

The Christian Life (21): Sanctification (Part 6)

Having considered the source (Christ) and cause of sanctification (Spirit), we come this morning to its means (faith). Christians are sanctified for the sake of Christ, by the Spirit, through faith. Put another way, while grace is found in Christ, its communicated to our hearts by the Spirit through the means of faith. Thus Christians "live by faith" (Gal.2:20), "walk by faith" (2Cor.5:7), "stand by faith" (2Cor.1:24); "fight by faith" (1Tim.6:12); "overcome by faith" (1Jn.5:4); and are "sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:18).

Faith is the mediate or instrumental cause of sanctification as well as of justification. It does not merit sanctification any more than it does justification, but it unites us to Christ and keeps us in touch with Him as the Head of the new humanity, who is the source of the new life within us, and also of our progressive sanctification, through the operation of the Holy Spirit. The consciousness of the fact that sanctification is based on justification, and is impossible on any other basis, and that the constant exercise of faith is necessary, in order to advance in the way of holiness, will guard us against all self-righteousness in or striving to advance in godliness and holiness of life.¹

I. Sanctification: Its means

1. *Its nature.* "During the Reformation a threefold definition of saving faith emerged. The principal elements of saving faith are (1) knowledge, (2) assent, and (3) trust. Each element was regarded as necessary for saving faith" (Sproul).² True faith understands the gospel, believes it, and trusts or relies upon Christ. "Faith is made up of three things—knowledge, belief, and trust. Knowledge comes first. 'How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard' (Rom.10:14). I need to be informed of a fact before I can possibly believe it. The mind goes on to believe that these things are true. It accepts the gospel as the truth. It then commits itself to the merciful God; it rests its hope on the gracious gospel; it trusts itself to the dying and living Savior" (Spurgeon).³ Thus, Scripture uses a number of imageries to illustrate the nature of saving faith: it's the mouth that eats Christ (Jn.6:51); the hands that receive Christ (Jn.1:12); the eyes that look to Christ (Isa.45:22); and the feet that come to Christ (Matt.11:28).

Thus, true and saving faith must be distinguished between a *historical*, *temporary*, and *dead* faith. By *historical* faith is meant a mere belief in the historical facts. "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble" (Jas.2:19). "A historic faith is a bare assent of the mind to the truth of what is revealed in the word of God; while the man who thus believes neither loves, nor regards, nor applies to himself the truths therein revealed" (Colquhoun).⁴ By *temporary* faith is meant a faith that doesn't last. "But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away" (Lk.8:13). "By a temporary faith a man with some degree of natural affection receives the truths of the gospel as both certain and good; but, as they have never been rooted in his heart, he soon afterwards loses all the impression of them, and in time of temptation falls away" (Colquhoun).⁵ By *dead* faith is meant a faith that fails to produce good works. "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 2:537

² R.C. Sproul, *Faith Alone*, 75

³ C.H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace*, 31-32

⁴ John Colquhoun, *Saving Faith*, 1

⁵ John Colquhoun, *Saving Faith*, 1-2

have works? Can faith save him" (Jas.2:14)? That is, can that kind or type of faith save him? The answer is obviously, no. As true faith unites the soul to Christ, it always gives way to a life of good works.

In contrast to historical, temporary, and dead faith, we read in Scripture also of a saving and justifying faith. This is that precious faith by which we cordially assent to all the truths concerning Jesus Christ and trust in Him alone for all His salvation. It is called saving faith because, in whomever it is implanted, there salvation is begun that will in due time be consummated; and it is called justifying faith because it is a believing with application, the gift of Christ's righteousness and a relying on that consummate righteousness only for all our security from eternal death, and all our title to eternal life; and because it is the instrument of justification before God. By this living faith, the believing sinner is vitally united to Christ as his Covenant-head and Surety; and he becomes personally interested in His righteousness and salvation. This faith differs not only in degree, but even in nature or kind from the counterfeits already mentioned.⁶

