

# The Doctrine of Sanctification 22. Its Instrument (COMPLETED)

by A.W. Pink

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## Transcript

The Doctrine of Sanctification

22. Its Instrument

(COMPLETED)

Having presented an outline in our last chapter of the part which faith plays in sanctification, we shall now endeavour, under God, to offer consolation unto some of our sin-burdened, doubt-harassed, Satan-tormented brethren and sisters in Christ. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God." (Isa. 40:1). And why? Because God's children are the most deeply distressed people on the face of the earth! Though at times they experience a peace which passeth all understanding, revel in that love which passeth knowledge, and rejoice with joy unspeakable, yet for the most part their souls are much cast down, and fears, bondage, groans, constitute a large part of their experience. They may for a brief season be regaled by the wells and palm trees of Elim, but most of their lives are lived in the "great howling wilderness" (Deut. 32:10), so that they are often constrained to say, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." Such a distressful experience causes many of the regenerate to very seriously doubt whether they are real Christians. They cannot harmonize their gloom with the light-heartedness they behold in religious professors all around them. No, and they need not wish to. The superficial and apostate religion of our day is producing nothing but a generation of flighty and frothy characters, who scorn anything sober, serious, and solemn, and who sneer at that which searches, strips, and abases into the dust. God's Isaacs must not expect to be understood and still less appreciated by the "mocking" Ishmaels (Gen. 21:9), for though these dwell for a while in Abraham's household, yet a different mother has borne them. Unless the sin distressed and fear-tormented believer is "as a sparrow alone upon the housetop" (Ps. 102 :7), then he will have to say "mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against me" (Jer. 12:9)—there is no oneness, no fellowship. Many of God's dear children are like Asaph. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had wellnigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not troubled as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain: violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly: concerning oppression, they speak loftily" (Ps. 73:2-8). As Asaph beheld the prosperity of these people he was staggered, supposing that God was with them and had deserted him. The spiritual counterpart of this

is found in modern Laodicea. There is a generation of professing Christians who appear to enjoy great religious "prosperity." They have considerable knowledge of the letter of Scripture; they are experts in "rightly dividing the Word;" they have great light upon the mysteries of prophecy; and are most successful as "soul winners." They have no ups and downs in their experience, no painful twistings and turnings, but go on in a straight course with light hearts and beaming countenances. Providence smiles upon them, and they never have a doubt as to their acceptance in Christ. Satan does not trouble them, nor is indwelling sin a daily plague to them. And the poor Christian, conscious of his weakness, his ignorance, his poverty, his vileness, is sorely tempted to be "envious" of them, for they seem to have "more than heart could wish," while the longings of his heart are denied him, and that which he pursues so eagerly continues to elude his grasp. Ah, but note well some of the other characteristics of this prosperous company. Pride compasseth them about as a chain" (Ps. 73 :6). Yes, they are utter strangers to humility and lowliness. They are pleased with their peacock feathers, knowing not that God views the same as "filthy rags." "Concerning oppression, they speak loftily" (Ps. 73:8). God's children are oppressed, sorely oppressed, by their corruptions, by their innumerable failures, by the hidings of the Lord's face, by the accusations of Satan. They are oppressed over the workings of unbelief, over the coldness of their hearts, over the insincerity of their prayers, over their vain imaginations. But these Laodiceans, "speak loftily," ridiculing such things, and prate of their peace, joy, and victory. "Therefore His people, return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them" (Ps. 73:10), for as real Christians listen to the "testimonies" of the "higher life" people, they conclude that it would be the height of presumption to regard themselves as Christians at all. Behold these are the ungodly," continues Asaph, "who prosper in the (religious) world; they increase in riches" (Ps. 73:12). And as he was occupied with them, contrasting his own sad lot, a spirit of discontent and petulance took possession of him. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain" (Ps. 73:13)—what is all my past diligence and efforts worth? I am not "prosperous" like these professors: I do not have their graces or attainments, I do not enjoy the peace, assurance, and victory, they have. Far from it: "For all the day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning" (Ps. 73:14). Ah, that was holy Asaph's experience, my reader; is it yours? If so, you are in goodly company, much as the present-day pharisees may despise you. Then the Psalmist was checked, and realized his wrong in giving way to such wicked sentiments. "If I say, I will speak thus, behold, I shall offend against the generation of Thy children" (Ps. 73:15). Yes, the generation of God's children will be offended when they hear one of their brethren saying it is "vain" to use the appointed means of grace because those have not issued in deliverance from indwelling sin. "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end. Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places; Thou castedst them down into destruction" (Ps. 73 :16-18). How unspeakably solemn! Instead of these prosperous Laodiceans having a spiritual experience high above those whose hearts plague them "all the day long," they were total strangers to real spirituality. Instead of being among the chief favorites of God, they had been set by Him in the "slippery places" of error and false religion, to be eventually "cast down into destruction." What a warning is this, my sin-harassed brother, not to envy those who are strangers to the plague of their own hearts, who groan not "being burdened" (2 Cor. 5:4), and who cry not "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24). Envy not the proud Laodiceans, who are "rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing;" and know not that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Instead, be thankful if God has made you "poor in spirit"—feeling that you are destitute of every spiritual grace and fruit; and to "mourn" over your barrenness and waywardness; for none other than Christ pronounces such characters "blessed." And why should you think it strange if you are among that little company who are the most distressed people on earth? Have you not been called into fellowship with Christ, and was He not "The Man of sorrows" while He tabernacled in this world? If He sorrowed and

