

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION *by Arthur W. Pink*

Chapter 23

The Means of Sanctification

One of the principal reasons why so many of the Lord's people have such vague and faulty conceptions of what the believer's sanctification really consists of, is because few of those who write or preach thereon take the trouble to deal with the subject in an adequate and systematic way. Important distinctions are ignored, diverse aspects are jumbled together, terms are not explained, and because little more than superficial generalizations are presented, nothing is definitely defined in the mind of the reader or hearer--or, only a single branch of the subject is understood by him. On the other hand, in our endeavour to present an orderly unfolding of this great truth, there is danger of confusing the reader's mind by the numerous divisions adopted. He is apt to conclude that the subject is too complex for him to grasp, or bewilder himself by supposing there are several different kinds of sanctification. Yet this ought not to be.

Such mistaken ideas will be avoided if our friends exercise due patience--a rare quality today!--and devote themselves to studying the subject with that diligence to which it is surely entitled, and with which their own peace and spiritual prosperity is so closely bound up. Anything in this life which is of value can only be obtained by painstaking effort. That which is worth something is rarely acquired without labour, perseverance, and expense. Why, then, begrudge the putting forth of these where the securing of a better knowledge of Scripture is concerned? Truth has to be bought (Prov. 23:23): it is obtained only by those who are willing to pay the price. And it is for their help that we write, and not for those who value their souls so lightly that they are too lazy to study.

Now, as we have sought to show in previous chapters, sanctification as a whole needs to be viewed from two chief viewpoints--the Divine and the human--the Divine inworking and the human outworking. While we have also stressed the importance of distinguishing between its two principal aspects--the positional and the practical: the place and state into which the mysterious work of Christ has brought the believer before God, and the response this calls for from him, namely, the conduct which becomes him as a saint. But often the Divine and human elements are so closely interwoven that, when developing certain phases of our subject, it is scarcely possible to draw a sharp line between them. Take that aspect which was last before us: the instrument of our sanctification, namely, faith. Now faith is both something which is Divinely inwrought and humanly outworked. It is a Divine gift, yet it has to be exercised by its recipient. Believing is my act, though it is through the Spirit I am enabled therein. In like manner, it is not always practicable to separate between positional and practical holiness when tracing out certain phases of our theme.

In taking up the means of sanctification it is the practical holiness of the believer which is to be in view. Were we to cast this article into the form of a sermon, our text would be, "Sanctify them through Thy Truth" (John 17:17). A superficial reading of that verse would cause us to draw the inference that the Apostles were not then sanctified, or why should Christ pray for them to be sanctified? Yet a little reflection will show that such an inference is a false one, for the Eleven had separated from the world when they responded to the call of Christ, and as real believers in Him they were most certainly "sanctified by faith." Then the question arises, Since they were already sanctified why did their great High Priest pray the Father to "sanctify" them? We raise this question for the purpose of impressing the reader with the fact that sanctification has various phases or aspects, and that we must carefully distinguish between the same if we are either to understand the teaching of Scripture on the subject or our own experience in the light of that teaching.

What the Lord Jesus prayed for in John 17:17 was that the Spirit would draw out what He had already wrought in them, that He would graciously call into exercise and act the principle of holiness which He had communicated to them at their regeneration. It is quite clear from the previous verse that the Apostles were already sanctified, and, as holy persons, Christ now prayed that they might be kept in the way of holiness, preserved in the practice of it, and that the fruits thereof might abound in them. Thus, it was not for their initial sanctification that Christ supplicated the Father, nor for any further and fresh sanctification, but for the drawing out and manifestation of what was already theirs. And in connection therewith, means were to be employed: "Sanctify them through Thy Truth: Thy word is Truth" (John 17:17). This, then, should make quite clear the place which "means" have--a subordinate one and at what stage they enter into our sanctification--only in connection with the drawing forth of what has already been wrought in us.

At the time that our Lord here prayed, the Apostles knew and believed the Truth, yet--as it is with us today--it was in a poor manner and low degree. Their apprehensions of spiritual things were very imperfect, and often quite erroneous: they were dull scholars--slow to learn, and slower still to unlearn, as the Gospel records abundantly testify. Like we, they had need to pray, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." But they were yet to be filled with the Spirit and guided into all Truth (John 16:13). And thus it is, in measure, with the Christian, for "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). Little by little the believer's heart is brought increasingly under the influence of the Truth, and thereby is he raised to closer experimental communion with Christ. The result of this is that he has an ever-deepening desire to keep himself unspotted from the world, be brought into complete and cheerful submission to the whole will of God, and walk before Him unto all pleasing.

