

The Key to
HOLINESS

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This new edition from Whitaker House has been updated for the modern reader. Words, expressions, and sentence structure have been revised for clarity and readability.

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THE KEY TO HOLINESS

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Chapter One

Perfection in Faith

The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.

—Psalm 138:8

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

—Hebrews 10:14

Think for a moment about the preceding Scriptures. In the first Scripture, Psalm 138:8, David went from bold faith to meek prayer. After having said in confidence, “*The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me,*” he was inclined to ask the Lord, “*Forsake not the works of thine own hands,*” sinking, as it were, to a lower note in the scale of music. We, also, are often inclined in this way. We often behold perfection in the dim obscurity of the future, like the sun veiled behind a cloud. Our faith rests on it as a thing unseen at the

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present time; our hearts yearn for it as an inheritance still in reserve for us.

Yet, this perfection is brought near to us as a thing accomplished, as an ever present fact, whose eternal reality shines upon us with unclouded luster. It is because of this that I quote the verse, “*By one offering [our Lord Jesus Christ] hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*” (Hebrews 10:14). Is it not incredibly pleasing to observe that what is presented to us in one part of Scripture as a matter of *faith*, is stated in another place as a matter of *fact*? He has perfected us forever.

I have been turning this text over and over in my mind, and praying about it, and looking into it, and seeking illumination from the Holy Spirit; but it has taken me a long time to be clear about its exact meaning. It is very easy to select a meaning, and then to say, “That is what the text means”; and it is very easy also to look at something that lies upon the surface. However, I am not quite so sure that, after several hours of meditation, any believer would be able to ascertain what is the Spirit’s mind in this particular verse, “*By one offering [Christ] hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*”

When I was trying to find out what this meant, I thought I would simply read the chapters before it, and if I should happen to find any word that seemed to be the key to this verse, I would then, under the Spirit’s guidance, seek to open this lock and mystery with the key that was there provided for me. Well, I read the chapters in Hebrews, and I did find something that seemed to explain the meaning of this verse. Now, as I write this chapter, I will try to show you what I think it means; and then I think it will stand out in a very clear and glorious light.

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SANCTIFIED AS A CHILD OF GOD

First, I will discuss the condition of the child of God—what he is. He is a sanctified person. The term *sanctified* is wholly intended for the children of God; they are described as sanctified people. What does this mean?

We usually say there are two meanings to the term *sanctified*. One is “set apart.” God has set apart His people from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), to be His chosen and peculiar inheritance (Psalm 33:12), and we are sanctified by God the Father. The other meaning implies not the decree of the Father, but the work of the Holy Spirit. We are sanctified in Christ Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, when He subdues our corruptions, imparts graces to us, and leads us onward in the divine walk and life of faith. Even so, the verse here, I think, includes both of these senses; and I must try, if I can, to find an illustration that will embrace them both.

What was the apostle writing about? In the ninth chapter of Hebrews, he wrote about the tabernacle, the candlestick, the table, the showbread, the sanctuary, the golden censer,¹ the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold, and the golden pot of manna (vv. 2–4). He also wrote about priests, and about priestly things and holy things (vv. 6–7). He declared that all these were sanctified things, but even though they were sanctified, they still needed to be made perfect by the sprinkling of blood (v. 7).

Now, I believe that the sanctification referred to in our text is to be understood in this sense. There were certain golden vessels that were used in the sanctuary,

1. *Censer*: a vessel for burning incense.

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that were never used for anything else except the service of God. They were set apart; they were made holy; and they were kept strictly to be the vessels of the sanctuary of the Lord God. They were sanctified things.

In the sanctuary, there were people who did nothing else but wait upon the Lord. These people were chosen, and then they were prepared. God chose the tribe of Levi, and out of the tribe of Levi, He chose the house of Aaron. The members of Aaron's family were consecrated to their offices. They underwent certain ceremonies and various washings, and so they were made ceremonially holy; and these priests were therefore sanctified people because they were set apart, dedicated, and reserved for the special service of the Lord God. Now, that is just what you and I are, and what we ought to be: we are sanctified persons. That is to say, we are chosen by God to be the particular vessels that He will use in pouring out His mercy, and to be the special priests whom He will employ in His divine worship in this world.

