

# The Doctrine of Sanctification 8. ITS NATURE

by A.W. Pink

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## Transcript

### The Doctrine of Sanctification

#### 8. ITS NATURE

We have now reached what is, in several respects, the most important aspect of our theme. It is very necessary that we should seek after a clear and comprehensive view of the character of sanctification itself, what it really consists of; or, at best, Our thoughts concerning it will be confused. Since holiness is, by general consent, the sum of all moral excellence, and the highest and most necessary attainment, it is of the utmost moment that we should well understand its real nature and be able to distinguish it from all counterfeits. How can it be discovered whether or not we have been sanctified, unless we really know what sanctification actually is? How can we truly cultivate holiness, until we have ascertained the real substance or essence holiness? A right apprehension of the nature of sanctification or holiness is a great aid to the understanding of much in the Scriptures, to the forming of right conceptions of the Divine perfections, and to the distinguishing of true religion from all that is false. We have also now reached what is the most difficult and aspect of our many-sided subject. The task of defining and describing the nature of sanctification is by no means a simple one. This is due, partly, to the many different aspects and angles which have to be borne in mind, if anything like a comprehensive conception is to be obtained. Scripture speaks of the believer being sanctified by God the Father; other passages speak of being sanctified in Christ and by His sacrifice; still others of being sanctified by the Spirit, by the Word, by faith, by chastisements. Of course these do not refer to so many different sanctifications, but to the various branches of one complete sanctification; which, nevertheless, need to be kept distinctly in our minds. Some Scriptures present sanctification as an objective thing, others as subjective. Sometimes sanctification is viewed as complete, at others as incomplete and progressive. These varied phases of our subject will pass under review (D.V.) in later chapters. As we have consulted the works of others on this subject, we have been struck by the paucity of their remarks on the nature of sanctification. While many writers have treated at length on the meaning of the term itself, the manner in which this gift has been provided for the believer, the work of the Spirit in imparting the same, the varying degrees in which it is manifested in this life, yet few indeed have entered into a clear description of what holiness actually is. Where false conceptions have been mercifully avoided, yet, in most cases, only partial and very inadequate views of the truth thereon have been presented. It is our conviction that failure at this point, inattention to this most vital consideration, has been responsible, more than anything else, for the conflicting opinions which prevail so widely among professing Christians. A mistake at this point opens the door for the entrance of all kinds of delusion. In order to remove some of the rubbish which may have

accumulated in the minds of certain of our readers, and thus prepare the way for their consideration of the truth, let us briefly touch upon the negative side. First, scriptural sanctification is not a blessing which may be and often is separated from justification by a long interval of time. Those who contend for a "second work of grace" insist that the penitent sinner is justified the moment he believes in Christ, but that he is not sanctified until he completely surrenders to the Lord and then receives the Spirit in His fulness—as though a person might be converted without fully surrendering to Christ, or become a child of God without the Holy Spirit indwelling him. This is a serious mistake. Once we are united to Christ by the Spirit and faith, we become "joint heirs" with Him, having a valid title to all blessing in Him. There is no dividing of the Saviour: He is the holiness of His people as well as their righteousness, and when He bestows forgiveness, He also imparts heart purity. Second, scriptural sanctification is not a protracted process which the Christian is made meet for Heaven. The same work of Divine grace which delivers a soul from the wrath to come fits him for the enjoyment of eternal glory. At what point was the penitent prodigal unsuited to the Father's house? As soon as he came and confessed his sins, the best robe was placed upon him, the ring was put on his hand, his feet were shod, and the word went forth, "Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this My son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:23, 24). If a gradual progressive work of the Spirit was necessary in order to fit the soul to dwell on High, then the dying thief was not qualified to enter Paradise the very day he first believed in the Lord Jesus. "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 6:11)—those three things cannot be separated. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). Third, scriptural sanctification is not the eradication of the carnal nature. The doctrine of the "Perfectionists" hardens souls in delusion, calling evil good, and allowing themselves in sin. It greatly discourages sincere souls who labour to get holiness in the right way—by faith in Christ—and leads them to think that they labour in vain, because they find themselves still sinful and far from perfect, when they have done their best to attain it. It renders meaningless many scriptural exhortations, such as Romans 6:12, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 4:22, 2 Timothy 2:22—"flee also youthful lusts," shows plainly they were still present even in the godly Timothy! Were the carnal nature gone from the Christian, he would be quite unfitted for such duties as the confessing of sins (1 John 1:9), loathing himself for them (Job 40:4), praying earnestly for the pardon of them (Matt. 6:12), sorrowing over them with godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10), accepting the chastisement of them (Heb. 12:5-11), vindicating God for the same (Ps. 119:75), and offering Him the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). Fourth, scriptural sanctification is not something wholly objective in Christ, which is not in anywise in ourselves. In their revolt against sinless perfectionism, there have been some who have gone to an opposite extreme: Antinomians argue for a holiness in Christ which produces no radical change for the better in the Christian. This is another deceit of the Devil, for a deceit it certainly is for anyone to imagine that the only holiness he has is in Christ. There is no such thing in reality as a perfect and inalienable standing in Christ which is divorced from heart-purity and a personal walk in righteousness. What a flesh-pleasing dogma is it, that one act of faith in the Lord Jesus secures eternal immunity from condemnation and provides a lifelong license to wallow in sin. My reader, a faith which does not transform character and reform conduct is worthless. Saving faith is only proved to be genuine by bearing the blossoms of experimental godliness and the fruits of personal piety. In our quest after the actual nature of holiness certain definite considerations need to be kept steadily before us, as guideposts along the track which we must follow. First, by noting what is holiness in God Himself, for the creature's holiness—be it the angels', Christ's, or the Christian's—must conform to the Divine pattern. Though there may be many degrees of holiness, there cannot be more than one kind of holiness. Second, by ascertaining what Adam had and lost, and which Christ has regained for His people. While it be

