

STUDIES ON SAVING FAITH Part IV 17. ITS MAINTENANCE

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Transcript

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Part IV

17. ITS MAINTENANCE

Here again there are two extremes to be guarded against: the fatalistic lethargy of I cannot help myself, and the humanistic effrontery which affirms that the remedy lies in my own hands. Spiritual assurance is a Divine gift, nevertheless the Christian has a responsibility for preserving the same. It is true that I cannot speak peace to my own conscience, or apply the balm of Gilead to my wounded heart, yet I can do many things to grieve and repel the great Physician. We cannot bring ourselves near to God, but we can and do wander from Him. Of ourselves we cannot live to God's glory, but we can to our own. Of ourselves we cannot walk after the Spirit, but we can after the flesh. We cannot make ourselves fruitful unto every good word and work, but we may by disobedience and self-indulgence bring leanness into our souls and coldness into our affections. We cannot impart health to our bodies, but we can use means which, by God's blessing, further the same. 1. Holy assurance cannot be maintained unless the Christian keeps his heart with "all diligence" (Prov. 4:23). "Watch ye and pray lest ye enter into temptation" (Mark 14:38). "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). There must be "A watchful fighting, and contending against the whole work of sin, in its deceits and power, with all the contribution of advantage and efficacy that it hath from Satan and the world. This the apostle peculiarly applies it unto, in the cautions and exhortations given us, to take heed of it, that we be not hardened by it; seeing its whole design is to impair or destroy our interest and persistency in Christ, and so to draw us off from the living God" (John Owen). More especially does the Christian need to pray and strive against presumptuous sins. Right hands must be cut off, right eyes plucked out (Matt. 5:29); a gangrened member must be amputated, or death will soon ensue. Cry mightily unto God for enabling grace to mortify besetting sins. Remember that a deliberate running into the place of danger, a willful exposing of myself to sin's attacks, is a tempting of the Lord. "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Prov. 4:14, 15). O what circumspect walking is called for in a world which abounds with pitfalls on every side! 2. Holy assurance cannot be maintained unless the Christian be diligent in cherishing his graces. A Christian is one who had been made a partaker of those spiritual graces which "accompany salvation" (Heb. 6:9), and for the establishing of his comfort and joy it is necessary that he know himself to be in possession of

them. The best evidence that we are in a state of grace, is to grow in grace. For this there needs to be a "daily constant cherishing, and laboring to improve and strengthen every grace by which we abide in Christ. Neglected grace will wither, and be ready to die (Rev. 3:2); yea, as to some degrees of it, and as to its work in evidencing the love of God unto us, or our union with Christ, it will utterly decay. Some of the churches in the Revelation had lost their first love, as well as left their first works. Hence is that command that we should grow in grace, and we do so when grace grows and thrives in us. And this is done two ways: "First, when any individual grace is improved. When that faith which was weak, becomes strong; and that love which was faint and cold, becomes fervent and is inflamed; which is not to be done but in and by the sedulous exercise of these graces themselves, and a constant application of our souls by them to the Lord Christ. Secondly, by adding one grace unto another: 'and besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge; etc.' (2 Pet. 1:5); this is the proper work of spiritual diligence. This is the nature of Gospel-graces, because of their linking together in Christ, and as they are wrought in us by one and the self-same Spirit, the exercise of one leads us to the stirring up and bringing in the exercise of another into the soul" (John Owen). 3. By keeping short accounts with God. "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" (Heb. 10:22). Note the intimate connection there is between these things. There cannot be a sincere and hearty approach unto God as worshippers while the guilt of sin be resting upon our consciences. Nothing more effectually curtails our freedom in drawing nigh to the thrice Holy One than the painful realization that my conduct has been displeasing to him. "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21). But strive as he may, walk as cautiously and carefully as he will, in "many things" the Christian "offends" (James 3:2) daily, both by sins of omission and commission. Yet, blessed be God, provision has been made by our loving Father even for this sad failure of ours. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). As soon as we are conscious of having done wrong, we should tin-bosom ourselves to God: holding nothing back, but freely acknowledging each offence. Nor should we fear to do this frequently, daily, yea constantly. If the Lord bids us to forgive our sinning brethren "until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22), is He less merciful? "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them (in heart and purpose) shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). 4. By cultivating daily communion with God. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:3, 4). Observe the connection between these two statements: fulness of joy (which, in this epistle, largely has reference to walking in the unclouded assurance of our Divine sonship) is the fruit of fellowship with the Father and His Son. But what is signified by the term "fellowship"? Many seem to have but vague and visionary ideas of its meaning. Oneness of heart and mind, common interests and delights, unity of will and purpose, reciprocal love, is what is denoted. It is a fellowship "in the light" (1 John 1:5-7). This was perfectly realized and exemplified by the Lord Jesus. He walked in uninterrupted communion with the Father: delighting in His will (Ps. 40:8), keeping His commandments (John 14:31), always doing those things which were pleasing in His sight (John 8:29). And this very epistle declares "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (2:6). What a standard is here set before us! Yet after it we should prayerfully and constantly strive. Fellowship is participation in the light and love of God. It is a refusing of the things He hates and a choosing of the things in which He delights. It is the losing of my will in His. It is a going out of self, and an embracing of God in Christ. It is the acceptance of His estimate of things, thinking His thoughts after Him, viewing the world and all in it, life both present and future, from His viewpoint. It is therefore a being moulded into conformity with His holy nature. It is living to His glory. And thus it is a fellowship of joy, and "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10): strength to overcome temptations,

to perform the duties of life, to endure its sorrows and disappointments. The closer we walk with the Lord, the brighter will be the evidences of our Divine sonship.

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