



"You will know them by their fruits." Mt. 7:16

ON TO PERFECTION

And Other Holiness Sermons

By **Benjamin Franklin Neely**

CONTENTS

(5 of 71 pages selected)

- 1 On to Perfection
- 2 The Evidence of Pentecost
- 3 Holiness Is Fundamental in Spiritual Normalcy
- 4 Three New Testament Revivals
- 5 Indwelling Sin
- 6 Problems of Carnality
- 7 Poison Pottage
- 8 The Baptism with the Holy Ghost
- 9 Entire Sanctification**
- 10 Pentecost Perpetuated

Chapter 9

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

The following propositions can be deduced from the text: (1) Entire sanctification is a work of cleansing. (2) It is a divine work. (3) It is consummated subsequent to regeneration. (4) It is obtainable in this life. (5) All of this makes a life of holiness a practical possibility.

Now the word sanctify and its derivatives have a twofold meaning, a primary and a secondary; and, like many other words in the English, they depend upon the circumstances

under which they are used to determine their meaning in any particular case. In defining the word sanctify, Mr. Webster gives as its primary meaning: "To make free from sin: to cleanse from moral pollution and corruption: to purify." Then he quotes as an illustration John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." This is a quotation from the Saviour's valedictory prayer, wherein He was praying for His disciples, human beings with moral natures, and therefore capable of moral corruption, and thus having the need of cleansing.

Then Mr. Webster gives as a secondary meaning of the word sanctify: "To make sacred or holy: to set apart to a religious use; to consecrate by appropriate rites; to hallow." Then he quotes Gen. 2:3, "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it." Now the seventh day is a stipulated amount of time.

But time has no personality, no volition, no consciousness, and therefore no possibility of moral corruption. Consequently sanctify could only mean set apart to a sacred use when applied to the seventh day, or any other impersonal object.

I. Entire sanctification is a work of cleansing.

1. If sanctification means both to purify and to set apart to a sacred use, then entire sanctification, or to be sanctified wholly, undoubtedly *includes both meanings*. Therefore when the Apostle Paul prayed for the Thessalonians to be sanctified wholly, he was praying for them to be both purified and set apart to the sacred service of God. Hence the text teaches that entire sanctification, as applied to human beings, is a cleansing.

2. In his letter to the Hebrews, the writer clearly taught sanctification as a cleansing. For he used the words sanctify, purify, and purge interchangeably, referring to one and the same thing. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ . . . purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:13-14.) The inspired writer is here illustrating his point on holiness by ceremonial cleansing, with which the Hebrew people were familiar. He assumes that it was a recognized fact that people could be sanctified, under ceremonial instruction, to the extent that they were made pure. Then he adds, if the worshiper, looking prophetically through types and shadows, could get the proper conception of the great prospective antitype, which was the cleansing blood of Jesus, and appropriate it, and thus be sanctified to the extent that he was purified, how much more (or easier) can one looking back to the shed blood of the world's Redeemer as a historic fact be cleansed by the sanctifying act of His matchless grace!

3. Again, the word sanctify was used by our Lord in the sense of purify when He prayed for His disciples. "Sanctify them through thy truth . . . that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:17-23). Now if they were to be sanctified that they might be made perfect, it follows that without sanctification they were not perfect. Also we have, by implication, an apostolic confession to impurity. "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8, 9). Now according to this statement both the household of Cornelius and the apostles received heart purity when they received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. And it is self-evident that, if the disciples received heart purity when they received the Holy Spirit, up to that time they were not pure.

The Saviour prayed for them in John 17 that they might be sanctified, that they might be

made perfect; and to be perfect they must be pure. Therefore He prayed for them to be sanctified to make them pure.

II. Entire sanctification is a divine work.

1. Because its accomplishment is beyond the limits of human possibility. St. Paul charged his inability to live up to the standard of spiritual excellence, prescribed by Moses' law, to indwelling sin. "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me (Rom. 7:20).

