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Law 144

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Sanctification

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 23rd March 1988

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” John 17:17

These words form a part of the intercessory supplication of the Lord Jesus Christ on the behalf and account of that people whom the Father had given to him to redeem, to save, to justify, to sanctify. We may rest fully assured of this, his request is heard, and this blessed matter will be fulfilled in the experience of every individual that belongs to this precious and blessed person. It is indeed a very great, profound and deep subject. I am exceedingly conscious that it is far above my ability to sufficiently consider and speak of this great and important matter of sanctification, but nevertheless, it is such an important matter, such a needful matter, and in the experience of it where God’s people are concerned, such a blessed and precious one too, that we will attempt to try and look a little at it.

Sanctification is inseparable from justification. It is distinguishable and quite different in its influence and effect, but it cannot be separated from it. A justified person is a sanctified person; a sanctified person is a justified person. Justification is the believer’s title to eternal bliss, life and happiness; sanctification is the believer’s meetness for heaven; and it is quite impossible that we should have any enjoyment whatsoever of God and his presence and that which he has promised to, and will provide for, his people, without a meetness for it: “... and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14)

Well then, we have to look at the prayer of Jesus Christ for the sanctification of that people whom the Father gave him to redeem, and the means whereby this sanctification should be received, experienced, known and enjoyed: that is, through the means of the truth in the power, influence and unction of it under the operation and power of the Holy Spirit upon the heart.

We will briefly notice what we are to understand by this word sanctification. This is a large subject, there being many parts to it, many aspects of it, and all exceedingly important. Firstly, the church of God is essentially and already sanctified, it is a perfect and complete church in regard to its state and standing before God. Then there is also that consideration of sanctification which is not perfect or complete, and cannot be, in the experience of it, in this life, but will be known and enjoyed in the fullness, blessedness and effect of it hereafter. The truth, the Word of God which is truth, is the means whereby God is pleased to convey this blessing into the heart effectually and powerfully—the Holy Word of God, the precious gospel in all its parts, the written Word. Nevertheless there is also that aspect of it that it is effectual through Christ who is the incarnate Word of God, he who is truth in the person of truth, the incarnate truth, the Word of God. It is only and alone through the precious, finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ that there is any holiness or any sanctification for us. If we would be possessors of this rich sanctification, this vital and needful blessing, we must seek it and find it in the same place and from the same source, as we receive and are blessed with a free justification—it flows from the same fountain, from the same source.

Then there is the necessity of it. Where is the necessity? Why, just in that consideration of our grievous state and condition by nature. We are fallen, we are unholy, we are corrupt, we are undone. These are not empty and unfelt words where a child of God is concerned; he feels it and he knows it. Do we sorely feel the fall? God’s people do feel it, and they feel it increasingly:

*That we’re unholy needs no proof
We sorely feel the fall,
But Christ has holiness enough
To sanctify us all.*

(Gadsby’s 181)

As we come into this world there is no difference, not an atom of difference, not the slightest difference between us and any other person born into this world. By nature we are all ruined and undone and fallen, but God has a people whom he has sanctified.

One aspect of this word, and the experience of sanctification, is a separation, a setting apart, a distinguishing. A difference is made between one person and another by the sanctifying influence of the Spirit and grace and the Word of truth and the merits of Christ.

Another aspect of it is the communication and impartation of sovereign and converting grace. It is also the impartation and the communication of the holiness of Christ whereby a sinner is made holy and comely in the comeliness of Christ. But I want to look at the beginning of all this and the reason why the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ is heard and answered, and the answer of it being manifested in the heart of every one of whom it is said, "I pray for them." (v. 9)

What I hope to come to is this: Am I among them? Am I one of these sanctified people? Have I been sanctified through the truth, through the Word of truth and through Christ the incarnate Word, he who is truth, the very person of truth? In the beginning, in eternity past, the Church of God was singled out, separated and set apart in the eternal purposes of God's love and grace. In the discriminating and separating decrees of God and his covenant he determined to have a people: "They shall be mine." (Malachi 3:17) God's portion is sanctified from all eternity, set apart in his mind, purposes, affection and designs of salvation.

Secondly, this people were also effectually, essentially and virtually sanctified when Christ was pleased to finish that work which God the Father gave him to do, his glorious work, which is redeeming, saving, justifying and sanctifying. It is by virtue of the vicarious, substitutionary, effectual merits, and wonderful worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ in his obedience and his blood, that the whole Church is sanctified. They are sanctified through that finished work and they have an interest in it. They have the communication of it and they have the experience of it by virtue of their union to him who is of God made unto them sanctification. This, I say, is that vital and desperate necessity which we have on account of our want of a meetness to dwell with God—our meetness for heaven.

