

The Doctrine of Sanctification 18. Its Rule (CONTINUED)

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Transcript

The Doctrine of Sanctification

18. Its Rule

(CONTINUED)

We trust it has now been clearly proved to the satisfaction of every Truth-loving reader that the great object in Christ's coming here was to magnify the Law and satisfy its righteous demands. In His fulfilling of the Law and by His enduring its penalty, the Lord Jesus laid the foundation for the conforming of His people to it. This is plainly taught us in, "For what the Law could not do (namely, justify and sanctify fallen sinners—neither remit the penalty, nor deliver from the power of sin) in that it was weak through the flesh (unable to produce holiness in a fallen creature, as a master musician cannot produce harmony and melody from an instrument that is all out of tune) God sending His own Son in the likeness of sin's flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that (in order that) the righteousness of the Law (its just requirements) might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:3, 4). This was the design of God in sending His Son here. "That He would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him (be in subjection to Him) without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life" (Luke 1:74, 75). "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24). These and similar passages, are so many different ways of saying that Christ "became obedient unto death" in order that His people might be recovered to obedience unto God, that they might be made personally holy, that they might be conformed to God's Law, both in heart and life. Nothing less than this would or could meet the requirements of the Divine government, satisfy God's own nature, or glorify the Redeemer by a triumphant issue of His costly work. Nor should it surprise any to hear that nothing short of heart-conformity to the Law could satisfy the thrice Holy One. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). We have read the Old Testament Scriptures in vain if we have failed to note what a prominent place this basic and searching truth occupies: any one who has access to a complete Hebrew-English concordance can see at a glance how many hundreds of times the term "heart" is used there. The great God could never be imposed upon or satisfied with mere external performances from His creatures. Alas, alas, that heart religion is rapidly disappearing from the earth, to the eternal undoing of all who are strangers to it. God has never required

less than the hearts of His creatures: "My son, give Me thine heart" (Prov. 23:26). "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life" (Deut. 4:9). "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked" (Deut. 10:16, and cf. Jer. 10:25, 26). "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your hearts and not your garments; and turn unto the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful" (Joel 2:12, 13). The regenerate in Israel clearly recognized the high and holy demands which the Law of God made upon them: "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6); and therefore did they pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23, 24). Now as we pointed out in our last, the Lord Jesus affirmed that the full requirements of the Law from us are summed up in, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). It was to restore His people to this that Christ lived and died: to recover them to God, to bring them back into subjection to Him (from which they fell in Adam), to recover them to the Lawgiver. Christ is the Mediator between God and men, and by Christ is the believing sinner brought to God. When He sends His ministers to preach the Gospel it is "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 5:18). To the saints Paul wrote "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). Of Christ it is written "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25); and again, "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18)—to the God of the Old Testament, the Lawgiver! Let us now consider how Christ recovers His people unto a conformity of the Law, how He restores them unto the Lawgiver. Since that which the Law requires is that we love the Lord our God with all our hearts, it is evident, in the first place, that we must have a true knowledge of God Himself: this is both requisite unto and implied in the having our affections set upon Him. If our apprehensions of God be wrong, if they agree not with the Scriptures, then it is obvious that we have but a false image of Him framed by our own fancy. By a true knowledge of God (John 17:3) we mean far more than a correct theoretical notion of His perfections: the demons have that, yet they have no love for Him. Before God can be loved there must be a spiritual knowledge of Him, a heartfelt realization of His personal loveliness, moral excellency, ineffable glory. By nature none of us possess one particle of genuine love for God: so far from it, we hated Him, though we may not have realized the awful fact, and had we done so, would not have acknowledged it. "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7): those are equivalents, convertible terms. Where there is enmity toward God, there is insubjection to His Law; contrariwise, where there is love for God, there is submission to His Law. The reason why there is no love for God in the unregenerate is because they have no real knowledge of Him: this is just as true of those in Christendom as it is of those in heathendom—to the highly privileged and well-instructed Jews Christ said, "Ye neither know Me, nor My Father" (John 8:19, 54). A miracle of grace has to take place in order to this: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6); "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true" (1 John 5:20). This true knowledge of God consists in our spiritually perceiving Him (in our measure) to be just such an One as He actually is. We see Him to be not only Love itself, the God of all grace and the Father of mercies, but also Supreme, infinitely exalted above all creatures; Sovereign, doing as He pleases, asking no one's permission and giving no account of His actions; Immutable, with

whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning; ineffably Holy, being of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity; inflexibly Just, so that He will by no means clear the guilty; Omniscient, so that no secret can be concealed from Him; Omnipotent, so that no creature can successfully resist Him; the Judge of all, who will banish from His presence into everlasting woe and torment every impenitent rebel. This is the character of the true God: do you love Him, my reader? Second, a high esteem for God is both requisite unto and is implied in loving Him. This high esteem consists of exalted thoughts and a lofty valuation of Him from the sight and sense we have of His own intrinsic worthiness and excellency. To the unregenerate He says, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself" (Ps. 50:21), for their concepts of God are mean, low, derogatory. But when the Spirit quickens us and shines upon our understandings we discern the beauty of the Lord, and admire and adore Him. We join with the celestial hosts in exclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." As we behold, as in a glass, His glory, we see how infinitely exalted He is above all creatures, and cry, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" yea, we confess "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee" (Ps. 73:25). Now this high estimate of God not only disposes or inclines the heart to acquiesce, but to exult in His high prerogatives. From a consciousness of His own infinite excellency, His entire right thereto, and His absolute authority over all, occupying the throne of the universe, He presents Himself as the Most High God, supreme Lord, sovereign Governor of all worlds, and demands that all creatures shall be in a perfect subjection to Him; deeming those who refuse Him this as worthy of eternal damnation. He declares, "I am the Lord, and beside Me there is no God: My glory will I not give to another: thus and thus shall ye do, because I am the Lord." As it would be the utmost wickedness for the highest angel in heaven to assume any of this honor to himself, yet it perfectly becomes the Almighty so to do: yea, so far above all is He, that God is worthy of and entitled to infinitely more honor and homage than all creatures together can possibly pay to Him. When the eyes of our hearts are open to see something of God's sovereign majesty, infinite dignity, supernal glory, and we begin to rightly esteem Him, then we perceive how thoroughly right and just it is that such an One should be held in the utmost reverence, and esteemed far above all others and exulted in: "Sing unto the Lord all the earth" (Ps. 96:1). A spiritual sight and sense of the supreme excellency and infinite glory of the Triune Jehovah will not only rejoice our hearts to know that He is King of kings, the Governor of all worlds, but we are also thankful and glad that we live under His government, and are His subjects and servants. We shall then perceive the grounds and reasons of His Law: how infinitely right and fit it is that we should love Him with all our hearts and obey Him in everything; how infinitely unfit and wrong the least sin is, and how just the threatened punishment. We shall then also perceive that all the nations of the earth are but as a drop in the bucket before Him, and that we ourselves are less than nothing in His sight. Third, a deep and lasting desire for God's glory is both requisite unto and is implied in our loving Him. When we are acquainted with a person who appears very excellent in our eyes and we highly esteem him, then we heartily wish him well and are ready at all times to do whatever we can to promote his welfare. It is thus that love to God will make us feel and act toward His honor and interests in this world. When God is spiritually beheld in His infinite excellency, as the sovereign Governor of the whole world, and a sense of His infinite worthiness is alive in our hearts, a holy benevolence is enkindled, the spontaneous language of which is, "Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength: give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name" (Ps. 96:6, 7). "Be thou exalted O God, above the heavens; let Thy glory be above all the earth" (Ps. 57:5). As self-love naturally causes us to seek the promotion of our own interests and self-aggrandizement, so a true love to God moves us to put Him first and seek His glory. This holy disposition expresses itself in earnest longings that God would glorify Himself and honor His great name by bringing more of our fellow-creatures into an entire subjection