Characterizing the inward evil as a law, or rule of action, he said, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23). He had already concluded that, if in the future he was not to serve sin, "the body of sin" must "be destroyed" (Rom. 6:6). And he was forced to confess that he did not know how to dispose of this troublemaker. "For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (7:18). Thus baffled and discouraged by the persistence of his unsubjected foe, he admitted his inability to free his spiritual life from the carnal inclinations of an un sanctified heart; and the contrast between his spiritual aspiration and his real condition wrung from his anguish-ridden soul his confession of a state of wretchedness.

In the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans are presented in contrast methods of dealing with indwelling sin. In the seventh chapter down to near its close, the task is looked at from the standpoint of knowledge reflected by the law, and the responsibility of the human will in the execution of its demands. Hence the struggle to measure up to the requirements of the law. But the struggle only revealed the power and stubbornness of the inward evil, and the weakness of the human will, and therefore its inability to free itself from the revolting presence of the carnal nature.

Thus it was demonstrated that an evil principle could not be legislated out of a living spirit. Neither can good legislation be effective in regulating the conduct of one whose very nature revolts against the quality of conduct which the law seeks to promote. For "the carnal mind is . . . not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Therefore deliverance from indwelling sin is beyond the possibility of the human.

2. Again, deliverance from the inbeing of sin is a divine work because He has been given thankful credit for its accomplishment. For when the unsuccessful struggle, described in the seventh chapter of Romans, brought the man to the very brink of despair, he turned his eyes from the law as a source of help, and centered his attention on the Victim of the middle cross; and cried out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And immediately a stream of living light from the Divine Presence dispelled the darkness from his melancholy spirit; and he shouted back, "Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:25). "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor 4:6).

Then he explains that this deliverance was wrought by and through the operation of the Holy Spirit. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). And thus in the eighth chapter of Romans he shouts over the destruction of "the body of sin," which was the very thing he so much lamented the presence of in the seventh chapter.

3. Still the text of this discourse is the very best and most positive proof that entire sanctification is a divine work. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly."

III. Entire sanctification is consummated subsequent to regeneration.

This fact is clearly and strongly proved from the setting of the text. For St. Paul indicates very emphatically that, when he was praying the prayer recorded in the text, he was praying for born-again Christians who were walking in all the light they then possessed (I Thess. 1:1-10).

1. He indicated their spiritual relationship to God when he addressed them as “the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (II Cor. 5:17). Hence the Thessalonians were new creatures in Christ.

2. He refers to their spiritual position, “knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.”

3. He speaks in the highest terms of their conduct and influence. (1) They had works of faith, labors of love, and patience of hope. (2) “Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord.” (3) “Ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.” (4) “In every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad.” (5) “Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” (6) “And to wait for his Son from heaven . . . which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

The foregoing is St. Paul’s complimentary address in his letter to this outstanding Christian group.

He was preparing them for the main object of his present effort, which according to the text and general tenor of the letter was to get them sanctified wholly. Later on in the Epistle he admitted that he had some anxiety about their present spiritual state, for it had been some time since he had personal contact with them. So before endeavoring to lead them into the deeper experience he must be sure that they were not backslidden, lest his efforts should be in vain. “For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity . . . we were comforted over you” (3:5-7). Then immediately he revealed the object of his present effort: “Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith . . . For this is the will of God, even your sanctification” (3:10 to 4:3).

Then beginning at the sixteenth verse of chapter 5, and climaxing with the text, he describes the spiritual temperature, state, attitude, and application which are conducive to the culmination of that objective. “Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly . . . Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” Therefore we must conclude that if, or rather when, this prayer was answered, God sanctified some of the finest Christians mentioned in the New Testament, after they were converted.

IV. Entire sanctification is obtainable in this life.

1. His exultant exclamation at the conclusion of his prayer for their sanctification indicated his expectancy of its immediate fulfillment. “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”

2. Also a solid basis for such expectancy is to be found in God's oath-confirmed promise to us through Abraham. "The oath which He swore to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto US, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:73-75).

3. Again, that fundamental holiness command recorded in Lev. 11:44, and repeated in I Pet. 1:15-16, emphatically enunciates both the promise and the obligation of holiness in this life. For the verb used, to describe both the manner of our conversation and the state of our being, is in the present tense. "But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

4. Again, that entire sanctification is obtainable in this life is proved beyond all petty objections by the fact that Jude wrote his short Epistle to people designated as such. "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called" (verse 1). It would be unthinkable that an inspired man of God would address a letter to people who were dead.

