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SANCTIFICATION:
WHAT IS IT?

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Sanctification: What Is It?

To minister peace and comfort to those who, though truly converted, have not laid hold of a full Christ, and who, as a consequence, are not enjoying the liberty of the Gospel, is the object we have in view in considering the important and deeply-interesting subject of sanctification. We believe that very many of those whose spiritual welfare we desire to promote suffer materially from defective or erroneous ideas on this vital question. Indeed, in some cases, the doctrine of sanctification is so entirely misapprehended as to interfere with the faith of the believer's perfect justification and acceptance before God.

For example, we have frequently heard persons speak of sanctification as a progressive work, in virtue of which our old nature is to be made gradually better; and, moreover, that until this process has reached its climax, until fallen and corrupt humanity has become completely sanctified, we are not fit for heaven.

Now, so far as this view of the question is concerned, we have only to say that both Scripture and the truthful experience of all believers are entirely against it. The Word of God never once teaches us that the Holy Spirit has for His object the improvement, either gradual or otherwise, of our old nature -- that nature which we inherit, by natural birth, from fallen Adam. The inspired apostle expressly declares that, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). This one passage is clear and conclusive on the point. If "the natural man" can neither "receive" nor "know" "the things of the Spirit of God," then how can that "natural man" be sanctified by the Holy Ghost? Is it not plain that to speak of "sanctification of our nature" is opposed to the direct teaching of 1 Cor 2:14?

Other passages might be adduced to prove that the design of the Spirit's operations is not to improve or sanctify the flesh, but there is no need to multiply quotations. An utterly ruined thing can never be sanctified. Do what you will with it, it is ruined; and, most assuredly, the Holy Ghost did not come down to sanctify a ruin, but to lead the ruined one to Jesus. So far from any attempt to sanctify the flesh, we read that "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are

contrary the one to the other" (Gal 5:17). Could the Holy Ghost be represented as carrying on a warfare with that which He is gradually improving and sanctifying? Would not the conflict cease so soon as the process of improvement had reached its climax? But does the believer's conflict ever cease so long as he is in the body?

This leads us to the second objection, to the erroneous theory of the progressive sanctification of our nature, namely, the objection drawn from the truthful experience of all believers. Is the reader a true believer? If so, has he found any improvement in his old nature? Is it a single whit better now than it was when he first started on his Christian course? He may, and should through grace, be able to subdue it more thoroughly; but it is nothing better. If it be not mortified, it is just as ready to spring up and show itself in all its vileness as ever. "The flesh" in a believer is in no wise better than "the flesh" in an unbeliever. And if the Christian does not bear in mind that self must be judged, he will soon learn by bitter experience that his old nature is as bad as ever; and, moreover, that it will be the very same to the end.

It is difficult to conceive how anyone who is led to expect a gradual improvement of his nature, can enjoy an hour's peace, inasmuch as he cannot but see, if he only looks at himself in the light of God's Holy Word, his old self -- the flesh -- is the very same as when he walked in the moral darkness of his unconverted state. His own condition and character are, indeed, greatly changed by the possession of a new, yea, a "divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4), and by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, to give effect to its desires; but the moment the old nature is at work, he finds it as opposed to God as ever. We doubt not but that very much of the gloom and despondency, of which so many complain, may be justly traced to their misapprehension of this important point of sanctification. They are looking for what they can never find. They are seeking for a ground of peace in a sanctified nature instead of in a perfect sacrifice -- in a progressive work of holiness instead of in a finished work of atonement. They deem it presumptuous to believe that their sins are forgiven until their evil nature is completely sanctified; and, seeing that this end is not reached, they have no settled assurance of pardon, and are therefore miserable. In a word, they are seeking for a "foundation" totally different from that which Jehovah says He has laid, and, therefore, they have no certainty whatever. The only thing that ever seems to

give them a ray of comfort is some apparently successful effort in the struggle for personal sanctity. If they have had a good day -- if they are favored with a season of comfortable communion -- if they happen to enjoy a peaceful, devotional frame, they are ready to cry out, "Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong; I shall never be moved" (Psalm 30).

But, ah! These things furnish a sorry foundation for the soul's peace. They are not Christ; and until we see that our standing before God is in Christ, there cannot be settled peace. The soul that has really got hold of Christ is desirous indeed of holiness; but if intelligent of what Christ is to him, he has done with all thoughts about sanctified nature. He has found his all in Christ, and the paramount desire of his heart is to grow into His likeness. This is true, practical sanctification.

