

Amiable Instincts Not Holiness

by Edward Payson

The apostle's prayer for the universal sanctification of the Thessalonian Christians highlights the importance of sanctifying the animal soul, which includes instincts such as parental love and sympathy.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 5:48, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:22, Philippians 2:3, Colossians 3:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:15

Topics: "Sanctification", "Holy Living"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the importance of sanctification, focusing on the need for the sanctification of the animal soul, which includes affections like parental love, compassion, and natural temper. He emphasizes that these affections, though seemingly good, need to be sanctified by divine grace to be truly holy and pleasing to God. Payson highlights that sanctification involves having right motives, directing affections towards God, and being in subordination to His will. He warns against relying on natural goodness or amiable tempers for salvation, stressing the necessity of true holiness through sanctification by the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

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 THESSALONIANS v. 23.

THIS prayer of the apostle for the universal sanctification of the Thessalonian Christians, leads us to notice a distinction in the natural constitution of man, which is not, perhaps, sufficiently attended to. He speaks, you will observe, not only of their body, and their spirit, but of their soul. The question is, what does he mean by this? The word soul, usually signifies the intellectual, immortal part of man, by which he is distinguished from the brutes. But this cannot be its meaning here, because he expressly mentions the spirit, or immortal part, in distinction from the soul, or as something different from it. What then does he mean by this term? If we turn our attention, for a moment, to irrational animals, we shall find a satisfactory answer to the question. We have no reason to believe that these animals possess an immortal soul, or what the apostle in our text calls a spirit. On the contrary, we have reason to believe, that they do not possess such a soul; for an inspired writer speaks of a difference between the spirit of a man, which goeth upward, and the spirit of a beast, which goeth downward to the earth. Yet animals have something, which may be called a soul, that is, something besides a body; for they can love and hate, they can be pleased or made angry; they have various wonderful instincts, and they evidently possess memory. Now take

away the intellectual, immortal part of man, or what is called in the text, his spirit, and he would be like one of these animals. He would still possess not only a body, but what may be called an animal soul; and it is, I conceive, this animal soul, which the apostle means in our text, and which he prays might be sanctified and preserved blameless. By praying that this might be the case, he evidently intimates, that it ought to be the case that the animal soul of man, as well as his body and immortal part, ought to be sanctified or made holy.

I have often explained the nature of sanctification, and its effects upon the appetites and members of the body. I propose, in the present discourse, to consider more particularly the sanctification of the animal soul of man, or that part of human nature, which does not, properly speaking, belong either to the body or to the mind, but which is distinct from both.

In the prosecution of this design I shall naturally be led to show more fully, what belongs to the animal soul of man, and in what respects the animal feelings of those, who are sanctified, differ from the same feelings in those, who are not.

The first thing, which I shall mention as belonging to the animal soul, is that mutual affection, which subsists between parents and their children. I consider this affection as belonging to the animal soul, because irrational animals evidently possess it. While their offspring are in a dependent state, and need their care, they display an affection for them, at least as strong, as was ever exhibited by human parents. They not only hazard, but often lose their own lives in defending their young. And their offspring no less evidently return their affection. We may add, that the sorrow which animals feel when deprived of their young, appears to be as deep, though by no means so lasting, as that which parents feel for the loss of their children. We have, therefore, I conceive, sufficient reason, to conclude that parental and filial love, as it naturally exists in mankind, is an affection, not of the immortal part or spirit, but of the animal soul, though it is doubtless, in some measure, modified and often regulated by our rational soul. And hence we farther conclude, that these affections, while they remain unsanctified by the Spirit of God, or as they exist in men void of religion, have nothing in them of a religious nature, nothing of moral goodness or true holiness nothing, which God is under any obligation to accept or reward. No one supposes, that there is any moral goodness in the affection, which animals feel for their young. And the affection, which parents and children feel for each other, appears to be of the same nature. We do not naturally love our children, because God requires it; we do not love them with a view to please him; we do not love them because it is a duty; our affection for them seems to be a mere natural animal instinct, which is, in itself; neither holy nor sinful. But as it now exists in fallen man, it partakes largely of that universal depravity, which infects his whole nature. In various ways it becomes sinful itself; and leads us into other sins.

