

The Doctrine of Sanctification 21. Its Instrument

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Transcript

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21. Its Instrument

Paul was sent unto the Gentiles "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18). Two extremes are to be guarded against in connection with the precise relation that faith sustains to the various aspects of salvation: disparaging it, and making too much of it. There are those who expressly deny that faith has any actual part or place in the securing of the same. On the other hand, there are some who virtually make a savior out of faith, ascribing to it what belongs alone to Christ. But if we adhere closely to Scripture and observe all that is said thereon (instead of restricting our attention to a few passages), there is no excuse for falling into either error. We shall therefore make a few remarks with the object of refuting each of them. "But without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). We are saved by faith (Luke 7:50). We are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1). We live by faith (Gal. 2:20). We stand by faith (2 Cor. 1:24). We walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). We obey by faith (Rom. 1:5). Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17). We overcame the world by faith (1 John 5:4). The heart is purified by faith (Acts 15:9). All duties, for their right motive and end, depend upon it. No trials and afflictions can be patiently or profitably borne unless faith be in exercise. Our whole warfare can only be carried on and finished victoriously by faith (1 Tim. 6:12). All the gifts and graces of God are presented in the promises, and they can only be received and enjoyed by us in a way of believing. It is high worship to be strong in faith giving glory to God. In view of all this, we need not be surprised to read that we are "sanctified by faith." But in what way does faith sanctify us? To answer this question properly we must carefully bear in mind the principal aspects of our subject, which have already been considered by us in the previous chapters of this book. First, faith has nothing to do with the Father's setting us apart and blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Christ before the foundation of the world: it is one of the God-dishonoring and creature-exalting errors of Arminianism to affirm that Christians were elected on the ground that God foresaw they would believe. Second, our faith was in no sense a moving cause to Christ's becoming the Surety of His people and working out for them a perfect holiness before God. Third, faith has no influence in causing the Holy Spirit to separate the elect from the reprobate, for at the moment He does this they are dead in trespasses and sins, and therefore totally incapable of performing any spiritual acts. Fourth, faith will not contribute anything unto the Christian's glorification, for that is solely the work of

God; the subject of it being entirely passive therein. "Whom he justified, them he also glorified." Thus faith, important though it be, plays only a secondary and subordinate part in sanctification. It is neither the originating, the meritorious, nor the efficient cause of it, but only the instrumental. Yet faith is necessary in order to a saving union with Christ, and until that be effected none of the blessings and benefits which are in Him can be received by us. It seems strange that any who are well versed in the Scriptures and who profess to be subject to their teachings, should question what has just been affirmed. Take such a declaration as "them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:39). True, we are not saved for our believing, yet equally true is it that there is no salvation for any sinner without his believing. Every blessing we receive from Christ is in consequence of our being united to Him, and therefore we cannot receive the holiness there is in Him until we are "sanctified by faith." Furthermore, faith is necessary in order to the reception of the purifying Truth, in order to practical deliverance from the power of sin, and in order to progress or growth in personal holiness. Before proceeding further let it be pointed out that the faith which the Gospel requires, the faith which savingly unites a sinner to Christ, the faith which issues in sanctification, is very much more than the bare assent of the mind to what is recorded in the Scriptures concerning the Lord Jesus; it is something far different from the mere adoption of certain evangelical opinions regarding the way of salvation. The Day to come will reveal the solemn fact that thousands went down to Hell with their heads filled with orthodox beliefs—which many of them contended for earnestly and propagated zealously, just as the Mohammedan does with the tenets and principles of his religion. Saving faith, my reader, is the soul's surrender to and reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ as a living, loving, all-sufficient Saviour, and that, upon the alone but sure testimony of God Himself. When we say "an all-sufficient Saviour" we mean One in whom there is a spotless holiness as well as perfect righteousness for those who come to Him. Faith lays hold of Christ as He is offered to sinners in the Gospel, and He is there presented not only for justification but also for the sanctification of all who truly believe on Him. The glorious Gospel of grace not only heralds One who delivers from the wrath to come but as giving title to approach now unto the thrice holy God. Moreover, faith accepts a whole Christ: not only as Priest to atone for us, but as a King to reign over us. Faith, then, is the instrument of our sanctification. Faith is the eye which perceives the gracious provisions which God has made for His people. Faith is the hand which appropriates those provisions. Faith is the mouth which receives all the good that God has stored up for us in Christ. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and without the exercise of faith it is impossible to make any real progress in the spiritual life. Many of the Lord's people rob themselves of much of their peace and joy by confounding faith with its fruits; they fail to distinguish between the Word of God believed and what follows from believing it aright. Fruit grows on the tree, and the tree must exist before there can be fruit. True obedience, acceptable worship, growth in grace, assurance of salvation, are what faith produces, and not what faith itself is: they are the effects of faith working, and not definitions of the nature of faith. Faith derives its being from the Word of God, and all its fruits are the result of believing. What God has spoken in His Word demands belief from all to whom the Word comes. Faith and the Word of God, then, are related as the effect and the cause, because "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). When faith comes by the inward "hearing," then we assent to what God has said, and we rely upon His faithfulness to make good what He has promised; until that has been effected there can be no fruits of faith. It is, then, of much importance to correctly define what faith is, for a mistake at this point is not only dishonoring to God, but injurious to the soul and inimical to its peace. Faith is a childlike taking God at His Word and resting on what He has said. It is a depending on Christ to bestow those blessings and graces which He has promised to those who believe. How is a sin-defiled soul to become a partaker of the cleansing efficacy of the blood of the Lamb? Only by faith. The purifying virtue of Christ's blood, and the administration of the Spirit, for the application to make it effectual unto our souls and