V. The life of holiness is a practical possibility.

A holy life is the outflow from a heart made pure by the incoming of the Holy Spirit in baptismal blessing and power. "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8, 9). "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things" (Matt. 12:34-35).

St. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that they should "be preserved blameless" soul, body, and spirit "unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And he prayed in faith, for he said: "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." A holy life is a blameless life, but not always a faultless life.

Faults often result from justifiable (unwillful) ignorance. And in that case they do not involve one in sin. Infirmities, involving mental limitations, have always been characteristic of man in any state of grace. The Apostle Paul admitted such limitations when he said: "Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Cor. 13:12). Also he confessed to having blundered, through mistake, when he rebuked the high priest for commanding him to be smitten contrary to law.

"I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts 23:5).

But *mistakes are not sins in the sight of God*. For sin has in it either the venom of evil intent or the careless disregard for that which is right. For the motive that prompts the action is that which gives quality to the action. This principle is a governing factor in all judicial procedure in courts of justice. If the individual is under criminal indictment, the court seeks to determine the following: Did he commit the deed with malice aforethought? If not that, was it the result of criminal carelessness?

Or was it a matter beyond the control of the one under charges? If either one of the first two is proved, the defendant is adjudged guilty. But if it is the latter, he is judged innocent and is set free.

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Sam.

16:7).

Those who characterize every blunder or mistake as sin, and thus contend that a sinless life is an impossibility in this world of sin and sorrow, may think they are holding a higher standard; but they are doing nothing of the kind. They are only distracting attention from the real blackness of sin by mixing it with other faulty conduct which results from unavoidable faulty judgment. Consequently, their glib confessions and prayers for forgiveness of sins at the close of almost all public prayers are merely routine. They express no godly sorrow for sin, and therefore no repentance. For repentance is the product of godly sorrow. For “godly sorrow worketh repentance” (II Cor. 7:10). Repentance cannot exist in the absence of that which produces it. Godly sorrow exists only in connection with a “broken and a contrite heart”; and a plea for forgiveness of sins that arise from such a broken heart can never be expressed in a stereotyped manner, such as you so often hear by those who contend for “sinning every day in word, thought, and deed.”

We repeat, *wrong acts are not always impure acts*. Neither are good acts always pure acts. The motives that prompt the deeds are the determining factors as to their purity or impurity. To illustrate: Once upon a time a very dear friend of mine remembered me as a beneficiary in his will. I was often with him in his sickness, and administered his medicine for him. Now suppose I had decided to cash in on the bequest he had made out to me and should have tried to give him poison to end his life, but made a big mistake in my effort and gave him a medicine that worked for him a wonderful cure.

Judging by the outcome, it would be a very good deed, for it was an act that brought a sick man back to health. But giving it its true appraisal, based on the motive that prompted it, the act would have been positively devilish. On the other hand, if in the sincerity of a heart filled with brotherly love, and making an honest effort to relieve the sufferings of my good friend, I make the fatal blunder of mistaking the medicine and give him a deadly poison which results in his death, the deed would be bad indeed, and I would forever regret it as long as mortal life should last. But it could not have the element of sin in it, for it was altogether unintentional. “Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (Ps. 32:2). “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom. 4:8).

Now in the foregoing discussion we have found these facts: (1) Entire sanctification includes cleansing. (2) Its cleansing aspect is a divine work. (3) That the Thessalonians, the very people to whom the text refers, were the very best examples of “born-again Christians.” (4) Paul’s effort to get them sanctified wholly is therefore positive proof that sanctification comes after regeneration, hence a second work of grace. (5) Jude’s letter to the sanctified, along with other proofs submitted, is incontestable proof that sanctification is obtainable in this life. (6) And finally, the fact that Paul prayed victoriously for the Thessalonians to be preserved blameless soul, body, and spirit unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; and furthermore God declared on oath that provisions are made for a holy life here and now (Luke 1:73-75), all combine to furnish a foundation for a faith to secure a pure heart out of which will flow a holy life in the sight of God.



