

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION *by Arthur W. Pink*

Chapter 32

The Practice of Sanctification

Ere seeking to open up this final phase of our many-sided subject, we had better make quite clear the relation between it and what has preceded. The believer possesses now a sanctification which is absolute, complete, and inalienable. He was sanctified by God the Father from all eternity, when chosen in Christ and blessed with all spiritual blessings in Him (Eph. 1:3, 4). He was sanctified by God the Son at the completion of His redemptive work upon the Cross (Heb. 13:12). He was sanctified by God the Spirit at regeneration (2 Thess. 2:13). Now this should, and does, produce radical effects in his life, though these effects vary considerably, both in specie and degree, in different cases; which variations are, in their final analysis, to be attributed unto the sovereignty of God's grace. Looking at the same thing in another way, we may say that this grand blessing and gift which is the believer's, entails definite obligations which he is required to discharge, and those obligations are what we are about to contemplate.

The ideas of the natural man here, as everywhere, are at direct variance with God's. People, generally, suppose that holy conduct makes a saint; whereas God's way is to make saints, and then demand from them holy conduct. An attentive reading of the New Testament Epistles will discover abundant confirmation of this. For example, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25): since the Spirit has regenerated us, our responsibility is to walk in newness of life. "I therefore . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. 4:1): we do not become saints by walking worthily, but because God has sanctified us in Christ Jesus, He bids us conduct ourselves suitably to such a

high privilege. "Now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). That is the Divine order--an inestimable privilege is conferred, and then we are called upon to make a fitting response thereto.

As this is a point of first importance, and one which is woefully subverted in some quarters today, we beg the reader to bear patiently with us while we labour it a little further. "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2). As we learn from the chapters that follow, the Corinthians were in a low spiritual and moral condition, and were acting most unworthily of their high calling--nevertheless, they were saints, and addressed as such. They were "saints" or "sanctified ones," not because they were perfect people, but because they had been sovereignly and supernaturally called of God: yet, alas, their conduct was most unsaintly. Theirs was, indeed, an extreme case, yet, for that very reason, it forcibly illustrates the point we are now pressing: God makes saints and then He bids them avoid everything incongruous therewith--"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (Eph. 5:3).

Not only are the saints exhorted to avoid everything contrary to their high calling, but they are to cultivate all that is consonant therewith: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy (saints) and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, etc." (Col. 3:12). "Keep thyself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22), not "make thyself pure" emphasises the same thought. "The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness" (Titus 2:3); their practical conduct should conform to their standing in Christ. Believers are, even now "A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation," yet that did not hinder the Apostle from saying, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:9, 11): yes, it was because they were "strangers and pilgrims," and not in order to become such, that they were exhorted to act accordingly.

Men, in their fancied wisdom, may conclude that it had been much more conducive to holy living, to have concealed the wondrous truth of the believer's completeness in Christ, and have left him to struggle on, stimulated by the thought that there is much for him to do and attain unto before he is qualified to enter into everlasting Glory. As, but "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," and sad to say, His wisdom is foolishness to them. It is the very revelation of the exceeding riches of His grace that exerts the greatest influence upon the renewed heart. And therefore, God had not only made known the completeness of His people's sanctification in Christ, but He uses the same to promote their spiritual purity: "And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3 and cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Practical holiness is promoted by nothing but the improvement or use of evangelical principles and motives. It is men's misunderstanding of the true way of practical sanctification--by the exercise of faith and love--which has caused them to decline from the Truth and accept the Papist, Arminian, and Antinomian errors, wherein Satan appears to their natural understandings as an angel of light. The believer's living unto God is not by his own power, but by faith's appropriation of the strength of Christ. Many suppose that the doctrine which we are here inculcating makes Christians careless of good works. Not so: it makes them careless of seeking to do them by their own natural power, and in a way of slavish fear, and it makes them careful of relying on the grace of God, and heartily desirous of doing that which is pleasing in His sight.

Yet that ancient objection is still made by those who imagine that the only effectual method of enforcing holiness is by telling people their ultimate salvation depends entirely on their own conduct and the determinations of their own will--supposing that to assure Christians they are already delivered from the wrath to come by their faith in Christ, thus freeing them from all terrors of Hell, is to leave them without any argument or motive of sufficient force to produce practical holiness. Whereas the truth is that if Christians

have no better security against the wrath to come than from their own behaviour and use of their wills, they, conscious of the deceitfulness of sin and of their own hearts, and of all the temptations and dangers attending their course, might indeed see reason for terror and dread, but in a manner and degree far from being favourable to inculcating holiness.

