

An Address to Professors

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the importance of vigilance in spiritual liberty, the role of faith in spiritual keeping, and the dangers of fanaticism, while encouraging listeners to beware of enthusiasm and to try the spirits whether they be of God.

Scripture: Jude 1:24

Topics: "Spiritual Liberty", "Faith And Obedience"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the importance of standing firm in the liberty given by Christ, emphasizing the need for vigilance against spiritual foes and the necessity of obedience to stay within the territory of God's protection. He highlights the role of faith in connecting our weakness to God's omnipotence and the conservation of spiritual power through faith. Steele warns against fanaticism in pursuing holiness, urging believers to avoid extremes, maintain a balance between reason and the Holy Spirit, and not neglect the means of grace in pursuit of higher spiritual experiences.

Transcript

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. --ST. PAUL.

It has been said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." This maxim may not in form be as old as St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, but it certainly is in substance. For he says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." There is no state of Christian experience in which we may live in ease and carelessness regardless of spiritual foes. It is true that we have the promise that Jesus will keep us. But this promise involves the condition that we keep ourselves on the territory prescribed for our residence, that is, the land of obedience. If we willfully and needlessly go upon the enchanted ground of temptation, presuming that the Lord will deliver us, we shall find ourselves sadly mistaken. We are to keep ourselves in the love of God. This is true of that perfect love which casts out all fear that has torment. But how may I do this? In what direction are my activities to be put forth? An erroneous answer to this question has led many to their spiritual downfall. They have made war directly upon their enemies, and while antagonizing them they have turned their eyes from Jesus, the source of all spiritual power. This was the mistake of Peter on the waters of the sea. As soon as he began to look at the waves he forgot the omnipotent power residing in the arm of Jesus, and dropped down from a faith in the supernatural to a natural view of things. "O, these waves will engulf me!" thought he, and sure enough, the surface, which had been as marble, at that moment gave way beneath his feet, and he was up to his loins in the sea. It

was not till in utter self-despair that he turned to the Master again, and felt his delivering hand laid upon him. We are kept by the power of God through faith. Faith is the human part of our keeping. All power is in our living Saviour above. Faith is the act which links our feebleness to his omnipotence. Scientists talk of the conservation and correlation of forces in physical phenomena. They mean by these hard words to teach that there is a fixed amount of physical force in the universe, and that when it disappears in one form it reappears in another; heat changing to electricity, etc.

Whether this theory is true or not, there is conservation and correlation of spiritual power. Faith is the point of contact between that battery and human souls. Whatever be the form of our religious activity, it is faith that is at the bottom, whether it be prayer, praise, watchfulness, resistance to sin, or efforts for the salvation of others. When St. Paul has enumerated the weapons which constitute the Christian's offensive and defensive armor, he adds, "above (or, over) all," as a protection to every other part of the armor itself, "take the shield of faith" -- continually exercise a strong and lively faith. The ancient shield covered the whole soldier. Hence the motto for all Christians, whatever their attainments, is "Looking unto Jesus." If your old enemy is the alcoholic or the narcotic appetite, you are not to be thinking all the time of the decanter and cigar, and bracing yourself against them in your own strength -- the method of occasional human victory, but more frequently of human defeat; but you are to look unto Jesus, to magnify his power, to dwell upon the promises, and to supplicate his great gift of the Comforter, to abide within, and to be the keeping power. The former method of overcoming sin is, in the words of President Finney, "the religion of resolution"; the latter way is "the religion of faith". As long as faith in Christ is kept in exercise, the soul is impregnable; it dwells in "the munition of rocks." Then "none shall be able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." True vigilance, therefore, the price of spiritual liberty, is faith in Christ modified by the apprehension of spiritual peril -- it is looking unto Jesus on the battle-field. The beautiful vignette of a cross grasped by a hand, with the motto underneath, *Teneo et teneor* -- I hold fast and am held fast -- expresses the same thought. There is no other way of maintaining the higher life. It is rest in Jesus. It is the rest of faith. They who thus rest are not exempted from temptation and warfare, but they are lifted by the power of the Holy Spirit into such a nearness to Jesus that they find trust in him a natural and a delightful exercise, and victory over sin easy.

The spiritual life, which was formerly much like a foreigner sojourning in the heart, has at length become a naturalized citizen, and means to stay forever. Formerly faith was a painful effort and spasmodic; now it is spontaneous, delightful, and continuous, so long as the grounds of faith, the Divine promises, are kept in view by the constant study of the Holy Scriptures.

