

The Doctrine of Sanctification 14. Its Procurer (COMPLETED)

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Transcript

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14. Its Procurer

(COMPLETED)

There is a perfect sanctification in Christ which became ours the moment we first believed in Him—little though we realized it at the time. There will also be a perfect conformity to this in us, an actual making good thereof, when we shall be glorified and enter that blessed realm where sin is unknown. In between these two things is the believer's present life on earth, which consists of a painful and bewildering commingling of lights and shadows, joys and sorrows, victories and defeats—the latter seeming to greatly preponderate in the cases of many, especially so the longer they live. There is an unceasing warfare between the flesh and the spirit, each bringing forth "after its own kind," so that groans ever mingle with the Christian's songs. The believer finds himself alternating between thanking God for deliverance from temptation and contritely confessing his deplorable yielding to temptation. Often is he made to cry, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24). Such has been for upwards of twenty-five years the experience of the writer, and it is still so. Now just as in the commercial world there are a multitude of medical charlatans announcing sure remedies for the most incurable diseases, and filling their pockets at the expense of those who are foolish enough to believe their fairy-tales; so there are numerous "quacks" in the religious world, claiming to have a cure for indwelling sin. Such a paragraph as we have just written above, would be eagerly seized by these mountebanks, who, casting up hands and eyes of holy horror, would loudly express their pity for such "a needless tragedy." They would at once affirm that such an experience, so largely filled with defeat, was because the poor man has never been "sanctified," and would insist that what he needed to do was "to lay his all on the altar" and "receive the second blessing," the "baptism of the Spirit," or as some call it, "enter into the victorious life" by fully trusting Christ for victory. There are some perverters of the Gospel who, in effect, represent Christ as only aiding sinners to work out a righteousness of their own: they bring in Christ as a mere make-weight to supply their deficiency, or they throw the mantle of His mercy over their failures. Some of the religious quacks we have referred to above would be loud in their outcry against such a travesty of the grace of God in Christ, insisting that we can be justified by nought but His blood. And yet they have nothing better to set before their dupes when it comes to "perfect sanctification" or "full salvation through fully trusting Jesus." Christ they say will aid us in accomplishing what we have vainly attempted in our own strength, and by fully trusting Him we now shall

find easy what before we found so arduous. But God's Word supplies no warrant to expect sinless perfection in this life, and such teaching can only tend to fatal deception or bitter disappointment. Those we have referred to above generally separate justification and sanctification both in fact and in time. Yea, they hold that a man may pass through the former and yet be devoid of the latter, and represent them as being attained by two distinct acts of the soul, divided it may be by an interval of years. They exhort Christians to seek sanctification very much as they exhort sinners to seek justification. Those who attain to this "sanctification," they speak of as being inducted into a superior grade of Christians, having now entered upon "the higher life." Some refer to this experience as "the second blessing:" by the first, forgiveness of sins is received through faith in the Atonement; by the second, we receive deliverance from the power (some add "the presence") of sin by trusting in the efficacy of Christ's Name—a dying Saviour rescues from Hell, an ever-living Saviour now delivers from Satan. The question may be asked, But ought not the Christian to "present his body a living sacrifice unto God?" Most assuredly, yet not for the purpose of obtaining sanctification, nor yet for the improving or purifying of "the flesh," the sinful nature, the "old man." The exhortation of Romans 12:1 (as its "therefore" plainly shows—the "mercies of God" pointing back to 5:1,2; 6:5, 6; 8:30, etc.) is a call for us to live in the power of what is ours in Christ. The presenting of our bodies "a living sacrifice to God" is the practical recognition that we have been sanctified or consecrated to Him, and we are to do so not in order to get our bodies sanctified, but in the gracious assurance that they are already "holy." The Christian cannot obtain a right view of the truth of sanctification so long as he separates that blessing from justification, or while he confines his thoughts to a progressive work of grace being wrought within him by the Holy Spirit. "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11): observe that we are "sanctified" just as we are "justified—in the Name of Another! "That they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:18): when we receive the "forgiveness" of our sins, we also receive "an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith." The prayer of Christ, "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17), is fulfilled as we obtain a spiritual knowledge of the Truth by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not by self-efforts, by any "consecration" of our own, by attempts to "lay our all on the altar" that we enter into what Christ has procured for His people, but by faith's appropriation of what God's Word sets before us. In Christ, and in Him alone, does the believer possess a perfect purity. Christ has consecrated us to God by the offering of Himself unto Him for us. His sacrifice has delivered us from defilement and the ensuing estrangement, and restored us to the favour and fellowship of God. The Father Himself views the Christian as identified with and united to His "Holy One." There are no degrees and can be no "progress" in this sanctification: an unconverted person is absolutely unholy, and a converted person is absolutely holy. God's standard of holiness is not what the Christian becomes by virtue of the Spirit's work in us here, but what Christ is as seated at His own right hand. Every passage in the New Testament which addresses believers as "saints"—holy ones—refutes the idea that the believer is not yet sanctified and will not be so until the moment of death. Nor does the idea of a progressive sanctification, by which the Christian "more and more dies unto sin," agree with the recorded experience of the most mature saints. The godly John Newton (author of "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds," etc.) when speaking of the expectations which he cherished at the outset of his Christian life, wrote, "But alas! these my golden expectations have been like South Sea dreams. I have lived hitherto a poor sinner, and I believe I shall die one. Have I, then, gained nothing? Yes, I have gained that which I once would rather have been without—such accumulated proof of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart as I hope by the Lord's blessing has, in some measure, taught me to know what I mean when I say, 'Behold I am vile!' I was ashamed of myself when I began to serve Him, I am more ashamed of myself now, and I expect to be most ashamed of

