



Christ and Sanctification

Octavius Winslow 1808-1878

By simple, close, and searching views of the cross of Christ, the Spirit most effectually sanctifies the believer. This is the true and great method of gospel sanctification. Here lies the secret of all real holiness and, may I not add, of all real happiness? For if we separate happiness from holiness, we separate that which, in the Covenant of Grace, God has wisely and indissolubly united. The experience of the true believer must testify to this. We are only *happy* as we are *holy* – as the body of sin is daily crucified, as the power of the indwelling principle of sin is weakened, and as the outward deportment more beautifully and closely corresponds to the example of Jesus. Let us not then look for a happy walk apart from a holy one. Trials we may have; indeed if we are the Lord's covenant ones, we shall have them, for He Himself has said, "*In the world ye shall have tribulation*" (John 16:33). Disappointments we may meet with – broken cisterns, thorny roads, wintry skies; but if we are walking in fellowship with God, walking in the light, growing up into Christ in all things, (with) the Spirit of adoption dwelling in us and leading to a filial and unreserved surrender – oh! there is happiness unspeakable, even though in the very depth of outward trial! *A holy walk is a happy walk.* This is God's order ... and therefore must be wise and good.

The Spirit especially and effectually sanctifies by unfolding the cross of Jesus

We desire to enlarge upon this point, not only because He Himself presents it in His Word as one of vast importance, but from the sober conviction of our judgment that there is no great advance in holiness without a growing knowledge of Christ as the sanctification of the believer. A reference to God's Word will place this truth in its proper light.

"And thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

(Matt. 1:21)

Not only shall He save them from the guilt and condemnation of sin, but also from the indwelling power or reign of sin, so that "*sin shall not have dominion over*" them (Rom. 6:14) ... Again, "*Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus*" (1 Cor. 1:2). But the most striking allusion to this important truth is found in verse 30, where the Lord Jesus is especially spoken of as made of God the *sanctification* of His people:

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

It is *essential* to a right reception of the subject that we should know in what points of view Christ is made our sanctification, so that believing in Him and receiving Him as such, we may "*grow up into him in all things*" (Eph. 4:15).

In the first place, the atoning work of Christ lays the foundation of sanctification

He opens a way by which God, so to speak, can treat with the soul in the great business of its holiness. Only upon the broad basis of His Law honored, His holiness secured, and His justice satisfied can God in the way of mercy have communication with the sinner. Here we see the great glory of Jesus as the God-man Mediator. His atoning work opens a channel through which God, without compromising a single perfection of His nature, can communicate the saving and sanctifying power of His grace to the soul. The obedience and blood-shedding of our adorable Lord

are ever connected in the divine Word with the sanctification of the church. A few examples will suffice to show this.

Speaking of the legal but imperfect sanctification by the sacrifices under the Law, the Apostle supplies an argument in favor of the superior sanctification by the blood of Christ.

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

(Heb. 9:13-14)

Thus does the atoning blood of Jesus lay the foundation of all future degrees of sanctification. The cross of Christ is, so to speak, the starting point of the soul in this glorious career of holiness and the goal to which it returns. *By* it, the body of sin is wounded, and wounded fatally. *From* it, pardon, peace, and holiness flow. And *through* it, the soul daily rises to God in a holy surrender of itself to His service. Let no man dream of true mortification of sin, of real sanctification of heart, who does not deal constantly, closely, and believingly with the atoning blood of Jesus. The Holy Spirit brings the cross into the soul and lays it upon the heart to be the death of sin. *"I am crucified with Christ"* (Gal. 2:20). *"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death"* (Phil. 3:10). *"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus"* (Gal. 6:17) – and see how the cross lifted (Paul) above the world and deadened him to it – *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Gal. 6:14). Thus did Paul breathe after and attain unto holiness.

