

IX.

Implanted Dispositions.

“Perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.”—*2 Cor. vii. 1.*

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To deny that the Holy Spirit creates new *dispositions* in the will is equivalent to a return to Romish error; even tho Rome argues the matter in a different way.

Rome denies the total corruption of the will by sin; that its disposition is wholly *evil*. Hence, the will of the sinner not being wholly useless, it follows: (1) that the regenerate does not need the implanting of a new disposition; (2) that in this respect there is no difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate. They who introduce into the Reformed churches this and similar teachings ought to consider that they impair one of the foundations of the Reformation, and, however unintentionally, lead us back to Rome.

The principal question in this controversy is: whether man is *something* or *nothing*.

If man is absolutely *nothing*, as some fondly proclaim; then God can not work in him; for He can not work in nothing. In nothing one can make nothing. In nothing nothing can be implanted. To nothing nothing can cleave. Nothing can not be a channel for anything. If man is nothing, there can be neither sin nor justification, for the sin of nothing is nothing; and nothing is no sin. Nothing can not be born again, or be converted, or share the glory of the children of God. And if there is no sin, there is no need of a Savior to atone for sin; for to atone for nothing is no atonement. Then there is no need of discussing sanctification at all. This shows that the idea that man is nothing can not be taken in the absolute sense. Since man is a *being*, he must be something; and they who maintain that he is nothing show by their actions that they consider themselves far from nothing.

But if we put it, “Man is nothing *before God*,” it becomes at once intelligible. Then every good Christian subscribes to it unconditionally; he mourns only that it is so hard to become nothing before God; and with all the saints he prays that he may more sincerely deny himself, die to himself, and know himself as nothing before God. Measured by God, man has no value. All his endeavor to be something before God is ridiculous folly. Every pulpit ought to cast down, as with trumpet-tones, every mountain of pride, and humble man before God, so that, feeling himself a mere drop in the bucket—yea, less than nothing—he may find rest in the adoration of the divine Majesty.

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Before God man is not anything, not even the regenerate man; but in His hand, by His ordinance, and in His estimation, he is so great that “God crowns him with glory and honor,” loves him as His child, makes him an heir of the heavenly bliss, and invites him to spend eternity with Him.

These two may never be confounded; man’s absolute nothingness *before God* may never be applied to man as an instrument in *God’s hand*. And man’s mighty significance as *God’s instrument* may never tend to make him the merest something before God as a *being*.

So we oppose pantheistic *Mysticism* and deadly *Pelagianism*..

The essential mistake of the latter is, that it gives man as such a certain standing before God, and refuses to acknowledge that even the most learned and most excellent, whose breath is in his nostrils, “Yea, wherein is he to be esteemed?” is less than nothing before God. And false *Mysticism* is that injurious tendency of the human mind which, in all ages and among all nations, for the sake of being nothing before God, denies man’s significance even as God’s instrument. In its writings it is reiterated that before God man is nothing, that in God he disappears and loses himself, that God absorbs him. And this being absorbed is pushed so far that nothing remains to which sin or guilt can be ascribed. And *thus* the consciousness of responsibility and the conception of imputability were lost. Christian men, carried away by the fascination of being nothing, have sung hymns and preached sermons very acceptable to the Buddhists of India, but entirely outside of the pale of Christianity.

Man as God’s instrument is significant indeed. In creating him from nothing He created, not nothing, but something; and that something was so important that all creatures made before him pointed to him; in Paradise he alone was the bearer of the divine image. Dominion over all the earth was given to him; he is even to judge the angels. “The Son assumed the nature, not of angels, but of man.”

To say that this means that man is only a *mirror* reflecting the divine nature is the vain effort of this sickly mysticism to reconcile man’s significance with its own pantheistic theories. The Scripture teaches, not that God *reflects* something in us, but that He *imparts* it to us. The love of God by the Holy Spirit is *shed abroad* in our hearts. The Lord makes us His temple and *enters* therein. A divine *seed* is placed in the soul. Pure water is *sprinkled* upon us. The Scripture uses many other images to warn us against the false theory that denies the inherent disposition in the soul and reduces man to a mere looking-glass. The *branch* is not a reflection of the *vine*, but grows from the trunk bearing leaf and cluster. A *child* is not a mere mirror of the father, but a being possessed of life and quality. An enemy is not one who merely fails to reflect correctly, but a being endowed with real existence.

To make man, even as God’s instrument, a mere mirror in principle denies sin, destroys the sense of responsibility, and changes actual life into the fancies of a dream.