No man had any right to take wine, for his own drinking, out of the golden cups of the sanctuary. If he did so, he did it to his own destruction—witness what happened to Belshazzar. (See Daniel 5.) He took the cups and the golden candlesticks, and so forth, and used them in his debaucheries, and lo! he was swept away, and the handwriting on the wall foretold his doom. In the same manner, Christian men are not to be used for anything but for God. They are a people set apart (Psalm 4:3); they are vessels of mercy (see Romans 9:23); they are not for the Devil's use, not for their own use, not for the world's use, but for their Master's use. He has purposefully made them to be used entirely, solely, and wholly for Him.

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Now, that is what is meant in this text by the word *sanctified*. We are sanctified people, set apart for God's use, consecrated just as the vessels, the cups, the candlesticks, the tables, and the altars of the sanctuary, were sanctified unto God and set apart for His service. We are priests, and we are sanctified, but not because of any holiness in our character, just as there were some of those early priests who were not holy in their character.

My text does not concern character. Rather, it concerns our position in the sight of God. We are not perfect in character, any one of us; we are only perfect in position. There were two men who officiated as priests before God, namely, the sons of Eli, who committed sin and iniquity before God. (See 1 Samuel 2:22.) And yet, they were set apart for God's service, for when they offered the sacrifices as priests, they were officially accepted as being sanctified persons because they had been washed with water and sprinkled with blood.

Now, dear reader, the children of God are sanctified people, sanctified to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and we have no right to do anything else but serve God. "What," you say, "am I not to attend to my business?" Yes, and you are to serve God in your business. "Am I not to look after my family?" Assuredly, you are, and you are to serve God in looking after your family, but still you are to be set apart.

You are not to wear the white robe nor the breastplate (see Exodus 28:4), but still you are to think of yourself as being as much a priest as if the breastplate were on your breast, and the white robe about your loins; for you are "*priests unto God and his Father*" (Revelation 1:6). He has made you a peculiar generation

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and a royal priesthood (see 1 Peter 2:9), and He has set you apart for Himself. (See Psalm 4:3.)

Now, I think that this first point has given you an idea of what the rest must mean. I have already hinted at what I think is the sense of the text. I have explained clearly enough, I suppose, in what sense God's people are sanctified people, as understood in this verse. They are chosen and set apart and reserved to be God's instruments and God's servants, and, therefore, they are sanctified.

PERFECTED IN CHRIST'S BLOOD

Now comes the second thing. "*He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*" (Hebrews 10:14). In what sense are we to understand that Christ has perfected these who are sanctified? Why, in the sense of what Christ has done for them. When the golden vessels were brought into the temple or into the sanctuary, they were sanctified the very first moment that they were dedicated to God. No one dared to employ them for anything except holy uses. Even so, they were not perfect. What did they need, then, to make them perfect? They needed to have blood sprinkled on them; and, as soon as the blood was sprinkled on them, those golden vessels were perfect vessels, officially perfect. God accepted them as being holy and perfect things, and they stood in His sight as instruments of an acceptable worship.

It was the same with the Levites and the priests. As soon as they were set apart to their office—as soon as they were born, in fact—they were consecrated; they belonged to God; they were His peculiar priesthood. However, they were not perfect until they had passed through many washings, and had had the blood

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sprinkled upon them. Then God looked upon them, in their official priestly character, as being perfect. I repeat, they were not perfect in character; they were only perfect officially, perfect in the sight of God, and they stood before Him to offer sacrifice as acceptably as if they had been as pure as Adam himself.

Now, then, how does this refer to us, and what is the meaning of this text, that “*by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*” (Hebrews 10:14)? Turn back to Hebrews 9:6–7, where you will read,

Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people.

Note that the first meaning of my text is this: the child of God is a priest, and as a priest he is sanctified to enter within the veil. He is now permitted to go into the place that was once within the veil, but that is not so now because the veil is torn in two. (See Matthew 27:51.)

