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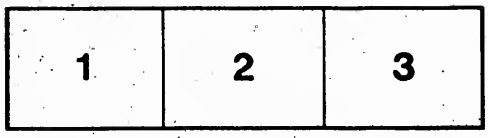

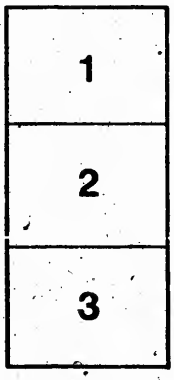

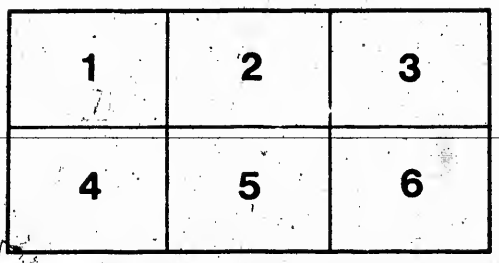

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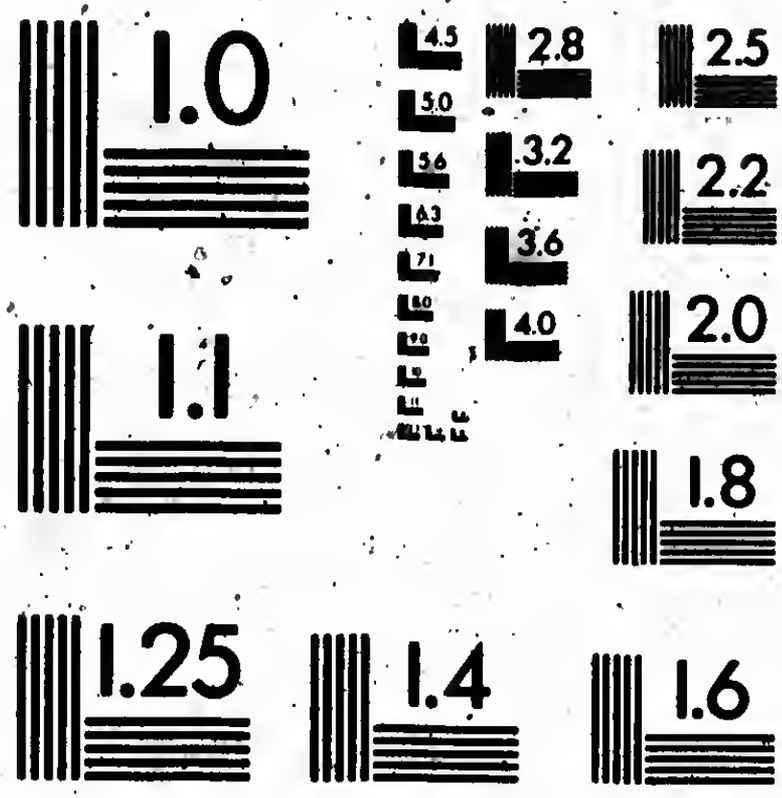

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SANCTIFICATION

A Sermon

PREACHED BY

REV. A. STEWART, B.D.,

Professor of Systematic Theology and Old Testament Exegesis in Wesley College, Winnipeg.

Published by request of the Manitoba and North-West Conference of the Methodist Church.

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SANCTIFICATION.

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification."
—I. Thess. iv. 3.

THE primary idea of sanctification, as set forth in the Old Testament, is undoubtedly that of separation or consecration unto God. This separation or consecration, in the case of persons, is in order to moral purity and spiritual growth. The New Testament representation of the subject makes this clear.

In our present treatment of the doctrine we shall ask, and endeavor to answer briefly, the following questions:

I. What is the place of this doctrine in the system of Christian truth and the experience of the individual believer?

II. What is the nature of the work of sanctification?

That all are born in sin—born with a sinful nature—is the explicit teaching of Scripture. That all have sinned against God and are guilty of personal transgression is also clearly taught therein. On the condition of repentance and faith, the guilt of sin is pardoned and the sinful nature renewed. The pardon of sin is called justification, and the renewal of the

