

# **The Doctrine of Sanctification**



**Part Two**

**A. W. Pink**

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### **4. Its Problem**

### **5. Its Solution**

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It should hardly be necessary for us to explain that when speaking of the problem of sanctification we refer not to such as unto God, but rather as it appears unto our feeble perceptions. But in these days it is not wise to take anything for granted, for not only are there some ready to make a man an offender for a word, if he fails to express himself to their satisfaction, but there are others who need to have the simplest terms defined unto them. No, it would be blasphemy to affirm that sanctification, or anything else, ever presented any problem to the great Jehovah: Omniscience can never be confronted with any difficulty, still less an emergency. But to the Christian's finite understanding, deranged as it has been by sin, the problem of Holiness is a very real and actual one; far more perplexing, we may add, than that presented by the subject of justification.

There are various subsidiary difficulties in sanctification, as we intimated in the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the Introductory article, such as whether sanctification itself be a quality or a position, whether it be legal or experimental, whether it be absolute or progressive; all of which need to be cleared up in any satisfactory treatment of this theme. But far more intricate is the problem itself of how one who is a moral leper can be fit to worship in the Sanctuary of God. Strange to say this problem is the acutest unto those who are the most spiritual. Self-righteous Pharisees and self-satisfied Laodiceans are in no wise troubled over the matter. Antinomians cut the knot (instead of untying it) and deny all difficulty, by asserting that

the holiness of Christ is imputed to us. But those who realize God requires *personal* holiness, yet are conscious of their own filthiness, are deeply concerned thereupon.

Things are now, generally, at such a low ebb, that some of our readers may be surprised to find us making any reference at all to the problem of sanctification. In most places, today, either the doctrine taught is so inadequate and powerless, or the practice maintained is so defective, that few are likely to be exercised in conscience over the nature of that holiness without which none shall see the Lord. The claims of God are now so whittled down, the exalted standard which Scripture sets forth is so disregarded, heart purity (in which vital godliness so largely consists) is so little emphasized, that it is rare to find any concerned about their personal state. If there be some preachers zealously warning against the worthlessness of good works to save where there be no faith in Christ, there are far more who earnestly cry up an empty faith, which is unaccompanied by personal holiness and obedience.

Such a low standard of spiritual living now prevails, that comparatively few of the Lord's own people have any clear or disturbing conceptions of how far, far short they come of measuring up to the holy model which God has set before us in His Word. Such feeble and faulty ideals of Christian living now prevail that those who are preserved from the grosser evils which even the world condemns, are "at ease in Zion." So little is the fear of God upon souls, so faintly are the majority of professing Christians conscious of the plague of their own hearts, that in most quarters to speak about the problem of sanctification, would be talking in an unknown tongue. A fearful miasma has settled down upon nine-tenths of Christendom, deadening the senses, blunting spiritual perceptions, paralyzing endeavour after deeper personal piety, till almost anything is regarded as being acceptable unto God.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that some of us have intensified the problem, by creating for ourselves additional and

needless difficulties, through erroneous ideas of what sanctification is or what it involves in this life. The writer has been personally acquainted with more than one who was in abject despair through failing—after the most earnest and resolute efforts—to attain unto a state which false teachers had told them was attainable in this life, and who terminated their mortal wretchedness by committing suicide; and it has long been a wonder to him that thousands more who heed such teachers do not act likewise. There is no need to multiply difficulties: scriptural sanctification is neither the eradication of sin, the purification of the carnal nature, nor even the partial putting to sleep of the “flesh;” still less does it secure an exemption from the attacks and harassments of Satan.

Yet, on the other side, we must not minimize the problem, and reduce it to such simple proportions that we suppose a complete solution thereto is provided by merely affirming that Christ is our sanctification, and in himself the believing sinner remains unchanged to the end of his earthly course. If we die unholy in ourselves, then we are most assuredly lost for eternity, for only the “pure in heart” shall ever see God (Matt. 5:8). What that purity of heart is, and how it is to be obtained, is the very real problem which sanctification raises. It is at the heart God looks (1 Sam. 16:7), and it is with the heart we need to be most concerned, for “out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). The severest woes were pronounced by Christ upon men not because their external conduct was foul, but because within they were “full of dead bones, and all uncleanness” (Matt. 23:27).

That personal holiness is absolutely essential for an entrance into Heaven was shown at length in our last chapter [booklet], and that what men regard as the lesser pollutions of sin just as effectually exclude from the kingdom of God as do the most heinous crimes, is clear from 1 Cor. 6:9, 10. The question which forces itself upon us is, How shall men be sanctified so as to suit an infinitely pure God? That we must be justified before we can stand before a righteous God is no more obvious than that it is

necessary that we must be sanctified so as to live in the presence of a holy God. But man is utterly without holiness; yea, he is impure, foul, filthy. The testimony of Scripture on this point is plain and full. “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy” (Psa. 14:1-3).