The higher life has deeper roots than the ordinary Christian life. It is rooted in the soil of the divine word, and, like the century enduring oak, appropriates therefrom all its elements of strength. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." He who wishes to dwell on this high spiritual plane above the clouds, which intercept the sunlight to the dwellers below, must consent to be a man of one book, and to endure the reproach of being a man of one idea -- Christ crucified. He will awake in the morning more hungry for his soul-food than for his breakfast. He will prefer the word of God to the morning paper, if he has time but for one; and, if compelled to go forth without his daily spiritual rations, he will be conscious of faintness and weakness. Well persons always feel the loss of their regular meals; the sick never, because they have no appetite intensely consuming their strength.

Let it be understood that the state of full trust in Christ cannot be maintained by hours devoted to current literature and minutes given to hasty glances at the Holy Scriptures. That is the path to spiritual emaciation, trodden by multitudes of weak believers, piteously crying, "O my leanness, my leanness!"

There must be time taken to read, mark, and inwardly digest spiritual truth, that it may pour its vital elements into the life-currents of our souls.

Many Christians are in too great a hurry to live the life of uninterrupted trust. The Comforter came to abide, but the place was too confused and he withdrew. "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." Again, the higher life is not a life of solitude. Society produces great men. They are not reared in the hermitage. Perfect love to God does not turn its back upon men, and bury itself in a desert or cloister. It seeks human abodes

"With prayers, entreaties, tears, to save,

To pluck men from the gaping grave,"

The ordinary social means of grace are necessary to the promotion of the life of the most advanced Christian. Beware of undervaluing the gatherings of the Church, where young and old, the mature Christian and the young convert, testify of Jesus' love. Both the faith and the lives of many of them may be imperfect. For this very reason they need your superior light, while you need their society to keep you in the closest sympathy with your fellow-disciples, and to counteract the tendency to segregate into cliques, to the detriment of Christian unity.

It sometimes happens that the repose of the soul in Christ is disturbed by another cause. Ecstatic joy has been erroneously assumed to be the only proof of the presence of the abiding Comforter; and when that rapturous exultation subsides, the individual is apt to say, "I have lost the fullness of the Spirit." The mistake is, the forgetfulness that there are other fruits of the Spirit, which may attest his presence; and, moreover, that the promise of God is still true, though for a brief period we see no evidence of his presence in our feelings. We are to walk by faith and not by feeling. Activity in behalf of the freedom of others is the way to preserve our own. In our Civil War it was found that the Republic could not maintain its own freedom without emancipating the slaves within its reach. It is just so with the preservation of that freedom indeed which Jesus, the Great Emancipator, proclaims. The person who sits down to enjoy the delicious sweets of his newly-found liberty, satisfied with the ecstasies of devotion, will soon find his joys expiring. Joy is given as a motive to labor. Great exultation today means great toil tomorrow. The gladness of the Pentecost was a preparation for the conversion of the three thousand. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." It is designed as a means to an end. "Restore unto me the joys of thy salvation; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners will be converted unto thee." If we begin to luxuriate in the means as itself an end, forgetful of the divine end, we pervert the blessing bestowed; and the manna, being selfishly hoarded, instead of being distributed to the hungry, "breeds worms."

BEWARE OF FANATICISM.

There are two enemies to the fullness of the Spirit -- baptized worldliness, and fanaticism run mad on the subject of holiness. Let us consider the latter. Fanaticism is not limited to religion. Wild and extravagant views may be indulged on any subject. In our late war we had peace-fanatics, who clamored for peace at any price; and war-fanatics, aching to see every rebel hung and his estate confiscated. In peace, we always have had fanatical agitators on various questions of social interest, such as labor, the sphere of woman, the hostility to immigration. In philosophy, we have fanatics intolerant of opposition, who ridicule as blockheads all who differ from them. Any person whose mind becomes so disproportionately filled with any one idea as to become unsymmetrical and unbalanced, is in danger of those extravagant views and intense feelings which make the fanatic. As religion is an exciting and absorbing theme, so there is

especial danger of running into unwarrantable enthusiasm. Religious fanaticism has deluged the world with bloodshed, instituted inquisitions, and invented thumbscrews. Sanctification fanaticism is a milder species of this genus, yet it is none the less mischievous. It brings into reproach the most glorious doctrine of the Gospel -- the office of the Sanctifier; it brings into ridicule the crowning blessing -- the most precious experience of our holy Christianity. Here is the portrait of a holiness fanatic, or perfectionist.

