Chapter XIII.

Of Sanctification

SECTION I.—They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened, in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

SECTION II.—This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life: there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

SECTION III.—In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome: and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

**Exposition**

In Scripture, the word sanctification bears a variety of senses. It signifies separation from a common to a sacred use, or dedication to the service of God. Thus the altar, temple, priests, and all the sacred utensils, were sanctified. It also signifies purification from ceremonial defilement.—Heb. ix. 13. But the sanctification of believers, of which this chapter treats, consists in their purification from the pollution of sin, and the renovation of their nature after the image of God.

Antinomians maintain, that believers are sanctified only by the holiness of Christ being imputed to them, and that there is no inherent holiness infused into them, nor required of them. This is a great and dangerous error; and, in opposition to it, our Confession asserts, that believers are really and personally sanctified. Their sanctification includes “the mortification of sin in their members.” It includes also “the fruits of the Spirit, as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”—Gal. v. 22. These are personal things; they are wrought in the hearts of believers, and produced in their tempers and lives. It is absurd to say they are in Christ, and imputed to believers; they are the effects of the Holy Spirit imparted to us, whose operations are compared, by Christ himself, to “a well of water within us, springing up unto everlasting life.”

Romanists, as we formerly noticed, confound justification with sanctification; and, as this leads to various dangerous mistakes, we shall mention several points in which they differ. They differ in their nature: justification is a relative change of state; sanctification is a real change of the whole man, soul and body. They differ in their order: justification, in the order of nature, though not of time, precedes sanctification; for righteousness imputed is, in the order of nature, prior to holiness, implanted and inherent. They differ in their matter: the matter of justification is the righteousness of Christ imputed; the matter of sanctification is an inherent righteousness communicated. They differ in their form: justification is a judicial act, by which the sinner is pronounced righteous; sanctification is a physical or moral act, or rather a series of acts, by which a change is effected in the qualities of the soul. They differ in their properties: justification is perfected at once, and is equal in all believers; sanctification is imperfect at first, and exists in different degrees of advancement in different individuals; hence the former is called an act, and the latter a work. Other points of difference might be mentioned, but we only add, that in justification we receive a title to heaven; sanctification gives us a meetness for, and a capacity of, enjoying it.

Sanctification is both a privilege and a duty. In the one view it is the work of God, and in the other it is the work of man, assisted by supernatural grace. As a privilege, it is graciously promised in the gospel.—Ezek. xxxvi. 27. As a duty, it is required by the law; hence we are called to “make” to ourselves a “new heart,” and to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”—Ezek. xviii. 31; 2 Cor. vii. 1.

Sanctification may be considered as initial and progressive. Initial sanctification is the same as regeneration, whereby we become “new creatures;”—”old things being done away, and all things becoming new.” In progressive sanctification, the several lusts of the old man are more and more weakened and mortified. In initial sanctification, the Spirit of Christ enters the heart with all his train of graces, and implants them there. In progressive sanctification, these graces are more and more quickened and strengthened. In initial sanctification, a principle of spiritual life is implanted, and the lineaments of the divine image faintly impressed upon the soul. In progressive sanctification, the spiritual life is increased, and the outlines of the divine image gradually filled up. In short, the same work which is begun in regeneration is carried on in sanctification, until the new creature attains to the full stature of a perfect man in Christ.—Phil. i. 6.

Sanctification extends to the whole man, including all the faculties of the soul, and all the members of the body.—1 Thess. v. 23. Our entire nature was originally created in the image of God; by the entrance of sin this image was utterly defaced and lost; hence corrupted and depraved nature is called “the old man,” because it infects the whole man, and defiles both soul and body. Now, as original corruption pervades the whole man, so sanctifying grace extends to every part; hence our nature, as renewed after the image of God, is called “the new man,” because the holiness communicated in sanctification possesses and ennobles the whole man.

Sanctification is imperfect in this life. There have been men, and there still are, who maintain, that sinless perfection is attainable in this life. This is held by Antinomians, who profess that the perfect holiness of Christ is imputed to believers. It is held likewise by Romanists, Socinians, and others, who affirm that believers have, or may attain, a perfect inherent holiness. The doctrine of sinless perfection was also held by the founder of the Methodists; and the same opinion is still held by his followers. In opposition to such views, our Confession decidedly affirms, that sanctification is “imperfect in this life.” Though it extends to the whole man, yet “there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part.” The Scriptures abound with the most explicit testimonies against the doctrine of sinless perfection.—Eccl. vii 20; James iii. 2; Prov. xx. 9, 1 John i. 8. The epithet perfect, is indeed applied to several saints, but it must be understood either comparatively, in which sense “Noah was perfect in his generation;” or, as synonymous with sincerity or uprightness, in which sense God said to Abraham, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect.” That the most eminent saints mentioned in Scripture were not free from sin, is evident from the defects and blemishes which are discovered in their conduct. They were far from imagining that they had attained to sinless perfection.—Job ix. 20; Ps. xix. 12; Phil. iii. 12. Every real Christian will certainly aspire after perfection; but none can attain to absolute perfection in this life.

As there is both grace and the remainders of corruption in every saint, it follows, that there will be “a continual and irreconcilable war” between these two opposite principles. This conflict is described in a very striking manner.—Rom. vii.; Gal. v. 17 Sometimes the one principle prevails, and sometimes the other; but grace will finally overcome.

The impulsive or moving cause of sanctification is the free grace of God.—Tit. iii. 5. The meritorious cause is the blood and righteousness of Christ.—Tit. ii. 14. The efficient cause is the Holy Spirit.—1 Pet. 1. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 13; 1 Cor. vi. 11. The instrumental cause is faith in Christ.—Acts xv. 9, xxvi. 18. The external means are, the Word, read and preached, the sacraments, and prayer.—John xvii. 17; 1 Pet. ii. 2. Providences, especially afflictive dispensations, are also blessed for promoting the sanctification of believers.—Rom. viii. 28, v. 3-5.

Holiness, though it cannot give us a title to heaven, is indispensably necessary. It is necessary by a divine and unalterable constitution; for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”—Heb. xii. 14. God has enacted it as an immutable law, that nothing which defileth shall enter into the heavenly city.—Rev. xxi. 27. It is necessary, also, as a preparative for heaven. It is the evidence of our title, and constitutes our meetness for enjoying the pleasures and engaging in the work of the heavenly world. “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.”—Matt. v. 8.

Let us, then, in the diligent use of appointed means, earnestly “follow holiness” “This is the will of God, even our sanctification.” This is his express command: “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” Those whom he ordained to glory as the end, he chose to holiness as the means, without which none shall ever attain that end.—Eph. i. 4. This is, also, the end of our redemption by Jesus Christ.—Eph. v. 25, 26. He died not only to save us from wrath, but to save us from our sins. Holiness was the primeval glory of our nature, and shall we not endeavour to recover that glory—to be restored to the image of him who created us? Holiness is eminently the glory of God; and shall we not seek to resemble him in sanctity? Holiness is necessary to make us “meet for being partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Presumptuous and delusive is that hope of seeing Christ hereafter; which does not produce an ardent desire and earnest endeavour to be conformed to him here. “Even man that hath this hope in him purified himself, even as he is pure.”—1 John in. 3.