The testimony of Scripture is that all men are vile and polluted; that they are, root and branch, source and stream, heart and life, not only disobedient, but *unholy*, and therefore *unfit* for God’s presence. The Lord Jesus who knew what was in man, makes this clear enough when, revealing with His own light that loathsome den, the human heart, He says, “Out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within” (Mark 7:21-23). Nor must we forget that the confession of saints concerning themselves has always corresponded to God’s testimony. David says, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa. 51). Job declared, “Behold I am vile; I abhor myself.” Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips..., for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

But the most remarkable confession of this absolute vileness is contained in an acknowledgment by the Old Testament church—a sentence which has been taken up by all believers as exactly expressing what they all have to say of their condition by nature: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). Strong language indeed is that, yet not one whit too strong to depict the mud and mire into which the Fall has brought us. If, then, when considering the doctrine of justification we found it appropriate—in view of man’s self-will, lawlessness, and disobedience—to ask, “How shall a man be just

with God?” it is no less so now we are contemplating the doctrine of sanctification to inquire—in view of man’s uncleanness and filthiness—“Who shall bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job 14:4).

We have no more power to make ourselves holy than we have to unmake or unbeing ourselves; we are no more able to cleanse our hearts, than we are to command or direct the winds. Sin in dominion is the “plague” of the heart (1 Kings 8:38), and as no disease is so deadly as the plague, so there is no plague so deadly as that of the heart. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23). The proud cannot make himself humble; the carnal cannot force himself to become spiritual; the earthly man can no more transform himself into a heavenly man than he can make the sun go backward or the earth fly upward. Sanctification is a work altogether above the powers of human nature: alas that this is so little realized today.

Even among those preachers who desire to be regarded as orthodox, who do not deny the Fall as a historical fact, few among them perceive the dire effects and extent thereof. “Bruised by the fall,” as one popular hymn puts it, states the truth far too mildly; yea, entirely misstates it. Through the breach of the first covenant all men have lost the image of God, and now bear the image of the Devil (John 8:44). The whole of their faculties are so depraved that they can neither think (2 Cor. 3:5), speak, nor do anything truly good and acceptable unto God. They are by birth, altogether unholy, unclean, loathsome and abominable in nature, heart, and life; and it is altogether beyond their power to change themselves.

Not only so, but the curse of the law lying upon them has severed all spiritual relation between God and them, cutting off all communion and communication with Heaven. The driving from the Garden of Eden of our first parents and the establishment of the cherubim with the flaming sword at its entrance, denoted that in point of justice they were barred from

all sanctifying influences reaching them—that being the greatest benefit man is capable of, as assimilating him to God Himself or rendering him like Him. The curse has fixed a gulf between God and fallen creatures, so that sanctifying influences cannot pass from Him unto them, any more than their unholy desires and prayers can pass unto Him. It is written, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord” (Prov. 15:8). And again, “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord” (verse 26).

It has, then, been rightly said that our sanctification “is no less a mystery than our justification” (Thomas Boston). As the depravity of human nature has always been so manifest that it could not escape notice even in the world, so in all ages men have, been seeking to discover a remedy for the same, and have supposed a cure could be achieved by a right use of their rational faculties. But the outcome has always been, at best, but an outward show and semblance of sanctification, going under the name of “moral virtue.” But so far is that from meeting the requirements of Him who is Light, that men themselves, once their eyes are (in any measure) anointed with heavenly eye salve, perceive their moral virtue to be as “filthy rags,” a menstrous cloth. Until men are regenerate and act from a principle of grace in the heart, all their actions are but imitations of real obedience and piety, as an ape would mimic a man.

It is a common error of those that are unregenerate to seek to reform their conduct without any realization that their state must be changed before their lives can possibly be changed from sin to righteousness. The tree itself must be made good, before its fruit can possibly be good. As well attempt to make a watch go, whose mainspring is broken, by washing its face and polishing its back, as for one under the curse of God to produce any works acceptable to Him. That was the great mistake Nicodemus laboured under: he supposed that teaching was all he needed, so that he might adjust his walk to the acceptance of Heaven. But to him the Lord Jesus declared, “Marvel not that I said unto thee,

Ye must be born again” (John 3:7): that was only another way of saying, Nicodemus, you cannot perform spiritual works before you possess a spiritual nature and a spiritual nature cannot be had until you are born again.