It was not the sanctification of the Apostles' persons that Christ prayed for, nor the sanctification of their nature, but rather of their walk. As to their

persons, God had set them apart in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4); as to their nature, that had been sanctified when (at the new birth) a principle of holiness had been communicated to them; and neither the one nor the other admitted of any improvement. Now in connection with the sanctification of the walk--a term which includes much more than outward conduct--the Word is the great means employed by God, working effectually with and by it on the hearts of His people. By the Scriptures the Spirit continues to enlighten the understanding, convict the conscience, inflame the affections, and move the will. By them He conveys to us a fuller and clearer knowledge of the amazing grace of God and love of Christ toward us, and how it becomes us to act in return. Not that our hearts then become more sanctified, but they are more influenced by Divine things and exercised before God.

Many and varied are the Scriptures which treat of this particular branch of our subject: the place which the written Word has in the practical sanctification of the believer. From them we select the following: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever" (Psa. 19:7-9). "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word" (Psa. 119:9). "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32). "Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). "I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). "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" (Eph. 5:25, 26). "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow

thereby" (1 Peter 2:1, 2). But let us enter more into detail and show wherein the believer is sanctified by the Truth.

First, by imparting to us a knowledge of God's will. That which He requires of us can be ascertained in no other way than through an acquaintance with the teachings of Holy Writ. It is for that reason God has given to us His Word: to set before us His standard of conduct, to make known to us what He hates and what He loves, to expose the sophistries of Satan and the vanities of the world--in short, to provide us with a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. "To the Law and to the Testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). The believer is sanctified experimentally just to the extent that he is brought under the illuminating and commanding influences of the Word of Truth. Personal holiness is our conformity to its requirements. Practical holiness is separation and abstention from evil, and association with and performance of that which is good; and only from the Scriptures can we fully discover what is evil and what is good.

From what has just been pointed out, it necessarily follows that all human rules and regulations for godly living are worthless, and the Christian must steadfastly refuse to be brought into bondage by them. Men have devised a great variety of prohibitions and observances in which they suppose holiness to consist, and by attending to the same have appeared to themselves and to others to have attained a very high degree of sanctity. The Pharisees were guilty of this, adding to the commandments of God their own traditions, such as the ceremonial washing of their hands and vessels in order to avoid moral defilement. The Romanists have followed in the same track, by inducing many of their deluded victims to retire entirely from the world to the "holy" (???) solitude of monasteries and convents, binding themselves to devote most of their time to the repetition of prayers and other "sacred" (?) exercises.

There has always been an element in Protestantism--those temperamentally disposed toward asceticism and mysticism--who have

pursued this same will o' the wisp. Supposing that the same would produce a greater deliverance from sin and secure a closer walking with God, they have submitted themselves to frequent fastings and other penances, taking upon them vows of poverty and celibacy, depriving themselves of the ordinary comforts and innocent recreations of life, and having sought to exist on the sparsest possible diet. But as the Holy Spirit tells us in Colossians 2:20-23 these ordinances of "touch not, taste not, handle not" are but "the commandments and doctrines of men, which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body," but, as it is added, "not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh."

The aesthetical austerities advocated in varying degrees by Keswick and other "Victorious Life" platforms, are little better than those of the poor Romanists, and we may say of the one what Luther said of the other, "they are nothing else than spiritual sorceries." How thankful should we be, then, that God Himself has placed in our hands a perfect and complete revelation of His will, an unerring standard by which we may measure all the plausible theorisings of "nice" and "good" men! "As we cannot serve God by doing what He has not commanded and still less by doing what He has forbidden (bringing ourselves into bondage to modern Pharisees-A.W.P.) so it is presumptuous to expect God's blessing upon means which, being introduced as supplementary to His ordinances, very plainly import that in this respect man is wiser than He is" (John Dick).

We have dwelt longer upon our first division because we were most anxious the reader should clearly perceive that the written Word is the chief means used by God in the practical sanctification of His people, for it--and it alone--imparts to us a knowledge of His will, discovering the things to be shunned and revealing the things which are to be followed. Just so far as we, in our quest after piety, substitute for the teachings of Holy Writ the sophisticated reasonings and dictatorial edicts of men, shall we forsake the substance and vainly pursue the shadows. On the other hand, just so far as we abstain from what God has forbidden and perform what He has enjoined,

are we really treading the Highway of Holiness. How it behooves us, then, to test our views and ideas by the Word of Truth!