blessedly true that the Christian obtains far more in the Second Man than was forfeited by the first man, yet this is a point of considerable importance. Third, by discovering the true nature of sin, for holiness is its opposite. Fourth, by remembering that sanctification is an integral and essential part of salvation itself, and not an extra. Fifth, by following up the clue given us in the threefold meaning of the term itself. What is connoted by the holiness of God? In seeking an answer to this question very little help is to be obtained from the works of theologians, most of whom contented themselves with a set of words which expressed no distinct thing, but left matters wholly in the dark. Most of them say that God's holiness is His purity. If it be enquired, in what does this purity consist? the usual reply is, In that which is opposite to all sin, the greatest impurity. But who is the wiser by this? That, of itself, does not help us to form any positive idea of what God's purity consists of, until we are told what sin really is. But the nature of sin cannot be experimentally known until we apprehend what holiness is, for we do not fully learn what holiness is by obtaining a right idea of sin; rather must we first know what holiness is in order for a right knowledge of sin. A number of eminent theologians have attempted to tell us what Divine holiness is by saying, It is not properly a distinct attribute of God, but the beauty and glory of all His moral perfections. But we can get no concrete idea from those words, until we are told what is this "beauty and glory." To say it is "holiness" is to say nothing at all to the point. All that John Gill gives us for a definition of God's holiness is, "holiness is the purity and rectitude of His nature." Nath Emmons, the perfecter of the "New England" scheme of theology, tells us, "Holiness is a general term to express that goodness or benevolence which comprises everything that is morally amiable and excellent." Though sound in their substance, such statements are too brief to be of much service to us in seeking to form a definite conception of the Divine Holiness. The most helpful description of God's holiness which we have met with is that framed by the Puritan, Stephen Charnock, "It is the rectitude or integrity of the Divine nature, or that conformity of it in affection and action to the Divine will, as to His eternal law, whereby He works with a becomingness to His own excellency, and whereby He hath a delight and complacency in everything agreeable to His will, and an abhorrency of everything contrary thereto." Here is something definite and tangible, satisfying to the mind; though perhaps it requires another feature to be added to it. Since the law is "a transcript" of the Divine mind and nature, then God's holiness must be His own harmony therewith; to which we may add, God's holiness is His ordering all things for His own glory, for He can have no higher end than that—this being His own unique excellency and prerogative. We fully concur with Charnock in making the will of God and the law of God one and the same thing, and that His holiness lies in the conformity of His affections and actions with the same; adding, that the furtherance of His own glory being His design in the whole. Now this concept of the Divine holiness—the sum of God's moral excellency—helps us to conceive what holiness is in the Christian. It is far more than a "position" or "standing." It is also and chiefly a moral quality, which produces conformity to the Divine will or law, and which moves its possessor to aim at the glory of God in all things. This, and nothing short of this, could meet the Divine requirements; and this is the great gift which God bestows upon His people. What was it that Adam had and lost? What was it which distinguished him from all the lower creatures? Not simply the possession of a soul, but that his soul had stamped upon it the moral image and likeness of his Maker. This it was which constituted his blessedness, which capacitated him for communion with the Lord, and which qualified him to live a happy life to His glory. And this it was which he lost at the fall. And this it is which the last Adam restores unto His people. That is clear from a comparison of Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:23: the "new man," the product of regeneration, is "renewed in knowledge (in the vital and experimental knowledge of God Himself: John 17:3) after the image of Him that created him," that is, after the original likeness which was bestowed upon Adam; and that "new man" is distinctly said to be "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Thus, what the first Adam lost and what the last Adam secured for His people, was the "image and likeness" of God

