

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION *by Arthur W. Pink*

Chapter 25

The Process of Sanctification

By the process of sanctification we mean the principal actings of those who have already been manifestatively set apart by God unto Himself and for Himself. To speak of the actings of sanctification necessarily presupposes a previous principle of holiness from which they arise. Sanctification, as we have pointed out in previous chapters, begins with and continues as a consequent of regeneration. Viewed from the experimental and practical side, sanctification is not a Divine act, but a work of God's grace, wherein He sustains and develops, continues and perfects, that which He imparted at the new birth. Thus considered, sanctification is a growth, under the supporting and fructifying influences of the indwelling Holy Spirit: a growth from spiritual infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, from youth to spiritual maturity. This growth follows a two-fold process: the mortification of the old nature, and the vivification of the new nature.

Throughout that twofold process there is a concurrence between the Spirit and the believer, and this, because holiness is both a privilege and a duty, a Divine gift and a human attainment. To our last statement some are likely to take exception, for the balance of Truth has been well-nigh lost on this subject. Antinomies insist that sanctification is solely the work of God, and that the believer has no part or hand in it. Pelagians virtually affirm that it is entirely the product of human industry. From one viewpoint, sanctification is indeed the work of God, but from another it is the work of man, assisted by supernatural grace. As a privilege, sanctification is the subject of promise and prayer: see Ezekiel 36:25-27, John 17:17, 1

Thessalonians 5:23. But as a duty, sanctification is the subject of exhortation: see Ezekiel 18:31, 2 Corinthians 7:1, 1 Peter 1:15.

Those who are so insistent upon affirming that sanctification is entirely the work of God, and that man has no part in it, overlook God's general method of working. Behold His handiwork in Nature. God does not create trees fully grown, nor even plants with flowers fully developed. Instead, they first exist as tiny seeds, and then they develop gradually unto maturity, and their growth is made dependent on the outworking of natural laws--supplies of rain and sunshine--and often of human cultivation. So it is spiritually. In the realm of grace, God works by means and according to the sequences of law. "Although the strength with which we believe is wholly and entirely from the Spirit, and put into the soul by Him who is said to 'strengthen us in the inner man' (Eph. 3:16), yet He useth apt and suitable motives, by and with which He conveys it, and conveys it answerable to the fitness and force that is in such motives to work upon an intelligent creature" (Thomas Goodwin, Vol. 8., p. 108).

Sanctification is our work--not as though we could change our own hearts from the love of sin to the love of God, nor even when they are changed to carry forward that change to perfection or completion--no, it is only as we are enabled from on High, for of ourselves we can do nothing (John 15:5). It is our work as we diligently use the appointed means, and trust God to make them effectual. It is God's work as the Spirit employs powerful motives to influence us to action. For instance, He impresses us with the fact that God's eye is ever upon us, and this causes us to walk softly before Him. Or, He applies to our hearts the solemn warnings of Scripture, so that we are afraid to sport with sin or give heed to Satan's allurements. Or again, He fills the heart with a sense of Christ's dying love for us, so that the springs of gratitude are set in motion, and we endeavour to please and glorify Him. By various considerations the Holy Spirit stirs up the believer to resist sin and cultivate holiness.

The process of our sanctification, then, is both a Divine and a human one. Having dwelt so much upon the Divine side in the earlier chapters we now continue our consideration of the human. This process is a protracted one, so that the believer gradually becomes more and more out of love with sin and in love with holiness. Now, as we have said above, this spiritual growth follows the twofold process of mortification and vivification. Yet those two actings are not so distinct that the one can go on independently, or at a distinct time from the other, for the one necessarily accompanies the other--nevertheless, in explaining that process of experimental and practical sanctification they need to be separately expounded; and a little reflection will show the order in which they need to be contemplated--we have to die to sin before we can live to God.

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection" etc. (Col. 3:5). This means, put to death those fleshly lusts which are set upon earthly objects, and thus prevent their evil fruits of "fornication" etc.: with this expression "your members which are upon the earth" compare "the body of sin" (Rom. 6:6), which does not mean our physical body, though sin acts through it. The term "mortify" is not used in Scripture absolutely to kill and destroy, so as that which is mortified no longer has any being, but rather that it should be rendered impotent and useless, unable to produce its wicked works. In proof of this assertion, let it be carefully noted that the same Greek word which is translated "mortify" in Colossians 3:5 is rendered "and being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old" (Rom. 14:19). Now the body of Abraham was not absolutely dead, but the natural force and vigour of it were considerably abated.

