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THE

Bible

STUDENT

THE ENTRANCE OF **THY WORD** GIVETH LIGHT

New Series
Vol. XXIII. No. 4

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NEW SERIES

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VOL. XXIII No. 4

SANCTIFICATION

By J. W. H. NICHOLS

Perhaps no truth of Scripture has been more distorted and misunderstood than the doctrine of 'sanctification'. The Scriptures are sublime in their simplicity, but often the simplest statements have been beclouded by those who have sought to find in them support for their own particular opinion. Some of the misunderstanding regarding sanctification has perhaps arisen through giving the word a wrong meaning. The word comes from two Latin words, *sanctus* (sacred), and *facere* (to make); *i.e.*, to *set apart* for sacred use. Its earliest use is in Genesis 2:3 in connection with the Sabbath day.

In Exodus 13 the first-born was sanctified, both man and beast. In Levit. 27:14, a man sanctified his house and field. The Tabernacle and its vessels, the Temple and its furnishings, were all sanctified. So that it is evident that sanctification had to do with *things* as well as with persons. It is worthy of note also that in Isaiah 66:17, men sanctified themselves *to do evil*.

Certain terms are frequently used by some persons such as 'getting sanctified', 'fully sanctified', or 'losing sanctification', all of which are, to say the least, misleading and confusing. Those who use such terms generally teach some doctrine of holiness by one's own efforts: they insist upon a moment of definite surrender as the time when sanctification or the 'second blessing' was obtained.

That every Christian should desire practical holiness is perfectly right: it is indeed the aspiration of the new nature and Scripture ever exhorts us to holiness of life. But this is not attained by merely human effort. Sooner or later the lesson must be learned

which the apostle Paul experienced, 'I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth *no* good thing' (Rom. 7:18).

How are we sanctified?

The question is answered in Hebrews 10:10, by 'the will of God and the offering of the body of Jesus Christ'. From 1 Cor. 6:11 we learn it is a definite act, 'ye were washed, ye were sanctified, ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of God'. See also Heb. 2:11; 10:14. All this is *positional* sanctification, the result of God's act in grace, and true of *every* believer on the Lord Jesus Christ the moment He is received by faith as personal Saviour. Set apart to God by the work of the Lord Jesus, and the sovereign grace and power of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 1:10), the believer's standing before God is unassailable. Hence the believer's sanctification, *positionally*, could not be more perfect than it is. It is of *this aspect* that Scripture most frequently speaks.

To confound our *standing* before God with our *state* of soul is frequently productive of much soul misery and retards spiritual growth, as well hinders joy and peace in the Lord. The believer can never be more meet (fit) for heaven than when first brought to Christ as Saviour. 'Giving thanks to the Father, who *hath* made us meet (fit) to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light' (Col. 1:12). Our fitness then is not the result of any effort on our part. The thief on the cross was made fit (meet) for Paradise by sovereign grace, based on the sacrifice of Christ, else he could not have gone there. Christ's own word to him was, '*To-day* shalt thou be with me. . . .' To make positional sanctification subsequent to justification is a fatal error, and derogatory to the value of Christ's work of redemption. It casts the soul upon itself and its experiences, which only results in self-occupation and leads either to self complacency or despair.

The Prodigal in Luke 15 gives an illustration of this common error: when in the far country he soliloquized; 'I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of *thy hired servants*".' His thought, evidently, was to crave an opportunity to *improve his state*, and enable him thus to prove himself worthy of a better *standing*. How little he knew the father's heart! How different the father's thoughts! The kiss of forgiveness settled the past and

secured the future, so that the Prodigal was unable to propose what he had planned. Believer! You have been received not as a servant, but as a son! But see to it you live up to that high standing and dignity, and prove yourself thereby!

Progressive Sanctification

That the believer's condition, or state of soul, should ever be a cause of exercise before God is important to recognize fully. The more we understand the wondrous position God has given us in the riches of His grace, the deeper will be our desire to live up to this grace in a practical way. Here comes in such passages as John 17:17, 'sanctify them through thy truth; thy Word is truth'. 1 Thess. 4:3-4, 'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification'. 2 Tim. 2:21-22, 'A vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work'.

We cannot detach practical sanctification from the new nature received at the new birth, and it is important to see that we are dependent upon the Word of God and the inworking of the Holy Spirit for this. Man is constituted of 'spirit, soul and body' (1 Thess. 5:23). By departure from God he became enslaved to his natural lusts, and alienated from God. Now grace has wrought to renew him, and he is a 'new creation in Christ Jesus'. But this does not allow him to be independent of God, but rather brings him into gladly-recognized dependence upon God. Christ (who loved and loves us), is, by the Holy Spirit, set before our hearts and minds as the object of our affections; and the Father's words to us now are, 'Be ye holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy' (1 Peter 1:15, 16).

Being born again of God, the new nature in the believer has only holy desires and tastes; but because the flesh, the old Adam nature, is also in us, power for holiness lies in *walking with God* and in willing, conscious dependence upon HIM alone. We repeat, *judicially* 'our old man is crucified with Christ . . . that we should no longer serve sin' (Rom. 6:6). Now we are to arm ourselves with this great fact and truth, by 'reckoning ourselves to be *dead indeed unto sin*, but *alive unto God*, through Jesus Christ our Lord', whose death delivers us from the domination of sin in the flesh, and from the law.

But many there are who, conscious that they had no righteousness to present to God, came to Him for forgiveness and rest; yet, while receiving these blessings, now seek to *gain* sanctification by

their own works! Practical, progressive sanctification is not by any efforts of the flesh: a *legal* basis is not an acceptable and possible basis for holiness in God's plan. But as the soul realizes its new position and condition in Christ before God, that by faith it is *sanctified*, then the inevitable *desire* which accompanies this (as inwrought by the indwelling life of the Holy Spirit), is that everything incompatible with this new life shall be utterly and constantly denied. Thus conduct is brought into conformity with the character of God: 'Ye ARE sanctified'. The standard of holiness is raised to that true standard of *moral conformity to Christ*, and the Holy Spirit becomes the *only* power for its accomplishment.

In closing, read carefully and prayerfully Hebrews 13:20.

THE WISDOM LITERATURE OF THE BIBLE

By F. F. BRUCE, M.A.

The Book of Ecclesiastes

The title *Ecclesiastes* appears first in the Septuagint. It is a Greek word, derived from *ekklesia* ('assembly') and ordinarily signifies a member of an assembly. But here it means rather the convener or president of an assembly, or the 'speaker' in the sense in which we talk of the 'Speaker' of the House of Commons, for it represents the Hebrew term *qoheleth*. This Hebrew term is akin to *qahal*, which also means 'assembly', and means 'one who gathers the assembly together'. It is a participial form, and (rather strikingly) is in the feminine gender. This has sometimes been explained by the argument that it is Wisdom personified that is viewed as convening the assembly (the Hebrew word for 'wisdom', *hokhmah*, being feminine); but this seems excluded by the opening words of the book, where 'the Preacher' (Heb. *qoheleth*) is identified as 'the son of David, king in Jerusalem' (and cf. Eccl. 1:12). It is more likely, therefore, that we have here what grammarians call the 'feminine of office', a phenomenon paralleled elsewhere in the O.T.