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THE CALL TO HOLINESS

By

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There is no doubt about the call. It is on every page of the Scriptures, and the reason for it is in the nature and character of God. Holiness is not optional, but imperative. Because God is holy, His people must be holy. Without holiness no man can see the Lord. It is imperative. It must be possible. He who wills the end must provide the means. The will of God is our sanctification. The command of God is that we be holy. If sanctification is His will, and holiness His command, He must have made it possible; otherwise He would mock us and call us to an unequal and unfair task. Life would be doomed to disappointment and dissatisfaction, failure and condemnation.

When God calls us to holiness it is frankly admitted that the demand is beyond us. We cannot attain unto holiness. God gives what we cannot gain by will or effort of our own. Sanctification is not attained; it is obtained. For it is of grace through faith and not of merit by works. It is without price, because it is priceless, and it is not of works, because it is beyond man's possibility. He who wills our sanctification is Himself the Sanctifier.

THE WILL OF GOD

God wills our sanctification. Of that there is no doubt. It is not a doctrine of man to be accepted or declined. We are called unto holiness, and God requires His people to be holy because He is holy. His holiness is the pattern, and His people are to be holy because He is holy, and His holiness is the pattern and standard of His demand. Absolute holiness belongs to God alone, and when He commands that His people be holy as He is holy, it means that every quality of holiness in Him must be in them, even as Jesus commanded, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." What He wills He commands. "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath given unto us his Holy Spirit" (I Thess. 4:7, 8). To reject the call is to reject God -- to despise God. To deny the call is to deny the Holy Spirit.

The will of God is our sanctification. Will implies purpose, purpose is dependent upon power, and power assumes provision. What God wills to be He must be able to do; what He requires He must make possible. Will implies freedom, our freedom as well as His. God cannot make saints as He makes worlds. When He wills man's sanctification, another will is involved. Man cannot be sanctified even by God apart from consent and without cooperation. The thirty-sixth chapter of Ezekiel is the chapter of God's "I wills." At the end of the chapter God says: "I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it," and immediately adds another "I will": "Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." God's will waits for man's will; and God's power is conditioned upon man's consent. His will is plainly our sanctification.

THE ACT OF GOD

Saints are God's workmanship. Sanctification is the act of God. Concerning this, the Word of God is decisive and emphatic. Saint Paul prays in the Thessalonian epistle -- "The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly." It is the Lord who separates the godly unto Himself, and He alone can make that which is separated to be holy in nature and character. There is a cleansing required that is beyond man's power, and there is a sanctification to be wrought that God alone can do. The carnal mind is rooted in the subsoil of human nature, and man knows that he cannot make himself clean. Sanctification is not by the will of man. Neither prayer nor discipline, Bible study nor fasting, penance nor ordinance, can purify the heart and sanctify the nature. It takes God to do that. He is able. He Himself does that which He wills and commands.

The experience of sanctification is variously ascribed to God, to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. We are sanctified through Christ; our Lord sanctified Himself that we might be sanctified, and we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10). We are sanctified with the blood of Christ (Heb. 13:12) and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin, (I John 1:7). We are sanctified through the Word of God. "The word is truth," (John 15:3-17; I John 1:7). We are made holy through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; II Thess. 2:13; I Peter 1:2). From first to the last, salvation is of grace through faith. As we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith.

THE WORK OF GOD

There is a tense in the Greek that indicates an act and implies a process. The act is definite and complete, and it establishes a subsequent and consequent order. That is the tense of the sanctifying act of God. It is a definite experience, specific in character, and verified by the assurance of the Spirit. It is a second work of grace involving a crisis, making an end and establishing a beginning. The act initiates a new order, a new stage of development, and a new inheritance of maturity. The son comes of age. The experience equips and endows. No state of grace is static, no growth in grace is final, no work of grace is unrelated.

We do not grow into the experience of sanctification. but we grow in it; there is no perfection beyond which there is no perfecting. The holy have their fruit unto holiness. The branch

in the vine is cleansed, that it may bring forth more fruit; the call to holiness is a call to a holy life. It is a tragedy when "holiness" people are not holy people.

The act of God in sanctification is followed by the work of God in holiness of character and life. "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 he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." (I Thess. 3:12,13).

WHEN DOES GOD SANCTIFY?

If a man must be holy to see God, there must be some point at which the work is done. Because the blessing seems impossible outside heaven, there are many who believe that it takes place at death. There is no Scripture authority for such belief, and death is never said to be either the time or the means of sanctification. Many regard holiness as a state toward which we continually strive but never attain. It is thus always an ideal and never an experience, but God speaks of it as an act, and treats it as an experience. The Scriptures never identify it with the new birth. They urge it upon the regenerate as an inheritance, and command it as an obligation. John Fletcher of Madeley has answered the question of time:

"If our hearts are purified by faith, as the Scriptures expressly testify, if the faith which peculiarly purifies the heart of Christians is a faith in the promise of the Father, which promise was made by the Son, and directly points at a peculiar effusion of the Holy Spirit, the purifier of spirits; if we may believe in a moment, and if God may in a moment seal our sanctifying faith by sending us a fullness of His sanctifying Spirit; if this, I say, is the case, does it not follow, that to deny the possibility of the instantaneous destruction of sin, is to deny that we can make an instantaneous act of faith in the sanctifying promise of the Father, and in the all-cleansing blood of the Son, and that God can seal that act by an instantaneous operation of His Spirit?"

Nothing surprised nor distressed John Wesley so much as the number of those who entered into the blessing of entire sanctification and lost it. The same disastrous experience is with us. The moral failures are largely responsible for the unbelief that despises the blessing. The strain of trying to live the holy life is intolerable if the life itself declines. It is only possible with God, and the conditions of life and growth are constant and uncompromising.

If the experience is not to end in disappointment and dishonor, there must be the work of God that establishes in holiness. The garden of God can suffer no neglect. Holiness involves diligence in cultivation, watchfulness in discipline, attention to nourishment, and exercise in Godlikeness. The perfect must go on unto perfection, and the sanctified must perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. The God that sanctifies can keep, and His keeping is as complete as His sanctifying. He keeps the spirit holy. He keeps the soul unspotted. He keeps the body sanctified, as becomes the temple of the indwelling God.

This whole subject is hopeless until it is approached from the Godward side. Man cannot make himself holy. He cannot keep himself holy. God can sanctify. God can keep. "Faithful is he that calleth you. who also will do it."

"Jesus, the First and Last,
On Thee my soul is cast;
Thou didst Thy work begin
By blotting out my sin;

Thou wilt the root remove,
And perfect me in love.
"Yet when the work is done
The work is but begun;

Partaker of Thy grace,
I long to see Thy face;
The first I prove below;
The last I die to know."

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THE END