It is true that fear has its place and use for the restraining of sin, yet the proper principle of true holiness is love, and the faith which works by love. But if the believer has nothing to look to for securing him against damnation but the exercise of his own will and the aids and assistance which he is free to use or neglect, then there will be cause for continual terror, such terror as has torment, and which is altogether inconsistent with that love which is the mainspring of holiness: 1 John 4:18. How differently has the Divine scheme of grace mixed and tempered things for the advancement of holiness! Though the salvation of God's people be secured upon the most solid foundation, yet there remains much for them to fear with regard to sin and its consequences, with regard to the terrible chastisements, both inward and outward, which God visits upon the iniquities of His people.

Yet the Christian has, at the same time, a sure and well-founded hope, a strong consolation, a blissful prospect, and the most attractive motives which tend to increase love to God, and to His sovereignty and holiness, and to strengthen his heart in labouring for conformity to it. Thus we may perceive the wisdom of that scheme which, while placing the curb of fear upon the unholy and unruly passions of the heart, supplies motives which contribute much to the advancement of love and strengthening of the hearts of Christians in their course. By Divine grace they have the greatest cause for that love which is the source of all acceptable obedience, yet a godly fear which is subservient to that love, having its root mainly in love itself. The grace of the new covenant has provided for the promotion of good works in a manner and degree far beyond what the Law of the old covenant produced.

Practical sanctification is absolutely demanded of those who are sanctified in Christ. "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that everyone of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess. 4:3, 4, 7). Those words, and there are many such in the New Testament, can only refer to our practical sanctification in daily life. We need to be much on guard here, lest in seeking to avoid the error of evacuating our perfect standing as God's holy ones, we fall into that other which evades the force of God's call to holiness of life. And let it be emphatically stated that the standard of practical holiness is the holiness of God Himself, and nothing lower. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48); "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).

The nature and extent of this calling to practical holiness is set forth in passage after passage. "But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Peter 1:15); "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversations and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11). There is a special need in these days of factitious morality, and of false sentiments as to what constitutes evangelical holiness, to turn to the Word of God, that we may search and try ourselves and our ways by its unerring standard. Men, even Christian men, are ever prone to select virtues which they esteem, and vices which they condemn--and the selection made by each individual is too apt to consist of virtues to which he is, or imagines himself, much inclined, and of vices to which he has, or thinks he has, little or no inclination. But the holiness of God demands he does not deal with a selection of virtues and vices: He requires holiness in everything.

The standard of holiness which God sets before us is, like Himself, perfect, and He will not lower it a single degree to meet our infirmities. He claims the whole being and requires holiness in every thought, word, and deed. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, whatsoever ye do, do all to the

glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31); "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17); "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11). Nothing short of an all-embracing holiness will measure up to the standard God has set before us. It is not only the outward life, but the inward also which is exposed to His searching light (Heb. 4:12, 13). Unto all the exercises and emotions of the heart, its motives and purposes, its affections and sufferings, God presents the claims of His holiness.

It makes nothing against the Scriptures quoted above that other passages in God's Word (like Rom. 7:14-25; Phil. 3:12, 13) just as clearly show that none actually attain unto God's standard in this life, that our practical holiness falls far short of the perfection to which we are called, and is so often interrupted in its progress because the medium of its action and manifestation is weak and imperfect, and is tenanted by the "flesh," which ever lusteth against the spirit. On the one hand, we must steadily decline to lower God's standard, confess the sad failure of our life and the many imperfections of our walk, no matter how humiliating this may be. It is because sinless perfectionists have such slight views of the enormity of sin, and such an inadequate conception of that holiness which God requires, that they are so easily deceived.

