

# The Doctrine of Sanctification 19. Its Rule (CONTINUED)

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## Transcript

The Doctrine of Sanctification

19. Its Rule

(CONTINUED)

It has been pointed out in earlier chapters that our practical sanctification by the Spirit is but His continuing and completing of the work which He began in us at regeneration and conversion. Now saving conversion consists in our being delivered from our depravity and sinfulness to the moral image of God, or, which is the same thing, to a real conformity unto the moral Law. And a conformity to the moral Law (as we showed in our last chapter), consists in a disposition to love God supremely, live to Him ultimately, and delight in Him superlatively; and to love our neighbors as ourselves, with a practice agreeing thereto. Therefore a saving conversion consists in our being recovered from what we are by nature to such a disposition and practice. In order to this blessed recovery of us to God, Christ, by His Spirit applies the law in power to the sinners understanding and heart, for "the Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Ps. 19:7). That effectual application of the Law causes the sinner to see clearly and to feel acutely how he had lived—in utter defiance of it; what he is—a foul leper; what he deserves—eternal punishment; and how he is in the hands of a sovereign God, entirely at His disposal (see Rom. 9:18). This experience is unerringly described in, "For without (the Spirit's application of) the Law, sin was dead (we had no perception or feeling of its heinousness). For I was alive without the Law once (deeming myself as good as anyone else, and able to win God's approval by my religious performances); but when the commandment came (in power to my conscience), sin revived (became a fearful reality as I discovered the plague of my heart), and I died" (to my self-righteousness)—Romans 7:8, 9. It is then, for the first time, that the soul perceives "the Law is spiritual" (Rom. 7:14), that it requires not only outward works of piety, but holy thoughts and godly affections, from whence all good works must proceed, or else they are unacceptable to God. The Law is "exceeding broad" (Ps. 119:96), taking notice not only of our outward conduct but also of our inward state; "love" is its demand, and that is essentially a thing of the heart. As the Law requires love, and nothing but love (to God and our neighbor), so all sin consists in that which is contrary to what the Law requires, and therefore every exercise of the heart which is not agreeable to the Law, which is not prompted by holy love, is opposed to it and is sinful. Therefore did Christ plainly declare, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). God requires far more than a correct outward deportment: "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts"

(Ps. 51:6). The Law takes cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart, saying, "thou shalt not covet, which is an act of the soul rather than of the body. When a sinner is brought to realize what the high and holy demands of the Law really are, and how utterly he has failed to meet them, he begins to perceive something of the awfulness of his condition, for "by the Law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Now it is that the awakened sinner realizes how justly the Law condemns and curses him as an inveterate and excuseless transgressor of it. Now it is that he has a lively sense in his own soul of the dreadfulness of eternal damnation. Now it is he discovers that he is lost, utterly and hopelessly lost so far as any self-help is concerned. This it is which prepares him to see his dire need of Christ, for they that are whole (in their self-complacency and self-righteousness), betake not themselves to the great Physician. Thus the Law (in the hands of the Spirit) is the handmaid of the Gospel. Was not this the Divine order even at Sinai? The moral law was given first, and then the ceremonial law, with its priesthood and sacrifices: the one to convict of Israel's need of a Savior, the other setting forth the Savior under various types and figures! It is not until sin "abounds" in the stricken conscience of the Spirit-convicted transgressor, that grace will "much more abound" in the estimation and appreciation of his Spirit-opened heart. In exact proportion as we really perceive the justice, dignity, and excellency of the Law, will be our realization of the infinite evil of sin; and in exact proportion to our sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin will be our wonderment at the riches of Divine grace. Then it is that "God, who commanded the light to shine out darkness, shines in our hearts, unto the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). As an experimental sense of the glory of God's righteousness in the Law and of His grace in the Gospel is imparted to the soul by the Spirit, the sinner is moved to return home to God, through the Mediator, to venture his soul and its eternal concerns upon His free grace, and to give up himself to be His forever—to love Him supremely, live to Him entirely, and delight in Him superlatively. Hereby his heart begins to be habitually framed to love his neighbor as himself, with a disinterested impartiality; and thus an effectual foundation is laid in his heart for universal external obedience, for nothing but a spontaneous and cheerful obedience can be acceptable to God, an obedience which flows from love and gratitude, an obedience which is rendered without repining or grudging, as though it were a grievous burden to us. It is thus that Christ, by His Spirit, conforms us to God's Law. First, by enlightening our understandings, so that we perceive the spirituality of the Law, in its high and meet demands upon our hearts. Second, by bringing us to perceive the holiness and justice of its requirements. Third, by convicting us of our lifelong trampling of the Law beneath our feet. Fourth, by causing us to mourn over our wicked defiance of its authority. And fifth, by imparting to us a new nature or principle of holiness. Now it is that the Lord puts His laws into our minds and writes them in our hearts (Heb. 8:10). Thus, so far from the grace of the Gospel "making void the Law," it "establishes" it (Rom. 3:31) in our consciences and affections. A spiritual and universal obedience is what the Law demands. The principal duties of love to God above all, and to our neighbors for His sake, are not only required by the sovereign will of God, but are in their own nature "holy, just and good" (Rom. 7:12), and therefore meet for us to perform. These are the two main roots from which issue all other spiritual fruits, and apart from them there can be no holiness of heart and life. And the powerful and effectual means by which this end is attained is the grand work of the Spirit in sanctifying us, for by that our hearts and lives are conformed to the Law. He must bestow upon us an inclination and disposition of heart to the duties of the Law, so as to fit and enable us unto the practice of them. For these duties are of such a nature as cannot possibly be performed while we have a disinclination from them. As the Divine life is thus begun, so it is carried on in the soul much after the same order. The Spirit of God shows the believer, more and more, what a sinful, worthless, Hell-deserving wretch he is in himself, and so makes him increasingly sensible of his imperative need of free grace through Jesus Christ, to pardon and sanctify him. He has an ever-deepening sense of those two things all his days, and thereby his heart is kept