nature is regeneration. It is not the work of regeneration to wholly purify the sinful nature and develop the Christian graces in the life. This is the work of sanctification. This, then, gives us an answer to our first question, as to the place of sanctification in the system of Christian truth and in the experience of the believer in Christ. Sanctification follows and completes the work begun in regeneration. That regeneration does not complete the work is the teaching of Scripture, with which our Methodist standards fully agree. Wesley, in his sermon "On Sin in Believers," is very explicit on this point. He quotes Gal. v. 17, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: these are contrary the one to the other;" and then adds, "Nothing can be more express. The apostle here directly affirms that the flesh, evil nature, opposes the Spirit, even in believers; that even in the regenerate there are two principles, 'contrary the one to the other.'" Wesley further adds: "When he (Paul) writes to the believers at Corinth, to those who were sanctified in Christ Jesus, he says, 'I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. Ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying and strife are ye not carnal?' Now, here the apostle speaks unto those who were unquestionable believers—whom in the same breath he styles his brethren in Christ—as being still in a measure carnal. He affirms there was envying (an evil temper) occasioning strife among them, and yet does not give the least intimation that

they had lost their faith. Nay, he manifestly declares they had not, for then they would not have been babes in Christ. And what is most remarkable of all, he speaks of being carnal and babes in Christ as one and the some thing; plainly showing that every believer is, in a degree, carnal while he is only a babe in Christ. Indeed, this grand point that there are two contrary principles in believers, nature and grace, the flesh and the Spirit, runs through all the epistles of St. Paul; yea, through all the Holy Scriptures; almost all the directions and exhortations therein are founded on this supposition, pointing at wrong tempers or practices in those who are, notwithstanding, acknowledged by the inspired writers to be believers. And they are continually exhorted to fight with and conquer these by the power of the faith which was in them." These extracts leave no room for doubt as to Wesley's position on this question.

We are next to consider the question, What is the nature of sanctification?

As to its nature, sanctification is two-fold; it consists of a work of purification from sin and of the development of the Christian graces in the life. In other words, it is a work of *purity* and a work of *maturity*.

The work of purification or cleansing includes purification from both inherited and acquired sinful propensities. We come into the world with a sinful nature. There are appetites, desires and affections, which are in their nature sinful and are the effect of original sin. In addition to these inherited sinful

propensities of our nature, we acquire others through sinful indulgence. It is the work of sanctification to cleanse the nature from both the inherited and acquired sinful propensities, whether in the form of appetites, desires or affections. Take, for example, the case of a person who is born into this life with an appetite for intoxicants; such appetite is inherited and in its nature sinful. It is the work of sanctification to cleanse the nature from such. The possibility of this as an actual experience cannot be doubted. Again, a man may acquire a desire for money, and it become so strong as to be the ruling power of his life. It is the work of sanctification to cleanse the nature from such sinful desire. Thus it is with everything of a sinful character in the heart or nature. Entire sanctification implies the purification of the heart from *all* sin, for this provision is made in the covenant of divine grace. It is to every Christian a possible experience. It is to very many an actual experience. All Christians who have lived lives faithful to God, know, as a matter of fact in their own experience, that they are cleansed from sinful desires or affections, which were to them at one time besetting sins. If divine grace is sufficient for the cleansing away of some, why not of all? "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (I. John i. 7.)

But with the heart and nature cleansed from all sin, is the Christian free from temptation? To this we answer that he is free from all temptation in the sense of *enticement* to sin, but not from temptation in

the sense of *testing*. An enticement to sin implies some sinful principle within to which the temptation is presented. Where there is no sin within the heart there can be no enticement. But although all sinful appetites, desires and affections are destroyed, there are still remaining, and must always remain, the natural appetites, desires and affections of the nature. It is not the work of divine grace to remove these; they must always remain, and, remaining, may be a source of temptation in the sense of testing. A consideration of the temptation of our Lord will throw light upon this question. "In Him there was no sin." In His case, therefore, there could be no enticement. There could be no response from any sinful principle within to any temptation that might be presented. His temptation was of the nature of a testing, as to whether he had perfect control of the appetites, desires and affections which he possessed as a man. According to the narrative in the 4th chapter of Luke's Gospel, our Saviour was forty days without food, and the devil, seeing his opportunity, came and suggested that He (Christ) should satisfy the cravings of hunger by making bread of the stones. There was no sin in feeling hungry. Here was an appeal to a natural appetite, and the result of the test showed that Christ had perfect control of the appetite. Next the devil takes Him up on a high mountain, and shows him all that beautiful country lying to the west, stretching away to the shores of the Mediterranean, and beyond that the vast domains of Greece and Rome. Then, turning to the east, he points out

the flourishing civilizations of Persia and Babylonia, and intimates to Christ that "all these and the glory of them" should be His, if He would fall down and worship him. Here again there was an appeal, not to any sinful principle, but to a natural desire—the desire of power. The result of the test showed that Christ had perfect control of that desire. It was next suggested by the devil that if Christ would throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple down into the valley and escape unhurt, it would be a marked demonstration to the Jews there in their very midst that God exercised a peculiar care over Him, and would doubtless secure for Him their sympathy and allegiance. This was a strong appeal, but still an appeal to a natural principle of Christ's human nature. Again, the result showed the perfect submission of the lower nature to the higher.

