

A.W. Pink:

## The Doctrine of Sanctification

### 17. Its Rule

Having considered the distinct acts of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of the Church, we must now carefully inquire as to the Rule by which all true holiness is determined, the Standard by which it is weighed and to which it must be conformed. This also is of deep importance, for if we mistake the line and plummet of holiness, then all our efforts after it will be wide of the mark. On this aspect of our subject there also prevails widespread ignorance and confusion today, so that we are obliged to proceed slowly and enter rather lengthily into it. If one class of our readers sorely needed—for the strengthening of their faith and the comfort of their hearts—a somewhat full setting forth of the perfect sanctification which believers have in Christ, another class of our readers certainly require—for the illumination of their minds and the searching of their conscience—a setting forth in detail of the Divinely-provided "Rule."

In previous chapters we have shown that holiness is the antithesis of sin, and therefore as "sin is the transgression (a deviation from or violation of) the Law" (1 John 3:4), holiness must be a conformity to the Law. As "sin" is a general term to connote all that is evil, foul, and morally loathsome, so holiness" is a general term to signify all that is good, pure, and morally virtuous or vicious, praiseworthy or blameworthy, as they express the desires, designs, and choices of the heart. As all sin is a species of self-love—self-will, self-pleasing, self-gratification—so all holiness consists of disinterested or unselfish love—to God and our neighbor: 1 Corinthians 13 supplies a full and beautiful delineation of the nature of holiness: substitute the term "holiness" for "love" all through that chapter. As sin is the transgressing of the Law, so love is the fulfilling of the Law (Rom. 13:10).

The spirituality and religion of man in his original state consisted in a perfect conformity to the Divine Law, which was the law of his nature (for he was created in the image and likeness of God), with the addition of positive precepts. But when man lost his innocency and became guilty and depraved, he fell not only under the wrath of God, but also under the dominion of sin. Consequently, he now needs both a Redeemer, and a Sanctifier; and in the Gospel both are provided. Alas that so often today only a half Gospel, a mutilated Gospel, is being preached—whereby sinners are made "twofold more the children of Hell" than they were before they heard it! In the Gospel a way is revealed for our obtaining both pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace. The Gospel presents Christ not only as a Deliverer from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10), but also as the Sanctifier of His Church (Eph. 5:26).

In His work of sanctifying the Church Christ restores His people unto a conformity to the Law. Before supplying proof of this statement, let us carefully observe what it is which the Law requires of us. "Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40). Christ here summed up the ten commandments in these two, and every duty enjoined by the Law and inculcated by the Prophets is but a deduction or amplification of these two, in which all are radically contained. Here is, first, the duty required—love to God and our neighbor. Second, the ground or reason of this duty—because He is the Lord our God. Third, the measure of this duty—with all the heart.

The grand reason why God, the alone Governor of the world, ever made the Law, requiring us to love Him with all our hearts, was because it is, in its own nature, infinitely just and fitting. That Law is an eternal and unalterable Rule of Righteousness, which cannot be abrogated or altered in the least iota, for it is an unchanging expression of God's immutable moral character. To suppose that He would ever repeal or even abate the Law—when the grounds and reasons of God's first making it remain as forcible as ever, when that which it requires is as just and meet as ever, and which it becomes Him as the moral Ruler of the universe to require as much as ever—casts the highest reproach upon all His glorious perfections. Such a horrible insinuation could have originated nowhere else than in the foul mind of the Fiend, the arch-enemy of God, and is to be rejected by us with the utmost abhorrence.

To imagine God repealing the moral Law, which is the rule of all holiness and the condemner of all sin, would be supposing Him to release His creatures from giving unto Him the full glory which is His due, and allowing them to hold back a part of it at least. It supposes Him releasing His creatures from that which is right and allowing them to do that which is wrong. Yea, such a vile supposition reflects upon God's very goodness, for so far from it being a boon and benefit to His creatures, the repealing or altering this Law, which is so perfectly suited to their highest happiness, would be one of the sorest calamities that could happen. If God had rather that heaven and earth should pass away than that the least jot or tittle of the Law, should fail (Matt. 5:18), how steadfastly should we resist every effort of Satan's to rob us of this Divine rule, weaken its authority over our

hearts, or prejudice us against it.