It becomes sinful, for instance, when it is inordinate. Our affection for any creature is inordinate and sinful, when we love that creature more than we love God; for he requires the first place in our affections, and forbids us to prefer any object to him. Agreeably, we find most awful punishments denounced upon Eli, because he preferred his sons to God. But all parents naturally love their children far more than they love God. Hence they take more pains to gratify them than they do to please God. Hence they are unwilling to part with them, when he calls, and often feel unreconciled and murmur, when he takes them away. Hence too, they are often so much engaged in acquiring wealth for their children, and in promoting their temporal advancement, that they neglect many of the most important duties which God requires them to perform. Now, when such are the effects of parental love, that love is evidently inordinate and sinful.

Again. Affection for our children becomes sinful, when it takes a wrong direction. Such a direction it takes, when it leads us to prefer their bodies to their souls; to seek their present, rather than their future happiness; to indulge their sinful propensities, rather than give them pain by restraining and correcting them. Yet such, in a considerable degree at least, are the invariable effects of parental love in those parents, who are not influenced by religion. Such parents show no more concern for the souls and eternal happiness of their offspring, than irrational animals. They neither pray for them, nor give them religious instruction, nor set before them a religious example. Surely no one, who believes the Bible, need be told, that such conduct is both highly irrational and exceedingly sinful.

Lastly. Parental affection is sinful, when it is not prompted by right motives. It ought to proceed from a regard to the appointment and will of God. We ought to look upon them from their birth, not as mere playthings--to love them, not as irrational animals do, but as rational and accountable creatures. We ought to love them for God's sake, because they are his creatures, because he gave them to us to be educated for him, and trained up for heaven. In a word, we ought to love them with a holy love, and because he requires it. But after what has been said, it is almost needless to remark, that no parents naturally love their children in this manner. Of course, there is nothing morally good, and there is much that is morally wrong, in their parental affection. Hence it is evident, that the affection of the animal soul needs to be sanctified, or brought under the controlling influence of religion. It must be sanctified, or we cannot be universally holy. And from the preceding remarks it will be easy to learn in what this sanctification consists, and what will be its effects. It is sanctified, when it is prompted by right motives, when it takes a right direction, and when it is kept in due subordination to the will of God. When this is done, we shall love our children as God's gifts, and for his sake. We shall prefer him to them. We shall feel ready to resign them, when he calls; and if he takes them away, our sorrow for their loss will have no mixture of repining or discontent. While they are spared to us, we shall make it our chief concern to educate them for God and heaven; their souls will receive a much greater share of our attention than their bodies; we shall be far more anxious for their eternal, than their temporal welfare; and to secure it, will be the principal object of all our exertions respecting them. Those, whose affection for their children is not thus regulated and directed, may be certain, that it is not yet sanctified, that it is sinful in the sight of God, and that they are very far from being such parents, as he approves. And yet they may feel very well satisfied with themselves; they may regard themselves as patterns of parental goodness, and even hope that God will reward them as such. Such is the blindness and deceitfulness of the human heart.

The second affection of the animal soul, which I shall mention, is that pain, which is excited by seeing our fellow creatures in distress, and that instinctive desire, which we feel, to relieve them. This affection is called sympathy, pity, and compassion. I infer, that it belongs to the animal part of our nature, from the fact, that many species of irrational animals often appear to feel it in a very high degree; and from the equally well known fact, that it is usually felt most strongly by children at a very early age, before the developement of their intellectual powers, and while they can scarcely be considered as rational beings.

And in persons farther advanced, it seems to be a merely animal instinct; for it is not guided by reason, and often operates partially and capriciously. Many persons, for instance, who are painfully affected by the sight of bodily suffering, seem to feel no compassion for the mental sufferings of their fellow creatures; and in others, who boast much of their sensibility, it seems to defeat the very end for which it was given, by rendering them unable to support the sight of keen distress, and impelling them to fly from their suffering friends, when they most need their assistance.

