

The King's Highway.

way shall there be, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness:

The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

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SANCTIFICATION

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Text: I Thess 4-3. "For this is the Will of God, your sanctification."

I wish this morning to present to you the great subject of Sanctification. You will notice that in reading the text I omit a little word which is often rather emphasized—the word "even." "This is the will of God, even your sanctification," is the way it is usually quoted, and the word is in the English text, but in italics—the sign that it is not in the original—in the Bible proper—but supplied by the Translator.

So Paul says to the Corinthians, "And this also we wish, your perfection," and the translator also put in there the word "even." We suppose the reason he put in this word is that he rated sanctification, or perfection, as extraordinary. Well, in modern times it certainly has not been the common experience of professing Christians, but as the Bible presents it, it ought to be the common experience of God's people. Christ gave His ministers for the perfecting of the saints; and the life into which sanctification brings His people is the normal life of the Christian.

This experience should not be regarded as the steeple to a church—not necessary, but proper to top-off. It is the temple itself, or rather the inner sanctuary of the temple, while justification is but the vestibule. Dr Chas Hodge says: "Justification is in order to sanctification, and his son, A A Hodge: "We are justified that we may be sanctified." Sanctification is necessary to fully Christianize man. There were no Christians, in the proper sense of the word, till Pentecost, and there can be no true Christians without the Pentecostal experience. Sanctification is essential to make us "perfect and complete in all the will of God;" "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."

Habitually we pray, "Thy will be done." But what is God's will? Paul says to the Ephesians: "Understanding what the will of the Lord is." This sets us searching the Scriptures which reveal God's will. The margin refers us to our text. And this again to the next chapter, "For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you;" and a little farther down, "Faithful is he, which calleth you, who also will do it." Do what? Sanctify you wholly. So Paul beseeches the Romans to consecrate, that they might "prove [by experience] what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God." Thus we find sanctification frequently presented as the will of God.

But what is sanctification? Strictly speaking, it is not the same as holiness. There is a distinction in the significance of the two words. Holiness is a moral quality, or state; sanctification is the experience by which we get that quality, by which we are brought into that state. Holiness is the life we live we after we have been sanctified. The great German exegete, Delitzsch, says, "Sanctification is not holiness; but is the putting on of it—the becoming holy." The discriminating Dr Godet explains thus. "In the cure of the soul, pardon is the crisis of convalescence, sanctification is the restoration to health, holiness is true life."

Now, I want to give you definitions of sanctification from three illustrious Johns.

First, John Fletcher: "It is the depth of evangelical repentance, the full assurance of faith, and the pure love of God and man shed abroad in a faithful believer's heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him, to cleanse him and to keep him clean from all the filthiness of the flesh and spirit, to enable him to fulfill the law of Christ according to the talents he is intrusted with and the circumstances in which he is placed in this world."

John Owen: "To be cleansed from the defilement of sin, whatever that may be; to have a heart inclined, disposed, enabled, to fear the Lord always, and to walk in all His ways and statutes accordingly, with an internal, habitual conformity of the whole soul unto the law of God, is to be sanctified, or to be holy."

John Wesley: "Sanctification in the proper sense, is an instantaneous deliverance from all sin, and includes an instantaneous power, then given, always to cleave to God." How discriminating! Wesley recognized that the word is used in secondary and accommodated senses; but here he gives the proper meaning. Why does he say, "an instantaneous deliverance?" Because he knows that the instantaneous tense in the Greek is nearly always used with the verb to sanctify. Why does he say "from all sin?" Because the Greek aorist tense in the imperative mode—which Jesus used in His prayer, for the sanctification of His disciples and Paul for the Thessalonians, always means instantly and completely. But sanctification is not only the elimination of all sin. Properly it includes a power given to cleave to God. And this power is not an after-experience. It belongs to sanctification—is then given.

My definition is this; "Sanctification is a work of grace wrought in a believer by the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire, given by Jesus Christ, purifying him from all sin, and perfecting him in love."

