

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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### SCRIPTURE AND SANCTIFICATION

Robert Candlish, one of the best Scottish exegetes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote "The believer's transformation by the renewing of his mind is not the ultimate end which the Holy Spirit seeks in his regenerating and renovating work. It is the immediate and primary design of that work, in one sense. We are created anew in Christ Jesus. That new creation is what the Holy Spirit first aims at and effects. But 'we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them' (Eph. 2:10). The essence of a good work is the doing of the will of God. The proving of the will of God, therefore, is a fitting sequel of our 'being transformed by the renewing of our mind.'"<sup>1</sup> How is this accomplished in the life of the believer? We are expressly told in II Tim. 3:16 that Scripture is the means that God uses to mature and equip the believer for *every* good work. Many people think that simply deducing principles for living from the Bible is their primary focus and, unfortunately, this mentality is widespread in our Evangelical churches. "Practical" sermons with titles like "Dare to be a Daniel" are standard fare. People approach the Bible like it was an owner's manual designed to help us solve personal problems and fix relationships. The Bible does indeed provide us with solutions to the various problems that confront us as sinners – but never as a means of simply giving us guidelines for self-improvement apart from the central message of redemption. Consider Paul's declaration in 1 Cor. 2:2 – "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Certainly a church like the one in Corinth stood in need of 'practical guidelines for living', yet the Apostle was emphatic that the message of the cross was the solution to all their problems. John 17 has come to be known as the high priestly prayer of our Lord. We have here the only long prayer of the Lord Jesus that is recorded. We know that He prayed often and for long periods of time. During His earthly life He prayed with loud cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7); He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21); at the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28 – 29); in the hills (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12); in solitary places (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 9:18); at Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36, 39, 42, 44; Mark 14:32, 35, 39; Luke 22:41 – 45). He prayed for Simon Peter that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32); He interceded for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12); He always lives to make intercession for His people (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34). Here we have recorded the prayer of the second Person of the Trinity to the Father, and we enter into the Holy of Holies. "The prayer which Christ made for us," said Augustin, "He hath also made known to us. Being so great a Master, not only what He saith in discoursing to the disciples, but also what He saith to the Father in praying for them, is their edification."<sup>2</sup> The chapter opens with the Lord Jesus praying for Himself, for His being glorified (vv. 1 – 5); the rest of the prayer concerns His own. He prays that the Father would keep them, and since they are to remain in the world, He prays for their protection. Because they are to be His witnesses, they must be sanctified. They are to be kept through the name of the Father, and Christ prays that His people partake of the Father's holiness. This work of holiness or sanctification is to be accomplished *in* the truth (or *through* the truth). This is Christ's request; this is what He prays for; this is the desire of His heart.

#### I. THE REQUEST: SANCTIFY THEM

The word translated *sanctify* is HAGIAZŌ, "to sanctify, to set apart and dedicate."<sup>3</sup> This is the same word that is translated "Holy" in v. 11 in reference to the Father. Contrary to what most people think, the word does not have reference to inward cleansing, still less to the eradication of the sin nature. It is extremely important that the doctrine of sanctification be understood within the overall scope of the person and work of Christ in our justification. The noted Reformed theologian G.C. Berkouwer helpfully shows how this had been developed by the Reformers. Berkouwer begins by noting that all discussions on this subject are concerned with this "evangelical sanctification," that is, with the question how sanctification is related to the gospel message, the glad tidings of salvation. The heart of sanctification is the life which feeds on this justification. There is no contrast between justification as act of God and sanctification as act of man. The fact that Christ is our sanctification is not exclusive of, but inclusive of, a faith which clings to him alone in all of life. Faith is the pivot on which everything revolves. Faith, though not itself creative, preserves us from

autonomous self-sanctification and moralism. One may say that the confessions proceed always from faith to works and thence back to faith. This interconnection and order is a typical feature of Reformation doctrine: thus maintaining the bond between justification and sanctification, over against the “abstraction” of good works, it walked in the ways of Holy Scripture. The conclusion we may infer from all these data is that we can, according to Reformed belief, speak truly of sanctification only when we have understood the exceptionally great significance of the bond between Sola-fide and sanctification. Genuine sanctification – let it be repeated – stands or falls with this continued orientation toward justification and the remission of sins. Hence, there is never a stretch along the way of salvation where justification drops out of sight. The believer, who understands his justification and views his life against the backdrop of Divine grace, will gain a deeper knowledge of his own sinfulness. To understand the Sola-fide of the Reformation as the only proper response to the biblical message of sovereign grace is to know that this Sola-fide can never be a threat to real sanctification. Such a threat can emerge only from a denial or devaluation of this doctrine. The ancient feud of Rome with the Sola-fide doctrine, based as it is on the view that Sola-fide is subversive of sanctification, must be called Rome’s most fundamental error. It was no other than Sola-fide which made clear the true significance of sanctification, and distinguished it from all moralistic effort at self-improvement, in short, from all practices and beliefs which do violence to Sola-fide and, therefore, to Sola-gratia. The moment sanctification is ejected from the temple of faith, and hence justification, that moment justification by faith has become an initial stage on the pilgrim’s journey, a supply-station, which later becomes a pleasant memory. Successive stages would follow, that of sanctification for instance, and in this stage it would be up to man to act. Understood in this fashion, the distinction between justification and sanctification would amount to assigning the one act wholly to God and the other wholly to man. Sanctification would then be described as a series of devout acts and works performed by the previously justified man. The distinction between justification and sanctification could then be traced to the subject of each act: God or man – this would be our conclusion – is not called upon to justify but to purify himself. It is not hard to see that the Scriptures are intolerant of this division. We are told, for example, that Christ “was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and *sanctification*, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30), and about man as an object of divine sanctification we hear: “...but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:11). The believers “are sanctified in Christ Jesus” (I Cor. 1:2; cf. Acts 20:32; 26: 18); the benediction in the epistle to the Thessalonians reads: “And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess. 5:23).<sup>4</sup> Note how Jesus uses the word in 17:19 (cf. also John 10:36). The word stresses *separation*. What does this involve?

