

The Doctrine of Sanctification 9. ITS NATURE (CONTINUED)

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Transcript

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(CONTINUED)

The threefold signification of the term "to sanctify." Perhaps the simplest and surest method to pursue in seeking to arrive at a correct understanding of the nature of sanctification is to follow up the meaning of the word itself, for in Scripture the names of things are always in accurate accord with their character. God does not tantalize us with ambiguous or meaningless expressions, but the name He gives to a thing is a properly descriptive one. So here. The word "to sanctify" means to consecrate or set apart for a sacred use, to cleanse or purify, to adorn or beautify. Diverse as these meanings may appear, yet as we shall see they beautifully coalesce into one whole. Using this, then, as our principal key, let us see whether the threefold meaning of the term will open for us the main avenues of our subject. Sanctification is, first of all, an act of the triune God, whereby His people are set apart for Himself—for His delight, His glory, His use. To aid our understanding on this point, let it be noted that Jude 1 speaks of those who are "sanctified by God the Father," and that this precedes their being "preserved in Jesus Christ and called." The reference there is to the Father choosing His people for Himself out of the race which He purposed to create, separating the objects of His favour from those whom He passed by. Then in Hebrews 10:10 we read, "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all": His sacrifice has purged His people from every stain of sin, separated them from the world, consecrated them unto God, setting them before Him in all the excellency of His offering. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 we are told, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth": this refers to the Spirit's quickening work by which He separates the elect from those who are dead in sin. Sanctification is, in the second place, a cleansing of those who are to be devoted to God's use. This "cleansing" is both a legal and an experimental one. As we prosecute our subject, it needs to be constantly borne in mind that sanctification or holiness is the opposite of sin. Now as sin involves both guilt and pollution, its remedy must meet both of those needs and counteract both of those effects. A loathsome leper would no more be a fit subject for Heaven than would one who was still under the curse. The double provision made by Divine grace to meet the need of God's guilty and defiled people is seen in the "blood and water" which proceeded from the pierced side of the Saviour (John 19:34). Typically, this twofold need was adumbrated of old in the tabernacle furniture: the laver to wash at was as indispensable as the altar for sacrifice.

Cleansing is as urgent as forgiveness. That one of the great ends of the death of Christ was the moral purification of His people is clear from many scriptures. "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15); "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); "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14); "Who His own self bear our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24). From these passages it is abundantly plain that the purpose of the Saviour in all that He did and suffered, was not only to deliver His people from the penal consequences of their sins, but also to cleanse them from the pollution of sin, to free them from its enslaving power, to rectify their moral nature. It is greatly to be regretted that so many when thinking or speaking of the "salvation" which Christ has purchased for His people, attach to it no further idea than deliverance from condemnation. They seem to forget that deliverance from sin—the cause of condemnation—is an equally important blessing comprehended in it. "Assuredly it is just as necessary for fallen creatures to be freed from the pollution and moral impotency which they have contracted, as it is to be exempted from the penalties which they have incurred; so that when reinstated in the favour of God, they may at the same time be more capable of loving, serving, and enjoying Him forever. And in this respect the remedy which the Gospel reveals is fully suited to the exigencies of our sinful state, providing for our complete redemption from sin itself, as well as from the penal liabilities it has brought upon us" (T. Crawford on "The Atonement"). Christ has procured sanctification for His people as well as justification. That cleansing forms an integral element in sanctification is abundantly clear from the types. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh" (Heb. 9:13). The blood, the ashes, the sprinkling, were all God's merciful provision for the "unclean" and they sanctified "to the purifying of the flesh"—the references being to Leviticus 16:14; Numbers 19:2, 17, 18. The antitype of this is seen in the next verse, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." The type availed only for a temporary and ceremonial sanctification, the Antitype for a real and eternal cleansing. Other examples of the same thing are found in, "Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes" (Ex. 19:10); "I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to Me in the priest's office" (Ex. 29:44)—for the accomplishment of this see Exodus 40:12-15, where we find they were "washed with water," "anointed" with oil, and "clothed" or adorned with their official vestments. Now the substitutionary and sacrificial work of Christ has produced for His people a threefold "cleansing." The first is judicial, the sins of His people being all blotted out as though they had never existed. Both the guilt and the defilement of their iniquities are completely removed, so that the Church appears before God "as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun" (Song of S. 6:10). The second is personal, at "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." The third is experimental, when faith appropriates the cleansing blood and the conscience is purged: "purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9), "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22). Unlike the first two, this last, is a repeated and continuous thing: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We hope to amplify these different points considerably when we take up more definitely our sanctification by Christ. Sanctification is, in the third place an adorning or beautifying of those whom God cleanses and sets apart unto Himself. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit in His work of morally renovating the soul, whereby the believer is made inwardly holy. That which the Spirit communicates is the life of the risen Christ, which is a principle of purity, producing love to God;