Our second question is: For whom is this sanctification? "This is the will of God, the sanctification of you"—as it is in the original. What kind of people were the ones thus addressed? We find Paul's estimate of them from reading the epistle.

About the close of the letter he says: "Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss." Surely an unconverted person could not do that. The kiss of Judas was unholy. These Thessalonians must have had the quality of holiness in some degree, to be able to give a holy kiss.

In the next verse Paul says: "I charge you by the Lord that this Epistle be read unto all the holy brethren." So those to whom the epistle was sent, and to whom our text applied, were in some sense already "holy."

Let me make a distinction here. Regeneration is a holy experience—an experience of holiness. When we are regenerated, we get holiness; when we are sanctified, we are made holy. ("Amen") Regeneration is the impartation of holy life. In the regenerate the principle of holiness is implanted, and they are holy, but not all holy. (Amen, That is it!) Sanctification is the gracious work of God by which all that is contrary to the new life given in regeneration is eliminated from the person, and he is actually and experimentally made holy. Because these Thessalonians were regenerated persons, partakers of His holiness, born of the Spirit, they were of the holy brotherhood.

But look farther. Turn to the first part of the Epistle. Here we see it was addressed to "the church;" and not simply a church organization but the church organism—"in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ"—vitaly connected with God through Christ.

In the second verse Paul expresses his thanks for them.

In the next he declares that he unceasingly remembered their faith and love and hope. Here are the three Christian graces; and these were in lively exercise—"work of faith, labor of love, patience of hope."

Next he says that he knew their election of God. He entertained no doubt that they had been effectually called, and were numbered among the elect.

Next he tells them why he had this assurance concerning them. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Very different this from many of the "conversions" (?) in these days, concerning which there is much doubt all around. The Thessalonians had been "powerfully converted."

Then they became followers, not only of the apostle, but of the Lord; and notwithstanding that they suffered much because of their adherence to Christ and His cause they knew the joy of the Holy Ghost—an essential part of the Kingdom.

They became examples to other believers in all that region round. Samples are always the best. So these Thessalonians were leading Christians. They were "the sample case" of that Gospel traveler, and were well-reputed for their good Christian work; so that it was known all around how they had "turned [literally, converted] to God from idols, to serve the living and true God."

And they were possessed of the blessed hope—the pole-star of the church in all ages, waiting for the return of Jesus from heaven.

Now, this is a good, long bill of particulars touching the Christian character of those for whom God willed sanctification. Much more might be said on this line, were it necessary. But certainly no more is needed to show that they were thoroughly converted to Jesus Christ.

But would some one suggest the possibility of their having backslidden? This point is well-guarded. In the third chapter the apostle confesses that he had entertained some fears "lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain." So, when he could no longer forbear, he sent Timothy to find out how it fared with them. But when this man of God returned with good tidings of their faith and love and good remembrance, the apostle was greatly comforted over them by their faith.

Still, they were the objects of the solicitude of Paul. He told them that he was praying night and day exceedingly in their behalf. Why? Because he wanted to go to them and perfect that which was lacking in their faith. Not to indoctrinate them more fully, but to bring them a fuller knowledge of the great salvation through faith—"to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God." Here it is: Holiness; heart holiness; unblameable heart holiness; establishment in unblameable heart holiness. Here is the will of God, and for this kind of persons. Between the lids of the Bible nowhere will you find that sanctifica-

tion is promised to, prayed for, or urged upon any who are not the true children of God. It is an experience for those only who are already abiding and persevering in Christ—the elect of God. "It is not God's will that anybody else should have it. God loved the world and gave His only begotten Son that the world should be saved. But Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it that He might sanctify it."

Our next question is: What is the will of God?

(1) It is God's law. The briefest and most satisfactory definition of the divine law is, the will of God. Certainly that law which itself is holy, just and good, can demand nothing less than holiness in the subjects of the Kingdom of God. So it is the divine requirement that all His children who have not received the distinctive experience that makes holy, be sanctified.

