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FOUNDATIONS OF OUR FAITH

ARTICLE X—SANCTIFICATION

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## *Article X—Sanctification*

This article on sanctification reads as follows:

We believe that sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of His holiness; that it is a progressive work; that it is begun in regeneration; and that it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the Sealer and Comforter, in the continual use of the appointed means—especially, the Word of God, self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness, and prayer.

It is not necessary for me to state to Christian students that this subject is one of importance, because that to which it refers is the crown of all Christian attainment and is the very highest fruitage of every Christian life.

The first thing that we need to do in this, as in everything else that we study, is to know as far as we may, just exactly the meaning of our subject. First, just what is meant by sanctification in itself? In itself it does not mean to set apart. That is not what it is in itself. Nor does it mean making progress. We can make progress in sin. Neither is it consecration. A man may consecrate himself to a bad life. That is only what is effected by it. Sanctification is what one might call moral purity. It is to have the soul white instead of spotted. That does not help us so very much, but we understand what is meant by it. It is the antipathy of sin. Take 1 Thessalonians 4:7 where it is said that we are not called to uncleanness but to sanctification. There, sanctification is given as the opposite of uncleanness, of course, meaning moral uncleanness. After a while we will try to get a conception of what moral purity is. We need an object lesson in order for us to know it. We can know it as far as we have experienced it. We may know it so far as we can observe it in others, but what is the perfect standard of sanctification, or moral purity, or holiness? This is found in God: “Be ye holy, for I am holy,” or “as I am holy” (Lev 11:44). The manifestation of this holiness—its object lesson through which we get the most perfect knowledge of it—is found in the life of Him who was God made manifest in the flesh.

Another question that we need to consider is the usage of this word “sanctification” in the Bible. In the Old Testament a thing was said to be sanctified, or to be holy, when it was set apart to the service or use of God.

But if a free moral being is to be set apart to the service of God, there must be something within him that will lead him to devote himself to God freely and of his own motion. Therefore comes this deepest idea of sanctification which we have spoken of, which leads a man to set himself apart for divine use. Any being that governs his own action must have something in his nature which is like the use for which he is set apart or sets himself apart, and if it is a holy use, devotion to a holy God, there must be this moral purity or sanctification within.

When we come to the New Testament, we find perhaps three uses of this word sanctification. First, the active use of it, which means sanctifying or the process by which we are sanctified. We have instances of this use in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and 7: "This is the will of God—your sanctification, your being made holy"—a process. Then, there is the use of this word which means the state which is accomplished by this process or the condition of being sanctified, the passive use of the word. You will find an instance of that in Romans 6:22: "Ye have your fruit unto sanctification". Finally, we have a third use of this term sanctification, where it has, I think, reference to what we might call our standing before God rather than our state in ourselves. An instance is found in 1 Corinthians 1:30 where it says: "Christ is made unto us of God wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." That is, this sanctification that we have in this sense comes to us altogether by our acceptance of the work of Christ by which we have his holy standing as our substitute. Of course, it is the first and second of these senses that we are chiefly concerned with in this study.

First of all, what is the starting point of sanctification? There are some who believe that sanctification starts from something that is innate in the nature which only requires cultivation and growth to result in sanctification. The tendency today, the swing of the new theological thought, as it is called, is all in this direction. There is good in every man and if we only appeal to that good and cultivate that good, he will rise to what is highest and noblest. The Scripture representation is just the opposite. There is an inclination in every man to evil; instead of his being on the upgrade toward that which is highest, he is on the downgrade toward that which is lowest. There is something down in the nature of a man which gives him an inclination and a taste for evil, rather than an inclination and a taste for moral purity, and this being in the nature and constitution and dominant, it can only be overcome by someone who has power over the nature to put into it something new and to make therein a new creation which will give this nature an inclination to what is holy.

