

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION *by Arthur W. Pink*

Chapter 26

The Process of Sanctification (continued-2)

Notwithstanding the judicial death of the Christian's old man and all his sins in the death of Christ (Rom. 6:6; 1 Peter 2:24), and notwithstanding that a real foundation of universal mortification is laid in the believer's first conversion (by conviction of sin, humiliation for it, and the forsaking of it), yet his indwelling corruptions so remain and work in the best of Christians that the constant mortification of sin is, all their days, incumbent upon them. Mortification, then, is a life-long continuance of our initial repentance, which included hatred of sin, sorrow for sin, confession of sin, and turning away therefrom--and, if these were really sincere, then a continued opposition to all the solicitations of the flesh, the Devil and the world, must ensue. "Mortify" means put to death: to slay an enemy is to destroy the principle of all his vigour and power, so that he cannot exert or put forth any actings of his own.

The subjugation of indwelling sin so that it may not have power to bring forth the works of the flesh is the constant duty of the believer. The health and comfort of his spiritual life depends thereon: he must be daily killing sin, or it will kill him. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13); "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). The solemn alternatives presented in these passages are too plain to be misunderstood. Nor is their point to be dulled by pitting against them the truth of the final preservation of the believer. These passages are to be taken at their face value, for there is no conflict between them and any

others--believers are preserved in the paths of righteousness, and God has nowhere promised to secure any soul which sports with sin.

This work of mortification is a very difficult one, especially considering the prevalence of corruption and the multitude of temptations we are exposed to--the subtlety and watchfulness of Satan, who goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; the treachery of our own hearts that are so prone to depart from God; the instability of our resolutions and the fickleness of our affections; the ceaseless efforts made by our corruptions to gain the advantage over us. O the deceitfulness and wickedness of our hearts, to call evil good and good evil, to represent such things as harmless and not displeasing to God, when really they are most injurious to us and offensive to Him. O the blindness of our sin-darkened understandings, to lead us into mistakes both as to the matter of sin and duty, and to persuade us those things will issue well that prove bitterness in the end. O the perversity of our wills, in walking contrary to God.

Now it is this which renders it so essential that we make a right use of those methods which God has prescribed for the mortification of sin, the chief of which is the denying of self and the taking up of our cross. And that is to be done daily; see Luke 9:23. We would advise those who have access to the complete works of Bunyan to read the piece "Instruction for the Ignorant" and especially the section on "Self-denial." It is in the form of questions and answers. We give a brief excerpt. "Quest., if a man carrieth himself well outwardly, so that he doth not dishonour the Gospel before men, may not this be counted self-denial? Ans., no, if he be not right at heart: 1 Samuel 16:7. He that makes not daily conscience of self-denial is very unlikely to abide a disciple in times of persecution. Quest., who are they that indulge their lusts? Ans., they that make provision for them, either in apparel, diet, or otherwise: Romans 13:12-14, Isaiah 3:6-21, Amos 6:3-6. Quest., who else do? Ans., they that heap to themselves such teachers as favour their lusts.

"Quest., Who else indulge their sins? Ans., They that choose rather to walk by the imperfect lives of professors, rather than by the holy Word of God; or those what make the miscarriages of some good men an encouragement unto themselves to forbear to be exact in self-denial. Self-denial is one of the distinguishing marks by which Christians are manifested from the feigned ones; for those that are feigned flatter God with their mouths, but their hearts seek Him not; but the sincere, for the love that he hath to Christ, forsaketh all that he hath which is opposed to Him: Psalm 78:36, 37; Ezekiel 33:31, 32." It is because of the extreme difficulty of the work of mortification that Christ bids those contemplating discipleship to "sit down first and count the cost" (Luke 14:28). Nevertheless, we must settle it in our minds that, either we must fight sin, or be eternally lost.