Indeed, many plead this as an excuse for neglecting to visit the sick and necessitous, and for leaving their friends, when any painful surgical operation is to be performed. They urge that their sensibility is too exquisite, that their feelings are too easily affected, to allow them to witness such scenes, or to perform such duties. We may add, that the same persons, when provoked, are often cruel, and feel no pity for the sufferings of those, who have offended them. What is still worse, they feel no compassion for the souls of men; no grief in view of the future miseries, to which sinners are exposed; nor will they make the smallest exertion to save them from these miseries.

If a friend or relative is sick of a mortal disease and, unconcious of his danger, is flattering himself with hopes of a speedy recovery, they will not speak a word to undeceive him, and perhaps will not even allow others to do it, lest it should give him pain. Supremely selfish, even in their sensibility, they leave him to discover his danger, when too late, to die unprepared, rather than perform the painful duty of warning him, that death is approaching. How widely this pity or compassion, if it deserves the name, differs from that which glowed in the bosom of our Savior, no one, who has read the New Testament with attention, needs be informed.

It is true, he pitied the corporeal sufferings which he witnessed, and was ever ready to relieve them; but it is equally true, that he felt and displayed incomparably more compassion for their perishing souls. It was to save them, that he came from heaven. It was to save them, that he shed, not tears only, but blood. He bore their sins in his own body on the tree, and freely consented to be wounded for their transgressions, to be bruised for their iniquities, and to pour out his soul unto death, that they might live.

His compassion evidently differed very widely from that blind instinct, that animal affection, which we dignify with the name. It was benevolence viewing misery, and willing to make that misery its own, not merely by sympathizing with it, but by actually bearing it, that the miserable might escape.

Nor was his sensibility blunted, as ours often is, by familiarity with scenes of suffering, or by the criminality of the sufferers. It is evident then, that our natural sympathy, amiable as it appears, necessary as it is, needs to be sanctified, and that until it is sanctified, it has nothing in it of moral goodness, or true benevolence. Before it can lay any just claim to these titles, it must be made to resemble the compassion of our Savior. It must cease to be capricious, partial, and selfish in its operations. It must make us willing to deny ourselves, and to suffer pain, inconvenience, and provocation, for the sake of alleviating the distresses of others. It must be excited by the sufferings of our enemies, as well as those of other men. Above all, it must be excited chiefly by the miseries, to which the souls of men are exposed; and enable us, when viewing our unconverted relatives, to say with Paul, I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. So far only, as we can truly say this, are our natural sensibility and sympathy sanctified. And if they are not thus sanctified, in some degree, at least, in vain shall we pretend to belong to the merciful, who shall obtain mercy of God, or claim any relation to our Savior; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if there is any thing in the spirit of Christ, by which he was peculiarly distinguished, it was compassion for the souls of men.

There are two other marks, by which we may be assisted in ascertaining how far our natural sympathies are sanctified. Merely natural sympathy usually declines, as men advance in years; so that, if they live to old age, it becomes almost extinct. But when it is sanctified, it not only continues, but increases in proportion to the christian's religious advancement. In this case it is truly beautiful to see the affectionate sensibility of youth united with the experience, firmness, and mature wisdom of age; to see the veteran disciple, who has learned to endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ, putting on bowels of mercies,

tenderness and gentleness of mind, to see the same tree adorned at once with the blossoms of spring and the fruits of autumn. The second mark of sanctified sympathy, is a disposition to participate in the joys, as well as sorrows, of our fellow creatures. This the scriptures require. They command not only to weep with those who weep, but to rejoice with those who rejoice. This command we shall obey, so far as our natural affections are sanctified. We shall make the happiness of others our own. But merely natural affection will not lead to this. On the contrary, it will often lead us to envy those, who are more prosperous than ourselves, to repine at their prosperity, especially if they are our rivals, and to wish that some calamity may befall them. He, in whom this disposition is subdued; he, that can truly rejoice in the happiness of those who do not love him, may safely conclude that he has made advances in the work of sanctification.

