

The Doctrine of Sanctification 7. ITS SOLUTION (COMPLETED)

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Transcript

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7. ITS SOLUTION

(COMPLETED)

At the beginning of the former chapter it was pointed out that in connection with the grand truth of sanctification there is both a mystery and a problem: the former relating to the unregenerate, the latter causing concern to the regenerate. That which is hidden from the knowledge of the natural man is, why his best works are unacceptable to God. Tell him that all his actions—no matter how carefully and conscientiously, diligently and devoutly, executed—are rejected by God, and that is something entirely above the reach of his understanding. He knows not that his breaking of the law in Adam has brought in a breach between himself and God, so that while that breach remains, the favour of God cannot flow out of him, nor his prayers or offerings pass in to God. The Lord will no more receive anything at the hands of the natural man than He would have respect unto the offering of Cain (Gen. 4). And had He left all men in their natural estate, this would have held true of the whole race until the end of time. Inasmuch as all men were given a holy nature—created in the image and likeness of God—in their representative and root, to be transmitted to them by him, before the law was given to Adam, it follows that the law requires a holy nature from each of us, and pronounces a curse wherever it finds the opposite. Though we are actually born into this world in a state of corruption and filth (Ezek. 16:3-6, etc.), yet the law will not abate its just demands upon us. In consequence of the sin which indwells us—which is so much a part and parcel of ourselves that everything we do is defiled thereby—we are thoroughly unable to render unto the law that obedience which it requires; for while we are alienated from the life of God, it is impossible that any outward acts of compliance with the law's statutes can proceed from those principles which it alone can approve of, namely, disinterested love and faith unfeigned. Consequently, the state of the natural man, considered in himself, is entirely beyond hope. The provision made by the manifold wisdom and sovereign grace of God to meet the desperate needs of His people was stipulated for in terms of the Everlasting Covenant. There it was agreed upon by the Eternal Three that the Mediator should be the Son of man, yet, that His humanity should be not only entirely free from every taint of original sin, but should be purer than that of Adam's even when his Creator pronounced him "very good." This was accomplished by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit in the virgin birth, and by the Son of God taking into personal union with Himself "that holy thing" which was to be born of Mary. Inasmuch as Christ, the God-man Mediator,

entered this world not as a private Person, but as a public, as the Representative and Head of God's elect, in the reckoning of the law they were born holy in their Surety and Sponsor, and so fully measure up to its requirements. Christ and His mystical body have never been viewed apart by the law. But this, unspeakably blessed though it be, was not all. A perfect legal standing only met half of the need of God's elect: in addition, their state must be made to accord with their standing. This also has been provided for by the measureless love of the God of all grace. He so ordered that, just as the guilt of Adam was imputed to all for whom He acted, so the righteousness of Christ should be imputed to all for whom He transacted: and, that just as spiritual death—with all its corrupting effects—should be transmitted by Adam to all his posterity, so the spiritual life of Christ—with all its gracious influences— should be communicated to all His seed. As they received a sinful and impure nature from their natural head, so the sanctified receive a sinless and pure nature from their spiritual Head. Consequently, as they have borne the image of the earthy, so they shall bear the image of the heavenly. Some of our readers may, perhaps, conclude that all difficulty in connection with this aspect of our subject has now been of, but a little reflection on the part of the believer soon remind him that the most perplexing point of all has yet to be cleared up. Though it be true that every essential requirement of the law has been met for the sanctified by their glorious Head, so that the law righteously views them as holy in Him; and though it be true that at regeneration they receive from Christ, by the Spirit, a new and holy nature, like unto His; yet the old nature remains, and remains unchanged, unimproved. Yea, to them it seems that the carnal nature in them is steadily growing worse and worse, and more active and defiling every day they live. They are painfully conscious of the jest that sin not only remains in them, but that it pollutes their desires, thoughts, imaginations, and acts; and to prevent its uprisings they are quite powerless. This presents to an honest heart and a sensitive conscience a problem which is most acute, for how can those who abhor themselves be pleasing unto the thrice holy One? How can those conscious of their filthiness and vileness possibly be fit to draw nigh unto Him who is ineffably and infinitely pure? The answer which some have returned to this agonized enquiry based upon an erroneous deduction from the words of Paul "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me": Rom. 7:20—will by no means satisfy them. To say it is not the regenerate person, but only the flesh in him, which sins, is to invent a distinction which repudiates the Christian's responsibility and which affords no relief to a quickened conscience. Scripture is far too plain on this point to justify a mistake: Old and New Testament alike insist it is the person who sins—"against Thee. . . have I sinned" (Ps. 51). Paul himself concludes Romans 7 by saying, "O wretched man that I am!" Where other matters are concerned, men have more sense than to fall back upon such a distinction as some modern theologians are so fond of insisting upon: it never occurs to them to argue thus in connection with temporal things. Imagine one before a judge, who was charged with theft, acknowledging his offence, but disowning all responsibility and culpability on the ground that it was his "evil nature" and not himself which did the stealing! Surely the judge would be in a quandary to decide whether prison or the madhouse was the right place to send him. This reminds us of an incident wherein a "Bishop" was guilty of blasphemy in the House of Lords (where all "Bishops" have seats). Being rebuked by his manservant, he replied, "It was the 'lord' and not the 'bishop' who cursed." His servant responded, "When the Devil gets the 'lord' where will the 'bishop' be!" Beware, my reader, of seeking to clear yourself by throwing the blame upon your "nature." Somewhere else, then, than in any supposed distinction between the sanctified person and his old nature, must the solution to our problem be sought. When one who has been walking with God is tripped up by some temptation and falls, into sin, or when indwelling corruption surges up and (for the time being) obtains the mastery over him, he is painfully aware of the fact; and that which exercises him the most is not only that he has sinned against the One who is nearer and dearer to him than all else, but that his communion with Him is broken, and that he is no longer morally fit to come into His sacred presence. Whilst his knowledge