Mortification, then, is not optional, but an imperative necessity. Sin indwells us to the end and it is ever lusting and labouring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh. Therefore no indulgence is to be shown it: the axe must be laid to the root of the tree. Dangerous enemies are to be grappled with promptly and no quarter shown them. One reason why God has given His children a new nature is that they may have within them a principle which is opposed to sin, and not to employ it in resisting sin is to neglect that excellent succour which God has granted us against our greatest foe. "Not to be daily mortifying sin, is to sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace and love of God, who has furnished us with a principle of defying it" (John Owen).

But, alas, we are living in a day when mortification has well nigh disappeared among those who bear the name of Christ. Carnal ease rather than striving against sin, self-gratification instead of self-denial, is the order of our perverse generation. Preachers and professing Christians generally now hold such a perverted concept of God's grace and mercy that they are able to digest sin without any bitterness of soul, which shows they are rotten at heart. Rightly has it been said that, "To use the blood of Christ--which is given to cleanse us, the exaltation of Christ--which is to give us repentance

(Acts 5:31), the doctrine of grace--which teaches us to deny all ungodliness (Titus 2:11,12), to countenance sin, is a rebellion that in the issue will break the bones."

It is not without good reason that God has expressed this duty of opposing sin and curbing its power by "mortification" or putting to death. There is something peculiar therein beyond any other duty. There is intimated a great contest of sin for the preservation of its life. Every creature will do its utmost to preserve its being, and sin is no exception. Sin cannot be vanquished, my reader, by gentle taps or half-hearted efforts to subdue it. The subjugation of indwelling sin is also likened unto "crucifixion" (Gal. 5:24) and that is a most painful process: and note that in Galatians 5:24 the Apostle does not say "they that believe Christ was crucified for them, are His," but only they who experience the efficacy of His sufferings in subduing their evil lusts. This duty is also likened to a cutting off of right hands and plucking out of right eyes. It is the difficulties and severities of mortification which constitute the narrowness of that "way which leadeth unto Life," for it shuts out the unbridled indulgence of sinful affections.

"If they that be Christ's have crucified the flesh, then the number of real Christians is very small. It is true, if all that seem to be meek, humble, and heavenly, might pass for Christians, the number would be great; but if no more must be accounted Christians than those who crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts, O how small is the number! For O how many there be under the Christian name that pamper and indulge their lusts, that secretly hate all who faithfully reprove them, and really love none but such as feed their lusts by praising and admiring them. How many that make provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts, who cannot endure to have their corruptions crossed. How many are there that seem very meek and humble until an occasion be given them to stir up their passion, and then you shall see in what degree they are mortified: the flint is a cold stone till it be struck, and then it is all fiery. I know the best of Christians are mortified but in part, and strong corruptions are oftentimes found in the most eminent;

but they love them not so well as to defend and countenance them, nor dare they secretly hate such as faithfully reprove them; as many thousands that go under the name of Christians do" (John Flavell, 1650).

But difficult as this work may be, and few as there are that set themselves to it, real Christians are not left to themselves therein: "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities" (Rom. 8:26), and therefore do we read, "For if ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (8:13). How clearly that shows the inseparable connection (of means and end) there is between mortification and life. Let it also be remarked that the term "body" in the second clause corresponds to "the flesh" in the first, and "deeds" here are the same as "works" in Galatians 5:19, some of which are internal, others external. But let it be carefully noted that it does not say "If the deeds of the flesh be mortified in you through the Spirit," but "if ye do mortify!"

"We must not dream of a mortification to be wrought in us without our consent or endeavours, as well whilst we are asleep as when we are waking, as if it were wrought in our cradles or whilst we were passing our days in childhood's play and pastime; or shall be done in our ripe age without any careful watch over our works and thoughts; or it may be by a sluggish wish or slothful prayer, as if this would mortify sin. No, all renewed ones must address themselves to the work; the flesh must be mortified, and mortified it must be by us, through the Spirit, if we would cherish the hope of life. The Spirit alone giveth victory, but we must be active in it, for His grace and powerful work do not license us to be idle, but calleth for an assiduous, diligent, and faithful use of means" (Thomas Manton). To the same effect wrote another renowned Puritan, when treating of mortification under the figure of "purging" used by Christ in John 15:2, 3.