Beloved! If we have due respect to the law of God, we surely must assent and consent to the doctrine and experience presented in the text this afternoon. This is the demand of God, your sanctification. I appeal to you, as children of God—as obedient children—be ye yourselves also holy. Why? Because so it is written, "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy." What is written is for our guidance—the rule of our life. Even the devil himself acknowledged this in his temptation of Jesus. He said, "It is written;" and Jesus replied, "It is written again." This is the end of controversy with heaven and hell. And certainly there should be no question as to Christian duty, when it is plainly written. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Why? Many arguments in favor of the sanctification of the Sabbath might be presented; but this is sufficient: so it is written. The holy Scriptures are the sufficient rule of faith and duty. Show me anything God requires in His word, and that is enough. That is a law for me. I am His subject and His child. If I am to be loyal and obedient, I must be sanctified, because my God and Father requires it. It is not a question concerning my desire or the desire of my fellows. It is: what does God demand?

We preachers have no preference in the matter of urging sanctification upon the church. We must preach the preaching He bids us preach. We must shun not to declare all His counsel. I declare that as a man of God and a minister of His Word I would not be loyal and faithful to my charge, did I fail to present this demand of His law, this requirement of His will, your sanctification. "Amen."

And as His child I must be obedient. He reveals to me His will concerning me. I want to obey. Adam fell by refusing to accept the will of God as the rule of his conduct, and I fear there are many persons to-day who have known God's justifying grace, who are fallen from favor and fellowship with God, because the duty to be sanctified, made plain by His word and Spirit—has been neglected. If we are going to continue to stand before Him in peace, we must say, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," and submit to His will, our sanctification.

Again: God's will for his children is His desire. He is not merely the Governor and Judge of all men. Let us not entertain the thought of Him

as the supreme Sovereign who imposes the law, and is exacting and insistent that we shall be holy. He is our Father, and He desires for us the best He has. He wants to see His every son that was dead and lost, but who is now alive and found, clothed with the best robe from Heaven's wardrobe. As he Himself is clothed with light as with a garment, so He would have us walk in the light as He is in the light. He wants us to be like Him in moral character in every particular. As He is light and in Him is no darkness at all. He would have His children to be made clean every whit, that with unsullied holiness they may show forth His praise, in His marvelous light.

And this just suits me. I want you to know, beloved, that I am on this line not merely from a feeling of obligation. If I didn't have to be holy I would want to be. ("Amen! Glory!") If the Lord should say to me, "My Son, you don't have to be sanctified. I do not require it of you. You may go on trying to serve me in your own poor, weak way, and at last I will save you;" I would reply, "No; I thank you." It is a privilege that the angels of glory certainly must prize, and it is a privilege that every redeemed child of God on earth ought to covet and enjoy, to be made holy.

I want to say to you, friends, that I am in the enjoyment of this blessed experience. The catechism says that we should "partake of the several benefits which accompany and flow from sanctification. Well, I am one of them, praise the Lord! I am one of the beneficiaries. It is the fulness of the blessing of Christ. It is the table prepared for us in the presence of our enemies. (Amen!) It is His desire that we all avail ourselves of this unspeakable blessing. He loves us. He yearns over us. He longs to bless us now. He longs to bring us to a place where we can enjoy religion. (Amen!)"

And again: God's will is His purpose to sanctify His children. What He demands and desires He decides for us. "Faithful is he which calleth you, who also will do it." Do what? That for which the apostle prays—sanctify you wholly, and preserve you blameless unto the coming of Jesus. He has taken oath that he will deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

How variously could this divine purpose be proved, illustrated and emphasized.

He wills that I shall holy be. What can withstand His will?

Nothing—if we but pray with real meaning. "Thy will be done," (Amen!)"

And once again: God's will is His provision for our sanctification. That which is in the divine requirement, desire and purpose He provides. The children of God are His heirs. The Holy Ghost speaks of an inheritance among them that are sanctified. Certainly the New Testament in Christ's blood is for our full redemption and fulness of blessing. He devoted Himself that we might be sanctified. He suffered without the gate that He might sanctify us. He loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it. According to the

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