A. Set Apart By God.

The believer is set apart by God, *in* time (in our experience) and *before* time (in God’s decree) (Ephesians 1:4). Sanctification is actually the fruition of election (James 1:18).

B. Purged By Degrees.

Sanctification, in one sense, takes place at the moment of belief (I Corinthians 6:11; II Thessalonians 2:13); but the word also refers to the *process* of sanctification. We are not only accounted as holy, but we are being made holy. “No one is a believer who is not holy,” wrote Calvin, “and no one is holy who is not a believer.”<sup>5</sup> Sanctification, therefore, is the renovation of the Christian by which God delivers His child, who has been justified by faith in Christ more and more from his native depravity and transforms him into His own image (by the Word and the Spirit). This renovation refers not only to outward acts, but to man’s nature (I Thessalonians 5:23), which includes the mind and will (Ephesians 4:22 – 24) as well as his desires (Galatians 5:24). Bavinck noted that to understand the benefit of sanctification correctly, we must proceed from the idea that Christ is our holiness in the same sense in which he is our righteousness. He is a complete and all-sufficient Savior. He does not accomplish his work halfway but saves us really and completely. He does not rest until, after pronouncing his acquittal in our conscience, he has also imparted full holiness and glory to us. By his righteousness, accordingly, he does not just restore us to the state of the just who will go scot-free in the judgment of God, in order then to leave us to ourselves to reform ourselves after God’s image and to merit eternal life. But Christ has accomplished

everything. He bore for us the guilt and punishment of sin, placed himself under the law to secure eternal life for us, and then arose from the grave to communicate himself to us in all his fullness for both our righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). The holiness that must completely become ours therefore fully awaits us in Christ. Many people still acknowledge that we must be justified by the righteousness that Christ has acquired but believe or at least act in practice as if we must be sanctified by a holiness we bring about ourselves. If that were the case, we would not—contrary to the apostolic witness (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 4:31; 5:1, 13)—live under grace and stand in freedom but continue always to be under the law. Evangelical sanctification, however, is just as distinct from legalistic sanctification as the righteousness that is of faith differs from that which is obtained by works. For it consists in the reality that in Christ God grants us, along with righteousness, also complete holiness, and does not just impute it but also inwardly imparts it by the regenerating and renewing working of the Holy Spirit until we have been fully conformed to the image of his Son.<sup>6</sup>

C. Endowed With God's Image and Likeness.

Not only is the believer cleansed from sin and its guilt (positionally via justification), the believer is adorned with grace (Ephesians 5:26 – 27). “The Church’s honour,” comments Manton, “lieth not in pomp and outward ornament, but in holiness.”<sup>7</sup>

D. It is the Work of God.

The prayer is made to God the Father. The New Testament tells us that the Triune God is involved in this work. “To them that are *sanctified* by God *the Father*” (Jude 1), *the Son* “gave himself for the church, that he might *sanctify* and cleanse it.” (Ephesians 5:25, 26), and “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through *sanctification of The Spirit*” (II Thessalonians 2:13).

**II. THE MEANS: THROUGH THY TRUTH<sup>8</sup>**

“Truth,” declared John Howe, “is the means of holiness.”<sup>9</sup> What is this *truth*? The word occurs over 182 times in the New Testament, 82 times in John’s writings, so this alone shows that the Bible places great emphasis upon truth. Sometimes the word simply refers to the plain facts of a case (Matthew 5:33; Luke 22:59). Most of the time, however, the word is used of God and righteous conduct. Truth is manifest in the Son (John 14:6; II Corinthians 11:10; Ephesians 4:12). He speaks Truth (John 8:30, 45, 46; 16:7). The Spirit is Truth (I John 5:6) and is the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; I John 4:6). God’s judgment is according to truth (Romans 2:2). The Gospel is truth (Galatians 2:5, 14; Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5). Note also how the *absence* of truth is described. There is no truth in the devil (John 8:44). Paul described the wicked as “holding down the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). They exchanged the truth for a lie (Romans 1:25), disobey the truth (Romans 2:8; Galatians 5:7), do not have the truth (I Timothy 6:5), lie against the truth (James 3:14), and wander from the truth (James 5:19). Truth, therefore, is connected with righteousness. The truth of Scripture is *not* the same thing as “truth” in other spheres. God’s truth always is related to God’s character. Truth leads to godliness (Titus 1:1).