Second, by its influential considerations. The Word of Truth not only defines our duties, but it also presents many considerations which are calculated to work powerfully upon our affections and wills. The Scriptures do more than set before us bare precepts--they exhibit them in all the loveliness of example, in the history of saints, and particularly in the life of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the precepts are accompanied by encouraging promises (2 Cor. 7:1)--the value of which is realized only so far as we are conscious of our weakness. When called upon to "purify our hearts" (James 4:8), we are ready to exclaim, How is it possible for me to cleanse myself from the pollutions of indwelling sin? In this state of despondency the Scriptures afford relief by assuring of supernatural grace: James 1:5; 4:6; 2 Corinthians 12:9. When bidden to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, we are informed "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12, 13).

Third, by strengthening faith, for the Word is its appointed food: "nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:6). There are many of God's dear children who long after and pray for an increase of their faith, but it is idle to do so while they continue to neglect the means provided for its nourishment. Trust in God will only be developed by feeding on His Word: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. 15:16). When the Devil challenged the faith of Christ, He set His people an abiding example by replying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Faith is strengthened by clearer apprehensions of the Truth. Hope brightens at the glorious prospect of life and immortality which the Gospel displays. Love grows warmer as the love of God is better known. All the graces of the Christian thrive under the beneficent influences of the Truth.

Fourth, by making us better acquainted with Christ. The more our minds are opened to take in the Truth concerning the Person and work of the Redeemer, the more is the soul perfumed therewith, and the more are its faculties influenced thereby. A deeper experimental knowledge of Christ enables us to rest upon Him more simply for the whole of our salvation. It is through the Truth that we become more firmly persuaded of the Father's love to us in His Son, whereby is "the heart established in grace" (Heb. 13:9). As our first believing of the Gospel had a most powerful effect upon the heart, so our continued apprehensions of other portions of the Truth produce beneficial results in the soul. It is because we shall have a perfect knowledge of Christ in Heaven that there we shall be perfectly holy.

Fifth, by its sacred awe upon the soul. "For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor (critic) of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). There is a pungency to the Holy Scriptures possessed by no other writings; often the wicked are conscious of this, and therefore refuse to read them. But far more are the regenerate aware of it: to them their utterances are the voice of God Himself, and they "tremble at His Word" (Isa. 66:2). Its denunciations of sin, the exposure of its infinite enormity, the announcement of its eternal punishment, the exhibition which the Scriptures give of the Son of God dying upon the Cross in order to make an atonement for it, cause the believer to walk more and more softly before God. While the character of God as revealed in His Word--His majesty, His power, His holiness, His wrath--exerts both a restraining and constraining influence upon its readers.

It is this very quality of the Scriptures--to sanctify--which supplies the Christian with the surest witness of their Divine origin. "When ye received the Word of God . . . which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). Ah, it is not "the testimony of the Church" nor the witness of Christians, but a personal acquaintance with their sanctifying power which conveys certainty to the soul. It is well to heed the testimony of the Lord's

people first, just as we take a medicine on the recommendation of others who have found it helpful; but we must not rest there. "For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5): this is what supplies convincing proof--as it was with the Samaritans who came to Christ because of the testimony of the woman at the well, saying to her, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves" (John 4:42).

Alas, the great majority in Christendom receive the Scriptures on no better ground than the Turks believe the Alcoran--because it is the tradition of their fathers. O labour, my reader, for something better than that, and "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). In order for that the Scriptures must be read, "searched," studied, meditated upon; and, above all, received by faith. Note how "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the Truth" (2 Thess. 2:13) are linked together. The Truth has no power on us further than it is believed by us. The Word worketh not without an act on our part, as well as God's. Solemn is that warning, "The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. 4:2). Where faith is active the precepts awe and the promises cheer. When tempted to evil, faith says, Shall I thus requite Christ for dying in my stead?

It is at this very point that we may perceive the great and vital difference which exists between social respectability and real piety or practical sanctification. The one is produced by moral education, according to natural principles, without any spiritual knowledge or heart desire to please God. Many are upright, truthful, honest in commercial transactions, obedient to civil laws and restrained from outward wickedness, who yet have no true grace. But all real practical sanctification is inclined and regulated by the Scriptures. Only that is personal holiness when we submit and conform ourselves in heart and life to the will of God as it is revealed in His Word. "He that doeth Truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made

manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:21): he tests himself by this rule and measures his conduct by this standard.

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