

# Sanctification

by J. Wilbur Chapman

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*Sanctification is the will of God, and it is a supernatural work that cannot be done by ourselves, but rather through faith in Christ and yielding to God's presence and power.*

**Scripture:** John 3:5, John 17:17, Romans 8:1-2, Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 5:25, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 1 John 3:2

**Topics:** "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the importance of sanctification, emphasizing that it is God's will for His people to be set apart and grow in faith and love. He compares sanctification to justification, highlighting that while justification is an act, sanctification is an ongoing work that requires complete reliance on Christ. Chapman stresses that sanctification is entirely by faith, leading to union with Christ, justification, participation in His life, peace, sanctification itself, and assurance of eternal life. He explains that sanctification is a supernatural work of God involving the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it requires daily yielding to God's presence and power for spiritual growth and transformation into Christlikeness.

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## Transcript

TEXT: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification."--1 Thess. 4:3.

It is quite significant that the Apostle Paul writes explicitly concerning sanctification to a church in which he had such delight that he could write as follows:

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the Church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with ever-lasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (2

Thessalonians 1:1-10).

No higher commendation than this could be paid to any followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet unto such a people we find him saying, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification."

It reminds us of that other scene in the New Testament when Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night. He was a member of the Sanhedrim, he was in the truest sense of the word a moral man, and yet Jesus, knowing all this, deliberately looked into his face and said with emphasis, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:5-7).

Both of these statements lead us to believe that God's requirements for his people are very high. These we may not attain unto at all in our own strength or the energy of our flesh or because of any inherited righteousness which we may possess. There is no way to reach his standard except by complete identity with Christ; and this is made possible by means of faith.

To know the will of God concerning anything is a great satisfaction. It is like food to our souls if we can say with Jesus, "My meat is to do God's will." It is an indescribable pleasure if we can say with the Son of God, "I delight to do thy will." It is the key to the highest form of knowledge, for we have found it true that "he that doeth the will of God shall know of the doctrine." It is the promise of eternal life, for we are told in God's Word, "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever." There is possibly no place where God's will for us is more clearly stated than in this text. Sometimes we may know his will by praying. How often revelations have come thus to us as if from the very skies concerning his desires for us! We may know it sometimes by thinking. If one would but yield his mind perfectly to God in his providences as well as in his word he would know God's will concerning him. We may know it sometimes by talking to others, for not infrequently God gives a revelation to one child of his for the guidance of another's life. But in this connection it is most definitely stated, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." And the Apostle emphasizes his words,

First: By the use of the most affectionate expression, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

Second: He speaks on the authority of Jesus himself. "For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 4:2).

Third: He emphasizes it by referring to the second coming of our Lord, for he well knew that if one was looking for the appearing of the Son of God he would turn away from fleshly lusts and abstain from that which was unclean, thus encouraging the work of sanctification. The Apostle Paul says to the Thessalonians after he has clearly set before them God's will concerning their living, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one

another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). It was not enough for them, in his judgment, to abide in the faith; they must abound in the works of the Gospel. To talk well without walking well is not pleasing to God, for the character of the Christian is thus described, "He walks not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

The presentation of this subject impresses upon us the fact that we have lost many of the best words in the Bible because they have been misused and their teaching misapprehended. If you speak of holiness men look askance at you, and yet holiness is simply wholeness or healthfulness and is to the soul what health is to the body. Who, then, would be without it? If you speak of sanctification immediately your hearers imagine you are talking concerning sinlessness, and yet there is no better word in the Scriptures than sanctification, for in one way it means separation from sin, in another way it means an increasing likeness to Christ. There are six particular effects of faith.

First: There is union with Christ. It is true that we were chosen in him before the foundation of the world and that we are an elect people, but it is also true that we are by nature the children of wrath and it is necessary that we should make a deliberate choice of him as a Savior. When by faith we have taken Christ as a Savior we are united to him. Faith is counting that which seems unreal as real, as untrue as true and that which seems not to exist as if it existed. Faith unites us to him. Without him we are as nothing.