The starting point in sanctification is regeneration—the putting into a man a new, holy life which changes the disposition or inclination towards what is sinful, towards what is holy, from what is bad to what is good. This,

when it dominates a man, gives a new direction to the will and changes the activity of a man from what is downward to what is upward. Once we had a lady stopping at our house and she was taken sick. Just as I was going out to a Sunday evening service, Mrs. Goodspeed called me and told me she had seen a change in her for the worse. I went for a skillful doctor and brought him back with me. He took his syringe and injected into her arm what I supposed was a most powerful stimulant, and waited for a moment with his finger on her pulse, and then he shook his head, and said to us, "If you have anything to say to her say it quick." That meant that she was on the downgrade to death and there was nothing which he could do that would rouse her physical nature to throw off that deathly disease that had come upon her. She died in twenty minutes.

Now mankind is in that state. There is no electrifying of an unregenerate nature so as to put a man on the upgrade to spiritual health, what holiness means. The starting point of sanctification must be the incoming of the new life which God alone can give. We do not need to dwell upon this further, but we need, however, to fortify ourselves against the new theological thought, which is drifting this way from other directions. If we hold to the Word of God, this new thought will not affect us much, because I think it has its source outside of the Bible and not in it.

The next thing that we need to consider is how fully to attain sanctification, how to advance this new life within us until this holy inclination shall overcome all other tendencies and the whole nature attain purity in its fullness and in its strength. There are some who say that this is done instantaneously just as regeneration takes place, that it happens through the work of the Spirit that lifts a man up from the lowest condition as a regenerate man into the heights of the sanctified life and the sanctified state. Those are called the instantaneous and entire sanctificationists.

There is another view which is in some respects the antithesis of this. It is what is called the antinomian theory, which holds that a converted man is no longer under the law in the sense of being under obligation to obey it. They take a passage like 1 Corinthians 1:30, where it says, "Christ is made unto us of God sanctification as well as wisdom, righteousness, and redemption," and they say that Christ having been made to us sanctification through His being our substitute and we having a standing in His holiness, there is no need of becoming sanctified in the sense of becoming morally pure. There is another view which is somewhat allied to this but not very much, that man is sanctified altogether by faith. At regeneration he has appropriated by faith something of the life of God. As he goes on in life and his faith strengthens he appropriates more and more of the life of God and when his faith becomes strong enough he appropriates all his nature

can contain, then he is sanctified. That makes sanctification altogether by faith, and not dependent at all upon other human activity.

In opposition to the instantaneous and entire sanctification teaching, most of our people and most of the Christian world hold that it is a progressive work, not realized instantaneously. In opposition to the last view referred to—that sanctification is by faith alone—it is held that it is realized likewise partly by struggle and effort and the holding of all spiritual forces to their work. We cannot determine whether sanctification is a progressive or instantaneous work by experience. If we say that in our experience it has been progressive, others may reply, “But by ours we know it has been instantaneous.” We have to go to the Word of God for sure and safe conclusions.

Now I find in the Word of God two forms of teaching as to believers. I find that in every case where people in a church are referred to as sanctified, it is the entire church. The reference is never to a class. Therefore we have to conclude that if any of the members were completely sanctified, all of them were. Take the case of the Corinthian church. They are said to be sanctified, but sanctified in Christ Jesus. Paul paints a picture of their character and we would not like to claim entire sanctification if it were to be as he said they were. Some of them claimed to be of Paul, some of them of Apollos, some of Cephas, and some of Christ. They were all torn to pieces with internal dissensions. They were carnal. They were in need of milk because they were not able to partake of strong meat. On the other hand, Paul refers to all the members of churches, whom he elsewhere declared sanctified, as still sinners. This shows that there is a use of the terms “sanctified” and “sanctification” which does not mean possessed in perfect inner purity. Believers are sanctified in the sense of having a holy standing in Christ although sin still exists within them. The Scriptures assert that all believers are sanctified in the same sense in which any are sanctified, and that all are sinners in the same sense in which any are sinners. It follows from this that there is no class that can claim to be a sanctified aristocracy. It follows, also, that none are completely sanctified in this life, and that sanctification must be a progressive work. The direct teaching of Scripture in support of this last position is found in passages like Ephesians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 2 Peter 3:18; Phillipians 1:6; Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15.