and love to God implies, of course, subjection to Him. Thus, holiness is an inward conformity to the things which God has commanded, as the "pattern" (or sample) corresponds to the piece from which it is taken. "For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:2, 3), i.e., your sanctification consists in a conformity to His will. Sanctification causes the heart to make God its chief good, and His glory its chief end. As His glory is the end God has in view in all His actions—ordering, disposing, directing everything with this design—so conformity to Him, being holy as He is holy, must consist in setting His glory before us as our ultimate aim. Subjective sanctification is that change wrought in the heart which produces a steady desire and purpose to please and honour God. This is not in any of us by nature, for self-love rules the unregenerate. Calamities may drive the unsanctified toward God, yet it is only for the relief of self. The fear of Hell may stir up a man to cry unto God for mercy, but it is only that he may be delivered. Such actions are only the workings of mere nature—the instinct of self-preservation; there is nothing spiritual or supernatural about them. But at regeneration a man is lifted off his own bottom and put on a new foundation. Subjective sanctification is a change or renovating of the heart so that it is conformed unto God—unto His will, unto His glory. "The work of sanctification is a work framing and casting the heart itself into the word of God (as metals are cast into a die or mould), so that the heart is made of the same stamp and disposition with the Word" (Thos. Goodwin). "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form (or "pattern") of doctrine whereto ye were delivered" (Rom. 6:17). The arts and sciences deliver unto us rules which we must conform unto, but God's miracle of grace within His people conforms them unto the rulings of His will, so as to be formed by them; softening their hearts so as to make them capable of receiving the impressions of His precepts. Below we quote again from the excellent remarks of Thos. Goodwin. "The substance of his comparison comes to this, that their hearts having been first, in the inward inclinations and dispositions of it, framed and changed into what the Word requires, they then obeyed the same Word from the heart naturally, willingly; and the commandments were not grievous, because the heart was framed and moulded thereunto. The heart must be made good ere men can obey from the heart; and to this end he elegantly first compares the doctrine of Law and Gospel delivered them, unto a pattern or sampler, which having in their eye, they framed and squared their actings and doings unto it. And he secondly compares the same doctrine unto a mould or matrix, in to which metal is being delivered, have the same figure or form left on them which the mould itself had; and this is spoken in respect of their hearts." This mighty and marvelous change is not in the substance or faculties of the soul, but in its disposition; for a lump of metal being melted and moulded remains the same metal it was before, yet its frame and fashion is greatly altered. When the heart has been made humble and meek, it is enabled to perceive what is that good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God, and approves of it as good for him; and thus we are "transformed by the renewing of our mind" (Rom. 12:2). As the mould and the thing moulded correspond, as the wax has on it the image by which it was impressed, so the heart which before was enmity to every commandment, now delights in the law of God after the inward man, finding an agreeableness between it and his own disposition. Only as the heart is supernaturally changed and conformed to God is it found that "His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). What has just been said above brings us back to the point reached in the preceding chapter (or more correctly, the first sections of this chapter, namely, that holiness is a moral quality, an inclination, a "new nature," a disposition which delights itself in all that is pure, excellent, benevolent. It is the shedding abroad of God's love in the heart, for only by love can His holy law be "fulfilled." Nothing but disinterested love (the opposite of self-love) can produce cheerful obedience. And, as Romans 5:5 tells us, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We are sanctified by the Spirit indwelling us, He producing in and through us the fruits of holiness. And thus it is that we read, "But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself" (Ps. 4:3). In the preceding (portion of this) chapter we asked, "How