The intercession of our Lord Jesus pleads for and secures the sanctification of the believer

In this sense, it may be said that He is *"made of God unto us sanctification."* The Christian reader may be but imperfectly aware how closely connected is every spiritual grace and blessing that he receives with the advocacy of Jesus at the right hand of God. (*Lord, increase our faith in this great and sanctifying truth!*) While yet upon earth, our dear Lord commenced that work of intercession for the sanctification of the church, which He ascended up on high more fully to carry on. This was the burden of His prayer; and it forms, as John Owen observes, *"the blessed spring of our holiness"* – *"Sanctify them through thy truth"* (John 17:17). And not only would He leave it, as it were, as a model of the intercession of His exalted priesthood, but for our encouragement He would provide an evidence of its success. To Peter, about to pass through a severe temptation, He says, *"I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"* (Luke 22:32). Nor *did* his faith fail. It was sifted, it was severely shaken, it was powerfully tried, *but it failed not!* Not a particle of the pure gold was lost in the refining, not a grain of the pure wheat in the sifting. *Why? – because Jesus had interceded, and His intercession was all-prevailing.* O the vast and costly blessings that flow into the soul from the intercession of Christ! Never shall we know the full extent of this until we pass within the veil. We shall then know the secret of our spiritual life, of all our supports, consolations, and victories: why it was that the spark in the ocean was not quite extinguished, why the vessel in the storm and amid the breakers did not quite become a wreck; why, when temptations assailed, crosses pressed, afflictions overwhelmed, and unbelief prevailed, our faith still did not fail and our (little boat) was not driven from its moorings; and that *"out of the depths"* (Ps. 130:1), we were enabled to cry, *"Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ"* (2 Cor. 2:14). The secret will then disclose itself – *the intercession of Jesus our great High Priest.*

How sweet and consoling to the believer is this view of our exalted Immanuel in the hour of bereavement, when confined to his chamber of solitude, or languishing upon his bed of *"pining sickness"* (Isa. 38:12). Too deeply absorbed in sorrow, it may be, to give utterance to his anguished spirit in prayer – his bodily frame so weakened by disease and racked by pain as to render the mind unfit for close and connected spiritual thought – *O how sweet the intercession of Jesus is then!* How sweet to know that in the hour of the soul's extremity when human sympathy and power are exhausted, Jesus has entered into heaven *"now to appear in the presence of God"*

(Heb. 9:24) for His suffering child. And when all utterance has failed on earth, when the heart is broken and the lips are sealed, *then* to look up and see our elder Brother, the Brother born for our adversity, the exalted High Priest waving the golden censer before the throne while the cloud of His atoning merit goes up before the mercy-seat, bearing as it ascends the person, the name, the circumstances, and the wants of the sufferer below – precious gospel that opens to the eye of faith so sweet a prospect as this! When you cannot think of Him, afflicted soul, He is thinking of *you*. When you cannot pray to Him, He is praying for *you*, for "*He ever liveth to make intercession*" (Heb. 7:25). But our Lord Jesus is the sanctification of the believer in still another and blessed sense.

View Him as the Head of all mediatorial fullness to His people

"It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col. 1:19). *"And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace"* (John 1:16). Here is sanctification for the believer who is mourning over the existence and power of indwelling sin, feeling it to be his greatest burden and the cause of his deepest sorrow. In the growing discovery of the hidden evil – each successive view, it may be, deeper and darker than the former – where is he to look but unto Jesus? Where can he fly, but to His cross? Hemmed in on every side by a host of spiritual Philistines, no avenue of escape presenting itself, the eternal Spirit leads the soul to a simple view of Jesus, opens to him the vast treasury of His grace, and the free welcome to all comers. And what does he find in that fullness? All that he wants to pardon sin, to hide deformity, to overcome unbelief, and (to) break the power of strong corruption; he finds that there is enough in Christ to make him holy, that, in simply taking his sins to Jesus, they are pardoned; in taking his strong infirmities, they are subdued; in taking his wants, they are supplied. In a word, he finds Christ to be his *"wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"* (1 Cor. 1:30).

Octavius Winslow

© 2016
www.christianstudylibrary.org