1. He abjures and pours contempt upon that scintillation of the eternal Logos, human reason. This lighted torch, placed in man's hand for his guidance in certain matters, he extinguishes in order ostensibly to exalt the candle of the Lord, the Holy Ghost, but really to lift up the lamp of his own flickering fancy. Reason is a gift of God, worthy of our respect. We are to accept it as our surest guide in its appropriate sphere. Beyond this sphere we should seek the light of revelation and the guidance of the Spirit. The fanatic depreciates one perfect gift from the Father of light, that he may magnify another. Both of these lights -- reason and the Holy Ghost -- are necessary to our perfect guidance. To reject one is to assume a greater wisdom than God's. Such presumptuous folly he will glaringly expose. He who spurns the Spirit will be left to darkness outside the narrow sphere of reason; and he who scorns reason will be left to follow the hallucinations of his heated imagination, instead of the dictates of common sense.

" 'Tis reason our great Master holds so dear;

'Tis reason's injured rights his wrath resents,

'Tis reason's voice t'obey his glorious crown;

To give lost reason life he poured his own.

Believe, and show the reason of a man;

Believe, and taste the pleasures of a God:

Through reason's wounds alone thy faith can die."

Mr. Wesley was pestered by persons

who imagine that they receive particular directions from God, not only in points of importance, but in things of no moment, in the most trifling circumstances of life. Whereas God has given to us our own reason for a guide, though never excluding the secret assistance of his Spirit.

2. The fanatic degrades the word of God by claiming for himself an inspiration equal to its divine truth, just as the free-thinker or the liberal adroitly belittles the Holy Scriptures by classifying their inspiration with that of Homer and Shakespeare. He proclaims new revelations of Christian truth beyond the utterances of the sacred oracles, forgetting the maxim of orthodoxy, that any thing essentially new in Christianity is essentially false. He takes to his bosom the baneful error that Christianity, as a system of objective truth, was not handed down from above a complete whole, but was left by its Author to be finished by endless supplements, communicated to individual believers in all ages. John Wesley was called to preach against this folly of "enthusiasts, who imagine that God dictates every word they speak, and that it is impossible they should speak any thing amiss, either as to the matter or manner of it." He also styles those enthusiasts "who designedly speak in public without any premeditation."

3. This fanatic also imagines he has a manifestation of God so immediate that he no longer needs the ordained means of grace. He is beyond the sacraments. Prayer is a superfluity. He receives without asking; or, if he asks for any thing, he asks but once. To repeat his request would imply imperfect faith. He omits one petition of the Lord's Prayer, because he has no trespasses to be forgiven; although the recording angel is daily noting a thousand sins of ignorance and infirmity which need the blood of sprinkling. If he is a logical fanatic -- a very rare bird -- he finds all his time so holy that he has no occasion to make the commanded distinction between secular and sacred days. A step further down this descending stairway brings him to the Oneida perfectionists -- to equal love to all men and to all women.

4. The fanatical pretender to Christian perfection is characterized by acts professedly prompted by the Spirit, but which are contrary to both reason and the word of God. One thinks himself called by the Spirit to skip about or dance in a Christian meeting, and to make gestures which enforce no truth, because no words are uttered, though St. Paul insists that all things be done to edification. Another whirls on one toe as swift as a top, till she sinks down exhausted. Another darts like an arrow across the prayer-room with outstretched hand, and lays it on the head of a brother to impart the Holy Ghost. Another is impelled to show his humility by leaving his seat in the church, and rolling in the dust in the broad aisle during the sermon. These are specimens of vagaries contrary to common sense and the Bible, which have brought spiritual Christianity under reproach, and have turned away formal professors from seeking the greatest gift that men can wish or Heaven can send -- "all the fullness of God."

"Such the credulous dotard's dream,

And such his shorter road:

Thus he makes the world blaspheme,

And shames the Church of God;

Staggers thus the most sincere,

Till from the Gospel hope they move;

Holiness as error fear,

And start at perfect love."

5. Another feature of the character of such a one is superiority to instruction and reproof. Are they not taught of the Lord? Shall they, who are receiving the blaze of the Spirit's light, like the full-orbed sun, turn away and follow the pale radiance of some brother's feebler light, glimmering like a faint star in the skies? Not they. In vain does the wise and deeply experienced Wesley expostulate with Bell and Maxfield, and their band of overheated zealots, who, by their dangerous delusions, were sadly damaging the fair fame of Methodism, and making her a laughingstock to her many foes. They would not deign to listen to "poor, blind John." After a long forbearance, sixty of these deluded members of the Foundry Society were cut off at once, and left to follow their disordered imaginations, in order to save the whole body from the fatal infection. Many of them "perished in the gain-saying of Korah."

