

The Doctrine of Sanctification 4. ITS NECESSITY (COMPLETED)

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Transcript

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4. ITS NECESSITY

(COMPLETED)

In the first part of our treatment of the necessity of sanctification it was shown that, the making of a sinner holy is indispensable unto his salvation, yea, that sanctification is an integral part of salvation itself. One of the most serious defects of modern ministry is the ignoring of this basic fact. Of only too many present-day "converts" does it have to be said, "Ephraim is a cake not turned" (Hos. 7:8)—browned underneath, unbaked on the top. Christ is set forth as a fire-escape from Hell, but not as the great Physician to deal with the malady of indwelling sin, and to fit for Heaven. Much is said upon how to obtain forgiveness of sins, but little is preached on how to be cleansed from its pollutions. The necessity for His atoning blood is set forth, but not the indispensability of experimental holiness. Consequently, thousands who mentally assent to the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, know nothing about heart purity. Again; there is a woeful disproportion between the place which is given to faith and the emphasis which the Scriptures give to that obedience which flows from sanctification. It is not only true that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6), but it is equally true that without holiness "no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Not only are we told "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal. 6:15), but it is also written, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Cor. 7:19). It is not for nothing that God has told us, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now it, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). Not only is there in all the promises a particular respect unto personal, vital, and practical "godliness," but it is that very godliness which, pre-eminently, gives the saint an especial interest in those promises. Alas, how many there are today who imagine that if they have "faith," it is sure to be well with them at the end, even though they are not holy. Under the pretense of honouring faith, Satan, as an angel of light, has deceived, and is still deceiving, multitudes of souls. But when their "faith" be examined and tested, what is it worth? Nothing at all so far as insuring an entrance into Heaven is concerned: it is a power-less, lifeless, and fruitless thing; it is nothing better than that faith which the demons have (James 2:19). The faith of God's elect is unto "the acknowledgement of the truth which is after godliness" (Titus 1:1). Saving faith is a "most holy faith" (Jude 20): it is a faith which "purifieth the heart" (Acts 15:9), it is a faith which "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6), it is a faith which "overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4), it is a faith which bringeth forth all

manner of good works (Heb.11). Let us now enter into detail, and show more specifically wherein lies the necessity for personal holiness. Our Personal holiness is required by the very nature of God. Holiness is the excellence and honour of the Divine character. God is called "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4), but "glorious in holiness" (Ex. 15:11) : His mercy is His treasure, but holiness is His glory. He swears by this perfection: "Once have I sworn by My holiness" (Psa. 89:35). Over thirty times is He called "The Holy One of Israel." This is the superlative perfection for which the angels in Heaven and the spirits of just men made perfect do so much admire God, crying "Holy, holy, holy" (1sa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). As gold, because it is the most excellent of the metals, is laid over inferior ones, so this Divine excellency is laid upon all connected with Him: His sabbath is "holy" (Ex. 16:33), His sanctuary is "holy" (Ex. 15:13), His name is "holy" (Psa. 99:3), all His works are "holy" (Ps. 145:17). Holiness is the perfection of all His glorious attributes: His power is holy power, His mercy is holy mercy, His wisdom is holy wisdom. Now the ineffable purity of the Divine nature is everywhere in the Scriptures made the fundamental reason for the necessity of holiness in us. God makes the holiness of His own nature the ground of His demand for holiness in His people: "For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:4). The same fundamental principle is transferred to the Gospel, "But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of behaviour; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1 :15, 16). Thus God plainly lets us know that His nature is such as, unless we be sanctified, there can be no intercourse between Him and us. "For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). Without personal holiness the relationship cannot be maintained that He should be our God and we should be His people. God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). Such is the infinite purity of His nature, that God cannot take any pleasure in lawless rebels, filthy sinners, the workers of iniquity. Joshua told the people plainly that if they continued in their sins, they could not serve the Lord, "for He is a holy God" (Joshua 24:19). All the service of unholy people toward such a God is utterly lost and thrown away, because it is 'entirely inconsistent with His nature to accept of it. The apostle Paul reasons in the same manner when he says, "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28,29). He lays his argument for the necessity of grace and holiness in the worship of God from the consideration of the holiness of His nature, which, as a consuming fire will devour that which is unsuited unto and inconsistent with it. He who resolveth not to be holy must seek another god to worship and serve, for with the God of Scripture he will never find acceptance. The heathen of old realized this, and liking not to retain the knowledge of the true God in their hearts and minds (Rom. 1:28), and resolving to give up themselves unto all filthiness with greediness, they stifled their notions of the Divine Being and invented such "gods" to themselves, as were unclean and wicked, that they might freely conform unto and serve them with satisfaction. God Himself declares that men of corrupt lives have some secret hopes that He is not holy: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee" (Psa. 50:21). Others, today, while professing to believe in God's holiness, have such false ideas of His grace and mercy that they suppose He will accept them though they are unholy. "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Why? Because herein consists our conformity to God. We were originally created in the image and likeness of God, and that, for the substance of it, was holiness—therein consisted the privilege, blessedness, preeminence of man over all the lower creatures. Wherefore, without this conformity unto God, with the impress of His image and likeness upon the soul, we cannot stand in that relation unto God which was designed us in our creation. This we lost by the entrance of sin, and if there be not a way for us to acquire it again, we shall forever come short of the glory of God and the end of our creation. Now this is done by our be-coming holy, for therein consists the renovation of God's image in us (Eph. 4:22-24 and cf. Col. 3:10). It is utterly vain for any man to expect an interest in God, while he