Multitudes have laboured with great earnestness to subdue their evil propensities, and have struggled long and hard to bring their inward thoughts and affections into conformity with the law of God. They have sought to abstain from all sins, and to perform every known duty. They have been so devout and intent that they have undermined their health, and were so fervent in their zeal that they were ready to kill their bodies with fastings and mascerations, if only they might kill their sinful lusts. They were strongly convinced that holiness was absolutely necessary unto salvation, and were so deeply affected with the terrors of damnation, as to forsake the world and shut themselves up in convents and monasteries; yet all the while ignorant of the *mystery* of sanctification—that a *new state* must precede a *new life*.

It is positively asserted by Divine inspiration that, “They that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). Alas, how few understand the meaning of those words “in the flesh;” how many suppose they only signify, to be inordinately addicted to the baser passions. Whereas, to be “in the flesh” is to be in a state of nature—fallen, depraved, alienated from the life of God. To be “in the flesh” is not simply being a personal transgressor of God’s holy law, but is the cause of all sinfulness and sinning. The “flesh” is the very nature of man as corrupted by the fall of Adam, and propagated from him to us in that corrupt state by natural generation. To be “in the flesh” is also being in complete subjection to the power of the Devil, who is the certain conqueror of all who attempt to fight him in their own strength or with his own weapons. The flesh can no more be brought to holiness by man’s most vehement endeavours, than he can bring a dead carcass to life by chafing and rubbing it.

The varied elements which entered into the problem of



Justification were: God's law requires from us perfect obedience to its statutes; this we have utterly failed to render; we are therefore under the condemnation and curse of the law; the Judge Himself is inflexibly just, and will by no means clear the guilty: how, then, can men be shown mercy without justice being flouted? The elements which enter into the problem of Sanctification are: the law requires inward as well as outward conformity to it: but we are born into this world with a nature that is totally depraved, and can by no means be brought into subjection to the law (Rom. 8:7). God Himself is ineffably pure, how then can a moral leper be admitted into His presence? We are utterly without holiness, and can no more make ourselves holy than the Ethiopian can change his skin. Even though a holy nature be imparted by regeneration, how can one with the flesh, unchanged, within him, draw near as a worshipper unto the Heavenly Sanctuary? How can I as a person possibly profess myself as holy, while conscious that I am full of sin? How can I honestly profess to have a "pure heart," while realizing a sea of corruption still rages within me? If my state must be changed before anything in my life is acceptable to God, what I possibly do?—I cannot unmake myself. If I know that I am polluted and vile, and utterly unsuited unto the thrice holy God, how much less can He regard me as fit for His presence?

## **5. Its Solution**

In connection with the grand truth of sanctification there is both a mystery and a problem: the former relates to the unregenerate; the latter is what exercises so deeply the regenerate. That which is hidden from the understanding of the natural man is, why his best performances are unacceptable unto God, no matter how earnestly and devoutly they be done. Even though he be informed that the tree must be made good if its fruit is to be wholesome, in other words, that his very state and nature must first be made acceptable unto God before any of his works can be so, he has not the remotest idea of how this is to be

accomplished. But that which perplexes the spiritual man is, how one who is still full of sin may justly regard his state and nature as being acceptable unto God, and how one who is a mass of corruption within can honestly claim to be holy. As the Lord is pleased to enable we will consider each in turn.

The natural man is quite ignorant of the mystery of sanctification. Though he may—under the spur of conscience, the fear of Hell, or from desire to go to Heaven—be very diligent in seeking to conquer the activities of indwelling sin and exceedingly zealous in performing every known duty, yet he is quite in the dark as to why his state must be changed before his actions can be acceptable unto God. That upon which he is unenlightened is, that it is not the matter which makes a work good and pleasing to God, but the principles from which that work proceeds. It is true that the conscience of the natural man distinguishes between good and evil, and religious instruction may educate him to do much which is right and avoid much that is wrong; nevertheless, his actions are not done out of gratitude and in a spirit of loving obedience, but out of fear and from a servile spirit; and therefore are they like fruit ripened by art and forced in the hothouse, rather than normally by the genial rays of the sun.

“Now the end (design) of the commandment (or law) is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned” (1 Tim. 1:5). Nothing less than this will meet the Divine requirements. Only those actions are pleasing to God which have respect unto His commandment, which proceed from gratitude unto Him for His goodness, and where faith has respect unto His promised acceptance and blessing. No works are approved of Heaven except they possess these qualities. A sense of duty must sway the conscience, disinterested affection must move the heart, and faith in exercise must direct the actions. Hence, should I be asked why I do thus and so? the answer should be, Because God has commanded it. And if it be further enquired, And why such earnestness and affection? the answer

ought to be, Because God requires my best, and I desire to honour Him with the same. Obedience respects God's authority; love, His kindness; faith, His bounty or reward.

