

Deliverance Deferred

by Daniel Steele

Christ promises to deliver us from the most distressing and perilous form of spiritual warfare, but not from all temptations, infirmities, or unpleasant experiences in this life.

Scripture: Romans 6:22, Romans 7:15, Romans 8:1, 1 Corinthians 15:26, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Philippians 3:12, James 5:15

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Sanctification"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the various ills that believers may face in this world, despite the promise of deliverance from sin's moral character. He discusses spiritual warfare, the ongoing battle against temptations, and the need to draw strength from Christ. Steele emphasizes that while believers may struggle with internal conflicts, the ideal Christian life is one of freedom from sin and condemnation in Christ. He also addresses the reality of enduring infirmities, the scars of sin that remain, and the limitations of sanctifying grace in the present life.

Transcript

Having shown that Christ proposes to free the believer in this world not only from acts of sin, but from the sinful disposition inherent in fallen humanity, we proceed to enumerate certain ills which are the effects of sin, and wear its appearance, but have not its moral character, and are not in the catalogue of things from which Jesus promises us deliverance in the present life. These are, --

First. Spiritual warfare. This implies temptations. Jesus warred with temptations. "As he is, so are ye in this world." "The disciple is not above his Lord." The Christian life is a long battle, for which we are to draw arms from the arsenal of Christ's promised presence and from the power of his word, and from the endowment of his Holy Spirit. But we do assert that we may be delivered from the most distressing and perilous form of war--a civil war; a confederacy against Christ raging in every believer's bosom. This civil war is disquieting the souls of many who have accepted Christ with a feeble faith. They are living in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. This, as we proved in the last chapter, was never designed to be the ideal Christian life, but is rather the portrayal of the struggles of a convicted sinner seeking justification by the works of the law. The ideal Christian life is found in the sixth chapter -- "But being now made free from sin, and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life;" also in the eighth chapter: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." An objector here queries whether the flesh, one of the triad of foes to the soul trusting in Jesus Christ, is not an inward foe, a traitor within the citadel.

Certainly it is such a foe in the first part of the spiritual campaign. But the promise is, "Ye shall be cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." The commandment is, "Crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." The ideal Christian life in the eighth of Romans is of this kind. It is a death unto sin, so that he who fully apprehends Christ, the life, is as free from the movements of sin within him as the corpses in yonder grave-yard are free from the cares which bustle at midday through the market-place. "If ye do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." To mortify is to slay. The Gospel contemplates the extirpation of all antagonisms to Christ within the believing soul. But does not St. Paul say, "I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection, lest, after having preached the Gospel to others I should become a castaway!" Christ would not bless, but curse us, if he should free us from the innocent appetites which our Creator has implanted in us for the preservation of the individual and of the race. These blind and instinctive impulses must be controlled by reason and conscience. Neither St. Paul nor any other saint was so holy that his hands would instinctively drop his knife and fork the instant he had eaten exactly enough, without the intervention of the will directed by the judgment. Christ does not propose to emancipate any person from the necessity of exercising his judgment in regard to his innocent appetites.

Second. Christ has not promised to deliver us, in the present life, from infirmities. So long as we abide in houses of clay we shall be humbled by their presence. I do not say that we shall be under a sense of condemnation in consequence of them. So long as we are in this tabernacle we shall groan for deliverance from these involuntary failures and weaknesses. They need the blood of sprinkling. Hence the holiest person on earth is not beyond saying daily, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." But you inquire, What is the nature of those infirmities from which we are to expect no release in the present life? They are the scars of sin: the wounds have been healed. As in the kingdom of nature, so in the kingdom of grace, there is no medicine to remove the scars of wounds, none efficacious in the present life. You may mend a pitcher by the application of cement, so that it will hold water; but when you strike it there is no ring. To regain the ring of a perfect vessel, you must hand it over to the potter to be ground to powder and to be reconstructed. So it is with us in the present life. Jesus, if we will submit our shattered vessels to him, can mend us up so that we may be filled with the Spirit, but we shall not on earth regain the true Adamic ring of absolute perfection. We must be handed over to death to be reduced to dust and be built up again by the Divine Potter, when we shall be presented faultless, not in the obscure twilight of some distant region, but faultless in the meridian splendour "of the presence of his glory."

As instances of invincible infirmities we would mention lack of knowledge in respect to subjects upon which we must act; hence errors of judgment, paving the way for errors in practice.

Defective memory is another infirmity which even the fullness of sanctifying grace does not remove. It was not designed to restore the intellectual powers in the present life to undecaying vigor. It quickens the dead spiritual nature, and reinforces conscience. A fallible judgment will be ours even when love to Christ has been perfected.

Hours of apathy and spiritual dullness by reason of our bodily organism or the state of the nerves. We cannot always prevent these states. Christ does not promise to work a miracle to keep us awake and aflame with zeal, in an atmosphere deprived of its oxygen by the carelessness of the sexton.

