

The Doctrine of Sanctification 6. ITS SOLUTION

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Transcript

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6. ITS SOLUTION

In connection with the grand truth of sanctification there is both a mystery and a problem: the former relates to the unregenerate; the latter is what exercises so deeply the regenerate. That which is hidden from the understanding of the natural man is, why his best performances are unacceptable unto God, no matter how earnestly and devoutly they be done. Even though he be informed that the tree must be made good if its fruit is to be wholesome, in other words, that his very state and nature must first be made acceptable unto God before any of his works can be so, he has not the remotest idea of how this is to be accomplished. But that which perplexes the spiritual man is, how one who is still full of sin may justly regard his state and nature as being acceptable unto God, and how one who is a mass of corruption within can honestly claim to be holy. As the Lord is pleased to enable we will consider each in turn. The natural man is quite ignorant of the mystery of sanctification. Though he may—under the spur of conscience, the fear of Hell, or from desire to go to Heaven—be very diligent in seeking to conquer the activities of indwelling sin and exceedingly zealous in performing every known duty, yet he is quite in the dark as to why his state must be changed before his actions can be acceptable unto God. That upon which he is unenlightened is, that it is not the matter which makes a work good and pleasing to God, but the principles from which that work proceeds. It is true that the conscience of the natural man distinguishes between good and evil, and religious instruction may educate him to do much which is right and avoid much that is wrong; nevertheless, his actions are not done out of gratitude and in a spirit of loving obedience, but out of fear and from a servile spirit; and therefore are they like fruit ripened by art and forced in the hothouse, rather than normally by the genial rays of the sun. "Now the end (design) of the commandment (or law) is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned" (I Tim. 1:5). Nothing less than this will meet the Divine requirements. Only those actions are pleasing to God which have respect unto His commandment, which proceed from gratitude unto Him for His goodness, and where faith has respect unto His promised acceptance and blessing. No works are approved of Heaven except they possess these qualities. A sense of duty must sway the conscience, disinterested affection must move the heart, and faith in exercise must direct the actions. Hence, should I be asked why I do thus and so? the answer should be, Because God has commanded it. And if it be further enquired, And why such earnestness and affection? the answer ought to be, Because God requires my best, and I desire to honour Him with the