From this it may be inferred that Christ's temptation was not the exact counterpart of ours. In Him there was no sin, and therefore there could be no enticement. Until we are wholly cleansed from sin there is in our case the possibility of enticement. What then does the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews mean, where he says, "For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin?" (Heb. iv. 15.) The words here translated "without sin" (χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας), properly mean, *apart from sinful propensity or desire.* In Christ there was no sinful propensity or desire, and, with this exception,

"He was tempted in all points as we are." The ordinary interpretation of this passage, viz., that Christ was tempted in every respect as we are, and yet did not sin, is inconsistent with the explicit teachings of the New Testament regarding the sinlessness of Christ. It is the privilege of the Christian to attain that state of purity wherein all sinful propensities are removed, and wherein there can consequently be no temptation arising from these. This is perfect cleansing; this is entire sanctification, so far as sanctification in the aspect of purity is concerned. The Christian who is thus cleansed will note in his experience that his temptations (and he may have many of them) arise not from sin which remains, but from his own natural appetites, desires or affections which it is not the work of grace to remove but to purify, refine and control.

In holding the view above expressed as to the possibility of being cleansed from all sin, we are aware that we are in opposition to writers whose opinions are entitled to the highest respect. For example, Dr. Beet, in the Appendix to his work on "Holiness as Understood by the Writers of the Bible," page 65, says: "But, although day by day as we trample them (tendencies to sin) under foot the inward forces of evil become weaker, and by their increasing weakness reveal our spiritual growth; yet I do not find anywhere in the Bible reason to believe that they may now, by our faith, or at any future time in our lives, be entirely annihilated." Dr. Beet here teaches a progressive work of purity, but such a

work as never reaches completion. We fail to see how the learned author we have quoted can make his view harmonize with the declaration of I. John i. 7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Surely the idea of the completeness of cleansing is in these words. If not, we cannot think of any form of words that would express it.

There are many eminent theologians who agree with Mr. Beet, that sanctification consists in the suppression rather than the eradication of the disordered or sinful affections of the nature. These writers seem to have taken this position to enable them to account for the possibility of temptation which remains after sanctification. But we have already shown that this is fully accounted for by the presence of the natural affections and desires which still remain after the work of cleansing is completed.

The next question to be considered in connection with cleansing is the time when it takes place. All are agreed, or, at least, nearly all, that cleansing follows regeneration. But is it an instantaneous or a gradual work? This is the point on which there is at the present time the greatest controversy and the most difference of opinion. Some hold to an instantaneous cleansing, and in the form of a particular and distinct work like that of justification and regeneration. It is sometimes called "the second blessing." If we ascertain the purpose or object of cleansing, it may throw some light on the subject. Cleansing is

in order to growth. The work of purity is in order to the work of maturity. A pure heart is the soil in which the graces of the Christian life root themselves and from which they spring. We cannot conceive of these graces rooting in, and springing from, a heart polluted with sin. Granting that the heart is cleansed from all sin, the only fruitage that will keep it cleansed is the "fruits of the Spirit." This is very forcibly taught by our Saviour where, in His parable, He represents the devil as coming and sowing tares amongst the wheat while men slept. A pure heart is a priceless treasure, but it is a treasure that can be retained only upon the condition of the progressive development of the graces of the Spirit in the life. We see no ground, either in Scripture or reason, for doubting the possibility of instantaneous cleansing as a separate and distinct blessing. We think, however, we see very strong reasons for expecting that the divine order would be that the work of purity and of maturity should progress side by side. The earlier the cleansing the earlier the growth of the graces; the more perfect the cleansing the more vigorous the growth of the graces. If the cleansing is in order to growth then we should expect the cleansing in proportion as we are prepared to develop, by their exercise, the graces of the Spirit in our lives. As we shall presently see, the graces of the Spirit will grow only as they are exercised. Their growth does not follow as a necessary result of regeneration or of cleansing. God is willing to prepare the soil of the heart just as fast as we are willing to cultivate the graces of the

Spirit therein. Where the ground is prepared, and no grain cultivated therein, weeds will most certainly grow. That tares are sown, and frequently sown, in the cleansed heart, is beyond question. As illustrating this truth, a quotation from Wesley's letter to Mr. Maxfield, may not be out of place. Maxfield professed to have received, and doubtless had received, the blessing of a pure heart. In this letter Wesley admonishes him as follows: (1) "I like your doctrine of perfection, or pure love—love excluding sin; your insisting that is by faith; that, consequently, it is instantaneous (though preceded and followed by a gradual work), and that it may be now at this instant. But I dislike your saying a man may be as perfect as an angel, that he can be infallible, or above being tempted; or, that the moment he is pure in heart he cannot fall from it. I dislike your directly or indirectly depreciating justification, saying a justified person is not in Christ, is not born of God, is not sanctified, not a temple of the Holy Ghost, or that he cannot please God, or cannot grow in grace.