6. We should deserve the reputation of an unskillful limner should we fail to portray the most prominent and most ugly feature of this character -- his uncharitableness. Professing perfect love to God, he grievously lacks tender affection to his fellow-men. All degrees of spirituality and faith below his own are

deemed by him worthy, not of sympathy but of censure. If the young convert falls into the hands of such a nursing father or nursing mother, he will have a sorry time indeed, and be more than once tempted to say that there is a mistake in the declaration that "the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness." He is scolded for every unsteady step; at every fall he is berated, and not encouraged to try again. He is judged by an absolute standard, and condemned without mercy if he fails in any particular. It is not our purpose to show the philosophy of so strange a combination of contradictions as this feature of the perfectionist-fanatic presents. Similar phenomena occur in the commercial world. Stock-gamblers, while calling millions their own, are penniless bankrupts. Both characters draw upon their imaginations, and account themselves rich. They do not put gold in their coffers. They are satisfied with the glitter of appearances. Simon Magus fixed his eye upon the worldly glory which the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost would confer, and was baptized, and found that he was still the same poor pagan sorcerer. Christians who seek for ecstatic joys, or showy gifts of the Spirit, or any thing else rather than the pure love of God, make the same mistake. Hence the importance of giving earnest heed to Wesley's admonition. "Let no one be satisfied with the direct witness of the Spirit, without the fruits of the Spirit."

APPLICATION: -- In the words of Wesley,

Watch and pray lest you fall into so great an evil. It easily besets those who fear or love God. O, beware you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think! Do not imagine you have attained that grace of God which you have not attained. You may have much joy; you may have a measure of love, and yet not have living faith. Cry unto the Lord that he would not suffer you, blind as you are, to go out of the way; that you may never fancy yourself a believer in Christ till Christ be revealed in you, and till his Spirit witness with your spirit that you are a child of God.

Beware of that daughter of pride, enthusiasm,(fanaticism.) O keep at the uttermost distance from it! Give no place to a heated imagination. Do not hastily ascribe things to God. Do not easily suppose dreams, voices, impressions, visions, or revelations to be from God. They may be from him. They may be from nature. They may be from the devil. Therefore 'believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God.' Try all things by the written word, and let all bow down before it. You are in danger of enthusiasm every hour if you depart ever so little from Scripture; yea, or from the plain, literal meaning of any text, taken in connection with the context. And so you are, if you despise or lightly esteem reason, knowledge, or human learning; every one of which is an excellent gift of God, and may serve the noblest purposes. I advise you never to use the words 'wisdom,' 'reason,' 'knowledge,' by way of reproach. On the contrary, pray that you yourself may abound in them more and more. If you mean worldly wisdom, useless knowledge, false reasoning, say so; and throw away the chaff but not the wheat. One general inlet of enthusiasm is expecting the end without the means; the expecting knowledge, for instance, without searching the Scriptures and consulting the children of God; the expecting spiritual strength without constant prayer and steady watchfulness; the expecting any blessing without hearing the word of God at every opportunity. Some have been ignorant of this device of Satan. They have left off searching the Scriptures. They have said, 'God writes all the Scriptures on my heart.' O take warning, you who are concerned herein! You have listened to the voice of a stranger.

In conclusion, this question arises. In view of the possibility of such an unlovely character coming into existence under the guise of entire sanctification, would it not be wise to abstain from inculcating this high doctrine, lying as it does on the borders of an infatuation so dangerous? Just as wise it would be to suppress Christianity because its abuse has bred fanatics, bigots, and persecutors. Just as wise as it would be to withdraw all gold and silver coin from our currency because of worthless imitations. Yet this is

the way the many are treating entire sanctification. A superior practical wisdom did the great founder of Methodism evince when, notwithstanding the outburst of religious madness and folly which at one time beslimed his London Societies, he insisted on preaching this truth, and enjoined on all his preachers to set forth "perfection to believers constantly, strongly, and explicitly," and exhorted them "to mind this one thing, and continually agonize for it." His brother Charles, constitutionally much conservative, thus expressed his sympathy with this doctrine in this fiery ordeal:-

"Set the false witnesses aside,

But hold the truth forever fast.'