humble, and Christ and free grace made increasingly precious. The Spirit of God shows the believer more and more the infinite glory and excellency of God, whereby he is influenced to love Him, live to Him, and delight in Him with all his heart; and thereby his heart is framed more and more to love his neighbor as himself. Thus "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). The last paragraph needs the following qualifications: the Spirit's operations after conversion are attended with two differences, arising from two causes. First, the different state the subject is in. The believer, being no longer under the Law as a covenant, is not, by the Spirit, filled with those legal terrors arising from the fears of Hell, as he formerly was (Rom. 8:15); rather is he now made increasingly sensible of his corruptions, of the sinfulness of sin, of his base ingratitude against such a gracious God; and hereby his heart is broken. Second, from the different nature of the subject wrought upon. The believer, no longer being under the full power of sin nor completely at enmity against God, does not resist the Spirit's operation as he once did, but has a genuine disposition to join with Him against sin in himself; saying, Lord, correct, chasten me, do with me as Thou wilt, only subdue my iniquities and conform me more and more unto Thy image. A few words now upon the relation of the Gospel. First, the grace of the Gospel is not granted to counterbalance the rigor of the Law, or to render God's plan of government justifiable so as to sweeten the minds of His embittered enemies. The Law is "holy, just, and good" in itself, and was so before Christ became incarnate. God is not a tyrant, nor did His Son die a sacrifice to tyranny, to recover His injured people from the severity of a cruel Law. It is utterly impossible that the Son of God should die to answer the demands of an unrighteous Law. Second, the Law, as it is applied by the Spirit, prepares the heart for the Gospel: the one giving me a real knowledge of sin, the other revealing how I may obtain deliverance from its guilt and power. Third, the Law, and not the Gospel, is the rule of our sanctification: the one makes known what it is that God requires from me, the other supplies means and motives for complying therewith. Fourth, the Law and the Gospel are not in opposition, but in apposition, the one being the handmaid of the other: they exist and work simultaneously and harmoniously in the experience of the believer. Fifth, the high and holy demands of the Law are not modified to the slightest degree by the Gospel: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5 48); "But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:15) is the standard set before us. Sixth, thus the Christian's rule of righteousness is the Law, but in the hands of the Mediator: "Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21)—beautifully typed out in the Law being given to Israel at Sinai after their redemption from Egypt, through Moses the typical Mediator (Gal. 3:19). Seventh, herein we may see the seriousness of the God-dishonoring error of all those who repudiate the moral law as the Christian's rule of life. "The holy Law of God and the Gospel of His grace reflect the Divine glory, the one upon the other reciprocally, and both will shine forth with joint glory eternally in Heaven. The Law setting forth, in the brightest light, the beauty of holiness, and the vileness and fearful demerit of sin, will show the abounding grace that hath brought the children of wrath thither, with infinite lustre and glory; and Grace will do honour to the Law, by showing in sinners, formerly very vile and polluted, the purity and holiness of the Law fully exemplified in their perfect sanctification; and Christ, the Lamb that was slain, by whom the interests of the Law and of Grace have been happily reconciled and inseparably united, will be glorified in His saints and admired by them who believe" (James Fraser, "The Scriptural doctrine of Sanctification," 1760). It is, then, by the regenerating and sanctifying work of His Spirit that Christ brings His people to a conformity unto the Law and to a compliance with the Gospel. "But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). The "glory of the Lord" is beheld by us, first, as it shines in the glass of the Law—the glory of His justice and holiness, the glory of His governmental majesty and authority, the glory of His goodness in framing such a Law, which requires that we love Him with all