"I dislike your affirming that justified persons in general persecute them that are saved from sin, and that they have persecuted you on this account.

(2) "As to your spirit, I like your confidence in God, and your zeal for the salvation of souls.

"I dislike something which has the appearance of pride, or overvaluing yourself and undervaluing others, particularly the preachers, thinking not only they are blind, and that they are not sent of God, but even that they are dead—dead to God, and walking

in the way to hell; that they are going one way, you another; that they have no life in them: your speaking of yourselves as though you were the only men who knew and taught the Gospel. I dislike something that has the appearance of enthusiasm, overvaluing feeling and inward impressions; mistaking the mere work of imagination for the voice of the Spirit; accepting the means and undervaluing reason, knowledge and wisdom in general. But what I most dislike is your littleness of love to the brethren; your want of meekness, gentleness, long-suffering; your impatience of contradiction, counting every man your enemy that reproves or admonishes you in love; your bigotry and narrowness of spirit; your loving in a manner only those that love you; censoriousness, proneness to think hard of all that do not earnestly agree with you; in one word, your divisive spirit."

Some have attempted to prove that the work of cleansing is always an instantaneous act by asserting that wherever the work is spoken of in the Greek of the New Testament it is the aorist tense (which means a single definite act) that is used. This argument, however, could only be used by one ignorant of the language. In the verse we have already quoted, 1 John i. 7, the verb is in the present progressive form. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanseth us from all sin." Here the cleansing is in proportion to our walking in the light.

We have now to deal with the positive side of this doctrine, viz., maturity or growth. When the sinner

is regenerated the work of cleansing begins. At the same time the germs of the Christian graces are implanted in the heart, and their development commences. This growth is gradual, as all growth is, and where the proper means are used continuous. It seems to be a principle in nature that the higher the quality of life the longer the time required for its development. In many of the lower forms of animal life but a short time is required. Some insects are ephemeral. In a single day they come into being, attain perfection, and pass out of existence. In many of the higher forms of animal life years are required for the full development of the powers. A spiritual life is the highest quality of life known to man on earth, and for the full development of the spiritual powers the longest time is required. This appears but reasonable, when we remember that the faculties or powers in the exercise of which we enjoy fellowship with God here, are the same faculties or powers in the exercise of which we shall enjoy His presence hereafter. The measure of their development, through exercise in his service here, will determine our capacity for the enjoyment of fellowship with him hereafter.

We are not to suppose that the graces of the Spirit will grow as the certain and inevitable result of regeneration, or even of cleansing. These make their growth possible. They will develop just in proportion as they are exercised. This accounts for the fact that some Christians excel in one grace and some in another. It also explains the apparent or real lack

of certain graces in others. The law which rules in the realm of our physical and intellectual natures rules also in our spiritual nature. Our physical and intellectual faculties develop just in proportion as they are properly exercised. Proper exercise is required for the development of the muscles of the arm, for the strengthening of the memory or the reason. In the same way charity grows by being exercised. Temperance increases by being faithfully practiced. Long-suffering is attained by allowing patience to have her perfect work. We can thus understand the meaning of our Saviour where he says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Every willing sacrifice develops the best principles of the heart and nature. Men love most those for whom they willingly sacrifice most. We are the most strongly attached to the persons, the objects, and the institutions in whose behalf we have made the greatest willing sacrifice. There is sound philosophy in our Lord's Parable of the Talents, "To him that hath shall be given." The talent is increased to the man that *hath* it to a good purpose, but from him that *hath* it not to a good purpose it is taken away. Our physical and intellectual faculties can be retained in a state of perfection only on the condition of their proper exercise. Neglect of their exercise results in loss of power. This is a truth that is too abundantly illustrated in life. It needs only to be stated to be admitted. But it is no less true in the spiritual than in the physical and intellectual life of the Christian.

What, then, let us ask, in conclusion, does entire

sanctification imply? It implies, in the first place, perfect cleansing; that is, not simply the suppression but the eradication of all sin. In this, the negative aspect of the doctrine there is the possibility of reaching a state of experience where the work is complete. With regard to the positive aspect of the doctrine or the work of maturity, provision is made for continuous growth throughout the longest life allotted to man on earth. In this respect the Christian's experience is as "the path of the just, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you, to the end that He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

"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."