

The Doctrine of Sanctification 10. ITS NATURE (COMPLETED)

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Transcript

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10. ITS NATURE

(COMPLETED)

That which we have laboured to show in the previous chapters of this book is the fact that the sanctification of the Christian is very much more than a bare setting apart of him unto God: it is also, and chiefly, a work of grace wrought in his soul. God not only accounts His people holy, but actually makes them so. The various materials and articles used in the tabernacle of old, when dedicated to God, were changed only in their use, but when man is dedicated to God he is changed in his nature, so that not only is there a vital difference between him and others, but a radical difference between him and himself (1 Cor. 6:11)—between what he was, and now is. That change of nature is a real necessity, for the man himself must be made holy before his actions can be so. Grace is planted in the heart, from whence its influence is diffused throughout all departments of his life. Internal holiness is a hatred of sin and a love of that which is good, and external holiness is the avoiding of the one and the pursuing of the other. Wherever there a change of heart fruits will appear in the conduct. Like "salvation" itself—according to the use of the term is Scripture (see 2 Tim. 1:9, salvation in the past; Phil. 2:12, salvation in the present; Rom. 13:11, salvation in the future) and in the actual history of the redeemed—so sanctification must be considered under its three tenses. There is a very real sense in which all of God's elect have already been sanctified: Jude 1; Hebrews 10:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13. There is also a very real sense in which those of God's people on earth are daily being sanctified: 2 Corinthians. 4:16; 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:23. And there is also a real sense in which the Christian's (complete) sanctification is yet future: Romans 8:30; Hebrews 12:23; 1 John 3:2. Unless this threefold distinction be carefully borne in mind our thoughts are bound to be confused. Objectively, our sanctification is already an accomplished fact (1 Cor. 1:2), in which one saint shares equally with another. Subjectively, our sanctification is not complete in this life (Phil. 3:12) and varies considerably in different Christians, though the promise of Philippians 1:6 belongs alike to all of them. Though our sanctification be complete in all its parts, yet it is not now perfect in its degrees. As the newborn babe possesses a soul and body, endowed with all their members, yet they are undeveloped and far from a state of maturity. So it is with the Christian, who (in comparison with the life to come) remains throughout this life but a "babe in Christ" (1 Pet. 2:2). We know but "in part" (1 Cor. 13:12), and we are sanctified but in part, for "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed" (Josh. 13 :1). In the most

gracious there remains a double principle: the flesh and the spirit, the old man and the new man. We are a mixture and a medley during our present state. There is a conflict between operating principles (sin and grace), so that every act is mixed: there is tin mixed with our silver and dross with our gold. Our best deeds are defiled, and therefore we continue to feed upon the Lamb with "bitter herbs" (Ex. 12:8). Holiness in the heart discovers itself by godly sorrowings and godly aspirations. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4): "mourn" because of the swellings of pride, the workings of unbelief, the surging of discontent; "mourn" because of the feebleness of their faith, the coldness of their love, their lack of conformity to Christ. There is nothing which more plainly evidences a person to be sanctified than a broken and contrite heart—grieving over that which is contrary to holiness. Rightly did the Puritan John Owen say, "Evangelical repentance is that which carrieth the believing soul through all his failures, infirmities, and sins. He is not able to live one day without the constant exercise of it. It is as necessary unto the continuance of spiritual life as faith is. It is that continual, habitual, self-abasement which arises from a sense of the majesty and holiness of God, and the consciousness of our miserable failures." It is this which makes the real Christian so thankful for Romans 7, for he finds it corresponds exactly with his own inward experience. The sanctified soul, then, is very far from being satisfied with the measure of experimental holiness which is yet his portion. He is painfully conscious of the feebleness of his graces, the leanness of his soul, and the defilements from his inward corruption. But, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6), or "they that are hungering and thirsting" as the Greek reads, being the participle of the present tense; intimating a present disposition of the soul. Christ pronounces "blessed" (in contrast from those under "the curse") they who are hungering and thirsting after His righteousness imparted as well as imputed, who thirst after the righteousness of sanctification as well as the righteousness of justification—i.e., the Spirit infusing into the soul holy principles, supernatural graces, spiritual qualities, and then strengthening and developing the same. Such has been the experiences of the saints in all ages, "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. 42:1, 2). One of the things which prevents so many from obtaining a right view of the nature of sanctification is that scarcely any of the bestowments of the Gospel are clearly defined in their minds all being jumbled up together. While every spiritual privilege the believer enjoys is the fruit of God's electing love and the purchase of Christ's mediation, and so are all parts of one grand whole, yet it is our loss if we fail to definitely distinguish them one from the other. Reconciliation and justification, adoption and forgiveness, regeneration and sanctification, all combine to form the present portion of those whom the Father draws to the Son; nevertheless, each of these terms stands for a specific branch of that "great salvation" to which they were appointed. It makes much for our peace of mind and joy of heart when we are able to apprehend these things severally. We shall therefore devote the remainder of this chapter unto a comparison of sanctification with other blessings of the Christian. Regeneration and sanctification. It may appear to some who read critically our articles on "Regeneration" and who have closely followed what has been said in our discussion of the nature of sanctification, that we have almost, if not quite, obliterated all real difference between what is wrought in us at the new birth and what God works in us at our sanctification. It is not easy to preserve a definite line of distinction between them, because they have a number of things in common; yet the leading points of contrast between them need to be considered if we are to differentiate them in our minds. We shall therefore occupy the next two or three paragraphs with an examination of this point, wherein we shall endeavour to set forth the relation of the one to the other. Perhaps it will help us the most to consider this by saying that, in one sense, the relation between regeneration and sanctification is that of the infant to the adult. In likening the connection between regeneration and sanctification to the relation between an infant and an adult, it should be pointed out that