In the light of what has been pointed out, how unspeakably horrible, that vile blasphemy, to imagine that the Son Himself should come from Heaven, become incarnate, and die the death of the cross, with the purpose of securing for His people a rescinding or abating of the Law, and obtain for them a lawless liberty. What! had He so little regard for His Father's interests and glory, for the honour of His Law, that He shed His precious blood so as to persuade the great Governor of the world to slacken the reins of His government and obtain for His people an impious license? Perish the thought. Let all who love the Lord rise up in righteous indignation against such an atrocious slur upon His holy character, and loathe it as a Satanic slander—no matter by whom propagated. Any Spirit-taught reader must surely see that such a wicked idea as the affirming that Christ is the one who has made an end of the Law, is to make Him the friend of sin and the enemy of God!

Pause for a moment and weigh carefully the implications. How could God possibly vindicate the honor of His great name were He to either repeal or abate that law which requires love to Him with all our hearts? Would not this be clearly tantamount to saying that He had previously required more than was His due? Or, to put it in another form, that He does not now desire so much from His creatures as He formerly did? Or, to state the issue yet more baldly: should God now (since the cross) relinquish His rights and freely allow His creatures to despise Him and sin with impunity? Look at it another way: to what purpose should Christ die in order to secure an abatement from that Law? What need was there for it? or what good could it do? If the Law really demanded too much, then justice required God to make the abatement; in such case the death of Christ was needless. Or if the Law required what was right, then God could not in justice make any abatement, and so Christ died in vain!

But so far from Christ coming into this world with any such evil design, He expressly declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled, Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19). This is the very thing He condemned the Pharisees for all through this chapter. They, in effect, taught this very doctrine, that the Law was abated, that its exacting demands were relaxed. They affirmed that though the Law did forbid some external and gross acts of sin, yet it did not reprehend the first stirrings of corruption in the heart or lesser iniquities.

For instance, the Pharisees taught that, murder must not be committed, but there was no harm in being angry, speaking reproachfully, or harboring a secret grudge in the heart (Matt. 5:21-26). That adultery must not be committed, yet there was no evil in having lascivious thoughts (vv. 27-30). That we must not be guilty of perjury, yet there was no harm in petty oaths in common conversation (vv. 33-37). That friends must not be hated, yet it was quite permissible to hate enemies (vv. 43-47). These, and such like allowances, they taught were made in the Law, and therefore were not sinful. But such doctrine our Saviour condemned as erroneous and damning, insisting that the Law requires us to be as perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (v. 48), and declaring that if our righteousness exceed not that of the scribes and Pharisees we could not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20). How far, then, was our holy Lord from abating God's Law, or lessening our obligations to perfect conformity to it!

The fact of the matter is (and here we will proceed to adduce some of the proofs for our statement at the beginning of the fourth paragraph), that Christ came into the world for the express purpose of giving a practical demonstration, in the most public manner, that God is worthy of all that love, honor, and obedience which the Law requires, and that sin is as great an evil as the punishment of the Law implies, and thereby declared God's righteousness and hatred of sin, to the end that God might be just and yet the Justifier of every sincere believer. This Christ did by obeying the precepts and suffering the death-penalty of the Law in the stead of His people. The great design of the incarnation, life and death of our blessed Lord was to maintain and magnify the Divine government, and secure the salvation of His people in a way that placed supreme honour upon the Law.

The chief object before the beloved Son in taking upon Him the form of a servant was to meet the demands of the Law. His work here had a prime respect to the Law of God, so that sinners should be justified and sanctified without setting aside its requirements or without showing the least disregard to it. First, He was "made under the Law" (Gal. 4 :4)—amazing place for the Lord of glory to take! Second, He declared, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy Law is within My heart" (Ps. 40:7, 8)—enshrined in His affections. Third, He flawlessly obeyed the commands of the Law in thought, and word, and deed: as a Child He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51); as Man He honored the sabbath (Luke 4:16), and refused to worship or serve any but the Lord His God (Luke 4:8). Fourth, when John demurred at baptizing Him, He answered "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15)—what a proof of His love for the Lawgiver in submitting to His ordinance! what proof of His love for His people in taking His place alongside of them in that which spake of death!

The truth is, that it was God's own infinite aversion to the repeal of the Law, as a thing utterly unfit and wrong, which was the very thing which made the death of Christ needful. If the Law might have been repealed, then sinners could have been saved without any more ado; but if it must not be repealed, then the demands of it

must be answered by some other means, or every sinner would be eternally damned. It was because of this that Christ willingly interposed, and "magnified the Law and made it honorable" (Isa. 42:21), so securing the honour of God's holiness and justice, so establishing His law and government, that a way has been opened for Him to pardon the very chief of sinners without compromising Himself to the slightest degree. "As many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse. . . Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:10, 13).