can it be discovered whether or not we have been sanctified, unless we really know what sanctification is?" Now let it be pointed out that our sanctification by the Father and our sanctification by Christ can only be known to us by the sanctification of the Spirit, and that, in turn, can only be discovered by its effects. And this brings us to the ultimate aspect of the nature of our sanctification, namely, that holy walk, or course of outward conduct, which makes manifest and is the effect of our inward sanctification by the Spirit. This branch of our subject is what theologians have designated our "practical sanctification." Thus, we distinguish between the act and process by which the Christian is set apart unto God, the moral and spiritual state into which that setting apart brings him, and the holy living which proceeds from that state; it is the last we have now reached. As the "setting apart" is both privative and positive—from the service of Satan, to the service of God— so holy living is separation from evil, following that which is good. Thos. Manton, than whom none of the Puritans are more simple, succinct, and satisfying, says, "Sanctification is threefold. First, meritorious sanctification is Christ's meriting and purchasing for His Church the inward inhabitation of the Spirit, and that grace whereby they may be sanctified: Hebrews 10:10. Second, applicatory sanctification is the inward renovation, of the heart of those whom Christ hath sanctified by the Spirit of regeneration, whereby a man is translated from death to life, from the state of nature to the state of grace. This is spoken of in Titus 3:5: this is the daily sanctification, which, with respect to the merit of Christ, is wrought by the Spirit and the ministry of the Word and sacraments. Third, practical sanctification is that by which those for whom Christ did sanctify Himself, and who are renewed by the Holy Spirit, and planted into Christ by faith, do more and more sanctify and cleanse themselves from sin in thought, word, and deed: (1 Pet. 1:15; 1 John 3:3). "As to sanctify signifieth to consecrate or dedicate to God, so it signifieth both the fixed inclination or the disposition of the soul towards God as our highest lord and chief good, and accordingly a resignation of our souls to God, to live in the love of His blessed majesty and a thankful obedience to Him. More distinctly (1) it implieth a bent, a tendency, or fixed inclination towards God, which is habitual sanctification. (2) A resignation, or giving up ourselves to God, by which actual holiness is begun; a constant using ourselves to Him, by which it is continued; and the continual exercise of a fervent love, by which it is increased in us more and more, till all be perfected in glory. As to sanctify signifieth to purify and cleanse, so it signifies the purifying of the soul from the love of the world. A man is impure because, when he was made for God, he doth prefer base trifles of this world before his Maker and everlasting glory: and so he is not sanctified that doth despise and disobey his Maker; he despiseth Him because he preferreth the most contemptible vanity before Him, and doth choose the transitory pleasure of sinning before the endless fruition of God. Now he is sanctified when his worldly love is cured, and he is brought back again to the love and obedience of God. Those that are healed of the over-love of the world are sanctified, as the inclinations of the flesh to worldly things are broken." "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). There was probably a threefold reference in the apostle's request. First, he prayed that all the members of the Thessalonian church, the entire assembly, might be sanctified. Second, he prayed that each individual member might be sanctified entirely in his whole man, spirit and soul and body. Third, he prayed that each and all of them might be sanctified more perfectly, moved to press forward unto complete holiness. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is almost parallel with Hebrews 13:20, 21. The apostle prayed that all the parts and faculties of the Christian might be kept under the influence of efficacious grace, in true and real conformity to God; so influenced by the Truth as to be fitted and furnished, in all cases and circumstances, for the performance of every good work. Though this be our bounden duty, yet it lies not absolutely in our own power, but is the work of God in and through us; and thus is to form the subject of earnest and constant prayer. Two things are clearly implied in the above passage. First, that the whole nature of the Christian is the subject of the work of sanctification, and not

merely part of it: every disposition and power of the spirit, every faculty of the soul, the body with all its members. The body too is "sanctified." It has been made a member of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15), it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). As it is an integral part of the believer's person, and as its inclinations and appetites affect the soul and influence conduct, it must be brought under the control of the spirit and soul, so that "every one of us should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour" (1 Thess. 4:4), and "as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Rom. 6:19). Second, that this work of Divine grace will be carried on to completion and perfection, for the apostle immediately adds, "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess.5:24). Thus the two verses are parallel with "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will finish it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Nothing short of every faculty and member of the Christian being devoted to God is what he is to ever aim at. But the attainment of this is only completely realized at his glorification: "We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2)—not only inwardly but outwardly: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21).

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