The object of this duty of mortification is indwelling sin, which may be viewed in a threefold manner: its root or principle, its disposition and powers, its effects or fruits. The root of indwelling sin is that depraved habit or principle which inclines fallen man unto all that is evil: it is "the flesh" or

"our old man." The disposition or powers of indwelling sin are designated its "affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24), "deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22), "secret (hidden, inward) faults" (Psa. 19:12). Its effects or fruits are its open transgressions against God's Law. Now to "mortify" sin is a continual act or work, whereby we are to strive against sin, sap its power, rendering it impotent to beget evil works. The same duty (with relation to the death of Christ as the meritorious and efficient cause of it), is expressed by crucifying the flesh (Gal. 5:24)--a form of death which is a painful and lingering one.

Mortification consists of a deliberate and diligent opposition to the solicitations of sin. It is the exercise and working of that hatred of sin which the Spirit communicated to the heart at the new birth. It is taking sides with the new nature against the flesh. It is the acting out of the grace received at regeneration unto a continual endeavour in the subjugating of the old nature, so that we may be able to truthfully say with the Apostle "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:27). It is the putting forth of our utmost endeavours to resist our corruptions by all those methods prescribed in the Gospel. It is the "putting off of the old man" (Eph. 4:22)--a displacing it from its former throne in the heart, so as no longer to yield obedience to its lusts or walk according to its dictates.

There are but two masters which divide the world between them--sin and God. Every man serves one of them, but no man can serve both. Every man serves either sin or righteousness, God or Satan, for there is no middle or neutral state: either their time and strength are spent in the service of the flesh, or the service of God. "For they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5); "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8). How it concerns us, then, to consider what or who it is that employs our souls! The faculties of the soul and the energies of the body cannot be inactive: they must be employed one way or the other--Heavenwards or Hellwards.

Both of these services are entered by consent: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). It is true there are degrees in this, some yielding up themselves more completely and entirely than others; nevertheless, the service which the unregenerate render to sin and the service which the regenerate render to righteousness, is quite voluntary. Of the one we read "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11), and again "Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:19); of the other it is written "but first gave their own selves to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:5). No excuses, no quibblings, no reasonings can neutralize the plain testimony of these Scriptures. Each man freely follows the bent of his own heart and pursues that which he is most in love with. The great difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate is this: the one denies self, the other gratifies it.

"Self denial lies in a man's renouncing, foregoing, and postponing all his pleasures, profits, relations, interest, and whatever he enjoys, which may be in competition with Christ. From love to Him, and to be given up at His command. A self-denying person seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and leaves all other things with God, to bestow upon him as He thinks fit; and what He has given him, he is ready at His command to bring all he has and place it at His feet, as the first Christians brought all they had and laid it at the Apostles' feet. This is self-denial" (John Gill). The great motive to this is the example left us by the Son of God Himself: see Philippians 2:5-8.

Mortification consists in the application to the heart and life of the principle of the Cross. It does not denote the abolition of sin in the believer or the present destruction of its being: our corruptions are not put off until we leave this world. Nor is the work of mortification to be understood in the literal and natural sense of the term, by the starving or scourging of the

body: many deluded souls mistake the mortification of the body for the mortification of sin. Nor does it consist in the suppressing of the external acts of sin only, for sin may reign over the heart where the outward conduct is highly esteemed among men. Nor should it be supposed that the mortification of sin has taken place because some particular inclination which formerly predominated is now weakened, for the effects of illness or the advances of old age often produce this consequence.

No, mortification is the purging of the soul, the freeing of it from that slavery of the flesh which detained it from God and disabled it from the duties of a holy and heavenly life. It is the resisting and denying of our corrupt inclinations. It is founded in a hatred of them, and not simply in fear of their consequences. It is not a bare abstinence from acts of evil, but an abhorrence for them from a regard to the authority of God in His Law, which forbids them. This is most important to note, for there is much abstaining from outward acts of sin where there is not a grain of holiness in the heart. There are various prudential considerations which deter many from crime, such as the fear of human punishment, the loss of reputation among men, the jeopardizing of a lucrative position, or concern for their health. But evangelical mortification proceeds from an abhorrence of evil and has respect to the will of Him who forbids its exercise.

Evangelical mortification rises from the principle of grace in the renewed soul, for that principle heartily approves both the precepts and prohibitions of the Law. And herein lies the imperative need of self-examination, observing our hearts and ascertaining from what views and motives we act, otherwise there will be little or no real holiness, even though our outward conduct be such as raises it above the censure of those who know us best. We have no warrant whatever to deem ourselves any more holy than as we act under the influence of spiritual considerations: that is, doing what we do out of love to God, with a respect unto His authority, seeking His glory. It is a very dangerous mistake to suppose that all

opposition to sin is genuine mortification, and therefore we need to carefully examine into the design and ends of our actions.