The high priest, on the contrary, could not go within the veil, because he was not perfect. He had to be sprinkled with the blood, and that made him officially perfect. It would not make him perfect merely to put on the breastplate, or to wear the ephod; he was not perfect until the blood had been sprinkled upon him, and then he went within the veil. Even so, when the next year came around, he was not fit to go within the veil until blood was sprinkled on him again. The same would happen every year, for although he was always a sanctified man, he was not always, officially, a perfect man. He

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had to be sprinkled with blood again. And so, year after year, the high priest who went within the veil needed afresh to be made perfect, in order to obtain access to God.

A POSITION OF PERFECTION

Therefore, this is one sense of Hebrews 10:14. The apostle said that we who are the priests of God have a right as priests to go to God's mercy seat, which is within the veil; but it would mean our death to go there unless we were perfect. However, we are perfect, for the blood of Christ has been sprinkled on us, and, therefore, our standing before God is the standing of perfection. Our standing, in our own conscience, is imperfection, just as the character of the priest might be imperfect. But that has nothing to do with it. Our standing in the sight of God is a standing of perfection; and when He sees the blood—as of old, when the destroying angel passed over Israel (see Exodus 12:3–13)—so this day, when He sees the blood, God passes over our sins and accepts us at the throne of His mercy, as if we were perfect.

Therefore, let us come boldly to His throne (Hebrews 4:16).

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)

In this twenty-second verse of Hebrews 10, the apostle brought in one inference that I have just drawn from my text: in having access to God, perfection is absolutely necessary. God cannot talk with an imperfect

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being. He could talk with Adam in the Garden, but He could not talk with you or with me, even in Paradise itself, as imperfect creatures.

How, then, are we to have fellowship with God, and access to His throne? Why, simply through the blood of Christ, which “hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). As a consequence of His offering, we can come boldly to the throne of heavenly grace, and may come boldly in all our times of need (Hebrews 4:16). And, what is better still, we are always perfect, always fit to come to the throne, whatever our doubts, whatever our sins.

I say this not of the priest’s character; we have nothing to do with that at present. We come before God in our position, in our standing, not in our character; and therefore, we may come as perfect men at all times, knowing that God sees no sin in Jacob, and no iniquity in Israel. (See Micah 3:8.) For in this sense, Christ has perfected forever every consecrated vessel of His mercy.

Is this not a delightful thought, that when I come before the throne of God, I feel that I am a sinner, but God does not look upon me as one? When I approach Him to offer my thanksgivings, I feel that I am unworthy in myself, but I am not unworthy in that official standing in which He has placed me. As a sanctified and perfected being in Christ, I have the blood upon me. God regards me in my sacrifice, in my worship, yes, and in myself, too, as being perfect.

Oh, how joyful this is! And there is no need to repeat this perfecting a second time. It is an everlasting perfection; it allows a constant access to the throne of heavenly grace. That is one meaning of the text.

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PERFECTED FOREVER

A little further on, the apostle, in Hebrews 9:21, wrote, “*He sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.*” They were all sanctified vessels, as you know, but they were not perfect vessels until they were sprinkled with the blood.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

(Hebrews 9:22–23)

Now, the vessels of the sanctuary, as I have said, were sanctified the moment they were put there, but they were not perfect. God could not therefore accept any sacrifice that was touched with the golden tongs or that lay upon the bronze altar, as long as those golden tongs and the bronze altar were imperfect. What was done to make them perfect? Why, they were sprinkled with blood; but they had to be sprinkled with blood many, many times—once, twice, three times, multitudes of times—because they continually needed to be made perfect.

You and I, if we are consecrated people, are presently like the vessels of the sanctuary. Sometimes we are like the censer: God fills us with joy, and then the smoke of incense ascends from us. Sometimes we are like the slaughter knife that the priest used: we are enabled to deny our lusts, to deny ourselves, and to put the knife to the neck of the victim. And sometimes we are like the altar: upon us God is pleased to lay a sacrifice of labor,

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and there it smokes acceptably to heaven. We are made like sanctified things of His house.

But, beloved, although we are sanctified and He has chosen us to be the vessels of His spiritual temple, we are not perfect until the blood is on us. Yet, blessed be His name, that blood has been put upon us once, and we are perfected for eternity. Is it not delightful to think that when God uses us in His service, He could not use unhallowed instruments? The Lord God is so pure that He could not use anything but a perfect tool to work with.

