

Sanctification

by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

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Of Him ye are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."--1 Cor. 1:30. p. 431, par. 1, [SANCTIFI]

SANCTIFICATION is one of the most glorious gifts which, by the Covenant of Grace, the Mediator bestows upon the saint. It covers his entire mental, spiritual, and physical nature. We should, therefore, thoroughly understand it, and learn how to obtain it, and every believer, whatever the measure of his faith, should be fully aware of his attitude toward it; for erroneous views concerning this will surely lead us astray from the living Christ. p. 431, par. 2, [SANCTIFI]

It is foolish to think that, although present-day heresies have affected the doctrines of Christ, Sin, and Regeneration, Sanctification is so simple as not to be affected. Yet even ministers fall into this sad delusion. Men of spiritual fervor, they strictly oppose heresies concerning these others, in their catechetical and pulpit instructions, and in their writings, regarding such as fundamental error; but somehow they never realize that the doctrine of sanctification can be imperiled, and they fail to put the Church on guard. p. 431, par. 3, [SANCTIFI]

Such imperiling was impossible; and so, indeed, they hardly care to have sanctification distinguished as a dogma at all. "On the contrary," they say, "it is the beauty of sanctification that it is life; hence utterly independent of the mysteries of a dogma. In the life of sanctification believers may be charged with neglect, careless living, slow progress--in brief, with faulty doing and working; for what is sanctification but betterment of self and daily, p. 431, par. 4, [SANCTIFI]

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growth in holiness? but never with faulty confessing, with faulty views of the doctrine; for sanctification is not doctrine, but life." In this way they have come to deny it the value and dignity of a dogma or doctrine; to make it almost synonymous with bettering of life; hence to make it the common property of all that try to lead earnest and pious lives. p. 432, par. 1, [SANCTIFI]

Then the idea naturally grew that many persons of unsound doctrine might lead more spiritual lives. This supposed fact was even fortified with the word of Jesus, that publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom of God before us; and the congregations often received the impression that rationalism itself might lead to better results than sometimes

flow from an orthodox belief. And the result was that this so-called sanctification led to a weakening of the faith, to a considering of purity of doctrine as immaterial; until finally it assumed a hostile attitude toward the mysteries of the truth. This was the natural effort of confounding self-betterment with sanctification, and of opposing life to doctrine as gold to tinsel. p. 432, par. 2, [SANCTIFI]

The spread of these false ideas of sanctification has not benefited Christianity in these provinces, but, as in pre-Reformation days, it has led the people astray from its pure doctrine. p. 432, par. 3, [SANCTIFI]

Rome once suffered and suffers still from the same evil. Not as though it surrendered or even slighted its doctrine; but, even in the flourishing days of its hierarchy, the necessity of reformation of life was so strongly felt that it resulted in a one-sided urging of sanctification. Its favorite motto was: "Good works." They were of greatest importance: not words, but power; not the confession, but the earnestness and willingness to do good, not merely in secret, but openly so that men could see it! This was carried so far that finally Rome ceased to be satisfied with good works as fruit of conversion, and even began to look upon them as a primary and meritorious cause of salvation; and thus it broke down the mystery of faith by a false preaching of sanctification. As now, unintentionally, by the cry, "Not doctrine, but life," men are driven, as by iron necessity, first to underestimate the value of doctrine, then to disapprove of it, and lastly to pronounce it injurious, yea, even dangerous; so did the cry for good works induce Rome gradually to divorce the mystery of the forgiveness of sin from the cross of Calvary, not in the confession, but in the conscience of its members. p. 432, par. 4, [SANCTIFI]

For the sake of clearer insight and safer procedure, we must return to the definite teaching that sanctification is a doctrine, an integral p. 432, par. 5, [SANCTIFI]

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part of the confession, a mystery, just as much as the doctrine of reconciliation, and therefore a dogma. In fact, in the treatment of sanctification we penetrate the very heart of the confession, the dogma *which scintillates* in the doctrine of sanctification. p. 433, par. 1, [SANCTIFI]

Of course we are not to divorce sanctification from life. No child of God denies that the doctrine has its application in life; there is no truth whose operation is not felt in his life. To him every doctrine is instinct with life, a live coal, a radiating fire, a lamp always burning, a well of living water springing up to eternal life. The content of every doctrine, of every mystery, is something in the living God or in His creature; the confession of a condition, a power, a working, a person who actually exists, who lives, who works. The blood of atonement means, not those particular drops which flowed from the cross, and were lost in the inhospitable ground of Calvary; but a treasure in the living Christ, unceasingly at work in heaven, by which He enriches His children on earth, the glorious power of which they know and experience. p. 433, par. 2, [SANCTIFI]