Well, the prayer of Christ, his intercessory supplication, is founded upon the merits of his own finished work. With authority he asks. He pleads upon the ground of his own worthiness and merits. The words laid upon my mind in our text are just this: 'Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.' I want to try and look just a little at some of the different aspects of the experience of this prayer being fulfilled on our account and behalf. There is the work carried on within the soul of a poor sinner whereby, in measure, he is sanctified manifestly; and the times when he is brought into the blessed enjoyment of this sacred experience. There is one aspect in which the church and every individual of it is sanctified in God's purposes by Jesus Christ; but so far as the experience of it is concerned one may know it more than another. A believer may know it in its influence at one time more than another. There are many alternations and fluctuations in regard to the present experience of the matter, so that at one time a person who is blessedly and sweetly under the power and influence of God's truth (whether we consider that as the Word of truth with divine power, or the influence of Christ as the incarnate Word and God of truth), knows what it is for the whole heart and soul and mind, for a few moments perhaps, to be devoted and the spirit to be truly sanctified and separated unto God. Those seasons are but few, when one knows something of sanctifying grace, sanctifying love and the sanctifying influence of Christ and his cross and the experience of it within. The apostle Paul knew nothing else but the power of the cross to separate him feelingly and comfortably from all the influence of the world within and the world without and the world beneath: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Galatians 6:14)

But we will try and be orderly in attempting to look first at the communications and the influence. As I have already said, we are, by nature, children of wrath even as others. There is no difference in our nature, our disposition, our character or our practices. As we are born into this world and until the Lord is pleased to set us apart for himself, we think and live, feel and do just as everybody else born into this world. Those words are absolutely true of us: "Such were some of you"—some more and some less in regard to the more vile outward practices; others in the secret lusts and carnal pursuits of mind and heart. "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified...." (1 Corinthians 6:11)

The beginning of it is a separating, a setting apart by that almighty act of God's Spirit through the Word, through the truth, which we call the washing of regeneration by the washing of water by the Word. In pursuing this matter perhaps we could use the illustration which is set before us under the ceremonial dispensation. There is a part there which has much instruction concerning sanctifying in all its parts. There were vessels appointed of God for a holy use; they are indicative and illustrative of vessels of mercy fit for the Master's use. Those vessels were no different to any other literally; they were just the same vessels of wood, earth, silver, gold. There was nothing to distinguish them from the others in any way at all, but some were set apart from among the rest and separated for holy use. By virtue of that very separation they were called holy vessels. So God's people are considered by God himself a holy people in that they are separated out from the rest. They are separated from the world by effectual grace, by an effectual call.

Now those vessels which were set apart, called holy vessels, must be fitted for the use for which they were appointed. There were three particular things that were done to make them fit for their holy use. One was, they were washed; the second, they were anointed with oil; and the third, they were sprinkled with blood. By virtue of these three things they were considered sanctified and holy vessels.

That is the illustration, but let us pursue that point in regard to experience. First, there is the washing, the great laver of regeneration. Now as sure as truth is truth, a person who is regenerated by God the Spirit and quickened into divine life, being partaker of the principle of grace, will stand out from the rest of mankind, as much as we could distinguish a man dressed in a yellow coat at a funeral service. He will stand out, he is a separate person, no longer keeping company with the world; he must come out of it. This is done through the Word of truth—either that Word of truth being spoken in a literal word of God to the heart, or the substance of it being brought into the soul. This sanctifies.

Do we know something of that first separating from the world? No longer feeling at home in it or with it? We could not abide its company with all the sinful, foolish, wicked, evil ways, thoughts words, and expressions; we wanted something different. Well, that is the very first part of sanctification; the washing of regeneration, and it proceeds from an interest in the cross of Christ. We have life by his death. It would be absolutely impossible for heaven to be heaven to an unregenerate person. We must be born again to have a capacity for eternal bliss and happiness. Sanctification is the meetness.

The second point in regard to this setting apart is the anointing with the oil. What is that but the blessed teaching and renewing and influence of the Holy Ghost upon the heart. Now truth in the power of it and truth in the experience of it will have a separating influence upon our souls, for the substance and the gist of it all is this: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:17-18) Why, whatever God might have used to influence that in our hearts, whatever word, whatever power or truth, either of the Word, or Christ as the truth in our poor hearts, to cause us to come out and be separate, has a sanctifying influence.