consciences, is exhibited in the promises of the Gospel; and the only way to be made a partaker of the good things presented in the promises is by faith. God Himself ordained this instrumental efficacy unto faith in the Everlasting Covenant, and nothing is more honoring to Him than the exercise of real faith. Returning to our earlier question, In what way does faith sanctify us? We answer, first, by uniting us to Christ, the Holy One. Oneness with Christ is the foundation of all the blessings of the Christian, but it is not until he is actually united to Christ by faith that those blessings are really made over to him. Then it is that Christ is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). It is faith which receives Christ's atonement, for God hath set forth Christ "a propitiation through faith in His blood" (Rom. 3 :25), and His infinitely meritorious blood not only justifies but sanctifies too. Thus there is no intrinsic virtue in faith itself, instead, its value lies wholly in its being the hand which lays hold of Him who possesses infinite virtue. For this very reason faith excludes all boasting (Rom. 3:27), and therefore any "believing" which produces self-gratulation or results in self-satisfaction is most certainly not the faith of the Gospel. Second, faith sanctifies the believer by enabling him to enjoy now what is his in Christ and what will be his in himself in Heaven. Faith sets to its seal that the testimony of God is true when He declares that "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). Faith assures its possessor that though he is still a fallen creature in himself, and as such a sinner to the end of his earthly course, yet in Christ he is perfectly holy, having the same immaculate standing before God as does his Head and Surety; for "as He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). Thus faith is "the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1) by the natural eye, nor felt by the natural senses. Faith projects us out of this scene entirely and carries the heart into Heaven itself—not a natural faith, not a preacher-produced faith, but Gospel faith, imparted by the Holy Spirit. But let us not be mistaken at this point. The faith of which we are here treating is not a blind fanaticism. It does not ignore the presence of indwelling sin. It does not lose its eyes to the constant activities of the flesh. It refuses to tone down the vile fruits which the flesh produces, by terming them peccadillos, ignorance, mistakes, etc. No, faith has clear vision and perceives the infinite enormity of all that is opposed to God. Faith is honest and scorns the hypocrisy of calling darkness light. But faith not only sees the total depravity of natural self and the horrible filth which fouls every part of it, but it also views the precious blood which has satisfied every claim of God upon those for whom it was shed, and which cleanses from all sin those who put their trust in it. It is neither fanaticism nor presumption for faith to receive at its face value what God has declared concerning the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. Third, faith sanctifies as it derives grace from the fullness in which there is in Christ. God has constituted the Mediator the Source of all spiritual influences and faith is the instrument by which they are derived from Him. Christ is not only a Head of authority to His Church, but also a Head of influence. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:15, 16). That "effectual working in the measure of every part" is by supplies of grace being received from Christ, and that grace flows through the appointed channel of faith. As the Lord Jesus declared unto the father of the demon-tormented son, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:28); and to the two blind beggars who cried unto Him for mercy, "According to your faith be it unto you" (Matt. 9:29). How earnest and importunate should we be, in begging the Lord to graciously strengthen and increase our faith. It is by faith laying hold upon a full Christ that the empty soul is replenished. All that we need for time as well as eternity is to be found in Him; but the hand of faith must be extended, even though it grasp but the hem of His garment, if virtue is to flow forth from Him into us. As Samson's strength was in his locks, so the Christian's strength is in his Head. This the Devil knows full well, and therefore does he labour so hard to keep us from Christ,