It frequently happens that persons, in speaking of sanctification, mean a right thing, although they do not express themselves according to the teaching of Holy Scripture. There are many also, who see one side of the truth as to sanctification, but not the other; and, although we should be sorry to make any one an offender for a word, yet it is always most desirable, in speaking of any point of truth, and especially of so vital a point as that of sanctification, to speak according to the divine integrity of the Word. We shall, therefore, proceed to quote for our readers a few of the leading passages from the New Testament in which this doctrine is unfolded. These passages will teach us two things, namely, what sanctification is, and how it is effected.

The first passage to which we would call attention is 1 Cor 1:30: "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Here we learn that Christ "is made unto us" all these things. God has given us, in Christ, a precious casket, and when we open that casket with the key of faith, the first gem that glitters in our view, in this wisdom of God, is "righteousness"; then, "sanctification"; and lastly, "redemption." We have them all in Christ. As we get one so we get all. And how do we get one and all? By faith. But why does the apostle name redemption last? Because it takes in the final deliverance of the body of the believer from under the power of mortality, when the voice of the archangel and the trump of God shall either raise it from the tomb, or change it, in the twinkling of an eye. Will this act be progressive? Clearly not; it will be done "in the twinkling of an eye."

The body is in one state now, and "in a moment" it will be in another. In the brief point of time expressed by the rapid movement of the eyelash, will the body pass from corruption to incorruption; from dishonor to glory; from weakness to power. What a change! It will be immediate, complete, eternal.

But what are we to learn from the fact that "sanctification" is placed in the group with "redemption"? We learn that what redemption will be to the body, that sanctification is now to the soul. In a word, sanctification, in the sense in which it is here used, is immediate, and complete, a divine work. The one is no more progressive than the other. The one is as immediate as the other. The one is as complete and as independent of man as the other. No doubt, when the body shall have undergone the glorious change, there will be heights of glory to be trodden, depths of glory to be penetrated, wide fields of glory to be explored. All these things shall occupy us throughout eternity. But, then, the work which is to fit us for such scenes will be done in a moment. So also is it, in reference to sanctification. The practical results of it will be continually developing themselves; but the thing itself, as spoken of in this passage, is done in a moment.

What an immense relief it would be to thousands of earnest, anxious, struggling souls to get a proper hold of Christ as their sanctification! How many are vainly endeavoring to work out a sanctification for themselves! They have come to Christ for righteousness after many fruitless efforts to get a righteousness of their own; but they are seeking after sanctification in a different way altogether. They have gotten "righteousness without works," but they imagine they must get sanctification with works. They have gotten righteousness by faith, but they imagine they must get sanctification by effort. They do not see that we get sanctification in precisely the same way as we get righteousness, inasmuch as Christ "is made unto us" the one as well as the other. Do we get Christ by effort? No; by faith. It is "to him that worketh not" (Rom 4:5). This applies to all that we get in Christ. We have no warrant whatever to single out from 1 Cor 1:30 the matter of "sanctification" and place it upon a different footing from all the other blessings which it enfolds. We have neither wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, nor redemption in ourselves; nor can we procure them by aught that we can do; but God has made Christ to be unto us all these things. In giving us Christ, He gave us all that is in Christ. The fullness of Christ is ours, and Christ is the

fullness of God.

Again, in Acts 26:18, the converted Gentiles are spoken of as "receiving forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith." Here, faith is the instrument by which we are said to be sanctified, because it connects us with Christ. The very moment the sinner believes on the Lord Jesus Christ he becomes linked to Him. He is made one with Him, complete in Him, accepted in Him. This is true sanctification and justification. It is not a process. It is not a gradual work. It is not progressive. The Word is very explicit. It says, "them which are sanctified by faith which is in me." It does not say, "which shall be sanctified," or, "which are being sanctified." If such were the doctrine it would have been so stated.