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). This must be our design—the glory of God—if our actions are to meet with His approval. Whether it be the discharge of our temporal duties, the performing of deeds of charity and kindness, or acts of piety and devotion, they must be executed with this aim: that God may be honoured by our conformity to His revealed will. The natural man, when in sore straits, will cry fervently unto God, but it is only that his wants be supplied. Many will contribute liberally of their means to the relief of sufferers, but it is to be seen of men (Matt. 6:2). People are religious on the Sabbath and attend public worship, but it is either to satisfy an uneasy conscience or in the hope of earning Heaven thereby.

From what has been said above it should be clear that the best deeds of the unregenerate fall far short of the Divine requirements. The actions of the natural man cannot receive the approbation of Heaven, because God is neither the beginning nor the end of them: love for Him is not their spring, glorifying Him is not their aim. Instead, they issue from the workings of corrupt self, and they have in view only the advancement of self. Nor can it be otherwise. Water will not rise above its own level, or flow uphill. A pure stream cannot issue from an impure fountain. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6), and will never be anything but flesh: educate, refine, religionize the flesh all we may, it can never become spirit. The man himself must be sanctified, before his actions are purified.

But how shall men be sanctified so as to be suited unto the presence of an infinitely pure God? By nature they are utterly without holiness: they are “corrupt, filthy, an unclean thing.” They have no more power to make themselves holy than they have to create a world. We could tame a tiger from the jungle far more easily than we could our lusts. We might empty the ocean

more quickly than we could banish pride from our souls. We might melt marble more readily than our hard hearts. We might purge the sea of salt more easily than we could our beings of sin. “For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God” (Jer. 2:22).

Why “when we were in our best condition by nature, when we were in the state of original holiness, when we were in Adam vested with the image of God, we preserved it not. How much less likely then, is it, that now, in the state of lapsed and depraved nature, it is in our power to restore ourselves, to reintroduce the image of God into our souls, and that in a far more eminent manner than it was at first created by God? What needed all that contrivance of infinite wisdom and grace for the reparation of our nature by Jesus Christ, if holiness, wherein it doth consist, be in our power, and educed out of the natural faculties of our souls? There can be no more fond imagination befall the minds of men, than that defiled nature is able to cleanse itself, or depraved nature to rectify itself, or we, who have lost that image of God which He created in us, and with us, should create it again in ourselves by our own endeavours” (John Owen).

Yet, let it be pointed out that this impotency to measure up to the requirements of God is no mere innocent infirmity, but a highly culpable thing, which greatly aggravates our vileness and adds to our guilt. Our inability to measure up to the standard of personal piety which God has appointed, lies not in a lack of executive power or the needful faculties, but in the want of a willing mind and a ready heart to practice true holiness. If men in a natural state had a hearty love and liking to true holiness, and a fervent and sincere endeavour to practice it, and yet failed in the event, then they might under some pretence plead for this excuse (as many do), that they are compelled to sin by an inevitable necessity. But the fact is that man’s impotency lies in his own obstinacy—“Ye will not come to Me” (John 5:40) said

the Lord Jesus.

Inability to pay a debt does not excuse a debtor who has recklessly squandered his estate; nor does drunkenness excuse the mad or violent actions of a drunkard, but rather aggravates his crime. God has not lost His right to command, even though man through his wickedness has lost his power to obey. Because the flesh “lusteth against the Spirit” (Gal. 5:17), that is far from an extenuation for not being in subjection to Him. Because “every one that doeth evil hateth the light,” that is far from justifying them because they “loved darkness” (John 3:19, 20); yea, as the Saviour there so plainly and solemnly states, it only serves to heighten their criminality—“This is the condemnation.” Then “How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?” (Job 15:16) that cannot practice holiness because he will not.

It is because men do not make a right use of their faculties that they are justly condemned. The soul in an unsanctified person is not dead, but is a living and acting principle; and therefore it is able to understand, desire, will, reason, and improve its opportunities, or redeem the time. Though the natural man is unable to work grace in his own heart, yet he is able to attend and wait upon the means of grace. An unsanctified person may as well go to hear a sermon as attend a theatre: he has the same eyes for reading the Scriptures as the newspaper or a novel: he may as well associate himself with those who fear an oath, as with those who delight to blaspheme that Name at which all should tremble. In the day of judgment unsanctified persons will be damned not for cannots, but for will not.

Men complain that they cannot purify themselves, that they cannot cease from sin, that they cannot repent, that they cannot believe in Christ, that they cannot live a holy life. But if only they were honest, if they were duly humbled, if they sincerely grieved over the awful hold which sin has obtained upon them, they would fly to the throne of grace, they would cry unto God day and night for Him to break the chains which bind them,

deliver them from the power of Satan and translate them into the kingdom of His dear Son. If they were but sincere in their complaint of inability, they would go to God and beg Him to sprinkle clean water upon them, put His Spirit within them, and give them a new heart, so that they might walk in His statutes and keep His judgments (Ezek. 36:25-28). And it is just because they will not, that their blood justly lies upon their own heads.

“Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded” (James 4:8). Outward separation from that which is evil and polluting is not sufficient: purity of heart is also indispensable. “Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts” (Psa. 51:6). The Divine law not only prohibits stealing, but also insists “Thou shall not covet,” which is a lusting of our souls rather than an external act. Holiness of nature is required by the law, for how else shall a man love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and his neighbour as himself? God is essentially holy by nature, and nothing can be so contrary to Him as an unholy nature. Nothing can be so contrary as opposite natures. How can a wolf and a lamb, or vulture and a dove, dwell together? “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?” (2 Cor. 6:14, 15).

How, then, is this mystery cleared up? By what method, or in what way, have the sanctified become blest with a nature which makes them meet for the ineffable presence of God? By what process does the evil tree become good, so that its fruit is wholesome and acceptable? Obviously, we cannot here supply the full answer to these questions, or we should be anticipating too much that we desire to bring out in later chapters. But we will endeavour to now indicate, at least, the direction in which and the lines along which this great mystery is cleared—lines which most assuredly would never have entered our hearts and minds to so much as conceive; but which once they are viewed by anointed eyes, are seen to be Divine and satisfying. The Lord graciously assist us to steer clear of the rocks of error and guide

us into the clear and refreshing waters of the truth.

As we have shown, it was quite impossible—though it was their bounden duty—for those whom God sanctifies to personally answer the requirements of His holy law: “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?” (Prov. 20:9). Wherefore, for the satisfaction of the law, which requires absolute purity of nature, it was settled as one of the articles in the Everlasting Covenant, that Christ, the Representative of all who would be sanctified, should be a Man of an untainted and perfectly pure nature, which fully met the requirements of the law: “For such an High Priest became us—holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26). The meeting of that requirement necessitated two things: first, that the Head of His people should be born with a holy human nature; second, that He should retain that holiness of nature inviolate unto the end. Let us consider, briefly, each of these separately.

There was a holy nature given to Adam as the Root of mankind, to be kept by him and transmitted to his posterity by natural generation. Upon that ground the law requires all men to be born holy, and pronounces them unclean and “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) in the contrary. But how can this demand be met by those who are born in sin? They cannot enter again into their mother’s womb, and be born a second time without sin. Even so, the law will not abate its demand. Wherefore it was provided that Christ, the last Adam, should, as the Representative and Root of His spiritual seed, be born perfectly holy; that whereas they brought a sinful nature into the world with them, He should be born “that holy thing” (Luke 1:35). Consequently, in the reckoning of the law all believers are born holy in the last Adam. They are said to be “circumcised” by the circumcision of Christ (Col. 2:11), and circumcision necessarily presupposes birth!

But more was required. It was necessary that the Second Man should preserve His holy nature free from all spot or defilement, as He passed through this world of sin. The law not only

demands holiness of nature, but also that the purity and integrity of that nature be preserved. Wherefore to satisfy this “demand,” it was provided that the believers’ federal Head should preserve His ineffable purity unstained. “He shall not fail” (Isa. 42:4). The first man did fail: the fine gold soon became dim: the holiness of his nature was quickly extinguished by sin. But the Second Man failed not: neither man nor devil could corrupt Him. He preserved the holiness of His nature unstained, even to the end of His life. And so of His sanctified, viewing them in Himself, He declares, “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee” (Song 4:7).

But while that completely meets the judicial side, satisfying the demands of the law, something more was yet required to satisfy the heart of God and meet the experimental needs of His people. In view of their being actually defiled in Adam when he sinned, they are defiled in their own persons so that not only is his guilt imputed to them, but his corruption is imparted to them in the nature they have received from him by generation. Therefore, not only were the elect legally born holy in Christ their Head, but from Him they also receive a holy nature: it is written, “The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). This is accomplished by that gracious and supernatural working of the third person in the Godhead, whereby the elect are vitally united to their head so that “he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17).

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Our being united to Christ, through the Spirit, by faith, makes us partakers of the same spiritual and holy nature with Him, as really and as actually as Eve (type of the Church) was made of one nature with Adam, being bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Because believers are united to Christ the Holy One, they are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:2). The believer being one with Christ is made “a new creature,” because



He is such a Stock as changes the graft into its own nature: “If the Root be holy, so are the branches” (Rom. 11:16). The same Spirit which Christ received “without measure” (John 3:34) is communicated to the members of His body, so that it can be said, “Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Being united to Christ by faith, and through the communication of the quickening Spirit from Christ unto him, the believer is thereupon not only justified and reconciled to God, but sanctified, made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, and made an heir of God.