2. *Its function.* While justifying and sanctifying faith are essentially the same, they are not functionally the same. Justifying faith merely receives, whereas sanctifying faith receives and works. Thus, while our faith functions differently in our justification and sanctification, we are nevertheless justified and sanctified by (or through the means of) faith. But why faith and not love, hope, or patience? Why has God chosen faith as the instrumental means of our salvation (justification and sanctification)? "Faith has been selected as the channel of grace because *there is a natural adaptation* in faith to be used as the receiver. It gives all the glory to God. It excludes all boasting. Thus God has selected faith to receive the unspeakable gift of His grace, because it cannot take to itself any credit, but must adore the gracious God who is the giver of all good. Faith sets the crown upon the right head, and therefore the Lord Jesus was wont to put the crown upon the head of faith, saying, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'" (Spurgeon).⁷

Faith is the instrument of receiving the blessings of salvation, as gifts of infinitely free grace, but it does not give a right to them. If it did, they could no longer be of free grace to the sinner; for nothing is of grace to an unworthy sinner but what is absolutely and in every way free to him. It is of faith, said an apostle, that it might be by grace (Rom.4:16). Faith subserves the absolute freeness, and therefore the glory, of redeeming grace; because, while it is the necessary instrument of receiving the blessings of grace, it is no ground of title, even to the very least of them. We are never said to be justified or sanctified for faith, or before faith, but only by faith, which evidently implies that it is not the proper condition, but only the instrument or means of union and communion with Christ in His righteousness and salvation. For, as the new heart is necessary to faith, so is faith to the possession of Christ, and of His whole salvation.⁸

(1) It receives from Christ. Faith unites us to Christ and receives from Christ. "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom.5:1-2). We receive grace from Christ by faith for our justification, and we also receive grace by faith for our sanctification. "Faith is *the instrument* of our sanctification. It is the eye which perceives the gracious provision which

⁶ John Colquhoun, *Saving Faith*, 3

⁷ C.H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace*, 40-41

⁸ John Colquhoun, *Saving Faith*, 13-14

God has made for His people. Faith is the hand which appropriates those provisions. It is the mouth which receives all the good that God has stored up for us in Christ. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and without the *exercise* of faith it is impossible to make any real progress in the spiritual life" (Pink).⁹

It is by faith laying hold upon a full Christ that the empty soul is replenished. All that we need for time as well as eternity is to be found in Him; but the hand of faith must be extended, even though it grasp but the hem of His garment, if virtue is to flow forth from Him into us. As Samson's strength was in his locks, so the Christian's strength is in his Head. As it is by the sap derived from the root which makes the branches fruitful, so it is by the virtue which faith draws from Christ that the believer is made to abound in holiness. Hence the exhortation, 'Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus' (2Tim.2:1).¹⁰

(2) It glorifies Christ. The Spirit glorifies Christ as He enables us to behold Christ by faith within Scripture. "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (Jn.16:14). "It is the work of the Spirit not to extol or teach men to cry up themselves who do receive Him, nor yet to glorify and exalt any other thing in the church but Christ alone; exalting His person, making His word singularly effectual, pointing out His sufferings as the only means of life, and Himself as the storehouse of His people" (Hutcheson).¹¹ "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Cor.3:18). Faith brings Christ and His promises near. "Faith sanctifies the believer by enabling him *to enjoy now* what is his in Christ and what will be his in himself in Heaven. It is 'the evidence of things not seen' (Heb.11:1) by the natural eye, nor felt by the natural senses. Faith projects us out of this scene entirely and carries the heart into Heaven itself – not a natural faith, not a preacher-produced faith, but Gospel faith, imparted by the Holy Spirit" (Pink).¹² Scripture likens faith to the eyes of the soul, which have been opened in our regeneration. "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor.4:6).

Faith affects the mind with an ineffable sense, taste, experience, and acknowledgment of the greatness, the glory, the power, the beauty of the things revealed and proposed in this way of salvation. The soul in it is enabled to see and understand that all the things belonging unto it are such as become God, His wisdom, goodness, and love. And a spiritual light-enabling hereunto is of the essence of saving faith; unless this be in us, we do not, we cannot, give glory to God in any assent unto the truth. And faith is that grace which God has prepared, fitted, and suited, to give unto Him the glory that is His due in the work of our redemption and salvation.¹³

(3) It works for Christ. As faith unites us to Christ and enables us a true sight of Christ. It gives rise to love which motivates us to work. It enables us to see the beauty and sufficiency of Christ, moving and motivating the soul to love and obey Him. "Faith works by love" (Gal.5:6). It works because of love, and the more it sees Christ the more it works for Christ. "But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I

