

Did St. Paul Profess Holiness or Sin?

by Daniel Steele

St. Paul's profession of holiness is a model for believers to hope for deliverance from indwelling sin in this life.

Scripture: Matthew 5:48, John 14:9, Acts 20:19, Galatians 2:20, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Sanctification"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the importance of understanding St. Paul's teachings on holiness and sanctification, emphasizing the need to scrutinize Paul's Epistles to grasp the concept of perfected holiness. Steele highlights the significance of examining Paul's prayers and requests for understanding his spiritual journey towards sanctification. The sermon delves into the comparison between Christ's and Paul's professions of holiness, showcasing the indirect declarations of sinlessness and the presence of Christian perfection in their lives.

Transcript

The importance of a correct answer to this question cannot be overestimated. St. Paul was chosen by our Lord Jesus, the sole author of the New Testament, to unfold in doctrinal form, after the gift of the Paraclete, those seed truths which Christ sowed in person.

Those facts in the future work of the Holy Comforter and Sanctifier which could not have been intelligibly described before the effusion of the Spirit, were reserved to be taught by our ascended and glorified Teacher, chiefly through the Apostle to the Gentiles. If he was not an example and witness of perfect deliverance from indwelling sin, there is little encouragement for an ordinary believer to hope for such a deliverance in this life. While it is true that Jesus Christ in the Gospels teaches perfect holiness as a duty, the argument to prove that it was held up as an unattainable ideal would be immensely strengthened if his own apostles failed to actualize that ideal through the incoming and abiding of the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier.

To prove that St. Paul was a possessor and professor of perfected holiness, we must scrutinize every word of his Epistles, the great seed-bed of Christian theology. Then we must candidly weigh every utterance in seeming contradiction to this high profession. We must study his prayers for others, and ascertain whether entire sanctification by the Spirit is not the burden of those petitions. We must then examine his requests for the prayers of the different churches in his own behalf, to ascertain whether he ever implies his own spiritual imperfection, or the existence of inbred sin in his own heart.

The scope of the question in this series of Bible Readings is so broad that it will require us to sweep over nearly one-half of the New Testament.

Another preliminary to our Biblical discussion of this question we note in the fact, that Paul's professions of holiness are, in their form, modeled after those of his Lord and Master. There are two ways of professing holiness -- the wise and the proper way, and the ostentatious and distasteful way. Christ did not say in a bold and offensive style, "I am perfectly holy." He might with truth have used these words; but he would have been needlessly beclouding his own humility, and laying stumbling-blocks in the way of his hearers. At this point some modern advocates of Christian perfection are at fault. In set phrase they profess more holiness in half an hour than Jesus Christ did in all his life. His profession was by a great variety of phrases, and almost always by implication: "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" "I always do those things that are pleasing to my Father." "He that seeketh the glory of him that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. For the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. I and my Father are one." These are samples of Christ's implied declaration of his sinlessness. Many expressions of Paul imply the complete extinction of sin as a principle in him. One of his modes of confessing indirectly perfect salvation through Christ, was to profess the possession of some one grace of Christian perfection. For these graces grow in clusters on one stem. The declared presence of one is proof of the presence of all. Olshausen, in his note on Matt. 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect," etc., says, "For the observance of one of these commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, nothing short of perfection is sufficient. Neither pure love nor mercy can be conceived alone in the human soul without the other qualities involved in perfection." What are the graces which always imply pure love? Let John Fletcher answer:

Christian perfection is a spiritual constellation made up of these gracious stars -- perfect repentance, perfect faith, perfect humility, perfect meekness, perfect self-denial, perfect resignation, perfect hope, perfect charity for our visible enemies, as well as for our earthly relations, and, above all, perfect love for our invisible God through the explicit knowledge of our Mediator, Jesus Christ; and as this last star, love, is always accompanied by all the others, as Jupiter is by his satellites, we frequently use, as St. John, the phrase perfect love instead of the word perfection; understanding by it the pure love of God shed abroad in the hearts of established believers by the Holy Ghost.

Another observation is that St. Paul, in numerous instances in detailing his own experience, modestly uses the plural "we," instead of the singular "I." He frequently begins with the plural, but in the intensity of his feeling changes to the singular; for the emotions when stirred to their depths always say "I," as in all lyric poetry. Father E. T. Taylor used to say that he could tell a true Methodist as soon as he opened his mouth; for he always says, "I feel." Says Alford, "The attributes which especially characterize the originality of Paul as an author are power, fullness, and warmth." These beget informality of expression, rhetorical and grammatical inaccuracy, and an appearance of egotism. Every one to whom Jesus Christ fulfils his promise, "I will manifest myself unto him," has an individuality of experience which, springing from a peculiar sense of proprietorship in him, justifies the use of the first person singular. He is mine. Mary Magdalene had so appropriated Christ that she thought she owned him. "They have taken away my Lord." "Tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." Appropriating faith underscores the "me" and "my" in the Bible. Hence it must always appear to unbelieving reason both mystic and egotistic. But Paul always put Christ first, not self, except when self is nailed to the cross. Then "I" stands first: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live." -- (Gal. 2:20, R. V. margin.)

Tholuck calls attention to the frequency and force of Paul's self-witness, as in Acts 20:19, 20, "Serving the Lord with all (possible -- Meyer) humility and with many tears and temptations, which befell me by the lying

in wait of the Jews: and I kept back nothing that was profitable for you." Here are several grapes which are found only in the cluster of Christian perfection, notably, "all possible humility," and perfect freedom from the fear of man, which fear prompts the prophecy of smooth things, rather than unpalatable and unpopular, yet profitable truths.

Paul's fearlessness is a token of perfect love, that love which casts out all fear that hath torment (1 John 4:18). These two graces will be more extendedly discussed farther on in this series of Pauline Readings.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/daniel-steele/did-st-paul-profess-holiness-or-sin/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net