suffered so much in enduring the penalty of sin, will you complain because God is now making you groan daily under the felt workings of the power of sin? The fact of the matter is that very much of that which now passes for sanctification is nothing but a species of pharisaism, which causes its deluded votaries to thank God that they are not like other men; and sad it is to find many of the Lord's people adding to their miseries by grieving over how far they come behind the lofty attainments which they imagine these boasters have reached unto. A true and God-honoring "Christian testimony," my reader, does not consist in magnifying self, by telling of attainments and excellencies which, with apparent humility, are ascribed to Divine enabling. No indeed, very far from it. That "witness" which is most honoring to the Lord is one which acknowledges His amazing grace and which magnifies His infinite patience in continuing to bear with such an ungrateful, hard-hearted, and unresponsive wretch. The great mistake made by most of the Lord's people is in hoping to discover in themselves that which is to be found in Christ alone. It is this, really, which causes them to become so envious and discontented when they behold the spurious holiness of some and the carnal attractiveness of others. There is such a thing as "the goodness" of the flesh, which is "as the flower of the field" (Isa. 40:6), yet as the very next verse tells us "the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it." But so easily are the simple deceived today they often mistake such "goodness" for godliness. Why, my reader, a man (or woman) in his personal makeup may be as meek and tractable as a lamb, he may be constitutionally as kind and grateful as a spaniel, and he may be temperamentally as cheerful as a lark; yet there is not a grain of grace in these natural qualities. On the other hand, the Christian, in his natural temperament, is likely to be as gloomy as an owl or as wild as a tiger; yet that does not disprove grace within him. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, and things which are not (non-entities, ciphers) to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:26-29). If this passage were really received at its face value, many of God's sin-afflicted and doubting children would find the key that unlocks much which is bewildering and grievous in their experience. In His determination to magnify His sovereign grace God has selected many of the very worst of Adam's fallen race to be the everlasting monuments of His fathomless mercy—those whom Luther was wont to designate "The Devil's riff-raffs." This is very evident too from "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" (Luke 14:21)—the most unlikely ones as guests for a royal feast, the waifs and strays of society! There are thousands of moral, upright, amiable people who are never effectually called by the Spirit; whereas moral perverts, thieves, and awful-tempered ones are regenerated. When such are born again they still have vile inclinations, horrible dispositions, fiery tempers, which are very hard to control, and are subject to temptations that many of the unregenerate have no first-hand acquaintance with. Hundreds more of God's children, whose animal spirits are much quieter by nature and whose temperament is more even and placid, yet are plagued by a spirit of pride and self-righteousness, which is just as hateful in the sight of God as moral degeneracy is to respectable worldlings. Now unless the thoughts of such are formed from the Scriptures, they are sure to entertain erroneous conceptions which will destroy their peace and fill them with doubts and fears, for upon a fuller discovery and clearer sight of the sea of corruption within, they will conclude they have never passed from death unto life. But to call into question our regeneration because we fail to obtain deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, is a great mistake; the new birth neither removes nor refines the flesh, but is the reception of a nature that feels sin to be an intolerable burden, and that yearns after holiness above everything else. If I have really come to Christ as a leprous and bankrupt sinner, utterly despairing of self-help, and have put my trust in the sufficiency of His sacrifice, the Scripture affirms