Third. We should be happy to inform millions of groaning saints that there is attainable in the present life a state of love to Christ so strong as to exclude every wandering thought in prayer. John Wesley, in his younger days, declared that such a state could be reached by saints in the flesh. He lived to see his error, and to confess it in his sermon on Wandering Thoughts. This was written to correct a practical error into

which some were running, of seeking the sanctification of the mind as distinct from the heart. These persons believed, that by the power of the Holy Spirit the succession of the thoughts could be so controlled as to shut out every improper or wandering thought, and that the mind could be stayed upon God in such a way that no distracting thought could intrude. Wesleyan saw that this was putting the work of entire sanctification so high as to render it unattainable, and that the advocacy of this extreme view was doing great damage to the precious doctrine of perfect love, which is far different from perfect thinking.

To all who are in distress on this account we commend the entire sermon. The philosophy of this whole subject lies in a few words. The work of the Divine Spirit is chiefly, if not wholly, comprised in a rectification of the will. Says Mr. Fletcher, "Christian perfection extends chiefly to the will, which is the capital moral power of the soul; leaving the understanding ignorant of ten thousand things. Adamic perfection extended to the whole man." The succession of ideas is independent of the will, and hence it is not the province of grace to prevent wandering thoughts. It may partially cure the evil by drawing the soul toward Christ as toward a great magnet, so that the tendency of even our random thoughts may be toward him.

Fourth. I nowhere find an assurance that the soul believing in Christ will be delivered from all unpleasant and improper dreams. We desire this state of religious experience, and we express our aspiration in song:

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"Yet in my dreams I'd be

Nearer, my God, to thee."

We must here disagree with President Edwards, who tells Christians to scrutinize their dreams in order to ascertain their real character and standing before God. So far as my observation goes, there is no law in our dreams but the law of contraries. The most peaceable, quarrel; the most gentle and tender, commit murder; the most contented with life, plot suicide; the temperate, become drunken; and the pure, become impure. These conceptions, resulting from the day's employment, the state of the digestion, the quantity of bedding, and a thousand other causes, give no more indication of the moral and spiritual condition than they do of the person's ancestral pedigree.

Fifth. Nor do we look for salvation from sudden trepidation when any thing startling occurs, like the crash of a thunderbolt or the presentation of a telegraphic dispatch from the absent family. All this is instinctive. As there is no sin in instinctive actions, so there is in them no ground of condemnation. An eminent Christian woman received a dispatch from her husband a thousand miles away, and then apologized to me, and asked forgiveness of God, for the dishonor she had done to the cause of Christ by the emotion which her trembling hand indicated when the dispatch was suddenly thrust before her eye. The apology and prayer were both needless, for there was no sin in this sudden agitation. The Saviour, for wise reasons, defers our deliverance from these till our feet touch the other shore; and yet, we are commanded with Abraham "to walk before God and be perfect."

Sixth. Nor does Jesus, the great Emancipator, deliver us from the unpleasant feeling of our insufficiency in our labors in his vineyard. We do not accomplish a thousandth part of what we desire to do. Fields lie waste all around us. The good seed we scatter is largely wasted; it brings little fruit to perfection. When we contemplate these facts, the thought suggests itself that if we were just right, perfectly guided by the Spirit of truth, we should engage in no abortive labors; every stroke would tell for the kingdom of Christ; every word of exhortation or of instruction would accomplish its exact purpose, like the word of the Lord "which returneth not unto him void." We have recently heard persons testify to such a fullness and guidance of

the Spirit that every effort to do good to others is successful, the Spirit directing, infallibly, to the susceptible persons, and suggesting the exact words needed for their deliverance. But there must be some mistake in this matter. We find no instance of this in the Holy Scriptures. The holiest men are afflicted with a sense of failure in their labors. Sinners were hardened under the preaching of St. Paul. His failure to save his brethren of the Hebrew nation produced the profoundest sorrow, so that he could wish himself "accursed from Christ;" that is, that he could make an atonement in addition to Christ's, to secure their salvation. Jesus himself, when he gazed from Olivet upon the rebellious city soon to be desolated by the judgments of God, and cried "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" keenly felt the failure of his ministry. If we correctly interpret the language of God the Father, we must understand that even his absolute perfections do not exclude a painful sense of failure in his unsuccessful attempts to save free agents who pervert their godlike attribute of freedom by rejecting his mercy: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." He "willeth not the death of the wicked, but rather that they would turn and live: Turn ye, turn ye." Therefore we do not teach the possibility of freedom from this sense of inefficiency in the present life. It is an element of our probation, one of the highest tests of faith, to toil for God when we see no fruit, to sow for others to reap, or for the birds to snatch away, or the thorns to choke. Was not this the bitter ingredient of that cup which made the Son of God a man of sorrows?

Seventh. Christ will not free us from death, nor from ills and diseases, the sappers and miners of the king of terrors. All these shall be put beneath the Conqueror's feet, but not now. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Nevertheless, when the gift of faith is bestowed as a charism, not a grace, the sick even in our day may be healed, and death itself may be postponed, in answer to prayer, as in the case of Hezekiah. 1 Cor. 12:9; James 5:15.

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