to Himself. The natural longing and language of true spiritual love is, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." When God is about to bring to pass great and glorious things to the magnifying of Himself, it causes great rejoicing: "Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad . . . He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth" (Ps. 96:11, 13). So too when God permits anything which, as it seems to us, tends to bring reproach and dishonor upon His cause, it occasions acute anguish and distress: as when the Lord threatened to destroy Israel for their stiffneckedness, Moses exclaimed "What will become of Thy great name? what will the Egyptians say!" From this disinterested affection arises a free and genuine disposition to give ourselves entirely to the Lord forever, to walk in His ways and keep all His commandments. For if we really desire that God may be glorified, we shall be disposed to seek His glory. A spiritual sight and sense of the infinite greatness, majesty, and excellency of the Lord of lords, makes it appear to us supremely fit that we should be wholly devoted to Him, and that it is utterly wrong for us to live to ourselves and make our own interests our last end. The same desire which makes the godly earnestly long to have God glorify Himself, strongly prompts them to live unto Him. If we love God with all our hearts, we shall serve Him with all our strength. If God be the highest in our esteem, then His honor and glory will be our chief concern. To love God so as to serve Him is what the Law requires; to love self so as to serve it, is rebellion against the Majesty of heaven. Fourth, delighting ourselves in God is both requisite unto and is implied in our loving Him. If there be a heartfelt realization of God's personal loveliness and ineffable glory, then the whole soul must and will be attracted to Him. A spiritual sight and sense of the perfections of the Divine character draw out the heart in fervent adoration. When we "delight in" a fellow-creature, we find pleasure and satisfaction in his company and conversation; we long to see him when absent, rejoice in his presence, and the enjoyment of him makes us happy. So it is when a holy soul beholds God in the grandeur of His being, loves Him above all else, and is devoted to Him entirely—now he delights in Him supremely. His delight and complacency is as great as his esteem, arising from the same sense of God's moral excellency. From this delight in God spring longings after a fuller acquaintance and closer communion with Him: "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is: to see Thy power and Thy glory . . . because Thy lovingkindness is better than life . . . my soul followeth hard after Thee" (Ps. 63:1-8). There is at times a holy rejoicing in God which nothing can dim: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17, 18). From this delight in God arises a holy disposition to renounce all others and to live wholly upon Him, finding our satisfaction in Him alone: "O Lord our God, other lords besides Thee have had dominion over us but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy name" (Isa. 26:13); "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3 :8). As the proud man seeks contentment in creature honors, the worldling in riches, the Pharisee in his round of duties, so the true lover of God finds his contentment in God Himself. That these four things are a true representation of the nature of that love which is required in the first and great commandment of the Law, upon which chiefly hang all the Law and the Prophets, is manifest, not only from the reason of things, but from this: that such a love lays a sure and firm foundation for all holy obedience. Only that love to God is of the right kind which effectually influences us to keep His commandments: "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected" (1 John 2:3-5). But it is evident from the very nature of things that such a love as this will effectually influence us so to do.

As self-love naturally moves us to set up self and its interests, so this love will move us to set up God and His interests. The only difference between the love of saints in heaven and of saints on earth is one of degree. Having shown that the great object in Christ's coming to earth was to magnify the Law (by obeying its precepts and suffering its penalty), and that by so doing He laid a foundation for the recovering of His people to the Lawgiver, it now remains for us to consider more specifically how He conforms them to the Law. This, as we have just seen, must consist in His bringing them to lay down the weapons of their warfare against God, and by causing them to love God with all their heart. This He accomplishes by the sending forth of His blessed Spirit to renew them, for "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us" (Rom. 5:5). It is the special and supernatural work of the Spirit in the soul which distinguishes the regenerate from the unregenerate. Previously we have shown at length that the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit is an orderly and progressive one, conducting the soul step by step in the due method of the Gospel: quickening, illuminating, convicting, drawing to Christ, and cleansing. That order can be best perceived by us inversely, according as it is realized in our conscious experience, tracing it backward from effect to cause. (5) Without the Spirit bringing us to Christ there can be no cleansing from His blood. (4) Without the Spirit working in us evangelical repentance there can be no saving faith or coming to Christ. (3) Without Divine conviction of sin there can be no godly sorrow for it. (2) Without the Spirit's special illumination there can be no sight or sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, wherein it consists—opposition to God, expressed in self-pleasing. (1) Without His quickening us we can neither see nor feel our dreadful state before God: spiritual life must be imparted before we are capable of discerning or being affected by Divine things. It is by the Spirit we are brought from death unto life, given spiritual perception to realize our utter lack of conformity to the Divine Law, enabled to discern its spirituality and just requirements, brought to mourn over our fearful transgressions against it and to acknowledge the justice of its condemning sentence upon us. It is by the Spirit we receive a new nature which loves God and delights in His Law, which brings our hearts into conformity to it. The extent of this conformity in the present life, and the harassing difficulty presented to the Christian by the realization that there is still so much in him which is opposed to the Law, must be left for consideration in our next chapter.

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