causing the clouds of unbelief to hide from our view the radiant face of the Sun of righteousness, and getting us so occupied with our miserable selves that we forget the great Physician. As it is by the sap derived from the root which makes the branches fruitful, so it is by the virtue which faith draws from Christ that the believer is made to abound in holiness. Hence the exhortation, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). Fourth, faith sanctifies because it cleanses the soul. "And God, which knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8, 9). It is by faith the heart is "sprinkled from an evil conscience" by the blood of Christ. It is by faith the affections are lifted unto things above, and thereby disentangled from the defiling objects of the world. It is by the exercise of faith that the "inward parts" (Ps. 51:6) are conformed in some measure unto the Rule of righteousness and holiness, for "faith worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6), and "love is the fulfilling of the Law" (Rom. 13:10). It is to be duly noted that in Acts 15:9 the apostle did not say "their hearts were purified by faith;" instead, he used the present tense "purifying," for it is a continuous process which lasts as long as the believer is hereupon earth. This aspect of our sanctification is not complete till we are released from this world. Fifth, faith sanctifies because it is by this we hold communion with Christ, and communion with Him cannot but nourish the principle of holiness within the regenerate. Thus faith is sanctifying in its own nature, for it is exercised upon spiritual objects. "But we all with open face beholding (by faith) as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). Faith is a transforming grace because it causes the soul to cleave unto the Divine Transformer. As it was faith which made us to first lay hold of Christ, so it impels us to continue coming unto Him; and if the woman who touched the hem of His garment by faith secured the healing of her body, shall not those who cleave to Christ continue obtaining from Him the healing of their spiritual maladies! Sixth, faith sanctifies because it appropriates the commandments of God and produces obedience. We are sanctified "by the Truth" (John 17:17), yet the Word works not without an act on our part as well as of God's. It is naught but blind enthusiasm which supposes that the Scriptures work in us like some magical charm. How solemn is that passage "but the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4:2). The Word avails us nothing if it be not received into a trustful heart and faith be acted upon it. Therefore do we read, "seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Pet. 2:22): it is only as the Truth is received upon the authority of God, given a place in our affections, and yielded to by the will, that our souls are "purified" by it. The more faith causes us to run in the way of God's commandments, the more is the soul delivered from the defiling effects of self-pleasing. Seventh, faith sanctifies because it responds to the various motives which God has proposed to His people, motives to stir them up unto their utmost endeavours and diligence in using those ways and means which He has appointed for preventing the defilements of sin, and for cleansing the conscience when defilement has been contracted. As faith receives the Word as God's, its Divine authority awes the soul, subdues enmity, and produces submission. The effects of faith are that the soul trembles at the Divine threatenings, yields obedience to the Divine precepts, and gladly embraces the Divine promises. Herein, and in no other way, do we obtain unfailing evidence of the reality and genuineness of our faith. As the specie of a tree is identified by the nature of the fruit which it bears, so the kind of faith we have may be ascertained by the character of the effects which it produces. Some of those effects we have sought to describe in the last few paragraphs.

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