

Purifying the Soul

*“Seeing ye have
purified your souls
in obeying the
truth through the
Spirit unto
unfeigned love of
the brethren, see
that ye love one
another with a
pure heart
fervently.”
—I Peter 1:22*

HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD

is a most important essential of the Christian life. Without it no Christian endeavor can be truly acceptable to the Heavenly Father. The words “purity” and “holiness” as used in the Bible have much the same meaning. They describe that condition of heart which must characterize all who aspire to joint heirship with Jesus in the glorious kingdom soon to be established. To be pure means to be unadulterated. Applied to the Christian life, it means that one’s heart attitude before God must be that of full and complete submission to him, undivided in its affection and loyalty.

This purity of heart before the Lord means a complete separation from the world and its spirit, a full renouncing of the will of the flesh, and a constant effort to bring the flesh into subjection to the will of God. To maintain this purity requires a continued alertness with respect to the deceptive influences of the great deceiver, Satan, and by means

of the whole armor of God to give battle against him. To be successful in attaining and maintaining this condition of holiness, one must use the divinely provided means of purification, which in our text is declared to be the Truth.

To be pure, or holy, also means to be sanctified. Jesus, praying on behalf of his disciples, said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) By inspiration, the Apostle Paul reiterates the thought expressed by Jesus, saying, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." (Eph. 5:25,26) From these scriptures, it is apparent that the Christian should esteem the Word of truth very highly and seek daily to become better acquainted with it. No wonder the Apostle Paul advised Timothy to study that he might show himself "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."—II Tim. 2:15

TRUE STANDARD OF HOLINESS

There are many false standards of holiness among the peoples of the earth. Frequently, the word "holiness" is erroneously used to convey the thought merely of moral uprightness. Yet, even the standard of moral uprightness varies much in different parts of the world. Some moralists of today would severely condemn Jesus for many things which he did, yet of him the Scriptures declare that he was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."—Heb. 7:26

The Bible sets forth a true code of morals for the Christian, and it is of utmost importance that every

Christian be guided by that code. Anyone who supposes, however, that the Christian life consists merely of living up to a high moral code will ultimately fail in his effort to be truly holy before the Lord, and his soul will be far from purified.

When Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17), he had far more in mind than the importance of moral uprightness. The various teachings of both Christendom and heathendom have produced a certain degree of moral integrity in those who have been brought under their influence, but the falsities in religion have not sanctified their followers. The fear of eternal torment in a creedal hell has frightened many into giving up certain earthly pleasures, but such a false conception of sanctity does not result in true holiness in the sight of the Lord. False teachings have never purified the souls of those who believed them from the standpoint that the word "purity" is used in our text.

The full thought of sanctification as taught in the Bible is that of a dedication, or setting apart, to the Lord's holy purpose. The word "purity" as used in our text has to do with the singleness of heart in living up to the terms of sanctification. It is for this reason that the truth of God's Word is our means of sanctification. The Truth is God's plan, and his plan reveals the will of God for his people who follow in the footsteps of Jesus. In order to do God's will, one must know his plan for salvation. For this purpose, God has given us his Word of truth, revealing his plan that we might become acquainted with the work he is doing in the earth. Thus we can understand how it applies to our moral conduct

and also as it touches upon our responsibility in the service of God and of his cause.

“OBEYING THE TRUTH”

A mere technical knowledge of the Truth, however, will not in itself produce a sanctifying effect on the heart. The apostle clearly shows that we are purified only by “obeying the truth through the Spirit.” (I Pet. 1:22) Jesus promised that he would send “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13), and that it would guide his disciples into all truth. Even this, though, does not complete the apostle’s formula for soul purification. There is still another qualification. The Truth must be obeyed “through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren.” Thus Peter concludes, “See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”

The Apostle John adds his testimony to the importance of brotherly love as the final step in soul purification, saying, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.” (I John 3:18,19) The importance of love as the final goal of the sanctified life is apparent when we remember that the plan of God itself—the Truth—is a revelation of how the love of God is operating for the redemption and restoration of a lost race. A knowledge of this plan is given to us in order that we, by co-operating in it, may become like God. It is evident that if God’s love is such as to prompt him to give the dearest treasure of his heart as a sacrifice on the cross in order that his enemies might ultimately be blessed, the one who has not

learned to love his brethren is far from the goal of Christian holiness.