we have in mind our practical and progressive sanctification, and not our objective and absolute sanctification. Our absolute sanctification, so far as our state before God is concerned, is simultaneous with our regeneration. The essential thing in our regeneration is the Spirit's quickening of us into newness of life; the essential thing in our sanctification is that thenceforth we are an habitation of God, through the indwelling of the Spirit, and from that standpoint all the subsequent progressive advances in the spiritual life are but the effects, fruits, and manifestations of that initial consecration or anointing. The consecration of the tabernacle, and later of the temple, was a single act, done once and for all; after, there were many evidences of its continuance or perpetuity. But it is with the experimental aspect we would here treat. At regeneration a principle of holiness is communicated to us; practical sanctification is the exercise of that principle in living unto God. In regeneration the Spirit imparts saving grace; in His work of sanctification, He strengthens and develops the same. As "original sin" or that indwelling corruption which is in us at our natural birth, contains within it the seeds of all sin, so that grace which is imparted to us at the new birth contains within it the seeds of all spiritual graces; and as the one develops and manifests itself as we grow, so it is with the other. "Sanctification is a constant, progressive renewing of the whole man, whereby the new creature doth daily more and more die unto sin and live unto God. Regeneration is the birth, sanctification is the growth of this babe of grace. In regeneration, the sun of holiness rises; in sanctification it keepeth its course, and shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day (Prov. 4:18). The former is a specific change from nature to grace (Eph. 5:8) the latter is a gradual change from one degree of grace to another (Ps. 84:7), whereby the Christian goeth from strength to strength till he appear before God in Zion" (Geo. Swinnock, 1660). Thus, the foundation of sanctification is laid in regeneration, in that a holy principle is then first formed in us. That holy principle evidences itself in conversion, which is a turning away from sin to holiness, from Satan to Christ, from the world to God. It continues to evidence itself under the constant work of mortification and vivification, or the practical putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new; and is completed at glorification. The great difference then between regeneration and experimental and practical sanctification is that the former is a Divine act, done once and for all; while the latter is a Divine work of God's grace, wherein He sustains and develops, continues and perfects the work He then began. The one is a birth, the other the growth. The making of us practically holy is the design which God has in view when He quickens us: it is the necessary means to this end, for sanctification is the crown of the whole process of salvation. One of the chief defects of modern teaching on this subject has been in regarding the new birth as the summum bonum of the spiritual life of the believer. Instead of its being the goal, it is but the starting point. Instead of being the end, it is only a means to the end. Regeneration must be supplemented by sanctification, or otherwise the soul would remain at a standstill if such a thing were possible: for it seems to be an unchanging law in every realm that where there is no progression, there must be retrogression. That spiritual growth which is so essential lies in progressive sanctification, wherein all the faculties of the soul are more and more brought under the purifying and regulating influence of the principle of holiness which is implanted at the new birth, for thus alone do we grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Justification and sanctification. The relation between justification and sanctification is clearly revealed in Romans 3 to 8: that Epistle being the great doctrinal treatise of the N. T. In the 5th chapter we see the believing sinner declared righteous before God and at peace with Him, given an immutable standing in His favour, reconciled to Him, assured of his preservation, and so rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. Yet, great as are these blessings, something more is required by the quickened conscience, namely, deliverance from the power and pollution of inherited sin. Accordingly, this is dealt with at length in Romans 6, 7, 8, where various fundamental aspects of sanctification are treated of. First, it is demonstrated that the believer has been judicially cleansed from sin and the curse of the law, and that, in order that he may be practically delivered

