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THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION

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Introduction

The evangelical interpretation of the doctrine of sanctification has greatly differed and it has not been easy to harmonize the various presentations one with the other or with the Bible. Without going into a critical study and evaluation of the historical or contemporary interpretation, we propose to present the doctrine as held by the Mennonite Brethren Church, as gleaned from the Bible, summarizing it under three major topics and the following order:

The Meaning of Sanctification.

The Nature of Sanctification.

The Means of Sanctification.

I. The Meaning of Sanctification.

The meaning of sanctification is best determined by a study of

1. The word in its original meaning.

2. The general and specific usage in the Bible.

In approaching the study of the original meaning it is well to remember that the root meaning of the words: sanctify, sanctification, holy, holiness is the same in the Hebrew and the Greek.

A careful review of the Hebrew "qodesh" and the Greek "hagiazō" will lead to the conclusion that the essential truth expressed in these words is "to separate unto God" or unto the gods, and "to fit an object or a person for the position of separateness and usefulness." It thus implies both a ceremonial as well as a moral aspect.

After a careful analysis of the words, W. E. Vine summarizes it as follows:

"sanctification is used as -

(1) separation to God, I Cor. 1:30; 2 Thess. 2:13; I pet. 1:2.

(2) the course of life befitting those so separated, I Thess. 4:3,4,7; Rom. 6:19; I Tim. 2:15; Heb. 12:14.

Sanctification is that relationship with God into which men enter by faith in Christ, Acts 26:18, I Cor. 6:11; and to which their sole title is the death of Christ, Eph. 5:25, 26; Col. 1:22; Heb. 10:10, 29; 13:12.

Sanctification is also used in the New Testament as the separation of the believer from evil things and ways, I Thess. 4:3."

2. The General and Specific usage in the Bible.

In order to see the richness of the word in its general and specific usage in the Bible, it must be stated preliminarily that a careful study of the numerous passages convince the reader that the words are used in a ceremonial and a moral sense indicating separation, dedication, purification, adornment as well as moral excellence and perfection, and are applied to places, objects, people, individual persons, as well as to the three persons of the Trinity.

In general it may be stated that to sanctify means:

1) to appoint, dedicate or set apart unto God, for a sacred and special purpose, Ex. 40:10, 11.

2) to cleanse ceremonially defiled objects, to restore them to sacred usefulness, Ex. 13:2; 19:10, 22.

3) to cleanse morally defiled persons to restore them to sacred usefulness, 2 Tim. 2:21; I Thess. 3:7.

4) to fit persons for fellowship and usefulness of God, Ex. 29:36; 40:11.

5) to conform persons to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ, Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 3:18.

6) When applied to God it may simply mean His Deity, His Glory and Majesty, Ex. 15:11-17; Is. 1:4; 12:6; 43:3, 15; Hosea 11:9; Ps. 89:18; Ezek. 36:23; 38:23; Is. 5:16.

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II. The Nature of Sanctification.

The nature of sanctification is best studied by considering it in its various aspects and relationships.

1. Absolute Sanctification.

(*Heiligung im Prozess — Vollendung nicht absolut*)

Absolute sanctification is both negative and positive in nature. Negatively it indicates the absence of all sin, blemish, spots or wrinkle, the total death of self-ishness (self-will and self-life.) Positively it means the presence of the sum of all moral excellence, (Eph. 5:27). It is the absolute conformity of our being to the original and ultimate design and purpose of God - the conformation to the image of His Son.

Absolute sanctification includes the whole being of man - spirit, soul and body.

1 Thess. 5:23.

This is the yearning and hope of every child of God. Rom. 8:28, 29; I John 3: 1, 2; and will come to its full realization at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Dispositional Sanctification.

The initial experience which transforms the sinner into a child of God is viewed in the scriptures in its various relationships and operations.

Viewed from the legal position it is spoken of as justification, from the divine point of view it is known as regeneration; considering the human aspect, we designate it as conversion; seen in its mystical relationship, it is union with Christ. The positional status is at several occasions expressed as adoption.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews employs the word sanctification in several instances, (Chap. 10:10, 14; 13:12) to indicate that principal, dispositional, inner change and transformation which theology generally describes by regeneration, a change within the mind, will and affections which makes man hate what he once loved and love what he once hated, loosening the heart from the desires of sin and implanting a yearning for godliness and love for holiness. It is the impartation of the Christ-life to the believer, Gal. 2:20. Thus a new direction of life results.