"In this work of mortification, considered thus in the progress of it, we are not mere passives--as at that final finishing of it and carrying away all sin at death we are, and are at that first beginning of it in the new birth--but therein we are 'workers together with God': we being purged from sin as the

body is by physic from poisons; though the physic work, yet nature joins with the physic, being quickened and helped by it to cast out the poisons; for give a dead man physic, and it carries not any poisons away. So as those means whereby God purgeth us are not to be imagined to do it as mere physical agents, like as the pruning-hook cuts off branches from a tree, or as when a surgeon cuts out dead flesh: but these means do it by stirring up our graces, and by setting our thoughts, faith, and affections a-work, and so God assisting with the power of Christ's death, He doth purge us daily. It is certain that unless our thoughts work upon the means, as well as the means work upon us, and so do mingle themselves with those means, that unless faith and Christ's death be mingled in the heart, it purgeth not. And therefore it is said that we 'purge ourselves': 2 Timothy 2:21; 1 John 3:3" (Thomas Goodwin, vol.3, p. 475).

The influence of the blessed Spirit upon the principle of grace in the believer is absolutely necessary unto the mortification of sin. The flesh needs no external influence to excite it to action: it is at all times capable of exerting itself without assistance from without. But not so with indwelling grace: it is entirely dependent on God to strengthen, and move it: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5). It is the Spirit who maintains in the believer a realization of the sinfulness of sin, without which we would never be in earnest in opposing it. It is the Spirit who suggests to the mind considerations and motives unto watchfulness against Satan's encroachments, and rouses us to endeavours against our evil lusts. He it is who makes us sensible of temptations, warns us against them, and often grants strength to resist them. He causes us to meditate upon the sufferings of Christ for our sins, and stirs us up to strive against them.

Though the utter destruction of sin in him is to be the believer's aim, so that it shall no more hold any residence in his heart, yet in this life such success is never fully accomplished. It was the Apostle's consuming desire to be "made conformable unto Christ's death, if by any means he might attain

unto the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10, 11), that is, so deny the lust of the flesh as to perfectly and wholly walk in newness of life. But he at once added, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect," (v. 12) which at once gives the lie to all claiming "sinless perfection" in this life. Nevertheless, he continued "but I follow after": he still earnestly pursued his quest, and, as his "if by any means" indicates, exerted all his faculties and followed out all the methods God has appointed for our fighting against sin. This brings us to speak more definitely on the means and methods of mortification.

If indwelling sin is to be subdued by the Christian, if temptations are to be successfully resisted, then he must, first, make a real effort daily to maintain in his mind a constant sense of the heinousness of sin, as being that abominable thing which God hates. The believer will never put forth his utmost endeavours against it while he regards sin lightly. Second, he must strive to keep his conscience under the awe of God, for this is the great preventative against sin, without which all other external rules and helps signify nothing, for "by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil" (Prov. 16:6). Third, there must be a diligent watching against the occasions of sin, against those things which excite our corruptions and tempt us to wrongdoing: let those who are really concerned turn up and ponder the following passages: Job 31:1; Psalm 18:23; Proverbs 4:14, 15 and 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Jude 23. It is our disobedience to these precepts which accounts for much of our failure.

Fourth, see to it that you do not give sin an advantage by making provision for its lusts. How diligent we are in this respect over the body: if there be any constitutional weakness, how carefully we guard against it-- shame on us that we are less diligent about our souls. Fifth, form the habit of nipping sin in the bud, resisting its first risings: that is more than half the battle--to promptly heed the convictions from the Spirit. Sixth, train the mind to dwell upon the enormity of sin: the fearfulness of its guilt, the horribleness of its defilement, and think of what it cost Christ to make

atonement for it. Seventh, let there be frequent self-examination, as to our motives and ends, and to discover what most absorbs our hearts. Eighth, deep humility for past sins begets hatred of sin and caution against it: see 2 Corinthians 7:11.