of the Gospel may be sufficient to allay any haunting fears of the penal consequences of his sins, yet this does not remove the defilement from his conscience. This is one important respect in which the unregenerate and regenerate differ radically: when the former sins it is the guilt (and punishment) which most occupies his thoughts; but when the latter, it is the defiling effects which most exercises his heart. There are two things in sin, inseparably connected and yet clearly distinguishable, namely, its criminality and its pollution. The pollution of sin is that property of it whereby it is directly opposed unto the holiness of God, and which God expresseth His holiness to be contrary unto. Therefore it is said, He is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and canst not look on evil" (Hab. 1:13)—it is a vile and loathsome sight to Him who is the Light. Hence doth He use that pathetic entreaty, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate" (Jer. 44:4.). It is with respect unto His own holiness that God sets forth sin by the names of everything which is offensive, objectionable, repulsive, abominable. Consequently, when the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, He imparts such a sight and sense of the filth of sin, that sinners blush, are ashamed, are filled with confusion of face, are abased in their own esteem, and abashed before God. As we are taught the guilt of sin by our own fear, which is the inseparable adjunct of it, so we are taught the filth of sin by our own shame, which unavoidably attends it. Under the typical economy God not only appointed sacrifices to make atonement for the guilt of sin, but also gave various ordinances for purification or ceremonial cleansing from the pollution thereof. In various ways, during Old Testament times, God instructed His people concerning the spiritual defilement of sin: the distinction between clean and unclean animals, the different natural distempers which befoul the body, the isolating of the leper, the accidental touching of the dead which rendered people religiously unclean by the law, are cases in point. All of them prefigured internal and spiritual pollution, and hence the whole work of sanctification is expressed by "a fountain opened...for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1)—that is, for the purging away of them. So inseparable is moral pollution from sin, and a sense of shame from a consciousness of the pollution, that whenever a soul is truly convicted of sin, there is always a painful sense of this filthiness, accompanied by personal shame. Only as this is clearly apprehended, are we able to understand the true nature of sanctification. The spiritual comeliness of the soul consists in its conformity to God. Grace gives beauty: hence it is said of Christ that He is "Fairer (or "more beautiful") than the children of men," and that beauty consisted in his being made in the image of God, which constituted the whole harmony and symmetry of his nature, all his faculties and actions having respect unto God. Therefore, that which is contrary to the image of God—depravity, contrary to grace—sin, hath in it a deformity which mars the soul, destroys its comeliness, disrupts its order, and brings deformity, ugliness, vileness. Whatever is contrary to holiness or the image of God on the soul, is base, unworthy, filthy. Sin dishonors and degrades the soul, filling it with shame. The closer we are permitted to walk with God and the more we see ourselves in His light, the more conscious are we of the deformity of sin and of our baseness. When our eyes were first opened to see our spiritual nakedness, how hideous did we appear unto ourselves, and what a sense of our pollution we had! That was but the reflex of God's view, for He abhors, loathes, and esteems as an abominable thing whatever is contrary to His holiness. Those who are made "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), do, according to their measure, but see themselves with God's eyes, as wretched, naked, shameful, loathsome, hideous and abominable creatures; and therefore do they, with Job, "abhor" themselves. The last four paragraphs are, in part, a condensation from John Owen; and from them we may clearly perceive that it is they who are truly sanctified and holy, who are the most deeply sensible of the root of corruption which still remains within them, and which is ever springing up and producing that which defiles them; and therefore do they greatly bewail their pollutions, as that which is most dishonoring to God and most disturbing to their own peace; and earnestly do they endeavour after the mortification of it. A remarkable corroboration is found in the fact that the most godly and holy have been the very ones who most strongly