Second: Justification. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). As we believe in Christ we are clothed with his righteousness. Whether we can explain it or not, this righteousness answers every demand of God's justice. Thus it is that Romans the eighth chapter the thirty-third and the thirty-fourth verses becomes true for us. Let it be noticed, however, that in both of these verses the two words, "it," and "is" are in italics, which would indicate that they were not in the original. Concerning those who are justified, therefore, the verses would read as follows: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect." The rest of the verse is a question, "God that justifieth?" The thirty-fourth verse reads, "Who is he that condemneth?" and the answer is a question, "Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God who also maketh intercession for us?" and Paul here simply means to say that if God can lay nothing to our charge and Christ would not condemn us then we are free, and justification at least to the layman carries with it this thought:

1. The justified man stands as if he had not sinned at all. His record is clean.
2. The debt which sin had incurred is paid and instead of being afraid and trembling at the thought of sin we sing with rejoicing, "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe."

Third: Participation of his life. Paul writes to the Galatians, "I live, and yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And in the fifteenth chapter of John the first six verses we read, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in

me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." So faith unites us to him and his life becomes a very part of our being.

(a) It is like the principle of grafting. When the branch is grafted into the tree the life of the tree throbs its way into the branch and ultimately there is fruitfulness. If we only could sustain the right relations to Christ we would have the cure for worldliness.

(b) Because of this participation and privilege we need not be concerned. I have heard of a man who grafted a branch into a tree and then went each day to take the graft out to see what progress it had made, and the branch died.

(c) Our life need not be intermittent--that is, hot to-day and cold to-morrow--but it may be all the time an abundant life; not because of what we are but because of what Christ is.

Fourth: Peace. Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And peace arises from a sense of reconciliation. If faith is strong, then peace is abundant; if it is fitful peace partakes of the same character. That man who has faith in Jesus Christ as a personal Savior has the following threefold blessing--first, Peace with God; second, The Peace of God; third, The God of Peace.

Fifth: Sanctification. Acts 26:18, "To open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Of this we shall speak more at length a little later.

Sixth: Assurance. This is plainly written in God's word. Notice John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." And John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is passed from death unto life." The entire first Epistle of John also emphasizes the same truth.

I

Sanctification is therefore entirely by faith.

First: By faith we receive the indwelling of the Spirit and he makes Christ real to us. Because Christ is real by faith we may walk with him; and that man who keeps step with Jesus Christ will find that he has come day by day to turn away from those things which were formerly his defeat. We may also talk with him. That hymn which we sometimes sing,

"A little talk with Jesus, How it smooths the rugged way,"

has been true in the experience of many of us. We may also be so constantly associated with him that we may find ourselves actually like him; and to grow like Christ by the power of the Spirit is to have the work of Sanctification carried on.

Second: By faith exercised in God the Spirit continues his work. We have only to remember the promises of God concerning him, the first of which is that the Spirit is here carrying on his special work in his particular dispensation. His second promise is that he is in us if we be children of God, and we need only to yield to his presence day by day to be delivered from the power of sin. His third promise is that he will

take of the things of God and show them unto us. Things which the world's people cannot understand he makes plain unto us. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for those who love him," but the Spirit hath revealed them unto us. The fourth promise is that he will not leave us. We may resist the Spirit, we may grieve the Spirit, but we will not grieve him away. His power may be greatly limited in our lives, the work of sanctification under the influence of his presence be greatly hindered, but he is with us, "nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature can separate us from him."

Third: By faith we have a vision of things unseen and they become real to us. Faith is to the soul what the eye is to the body. The things of God become actually real, and becoming so they are powerful. Under the influence of this vision temporal things are trifling. The Christian who is true to his position lives in heaven, breathes its atmosphere, is pervaded by its spirit and so becomes pure, tender, obedient, loving. No wonder that to these people whose lives were so attractive Paul wrote in the text, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification."

II

Justification and sanctification ought to be compared to appreciate the latter. The first is an act, the second is a work. We do not grow in justification. There is no distinction between Christians in this respect; the smallest child accepting Christ is as truly justified as the saint of a half century. So far as sanctification is concerned there is the widest possible difference. Justification depends upon what Christ does for us, sanctification depends upon what Christ does in us. First of all it is a supernatural work. In this respect among others it differs from reformation. Henry Drummond has said that in reformation men work from the circumference, in sanctification they work from the center. The Triune God may really be counted upon as the author of this work. In 1 Thessalonians the fifth chapter and the twenty-third verse we have the work of the Father. "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." In Ephesians fifth chapter twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth verses we have the work of the Son. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

In John the seventeenth chapter and the seventeenth verse we have special emphasis laid upon the work of the Spirit. "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." What folly, therefore, to think that we could carry on this work by ourselves!