Ninth, spare no pains to nourish and develop those graces which are the opposites of your besetting sins: pride is weakened by cultivating humility, uncleanness by purity of mind and conscience, love of the world by heavenly mindedness. Tenth, make yourself willing to be reprov'd for your faults: Psalm 141:5. Eleventh, meditate often upon the vanity of the creature and the transitoriness of all earthly pleasures: the sweetest enjoyments this world has to offer are but fading flowers and withering grass. Twelfth, cry mightily unto God for restraining grace: Psalm 19:13; appropriate such promises as Micah 7:19 and Romans 6:14; plead the blood of Christ for victory. Thirteenth, seek to get chastisements and afflictions sanctified unto your souls: Isaiah 27:9; Hebrews 12:11. Finally, beg the Spirit to teach you to "Put on the whole armour of God" (Eph. 6:10-18). We have covered much ground in these fourteen points and they need to be carefully pondered if they are to be made real helps in this work.

In bringing this chapter to a close we offer a few suggestions on the evidences of a mortified heart, for that is a matter of deep concern to renewed souls, unto whom it frequently appears that sin completely fills and dominates their hearts, and who feel that if their resistance to indwelling corruption is anything more than a mere pretence, it is certainly unavailing and a total failure. Satan will frequently tell the Christian that he might as well seek to subdue the wind or reverse the action of the tides, as expect to overcome the evil inclinations of the flesh. Satan will taunt him with his defeats, assure him he is waging a losing battle, and bid him give up the hopeless fight. But success is not the true criterion--sincerity, genuine desires and faithful efforts are the determining factors as to whether or not we are really engaged in this protracted and painful work.

First, genuine tenderness of conscience as to all known sins is a sign that sin does not have dominion in the soul. It is a great mercy to have a heart that smites us for things which others do not regard as sinful, to have a heart that admonishes us for secret faults is proof that sin is loathed by us: "what I hate, that do I" (Rom. 7:15). Second, "The sincere and earnest desires of our souls to God in prayer for heart-purging and sin-mortifying grace, is a good sign our souls have no love for sin. Canst thou say, poor believer, in the truth of thy heart, that if God would give thee thy choice, it would please thee better to have sin cast out, than to have the world cast in; that thy heart is not so earnest with God for daily bread, as it is for heart-purging grace?" (J. Flavel).

Third, honest efforts to guard against the occasions of sin and a daily attempt to preserve the heart from Satan's incursions, argue a purpose to mortify sin. Fourth, thankfulness to God when His providences cross our worldly and evil desires, blocks the actual commission of sin, manifests that sin is hated and not loved--such was the case with David: 1 Samuel 25:33. Fifth, bitter grief over failure, mourning when sin has overcome you, is clear evidence of a mortified heart. Sixth, the holding of earthly things lightly and valuing them cheaply, is another mark of a mortified heart. The unregenerate set a high price on worldly possessions and carnal pleasures, for their hearts are completely wedded to material and outward things; but the regenerate set their affections on spiritual and heavenly objects. Seventh, contentment with the position and portion God has allotted in this life, is another fruit of mortification, for such an one can genuinely pray, "Give me neither poverty nor riches" (Prov. 30:8).

That aspect of our subject which we are now dealing with is of great practical importance and value, for the more thorough be the mortification of our lusts, and the clearer the evidence of the same, then the stronger and brighter the assurance of our interest in and union with Christ: note how the Spirit has joined the two things together in Galatians 5:24! The proof that we are Christ's is that we have crucified the flesh. This does not mean that

the flesh is now dead, or that it has improved any, but that we are engaged in seeking to put it to death. Among further evidences of this process we name the following: the degree of our mortification may be ascertained by the extent of our self-denial. A deeper insight into spiritual corruptions, and a striving against them. A spiritual appetite for the Word--not an intellectual curiosity. Shame over our previous performances and attainments--i.e., over wasted opportunities and half-hearted efforts.

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