

Sanctification -- Clearing Away the Rubbish

by J.H. Collins

Sanctification is the process of becoming holy and perfect in God's sight, but it does not mean freedom from ignorance, mistake, temptation, or infirmity.

Scripture: Nehemiah 4:10, Isaiah 57:14, John 15:5, Galatians 2:20, Hebrews 4:15, 1 John 3:9

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Sanctification"

Description

J.H. Collins preaches on the challenges Nehemiah faced while rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, emphasizing the need to clear away the 'rubbish' hindering Christian perfection. He explains that Christian perfection does not imply perfect knowledge, freedom from temptation, infirmities, or the impossibility of sinning, but rather a sanctified relationship with God where one is tempted but does not sin. Collins clarifies that Christian perfection is not about having Christ's holiness imputed to us, but rather having it imparted within us through a deep connection with Christ.

Transcript

"There is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall." (Neh. 4:10).

"Take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people." (Isaiah 57:14).

When Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem he met with much discouragement. He was laughed at by some, scoffed at by others, and openly resisted by many. Tobiah said that if a fox were to go up he would even break down their stone wall. In the midst of his labors Nehemiah was informed that there was much rubbish in the way to hinder the building, so, in our attempt to build the wall of Christian perfection, we find it necessary to first direct our labors to patiently clearing away the rubbish. Many dear people are saying, "O I don't believe in this doctrine of sanctification; I don't think we'll ever get where we will not be tempted; I think we'll never get where we cannot sin; I have evil thoughts every day." Such like objections we are expected to consider, and by the help of God to kindly remove them, as we are admonished to "take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people."

First, Christian perfection does not suppose that we are made perfect in knowledge. In the works of nature God's laws are mysterious. Much has been discovered; but how little, compared to the vast realms that are yet unexplored. A child can puzzle a philosopher; and why? Because the simplest things about us can not be fully explained. The chemist may separate certain substances into their elements; but ask him what is the essence of anything, and he cannot tell you. Another man in the pursuit of knowledge may assert

specific properties of matter, such as figure, dimension, density, force, etc.; but ask him what is force, and he is compelled to confess his ignorance. In short, who can trace to their finality heat, light, life, electricity, and many other things with which we come in contact every day? In these, "who by searching can find out God? Lo, these are a part of his ways, but the thunder of his power who can understand?" So in divine providence we may say what he does "we know not now." We know not "what a day may bring forth;" we cannot correctly plan the future; we take but one step at a time, for we walk by faith, not by sight. The same may be said in reference to the spiritual kingdom here: "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness."

During one of my trips into the northern portion of California, I came within a few miles of Mount Shasta. I had often desired to have a near view of this grand mountain. Suddenly coming from the forest into an open place, I turned to look, expecting to realize my satisfaction -- when, lo! the summit and sides of the vast butte were covered with clouds. Here and there through breaks in the clouds I could discover patches of the mountain glittering with snow. Then my mind went up to God, and I thought of that wonderful passage, "Clouds and darkness are round about him," while we gain but little knowledge of his ways.

As we cannot be perfect in knowledge, neither can we be free from mistake, as imperfection in knowledge implies liability to mistake. Erroneous opinion will tend to produce erroneous practice; and so mistakes will be made which may be both afflictions to ourselves and to others. Yet, in this we cannot see any condemnation. We conceive that an angel does not know all things, and, therefore, might innocently blunder.

Second, Christian perfection is not a state in which we are free from temptation. The word "tempt" is used in the Bible with two meanings: first, it means to try, to test, as it is said that God tempted Abraham; second, it is to solicit to do evil. In this sense, it is said: "God tempted no man, neither is he tempted." With these definitions of the word "temptation," we understand that we will never reach a plane where we will not be tempted. But the trouble of many people comes in just here; they do not distinguish between a temptation and a sin; they confound the one with the other.

A temptation is not a sin. Let us set a stake down here. If temptation is a sin, then it follows that Jesus was one of the greatest sinners that ever lived; for he was tempted to worship the devil. "He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin."

It is said that the "thought of foolishness is sin." So it is; but let us explain. This does not mean that to think about foolishness is sin; for the Saviour thought about worshiping the devil; and what greater foolishness than that? The truth is, there is no sin in foolish thoughts passing through our minds. The sin would be in harboring them. In the language of an old Proverb, "We cannot prevent the birds from flying over our heads, but we can keep them from building nests in our hair."

Christian perfection does not free us from infirmities. These may be either of the mind -- as irresolution, slow perception, feeble memory -- or of the body. We often see persons who are near-sighted; others again who stutter in their speech. Such we call infirmities; they arise from some mental or physical defect. They are now covered with the blood of Christ, and will be kissed away in the resurrection. It does not mean a state where we may not sin. We will never reach a plane in the present life where there is no possibility of falling away. There is one sense, however, in which the sanctified cannot sin -- that is, they cannot sin and maintain a sanctified relation at the same time. This is true of all the children of God, whether entirely sanctified or not. "He that is born of God doth not commit sin." You offer a man a

thousand dollars if he will strike his mother, and he says, "No; I love my mother; I cannot strike her." But if he gets drunk, then he will strike his mother for nothing. Just so long as a person loves God he cannot sin; but the moment he loses his love, he is prepared to rush into sin. To shape our thoughts; the sanctified person is tempted, may sin, but does not sin, and has no sin.

To be sanctified does not mean to have Christ's holiness imputed to us. As Mr. Fletcher says, "we must have holiness in ourselves, but not of ourselves." Not imputed, but imparted. The scriptural illustration is: "I am the vine, ye are the branches." Now, if the branches only have the juices of the vine imputed to them, they will be dead. Thank God, the juices of the vine are to be imparted to them. "For he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." (John 15:5). We must not only have Christ crucified for us, but we must be crucified with him. Not only Christ for us, but Christ in us. To sum up: Christian perfection is not freedom from ignorance, nor mistake, nor temptation, nor infirmity, nor the possibility of falling; neither is it imputed holiness. Then what is it?

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