Thirdly. What is commonly called the natural temper, or disposition, seems to belong chiefly to the animal soul. I say, chiefly, for some of the passions, which affect the temper, such as pride, ambition, avarice, envy, malice, and revenge, evidently belong to the spirit, or immortal part; for we are taught, that evil spirits, who have no animal soul, are subject to these passions. but setting these passions aside, there is something in the natural temper or disposition of men, which may be, and which indeed often is, called constitutional.

In this respect different persons differ very widely, even from their birth. Some appear to be constitutionally timid, mild, gentle, quiet, affectionate, and yielding; while others are bold, boisterous, restless, irritable, and obstinate. In a word, some have naturally an amiable and others an unamiable temper. Now that this difference of temper depends upon the animal soul, appears, to say the least, highly probable from the fact, that we find a similar difference among irrational animals, even among those of the same species.

For instance, among the domestic animals, which are employed by man, there seems to be as great a diversity of natural temper, as is found among human beings. Some are quiet, mild, gentle, and tractable. Others, of the same species, are irritable, quarrelsome, and perverse. What renders it still more probable that the temper belongs to the animal soul, is the well known fact, that it seems to be much affected by the state of the health. Persons, who, while in good health, appear to be mild, affectionate, and contented, will often, when assailed by disease, become peevish, fretful, irritable and querulous.

This is especially the case with children, who are less careful, than older persons, to conceal their feelings. Now every one will probably acknowledge that when the temper is naturally unamiable and bad, it needs to be sanctified. When persons of such a temper profess to have become christians, an amelioration of their temper is always expected. This is, perhaps, one of the first proofs of their sincerity, for which their acquaintance look; and if it is not found, their professions are naturally supposed to be insincere.

On the contrary, when a great and obvious change for the better is witnessed in the temper of such persons, their sincerity is usually acknowledged, and religion is honored. This being the case, it is evidently of very great importance, that those professing christians, whose temper is naturally bad, should pay the strictest attention to this subject, and make it their chief concern to have their temper sanctified by divine grace. Until this is done, they can neither possess themselves, nor exhibit to others, satisfactory evidence of their sincerity, nor can they adorn the religion, which they profess.

Indeed, they will not fail to dishonor it, and cannot be either useful, consistent, or happy. As persons, who have such a temper, are not infrequently bold, resolute, and unyielding, it is easy for them to be firm, zealous, and courageous in the cause of Christ, and they may easily mistake their constitutional courage for holy boldness and christian zeal. But let them beware of this mistake. Let them not conclude they have

made much progress in the work of sanctification, until their zeal and boldness are guided by knowledge, tempered with gentleness and prompted by love; nor until they habitually possess and exercise a kind, affectionate, meek, humble, contented and quiet spirit.

When this is done, they will resemble their Master, who united in himself the apparently inconsistent qualities of the lion and the lamb, the serpent and the dove,--and will be of all christians the most amiable, exemplary, and useful.

But while all will allow, that a naturally bad temper needs to be thus sanctified, there are many who by no means suppose, that tempers naturally amiable equally need sanctification. But if we take the scriptures for our guide, a little reflection will convince us, that this is actually the case. The scripture teaches, that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. But there is nothing of the nature of holiness in a naturally amiable temper. Holiness consists in conformity to the law of God.

But persons, who possess the temper of which we are speaking, naturally pay no more regard to the law of God than others do. They are not gentle, kind, and affectionate, because God requires them to be, or because they wish to please him; for they often live without God in the world. They do not naturally love prayer, or the Bible, or the Savior, or any part of religion; but it is as difficult to draw their attention and affections to these subjects, as it would be if their tempers were unamiable.

The young ruler, who asked our Savior what he should do to inherit eternal life, evidently possessed a naturally amiable disposition. Yet when Christ said to him, Take up thy cross and follow me, he was no more willing to obey, than were the scribes and Pharisees. Hence we find that when our Savior asserted the necessity of regeneration, repentance, and faith, he represented them as alike necessary to all, and made no exception in favor of amiable characters. It is therefore evident, that in his view, such characters need sanctification no less than other men.

