

### XIII.

#### The Work of God in Our Work.

“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 the Lord Jesus Christ.”—*1 Thess. v. 23.*



The difference between *sanctification* and *good works* should be well understood.

Many confound the two, and believe that sanctification means to lead an honorable and virtuous life; and, since this is equal to good works, sanctification, without which no man shall see God, is made to consist in the earnest and diligent effort to do good works.

But this reasoning is false. The grape should not be confounded with the vine, lightning with thunder, the birth with the conception, any more than sanctification with good works. Sanctification is the kernel from which the blade and full ear of good works shall spring; but this does not identify the kernel with the blade. The former lies in the ground and by its fibers attaches itself to the furrow *internally*. The latter shoots from the ground *externally* and visibly. So is sanctification the implanting of the germ, of the disposition, and inclination which shall produce the blossom and fruit of a good work.

Sanctification is *God's* work in us, whereby He imparts to our members a holy disposition, inwardly filling us with delight in His law and with repugnance to sin. But good works are acts of *man*, which spring from this holy disposition. Hence sanctification is the source of good works, the lamp that shall shine with their light, the capital of which they are the interest.

Allow us to repeat it: “sanctification“ is a work of God; “Good works“ are of men. “Sanctification“ works internally; “good works“ are external. “Sanctification“ imparts something to man; “good works“ take something out of him. “Sanctification“ forces the root into the ground; to do “good works“ forces the fruit out of the fruitful tree. To confound these two leads the people astray.

The Pietist says: “Sanctification is man's work; it can not be insisted upon with sufficient emphasis. It is our best effort to be godly.” And the Mystic maintains: “We can not do good works, and may not insist upon them for man is unable; God alone works them in him independently of him.”

Of course, both are equally wrong and unscriptural. The former, in reducing sanctification to good works, takes it out of God's hand and lays it upon man, who never can perform it; and the latter, in making good works take the place of sanctification, releases man from the task laid on him and claims that God will perform it. Both errors must be opposed.

Both sanctification and good works should receive recognition. Ministers of the Word, and through them the people of God, should understand that sanctification is an *act of God* that He performs in man; and that God has commanded man to do good works to the glory of His name. And this will have twofold effect: (1) God's people will acknowledge their



complete inability to receive a holy disposition otherwise than as a gift of free grace, and then they will earnestly pray for this grace. (2) They will pray that His elect, in whom this work is already wrought, may show it forth in God-glorifying works: “Chosen in Christ Jesus, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (Ephes. i. 4).

Tho this distinction is very clear, two things may cause confusion:

First, the fact that holiness may be attributed to the good works themselves. One may *be* holy, but also do holy works. The Confession speaks of the “many holy works which Christ has done for us and in our stead” (art. 22). Hence holiness maybe *external* and *internal*.

The following passages refer, not to *sanctification*, but to good *works*: “Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation?” (2 Peter iii. 11). “As He which hath called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter i. 15). “That we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, may serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life” (Luke i. 75).

We find that the word “holy” is used of both our *inward disposition and of its result*, the *outward life*. It may be said of the spring as well as of the water, that it contains iron; of the tree as well as of the fruit, that it is good; of the candle as well as of the light, that it is bright. And, since holiness may be attributed to both the inward disposition and the outward life, sanctification may be understood as referring to the sanctification of our life. This may lead to the supposition that an outwardly blameless life is the same thing as sanctification. And if this is so, then sanctification is but a duty imposed, and not a gift imparted. It should therefore be carefully noticed that the sanctification of the mind, affections, and dispositions is not our work, but God’s; and that the holy life which springs from it is ours.

Second, the other cause of confusion is the many Scripture passages that exhort and encourage us to sanctify, purify, and perfect our lives, yea, even “to perfect our holiness” (2 Cor. vii. 1); to “yield ourselves as servants to holiness” (Rom. vi. 19); and to be “unblamable in holiness” (1 Thess. iii. 13), etc.

And we should not weaken these passages, as the Mystics do; who say that these texts mean, not that we should yield our members, but that God Himself will take special care that they be so yielded. These are tricks that lead men to trifle with the Word. It is an abuse of the Scripture for the sake of introducing one’s own theories under the cover of divine authority. The preachers who for fear of imposing responsibilities upon men abstain from exhortation, and dull the edge of the divine commandments by representing them as promises, take a heavy responsibility upon themselves.

For altho we know that no man has ever performed a single good work without God, who wrought in him both to will and to do; altho we heartily agree with the Confession, “That we are beholden to God for our good works and not God to us” (art. 24); and rejoice



with the holy apostle in the fact, "That God has before ordained the good works that we should walk therein" (Eph. ii. 10); yet this does not absolve us from the duty of exhorting the brethren.

It is a fact that God is pleased to use man as an instrument, and by the spur of his own ability and responsibility to incite him to *activity*. A cavalryman on the battle-field is fully aware how much he depends upon the good services of his horse; and also that the animal can not run unless God enabled it. Being a godly man, he prays before mounting that the Lord enable his horse to bring him victory; but after he is mounted, with spur and knee, rein and voice, he uses all his strength to make the horse do what it should do. And the same is true of sanctification. Unless the breath of the Lord blow through the garden of the soul, not a leaf can stir. The Lord alone performs the work from the beginning to the end. But He performs, it partly by the aid of means; and the instrument chosen is often *man himself*, who cooperates with God. And to this human instrumentality the Scripture refers when, in connection with sanctification, it admonishes us to good works.