At the beginning of the former chapter it was pointed out that in connection with the grand truth of sanctification there is both a mystery and a problem: the former relating to the unregenerate, the latter causing concern to the regenerate. That which is hidden from the knowledge of the natural man is, why his best works are unacceptable to God. Tell him that all his actions—no matter how carefully and conscientiously, diligently and devoutly, executed—are rejected by God, and that is something entirely above the reach of his understanding. He knows not that his breaking of the law in Adam has brought in a breach between himself and God, so that while that breach remains, the favour of God cannot flow out of him, nor his prayers or offerings pass in to God. The Lord will no more receive anything at the hands of the natural man than He would have respect unto the offering of Cain (Gen. 4). And had He left all men in their natural estate, this would have held true of the whole race until the end of time.

Inasmuch as all men were given a holy nature—created in the image and likeness of God—in their representative and root, to be transmitted to them by him, before the law was given to Adam, it follows that the law requires a holy nature from each of us, and pronounces a curse wherever it finds the opposite. Though we are actually born into this world in a state of corruption and filth (Ezek. 16:3-6, etc.), yet the law will not abate its just demands upon us. In consequence of the sin which indwells us—which is so much a part and parcel of ourselves

that everything we do is defiled thereby—we are thoroughly unable to render unto the law that obedience which it requires; for while we are alienated from the life of God, it is impossible that any outward acts of compliance with the law's statutes can proceed from those principles which it alone can approve of, namely, disinterested love and faith unfeigned. Consequently, the state of the natural man, considered in himself, is entirely beyond hope.

The provision made by the manifold wisdom and sovereign grace of God to meet the desperate needs of His people was stipulated for in terms of the Everlasting Covenant. There it was agreed upon by the Eternal Three that the Mediator should be the Son of man, yet, that His humanity should be not only entirely free from every taint of original sin, but should be purer than that of Adam's even when his Creator pronounced him "very good." This was accomplished by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit in the virgin birth, and by the Son of God taking into personal union with Himself "that holy thing" which was to be born of Mary. Inasmuch as Christ, the God-man Mediator, entered this world not as a private Person, but as a public, as the Representative and Head of God's elect, in the reckoning of the law they were born holy in their Surety and Sponsor, and so fully measure up to its requirements. Christ and His mystical body have never been viewed apart by the law.

But this, unspeakably blessed though it be, was not all. A perfect legal standing only met half of the need of God's elect: in addition, their state must be made to accord with their standing. This also has been provided for by the measureless love of the God of all grace. He so ordered that, just as the guilt of Adam was imputed to all for whom He acted, so the righteousness of Christ should be imputed to all for whom He transacted: and, that just as spiritual death—with all its corrupting effects—should be transmitted by Adam to all his posterity, so the spiritual life of Christ—with all its gracious influences—should be communicated to all His seed. As they received a sinful and

impure nature from their natural head, so the sanctified receive a sinless and pure nature from their spiritual Head. Consequently, as they have borne the image of the earthy, so they shall bear the image of the heavenly.

Some of our readers may, perhaps, conclude that all difficulty in connection with this aspect of our subject has now been disposed of, but a little reflection on the part of the believer soon remind him that the most perplexing point of all has yet to be cleared up. Though it be true that every essential requirement of the law has been met for the sanctified by their glorious Head, so that the law righteously views them as holy in Him; and though it be true that at regeneration they receive from Christ, by the Spirit, a new and holy nature, like unto His; yet the old nature remains, and remains unchanged, unimproved. Yea, to them it seems that the carnal nature in them is steadily growing worse and worse, and more active and defiling every day they live. They are painfully conscious of the fact that sin not only remains in them, but that it pollutes their desires, thoughts, imaginations, and acts; and to prevent its uprisings they are quite powerless.

This presents to an honest heart and a sensitive conscience a problem which is most acute, for how can those who abhor themselves be pleasing unto the thrice holy One? How can those conscious of their filthiness and vileness possibly be fit to draw nigh unto Him who is ineffably and infinitely pure? The answer which some have returned to this agonized enquiry based upon an erroneous deduction from the words of Paul “it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me:” (Rom. 7:20)—will by no means satisfy them. To say it is not the regenerate person, but only the flesh in him, which sins, is to invent a distinction which repudiates the Christian’s responsibility and which affords no relief to a quickened conscience. Scripture is far too plain on this point to justify a mistake: Old and New Testament alike insist it is the person who sins—“against Thee. . . have I sinned” (Psa. 51). Paul himself concludes Romans 7 by saying, “O wretched man that I am!”