same. Obedience respects God's authority; love, His kindness; faith, His bounty or reward. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). This must be our design—the glory of God—if our actions are to meet with His approval. Whether it be the discharge of our temporal duties, the performing of deeds of charity and kindness, or acts of piety and devotion, they must be executed with this aim: that God may be honored by our conformity to His revealed will. The natural man, when in sore straits, will cry fervently unto God, but it is only that his wants be supplied. Many will contribute liberally of their means to the relief of sufferers, but it is to be seen of men" (Matt. 6:2). People are religious on the Sabbath and attend public worship, but it is either to satisfy an uneasy conscience or in the hope of earning Heaven thereby. From what has been said above it should be clear that the best deeds of the unregenerate fall far short of the Divine requirements. The actions of the natural man cannot receive the approbation of Heaven, because God is neither the beginning nor the end of them: love for Him is not their spring, glorifying Him is not their aim. Instead, they issue from the workings of corrupt self, and they have in view only the advancement of self. Nor can it be otherwise. Water will not rise above its own level, or flow uphill. A pure stream cannot issue from an impure fountain. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3 :6), and will never be anything but flesh: educate, refine, religionize the flesh all we may, it can never become spirit. The man himself must be sanctified, before his actions are purified. But how shall men be sanctified so as to be suited unto the presence of an infinitely pure God? By nature they are utterly without holiness: they are "corrupt, filthy, an unclean thing." They have no more power to make themselves holy than they have to create a world. We could tame a tiger from the jungle far more easily than we could our lusts. We might empty the ocean more quickly than we could banish pride from our souls. We might melt marble more readily than our hard hearts. We might purge the sea of salt more easily than we could our beings of sin. "For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God" (Jer. 2:22). Why "when we were in our best condition by nature, when we were in the state of original holiness, when we were in Adam vested with the image of God, we preserved it not. How much less likely then, is it, that now, in the state of lapsed and depraved nature, it is in our power to restore ourselves, to reintroduce the image of God into our souls, and that in a far more eminent manner than it was at first created by God? What needed all that contrivance of infinite wisdom and grace for the reparation of our nature by Jesus Christ, if holiness, wherein it doth consist, be in our power, and educed out of the natural faculties of our souls? There can be no more fond imagination befall the minds of men, than that defiled nature is able to cleanse itself, or depraved nature to rectify itself, or we, who have lost that image of God which He created in us, and with us, should create it again in ourselves by our own endeavours" (John Owen). Yet, let it be pointed out that this impotency to measure up to the requirements of God is no mere innocent infirmity, but a highly culpable thing, which greatly aggravates our vileness and adds to our guilt. Our inability to measure up to the standard of personal piety which God has appointed, lies not in a lack of executive power or the needful faculties, but in the want of a willing mind and a ready heart to practice true holiness. If men in a natural state had a hearty love and liking to true holiness, and a fervent and sincere endeavour to practice it, and yet failed in the event, then they might under some pretence plead for this excuse (as many do), that they are compelled to sin by an inevitable necessity. But the fact is that man's impotency lies in his own obstinacy—"Ye will not come to Me" (John 5:40) said the Lord Jesus. Inability to pay a debt does not excuse a debtor who has recklessly squandered his estate; nor does drunkenness excuse the mad or violent actions of a drunkard, but rather aggravates his crime. God has not lost His right to command, even though man through his wickedness has lost his power to obey. Because the flesh "lusteth against the Spirit" (Gal. 5:17), that is far from an extenuation for not being in subjection to Him. Because "every one that doeth evil hateth the light," that is far from justifying them because they "loved darkness" (John

3:19, 20); yea, as the Saviour there so plainly and solemnly states, it only serves to heighten their criminality—"This is the condemnation." Then "How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" (Job 15:16) that cannot practice holiness because he will not. It is because men do not make a right use of their faculties that they are justly condemned. The soul in an unsanctified person is not dead, but is a living and acting principle; and therefore it is able to understand, desire, will, reason, and improve its opportunities, or redeem the time. Though the natural man is unable to work grace in his own heart, yet he is able to attend and wait upon the means of grace. An unsanctified person may as well go to hear a sermon as attend a theatre: he has the same eyes for reading the Scriptures as the newspaper or a novel: he may as well associate himself with those who fear an oath, as with those who delight to blaspheme that Name at which all should tremble. In the day of judgment unsanctified persons will be damned not for cannots, but for will not:. Men complain that they cannot purify themselves, that they cannot cease from sin, that they cannot repent, that they cannot believe in Christ, that they cannot live a holy life. But if only they were honest, if they were duly humbled, if they sincerely grieved over the awful hold which sin has obtained upon them, they would fly to the throne of grace, they would cry unto God day and night for Him to break the chains which bind them, deliver them from the power of Satan and translate them into the kingdom of His dear Son. If they were but sincere in their complaint of inability, they would go to God and beg Him to sprinkle clean water upon them, put His Spirit within them, and give them a new heart, so that they might walk in His statutes and keep His judgments (Ezek. 36:25-28). And it is just because they will not, that their blood justly lies upon their own heads. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded" (James 4:8). Outward separation from that which is evil and polluting is not sufficient: purity of heart is also indispensable. "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Psa. 51:6). The Divine law not only prohibits stealing, but also insists "Thou shall not covet," which is a lusting of our souls rather than an external act. Holiness of nature is required by the law, for how else shall a man love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and his neighbour as himself? God is essentially holy by nature, and nothing can be so contrary to Him as an unholy nature. Nothing can be so contrary as opposite natures. How can a wolf and a lamb, or vulture and a dove, dwell together? "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. 6:14, 15). How, then, is this mystery cleared up? By what method, or in what way, have the sanctified become blest with a nature which makes them meet for the ineffable presence of God? By what process does the evil tree become good, so that its fruit is wholesome and acceptable? Obviously, we cannot here supply the full answer to these questions, or we should be anticipating too much that we desire to bring out in later chapters. But we will endeavor to now indicate, at least, the direction in which and the lines along which this great mystery is cleared—lines which most assuredly would never have entered our hearts and minds to so much as conceive; but which once they are viewed by anointed eyes, are seen to be Divine and satisfying. The Lord graciously assist us to steer clear of the rocks of error and guide us into the clear and refreshing waters of the truth. As we have shown, it was quite impossible—though it was their bounden duty—for those whom God sanctifies to personally answer the requirements of His holy law: "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?" (Prov. 20:9). Wherefore, for the satisfaction of the law, which requires absolute purity of nature, it was settled as one of the articles in the Everlasting Covenant, that Christ, the Representative of all who would be sanctified, should be a Man of an untainted and perfectly pure nature, which fully met the requirements of the law: "For such an High Priest became us—holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). The meeting of that requirement necessitated two things: first, that the Head of His people should be born with a holy human nature; second, that He should retain that holiness of nature inviolate unto the end. Let us consider, briefly, each of these separately. There was a holy nature given to