myself when He comes to receive me to Himself. But oh! I rejoice in Him, that He is not ashamed of me!" Ah, as the Christian grows in grace, he grows more and more out of love with himself. "And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, Holiness to the Lord. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted of "before the Lord" (Ex. 28:36-38). These verses set before us one of the most precious typical pictures to be found in the Old Testament. Aaron, the high priest, was dedicated and devoted exclusively to the Lord. He served in that office on the behalf of others, as their mediator. He stood before God as the representative of Israel, bearing their names on his shoulders and on his heart (Ex. 28:12, 29). Israel, the people of God, were both represented by and accepted in Aaron. That which was set forth in Exodus 28:36-38 was not a type of "the way of salvation" but had to do entirely with the approach unto the thrice holy God of His own sinning and failing people. Though the sacrifices offered on the annual day of atonement delivered them from the curse of the law, godly individuals in the nation must have been painfully conscious that sin marred their very obedience and defiled their prayers and praises. But through the high priest their service and worship was acceptable to God. The inscription worn on his forehead "Holiness to the Lord," was a solemn appointment by which Israel was impressively taught that holiness became the House of God, and that none who are unholy can possibly draw near unto Him. In Leviticus 8:9 the golden plate bearing the inscription is designated "the holy crown," for it was set over and above all the vestments of Aaron. Now Aaron foreshadowed Christ as the great High Priest who is "over the House of God" (Heb. 10:21). Believers are both represented by and accepted in Him. The "Holiness to the Lord" which was "always" upon Aaron's head, pointed to the essential holiness of Christ, who "ever liveth to make intercession for us." Because of our legal and vital union with Christ, His holiness is ours: the perfections of the great High Priest is the measure of our acceptance with God. Christ has also "borne the iniquity of our holy things"—made satisfaction for the defects of our worship—so that they are not laid to our charge; the sweet incense of His merits (Rev. 8:3) rendering our worship acceptable to God. By Him not only were our sins put away and our persons made acceptable, but our service and worship is rendered pleasing too: "To offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). Here, then, is the answer to the pressing question, How can a moral leper be fitted for the presence of God? We need a perfect holiness as well as a perfect righteousness, in order to have access to Him. The Holy One cannot look upon sin, and were we to approach Him in a way wherein He could not look upon us as being perfectly holy, we could not draw nigh unto Him at all. Christ is the all-sufficient answer to our every problem, the One who meets our every need. The precious blood of Jesus has separated the believer from all evil, removed all defilement, and made him nigh unto God in all the acceptableness of His Son. How vastly different is this from that conception which limits sanctification to our experiences and attainments! How definitely better is God's way to man's way, and how far are His thoughts on this above ours! Now it is in the New Testament Epistles that we are shown most fully the reality and substance of what was typed out under Judaism. First, we read, "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one" (Heb. 2:11). Christ is both our sanctification and our Sanctifier. He is our Sanctifier, first, by His blood putting away our sins and cleansing us from all defilement. Second, by the operations of the Holy Spirit, for whatever He doth, He does as "the Spirit of Christ" who procured Him (Psa. 68:18 and Acts 2:33) for His people. Third, by communicating a holy life unto us (John 10:10): the whole stock of grace and holiness is in His hands, He communicating the same unto His people (John 1:16). Fourth, by appearing in Heaven as our representative: He being "Holiness to the Lord" for us. Fifth, by applying and blessing His Word to His people, so that they are washed thereby (Eph. 5:26). He is our

