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THE SANCTIFICATION

What it is and What it is Not!

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The sanctification, without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14, R. V.)

Many people among us are seeking this great experience; many are finding it; and then, not understanding just what the nature of the experience is, and what may be rightly expected of it, they get discouraged. The evil one is promptly on hand to take advantage of the situation and lead them to doubt the possibility of the experience, or the reality of it, or the possibility of keeping it. He suggests to the troubled soul to dismiss from his mind the whole subject. If one does it, Satan's victory is complete. Notice then:

I. Sanctification, or its synonym, holiness, is not always attended by ecstatic emotional experiences. When one first receives the blessing, there are usually more or less joyful emotions. But such intense emotional experience is never abiding. In the very nature of the case it cannot be. The human body could not endure the strain. It would make sleep impossible, and make one insane or end life itself.

But ecstasies of joy are no essential part of the experience. Jesus Christ, our model of holiness, was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." To be sure, He had His Mount of Transfiguration; but it lasted only a few hours. He had to go down to the foot of the mount and face disease and suffering, the bloody sweat of Gethsemane, shame and scourging, the thorns and the spear, and the pangs of death! It was not all ecstasy. Neither was it with Abraham trudging that long journey to the top of Moriah to offer up Isaac; nor to Joseph in the pit, and the prison; nor to Jeremiah in the slimy pit of the dungeon; nor to Daniel spending a night with the lions; nor to Paul with his oft-repeated beatings and stonings and imprisonments, his "heaviness and continued sorrow!" No; the most exalted piety is not always abounding in ecstasy and when that is gone Satan will suggest, "There, you have lost your experience." Do not believe him; he is a liar from the beginning! Hold fast by faith all the more firmly, and "endure as seeing him who is invisible." Feeling or no feeling, hold fast by faith.

II. It is not on experience exempt from temptation. Temptations are to your life what the fierce winds are to the oaks on the mountainside. They make them root more deeply and add more strength to their gnarled limbs. The Son of God was not exempt from temptations. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. In other words, it was the Father's will that His only Son, now united to human nature, should be tempted like other mortals, for an example to us as well as for His own good and glory.

Notice how Job was tempted when he had

already got the honorary degree of "perfect and upright" from God Himself. He was bereft of his family, stripped of his property; his wife became his temptress; his friends became cruel slanderers; his reputation taken from him; robbed of his health by the devil! He sat down in the ashes to find some relief for his pain tortured body. Yet "in all this he sinned not nor charged God foolishly."

With heroic faith, though every word and breath cost him a pang, he exclaimed, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him!"

In spite of all Satan could do, God vindicated His keeping grace and Job's holiness to humanity for all coming time. And it all came about through temptation. James said, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:2, 3), A more godlike character.

III. It does not put an end to infirmities. The dear soul that had a poor memory, or was poor in mathematics, or was weak in judgment and the intuitive ability to read the character of others, will be likely to remain so to the end. Knaves will deceive him, frauds will rob him. Very strong-minded people may say of him: "I admit he is a righteous man; but, I declare sometimes, I think he needs a guardian to keep him from follies and blunders!" One of the best Christians and most effective Christian workers I ever knew had scarcely enough pennies to clink together in his pocket when he died, but he was rich in the bank of heaven. I dare say he now has a palace on Hallelujah Avenue and Glory Boulevard!

But let it be understood that in matters of moral danger and questions of right and wrong that dear saint will have a heavenly light shining on his pathway and a divine voice will say, "This is the way; walk ye in it." Best of all, the Holy Spirit will call truth to his remembrance and take of the things of Christ and show unto him. Paul had his weaknesses, his "thorn in the flesh," which he longed to be rid of. But God preferred he should retain it, and sweetly whispered, "My grace is sufficient." So the brave soul went on, even glorying in his infirmities and in spite of them, became the most effective man of all the Christian centuries.

IV. This great blessing of sanctification does not end growth in grace. On the other hand, it removes the hindrances to growth of grace, and makes the growth of all graces possible. We make the corn and the flowers grow by destroying the weeds; we make the virtues grow by uprooting carnality, the enemy of God and man. There is a negative and a positive side to this experience. By the first we are emptied of the old man of inbred sin; by the second we are "filled with the Spirit."

We are assured that "the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering,

gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, patience." What a harvest!

V. It is not an experience from which it is impossible to fall. There is an unscriptural theology which teaches that anyone who is once regenerated can never fatally backslide and be lost. This is exactly what the devil would be glad to have all converts believe, that their heaven is certain; in short, that justification and sanctification cannot be lost. It leads to all manner of careless living and presumption, people presuming that because they were once regenerated they can practise sin and still have a clear and unclouded title to heaven.

Nay, nay! "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." If it is not possible to fall all the solemn warnings of the Lord are meaningless. "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4:11). Multitudes have "made shipwreck of faith." And you may (I Tim. 1-19). Multitudes have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit and tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and fell away (Revised Version) till it was impossible "to renew them again to repentance." And you may (Heb. 6:4-6). It is possible "after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," to be "again entangled therein and overcome," till "the last state is become worse . . . than the first." Multitudes have been and you may be (2 Peter 2:20). Many cease to abide in Christ and are cast out to perish and you may (John 15:6). We are in the enemy's country. It is no place to be careless and presumptuous as millions of others have done. The Israelites forsook God and perished. "Continue thou in his goodness: otherwise thou shalt be cut off."

"But," someone asks, "how can a holy being fall?" We answer by asking another question, "How did Satan and a third part of the angels sin and fall in a holy heaven? How did our first parents sin and fall, when God created them in His moral image and likeness?" Do not believe the devil's theology; but "watch and pray," and "take heed lest ye fall."

VI. What, then, is sanctification or holiness. It is a state of the moral nature in which "the old man is crucified, that the body of sin might be done away, so that we shall be no longer in bondage to sin," the sin principle (Rom. 6:6, R. V.). It is a state of the moral nature, in which you are "dead unto sin," the sin principle, "but alive unto God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). It is such a state of your moral nature as results when you no longer "present your members [faculties and powers] unto sin," the sin principle, "as weapons of unrighteousness;"

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