⁹ A.W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 191

¹⁰ A.W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 194

¹¹ John Hutcheson, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 371

¹² A.W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 193

¹³ John Owen, *Works*, 5:419

have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (Jas.2:18). "Faith trusts Christ for all supplies of grace and so is the instrument of receiving out of His fullness grace sufficient for the acceptable performance of every duty. Accordingly, faith is said to work, and to work by love (Gal.5:6)" (Colquhoun).¹⁴

If we trust cordially that Christ loves us, and that He will save us from all sin, and from all the punishment of sin, we cannot but love Him, and our love of Him will dispose us to delight in doing His will. 'This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments (1Jn.5:3). In proportion as we know and believe the love that God has for us, we will love Him; and as we love, we will cheerfully obey Him. A man trusting in Christ for sanctification cannot but be sanctified in proportion to the degree of his trust; and, according to the degree of his sanctification, his obedience will be holy and acceptable to God. Indeed, without faith it is impossible to please Him (Heb.11:6); for whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom.14:23).¹⁵

3. *Its increase.* Faith is strengthened and increased through means. Older writers referred to these as ordinances (as they've been ordained of God for specific use). They can be distinguished between public and private. Public refers to the public worship of God and private to domestic and personal devotions. Faith (and every other grace) is strengthened through a diligent use of the means of grace. These are means and not ends. There is no grace in the means apart from their intended goal (Christ). They communicate grace as they are done in faith and blessed by the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit is free, but He freely binds Himself to these means as His ordinary method of operation" (Horton).¹⁶ "Fallen man receives all the blessings of salvation out of the eternal fountain of the grace of God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ and through the operation of the Holy Spirit. While the Spirit can and does in some respects operate immediately on the soul of the sinner, He has seen fit to bind Himself largely to the use of certain means in the communication of divine grace" (Berkhof).¹⁷ Thus, the means of grace are means whereby our faith is increased and in turn, every other grace strengthened and improved.

I define means of grace as the delivery systems God has instituted to bring grace – that is, spiritual power, change, help, and blessings – to needy souls on the earth. Grace comes from our Father, through the Son, by the Spirit ordinarily in conjunction with the ordained means. The means of grace are those conduits through which Christ alters, modifies, adjusts, changes, transforms, and develops souls on the earth. Herman Bavinck says, 'Christ is and remains the acquirer (one who acquires) as well as the distributor of grace.' That is, Christ acquired grace *for* us and distributes grace *to* or *in* us. In order to get acquired grace *to* or *in* us, God has ordained means through which it is distributed. The means of grace, then, are God's delivery systems through which that which was acquired *for* us gets distributed or delivered *to* or *in* us.¹⁸

We do indeed assert and profess, that a true and lively faith in Christ is alone sufficient and effectual, through the grace of God, to receive Christ and all His fullness, so far as is necessary in this life, for our justification, sanctification, and eternal salvation; but yet

¹⁴ John Colquhoun, *Saving Faith*, 14

¹⁵ John Colquhoun, *Saving Faith*, 14-15

¹⁶ Michael Horton, *Calvin*, 19

¹⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 604

¹⁸ Richard Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 23

we also assert, and profess, that several means are appointed of God for the begetting, maintaining, and increasing this faith, and the acting and exercising it, in order to the attainment of its end; and that these means are to be used diligently.

(1) Scripture. The Scripture read, studied, memorized, pondered, but especially heard, is the primary means of grace. "The word is the means, after all, in all other means. Where the Word is not, there is no holiness" (Dabney).¹⁹ Thus, Paul described the word as "the word of His grace" (Acts 20:32), as it's the means through which grace is given, and Peter as "the pure milk of the word," whereby we grow (1Pet.2:1-3). "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (Jn.17:17). "We must endeavor diligently to know the word of God contained in the holy scripture, and to improve it to this end, that we may be *made wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus* (2Tim.3:15). Other means of salvation are necessary to the more abundant *well-being* of our faith, and of our new state in Christ; but this is absolutely necessary to the *very being* thereof: because *faith comes by hearing* the word of God, and receives Christ as manifested by the word" (Marshall).²⁰