No doubt, the believer grows in the knowledge of this sanctification, in his sense of its power and value, its practical influence and results, the experience and enjoyment of it. As "the truth" pours its divine light upon his soul, he enters into a more profound apprehension of what is involved in being "set apart" for Christ, in the midst of this evil world. All this is blessedly true; but the more its truth is seen, the more clearly we shall understand that sanctification is not merely a progressive work, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, but that it is one result of our being linked to Christ, by faith whereby we become partakers of all that He is. This is an immediate, a complete, and an eternal work. "Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it" (Eccles 3:14). Whether He justifies or sanctifies, "it shall be forever." The stamp of eternity is fixed upon every work of God's hand: "nothing can be put to it," and, blessed be His name, "nothing can be taken from it."

There are passages which present the subject in another aspect, -- the practical result in the believer of his sanctification in Christ, and which may require fuller consideration hereafter. In 1 Thess 5:23, the apostle prays for the saints whom he addresses: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here, the Word is applied to a sanctification admitting of degrees. The Thessalonians had, along with all believers, a perfect sanctification in Christ; but as to the practical enjoyment and display of this, it was only accomplished in part, and the apostle prays that they may be wholly sanctified.

In this passage, it is worthy of notice, that nothing is said of "the flesh." Our fallen, corrupt nature is always treated as a hopelessly ruined thing. It has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. It has been measured by a divine rule and found short. It has been tried by a perfect plummet and proved crooked. God has set it aside. Its "end has come before him." He has condemned it and put it to death (Rom 8:3). Our old man is crucified, dead, and buried (Rom 6:8). Are we, then, to imagine for a moment, that God the Holy Ghost came down from heaven for the purpose of exhuming a condemned, crucified, and buried thing, so that He might sanctify it? The idea has only to be named, to be abandoned forever by every one who bows to the authority of Scripture. The more closely we study the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms, and the entire New Testament, the more closely we shall see that the flesh is wholly unmendable. It is absolutely good for nothing. The Spirit does not sanctify it, but He enables the believer to mortify it. We are told to "put off the old man." This precept would never have been delivered to us if the object of the Holy Ghost were the sanctification of that "old man."

We trust that no one will accuse us of entertaining a desire to lower the standard of personal holiness, or to weaken the soul's earnest aspirations after a growth in that purity for which every true believer must ardently long. God forbid! If there is one thing above another which we desire to promote in ourselves and others, it is a full personal purity -- a godly practical sanctity -- a wholehearted separation to God -- from all evil, -- in every shape and form. For this we long, for this we pray, in this we desire to grow daily.

But then we are fully convinced that a superstructure of true, practical holiness can never be erected on a legal basis; and hence it is that we press I Cor 1:30, upon the attention of our readers. It is to be feared that many who have, in some measure, abandoned the legal ground, in the matter of "righteousness," are yet lingering thereon for "sanctification." We believe this to be the mistake of thousands, and we are most anxious to see it corrected. The passage before us would, if simply received into the heart by faith, entirely correct this serious mistake.

All intelligent Christians are agreed as to the fundamental truth of "Righteousness without works." All freely and fully admit that we cannot, by any efforts of our own, work out a righteousness for ourselves before God. But it is not just so clearly seen

that righteousness and sanctification are put upon precisely the same ground in the Word of God. We can no more work out a sanctification than we can work out a righteousness. We may try it, but we shall, sooner or later, find out that it is utterly vain. We may vow and resolve; we may labor and struggle; we may cherish the fond hope of doing better tomorrow than we have done today; but, in the end, we must be constrained to see, and feel, and own, that as regards the matter of sanctification, we are as completely "without strength" as we have already proved ourselves to be in the matter of righteousness.

And, oh! What sweet relief to the suffering one who has been seeking for satisfaction or rest in his own holiness to find, after years of unsuccessful struggle, that the very thing he longs for is treasured up in Christ for him -- his own this moment, even a complete sanctification to be enjoyed by faith! Such a one may have been battling with his habits, his lusts, his tempers, his passions; he has been making the most laborious efforts to subdue his flesh and grow in inward holiness. But alas, he has failed! He finds, to his deep sorrow, that he is not holy, and he reads that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Not, observe, without a certain measure, or attainment in holiness, but without the thing itself; which every Christian has, from the moment he believes, whether he knows it or not. Perfect sanctification is as fully included in the word "salvation" as is "righteousness," or "redemption." He did not get Christ by effort, but by faith; and when he laid hold on Christ he received all that is in Christ. Hence, it is by abiding in Christ he finds power for the subjugation of his lusts, passions, tempers, habits, circumstances, and influences. He must look to Jesus for all.