Mortification of sin is one of the chief duties and should be the daily business of every Christian. Some who seem much mortified to bodily lusts, are yet greatly captivated by intellectual lusts. They do not wallow in the mire of immorality, drunkenness, and other fleshly gratifications, but they are full of pride, envy, covetousness, malice, contempt of others--which lusts are just as vile in themselves and as hateful to God as the others. True grace opposes lusts of every kind, for it will not connive at any evil. The new nature is just as much antagonistic to internal eruptions of sin as to the outward acts: necessarily so, for without this there is no purity of heart and nothing of that holiness which is indispensably requisite for eternal happiness. Many appear to think otherwise, and therefore so long as their lusts break not forth into outward acts of sin, they are well pleased with themselves.

Alas, what multitudes are fatally deceived at this very point--the externals of religion and the outward acts of morality are all that concern them. But God is to be worshipped "in spirit and in truth," if He is to be worshipped acceptably; and none but the pure in heart are admitted into Heaven. O how few make conscience of evil thoughts, or the first motions of the affections after that which is prohibited: the "plague of his own heart" (1 Kings 8:38) occasions them no concern--which is sure proof that they are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God requires the heart (Prov. 23:26), and if we give not that to Him, then He receives nothing which He values in the slightest degree. Such was the case with the Pharisees--and they have numerous successors today--whom our Lord compared to whited sepulchres, which are beautiful without, but within are full of putridity.

Here is the great difference between faith and presumption: the one hates sin, is plagued by its presence, and mourns over its activities; the other is bold in sinning, persuades itself of security in Christ, lightly passes over its commission, having little remorse when guilty of it. Evangelical

mortification of sin, then, respects not only the behaviour, but the heart, for there it begins. Its aim is to produce spirituality of mind, for "to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). Abhorrence of evil, love of God, and a delight in conformity to His will, is the root of it, and where these be not in some measure, there is nothing of that mortification which God requires. Indwelling sin must not be spared, but attacked, for there is no other way of being freed from bondage to it, but by constantly opposing it, root and branch.

Every unmortified sin will weaken the soul, so as to deprive it of its strength Godwards, and it will darken the soul, so as to deprive it of its peace and comfort. Observe what an unmortified lust in the heart did for David: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (Psa. 32:3, 4). So too unmortified lust spreads a cloud over the soul, so that the beams of God's favour are intercepted: "Your sins have hid His face from you" (Isa. 59:2). Nothing is so destructive of communion with God as the allowance of sin. Nothing is so opposed to our best interests as the indulgence of fleshly lusts. Nothing presents so serious a stumbling block to babes in Christ's family as to behold the older members of it trifling with that which caused His crucifixion. If He died for sin, surely we must die to sin.

On the other hand, there is a blessedness which results from mortification which should set every Christian to be more diligent and earnest in the prosecution of it. There is a double comfort in mortification: one in the nature of the work itself, as it is a God-appointed duty; the other as it respects Christ, affording evidence of our union with Him. God will be no man's debtor, and He richly rewards those who set themselves to the work He has assigned. What a blessed tranquility of conscience and joy of heart is ours when we have faithfully repelled temptations and successfully resisted our corruptions! What recompense is found in the smile of God! There is then a Heaven within--whereas the wicked have a taste of Hell, in

their gripes of conscience and terrors of the wrath to come. Moreover, mortification evidences our interest in Christ (Gal. 5:24): those endeavours of mortification, sincere yet feeble, plainly show that the Holy Spirit is in me, and what joy such assurance brings!

Further, the daily mortification of indwelling sin not only has much to do with the comforts enjoyed by our souls, but it is instrumental in fitting us to be used by Christ, in whatever humble capacity He is pleased to employ us. "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). What is the blessedness of life but in being of some use in the Lord's vineyard? Only so far as we live a fruitful life unto God, do we answer the end of our being. But let a proud, a carnal, or a worldly heart be employed in any service to the Lord, and such an heart is certain to spoil the work by managing it for some self end. Sin is a disease, a consumption upon the inner man, and so far as it prevails, unfits us to be used by Christ. When the Lord employed Isaiah, He first purged his iniquity: Isaiah 6:7, 8!

Temptations can only be resisted in proportion as we devote ourselves to the work of mortification. It is the condition of our heart which determines whether or not we respond to Satan's allurements. So too afflictions are unsupportable without mortification. My reader, you live in a mutable world, where Providence rings the changes in all its affairs. You that have husband or wife may be left desolate tomorrow. You that have riches or children may be bereft of both before you are aware. Sickness treads upon the heels of health, and death as surely follows life as the night does the day. Consider well with yourself: are you able to bear the loss of your sweetest enjoyments with patience? O get the heart mortified to all these things, and you will bless a taking as well as a giving God.

[Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Return to *The Sovereign Grace Home Page*](#)