stamped upon the heart, which "image" consists of "righteousness and holiness." Hence to understand that personal and experimental holiness which the Christian is made partaker of at the new birth, we have to go back to the beginning and ascertain what was the nature or character of that moral "uprightness" (Eccl. 7:29) with which God created man at the beginning. Holiness and righteousness was the "nature" with which the first man was endowed; it was the very law of his being, causing him to delight in the Lord, do those things which are pleasing in His sight, and reproduce in his creature measure God's own righteousness and holiness. Here again we discover that holiness is a moral quality, which conforms its possessor to the Divine law or will, and moves him to aim only at the glory of God. What is sin? Ah, what man is capable of supplying an adequate answer: "Who can understand his errors?" (Ps. 19:12). A volume might be written thereon, and still much be left unsaid. Only the One against whom it is committed can fully understand its nature or measure its enormity. And yet, from the light which God has furnished us, a partial answer at least can be gathered. For example, in 1 John 3:4 we read, "Sin is the transgression of the law," and that such transgression is not confined to the outward act is clear from "the thought of foolishness is sin" (Prov. 24:9). But what is meant by "sin is the transgression of the law?" It means that sin is a trampling upon God's holy commandment. It is an act of defiance against the Lawgiver. The law, being "holy and just and good" it follows that any breach of it is an evil and enormity which God alone is capable of estimating. All sin is a breach of the eternal standard of equity. But is more than that: it reveals an inward enmity which gives to the outward transgression. It is the bursting forth of that pride and the self-will which resents restraint, which repudiates control, which refuses to be under authority, which resists rule. Against the righteous restraint of law, Satan opposed a false idea of "liberty" to our first parents—"Ye shall be as gods." And he is still plying the same argument and employing the same bait. The Christian must meet it by asking, Is the disciple to be above his Master, the servant superior to his Lord? Christ was "made under the law" (Gal. 44), and lived in perfect submission thereto, and has left us an example that we should "follow His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Only by loving, fearing, and obeying the law, shall we be kept from sinning. Sin, then, is an inward state which precedes the evil deeds. It is a state of heart which refuses to be in subjection to God. It is a casting off the Divine law, and setting up self-will and self pleasing in its stead. Now, since holiness is the opposite of sin this helps us to determine something more of the nature of sanctification. Sanctification is that work of Divine grace in the believer which brings him back into allegiance to God, regulating his affections and actions in harmony with His will, writing His law on the heart (Heb. 10-16), moving him to make God's glory his chief aim and end. That Divine work is commenced at regeneration, and completed only at glorification. It may be thought that, in this section, we have contradicted what was said in an earlier paragraph. Not so; in God's light we see light. Only after the principle of holiness has been imparted to us, can we discern the real character of sin; but after it has been received, an analysis of sin helps us to determine the nature of sanctification. Sanctification is an integral part of "salvation." As this point was dwelt upon at length in the third chapter, there is less need for us to say much upon it here. Once it be clearly perceived that God's salvation is not only a rescue from the penalty of sin, but is as well, and chiefly, deliverance from the pollution and power of sin—ultimating in complete freedom from its very presence there will be no difficulty in seeing that sanctification occupies a central place in the process. Alas that while there are many who think of Christ dying to secure their pardon, so few today consider Christ dying in order to renew their hearts, heal their souls, bring them unto obedience to God. One is often obliged to wonder if one out of each ten professing Christians is really experimentally acquainted with the "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3) of God! Inasmuch as sanctification is an important branch of salvation, we have another help towards understanding its nature. Salvation is deliverance from sin, an emancipation from the bondage of Satan, a being brought into right relations with God; and sanctification is that which makes this actual in the believer's experience—not perfectly so in this

life, but truly so, nevertheless. Hence sanctification is not only the principal part of salvation, but it is also the chief means thereto. Salvation from the power of sin consists in deliverance from the love of sin; and that is effected by the principle of holiness, which loves purity and piety. Again, there can be no fellowship with God, no walking with Him, no delighting ourselves in Him, except as we tread the path of obedience (see 1 John 1:5-7); and that is only possible as the principle of holiness is operative within us. Let us now combine these four points. What is scriptural sanctification? First, it is a moral quality in the regenerate—the same in its nature as that which belongs to the Divine character—which produces harmony with God's will and causes its possessor to aim at His glory in all things. Second, it is the moral image of God—lost by the first Adam, restored by the last Adam—stamped upon the heart, which "image" consists of righteousness and holiness. Third, it is the opposite of sin. Inasmuch as all sin is a transgression of the Divine law, true sanctification brings its possessor into a conformity thereto. Fourth, it is an integral and essential part of "salvation," being a deliverance from the power and pollution of sin, causing its possessor to love what he once hated, and to now hate what he formerly loved. Thus, it is that which experimentally fits us for fellowship with and the enjoyment of the Holy One Himself.

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