As in nature God gives the seed and the forces in the soil and rain and sunshine to mature the fruit of the earth, while at the same time He uses the farmer to perfect His work, so it is also in sanctification: God causes it to work effectually; but He employs the human instrument to cooperate with Him, as the saw works together with him that handles it.

However, this should not be understood as tho in sanctification God had made Himself absolutely dependent upon the human instrument. This is impossible; by nature man can indeed *mar* sanctification, but never *further* it. By nature he hates and opposes it. Moreover, he is absolutely unable to produce from his own corrupt nature anything for his growth in sanctification. His instrumental cooperation should therefore not be abused either by ascribing to man a power for good, or to obscure the work of God.

Careful discrimination is necessary. He that implants the holy disposition is the Lord. The combined exertions of all these instruments could not implant one single feature of the holy mind, any more than all the carpenter's tools together could draw the molding of one panel. The artist paints upon the canvas; but with all their exertions his palette, brush, and paint-box could never draw a single figure. The sculptor molds the image; but of themselves his chisel; mallet, and stool can not detach a single chip from the rough marble. To engrave the features of holiness in the sinner is a work in the highest sense artistic, unspeakably divine. And the Artist who executes it is the Lord as St. Paul calls Him, the *Artist* and *Architect* of the City which has foundations. The fact that the Lord is pleased to use instruments for some parts of the work does not impart to them any value, much less any ability to accomplish anything of themselves without the Artist. He is the only Worker.

But as Artist He uses three different instruments, viz., the *Word*, *His providential dealings*, and *the regenerate person himself*.

1. The Word is a vital power in the Church which pierces even to the dividing asunder of the joints and the marrow, and, as such it is a divinely ordained instrument to create impressions in a man; and these impressions are the means by which holy inclinations are implanted in his heart.

2. *Life's experiences* also make impressions in us more or less lasting; and these God uses also to create holy dispositions.

3. The third instrument refers to the effect of *habit*. Repeated sinful acts make the sinner bold and create sinful habits; in this way he cooperates to make himself a greater sinner. In a similar sense the saint cooperates in his own salvation by allowing the holy disposition to radiate in good works. The frequent act of doing good creates the habit. The habit gradually becomes a second nature. And it is this mighty influence of habit which God uses to teach us holiness. In this way God can make one saint instrumental in the sanctification of another.

An architect builds a palace which makes him famous as an artist. It is true the contractor, an important person in his place, erects the structure; but his name is scarcely mentioned, it is the architect alone for whom all the praise is reserved. In sanctification it is not the Word by itself that is effectual, but that Word handled by the *Holy Spirit*. Neither is it the experience of life alone, but that experience employed by the *Holy Artist*. Neither is it the regenerate person who serves as foreman, but the glorious, Triune God, in whose service he labors.

## XIV.

**The Person Sanctified.**

“The putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh.”—*Col. ii. 11.*

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Sanctification embraces the whole man, body and soul, with all the parts, members, and functions that belong to each respectively. It embraces his *person* and, all of his person. This is why sanctification progresses from the hour of regeneration all through life, and can be completed only in and through death.

St. Paul prays for the church of Thessalonica: “The God of peace sanctify you wholly, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*1 Thess. v. 23*) Sanctification is essentially a work of one piece, simply because our person is not pieced together, but is organically *one* in all its parts.

The sinner’s holiness or unholiness embraces his whole being. He is a sinner not only in his body, but in his soul, and even more so and in his soul not only because his will is unholy, but also because his understanding is unholy, and even more so. The memory, the imagination, and all that belongs to him as a man are radically defiled, desecrated, and corrupted by sin. He lies in the midst of death. Even in a small child, every part is affected. Without the least exertion he learns a street-song, while it seems almost impossible to commit one stanza of a psalm.

If sanctification has reference to the inherited stain, as justification to the inherited guilt, it follows that sanctification must extend as far as the inherited stain. If man’s entire person is covered with the poison of the stain, it must be covered much more abundantly by sanctification.

Sin is disturbance, derangement, discord, and warfare in home and heart, and is not overcome completely until superseded by holy peace. This is the reason why St. Paul calls the God of sanctification the God of peace; and so he prays for the Church that the God of peace sanctify them *wholly*, or literally, “*unto the full end*,” so that the end of sanctification may be accomplished in them perfectly.<sup>11</sup>

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11 This is not the place to discuss the opinion held by many, that *1 Thess. v. 23* teaches trichotomy, i.e., the threefold division of man’s being. Let this only be observed, that it does not read, “*Ehdpopovs*,” “in all your parts,” followed by the summing up of those parts, *spirit, soul, and body*; but that it reads “O2.OTEXEGS,” which refers, not to the parts, but to the final end, “TEXOS.” Moreover, it should be noticed that in those passages which oppose the *spiritual* man to the *natural*—i.e., the pneumatical to the psychical, as in *1 Cor. ii. 14, 15*—the word “*rvevpa*” indicates the new life-principle, of which it never can be said that it be preserved blameless. For this ‘rvevja’ is sinless *by nature*. Calvin explains “spirit” and “soul” by making them to refer to our rational and moral existence as beings endowed with reason and volition, both modes of the soul’s existence.