

The Will of God — YOUR SANCTIFICATION

by Joseph H. Smith

"This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3).

Ignorance of a rich uncle's will kept a young, widowed mother in abject poverty, straining with untrained fingers at seamstress work, in a poor tenement house in New York City, in an effort to keep body and soul of her two little children together. Thus she lived at "a poor dying rate" for two whole years when she was a millionaire. But she did not know she was a millionaire! And ignorance of possession is tantamount to poverty itself. Messengers of the executor in England were not able to locate the heiress in a strange and distant country, with her change of name, loss of circumstances, and bereft of her husband. But when, at length, she was discovered and identified, and learned of the will, and received her inheritance, she no longer lived as she had been living.

I might, very justly and truly, direct your attention by my text to the will of God as our Sovereign Ruler and our Judge at length, and press His claim to our all, and herald His command for us to be holy, and sound His admonitory declaration that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. But I choose rather to think of Him as our Father, and of His will as our patrimony. And I would try to tell you that, as a child of God, there is something coming to you, my brother.

Since sanctification is peculiarly the heritage of the family, we shall look at the identification marks of those addressed here, to see whether we bear plainly enough the family resemblance to be classed among the heirs.

Paul was sure as to the credentials of the legatees when he made the announcement of our text: for he had prefaced by saying: "Knowing, beloved, your election of God." And in the first chapter he named five marks which convinced him beyond all question that, whatever they may have been in the past, they were now in saving relationship with God.

1. They had been subjects of Holy Ghost preaching.
2. They had received the Word with joy of the Holy Ghost.
3. They had turned from idols to serve the living and true God.
4. They had sounded their faith abroad.
5. They were looking for the Lord's return from heaven.

Upon these accounts, the apostle had given much thanks to God in their behalf, had prayed and labored for the perfecting of their faith, and felt emboldened to believe and write unto them, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." Evidently he could have meant nothing less than their entire sanctification, seeing that what he had thus accredited to them implies a very considerable measure of sanctification already; and noting, too, that in concluding the epistle he prayed explicitly for the very God of peace to sanctify them wholly.

If, beloved, you have had the genuine experience of the new birth and find such marks in your life as are here recorded of these Thessalonians, you may confidently count yourself among the heirs, and make early application to the Executor for the baptism with the Holy Spirit to the purification of your entire being. For God, through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ, has made provision for your sanctification and cleansing, and for your presentation to Himself in present and perfect union.

There are several meanings and phases to sanctification in the uses of that term as found in the Bible. But we shall confine ourselves to the one in this text. This

is not exactly the same as that when Joshua commanded the people, "Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." And it means more also than that where Paul addressed the Corinthians as the "sanctified in Christ Jesus," notwithstanding they were as yet but "babes in Christ," "still carnal," and capable of receiving only the "milk of the word."

It is the same, however, as that when Christ, praying for them who were already separated from the world, and given to Himself, and "kept from the evil," asked the Father to "sanctify them." He proceeded also to indicate the truth as the medium of their sanctification; and the provision made in His atonement for their sanctification thus, saying: "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:19).

Perhaps I can give you no better definition of sanctification than that I received from a distinguished lady after she had prayed her way through some difficulties on the subject. At first she could see no distinction between forgiveness and cleansing, and nothing higher for her than an oft-repeated sinning—an again and again and repeatedly forgiven life. All our explanations and illustrations having failed to show her this distinction, and seeing that she was a very bright, intellectual woman, we concluded that the difficulty must be deeper down than her thought life—possibly in her affections or ambitions or her will and pride of position, etc. So we left her with the Lord. After about three days she returned to the meeting, with this testimony: "Last night, in the secret of my room, after days of struggle and importunity, God showed me what cleansing means by giving me a clean heart." But not quite finished, she stepped up to us at the close of the meeting and said, "Now you noticed I did not claim to be sanctified—only that God had given me a clean heart." We responded, "Sister, the Lord and you got on so much better than you and I did on definitions, I turn you back to Him on synonyms. Goodbye." She took the hint, and on the next afternoon she said, "God showed me last night that to be sanctified does not mean to be angelic, nor to never be tempted, nor make any mistakes, nor be incapable of sinning, as I thought; but to be sanctified is to have a clean heart, filled with God's love and indwelt by the Holy Ghost. Put me down on the roll, for God has done it for me."

Now doubtless many of you can furnish the best commentary of this and the best ground for my exhortation—if any be needed. Just recall the many times you have felt a rising in your heart of such sighings as this, "Oh, to have nothing in my heart contrary to the will of God." I want to be entirely conformed to the image of Christ." Or your crying and singing, "Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole." "O wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Or "Take away my bent to sinning," for how often I feel anger or resentment, or love of the world, or wrong passion and desire, even though I do not yield to it. "Create in me a clean heart."

Now, beloved, take just a moment with me to analyze those longings: 1. They are peculiarly the longings of a Christian heart; 2. There is a real condition of need behind them; 3. They must have been begotten by the Spirit of God; 4. And did God ever create an appetite which He had made no provision to satisfy? Is it not written, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"? Is not the very longing for inward holiness an evidence that "this is the will of God, even your sanctification"?