All this is simple to faith. The believer's standing is in Christ, and if in Christ for one thing, he is in Christ for all. I am not in Christ for righteousness, and out of Christ for sanctification. If I am a debtor to Christ for righteousness, I am equally a debtor to Him for sanctification. I am not a debtor to legalism for either the one or the other. I get both by grace, through faith, and all in Christ. Yes, all -- all in Christ. The moment the sinner comes to Christ, and believes on Him, he is taken completely off the old ground of nature; he loses his old legal standing and all its belongings, and is looked at as in Christ. He is no longer "in the flesh" but "in the Spirit" (Rom 8:9). God only sees him in Christ, and as Christ. He becomes one with Christ forever. "As he is, so

are we in this world" (1 John 4). Such is the absolute standing, the settled and eternal position, of the very feeblest babe in the family of God. There is but one standing for every child of God, every member of Christ. Their knowledge, experience, power, gift, and intelligence, may vary; but their standing is one. Whatever of righteousness or sanctification they possess, they owe it all to their being in Christ; consequently, if they have not gotten a perfect sanctification, neither have they gotten a perfect righteousness. But 1 Cor 1:30 distinctly teaches that Christ "is made" both the one and the other to all believers. It does not say that we have righteousness and "a measure of sanctification." We have just as much scriptural authority for putting the word "measure" before righteousness as before sanctification. The Spirit of God does not put it before either. Both are perfect, and we have both in Christ. God never does anything by halves. There is no such thing as a half justification. Neither is there such a thing as a half sanctification. The idea of a member of the family of God, or of the body of Christ, wholly justified, but only half sanctified, is at once opposed to Scripture, and revolting to all sensibilities of the divine nature.

It is not improbable that very much of the misapprehension which prevails in reference to sanctification is traceable to the habit of confounding two things which differ very materially, namely our standing and our walk, or position and condition. The believer's standing is perfect because it is the gift of God in Christ. His walk, alas, may be very imperfect, fluctuating, and marked with personal infirmity. Whilst his position is absolute and unalterable, his practical condition may exhibit manifold imperfections, inasmuch as he is still in the body and surrounded by various hostile influences which affect his moral condition from day to day. If, then, his standing be measured by his walk, his position by his condition, what he is in God's view by what he is in man's, the result must be false. If I reason from what I am in myself, instead of from what I am in Christ, I must, of necessity, arrive at a wrong conclusion.

We should look carefully to this. We are very much disposed to reason upward from ourselves to God, instead of downward from God to us.

We should bear in mind that

"Far as heaven's resplendent orbs
Beyond earth's spot extend,
As far My thoughts, as far My ways,
Your ways and thoughts transcend."

God looks on His people, and acts toward them, too, according to their standing in Christ. He has given them this standing. He has made them what they are. They are His workmanship. Hence, therefore, to speak of them as half justified would be a dishonor cast upon God; and to speak of them as half sanctified would be just the same.

This train of thought conducts us to another weighty proof drawn from the authoritative and conclusive page of inspiration, namely, 1 Cor 6:11. In the verses preceding, the apostle draws a fearful picture of fallen humanity, and he plainly tells the Corinthian saints that they had been just like that. "Such were some of you." This is plain dealing. There are no flattering words - - no daubing with untempered mortar -- no keeping back the full truth as to nature's total and irretrievable ruin. "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

What a striking contrast between the two sides of the apostle's "but"! On the one side, we have all the moral degradation of man's condition; and, on the other side, we have all the absolute perfectness of the believer's standing before God. This, truly, is a marvelous contrast; and be it remembered that the soul passes in a moment, from one side to the other of this "but." "Such were some of you: but ye are" now something quite different. The moment they received Paul's Gospel, they were "washed, sanctified, and justified." They were fit for heaven; and, had they not been so, it would have been a slur upon the divine workmanship.

"'Clean every whit,' thou saidst it, Lord;
Shall one suspicion lurk?
Thine, surely, is a faithful word,
And Thine a finished work."