And this is true of every mystery, as our confession of the Holy Trinity shows, which says of this deepest and most incomprehensible dogma: "That God's children know this

as well from the testimonies of Holy Writ as from the operations of the divine Persons, and chiefly by those we feel in ourselves" (art. ix.). p. 433, par. 3, [SANCTIFI]

And this applies to the doctrine of sanctification as well as to all other doctrines; for it is not, any more than the other dogmas, the confession of a lifeless matter, but the confession of an awful power, which lives and works effectually in us. Hence sanctification must be preached once again as a *doctrine*; it must be confessed, examined, and studied as a doctrine; to be followed by an appropriate application like the preaching of any other doctrine; and godliness, spiritual life, and good works will be the result. But to obtain this result a clear exposition of the cause and animating power of sanctification is necessary. p. 433, par. 4, [SANCTIFI]

When on a cold morning the fire does not burn, and the family suffers, it is foolish to say: "Since the fire does not burn remove it, and get warm without it." To keep from freezing requires more fire; not the fire, but the cause of its failure, must be removed. And this applies to sanctification. There is a general and bitter complaint of the coldness that has fallen upon the Church; and it requires the powerful working of sanctification to save the Church. p. 433, par. 5, [SANCTIFI]

But the means employed frequently show poor judgment. p. 433, par. 6, [SANCTIFI]

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Formerly the Church confessed a pure doctrine by which it kept close to the source of vital heat which is given us in God's Word; and the powers and workings deposited in the Mediator for the Church radiated in glorious activity. Then the Church flourished and faith celebrated its greatest triumphs. It was severely cold without, but, while the world lay perishing in its cerements, truth filled the Church with light and heat, and the sacred fire of a pure doctrine glowed and sparkled. But the light grew dim, and the fire went out; and the Church of God became dark and cold. And the saints, half frozen and stiff, became deeply conscious of the loss they had suffered, and of the need of light and heat. And now, instead of advising them to light the lamp of truth and rekindle the fire of the confession, that their souls may be revived and comforted, many say: "Dear brethren, there is no salvation in dogma or confession; they are utterly unprofitable; nothing remains but to kindle light and heat in your souls without them." And thus the Church is threatened with death and destruction. p. 434, par. 1, [SANCTIFI]

In quiet assurance of the blessing of God, we proceed in the opposite direction, and advise the brethren to fill the lamp of the divine mysteries with oil, to put more fuel upon the fire of the confession; then there shall be light and heat, and the Church shall be saved. This shall be so, provided--and this needs no emphasis--that the doctrine be really confessed. To confess is not merely to say, "There is a comfortable fire in the house," and then to stay out in the cold; but to accept its comfort and benefit for others as well as for ourselves. p. 434, par. 2, [SANCTIFI]

The cry, "Not dogma, but life," is folly and unbelief. Let us rather oppose the shallow and unsound teaching of the day. The doctrine should be a faithful expression of the mystery; the mystery should stand clearly before the spiritual eye and illuminate the soul, as it

radiates from the living Christ, according to the design of salvation. Instead of turning the people away from the doctrine, we should make them see how little they understand it; how they have trifled with it, and not confessed it; that their soul's welfare requires its earnest study, that so the act of confessing may deepen and enrich their spiritual life. And then let us imagine, not that the fruit of life must still be imported from elsewhere, but that the doctrine, rightly confessed, becomes its own instrument to manifest its power in us. p. 434, par. 3, [SANCTIFI]

Thus sanctification should be treated. p. 434, par. 4, [SANCTIFI]

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Sanctification is a Mystery.

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." --2 Cor. 7:1. p. 435, par. 1, [SANCTIFI]

SANCTIFICATION belongs to the mysteries of faith; hence it can not be confessed but as a dogma. p. 435, par. 2, [SANCTIFI]

By this statement we intend to cut off at once every representation which makes "sanctification" to consist of the human effort to make oneself holy or holier. p. 435, par. 3, [SANCTIFI]

To become more holy is undoubtedly the duty which rests upon every man. God has condemned all unholiness as an accursed thing. Inferior holiness can not exist before Him. Every man more or less holy is bound to forsake all unholiness, to resign all lesser holiness, and let perfect holiness dwell and be manifest in him instantly. The commandment, "Be ye holy as I am holy," may not be weakened. The laxity of the current morale requires that God's absolute right to demand absolute holiness of every man be incessantly presented to the conscience, bound as a memorial upon the heart, and proclaimed to all with no uncertain sound. p. 435, par. 4, [SANCTIFI]