from the dominion of sin, so that he may delight in and serve the law. Union with Christ not only involves identification with His death, but participation in His resurrection. Yet though sanctification is discussed by the apostle after his exposition of justification, it is a serious error to conclude that there may be, and often is, a considerable interval of time between the two things, or that sanctification is a consequent of justification; still worse is the teaching of some that, having been justified we must now seek sanctification, without which we must certainly perish—thus making the security of justification to depend upon a holy walk. No, though the two truths are dealt with singly by the apostle, they are inseparable: though they are to be contemplated alone, they must not be divided. Christ cannot be halved: in Him the believing sinner has both righteousness and holiness. Each department of the Gospel needs to be considered distinctly, but not pitted against each other. Let us not draw a false conclusion, then, because justification is treated of in Romans 3 to 5 and sanctification in 6 to 8: the one passage supplements the other: they are two halves of one whole. The Christian's regeneration is not the cause of his justification, nor is justification the cause of his sanctification—for Christ is the cause of all three; yet there is an order preserved between them: not an order of time, but of nature. First we are recovered to God's image, then to His favour, and then to His fellowship. So inseparable are justification and sanctification that sometimes the one is presented first and sometimes the other: see Romans 8:1 and 13: 1 John 1:9; then Micah 7:19 and 1 Corinthians 6:11. First, God quickens the dead soul: being made alive spiritually, he is now capacitated to act faith in Christ, by which he is (instrumentally) justified. In sanctification the Spirit carries on and perfects the work in regeneration, and that progressive work is accomplished under the new relation into which the believer is introduced by justification. Having been judicially reconciled to God, the way is now open for an experimental fellowship with Him, and that is maintained as the Spirit carries forward His work of sanctification. "Though justification and sanctification are both of them blessings of grace, and though they are absolutely inseparable, yet they are so manifestly distinct, that there is in various respects a wide difference between them. Justification respects the person in a legal sense, is a single act of grace, and terminates in a relative change; that is, a freedom from punishment and a right to life. Sanctification regards him in an experimental sense, is a continued work of grace, and terminates in a real change, as to the quality both of habits and actions. The former is by a righteousness without us; the latter is by holiness wrought in us. Justification is by Christ as a priest, and has regard to the guilt of sin; sanctification is by Him as a king, and refers to its dominion. Justification is instantaneous and complete in all its real subjects; but sanctification is progressive" (A. Booth, 1813). Purification and sanctification. These two things are not absolutely identical: though inseparable, they are yet distinguishable. We cannot do better than quote from G. Smeaton, "The two words frequently occurring in the ritual of Israel, 'sanctify' and 'purify,' are so closely allied in sense, that some regard them as synonymous. But a slight shade of distinction between the two may be discerned as follows. It is assumed that ever-recurring defilements, of a ceremonial kind, called for sacrifices which removed, and the word 'purify' referred to these rites and sacrifices which removed the stains which excluded the worshipper from the privilege of approach to the sanctuary of God, and from fellowship with His people. The defilement which he contracted excluded him from access. But when this same Israelite was purged by sacrifice, he was readmitted to the full participation of the privilege. He was then sanctified, or holy. Thus the latter is the consequence of the former. We may affirm, then, that the two words in this reference to the old worship, are very closely allied; so much so, that the one involves the other. This will throw light upon the use of these two expressions in the N. T.: Ephesians 5:25, 26; Hebrews 2:11; Titus 2:14. All these passages represent a man defiled by sin and excluded from God, but readmitted to access and fellowship, and so pronounced holy, as soon as the blood of sacrifice is applied to him." Often the term "purge" or "purify" (especially in Hebrews) includes justification as well. Objective holiness is the result of a relationship with God, He having set apart some

thing or person for His own pleasure. But the setting apart of one unto God necessarily involves the separating of it from all that is opposed to Him: all believers were set apart or consecrated to God by the sacrifice of Christ. Subjective holiness is the result of a work of God wrought in the soul, setting that person apart for His use. Thus "holiness" has two fundamental aspects. Growing out of the second, is the soul's apprehension of God's claims upon him, and his presentation of himself unto God for His exclusive use (Rom. 12:1; etc.), which is practical sanctification. The supreme example of all three is found in Jesus Christ, the Holy one of God. Objectively, He was the One "whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world" (John 10:36); subjectively, He "received the Spirit without measure" (John 3 :34); and practically, He lived for the glory of God, being absolutely devoted to His will—only with this tremendous difference: He needed no inward purification as we do. To sum up. Holiness, then, is both a relationship and a moral quality. It has both a negative and a positive side: cleansing from impurity, adorning with the grace of the Spirit. Sanctification is, first, a position of honour to which God has appointed His people. Second, it is a state of purity which Christ has purchased for them. Third, it is an inducement given to them by the Holy Spirit. Fourth, it is a course of devoted conduct in keeping therewith. Fifth, it is a standard of moral perfection, at which they are ever to aim: 1 Peter 1:15. A "saint" is one who was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), who has been cleansed from the guilt and pollution of sin by the blood of Christ (Heb. 13:12), who has been consecrated to God by the indwelling Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21, 22), who has been made inwardly holy by the impartation of the principle of grace (Phil. :6), and whose duty, privilege, and aim is to walk suitable thereto (Eph. 4:1).

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