Their natural affections must be christianized, if I may so express it, or baptized by the Holy Spirit, before they can possess any thing of the nature of true religion. Until this is done, they are no more christians, merely for possessing such affections, than an animal of a mild and tractable disposition is a christian. And besides this general radical defect of such characters, which consists in an entire want of true holiness. they are subject to many particular defects; defects which often attend them even after they become christians.

They are often constitutionally timid, irresolute, and easily prevailed upon by solicitations, to do what they know, or at least suspect to be wrong. To these solicitations, they find it very difficult to say, No, with firmness, and to obey the precept, which says, My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Nor do they usually display much zeal and courage, in doing good, or in maintaining their Master's cause. Many of them also are constitutionally indolent: hence, if they become christians, they are often slothful christians.

Like the sluggard mentioned by Solomon, they are too ready to say, There is a lion in the way; and the fear of man, a fear of giving offence, often entangles them in a snare. Often too, they forget or neglect the rule of being just before they are generous; and, prompted by natural temper, give away what is not theirs to give. If they do not become christians, these defects prevail in their character in a still greater degree, and often prove their ruin, both for this world and the next.

A large proportion of those, who fall a prey to dissipation, gaming, intemperance, and debauchery, are of this class. They are, at first, led into these vices by the example and solicitations of their companions, which they have not sufficient strength of mind to resist and afterwards continue to practice them through habit. If they escape this snare, and maintain a correct moral character, they are in danger of falling into other errors, hardly less fatal. As they are commonly much beloved and esteemed, their company is sought after, and they find themselves so pleasantly situated in this world, that they have little leisure or inclination to think of another.

Besides, the good opinion of their fellow creatures, tempts them to think too highly of themselves, and to trust in their amiable temper and correct morals, while they neglect the Savior of sinners, the only name under heaven, by which any can be saved. Surely then, no one, who regards the scriptures, can doubt, whether such characters need to be sanctified by divine grace. And those of them, in whom this work is begun, need to go on unto perfection. They must judge of their progress towards perfection by the degree, in which they conquer those sins and errors, to which they have a constitutional propensity.

If they are enabled to overcome indolence and timidity, and to be zealous, bold, and diligent in the cause of Christ; if they can resolutely resist temptation; if their natural mildness and gentleness are exalted into true benevolence; if they become as unwilling to offend God, as they naturally are to offend their fellow creatures; and if they become more and more sensible of their constitutional failings, and more solicitous to correct them-- they have reason to hope, that the work of sanctification is rapidly advancing.

I have now mentioned the principal affections of the animal soul, and attempted to show that they need to be sanctified. It remains to make some improvement of the subject.

1. What has been said, may throw some light upon the doctrine of man's entire depravity, and remove some plausible objections, which are often urged against its truth. When we say, that men are entirely depraved, we mean, as I have often stated to you, that they are entirely destitute of holiness. They are as destitute of holiness, as a dead man is of life; and hence they are said by the inspired writers to be dead in trespasses and sins. In reply, the adversaries of the doctrine refer us to parental and filial affection, to that sympathy or compassion, which seem natural to man; to the amiable tempers, which many seem to possess, and to the moral actions, which flow from these several sources. They suppose the existence of these things proves conclusively, that men are not entirely depraved. But it has been clearly shown, if I mistake not, that there is no holiness in any of these things; that we possess them in common with irrational animals that they are, in many respects, imperfect and sinful, and that they lead us into many sins. Now if this has been proved, it evidently follows, that the existence of these animal affections is no proof at all, that men are not entirely depraved. It has also been proved, indeed our text clearly proves, that these affections of the animal soul need to be sanctified, or made holy. But if they need to be made holy, it is evident, that they are not originally holy, but that they are, on the contrary, depraved, or sinful; for nothing, which is not sinful, needs to be made holy.