that God has made Christ to be sanctification to me (1 Cor. 1:30) and that I have received a spirit of holiness from Him. Now faith accepts this blessed fact notwithstanding an ocean of corruption and the continued raging of sin within. My peace of mind will, then, very largely depend upon faith's continued apprehension of the perfect salvation which God has provided for His people in Christ, and which in Heaven they shall enjoy in their own persons. After the sinner has come to Christ savingly, the Holy Spirit gives him a much fuller discovery of his vileness, and makes him a hundredfold more conscious of how much there is in his heart that is opposed to God than ever he realized previously; and unless faith be daily in exercise, the activities of the flesh will slay his assurance—instead, they ought to drive him closer and closer to Christ. O my Christian reader, what a difference it would make were you to steadily realize the truth that, every temptation you encounter, every defeat you suffer, every distressing experience you pass through, is a call and a challenge for the exercise of faith. You complain that you are still the subject of sin, that it cleaves to you as the flesh does to your bones, that it mixes with your duties and defiles every act you perform. You often feel that you are nothing but sin. When you attempt to walk with God, inward evil rises up and stops you. When you read His Word or endeavour to pray, unbelieving thoughts, carnal imaginations, worldly lusts, seek to possess your soul. You strive against them; but in vain. Instead of improvement, things grow worse. You beg of God for humility, and pride rises higher; you cry to Him for more patience, but apparently His ear is closed. Ah, you are now learning the painful truth that in your flesh there dwelleth "no good thing." Yes, but what is a poor soul to do in such a harrowing case? How is it possible for him to preserve any peace in his conscience? When the believer is so sorely attacked by sin and Satan, how is he to defend himself? Nothing but faith in the sure Word of God can keep him from sinking into abject despair. This is the very time for him to maintain his trust in the sufficiency of Christ's blood and the excellency of His imputed righteousness. His faith is now being tried by the fire that it may come forth as gold. It is by such experiences the genuineness of his faith is put to the proof. The believer is cast into the furnace that faith may conflict with unbelief, and though he will be hard put to it, yet victory is sure. The proof of his victory is faith's perseverance (amid a thousand waverings) unto the end. Remember, my reader, that the test of perseverance is not how we act in the face of success, but how we conduct ourselves under a long series of defeats. "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again" (Prov. 24:16). Let it not be overlooked that we can no more take our place before God now as accepted worshippers without a perfect holiness, than we can enter Heaven without it; but that perfect holiness is to be found in Christ alone—the practical holiness of the Christian is, at present, but a very, very faint reflection of it. The more I feel my utter unworthiness and total unfitness to approach unto God and call upon Him in my own name, the more thankful I should be for the Mediator, and the unspeakable privilege of calling upon God in Christ's name. And it is faith which counts upon the glorious fact that the thrice holy God can exercise His grace and goodness toward one so vile as I, and that, consistently with His majesty and justice—Christ has honored the Law infinitely more than my sins dishonor it. One who feels that, as a Christian, he is "an utter failure," and who is conscious of his continued abuse of God's mercies, can only draw nigh to God with confidence as he exercises faith in the infinite merits of Christ. As we stated at the beginning, our principal object in writing this chapter is, under God, to comfort His sin-distressed, doubt-harassed, Satan-tormented people. We are not unmindful that among the ranks of nominal Christians there are, on the one hand, many "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth" (2 Tim. 3:5, 7), who will regard as highly "dangerous" much of what we have said; while on the other hand, there are "ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4), who are likely to abuse the same by adopting it as an intellectual opinion, from which they may derive peace in their defiance of God. Yet notwithstanding these likely eventualities, we shall not withhold a needful portion of the children's bread. Those who claim to