This is divinely true. The most inexperienced believer is

"clean every whit," not as a matter of attainment, but as the necessary result of being in Christ. He will, no doubt, grow in the knowledge and experience of what sanctification really is. He will enter into its practical power; its moral effects upon his habits, thoughts, feelings, affections, and associations: in a word, he will understand and exhibit the mighty influence of divine sanctification upon his entire course, conduct, and character. But, then, he was as completely sanctified, in God's view, the moment he became linked to Christ by faith, as he will be when he comes to bask in the sunlight of the divine presence, and reflect back the concentrated beams of glory emanating from the throne of God and of the Lamb. He is in Christ now; and he will be in Christ then. His sphere and his circumstances will differ. His feet shall stand upon the golden pavement of the upper sanctuary, instead of standing upon the arid sand of the desert. He will be in a body of glory, instead of a body of humiliation; but as to his standing, his acceptance, his completeness, his justification, and sanctification, all was settled the moment he believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God -- as settled as ever it will be, because as settled as God could make it. All this seems to flow as a necessary and unanswerable inference from I Cor 6:11.

It is of the utmost importance to apprehend, with clearness, the distinction between a truth and the practical application and result of a truth. This distinction is ever maintained in the Word of God. "Ye are sanctified." Here is the absolute truth as to the believer, as viewed in Christ. The practical application of it, and its results in the believer, we find in such passages as these. "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (Eph 5:25-26). And "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1 Thess 5:23).

But how is this application made, and this result reached? By the Holy Ghost, through the written Word. Hence we read, "Sanctify them through thy truth" (John 17). And again, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess 2:13). So also, in Peter, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit" (1 Pet 1:2). The Holy Ghost carries on the believer's practical sanctification on the ground of Christ's accomplished work; and the mode in which He does so is by applying to the heart and conscience the truth as it is in Jesus.

He unfolds the truth as to our perfect standing before God in Christ, and, by energizing the new man in us, He enables us to put away everything incompatible with that perfect standing. A man who is "washed, sanctified, and justified," ought not to indulge in any unhallowed temper, lust, or passion. He is separated to God and should "cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." It is his holy and happy privilege to breathe after the very loftiest heights of personal sanctity. His heart and his habits should be brought and held under the power of that grand truth that he is perfectly "washed, sanctified, and justified."

This is true practical sanctification. It is not any attempt at the improvement of our old nature. It is not a vain effort to reconstruct an irretrievable ruin. No; it is simply the Holy Ghost, by the powerful application of "the truth," enabling the new man to live, and move, and have his being in that sphere to which he belongs. Here there will undoubtedly be progress. There will be growth in the moral power of this precious truth -- growth in spiritual ability to subdue and keep under all that pertains to nature -- a growing power of separation from the evil around us -- a growing meekness for that heaven to which we belong, and toward which we are journeying -- a growing capacity for the enjoyment of its holy exercises. All this there will be, through the gracious ministry of the Holy Ghost, who uses the Word of God to unfold to our souls the truth as to our standing in Christ, and as to the walk which comports with such standing. But let it be clearly understood that the work of the Holy Ghost in practical sanctification, day by day, is founded upon the fact that believers "are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once" (Heb 10:10). The object of the Holy Ghost is to lead us into the knowledge, the experience, and the practical exhibition of that which was true of us in Christ the very moment we believed. As regards this, there is progress; but our standing in Christ is eternally complete.

"Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). And again, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (1 Thess 5:23). In these passages, we have the grand practical side of this question. Here we see sanctification presented, not merely as something absolutely and eternally true of us in Christ, but also as wrought out in us, daily and hourly, by the Holy Ghost through the Word. Looked at from this point of view, sanctification is obviously a progressive thing. I should be more advanced in personal holiness next year than I was in this. I should, through

grace, be advancing, day by day, in practical holiness. But what, let me ask, is this? What, but the working out in me of that which was true of me in Christ, the very moment I believed? The basis on which the Holy Ghost carries on the subjective work in the believer is the objective truth of his eternal completeness in Christ.

Again, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Here is holiness presented as a thing to be "followed after" -- to be attained by earnest pursuit -- a thing which every true believer will long to cultivate.

May the Lord lead us into the power of these things. May they not dwell as doctrines and dogmas in the region of our intellect, but enter into and abide in the heart, as sacred and powerfully influential realities! May we know the sanctifying power of the truth (John 17:17); the sanctifying power of faith (Acts 26:18); the sanctifying power of the name of Jesus (1 Cor 1:30; 6:11); the sanctifying of the Holy Ghost (1 Pet 1:2); the sanctifying grace of the Father (Jude 1).

And, now, unto the Father and unto the Son and unto the Holy Ghost, be honor and glory, might, majesty, and dominion, world without end. Amen.