The process of soul purification embraces the complete work of conversion from the service of Satan and selfishness to the service of God and being guided by the godly principle of love. This purification begins when the light of truth concerning God's love breaks in upon our hearts and minds, and under its influence we become constrained to give our all to him. Paul says, "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."—II Cor. 5:14,15

When the constraining love of God and of Christ brings one to the point of full consecration, and the work of sanctification begins, it will be found to divide itself into two major aspects. One aspect of the purifying work has to do more particularly with one's own personal conduct, and the other with activity in the service of him to whom all has been devoted. It is not possible to say which of these phases of sanctification is the more important because there could be no sanctification at all unless both were given their proper place in the Christian life.

PURE PERSONAL CONDUCT

The "personal conduct" aspect of sanctification has to do, in addition to one's strictly personal affairs, with our domestic life, our attitude toward our brethren in the church and how we should endeavor to deal with our brethren, and with our

relatives in the world. It has to do with the proper attitude toward the governments of this world and how we should deal with our enemies. In all these matters and others, the Bible gives us our instructions. In order for the work of soul purification to go on acceptably before God, the Christian will need to give careful attention to all these instructions and endeavor to obey them, not only in letter, but in spirit also. Any failure to adhere to the expressed will of God as found in his Word constitutes a measure of impurity or lack of holiness. Unwilling failures are covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness, but willful disobedience will be punished.

One may become free from all his impure habits and from the worldly viewpoint be a noble example of good citizenship. Yet, if he persists willfully in speaking evil of his brethren or others, he shows disobedience to the command, "Speak evil of no man." (Titus 3:2) He is unholy in the sight of God and is far from the point of being fully sanctified. One may never become intoxicated, steal, or use impure language. He may be a model husband and a loving father. He may be a good neighbor and highly respected in his community. If, however, in the spirit of carnality he is guilty of sowing discord among the brethren, he is unholy in the sight of God and has failed fully to purify his soul through obeying the Truth.

In Matthew's gospel (18:15-18), Jesus gives explicit directions as to the proper course to pursue when difficulties arise among the brethren. A failure or refusal to follow these directions constitutes, by default, an unholy act. One may spend hours in

prayer and meditation until he fancies himself very close to the Lord. Yet, if he disobeys this important command of the Lord, he is in that proportion unholy, and his soul has not been truly purified. If his failure to act as directed by Jesus causes any of his brethren to suffer through misunderstanding or misrepresentation, the sin is doubly reprehensible in God's sight.

Prayer is absolutely necessary for the Christian, but he must first obey the Lord's commands if he expects his prayers to be heard. The Christian is expected to forgive and love his enemies. Forgiveness of his enemies is the condition upon which his own sins may be forgiven by the Heavenly Father. If such forgiveness is not forthcoming on the part of the professed follower of the Master, the unforgiving one is unholy. Not only is such a one unholy because of his failure to obey the Lord's commands, but he is unholy also in the sense that his own sins are still charged against him because he has failed to meet the conditions of their forgiveness. Impure, indeed, is the heart that continues to harbor anger and malice toward others, and is unable to forgive the imperfection in them by which he is so afflicted himself.

Some make the mistake of supposing that Jesus meant we should forgive what merely appears to be a trespass. They believe that if the trespass is found to have been a real one—if wrong has actually been done—forgiveness should be withheld and punishment administered instead. This is not the case. Real trespasses are the kind which our Heavenly Father forgives in us, hence it is the real trespasses against us that we must forgive in others,

else we are unholy. That which appears to be a trespass, but turns out not to be, does not need to be forgiven, for there is nothing to forgive.

PURITY IN SERVICE

The soul that is purified by the Truth and sanctified to God is a soul that is devoted to a definite, active purpose. As the faithful soldier must do more than merely wear the uniform and obey military rules, so the good soldier of Jesus Christ must do more than properly govern his personal conduct. He must do more than forgive his enemies. He must bless them as well, and “do good” unto them that despitefully use him. (Matt. 5:44) Yes, to be sanctified by the Truth means more than to be guided by the abstract principles of right, important though this is. Even as there can be no true sanctification apart from a scripturally governed personal conduct, so also there can be no true holiness unless the soul purification continues to the point where the being is consumed in the service of God to whom it is consecrated.

Our service to the Lord cannot be of just any kind. The service must be in harmony with the divine plan and the expressed will of God. The Heavenly Father is very particular about this. When he commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle and gave him instructions concerning its services, he said, “See . . . that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.” (Heb. 8:5; Exod. 25:40) Death was the penalty for disobeying this command. The Tabernacle and its services were illustrations of better things to come. Many of these “better things” have to do with the Christian

life and service. Surely God would not be less particular about the reality than he was of the typical shadow.