Second: Just what, therefore, is this work of sanctification? When we are regenerated we have given to us an entirely new nature. The old nature and the new are absolutely different; and the old and the new war one against the other. The Bible is full of the accounts of those who have met this inward conflict. Some of the most eminent people in the world whose names have been mentioned in the Bible and out of it have told the story of their backsliding, their falling, their repentance, and their lamentation because of their weakness. You have all read the seventh chapter of Romans. Whether this is the story of Paul's experience or not, it is the story of yours. Galatians the fifth chapter sixteenth and seventeenth verses gives us the same thought. "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary, the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." What is it, therefore? It is just the working day by day of the spirit of Christ in us. It is the growth of that spiritual nature which after a while controls our whole being. It is the bringing into subjection of the old nature until it has no more dominion over us. After Paul's

struggle in the seventh chapter of Romans he comes triumphantly to the second verse of the eighth chapter of Romans and exclaims, "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

### III

It God is the author, then certain things need to be emphasized.

First: We need only to be yielding day by day to his efforts and presence and power to become more and more sanctified. His life flows along the path of least resistance; if there is difficulty with us in the matter of temper, sharpness of tongue, an impure mind or an unforgiving spirit, give him liberty and the work is complete.

Second: We must learn that the least thing may hinder his work in us. It became necessary for me recently to purchase a hayrake. I was told of two different kinds, one the old-fashioned kind where the prongs of the rake must be lifted by hand, the other an automatic arrangement where by simply touching the foot to a spring the movement of the wheels would lift the rake at the proper time so that raking hay was a delight. The first day the rake was in the field it was almost impossible to use it. It was too heavy to lift by hand and the foot attachment would not work. We sent for the man who had sold us the implement. There was just one little part of the attachment missing. Missing that, hard effort was required and poor work was accomplished. It may be that some little thing stands in the way of your blessing, or the lack of some little thing hinders your usefulness.

Third: We have only to remember the law of growth. We do not grow by trying. Who ever heard of a boy growing in this way? Who ever heard of a doctor who had a prescription for growth? Our effort for Christian growth is just a succession of failures. How many times we have said, "I am determined to be better; my temper shall never get the better of me again"! We are beginning at the wrong end. Instead of dealing with the symptoms, let us see that we are in right relations with Christ and he will effect the cure. Let us, therefore, just observe the right attitude towards Christ and we have the secret.

Henry Drummond has said in one of his books that the problem of the Christian life is simply this: "Men must be brought to observe the right attitude. To abide in Christ is to be in right position and that is all." Much work is done on board a ship in crossing the Atlantic, yet none of this is spent in making the ship go. The sailor harnesses his vessel to the wind, he lifts his sail, lays hold of his rudder and the miracle is wrought. God creates, man utilizes. God gives the wind, the water, the heat, and man lays hold of that which God has given us, holding himself in position by the grace of God, and the power of omnipotence courses within his soul.

### IV

We are in this world slowly but surely coming to be like Christ. To be Christ-like is one thing--we may be in this way or that--but to be like Christ is entirely different. Wonderful transformations have been wrought in this world by education and by culture. I remember when I was a lad in Indiana being told of a celebrated Indianapolis physician who advertised for the most helpless idiot child and the most hopeless was brought to him. For weeks and months no impression could be made upon that child. He used every day to take the child into his parlor, put him down on the floor and then lie beside him with the sunlight streaming in his face. He said over and over one syllable of a word until at last the child caught it, and I remember as a boy seeing that same child stand upon a platform, repeat the Lord's Prayer and the twenty-third Psalm and

sing a hymn to the praise of God [Transcriber's note: part of page torn away here, and one, possibly two, words are missing] is wonderful; but more remarkable than that is the work which is going on in us day by day. We are becoming more Christlike; one day we shall be like Christ. "But when?" you say. This is the answer: "Beloved, now are ye the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

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