

Positional Sanctification

For the explanation of my interpolations in this chapter, see the Introduction.

In a letter to Alexander Coats, 22nd April 1761, Berridge raised the subject of positional sanctification, but only mentioned it:

I see that faith alone can purify the heart and pacify the conscience; and Christ is become my all in everything, my all in wisdom, in justification, [positional] sanctification and complete redemption [1 Cor. 1:30].¹

In a letter to John Thornton,² 14th January 1774, however, Berridge commented in greater detail on this important verse. I quote it: ‘Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto (or for) us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption’ (1 Cor. 1:30). Let me render it in a better translation:

You are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption (NIV).

This better translation gives a truer sense of what the apostle is saying. Christ is not four things to the believer. Rather, he is the believer’s wisdom, and this is shown in three particulars: Christ is the believer’s righteousness, the believer’s holiness or sanctification, and the believer’s redemption. And the ‘sanctification’ Paul is speaking about is not the believer’s progressive sanctification, his holiness of life, his growth in grace, his Christ-likeness in his daily life. No! The apostle is speaking of what the believer immediately becomes in the sight of God at the point of conversion; that is, when he repents and believes and is united to Christ by faith. At

¹ Pibworth: *Letters* pp75-76.

² See the Introduction.

Positional Sanctification

that point, Christ justifies the believing sinner, positionally sanctifies him, applying to him the fruits of the redemption he accomplished for him on the cross.³

As Berridge explained to Thornton:

Paul is not here speaking of what Christ works *in* us by his grace, but of what he has wrought *for* us, as our legal Surety.⁴ The four capital blessings mentioned in the text were procured for us without any contrivance or concurrence of our own; and therefore the conclusion in the next verse is weighty: ‘Let him that glories glory in the Lord’.

Berridge made a general point:

Laws, human and divine, not only demand obedience, but require from the subject a right knowledge of the laws. God’s law demands an atonement for sins of ignorance (Lev. 4 and 5), and he who breaks a human law will not escape punishment by pleading ignorance. Now, man at his first creation had a perfect knowledge given him of God’s law,⁵ but through sin he lost that knowledge. His faculties were darkened, and he became a stranger to the spiritual nature and extent of his Maker’s law. However, God, as our great creditor, has a right to demand full payment of that knowledge he had lent us, though we through misconduct are unable to pay, having squandered it all away. And thus we become debtors for the loss of *knowledge*, as well as for the loss of *innocence*. On which account we need a Surety for wisdom, and one is provided: ‘In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ [Col. 2:3]. And without a Surety for wisdom, the wisest Christian would have perished, on account of his

³ For the arguments behind these assertions, see my *Eternal; Four; Fivefold; Positional*.

⁴ A surety is one who takes legal responsibility for the debts of others, and acts as guarantee for them. Christ took his people’s sins, and is the guarantor and guarantee of the new covenant. Thus he is his people’s Surety.

⁵ This is not the so-called covenant of works. See my ‘The Covenant that Never Was’.

Positional Sanctification

knowing but in part... Now, righteousness in its strict meaning is an outward conformity to the law, and sanctification or holiness is an inward conformity to it, or devotedness of heart to God. Both the outward and inward conformity are required by the law, and in a perfect degree: but in both we are utterly defective. On these accounts a Surety is wanted both for righteousness and sanctification.

So much for the general point. Berridge then spoke of Christ as the believer's Surety:

A Surety is wanted both for righteousness and sanctification; and one is provided, [one] who 'fulfilled all righteousness' [Matt. 3:15; 5:17-20; Rom. 8:1-4; 10:4], and could say: 'Your law is within my heart' [Ps. 40:8], and it is 'my meat and drink to do your will' [John 4:34].

Berridge brought this home to the individual by exposing the sinner's need, and declaring that that need is fully met in Christ:

We are insolvent debtors for wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and as such, we are fallen under the curse of the law, and need a Surety to redeem us from it. Jesus is that Surety, 'in whom we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins' [Col. 1:14] Thus we are shown in this noble text [1 Cor. 1:30] all the debts Jesus Christ undertook as our Surety, and discharged for us.

Alas, as Berridge well knew, many believers simply do not understand 1 Corinthians 1:30:

The commentators I have seen make a sadly confused work of this passage. They are puzzled to keep the parts distinct, and [so, according to them,] some parts are supposed to be wrought for us, and some wrought in us. But Paul makes no such distinction, nor will his words allow it. He only declares in this passage what Christ was made for us; a Surety for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; a Surety to discharge every claim the law had upon us.

Positional Sanctification

In other words, although many regard the sanctification of 1 Corinthians 1:30 as progressive, in fact, the apostle is speaking of positional sanctification. Christ is the believer's positional sanctification at the point of conversion, and this is absolute, complete and unchangeable, as is the believer's justification. Christ also gives his Spirit and his word to the believer in order to enable him to grow in progressive sanctification. All this must be kept clear and distinct. Immense problems arise when these two aspects of sanctification are confused. The sanctification in 1 Corinthians 1:30 is positional.

Berridge had not finished. As Christ brings the sinner to the point of conversion, he regenerates him by his Spirit, and this brings about a seismic spiritual change in the sinner's attitude to the Lord:

Now, when Jesus opens a sinner's eyes, to behold the multiplied guilt of his ignorance, unrighteous conduct, and unholy heart, and of his lying under a law curse thereby, he quickly flies to the Surety for relief. And when by faith he is enabled to view a finished salvation, and steadfastly to rely upon the Surety, redemption is found; he feels the sprinkled blood, the love of God is poured into his heart, which hallows it, making self-denial an easy yoke and obedience a cheerful service.

What a vital truth! Berridge was now speaking of the believer's progressive sanctification, and showing how this is accomplished as he looks to Christ and his grace to him. In other words, not only is the sinner converted by looking to the crucified Christ, but by the same means the converted sinner – now a saint – is progressively sanctified. And, it surely goes without saying, the believer does not keep his eye on Christ as a mere spectator, but as one who has a personal and felt interest in Christ and what he has done for, in and to him. As the apostle declared:

Positional Sanctification

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:19-20).

In other words, the believer's progressive sanctification is brought about as he keeps his mind on his positional sanctification and justification in Christ (Col. 3:1-11). And, as Berridge said, this looking to Christ by the believer is not a one-off:

And while believers keep simply looking to a crucified Christ, and the eye of faith is kept open, love and peace flow on sweetly like a river, and the heart becomes more lowly, more childlike, and more devoted unto God. By feeding *only* and daily on the flesh and blood of Christ, eternal life springs up in them as a well of water.⁶

Excellent! As the sinner trusts Christ and his grace, he is saved – justified and positionally sanctified – and as the believer keeps his eye on Christ and his grace, so he is progressively sanctified.

⁶ Pibworth: *Letters* pp221-223, emphasis original.