It is obvious that Paul was expressing something more than a mere ideal when he said that we should study to rightly divide the Word of truth if we are to be workmen approved by God. (II Tim. 2:15) A workman on any project could not be approved by his employer if he did not follow the plans given to him. If the Truth is the sanctifying medium in our lives and through obedience to it we are purified, is it reasonable to suppose that there can be true sanctification where the Truth is ignored, minimized, or opposed? Is the preaching of eternal torture for nine-tenths of the human race a holy work? It would not seem so and for the reason that it is not God's work. This is an extreme illustration but it will help us to realize the importance of the true doctrines of God's plan in connection with the work of soul purification that is going on within us.

Let us remember that the Christian is not commissioned to engage in any work except that which has to do with his share in the fulfillment of God's plan. No work can be holy work that is out of harmony with the divine will. The reverse of this is also true. Any work that is in harmony with the divine plan is properly a part of the Christian's privilege and a holy work. It is a practice of true holiness to engage in that work. Nor is one part of God's work either more or less holy than another.

THE DIVINE COMMISSION

Specifically, then, what is the Christian's work and how is it to be accomplished? Many have supposed

that it was God's will that the Christian church should convert the whole world in this present age, making Christians of the entire human race. Thousands of lives have been sacrificed in this unauthorized work. True, many were "converted" in this way, and some might be inclined to say that this is evidence that God blessed the work. This is not necessarily so. Almost any kind of message preached in any part of the world will result in converts to the particular theory advanced. This is especially true with respect to religious teaching. If the theories advanced offer future salvation from eternal torture, the result in the number of converts is often outstanding.

The divine commission to the church was to engage in the work of making disciples. (Matt. 28:19,20) The Scriptures show that the entire group of disciples to be made, from Pentecost down to the very end of the Gospel Age, was to constitute the church of Christ, also styled the "bride" of Christ. The completion of this work is referred to in Revelation 19:7, where it is said that "his wife hath made herself ready." The method by which the bride of Christ makes herself ready is the proclamation of, and obedience to, the Truth. Since it is the Truth—the Gospel message—that sanctifies, it is obvious that it must be made known to those who are to come under its purifying influence.

Every consecrated Christian is anointed by the Holy Spirit to take part in this work. In the association of God's people as groups, God has arranged that some be chosen to serve in special ways. This does not relieve those not chosen of their responsibility in the general work. Every activity of the

Christian has to do with the work of making ready the bride. He attends meetings and conventions, he prays, he sings praises, he preaches, he witnesses, all in order that the making-ready process might go on in himself as well as in others. Thus, everything pertaining to one's Christian activity is a part of the holy work in which they are engaged.

So far as we are concerned the church, while still in the flesh, will always be made up of those in various stages of development. Hence it will always be necessary to promote all possible activities in the work of finding and making disciples. The Lord himself is the only one who can end this work. When he does stop it, no Christian will question the matter. However, until the Lord does stop the work, every Christian whose soul has been purified by obeying the Truth should continue on in the use of whatever opportunities of service the Lord may give. None are entirely without opportunities, as even a prayer on behalf of fellow members of the bride class is a privilege of service.

In the days of the Early Church, the opportunities of service were not as diversified as they are today. Now we have the printed page, radio, television, and an explosion of electronic media available. There is something for all willing hands to do either directly or in cooperation with others. Every activity of the Christian should be in the direction of the one goal, which is the full preparation of the bride. The complete adornment of the bride must be the adornment of love, hence the apostle says in our text, "unto unfeigned love of the brethren."

When the sanctifying work of the church is complete and the entire Christ company is brought

wholly under the influence of divine love, then this holy bride will become, with her heavenly Bridegroom, the pure source of blessing for mankind in general. It is for this future work that the church is now, through soul purification, being made ready.

The importance of loyalty to the Truth as the sanctifying medium in our lives cannot be overemphasized. God severely censured his typical people for compromising with the false gods of their heathen neighbors. To the Christian, Paul says, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” (II Cor. 6:17) Paul is here referring to heathen temples and heathen gods. Similarly “unclean” philosophies permeate many religions today and have done so for centuries. God has given his people the Truth in order that they might be sanctified by it—fully set apart to his holy will and purpose. Let us cherish that Truth, and through the full submission of our wills come wholly under its purifying influence. ■