The Scripture teaches on this point that before God man is nothing; that only through God man is something; and that all inherent and acquired goodness comes only from the Fountain of all good. And, following in the steps of the Reformed fathers, we must maintain this doctrine. But to deny man’s real and peculiar being is inconsistent with Scripture and with the Confession.

Thus escaping from the chaos of a false mysticism, and returning to the purified and ordained truth, we find no more difficulty in sanctification. Of course, if God’s child is but a polished mirror, then they who deny the inherent, holy disposition are right, and such



disposition is out of the question. As a mirror, man is dead, and all that can be seen in him is but a faint and passing reflection of the image of God. But if man, as God's instrument, has being of his own kind, it is natural that besides *being*, God gave him also *qualities*. A being without qualities is unthinkable. There are qualities in every sphere: in the material world, for man eats, drinks, walks, and sleeps; in the intellectual world, for he thinks, judges, and decides; in matters of taste, for he judges things to be beautiful, ugly, or indifferent; and in the moral world, for his desires are righteous or unrighteous, noble or base, good or evil.

And these qualities differ in different men. One loves food which another abhors. The judgment of one is blunt, and of another sharp. One calls handsome what another calls unsightly; good, what another deems evil. Hence there must be a difference in men's essential conditions, which may spring from their respective tempers, education, occupations, etc. Some men have these differences in common. Men of one group do not consider cursing sinful, but rather seem to enjoy it; those of another abhor it and protest against it. This proves that between these two there must be a difference of something; for without a different cause there can be no different effect. And this difference which causes some men to enjoy cursing and others to abhor it is called the *disposition* of a man's personality.

It may be *holy* or *unholy*, but never indifferent. Being corrupt and unholy in unregenerate human nature, it can not be holy in the regenerate unless God create it in them. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. All our running and racing, toiling and slaving, can not create in us a holy disposition. God alone can do that. As He has the power by regeneration to change the root of life, so can He also by sanctification change the *disposition* of the affections. And He could have done this *at once*, just as in regeneration, by making our nature at once perfect in all its dispositions; but He that giveth no account of any of His matters has not been pleased to do so.

Of course, He delivers His child at once from the bondage of sin; but as a rule the sanctification of his dispositions is gradual except in deceased infants elect, and men converted on their deathbed. In all others the implanting of holy dispositions goes step by step, sometimes even with temporal relapse. Without this increase in Christ there can be no sanctification; and the soul that falls short of sanctification, what ground has it to glory in its election?



X.

Perfect in Parts, Imperfect in Degrees.

And the very God of peace sanctify, you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. — *1 Thess. v. 23.*



The Scriptural doctrine that sanctification is a gradual process perfected only in death must be maintained clearly and soberly: first, in opposition to the Perfectionist, who says that saints may be "wholly sanctified" in this life; *secondly*, to those who deny the implanting of inherent holy dispositions in God's children.

It should be noticed, therefore, that Sacred Scripture distinguishes sanctification, imperfect in *degrees*, and sanctification perfect in *parts*. A normal infant, tho small, is a perfect human being. Of course it must grow, but it has all the parts of the human body. The mental faculties can not be examined, but the bodily members are obviously *perfect* and complete. The head may not be covered with hair, various members may be still incomplete, but that does not impair its perfection: in a small beginning the constituent parts and members are all present. Hence the child is called perfect in *parts*.

Yet it is not perfect in degrees, *i.e.*, it has not attained its full growth. It must grow and increase in every respect. And this is a slow and imperceptible progress. A garment fitting perfectly at night is never too small in the morning. One night's growth is imperceptible. Yet we grow and increase; and until death's hour the body changes constantly. And this increase and the subsequent decrease of old age affect all the parts *equally*. It never happens that a child's arm grows, but not his leg, that his neck expands, while the head remains small. This gradual increase is the expanding force of an inherent vital principle, pervading all the members and every part.

This applies to the children of God in the second birth even more forcibly, for in the divine kingdom are no deformities; all proceed from the hand of their Creator a perfect creation. This perfection is in the *parts, i.e.*, they have what essentially belongs to them. And every member is internally animated and wrought upon from one vital principle, by the Holy Spirit, in such a way that all the parts are affected by it spontaneously. Hence in sanctification holy desires and inclinations must spring from that internal, vital principle in the parts and pervade every member.



In this sense sanctification is a *perfect* work; not externally, but on God's part, in that He causes the sanctifying principle to affect every member. He does not first sanctify the will, then the understanding, or first the soul and then the body; but His work embraces the entire new man at once.

But sanctification is *imperfect* in the degree of its development. When for ten years God has wrought in us, the holy desire must be much stronger than in the beginning. This is the