3. Experiential Sanctification.

Experiential sanctification finds its origin and roots in dispositional sanctification, (Rom. 6:22; Matth. 7:16, 20). It is progressive in the Christian life commencing immediately with the implanting of the new life and culminating with the coming of the Lord, (2 Cor. 7:1). It is both negative and positive. Negatively it is a constant life of self-denial, self-crucifixion, (I Cor. 9:25-27; Gal. 6:14), a daily dying (1 Cor. 15:31), putting off the old man (Eph. 4:22ff), mortifying the members (Col. 3:5-9), laying aside the weight and sin which doth so easily beset us (Heb. 12:1-4), it is a life of separation (2 Cor. 6:11-7:1), cleansing, humiliation and confession (1 John 1:9). Positively, it is a life of putting on the new man, (Col. 3:10-15) obeying God in His Word, yielding life and members to God for positive accomplishments (Rom. 6:1ff), living out the Christ-life in the believer (Gal. 2:20), growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord, (2 Peter 3:18), bearing fruit (John 15:1ff), manifesting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), and the traits of a true Christian character (2 Pet. 1:5-8). Thus the individual is transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

4. Positional Sanctification.

Positional sanctification relates to that blessed standing of the Christian which is his in the presence of God in virtue of his being "in Christ." Being in Christ he is an heir to the righteousness and holiness of Christ, these being imputed to him because of his relationship to Christ. "Ye are complete in Him" is the verdict of Paul through the Holy Spirit (Col. 2:10; Rom. 8:11).

Note: Great harm has been caused by separating sanctification from justification. Well has it been said:

"Though the justification and the sanctification of the believing sinner may be, and should be, contemplated singly and distinctively, yet they are inseparably connected, God never bestowing the one without the other; in fact we have no way or means whatsoever of knowing the former apart from the latter."

Again this same writer says:

"There are two principle effects that sin produces, which cannot be separated: the filthy defilement it causes, the awful guilt it entails. Thus, salvation from sin necessarily requires both a cleansing and a clearing of the one who is to be saved. Again; there are two things absolutely indispensable in order for any creature to dwell with God in heaven: a valid title to that inheritance, and a personal fitness to enjoy such blessedness - the one is given in justification, the other is commenced in sanctification."

The following references substantiate the absolute inseparability of justification and sanctification: Isa. 45:24; I Cor. 1:30; 6:11; I John 1:9.

"These blessings walk hand in hand; and never were, never will be and never can be parted."

III. The Means of Sanctification.

It is understood that the Holy Spirit is the indwelling agent as well as the dynamic in a life of sanctification. In the accomplishing of His ministry He employs definite means which may be stated in outline form as follows:

1. The Word of God.

By the Word of God we mean the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testament. The Word of God is inseparably bound up with the Christian life in sanctification as well as in regeneration. Compare 1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12; Ps. 119:11; 1 Peter 1:22; 2 Cor. 3:18; James 1:25; John 17:17; Ps. 119:105; 2 Pet. 1:19; Eph. 5:26.

2. The Practice of Prayer.

Prayer occupies a large and prominent place in Sanctification. It is a spiritual force at work. The poverty of the Christian life is attributed to the neglect of prayer (James 4:2b), and its sanctifying effect is well illustrated in the prayer of the Lord in John 17, and in the prayers of Paul in Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-14.

3. The Fellowship of the Saints.

The fellowship of the saints (koinonia) is another prominent factor in sanctification. It is a creation of God, designed to serve the purposes of God, which purposes definitely and specifically include the sanctification and transformation of the individual believer. (See Acts 2:42; 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23; Rom. 8:28-30; Heb. 10:24, 25; Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:14, 15; 2 Thess. 3:6-12; 1 Peter 2:2.)

4. Divine Providence and Chastenings.

God operates in providence and chastenings, seeking the sanctification of His own, (Rom. 8:28; Heb. 12:5-11; Prov. 3:6; Mal. 3:2, 3; Prov. 27:21; 1 Pet. 1:5-9; 3:14-16; 4:1, 12, 13-19; James 1:12).

Die Wirkung der Erkenntnis Jesu Christi als ein Mittel zur Heiligung
Gemeindezeit als Mittel zur Heiligung
Gehorsam gegen Gottes Wort und Gemeinde