“Then surely He could never use you or me,” you say. No! Do you not see? The blood is on us, and we are the sanctified instruments of His grace; moreover, we are the perfect instruments of His grace through the blood of Jesus. Oh! I take delight in just thinking about it! I am imperfect in my own estimation and, rightly enough, in yours; yet, when God makes use of me, He does not make use of an imperfect man. No, He looks upon me as being perfect in Christ, and then He says, “I can use this tool. I could not put My hand to an unholy thing, but I will look upon him as being perfected forever in Christ, and therefore I can use him.”

Oh, Christian, do try to digest this precious thought. It has indeed been precious to my soul since I first laid hold of it. You cannot tell what God may do with you, because if He uses you at all, He does not use you as a sinner. Rather, He uses you as a sanctified person; no, more than that, He uses you as a perfect person. I will repeat it: I do not see how a holy God could use an unholy instrument; but He puts the blood on us, and then He makes us perfect—He perfects us for eternity—and then He uses us.

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And so, we may see the work of God carried on by men who we think are imperfect, but, in reality, we never see God doing any of His deeds except with a perfect instrument. If you were to ask me how He has done it, I would tell you that all His consecrated ones, all whom He has sanctified to His use, He has first of all perfected forever through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

A PERFECT JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD

And now we will examine one more thought, and then I will have given you the full meaning of Hebrews 10:14. In Hebrews 7:19, there is a word that is a key to the meaning of my text, and that helped me through it:

*For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope **did**; by the which we draw nigh unto God.* (emphasis added)

Compare that verse to Hebrews 10:1:

The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

There is the word *perfect*, which is implied in the verse that follows: “*For then [if they had been perfect] would they not have ceased to be offered?*” (v. 2). Why offer any more, if you are already a perfect man? Because, if the sacrifice is perfect, “*the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins*” (v. 2).

Note that the Jewish sacrifice was never intended to make the Jews’ moral character any better, and it did not. It had no effect upon what we call a person’s

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sanctification. All the sacrifice dealt with was his justification; and after that, the perfection would be sought. The perfection is not of sanctification, which the Arminian² talks about. Rather, it is the perfection of official standing, as a person stands justified before God.

Now, that is the meaning of the word *perfect* here. It does not mean that the sacrifice did not make the man perfectly holy, perfectly moral, and so forth, because the sacrifice had no tendency to do that, for it was quite another matter. Rather, it means that it did not perfectly make him justified in his own conscience and in the sight of God, because he had to come and offer again.

Suppose a man who is troubled in his conscience comes sighing to the temple, and he must speak to the priest. He says to the priest, "I have committed such and such a sin."

"Ah!" says the priest. "You will never have any ease in your conscience unless you bring a sin offering." So the man brings a sin offering, and it is offered, and the man sees it burn, and he goes away. He has faith—faith in the great Sin Offering that is to come—and his conscience is easy.

A day or two later, the same feelings arise; and what does he do? He goes to the priest again. "Ah!" says the priest. "You must bring another offering; you must bring a trespass offering." So, he brings the trespass offering, and his conscience grows easier for a time; but the more his conscience comes alive, the more he sees the unsatisfactory character of the offering he brings.

2. *Arminian*: one who is opposed to the absolute predestination of strict Calvinism and who maintains the possibility of salvation for all.

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At last, he says, "I am so uneasy; how I wish that I could have a sacrifice every hour! For when I put my hand on the head of the victim, I feel so happy; when I come to see it slaughtered, and the blood flowing, I feel so easy; but I do not feel perfect. I will go up to the temple again, so that I may live."

So he sees a lamb slaughtered in the morning, and tears of joy are in his eyes. "Oh!" he says. "I have seen that lamb; and when I saw the blood of that lamb flowing, I felt so glad." Noon comes. "Ah!" he says. "My sins arise again; where can I get relief for my conscience?" So off he goes to the temple. And there is another lamb in the evening, because God well knew that the sacrifices were themselves imperfect—only a shadow of the great Substance—and that His people would need to have the service renewed, not only every year, but every day—no, every morning and every evening.

But now, beloved, behold the glory of Christ Jesus as revealed to us in our text. Those sacrifices could not "*make the comers thereunto perfect*" (Hebrews 10:1). They could not feel in their own conscience that they were perfectly justified, and they wanted fresh offerings; but today we see the slaughtered Lamb on Calvary. It may have been just yesterday that you rejoiced in Him, but you can rejoice in Him again today.