(2) Prayer. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb.4:16). Prayer is the primary means in which strength is conveyed to an individual soul. So much so that Pastor A.N. Martin has said, "God has ordained that prayer be the means in which we exchange our weakness for His strength" and Aruthur Pink said, "Prayer is not so much an act as it is an attitude—an attitude of dependency, dependency upon God. Prayer is a confession of creature weakness, yea, of helplessness. Prayer is the acknowledgement of our need and the spreading it out before God."²¹ This is illustrated throughout the Psalms: "Turn to me, and be gracious to me; Oh grant Thy strength to Thy servant" (Ps.86:16); "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face continually (Ps.105:4); "On the day I called Thou didst answer me; Thou didst make me bold with strength in my soul" (Ps.138:3).

Prayer is appointed by God *for our spiritual blessing*, as a means for *our growth in grace*. When seeking to learn the *design* of prayer, this should ever occupy us *before* we regard prayer as a means for obtaining the supply of our need. Prayer is deigned by God for our *humbling*. Prayer, real prayer, is a coming into the Presence of God, and a sense of His awful majesty produces a realization of our nothingness and unworthiness. Again, prayer is designed by God for *the exercise of our faith*. Faith is begotten in the Word (Rom.10:17), but it is exercised in prayer; hence, we read of 'the prayer of faith.' Again, prayer calls *love* into action. Concerning the hypocrite the question is asked, 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God' (Job 27:10)? But they that love the Lord cannot be long away from Him, for they *delight* in unburdening themselves to Him. Not only does prayer call love into action, but through the direct answers vouchsafed to our prayers, our love to God is increased – 'I love the Lord, *because* He has heard my voice and my supplications' (Ps.116:1).²²

(3) Sacraments. The word "sacrament" comes from the Latin word *sacramentum* meaning "something sacred or used for sacred purposes." "Protestant orthodoxy defines a sacrament as a sacred action, instituted by God, that employs an external sign, or element, to confer on and seal to believers by grace the

¹⁹ Robert Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 666

²⁰ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, 186

²¹ A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 176

²² A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 170

promise of the gospel for remission of sins and life eternal" (Muller).²³ Calvin said, "A sacrament is an outward attestation of the divine benevolence towards us, which, by a visible sign, figures spiritual grace, to seal the promises of God on our hearts, and thereby better confirm their truth to us."²⁴ Thus, the Protestant Church recognizes two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. "Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only Law-giver, to be continued in His church to the end of the world" (2LBC).²⁵ We must remember, sacraments (as the other means of grace) only benefit those who partake in faith. There is no grace native to the sacrament apart from Christ (as received by faith). "The Reformed view is simply that only those who believe receive grace from the sacraments" (Kuiper).²⁶ "If the Spirit be lacking, the sacraments can accomplish nothing more in our minds than the splendor of the sun shining upon blind eyes, or a voice sounding in deaf ears" (Calvin).²⁷ "The sacrament of *baptism* must needs be of great use to promote the life of faith, if it be made use of according to its nature and institution, because it is a seal of the righteousness of faith (Rom.4:11). The sacrament of the *Lord's supper* is as a spiritual feast to nourish our faith, and to strengthen us to walk in all holiness by Christ living and working in us, if it be used according to the pattern which Christ gave us in its first institution recorded by the three Evangelists, and was extraordinarily revealed from heaven by Christ Himself to the Apostle Paul (1Cor.11:23-25)" (Marshall).²⁸

(4) Afflictions. While afflictions are not technically means of grace, they are often used by God to drive us to Himself through prayer. Thus, Paul's thorn in the flesh was intended to drive him to the grace of Christ, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2Cor.12:9). The grace was not in the thorn but in Christ. The thorn merely encouraged Paul to feel his weakness and seek after strength outside of himself. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word" (Ps.119:67). His afflictions drove him back to God for strength to keep His commandments.

(5) Fellowship. God uses Christian fellowship as a means to encourage, rebuke, and strengthen His people. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Eph.4:29). "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Prov.27:17). It's through the fellowship of the local church that spiritual gifts are exercised for the edification of the body (1Cor.14:26; 1Pet.4:10-11).

²³ Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 268

²⁴ John Calvin, *Catechism of the Church in Geneva, Tracts and Letters*, 2:83-84

²⁵ 2LBC, 28:1

²⁶ R.B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ*, 205

²⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.9

²⁸ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, 195-197