affirmed their sinfulness and most loudly bewailed the same. It was one whom God Himself declared to be a "perfect (sincere) and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8) who declared "Behold, I am vile" (40:4). It was one "greatly beloved" of God (Dan. 10:19), who acknowledged "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption" (10:8). It was he who was caught up to the third heaven and then returned again to earth who moaned, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). From the quotations just made from the personal confessions of some of the most eminent of God's saints, it is perfectly plain to any simple soul that a "pure heart" cannot signify one from which all sin has been removed, nor can their language possibly be made to square with the utopian theory that the carnal nature is eradicated from any believer in this life. Indeed it cannot; and none but they who are completely blinded by Satan would ever affirm such a gross absurdity and palpable lie. But this requires us now to define and describe what a "pure heart" consists of, according to the scriptural meaning thereof. And in our efforts to supply this, we shall have to try and guard against two evils: providing a pillow for empty professors to comfortably rest upon; and stating things in such a way that hope would be killed in the regenerate. First, a "pure heart" is one which has experienced "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). That takes place at the new birth, and is maintained by the Spirit throughout the Christian's life. All that this involves we cannot now state at any length. But, negatively, it includes the purifying of the believer's understanding, so that it is no longer fatally blinded by Satan, but is supernaturally illumined by the Spirit: in consequence, the vanity of worldly things is now perceived. The mind is, in great measure, freed from the pollution of error, and this, by the shining in of the light of God's truth. It includes, negatively, the cleansing of the affections, so that sin is no longer loved but loathed, and God is no longer shrunk from and avoided, but sought after and desired. From the positive side, there is communicated to the soul at regeneration a nature or principle which contains within itself pure desires, pure intentions, and pure roots of actions. The fear of God is implanted, and the love of God is shed abroad in the heart. In consequence thereof, the soul is made to pant after God, yearn for conformity to His will, and seeks to please Him in all things. And hence it is that the greatest grief of the Christian arises from the hindering of his spiritual longings and the thwarting of his spiritual aspirations. A pure heart is one that loathes impurity, and whose heaviest burden is the realization that such an ocean of foul waters still indwells him, constantly casting up their mire and dirt, polluting all he does. A "pure heart," therefore, is one which makes conscience of foolish, vile imaginations, and evil desires. It is one which grieves over pride and discontent, mourns over unbelief, and enmity, weeps in secret over unholiness. Second, a "pure heart" is one which has been "sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22). An "evil conscience" is one which accuses of guilt and oppresses because of unpardoned sin. Its possessor dreads the prospect of the day of judgment, and seeks to banish all thoughts of it from his mind. But a conscience to which the Spirit has graciously applied the atoning blood of Christ obtains peace of mind, and has confidence to draw nigh unto God: in consequence, superstition, terror and torment is removed, and an aversion to God is displaced by a joy in God. Hence, also, third, we read "purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). As unbelief is a principle which defiles, so faith is a principle which purges, and that, because of the object which it lays hold of. Faith looks away from self to Christ, and is enabled to realize that His blood "cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Every Christian, then, has a "pure" heart in the particulars given above. But every Christian does not have a "clean" heart (Ps. 51 :10). That which pollutes the heart of a Christian is unjudged sin. Whenever sin is allowed by us, communion with God is broken, and pollution can only be removed, and communion restored, by genuine repentance—a condemning of ourselves, a mourning over the sin, and unsparing confession of the same, accompanied by a fervent desire and sincere resolution not to be overtaken by it again. The willing allowance and indulgence of any known sin cannot exist with a clean heart. Rightly, then, did John Owen say of repentance: "It is as necessary unto

the continuance of spiritual life, as faith itself." After the repentance and confession, there must be a fresh (and constant) recourse unto that Fountain which has been "opened for sin and for uncleanness," a fresh application by faith of the cleansing blood of Christ: pleading its merits and efficacy before God. In this chapter (in two sections) we have sought to answer the questions at the close of the fifth chapter. We have met every demand of the law in the person of our Surety. We are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, because all the value of Christ's cleansing blood is reckoned to our account. We are capacitated to draw nigh unto God now, because the Holy Spirit has communicated to us the very nature of Christ Himself. By faith we may regard ourselves as holy in Christ. By regeneration we have received a "pure heart:" proof of which is, we hate all impurity, although there is still that in us which delights in nothing else. We are to maintain communion with God by cleansing our own hearts (Ps. 73:13), and that, through constant mortification, and the daily and unsparing judgment of all known sin in and from us.

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