does not earnestly endeavor after conformity to Him. To be sanctified is just as requisite as to be justified. He that thinks to come to enjoyment of God without holiness, makes Him an unholy God, and puts the highest indignity imaginable upon Him. There is no other alternative: we must either leave our sins, or our God. We may as easily reconcile Heaven and Hell, as easily take away all difference between light and darkness, good and evil, as procure acceptance for unholy persons with God. While it be true that our interest in God is not built upon our holiness, it is equally true that we have none without it. Many have greatly erred in concluding that, because piety and obedience are not meritorious, they can get to Heaven without them. The free grace of God towards sinners by Jesus Christ by no means renders holiness needless and useless. Christ is not the minister of sin, but the Main-tamer of God's glory. He has not purchased for His people security in sin, but salvation from sin. According to our growth in likeness unto God are our approaches unto glory. Each day both writer and reader is drawing nearer the end of his earthly course, [A. W. Pink finished his earthly course on July 15, 1952] and we do greatly deceive ourselves if we imagine that we are drawing nearer to Heaven, while following those courses which lead only to Hell. We are woefully deluded if we suppose that we are journeying towards glory, and yet are not growing in grace. The believer's glory, subjectively considered, will be his likeness to Christ (1 John 3:2), and it is the very height of folly for any to think that they shall love hereafter what now they hate. There is no other way of growing in the likeness of God but in holiness: thereby alone are we "changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18)—that is, from one degree of glorious grace to another, until by one last great change shall issue all grace and holiness in eternal glory. But is not God ready to pardon and receive the greatest and vilest sinner who comes unto Him by Christ? Is not His mercy so great and His grace so free that He will do so apart from any consideration of worth or righteousness of their own? If so, why insist so much on the indispensability of holiness? 'This objection, though thousands of years old, is still made. If men must be holy, then carnal reasoners can see no need of grace: and they cannot see how God is gracious if men perish because they are unholy. Nothing seems more reasonable to carnal minds than that we may live in sin because grace has abounded. This is met by the apostle in Rom. 6:1, where he subjoins the reasons why, notwithstanding the superaboundings of grace in Christ, there is an indispensable necessity why all believers should be holy. Without the necessity of holiness in us, grace would be disgraced. Note how when He proclaimed His name "gracious and merciful," the Lord at once added, "and will by no means clear the guilty" i.e. those who go on in their sins without regard unto obedience. 2. Our personal holiness is required by the commands of God. Not only is this so under the covenant of works, but the same is inseparably annexed under the covenant of grace. No relaxation unto the duty of holiness is granted by the Gospel, nor any indulgence unto the least sin. The Gospel is no less holy than the Law, for both proceeded from the Holy One; and though provision be made for the pardon of a multitude of sins and for the acceptance of the Christian's imperfect obedience, yet the standard of righteousness is not lowered, for there is no abatement given by the Gospel unto any duty of holiness nor any license unto the least sin. The difference between those covenants is twofold: under that of works, all the duties of holiness were required as our righteousness before God, that we might be justified thereby (Rom 10:5)—not so under grace; no allowance was made for the least degree of failure (James 2:10)—but, now, through the mediation of Christ, justice and mercy are joined together. Under the Gospel commands for universal holiness, respect is required unto three things. First, unto the authority of Him who gives them. Authority is that which obligates unto obedience: see Mal. 1:6. Now He who commands us to be holy is our sovereign Lawgiver, with absolute right to prescribe that which He pleases, and therefore a non-compliance is a despising of the Divine Legislator. To be under God's command to be holy, and then not to sincerely and earnestly endeavour always and in all things so to be, is to reject His sovereign authority over us, and to live in defiance of Him. No better than that is the state of every one