In the innumerable territories of heaven where God gathers His redeemed, all unholiness is excluded and absolute holiness is the never-failing characteristic. And as it is in heaven, so it ought to be on earth. God, the sovereign Ruler of all the kingdoms of this world, has strictly forbidden the least unholiness in heart or home or any other place on earth under the penalty of death. In fact, there is on earth no unholiness, of whatever name or form, that does not exist in defiance of His express will. p. 435, par. 5, [SANCTIFI]

It must be conceded, therefore, that it is His revealed will and commandment that all this unholiness must cease immediately, and be replaced directly by what is holy and good. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. p. 435, par. 6, [SANCTIFI]

It must be equally conceded that it is every man's duty to remove p. 435, par. 7, [SANCTIFI]

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unholiness, and to advance the things that are holy. He caused the hurt must also heal it. He that destroyed must also restore the things destroyed. He that desecrated the holy must also reconsecrate it. Men still alive to a sense of justice will not contradict us. p. 436, par. 1, [SANCTIFI]

The obligation to resanctify this world's life rests in its deepest sense upon Satan. He instilled into our veins the poison which generates the diseases of our souls. The spark that caused the fire of sinful passions to break out in human nature was kindled by him. That Satan is hopelessly lost and condemned, does not annul God's eternal right. Even Satan himself, according to this right, ought immediately to repent and stand before God holy as in the beginning. And this world of men, which he corrupted, was not his, but belonged to God. He should never have touched it. Hence the obligation continues to rest upon him not only to stop his unholy working in it, but also to reconsecrate perfectly what he has so bitterly and maliciously profaned. p. 436, par. 2, [SANCTIFI]

That Satan neither will nor can do this justifies his fearful judgment; but it does not annul God's right and never will. If in Paradise man had *unwillingly* fallen a victim to Satan, the obligation to resanctify the life of this world would have rested upon Satan, but not upon him. But man fell willingly; sin owes its existence not only to the fatherhood of Satan, but also to the motherhood of man's soul; hence man himself is involved in the guilt and included under the judgment of death, and therefore obliged to restore what he has ruined. p. 436, par. 3, [SANCTIFI]

God created man holy, with the power to continue holy; holy also by virtue of the increasing development of the implanted germ. But man ruined God's work in his heart. He soiled the undefiled raiment of holiness. And doing this he violated the right. If he had belonged to himself, if God had allowed him to do with himself as he pleased, the right would not have been violated. But He did not give man to himself; He retained him for Himself as His own property. The hand that ruined and desecrated man destroyed God's property, encroached upon the divine right of sovereignty--yea, upon His very right of ownership, and thus became liable (1) to the penalty for this encroachment, and (2) to the obligation of restoring the ruined property to its original state. p. 436, par. 4, [SANCTIFI]

Hence the undeniable and positive obligation of man's self-sanctification. This obligation rests, not upon God, nor upon the p. 436, par. 5, [SANCTIFI]

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Mediator, but upon man and Satan. The prayer, "Lord, sanctify me," upon the lips of the unconverted, not under the Covenant of Grace, is most unbecoming. First wilfully to destroy God's property, and then to take the ruined thing to Him demanding that He heal and restore it, antagonizes the right and reverses the ordinances. Nay, outside of the mysteries of the Covenant of Grace, under the obligations of simple justice, we are not to ask: "Lord, sanctify Thou us," but God is to enforce His righteous claim: Sanctify thyself." p. 437, par. 1, [SANCTIFI]

Sanctify thyself does not mean that man should fulfill *the law*. The keeping of the law and sanctification are two entirely different things. Let the sinner first be sanctified, and

then he shall also fulfill the law. First *sanctification*, then *fulfillment of the law*. p. 437, par. 2, [SANCTIFI]

It is like a harp with broken strings. The harp was made to produce music by the harmonious vibration of the strings. But the production of music is not the mending of the harp. The broken strings must be replaced, the new strings must be tuned, and then is it possible to strike the melodious chords. The human heart is like that harp: God created it pure that we might keep the law; which an impure heart can not do. Hence being profaned and unholy, it must be sanctified; then it will be able to fulfil the law. p. 437, par. 3, [SANCTIFI]

For the sake of clearness, two acknowledged facts should be noticed: p. 437, par. 4, [SANCTIFI]