sanctification because the holiness of His nature, as well as His obedience, is imputed to us (1 Cor. 1:30). "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). The Christian will never have right thoughts on this subject until he perceives that his sanctification before God was accomplished at Calvary. As we read, "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in His, sight" (Col. 1:21, 22): By His work at the cross, Christ presents the Church unto God in all the excellency of His perfect sacrifice. In these passages it is not at all a question of any work which is wrought in us, but of what Christ's oblation has secured for us. By virtue of His sacrifice, believers have been set apart unto God in all Christ's purity and merits, a sure title being accorded them for Heaven. God accounts us holy according to the holiness of Christ's sacrifice, the full value of which rests upon the least instructed, the feeblest, and most tried Christian on earth. So infinitely sufficient is Christ's oblation for us that "by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). As we read again, "Ye are complete in Him" (Col. 2:10), and this, because His work was complete. All true believers are in the everlasting purpose of God, and in the actual accomplishment of that purpose by the Lord Jesus, perfectly justified and perfectly sanctified. But all believers are not aware of that blessed fact; far from it. Many are confused and bewildered on this subject. One reason for that is, that so many are looking almost entirely to human teachers for instructions, instead of relying upon the Holy Spirit to guide them into the truth, and searching the Scriptures for a knowledge of the same. The religious world today is a veritable "Babel of tongues," and all certainty is at an end if we turn away from the Word (failing to make it our chief study) and lean upon preachers. Alas, how many in professing Protestantism are little better off than the poor Papists, who receive unquestioningly what the "priest" tells them. It is only as we read God's Word, mixing faith therewith (Heb. 4:2) and appropriating the same unto ourselves, that the Christian can enter into God's thoughts concerning him. In the sacred Scriptures, and nowhere else, can the believer discover what God has made Christ to be unto him and what He has made him to be in Christ. So too it is in the Scriptures, and nowhere else, that we can learn the truth about ourselves, that "in the flesh (what we are by nature as the depraved descendants of fallen Adam) there dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). Until we learn to distinguish (as God does) between the "I" and the "sin which dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:20) there can be no settled peace. Scripture knows nothing of the sanctification of "the old man," and as long as we are hoping for any improvement in him, we are certain to meet with disappointment. If we are to "worship God in the Spirit" and "rejoice in Christ Jesus" we must learn to have "no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). "Wherefore Jesus, also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). The precious blood of Christ has done more than simply make expiation for their sins: it has also set them apart to God as His people. It is that which has brought them into fellowship with the Father Himself. By the shedding of His blood for us, Christ made it consistent with the honour and holiness of God to take us as His peculiar people; it also procured the Holy Spirit who has (by regeneration) fitted us for the privileges and duties of our high calling. Thus, Christ has sanctified His people both objectively and subjectively. We are "sanctified with His own blood," first, as it was an oblation to God; second, as its merits are imputed to us; third, as its efficacy is applied to us. Christ's blood "cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 7) in a threefold way. First, Godwards, by blotting out our sins and removing our defilement from His view (as Judge). Second, by procuring the Holy Spirit, by whom we receive "the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). Third, by our consciences being "purged" (Heb. 9:14) as faith lays hold of these blessed facts, and thus we are fitted to "serve the living God!" Herein we may perceive how God puts the fullest honour on His beloved Son, by making Him not only the Repairer of our ruin and the triumphant Undoer of the Serpent's work (1 John 3:8), but also giving us His own perfect standing before God and communicating His own holy nature unto His people—for a branch

cannot be in the true vine without partaking of its life. In the person of Christ God beholds a holiness which abides His closest scrutiny, yea, which rejoices and satisfies His heart; and whatever Christ is before God, He is for His people—"whither the Forerunner is for us entered" (Heb. 6:20), "now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24)! In Christ's holiness we are meet for that place unto which Divine grace has exalted us, so that we are "made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). This is not accomplished by any experience, separated by a long process from our justification, but is a blessed fact since the moment we first believed on Christ. We are in Christ, and how can any one be in Him, and yet not be perfectly sanctified? From the first moment we were "joined to the Lord" (1 Cor. 6:17), we are holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). This is what the Christian's faith needs to lay hold of and rest on, upon the authority of Him that cannot lie. Nevertheless, the best taught, the most spiritual and mature Christian, apprehends the truth but feebly and inadequately, for now "we see through a glass darkly." True, there is such a thing as a growth in the knowledge of sanctification, that is, providing our thoughts are formed by the Word of God. There is an experimental entering into the practical enjoyment of what God has made Christ to be unto us, so that by faith therein our thoughts and habits, affections and associations are affected thereby. There is such a thing as our apprehending the glorious standing and state which Divine grace has given us in the Beloved, and exhibiting the influence of the same upon our character and conduct. But that is not what we are here treating of. That which we are now considering is the wondrous and glorious fact that the Christian was as completely sanctified in God's view the first moment he laid hold of Christ by faith, as he will be when every vestige of sin has disappeared from his person, and he stands before Him glorified in spirit and soul and body. But the question may be asked, What provision has God made to meet the needs of His people sinning after they are sanctified? This falls not within the compass of the present aspect of our subject. Yet briefly, the answer is, The ministry of Christ on high as our great High Priest (Heb. 7:25) and Advocate (1 John 2:1); and their penitently confessing their sins, which secures their forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). The sins of the Christian mar his communion with God and hinder his enjoyment of His salvation, but they affect not his standing and state in Christ. If I judge not myself for my sinful failures and falls, the chastening rod will descend upon me, yet wielded not by an angry God, but by my loving Father (Heb. 12:5-11). We are not unmindful of the fact that there is not a little in this chapter which worldly-minded professors may easily pervert to their own ruin—what truth of Scripture is not capable of being "wrested"? But that is no reason why God's people should be deprived of one of the choicest and most nourishing portions of the Bread of Life! Other chapters in this book are thoroughly calculated to "preserve the balance of truth."

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