**III. THE REASON: THY WORD IS TRUTH**

This expression, “Thy word is truth,” is found in the Old Testament. “Thy law is the truth” (Psalm 119:142), “thou are God, and thy words be true” (II Samuel 7:28). “The phrase,” notes Westcott, “occurs in one of the Jewish prayers for the new year. ‘Purify our hearts to serve thee in truth. Thou, O God, art Truth (Jeremiah 10:10) and Thy Word is Truth and standeth forever.’”<sup>10</sup> Please note the words of Calvin, “There are fanatics who indulge in much useless prattle about *sanctification*, but who neglect *the truth* of God, by which he consecrated himself to us. Again, as there are others who chatter quite foolishly about *the truth*, and yet disregard *the word*, Christ expressly says that *the truth* by which God sanctifies his sons, is not to be found any where else than in *the word*.”<sup>11</sup> It is by means of the Word that Christians grow (I Peter 2:2). “When men neglect and contemn the word of God, they dam up the fountains of holiness.”<sup>12</sup> Note this: truth *separates* from error, and, therefore, from evil. Error leads to evil conduct. The relationship between the two petitions of Christ underscores this: “Keep them from the evil one” (v. 15) and “Sanctify them by thy truth” (17:17). The latter secures the former.

**CONCLUSION:** What is our attitude toward the Bible? There is a marked tendency today to pay lip service to the Bible as the Word of God and to *use* the Bible to support *insights* gained from other sources (psychology, business

management, science, etc.). The justification for this is, “All truth is God’s truth.” Often one encounters the direct statement that the Bible is not *completely* sufficient today. It does not address all the issues that we face, so we must turn to other sources for help. This mentality is seen in the tendency among Evangelicals to yield to some of the *modern* demands for *relevancy*. The general depreciation of theology and a lack of clarity in stating doctrine are two of the most glaring features of this mindset. God has never promised to sanctify His people except by means of His Word. D.A. Carson helpfully observes, “The Father will immerse Jesus’ followers in the revelation of Himself in His Son; He will sanctify them by sending the Paraclete to guide them into all truth (15:13). Jesus’ followers will be ‘set apart’ from the world, reserved for God’s service, insofar as they think and live in conformity with the truth, the ‘word’ of revelation (v. 6) supremely mediated through Christ (himself the truth, 14:6, and the Word incarnate, 1:1, 14) – the revelation now embodied in the pages of this book. In practical terms, no one can be ‘sanctified’ or set apart for the Lord’s use without learning to think God’s thoughts after Him, without learning to live in conformity with the ‘word’ He has graciously given. By contrast, the heart of ‘worldliness’, of what makes the world the world (1:9), is fundamental suppression or denial of the truth, profound rejection of God’s gracious ‘word’, His self-disclosure in Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Calvin pointed out long ago the centrality of the Gospel in understanding sanctification “By these words He explains more clearly from what source that sanctification flows which is accomplished in us by the teaching of the Gospel. It is because He consecrated Himself to the Father that His holiness might come to us. For as the blessing is spread to the whole harvest from the first-fruits, so God’s Spirit cleanses us by the holiness of Christ and makes us partakers of it. And not by imputation alone, for in that respect He is said to have been made to us righteousness (I Cor. 1:30); but He is also said to have been made to us sanctification, because He has, so to say, presented us to His Father in His own person (*in sua persona*) that we may be renewed to true holiness by His Spirit. Although this sanctification belongs to the whole life of Christ (*ad totam Christi vitam*), it shone brightest in the sacrifice of His death; for then He appeared as the true High Priest who consecrated the Temple, the altar, all the vessels and the people by the power of His Spirit.”<sup>14</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert S. Candlish, *Studies in Romans 12: The Christians Sacrifice and Service of Praise* (rpt Kregel Publications, 1989), pp. 80-81

<sup>2</sup> As cited by J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels IV* (Baker, 1977), p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> More fully stated, the verb HAGIAZŌ means “to set apart from the world by actual sanctification of life, so that in heart and mind, in thoughts, words, and deeds, one begins to live more and more in accordance with the law of God.” Cf. W. Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Baker, 1954), p. 361.

<sup>4</sup> These various citations have been called from Berkouwer's *Studies In Dogmatics: Faith and Sanctification* (Eerdmans 1952)

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics IV* (Baker Book House, 2008) p. 248

<sup>7</sup> *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton X* (Marantha, N.D.), p. 412.

<sup>8</sup> The Greek text is EN TE ALETHEIA which may be rendered in the truth, or by the truth, or through the truth. It is in the sphere of God’s truth that is meant. Truth is the element in which the sanctification takes place.

<sup>9</sup> *The Works of the Reverend John Howe (1630 – 1705) I* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), p. 249.

<sup>10</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* (Baker, 1980), p. 254.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John II*, trans, W. Pringle (Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 179 – 18.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Manton, *op. cit.*, p. 426.

<sup>13</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991) p. 566.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *op. cit.* p. 146.