have received the "second blessing" and be "entirely sanctified" in themselves, have never seen their hearts in the light of God. Those who boast of their sinless perfection are deceived by Satan, and "the truth is not in them" (1 John 1:8). Two things ever go together in the experience of a genuine believer: a growing discovery of the vileness of self, and a deepening appreciation of the preciousness of Christ. There is no solid ground for a believer to rest upon till he sees that Christ has fully answered to God for him. In exact proportion to his faith will be his peace and joy. "Ye are complete in Him" (Col. 2:10): believers now possess a perfect holiness in the Covenant-Head, but at present they are far from being perfect in the grace which flows to them from Him. God honors and rewards that faith which is exercised upon our holiness in Christ: not necessarily by subduing sin or granting victory over it, but by enabling its possessor to continue cleaving to Christ as his only hope. O my Christian reader, be content to be nothing in yourself, that Christ may be your all. O to truly say "He must increase, but I decrease" (John 3 :30). Growth in grace is a being brought more and more off from self-complacency and self-dependency, to an entire reliance upon Christ and the free grace of God through Him. This temper is begun in the believer at regeneration, and like the tiny mustard seed it at last develops into a large tree. As the Christian grows in grace he finds himself to be increasingly full of wants, and further off than ever from being worthy to receive the supply of them. More and more the spirit of a beggar possesses him. As the Spirit grants more light, he has a growing realization of the beauty of holiness, of what Christ is entitled to from him; and there is a corresponding self-loathing and grief because he is so unholy in himself and fails so miserably to render unto Christ His due. Fellowship with God and walking in the light as He is in the light, so far from filling the Christian with self-satisfaction, causes him to groan because of his darkness and filthiness—the clearer light now making manifest what before was unperceived. Nothing is more perilous to the soul than that we should be occupied with our achievements, victories, enjoyments. If Paul was in danger of being exalted by the abundance of the revelations vouchsafed him, can the danger be less of our being puffed up with thoughts of spiritual progress, spiritual conquests, spiritual excellencies. And yet the cherishing of such thoughts is the very thing which is now being increasingly encouraged by the religious quacks of the day. No matter what fellowship with Christ be enjoyed, what growth in grace be made, it will ever remain true that "we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened" (2 Cor. 5:4). So far from what we have said in this chapter encouraging a real Christian to entertain low views of sin, it is only in the vital and experimental knowledge of the same that a life of holiness begins. Nothing will cause a renewed soul to hate sin so much as a realization of God's grace; nothing will move him to mourn so genuinely over his sins as a sense of Christ's dying love. It is that which breaks his heart: the realization that there is so much in him that is opposed to Christ. But a life of holiness is a life of faith (the heart turning daily to Christ), and the fruits of faith are genuine repentance, true humility, praising God for His infinite patience and mercy, pantings after conformity to Christ, praying to be made more obedient, and continually confessing our disobedience. Daydreaming about complete deliverance from indwelling sin, seeking to persuade ourselves that the flesh is becoming less active, cannot counter-balance the humbling reality of our present state; but our corruptions should not quench a true Gospel hope. Those who have read the previous chapters of this book cannot suppose that we have any design to lower the standard of the Christian life, or to speak peace to deluded souls who "profess that they know God, but in works deny Him" (Titus 1:16). Some indeed may charge us with encouraging light views of the sinfulness of sin, yet it must be remembered that the grand truth of Divine grace has ever appeared "dangerous" to mere human wisdom. A worldly moralist must think it subservient of the very foundations of virtue to proclaim to men, without regard to what they have done, and without stipulation as to what they are to do, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." If I believed that says the unrenewed man, I would take my fill of sin, without fear or remorse. Ah, but a saving faith from God is always accomplished by a principle

which hates sin and loves holiness; and the greatest grief of its possessor is, that its aspirations are so often thwarted. But those very thwartings are the testings of faith, and should daily drive us back to Christ for fresh cleansings. Lord, increase our faith.

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