Adam as the Root of mankind, to be kept by him and transmitted to his posterity by natural generation. Upon that ground the law requires all men to be born holy, and pronounces them unclean and "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3) in the contrary. But how can this demand be met by those who are born in sin? They cannot enter again into their mother's womb, and be born a second time without sin. Even so, the law will not abate its demand. Wherefore it was provided that Christ, the last Adam, should, as the Representative and Root of His spiritual seed, be born perfectly holy; that whereas they brought a sinful nature into the world with them, He should be born "that holy thing" (Luke 1:35). Consequently, in the reckoning of the law all believers are born holy in the last Adam. They are said to be "circumcised" by the circumcision of Christ (Col. 2:11), and circumcision necessarily presupposes birth! But more was required. It was necessary that the Second Man should preserve His holy nature free from all spot or defilement, as He passed through this world of sin. The law not only demands holiness of nature, but also that the purity and integrity of that nature be preserved. Wherefore to satisfy this "demand," it was provided that the believers' federal Head should preserve His ineffable purity unstained. "He shall not fail" (Isa. 42:4). The first man did fail: the fine gold soon became dim: the holiness of his nature was quickly extinguished by sin. But the Second Man failed not: neither man nor devil could corrupt Him. He preserved the holiness of His nature unstained, even to the end of His life. And so of His sanctified, viewing them in Himself, He declares, "Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee" (Song of 5:4:7). But while that completely meets the judicial side, satisfying the demands of the law, something more was yet required to satisfy the heart of God and meet the experimental needs of His people. In view of their being actually defiled in Adam when he sinned, they are defiled in their own persons so that not only is his guilt imputed to them, but his corruption is imparted to them in the nature they have received from him by generation. Therefore, not only were the elect legally born holy in Christ their Head, but from Him they also receive a holy nature: it is written, "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). This is accomplished by that gracious and supernatural working of the third person in the Godhead, whereby the elect are vitally united to their head so that "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Our being united to Christ, through the Spirit, by faith, makes us partakers of the same spiritual and holy nature with Him, as really and as actually as Eve (type of the Church) was made of one nature with Adam, being bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Because believers are united to Christ the Holy One, they are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2). The believer being one with Christ is made "a new creature," because He is such a Stock as changes the graft into its own nature: "If the Root be holy, so are the branches" (Rom. 11:16). The same Spirit which Christ received "without measure" (John 3:34) is communicated to the members of His body, so that it can be said, "Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Being united to Christ by faith, and through the communication of the quickening Spirit from Christ unto him, the believer is thereupon not only justified and reconciled to God, but sanctified, made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and made an heir of God.

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