I am sure that if the Holy Ghost brings the Word with power into our hearts and conveys a sense of God's love, so that we are caused to feel that God has love toward us in the measure that that is truly and really felt within our souls, it will have a sanctifying effect. O, how vastly different is this to any fleshly vow, resolution or carnal attempt at separation from those things which are not good or profitable or expedient. Love will have two effects; it will attach us, sweetly attach us, to him who is the author of that love manifestly, and it will sweetly detach us from all other. That is a sweet detachment. It is a wonderful mercy when we can truly feel and say:

*Far from my thoughts, vain world, be gone;
Let my religious hours alone.*

(Gadsby's 264)

This is love's sanctifying effect. Now this is conveyed through the Word of truth. If the Holy Spirit takes that Word and impresses it upon the heart with divine persuasion, so that we feel the sweetness and power of love, that teaching and anointing will have an abiding influence. If the Holy Spirit is pleased to bring a word of truth into our hearts with divine power, and convey a realisation and sense of our interest in Jesus Christ and his finished work, so that we behold him with a measure of love and adoration and

admiration, then such love has a sanctifying effect upon our spirit, detaching us from vanity and self and the world and sin. O, the alternative attraction of the beauty and loveliness of Christ as revealed to the soul! It will cause our hearts to cleave to him and be detached from all other. This is indeed that which the living soul longs to know more of in the sweet experience of it. But there are fluctuations of this experience. There are times when a believer mourns because he knows so little of the sanctifying influence of the teaching of the Holy Ghost and the power of the Word of truth. You see, the letter of it will do us no good, it will have no influence. Mere dry doctrine will have no effect. There must be the anointing of the Holy Ghost. That is what he does for his people in his sanctifying influence of the truth. 'Thy word is truth'—that which is conveyed with divine power and influence. Well, there is the water and there is the oil of the anointing of the Spirit which teacheth all things.

Now the third thing in regard to those vessels was that they were to be sprinkled with blood. As I have said, if we are to know and enjoy this rich blessing, the wonderful grace of sanctification, then we must find it in the same place and receive it from the same source as we receive justification. If the precious blood of Jesus Christ is applied to the heart and conscience, if the Holy Spirit is pleased to convey that precious favour and blessing with power into the heart, through the Word being impressed upon our hearts, causing our souls to rejoice in a felt sense and experienced interest in the death, blood-shedding and cross of Christ, and we really feel it, that has a sanctifying and separating effect. If we know anything of it at all, may I ask this question? When the blood has been applied to our conscience, did that cause us to love ourselves and our sins, or did it cause us to hate ourselves and our sins? I am sure that sanctification is not licentiousness, nor is it liberty to sin. It is just the opposite. The application of the precious blood of Christ will have a sweetly sanctifying effect upon our hearts; it will purge and cleanse and sanctify. What a rich and wonderful blessing that is, to be feelingly and sensibly separated from sin and self in the love and practice and guilt of it!

Another aspect of this sanctification is holiness. Where shall we find holiness, such that is acceptable and that is received by a holy, heart-searching God? Why, only and alone by the imputed and imparted righteousness and holiness of Jesus Christ! It is this also which has a sanctifying effect upon the spirit, for there is, in the new birth, an impartation of a new nature, a nature that is holy. It is the impartation of grace, which is holy grace. It is the communication of the measure of the Spirit, who is a holy Spirit. It is only and alone in Jesus Christ and through his blood and righteousness that any poor sinner may be holy in the sight of God and may be a partaker of holiness in its effects and fruits.

Well now, in this we have a paradox. The more we are sanctified effectually, sensibly and feelingly, and the more that holiness is imparted and imputed to our poor hearts, and the more we receive of the nature of Jesus Christ imparted, and the more the Word of God, the Word of truth, is communicated in its divine power, then the more we shall feel our own darkness, wickedness, guilt and wretchedness. It is holiness imparted that causes a sinner to feel his sinnership; and the more holiness, then the more we loathe our desperately wicked hearts and detest ourselves for our sin and are separated from ourselves. Now it is this sanctification, this holiness, which is the believer's meetness for heaven. It is in this holiness that he is acceptable in the sight of God.

I want to go a little further and attempt to look at this matter in the experience of it. I am sure that the people of God have to mourn and lament, as Joseph Hart mourned and lamented over his sin, filth and want of sanctification. He knew so much of carnality, so much of worldliness, so much of a wandering spirit and heart, so much of being involved and taken up in the things of flesh and the world, and experienced such a little of sanctification. Now this may be realised and known in some measurable degree at times, and at other times we may be very far off from the sweetness and blessedness of it. I like that verse of Hart in one of his hymns, it has suited me well a good many times:

*Jesus' precious blood once spilt,
I depend on solely,
To release and clear my guilt;
But I would be holy.*

(Gadsby's 780)

O, how blessed it would be for us if that word were fulfilled!