our hearts, and, for His sake, as His creatures, our neighbors as ourselves. The "glory of the Lord" is beheld by us, second, as it shines forth in the glass of the Gospel—the glory of His redeeming love, the glory of His amazing grace, the glory of His abounding mercy. And, as renewed creatures, beholding this, we are "changed (the Greek word is the same as Christ being "transfigured") into the same image, from glory to glory (progressively, from one degree of it to another) by the Spirit of the Lord:" that is, into a real conformity to the Law, and a real compliance with the Gospel. The Gospel calls upon us to repent, but there can be no genuine repentance until we see and feel ourselves to be guilty transgressors of the Law, and until we are brought by the Spirit to realize that we are wholly to blame for not having lived in perfect conformity to it. Then it is we clearly realize that we thoroughly deserve to be damned, and that, notwithstanding all our doings and religious performances. Yea, then it is that we perceive that all our previous religious performances were done not from any love for God, or with any real concern for His glory, but formally and hypocritically, out of self-love, from fear of Hell, and with a mercenary hope of gaining Heaven thereby. Then it is that our mouth is stopped, all excuses and extenuations silenced, and the curse of the Law upon us is acknowledged as just. Then it is that seeing God to be so lovely and glorious a Being, we are stricken to the heart for our vile enmity against Him, and condemn ourselves as incorrigible wretches. Such are some of the elements of genuine repentance. The Gospel calls upon us to believe, to receive upon Divine authority its amazing good news: that a grievously insulted God has designs of mercy upon His enemies; that the Governor of the world, whose Law has been so flagrantly, persistently, and awfully trampled upon by us, has, in His infinite wisdom, devised a way whereby we can be pardoned, without His holy Law being dishonored or its righteous claims set aside; that such is His wondrous love for us that He gave His only begotten Son to be made under the Law, to personally and perfectly keep its precepts, and then endure its awful penalty and die beneath its fearful curse. But when a sinner has been awakened and quickened by the Holy Spirit, such a revelation of pure grace seems "too good to be true." To him it appears that his case is utterly hopeless, that he has transgressed beyond the reach of mercy, that he has committed the unpardonable sin. One in this state (and we sincerely pity the reader if he or she has never passed through it) can no more receive the Gospel into his heart than he can create a world. Only the Holy Spirit can bestow saving faith. The Gospel calls upon us to obey, to surrender ourselves fully to the Lordship of Christ, to take His yoke upon us, to walk even as He walked. Now the yoke which Christ wore was unreserved submission to the will of God, and the rule by which He walked was being regulated in all things by the Divine Law. Therefore does Christ declare, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24), for He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. It is their refusal to comply with this demand of the Gospel which seals the doom of all who disregard its claims. As it is written, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven, with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel" (2 Thess. 1:7, 8); and again, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God!" (1 Pet. 4:17). But such obedience as the Gospel requires can only be rendered by the sanctifying operations of the gracious Holy Spirit. Marvelous indeed is the change which the poor sinner passes through under the regenerating and converting operations of the Spirit in his soul: he is made a new creature in Christ, and is brought into quite new circumstances. Perhaps the closest analogy to it may be found in the experience of orphan children, left without any guardian or guide, running wild and indulging themselves in all folly and riot; then being taken into the family of a wise and good man and adopted as his children. These lawless waifs are brought into new surroundings and influences: love's care for them wins their hearts, new principles are instilled into their minds, a new temper is theirs, and a new discipline regulates them; old things have passed away, all things have become new to them. So it is with the

Christian: from being without God and hope in the world, from running to eternal ruin, they are delivered from the power of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ. A new nature has been communicated to them, the Spirit Himself indwells them, and a reconciled God now bestows upon them a Father's care, feeding, guiding, protecting them, and ultimately conducting them into everlasting glory.

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