First, if man had never been profaned by sin, it would never have entered his mind to sanctify himself; and yet the law would have been fulfilled without disturbance. This shows that sanctification and fulfillment of the law are two entirely different things. p. 437, par. 5, [SANCTIFI]

Second, sanctification continues until a man dies and enters heaven. Then he is holy. Hence there is no sanctification in heaven. Yet the only occupation of the saints in heaven is the doing of that which is good. Hence sanctification is a matter by itself; it does not consist in the doing of good works, but must be an accomplished fact before a single good work can be done. p. 437, par. 6, [SANCTIFI]

Since man profaned himself, he is called of God to resanctify himself. Hence the *claim* of sanctification contains not even the shadow of a mystery. It has nothing to do with the mysteries, therefore is no dogma. It is the simplest and most natural verdict of God's right in the conscience. That we speak of unholiness implies that we are convinced that we ought to be holy. p. 437, par. 7, [SANCTIFI]

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Is there contradiction, then, when we say, first, that sanctification itself is a mystery, and can be confessed only in the dogma; second that the *demand* of sanctification has nothing to do with the dogma? p. 438, par. 1, [SANCTIFI]

Not in the least. Sinners of whom God demands that they sanctify themselves are, individually and collectively, totally unable to satisfy that demand. To a certain extent they can withdraw from sin and worldliness, and often have done so. Many unconverted men have done many praiseworthy works. In many cases lives have been reformed, the whole tone of existence has been improved from mere impulse, without a trace of real conversion. And, conceiving sanctification to consist in the doing of less evil and of more good, and that from an improved motive, it was thought that unholy man, though unable to satisfy this divine claim *perfectly*, might satisfy it to some extent. But all this has nothing in common with sanctification, and can be accomplished wholly without it. With all his self-betterment he can not effect the least part of it; though told a thousand times to sanctify himself, he is both unwilling and unable. p. 438, par. 2, [SANCTIFI]

Hence the question: How, *then*, is sanctification to be accomplished? And since the question never received an answer from any of the sages, but only from God in His Word, therefore not the *demand*, but the *means*, of sanctification is for us incomprehensible and mysterious. Hence the *character* of sanctification must be emphasized as a mystery. p. 438, par. 3, [SANCTIFI]

And what is the reason for denying that sanctification is a mystery, *i.e.*, the content of a dogma? The supposition that it is of human origin, that man is not totally unable, and that sanctification is betterment of character and life. Hence it is tantamount to (1) a lowering of holiness to the human standpoint; (2) an opposing sanctification as a work of God. And this is a very serious matter. We should again become clearly conscious of the fact that the holiness without which no man shall see God is not attained by the departing from some evil and the habitual doing of some good. p. 438, par. 4, [SANCTIFI]

The *demand* of sanctification belongs to the Covenant of Works; sanctification itself to the Covenant of Grace. This makes the difference very obvious. Not as though the Covenant of Works commanded man to sanctify himself; given to holy men, it excluded sanctification. But God gave the Covenant of Grace to unholy p. 438, par. 5, [SANCTIFI]

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men. And the only connection between the demand for sanctification and the Covenant of Works is, that the latter ever pursues fallen man with this demand, and with the terror of Horeb. Unholiness destroys the foundation of the Covenant of Works and renders compliance with its conditions impossible. Hence the absolute contradiction between it and the sinner's personal life. The one must make room for the other; they can not stand together. p. 439, par. 1, [SANCTIFI]

In this painful conflict we are often tempted to ask whether God is not unjust in His law to demand of us the impossible, and to lay the blame on Him; for did He not make us so? And from this difficulty the Arminian in our own heart seeks to escape, either by denying that there ever was a Covenant of Works, or by substituting the fulfillment of the law for sanctification. p. 439, par. 2, [SANCTIFI]

Wherefore it is our aim, especially regarding this doctrine, to escape from this harmful confusion of ideas, and to arrive at a correct understanding and purity of expression. The preaching must not add to the chaos, but lead us to clear insight and understanding. p. 439, par. 3, [SANCTIFI]

Instead of sweetly cradling ourselves upon the Word, we must earnestly endeavor to *understand* it. In city and country church the Word must be preached persistently, and with ever-increasing purity, until, convicted of personal unholiness, men begin to see that by absolute sanctification, not mere self-betterment, they must restore unto God His right; until, feeling their inability, with broken hearts they turn to God to receive the *Mystery of Sanctification* from the treasures of the Covenant of Grace. p. 439, par. 4, [SANCTIFI]