Christian reader, it is just because our sanctification in Christ is eternally complete and absolutely up to the satisfaction of God's thoughts and heart, that we are called to the pursuit of perfect holiness, and are to be satisfied with nothing less. It is just because of this that we can never reach a point at which we may cease the pursuit: the goal of today must be the starting-point of tomorrow, and so till the end of our earthly pilgrimage. "Follow peace with all, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). In those words the Holy Spirit has not hesitated to predicate eternal destiny upon the presence or absence of personal holiness;

not because it rests on that, but because in the new creation there is never life, without life's action--in God's husbandry, there is never root without fruit in some measure.

Practical sanctification, or holiness of heart and life, of character and conduct, is, then, a reflection or manifestation of that perfect sanctification which the believer has in and through Christ; yet it is now but a dim reflection at best, because obstructed by the flesh, which remains unchanged to the last. It is because of our consciousness of the dimness to this reflection that we so often become discouraged and distracted. A sincere soul is much troubled over his conformity to Christ, and is so often made to wonder whether the root of the matter be in him at all. Let it be said, then, for the comforting of such, that holiness is more longed after than realized in this life; yet this statement requires to be guarded, lest those not entitled to it should draw consolation therefrom. Not a few have a vague and general wish for holiness in the abstract while having no relish for it in the concrete and the details of what is involved in a close walking with God.

The Israelites of old were well pleased with the abstract idea of serving the Lord, and avowed their purpose of doing so: they said, "The LORD drove out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for He is our God. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for He is an holy God; He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins" (Josh. 24:18, 19). Certain of the Jews said to Christ, "Lord, evermore give us this bread" (John 6:34), yet when He told them what it was to have the Bread of Life, they were offended. Ah, when it comes to the actual point of treading the Narrow Way, of watching and striving against sin both within and without, or rowing against the stream of the flesh, of diligently using all those means which are necessary for communion with God--they falter, murmur, and do nothing.

These vague and idle wishes after holiness which many religionists have are but hasty and ill-considered, and not deliberate and serious. The

hearing of a powerful sermon, or the reading of an impressive article produces a real but evanescent effect, and for the moment such people are quite carried away. The commendations of holiness, and the representations of its imperative necessity convinces the mind, and they assent thereto, and promise themselves they will now make the pursuit thereof their chief business. Their emotions are stirred, the Word is received willingly, and they "consecrate" themselves afresh to God. But alas, their "goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hosea 6:4): only that of which God Himself is the Author will survive the testings of time and endure for eternity.

The experience of such people is not bottomed in grace, and therefore they have no spiritual sincerity to sustain them. Their desires after holiness are but empty wishes, unaccompanied by diligent and laborious efforts. "The desires of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour" (Prov. 21:25). It is like saying, O that I had a lovely garden, and then refused to spade, plant, and weed it. Or, O that I were in such a place, and then were too lazy to journey there. The wishes after holiness of this class are not steady and lasting, but are quickly crowded out by lusting after other things. They are not prepared to "buy the Truth" (Prov. 23:23). But he who truly thirsts for God and yearns to be conformed to His image, will put forth his utmost endeavours after the same. The language of the regenerate is "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD (enjoy fellowship with Him) all the days of my life" (Psa. 27:4).

"LORD, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble: Thou wilt prepare their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear" (Psa. 10:17). How comforting is this for those lowly ones who sincerely yearn after personal holiness! Their very yearning is a prayer, which reaches the ear of Him who will not quench the smoking flax. "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him: He also will hear their cry, and will save them" (Psa. 145:19). And again, "The desire of the righteous shall be granted" (Prov. 10:24). Yes, not only does God hear

the spiritual desire of His distressed child, but, in due time, He will fulfil it: that is a promise for faith to lay hold of, for its accomplishment is not in this life, but in the next. Meanwhile, our duty is defined in that word, "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psa. 37:4)--meditate upon His wondrous perfections, seek communion with Him, honestly endeavour to please Him.

Since God has promised to grant the desire of the righteous, how important it is that the Christian should watch against the abatement of his spiritual longings. If a man loses his natural appetite, his body soon languishes; so it is with the soul. True, we can neither give ourselves an appetite nor retain it, but we can do those things which will greatly impair it, and it is our responsibility to avoid whatever is injurious to our health--true alike naturally and spiritually. It is the Christian's duty to do as those who would keep in the fire: cherish the spark, blow upon the embers, add more fuel to it. On the one hand, we must guard against those things which would chill and quench our love for God; and on the other, we must "strengthen the things which remain" (Rev. 3:2).

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