Where other matters are concerned, men have more sense than to fall back upon such a distinction as some modern theologians are so fond of insisting upon: it never occurs to them to argue thus in connection with temporal things. Imagine one before a judge, who was charged with theft, acknowledging his offence, but disowning all responsibility and culpability on the ground that it was his “evil nature” and *not himself* which did the stealing! Surely the judge would be in a quandary to decide whether prison or the madhouse was the right place to send him. This reminds us of an incident wherein a “Bishop” was guilty of blasphemy in the House of Lords (where all “Bishops” have seats). Being rebuked by his manservant, he replied, “It was the ‘lord’ and not the ‘bishop’ who cursed.” His servant responded, “When the Devil gets the ‘lord’ where will the ‘bishop’ be!” Beware, my reader, of seeking to clear yourself by throwing the blame upon your “nature.”

Somewhere else, then, than in any supposed distinction between the sanctified person and his old nature, must the solution to our problem be sought. When one who has been walking with God is tripped up by some temptation and falls, into sin, or when indwelling corruption surges up and (for the time being) obtains the mastery over him, he is painfully aware of the fact; and that which exercises him the most is not only that he has sinned against the One who is nearer and dearer to him than all else, but that his communion with Him is broken, and that he is no longer morally fit to come into His sacred presence. Whilst his knowledge of the Gospel may be sufficient to allay any haunting fears of the penal consequences of his sins, yet this does not remove the defilement from his conscience. This is one important respect in which the unregenerate and regenerate differ radically: when the former sins it is the guilt (and punishment) which most occupies his thoughts; but when the latter, it is the defiling effects which most exercises his heart.

There are two things in sin, inseparably connected and yet clearly distinguishable, namely, its criminality and its pollution.

The pollution of sin is that property of it whereby it is directly opposed unto the holiness of God, and which God expresseth His holiness to be contrary unto. Therefore it is said, He is “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and canst not look on evil” (Hab. 1:13)—it is a vile and loathsome sight to Him who is the Light. Hence doth He use that pathetic entreaty, “Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate” (Jer. 44:4.). It is with respect unto His own holiness that God sets forth sin by the names of everything which is offensive, objectionable, repulsive, abominable. Consequently, when the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, He imparts such a sight and sense of the filth of sin, that sinners blush, are ashamed, are filled with confusion of face, are abased in their own esteem, and abashed before God.

As we are taught the guilt of sin by our own fear, which is the inseparable adjunct of it, so we are taught the filth of sin by our own shame, which unavoidably attends it. Under the typical economy God not only appointed sacrifices to make atonement for the guilt of sin, but also gave various ordinances for purification or ceremonial cleansing from the pollution thereof. In various ways, during Old Testament times, God instructed His people concerning the spiritual defilement of sin: the distinction between clean and unclean animals, the different natural distempers which befoul the body, the isolating of the leper, the accidental touching of the dead which rendered people religiously unclean by the law, are cases in point. All of them prefigured internal and spiritual pollution, and hence the whole work of sanctification is expressed by “a fountain opened...for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1)—that is, for the purging away of them.

So inseparable is moral pollution from sin, and a sense of shame from a consciousness of the pollution, that whenever a soul is truly convicted of sin, there is always a painful sense of this filthiness, accompanied by personal shame. Only as this is clearly apprehended, are we able to understand the true nature of sanctification. The spiritual comeliness of the soul consists in its

conformity to God. Grace gives beauty: hence it is said of Christ that He is “Fairer (or “more beautiful”) than the children of men,” and that beauty consisted in his being made in the image of God, which constituted the whole harmony and symmetry of his nature, all his faculties and actions having respect unto God. Therefore, that which is contrary to the image of God—depravity, contrary to grace—sin, hath in it a deformity which mars the soul, destroys its comeliness, disrupts its order, and brings deformity, ugliness, vileness.

Whatever is contrary to holiness or the image of God on the soul, is base, unworthy, filthy. Sin dishonours and degrades the soul, filling it with shame. The closer we are permitted to walk with God and the more we see ourselves in His light, the more conscious are we of the deformity of sin and of our baseness. When our eyes were first opened to see our spiritual nakedness, how hideous did we appear unto ourselves, and what a sense of our pollution we had! That was but the reflex of God’s view, for He abhors, loathes, and esteems as an abominable thing whatever is contrary to His holiness. Those who are made “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), do, according to their measure, but see themselves with God’s eyes, as wretched, naked, shameful, loathsome, hideous and abominable creatures; and therefore do they, with Job, “abhor” themselves.