Christ loved His Father's honour far too much to revoke His Law, or bring His people into a state of insubordination to His authority; and He loved them too well to turn them adrift from "the perfect Law of liberty." Read carefully the inspired record of His life upon earth, and you will not discover a single word falling from His lips which expresses the slightest disrespect for the Law. Instead we find that He bade His disciples do unto men whatsoever we would that they should do unto us because "this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). In like manner Christ's apostles urged the performance of moral duties by the authority of the Law: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the Law" (Rom. 13:8); "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right: honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise" (Eph. 6:1, 2). The apostle John exhorted believers to love one another as "an old commandment which ye had from the beginning" (1 John 2:7). And, as we shall yet show at length, the Law is the great means which the Spirit uses in sanctifying us.

Here, then, is a "threefold cord" which cannot be broken, a threefold consideration which "settles the matter" for all who submit to the authority of Holy Scripture. First, God the Father honored the Law by refusing to rescind it in order that His people might be saved at less cost, declining to abate its demands even when His own blessed Son cried, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." God the Son honored the Law by being made under it, by perfectly obeying its precepts, and by personally enduring its awful penalty. God the Spirit honours the Law by making quickened sinners see, feel, and own that it is "holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12) even though it condemns them, and that, before ever He reveals the mercy of God through Jesus Christ unto them; so that the Law is magnified, sin is embittered, the sinner is humbled, and grace is glorified all at once!

There are some who will go with us this far, agreeing that Christ came here to meet the demands of the Law, yet who insist that the Law being satisfied, believers are now entirely freed from its claims. But this is the most inconsistent, illogical, absurd position of all. Shall Christ go to so much pains to magnify the Law in order that it might now be dishonored by us! Did He pour out His love to God on the Cross that we might be relieved from loving Him! It is true that "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. 10:4)—for "righteousness" (for our justification), yes; but not for our sanctification. Is it not written that "he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked" (1 John 2:6), and did not Christ walk according to the rule of the Law? The great object in Christ's coming here was to conform His people to the Law, and not to make them independent of it. Christ sends the Spirit to write the Law in their hearts (Heb. 8:10) and not to set at nought its holy and high demands.

The truth is that God's sending His Son into the world to die for the redemption of His people, instead of freeing them from their obligations to keep the Law, binds them the more strongly to do so. This is so obvious that it ought not to require arguing. Reflect for a moment, Christian reader, upon God's dealings with us. We had rebelled against the Lord, lost all esteem for Him, cast off His authority, and practically bid defiance to both His justice and His power. What wonder, then, had He immediately doomed our apostate world to the blackness of darkness forever? Instead, He sent forth His own dear Son, His only Begotten, as an Ambassador of peace, with a message of good news, even that of a free and full forgiveness of sins to all who threw down the weapons of their warfare against Him, and who took His easy yoke upon them.

But more: when God's Son was despised and rejected of men, He did not recall Him to Heaven, but allowed Him to complete His mission of mercy, by laying down His life as a ransom for all who should believe on Him. And now He sends forth His messengers to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth, inviting His enemies to cease their rebellion, acknowledge the Law by which they stand condemned to be holy, just and good, and to look to Him through Jesus Christ for pardon as a free gift, and to yield themselves to Him entirely, to love Him and delight themselves in Him forever. Is not this fathomless love, infinite mercy, amazing grace, which should melt our hearts and cause us to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" which is indeed our "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1)?

O my Christian reader, that God out of His own mere good pleasure, according to His eternal purpose, should have stopped thee in thy mad career to Hell, made thee see and feel thy awful sin and guilt, own the sentence just by which thou wast condemned, and bring thee on thy knees to look for free grace through Jesus Christ for pardon, and through Him give up thyself to God forever. And that now He should receive thee to His favor, put thee among His children, become your Father and your God, by an everlasting covenant; undertake to teach and guide, nourish and strengthen, correct and comfort, protect and preserve; and while in this world supply all thy need and make all things work together for thy good; and finally bring thee into everlasting glory and blessedness. Does not this lay thee under infinitely deeper obligations to Love the Lord thy God with all thine heart? Does not this have the greatest tendency to animate thee unto obedience to His righteous Law? Does

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**not this engage thee, does not His love constrain thee, to seek to please, honor and glorify Him?**