2. From this subject it appears, that those who are sanctified, and those who are not, differ very widely, even in those respects. in which they seem to be alike. For instance, both classes eat and drink; but he who is sanctified, eats and drinks to the glory of God, while the unconverted sinner eats and drinks to gratify himself. Both classes love their children. But in unsanctified persons, parental love is a merely animal affection. inordinate, wrongly directed, and not subordinate to the love of God. In those, who are sanctified, on the contrary, it is a holy affection rightly directed, regulated by God's law, and in subordination to his love. Both classes may pity and relieve the distressed. But the former are led to do

this by a blind animal instinct, which is capricious, irregular, and partial in its operations; while the compassion of the latter is elevated and ennobled by divine grace, and resembles that, which glowed in the bosom of our Savior. Both classes may possess amiable tempers, and live correct moral lives. But the amiable tempers of the former, and the morality, which they sometimes produce, do not spring from religion; they are not influenced by religion; nor have they any reference either to God and his law, or to Christ and his gospel. The temper and morals of the latter, on the contrary, spring from religion in the heart; they are the effects of God's law written in the heart; their love to men flows wholly from love to God; their morality is true christian morality, and they are constrained by the love of Christ to imitate his example. In short the governing motives, the main-springs of action, in the sanctified and unsanctified man are totally different; and since God looks at motives, since, in his view, the character of every action is determined by its motive, it is evident, that the same actions which are good when performed by a good man, may be altogether wrong when performed by a sinner. The sanctified, and the unsanctified may apparently resemble each other in temper and conduct, and yet the latter may be justly punished, while the former are rewarded. Hence we see,

3. How greatly and fatally those are deceived, who found a hope of heaven on their naturally amiable tempers and moral lives. We have seen that these need to be sanctified, and that till they are so, they are imperfect and sinful. Those then, who found their hope on these things, found it on their sins and imperfections. They found it on something, which needs pardon, and which cannot therefore merit reward. St. Paul tells us, that if any supposed they had something of this kind, in which they might safely trust, he had more. But, he adds, what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; and he proceeds to inform us that he counted all his supposed goodness and morality as mere filth, that he might win Christ. O then, let all who share in Paul's salvation, imitate in this respect the example of Paul.

4. This subject may assist us to understand that memorable declaration of Christ, From him that hath not shall be taken away even that, which he seemeth to have. We have seen that every thing, which appears to be naturally good and amiable in sinners, such as parental and filial affection, sympathy or compassion, and a sweet natural temper, belongs to the animal soul. Now this dies with the body. Nothing survives death, but the immortal spirit. Of course, at death, sinners, who have no grace, no real goodness, will lose all this apparent goodness, all those natural affections, which made them appear amiable here; and nothing will remain, but a spirit wholly given up to the power and rage of malignant passions. Thus from those, who have no grace, no real goodness or holiness, will be taken away all which they now appear to have. O then, be persuaded, ye, who now appear amiable, to seek, most earnestly to seek the sanctifying grace of God. This alone can render your apparent goodness real, and cause it to be permanent. This alone can stamp on your souls that image of God, which consisteth in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, and without which no man shall ever see the Lord.

To conclude. Let me urge all, who profess to be the disciples of Christ, to aim at universal and complete sanctification, even to be sanctified throughout in spirit, in soul, and in body. Remember, that to aim at this, is your indispensable duty. Regard it to as your privilege. O, how desirable it is, to be thus universally holy; to have the immortal spirit clean and white, the animal soul without spot, and the body rendered worthy of such an inhabitant. This you are taught to believe, will, at length, be your happy state in heaven. Will you not, then, strive to make as near approaches to it, as possible, on earth? but the present subject leads me to press upon you, more particularly, the sanctification of the animal soul, with its affections. This is one of the principal seats of depravity. Let it then be one of your chief objects to have it sanctified. Think it not sufficient to love your children, unless your affection for them be such as has been described. Think

it not sufficient to be compassionate and sympathizing, unless your compassion resembles that of your Saviour. And be not satisfied with your temper, until you feel in full strength, that heaven-born charity which seeketh not her own.

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