Some years ago, I sought Him, and I found Him. I do not want another Lamb. I do not want another sacrifice. I can still see that blood flowing, and I can feel continually that I have no more consciousness of sin. The sins are gone. I have no more remembrance of them; I am purged from them; and as I see the perpetually flowing blood of Calvary, and the ever rising merits of His glorious passion, I am compelled to rejoice in this

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fact, that He has perfected me forever (Hebrews 10:14). He has made me completely perfect through His sacrifice.

And now, Christian, try to lay hold of this meaning of the text. Christ has set your conscience at ease forever; and if it disturbs you, recall that it has no cause to do so, if you are a believer in Christ. For has He not given you that which will put away all consciousness of sin? Oh, rejoice! His sacrifice has purged you so entirely that you may sit down and rest. You may sing with the poet—

Turn, then, my soul unto thy rest;
The merits of thy great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty.
Trust in his efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.

Look again at Hebrews 10:14. Once again, I am going to repeat the same things, lest I should not be quite understood. We, as believers, cannot have access to God unless it is on the footing of perfection; for God cannot walk and talk with imperfect creatures. But, we are perfect—not in character, of course, for we are still sinners—but we are perfected through the blood of Jesus Christ, so that God can allow us as perfected creatures to have access to Him. We may come boldly to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), because, being sprinkled with the blood, God does not look on us as unholy and unclean. Otherwise, He could not allow us to come to His mercy seat. However, He looks upon us as being perfected forever through the one sacrifice of Christ.

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That is one thing. Another is this: we are the vessels of God's temple; He has chosen us to be like the golden pots of His sanctuary. Those vessels, remember, were made perfect by being sprinkled with blood. God could never accept a worship offered to Him in unholy vessels. Likewise, God could not accept the praise that comes from your unholy heart; He could not accept the song that springs from your uncircumcised lips, nor the faith that arises from your doubting soul, unless He had taken the great precaution to sprinkle you with the blood of Christ. And now, whatever He uses you for, He uses you as a perfect instrument, regarding you as being perfect in Christ Jesus. That, again, is the meaning of the text, and the same meaning, only a different phase of it.

The last meaning is that the sacrifices of the Jews did not give believing Jews peace of mind for any length of time; they had to come again and again and again, because they felt that those sacrifices did not give them a perfect justification before God. But, behold, beloved, you and I are complete in Jesus (Colossians 2:10). We have no need for any other sacrifice. All others we disclaim. "*He hath perfected [us] for ever*" (Hebrews 10:14). We may set our consciences at ease, because we are truly, really, and everlastingly accepted in Him. "*He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*" (v. 14).

Now, what is left, except to ask you, "Are you a sanctified person?" I have known a man to say sometimes to a believer, "Well, you look so sanctified. Ah! You must be one of those sanctified people!" Well, if they said that to me, I would reply, "I wish you would prove it, then." What can be more holy than to be a sanctified man?

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Let me ask you, then, “Are you sanctified?” You may say, “I feel so sinful.” But I do not ask you that. Rather, I ask you whether you are set apart to God’s service. Can you say,

Dear Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do?

Can you say, “Take me just as I am, and make use of me; I desire to be wholly thine”? Do you feel that for you to live is Christ (Philippians 1:21); that there is not any reason for which you are living except for Christ; that Christ is the great aim of your ambition, the great objective of all your labors; that you are like Samson, a Nazarite, consecrated to God? Oh, then, remember that you are perfected in Christ. (See Hebrews 10:14).

But, dear reader, if you are not sanctified to God in this sense—if you live unto yourself, unto pleasure, and unto the world—then you are not perfected in Christ. And what will become of you? God will give you no access to Him. God will not use you in His service; you will have no rest in your conscience; and in the day when God will come to separate the precious from the vile, He will say, “Those are My precious ones, who have the blood on them. But these have rejected Christ; they have lived unto themselves; they were dead while they lived, and they are damned now that they are dead.”

Take heed of that! May God give you grace to be sanctified to God, and then you will be forever perfected through Christ.