Many years after the great work of sanctification which was wrought so powerfully in the Wesleyan Societies, beginning in Otley about 1760, and spreading rapidly through the connection, and in some places running into extravagances requiring excision, Wesley calmly reviews that great outpouring of the sanctifying Spirit, and adopts the prayer of a devout Scotchman:

O Lord! if it please thee work the same work again without the blemishes. But if this cannot be, though it be with all the blemishes, work the same work."

Let me exhort you, in the words of Wesley, so full of practical wisdom,

TO BEWARE OF SCHISM,

of making a rent in the Church of Christ. Beware of a dividing spirit; shun whatever has the least aspect that way. Suffer no thought of separating from your brethren, whether their opinions agree with yours or not. Do not dream that any man sins in not believing you, in not taking your word; or that this or that opinion is essential to the work. Beware of impatience of contradiction. Do not condemn or think hardly of those who cannot see as you see, or judge it their duty to contradict you whether in a great thing or as small. O beware of touchiness and testiness! Expect contradiction and opposition, together with crosses of various kinds. Consider the words of St. Paul, 'For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ'-for his sake as the fruit of his death and intercession for you -'not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.' Phil. 1:29. It is given! God gives you this opposition or reproach; it is a fresh token of his love.

Be particularly careful in speaking of yourself; you may not, indeed, deny the work of God, but speak of it, when you are called thereto, in the most inoffensive manner possible. Avoid all magnificent, pompous words; indeed, you need give it no general name, neither sanctification, perfection, the second blessing, nor having attained. Rather speak of the particulars which God has wrought for you. You may say, 'At such a time I felt a change which I am not able to express; and since that time I have not felt pride, or anger, or unbelief, nor any thing but a fullness of love to God!' And if any of you should at any time fall from what you now are, if you should again feel pride or unbelief, or any temper from which you are now delivered, do not deny, do not hide, do not disguise it at all, at the peril of your soul. At all events go to one in whom you can confide, and speak just what you feel.

Finally, if you must neglect any means of grace, be sure that it is not the ordinary meetings of the Church, the preached word, the class, the prayer-meeting, and the Sunday-school. Separate meetings for the promotion of holiness, under proper supervision, have been useful, but without such supervision they have been detrimental. By exclusive association with one another there is engendered the feeling that they monopolize all the piety of the Church, and they insensibly begin to withdraw sympathy from those of

weaker faith, who, most of all, need the association and aid of those who are stronger. Nevertheless, where there is great opposition to the preaching of full salvation in the ordinary means of grace it may be expedient, for the sake of peace, to appoint a special meeting.

The purpose of this advice is to avoid every divisive tendency, every entering wedge of schism in the body of Christ. We believe there are few evangelical Churches where a modest, guarded declaration of the wonderful work of God in higher Christian experience, with exhortations drawing, not driving, justified souls toward the same sunny heights, would not be received with gladness. There is an intense hunger for the fullness of the Spirit in all the Churches, as is evinced by the widespread popularity of the hymn,

"Nearer, my God, to thee."

Another reason for our advice is, that no truth in the Gospel scheme was designed to be isolated from its connection with the whole system, and magnified out of due proportion by being exclusively dwelt upon. Such treatment of a most vital truth creates error. Justification by faith, preached alone, without the safeguard set up by St. James, runs into the rankest Antinomianism. But justification by works exclusively preached begets Pharisaism. The sovereignty of God may be magnified into the iron scheme of fatalism; the merit of Christ's suffering and death may be preached to the total neglect of the regenerating and sanctifying offices of the Holy Spirit, and result in Universalism. So there may be so long and so absorbing a contemplation of the doctrine of Christian perfection as to lose sight of the duty of calling sinners to repentance. We may linger with Jesus so long on the mount as to forget that, at its foot, is a world lying in the "wicked one," greatly needing our added faith to expel the devil from his usurped possession. Hence, while the whole Gospel is preached, the wise workman will be careful rightly to divide the word of truth.

Yet there is in every living Church a felt necessity for a meeting, under competent supervision, for the promotion of advanced Christian experience. Wesley, with an admirable sagacity, met this need by his "select societies" and "bands."* Where there is no provision for this want, hungry souls may fall into the hands of ill-balanced and unskillful teachers of these deep mysteries.

The universal disuse of these in America, and their removal from the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1856, is the natural consequence of the general decline of preaching evangelical perfection as a distinct work of the Spirit. We earnestly hope that some substitute for the "select society" will be devised by the next General Conference, and that it will incorporate into its itineracy evangelists, who, like Paul and Wesley, shall go flaming through the Church calling sinners to Christ, and believers to the fullness of the Spirit.

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