*O, dwell in me, fill all my soul,
And all my powers by thine control.*

(Gadsby's 1075)

It is the desire of the Holy Spirit, expressed by the apostle Paul, that the Church should be sanctified wholly, every thought brought into obedience to Christ. Eyes, hearts, ears, tongues, hands, health, affections, time, strength, faculties and passions—all devoted to God; not lent for one moment to the service of vanity, self, sin and the pursuit of those things that are unprofitable. O, how little we know of real sanctification in the enjoyment and experience of it! A wonderful mercy if we are wholly surrendered to the crucified one, if Christ is the only sovereign of our hearts! True, we greatly need the answer of this petition on our account and behalf, to be sanctified wholly—for God's Holy Spirit to so dwell in our hearts and affections to be so taken possession of, that they might be sanctified and devoted to and fixed upon him who alone is worthy of all our heart, all our love and all our devotion. Those seasons are few and short and small; but a taste is an earnest.

Now there may be happy seasons with a believer when he is under the power and influence of love and blood and the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon his spirit. Under the influence of it he wants to get alone in a dark corner, away from all company, away by himself and enjoy the company of his God and enjoy communion with his Saviour. His whole heart is fixed, and he wants nothing to do with this world and the distractions and deviations that draw the heart aside. For a few moments he knows what it is to enjoy sanctification, but the season is short and he soon gets back to his old place again. He is taken up with all sorts of things—a carnal mind, a hard heart, a wandering spirit, a prayerless spirit—and he feels almost as far from being sanctified as a worldling. Therefore he needs a further communication. He needs the Lord to come again and speak a word with divine power. He needs his love to be shed abroad in the heart once more. Let the unction of thy love, set my mind on things above. O, love's sanctifying effect is little known! But what a wonderful mercy when it is known!

This then is something which is to be repeated in the experience, over and over and over again. Sanctification is ever joined to justification but also distinguishable from it. Justification is a complete matter where it is experienced but sanctification is not yet complete and cannot be so long as we are in the body. But O the prospect! Blessed prospect!

*Perfect holiness of spirit,
Saints above, full of love,
With the Lamb inherit.*

(Gadsby's 484)

Now it is a sacred truth and a solemn truth that without holiness there can be no happiness. These two things are inseparably connected. Just as there is that measure of sanctification in its separating influence, holiness in the impartation of it through the Word with divine power in the heart and the love and blood of Christ felt in the heart, just so much happiness we know, and no more.

There is an aspect in which this work, being commenced, is carried on. It is the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. I am not for one moment inferring that there is any such thing as progressive sanctification. That is a blatant error, a lie of the devil; there is no such thing as progressive sanctification. Those who speak of this are under a false notion in regard to this matter. It is nothing at all to do with the flesh, *nothing at all*. It is impossible that we should ever look for any change in carnal nature; that will be as carnal as ever from beginning to end. The work of grace upon the new man is in the new nature. That is where holiness, sanctification and justification are known and experienced and proved and have their influence. Nevertheless the work of grace begun is carried on, so that the work of sanctification progresses. The work is carried on until the soul that is the subject of it is brought to perfection in glory, in eternity.

If I may be helped to illustrate that for a moment from a figure we have in God's Word. You will remember how God permitted King David to provide materials for the building of the temple. He did not allow him to build it himself, for he was a man of blood, so Solomon had to do the building. But those materials were holy materials, sanctified materials. They were set apart, separate, for one purpose only, and that was for the building of the temple of God. Yet in their original condition, rocks hewn out

of the quarry, trees cut down for timber, gold out of the mine, silver out of the earth were in no fit condition to be used to build a temple. The gold must go in the fining pot and be cast into suitable shapes for its purpose. The stone from the quarry must be the subject of a quarryman's chisel and hammer so that it might be fitted and prepared for its place and made ready; the timber must come under the skilful hand of the carpenter and fitted for its place in the temple.

Just so, God's people must be prepared and made fit for the place prepared for them. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. We must know what it is to come under the almighty hand of God, for his work to go on in our souls, for the work of sanctification to progress until the work is finished. The stone must have all its rough corners knocked off. It must be shaped, reduced, prepared and fitted and made meet.

Now it is a wonderful thing if we are thus being prepared, being made meet, sanctified by the almighty work of the Spirit through the instrumentality of his Word with power and unction in our souls. If we thus know sanctification in all its parts—that which is already accomplished if we are among his people, that which is already ours through Christ and his finished work, and that which is effected in our heart by the water, oil and blood—the holiness of Christ imparted, and the Spirit's work carried on to perfection and completion.

There are many aspects of this great subject, yet it is all one blessed whole—and God's people shall be, in the end, manifested as that people whom he has set apart for himself from all eternity.

May we know something of that sanctifying work in its effects which are a proof and an earnest of our interest in God's electing love, in Christ's redemption, salvation, justification and sanctification, and may the Holy Spirit be pleased to indwell and operate upon our spirit, setting us apart for glory.

The Lord add his blessing.

Amen.