), by Christ we are justified (Isa. 53:11), by the Spirit we are justified (1 Cor. 6:11). By the Father we are preserved (1 Pet. 1 :5), by the Son we are preserved (John 10:28), by the Spirit we are preserved (Eph. 4:30). By the Father we shall be raised (2 Cor. 1 :9), by the Son (John 5:28), by the Spirit (Rom.8:11). The

actions of the Persons in the Godhead are not unlike to the beautiful colors of the rainbow: those colors are perfectly blended together in one, yet each is quite distinct. So it is in connection with the several operations of the Holy Three concerning our sanctification. While it be blessedly true that the Triune God is the Author of this wondrous work, yet, if we are to observe the distinctions which the Holy Scriptures make in the unfolding of this theme, they require us to recognize that, in the economy of salvation, God the Father is, in a special manner, the Originator of this unspeakable blessing. In connection with the whole scheme of redemption God the Father is to be viewed as the Fountain of grace: all spiritual blessings originating in His goodness, and are bestowed according to the good pleasure of His sovereign will. This is clear from Ephesians 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ." That the Father is the Sanctifier of the Church is obvious from 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ Here He is acknowledged as such, by prayer being made to Him for the perfecting of this gift and grace. So again in Hebrews 13:20, 21, we find the apostle addressing Him as follows, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 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." It is the furthering of this work within His people for which the apostle supplicates God. In both passages it is the Father who is sought unto. "By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10): here the sanctification of the Church is traced back to the sovereign will of God as the supreme originating cause thereof, the reference again being to the eternal gracious purpose of the Father, which Christ came here to accomplish. Further proof that the first Person in the Divine Trinity is the immediate Author of our sanctification is found in Jude 1: "To them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, called." Note it is not simply "them that are sanctified by God," but more specifically "By God the Father." Before attempting to give the meaning of this remarkable text, it needs to be pointed out that it is closely connected with those words of Christ in John 10:36, "Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest because I said, I am the Son of God?" Our Lord was there referring to Himself not as the second Person of the Godhead absolutely considered, but as the Godman Mediator, for only as such was He "sent" by the Father. His being "sanctified" before He was "sent," has reference to a transaction in Heaven ere He became incarnate. Before the foundation of the world, the Father set apart Christ and ordained that He should be both the Head and Saviour of His Church, and that He should be plenteously endowed by the Spirit for His vast undertaking. Reverting to Jude 1, we would note particularly the order of its statements: the "sanctified by God the Father" comes before "preserved in Jesus Christ, called." This initial aspect of our sanctification antedates our regeneration or effectual call from darkness to light, and therefore takes us back to the eternal counsels of God. There are three things in our verse: taking them in their inverse order, there is first, our "calling," when we were brought from death unto life; that was preceded by our being "preserved in Jesus Christ," i.e., preserved from physical death in the womb, in the days of our infancy, during the recklessness of youth; and that also preceded by our being "sanctified" by the Father, that is, our names being enrolled in the Lamb's book of life, we are given to Christ to be loved by Him with an everlasting love and made joint-heirs with Him forever and ever. Our sanctification by the Father was His eternal election of us, with all that that term connotes and involves. Election was far more than a bare choice of persons. It included our being predestined unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself (Eph. 1:15). It included our being made "vessels unto honour" and being "afore prepared to glory" (Rom. 9:21, 22). It included being "appointed to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5 :9). It included our being separated for

God's pleasure, God's use, and "that we should be to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:12). It included our being made "holy and without blame before him" (Eph. 1:4). This eternal sanctification by God the Father is also mentioned in 2 Timothy 1:9, "Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." As we pointed out in the last paragraph of the preceding chapter, "Sanctification is, first, a position of honor to which God hath appointed His people." That position of honor was their being "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4), when they were constituted members of His mystical Body by the eternal purpose of God. O what an amazing honour was that! a place in glory higher than that of the angels being granted them. Our poor minds are staggered before such wondrous grace. Here, then, is the link of connection between John 10:36 and Jude 1: Christ was not alone in the mind of the Father when He "sanctified" Him: by the Divine decree, Christ was separated and consecrated as the Head of a sanctified people. In the sanctification of Christ, all who are "called saints" were, in Him, eternally set apart, to be partakers of His own holy standing before the Father! This was an act of pure sovereignty on the Father's part. As it is not possible that anything can add to God's essential blessedness (Job 22:2, 3; 35:7), so nothing whatever outside of God can possibly be a motive unto Him for any of His actions. If He be pleased to bring creatures into existence, His own supreme and sovereign will must be the sole cause, as His own manifestative glory is His ultimate end and design. This is plainly asserted in the Scriptures: "The Lord hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. 16:4), "Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11), "Who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever, Amen" (Rom. 11:35, 36). So it is in the ordaining of some of His creatures unto honour and glory, and appointing them to salvation in bringing them to that glory: nought but God's sovereign will was the cause, nought but His own manifestative glory is the end. As we have shown in previous chapters, to "sanctify" signifies to consecrate or set apart for a sacred use, to cleanse or purify, to adorn or beautify. Which of these meanings has the term in Jude 1? We believe the words "sanctified by God the Father" include all three of those definitions. First, in that eternal purpose of His, the elect were separated from all other creatures, and predestinated unto the adoption of sons. Second, in God's foreviews of His elect falling in Adam, the corrupting of their natures, and the defilement which their personal acts of sin would entail, He ordained that the Mediator should make a full atonement for them, and by His blood cleanse them from all sin. Third, by choosing them in Christ, the elect were united to Him and so made one with Him that all His worthiness and perfection becomes theirs too; and thus they were adorned. God never views them apart for Christ. "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). The Greek word for "accepted" is "charitoo," and Young's Concordance gives as its meaning "to make gracious." It occurs (as a passive participle, rather than in its active form, as in Eph. 1:6) again only in Luke 1:~8, where the angel said to the Virgin, "Hail, highly favored one," which Young defines as "to give grace, to treat graciously," and in his Index "graciously accepted or much graced." This, we believe, is the exact force of it in Eph. 1:6: "according as He hath much graced us in the Beloved." A careful reading of the immediate context will show that this was before the foundation of the world, which is confirmed by the fact that the elect's being "much graced in the Beloved" comes before "redemption" and "forgiveness of sins" in verse 7!—note too the "hath" in verses 3, 4, 6 and the change to "have" in verse 7! Here, then, is the ultimate reference in "sanctified by God the Father" (Jude 1). As we have so often pointed out in the previous chapters "sanctification" is not a bare act of simply setting apart, but involves or includes the adorning and beautifying of the object or person thus set apart, so fitting it for God's use. Thus it was in God's eternal purpose. He not only made an election from the mass of creatures to be created; He not only separated

those elect ones from the others, but He chose them "in Christ," and "much graced them in the Beloved !" The elect were made the mystical Body and Bride of Christ, so united to Him that whatever grace Christ hath, by virtue of their union with Him, His people have: and therefore did He declare, "Thou hast loved them AS Thou loved Me" (John 17:23). O that it may please the Holy Spirit to so shine upon our feeble understandings that we may be enabled to lay hold of this wondrous, glorious, and transcendent fact. "Sanctified by God the Father : " set apart by Him to be Body and Bride of Christ, "much graced" in Him, possessing His own holy standing before the Throne of Heaven.

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