who does not make the pursuit of holiness his daily and chief concern. Forgetfulness of this, or failure to heed it as we ought, is the chief reason of our careless walking. Our great safeguard is to keep our hearts and minds under a sense of the sovereign authority of God in his commands. Second, we must keep before our minds the power of Him who commands us to be holy. "There is one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy" (James 4:12). God's commanding authority is accompanied with such power that He will eternally reward the obedient and eternally punish the disobedient. The commands of God are accompanied with promises of eternal bliss on the one hand, and of eternal misery on the other; and this will most certainly befall us according as we shall be found holy or unholy. Herein is to be seen a further reason for the indispensable necessity of our being holy: if we are not, then a holy and all-powerful God will damn us. A due respect unto God's promises and threatenings is a principal part of spiritual liberty: "I am the almighty God: walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1): the way to walk up-rightly is to ever bear in mind that He who requires it of us is Almighty God, under whose eyes we are continually. If, then, we value our souls, let us seek grace to act accordingly. Third, respect is to be had unto the infinite wisdom and goodness of God. In His commands God not only maintains His sovereign authority over us, but also exhibits His righteousness and love. His commands are not the arbitrary edicts of a capricious despot, but the wise decrees of One who has our good at heart. His commands "are not grievous" (1 John 5:3): they are not tyrannical restraints- of our liberty, but are just, wholesome, and highly beneficial. It is to our great advantage to comply with them; it is for our happiness, both now and hereafter, that we obey them. They are a heavy burden only unto those who desire to be the slaves of sin and Satan: they are easy and pleasant unto all who walk with God. Love for God carries with it a desire to please Him, and from Christ may be obtained that grace which will assist us thereto— but of this, more later, D. V. Our personal holiness is required by the Mediation of Christ. One principal end of the design of God in sending His Son into the world was to recover us unto that state of holiness which we had lost: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the Devil" (1 John 3:8). Among the principal of the works of the Devil was the infecting of our natures and persons with a principle of sin and enmity against God, and that evil work is not destroyed but by the introduction of a principle of holiness and obedience. The image of God in us was defaced by sin; the restoration of that image was one of the main purposes of Christ's mediation. Christ's great and ultimate design was to living His people unto the enjoyment of God to His eternal glory, and this can only be by grace and holiness, by which we are made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Now the exercise of Christ's mediation is discharged under His threefold office. As to His priestly, the immediate effects were the making of satisfaction and reconciliation, but the mediate effects are our justification and sanctification: "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2 :14)—no unholy people, then, have any sure evidence of an interest in Christ's sacrifice. As to His prophetic office, this consists in His revelation to us of God's love and will: to make God known and to bring us into subjection unto Him. At the very beginning of His prophetic ministry we find Christ restoring the Law to its original purity—purging it from the corruptions of the Jews: Matt. 5. As to His kingly office, He subdues our lusts and supplies power for obedience. It is by these things we are to test ourselves. To live in known and allowed sin, and yet expect to be saved by Christ is the master deception of Satan. From which of Christ's offices do I expect advantage? Is it from His priestly? Then has His blood cleansed me? Have I been made holy thereby? Have I been redeemed out of the world by it? Am I by it dedicated to God and His service? Is it from His prophetic office? Then have I effectually learned of Him to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world?" (Titus 2:12). Has He instructed me unto sincerity in all my ways, in all my dealings with God and men? Is it from His Kingly office? Then does He actually rule in me and over me? Has He delivered me from the

power of Satan and caused me to take His yoke upon me? Has His sceptre broken the dominion of sin in me? Am I a loyal subject of His kingdom? If not, I have no rightful claim to a personal interest in His sacrifice. Christ died to procure holiness, not to secure an indulgence for unholiness. Our personal holiness is required in order to the glory of Christ. If we are indeed His disciples, He has bought us with a price, and we are "not our own," but His, and that to glorify Him in soul and body because they are His: 1 Cor. 6:19, 20. He died for us that we should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him who redeemed us at such fearful cost. How, then, are we to do this? In our holiness consists the principal part of that revenue of honour which the Lord Jesus requires and expects from His disciples in this world. Nothing glorifies Him so much as our obedience; nothing is a greater grief and reproach to Him than our disobedience. We are to witness before the world unto the holiness of His life, the heavenliness of His doctrine, the preciousness of His death, by a daily walk which "shows forth HIS praises" (1 Peter 2:9). This is absolutely necessary if we are to glorify Him in this scene of His rejection. Nothing short of the life of Christ is our example: this is what the Christian is called to "follow." It is the life of Christ which it is his duty to express in his own, and he who takes up Christianity on any other terms woefully deceives his soul. No more effectual reproach can be cast upon the blessed name of the Lord Jesus than for His professing people to follow the lusts of the flesh, be conformed to this world, and heed the behests of Satan. We can only bear witness for the Saviour as we make His doctrine our rule, His glory our concern, His example our practice. Christ is honoured not by wordy expressions, but by a holy conversation. Nothing has done more to bring the Gospel of Christ into reproach than the wicked lives of those who bear His name. If I am not living a holy and obedient life this shows that I am not "for" Christ, but against Him. (N. B. Much in this article is a condensation of John Owen on the same subject, Vol. 3, of his works.)

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