The last four paragraphs are, in part, a condensation from John Owen; and from them we may clearly perceive that it is they who are truly sanctified and holy, who are the most deeply sensible of the root of corruption which still remains within them, and which is ever springing up and producing that which defiles them; and therefore do they greatly bewail their pollutions, as that which is most dishonouring to God and most disturbing to their own peace; and earnestly do they endeavour after the mortification of it. A remarkable corroboration is found in the fact that the most godly and holy have been the very ones who most strongly affirmed their sinfulness and most loudly bewailed the same. It was one whom God Himself declared to be

a “perfect (sincere) and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8) who declared “Behold, I am vile” (40:4). It was one “greatly beloved” of God (Dan. 10:19), who acknowledged “my comeliness was turned in me into corruption” (10:8). It was he who was caught up to the third heaven and then returned again to earth who moaned, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24).

From the quotations just made from the personal confessions of some of the most eminent of God’s saints, it is perfectly plain to any simple soul that a “pure heart” cannot signify one from which all sin has been removed, nor can their language possibly be made to square with the utopian theory that the carnal nature is eradicated from any believer in this life. Indeed it cannot; and none but they who are completely blinded by Satan would ever affirm such a gross absurdity and palpable lie. But this requires us now to define and describe what a “pure heart” consists of, according to the scriptural meaning thereof. And in our efforts to supply this, we shall have to try and guard against two evils: providing a pillow for empty professors to comfortably rest upon; and stating things in such a way that hope would be killed in the regenerate.

First, a “pure heart” is one which has experienced “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). That takes place at the new birth, and is maintained by the Spirit throughout the Christian’s life. All that this involves we cannot now state at any length. But, negatively, it includes the purifying of the believer’s understanding, so that it is no longer fatally blinded by Satan, but is supernaturally illumined by the Spirit: in consequence, the vanity of worldly things is now perceived. The mind is, in great measure, freed from the pollution of error, and this, by the shining in of the light of God’s truth. It includes, negatively, the cleansing of the affections, so that sin is no longer loved but loathed, and God is no longer shrunk from and avoided, but sought after and desired.

From the positive side, there is communicated to the soul at regeneration a nature or principle which contains within itself pure desires, pure intentions, and pure roots of actions. The fear of God is implanted, and the love of God is shed abroad in the heart. In consequence thereof, the soul is made to pant after God, yearn for conformity to His will, and seeks to please Him in all things. And hence it is that the greatest grief of the Christian arises from the hindering of his spiritual longings and the thwarting of his spiritual aspirations. A pure heart is one that loathes impurity, and whose heaviest burden is the realization that such an ocean of foul waters still indwells him, constantly casting up their mire and dirt, polluting all he does. A “pure heart,” therefore, is one which *makes conscience* of foolish, vile imaginations, and evil desires. It is one which grieves over pride and discontent, mourns over unbelief, and enmity, weeps in secret over unholiness.

Second, a “pure heart” is one which has been “sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22). An “evil conscience” is one which accuses of guilt and oppresses because of unpardoned sin. Its possessor dreads the prospect of the day of judgment, and seeks to banish all thoughts of it from his mind. But a conscience to which the Spirit has graciously applied the atoning blood of Christ obtains peace of mind, and has confidence to draw nigh unto God: in consequence, superstition, terror and torment is removed, and an aversion to God is displaced by a joy in God. Hence, also, third, we read “purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). As unbelief is a principle which defiles, so faith is a principle which purges, and that, because of *the object which it lays hold of*. Faith looks away from self to Christ, and is enabled to realize that His blood “cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Every Christian, then, has a “pure” heart in the particulars given above. But every Christian does not have a “clean” heart (Psa. 51:10). That which pollutes the heart of a Christian is *unjudged sin*. Whenever sin is *allowed* by us, communion with God is broken, and pollution can only be removed, and



communion restored, by genuine repentance—a condemning of ourselves, a mourning over the sin, and unsparing confession of the same, accompanied by a fervent desire and sincere resolution not to be overtaken by it again. The willing allowance and indulgence of any known sin cannot exist with a clean heart. Rightly, then, did John Owen say *of repentance*: “It is as necessary unto the continuance of spiritual life, as faith itself.” After the repentance and confession, there must be a fresh (and constant) recourse unto that Fountain which has been “opened for sin and for uncleanness,” a fresh application by faith of the cleansing blood of Christ: pleading its merits and efficacy before God.

In this chapter (in two sections) we have sought to answer the questions at the close of the fifth chapter. We have met every demand of the law in the person of our Surety. We are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, because all the value of Christ’s cleansing blood is reckoned to our account. We are capacitated to draw nigh unto God now, because the Holy Spirit has communicated to us the very nature of Christ Himself. By faith we may regard ourselves as holy in Christ. By regeneration we have received a “pure heart:” proof of which is, we hate all impurity, although there is still that in us which delights in nothing else. We are to maintain communion with God by cleansing our own hearts (Psa. 73:13), and that, through constant mortification, and the daily and unsparing judgment of all known sin in and from us.

The second of seven booklets.