The next question is, “What are the means by which sanctification is attained?” Now this is a very familiar ground and perhaps we might be helped the most by getting down to some principles which underlie and give power to the means for sanctification. Here is one great principle. We tend always to grow like that which is kept perpetually before the mind or in the attention. I repeat, we tend to grow like that which is perpetually

before the mind or upon which the attention is fixed. It is said that if in a family there is a beautiful work of art and the children have their attention fixed upon it, as they grow up, the artistic faculty within them will grow. In the family where there is always fine music, the children will grow up with an ear for harmony. It is said even that if there is a beautiful painting, say of a young lady, the girl who grows up with it before her will come to resemble it in expression. The confining of the attention on any one thing, tends to conform our nature to its likeness. Whatever the object upon which we fix our attention, there must be something like it in the nature that responds to it. In proportion as this responds to the object, it develops and grows. And so it is that, like the object which holds our attention, it gradually develops until it becomes the chief characteristic of nature and life. The greatest of all methods to obtain sanctification is to keep a holy ideal or a holy model before our attention. Think about God. Think about Christ. Next to that think about truth, think about holy things. Associate with those who are good. In all these ways, according to this law, the inclination, which was implanted in us by regeneration, will be helped to grow strong until it gains complete control of heart and life.

Even if this holy disposition is in us and we do not fix our attention upon that which is holy there being nothing to make its appeal to this holy principle within us, there is nothing to lure it forth and we shall be in danger of coming to a standstill in the advance toward sanctification, if we do not go backwards and become less pure in heart and life. That is one of the principles and we see how it covers one great portion of what are called the means of grace.

The other is a very familiar one which we refer to very often, that exercise develops. If we want this purity within the nature, this principle of holiness within to grow and become strong, we must exercise it. We will not only have to hold something out before this disposition to allure it forward, but we will have to do something that exercises it. This brings in all forms of what we might call holy activity, all forms of service to a holy God, all kinds of holy motives in whatever we do. In all of these ways we will be exercising holy principles within and they will therefore grow finally into fullness of strength.

Then of course the last principle is that God has this for us, and we, by going to Him Who implants His Holy Spirit within us and by praying to Him, can get His help in the advancement of the process of sanctification within us.

Now I want, in closing, to refer to some things which sanctification conditions. It is necessary for the closest fellowship with God. "How do we have fellowship with one another? How do we have communion with one another?" There must be something common between those who have

fellowship and communion with each other. If there is nothing common between them, there can be no fellowship. Two strangers meet. If they enter into conversation, there must be something common between them, common knowledge, or common friends, before they can enjoy it. And so it is with reference to God and so it is in reference to God's work. We want to know how it is we can have fellowship with God in His purpose, in His work, in other words, how we can go into the work of God and help to accomplish His purpose with joyous devotion. It is only as this work of sanctification goes on, and we are thus brought into harmony and likeness with God and just as far as we are brought into likeness with God, that we will love God's work and take interest in it. If we like Him we shall like what He likes. This is the only way in which we can have joy in God Himself. A bad man cannot have joy in a good man, and a good man cannot have joy in a bad man. Only a holy being can have the highest joy in a holy God. Only a holy man can have joy in a holy heaven.

I would like to say just one word more and it is this: It seems to me if there is anything in the world or in the universe or in heaven that ought to call forth within a man an ambition which would arouse every faculty and every power into intensest exercise, it is the great thought that we can become more and more like God Himself. May we all make as rapid progress as possible in this sanctified life, the highest fruitage of the Christian life on earth, and its crown and glory even in heaven.

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