

Entire Sanctification a Limit to Growth

by Daniel Steele

Daniel Steele argues that entire sanctification does not limit spiritual growth but rather promotes ongoing holiness and empowerment through the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Romans 6:6, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 4:22, Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Sanctification", "Holiness Growth"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the misconception of entire sanctification as a boundary line for growth in holiness, emphasizing that holiness is more than just the absence of sin but a self-devotement leading to continuous progress and positive growth. He refutes the idea that Wesleyan doctrine hinders growth after sanctification, highlighting the Wesleyan belief in immediate repentance and a clear conversion as the foundation for an active and growing Christian life. Steele challenges the notion that sanctification leads to a stagnant Christian life, advocating for a continuous pursuit of holiness and service to others as a sign of spiritual growth.

Transcript

THE conception of entire sanctification as a boundary line beyond which growth in holiness is impossible has been very widely spread, especially in Calvinistic circles. We are sorry that our author, whose education was under Arminianism of the best type, should indorse this view in these words : "Where one is entirely freed from depravity or sinfulness or evil there can be no more growth in holiness or goodness." This would be true were holiness a mere negation of sin, but it is more than this, infinitely more. In its positive quality it is self-devotement, an inexhaustible spring of thought, energy, and progress. It is true that Wesley locates Christian perfection at the point of time when proneness to sin is eradicated. It is also true that his assertion that growth in holiness is more rapid after that point is not contradictory, but eminently philosophical when we consider the positive side of this blessed experience. This growth in self-devotement is also attended by a decrease, not of depravity, but of susceptibility to sin in the form of temptation; for as long as we are in probation we are all within gunshot of the devil. But to a soul rapidly moving Godward it is more and more "a spent ball -- no harm is done," as Washington at Yorktown said to General Knox when he grasped his arm to draw him out of the range of a musket ball which rolled to his feet.

There is implied throughout this book the erroneous idea that the Wesleyan doctrine is not promotive of growth in holiness after entire sanctification instantaneously wrought by the Holy Spirit. The author says

that many have been impressed with "this weakness of the second blessing theory;" that it "seems to promote the feeling that about everything of consequence has been obtained, and that self-gratulation is the main thing in order for the rest of one's days." Some of our Episcopal friends allege the same objection against an instantaneous new birth -- that it is rested in to the detriment of future growth, and that growth into regeneration is more favorable to growth afterward. We Methodists admit that there may be exceptional instances of resting idly for "forty years" in a sudden translation out of darkness into God's marvelous light, as there are blossoms suddenly bursting into beauty and fragrance which never yield any fruit. But true followers of Wesley urge men to immediate repentance, and assure the penitent believer that he may here and now, while at the altar, consciously pass from death into life and receive the Spirit of adoption, crying, "Abba, Father." They do not believe that in so doing they are laying the foundation of an unprogressive Christian life, but rather that a clear conversion, with a date to it, is the birthday of an active, testifying, growing Christian. The same is true of the instantaneous completion of the spiritual life by the extinction of the hereditary propensity to sin. It is the inspiration of a robust and ever-expanding life, because the source of feebleness and decay has been removed. This is sound philosophy. Perfect love to God is perfect love to men, awakening ceaseless activity for their salvation. Healthful activity promotes growth in strength.

This book says that there is "a weakness in the second blessing theory" because "it makes no suitable provision for perpetual advance and offers no goal of attainment." Let us see whether the same objection does not lie against the theory of a definite and "full empowerment for service." It is thus portrayed:

Thus resting in this comfortable assurance, all his anxieties, which were inseparable from a partial consecration and an imperfect faith, being at an end, he has perfect peace, abiding joy, and meetness for the Master's use. This will be a momentous era in his life, an epoch from which he will very naturally date as being almost a fresh conversion.

But will not this "fresh conversion" also promote "the feeling" ascribed to the second blessing, "that about everything of consequence has been obtained, and that self-gratulation is the main thing in order for the rest of one's days?" We fail to see the superiority of this theory, in affording motives to growth, to the Wesleyan doctrine which, after entire sanctification, urges to "perfecting holiness" objectively, while the new theory urges to a progressive subjective sanctification without the prospect of ever reaching it in its entirety till the trumpet of the resurrection sounds.

Again, it is said that "there is not a particle of proof, either in Scripture or reason, that the second blessing is a finality entirely removing all depravity left after regeneration." Depravity is not a scriptural term, but there are terms which must include what it signifies in its accepted meaning. One of these is "the old man," which "the saints and the faithful in Christ Jesus," that is, the regenerated, are supposed to have "put off" (aorist) once for all, and yet they are afterward commanded "to put away lying" and stealing and impure speaking, and all bitterness and malice. The fountain from which these bad things flow must be a kind of "depravity" of which they were to be divested here in this life in order that they may be "kind to one another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. iv, 22-32). The new birth had bound "the old man" and sentenced him to death by crucifixion (Rom. vi, 6) and possibly had nailed him to the cross, but had not yet thrust a spear into his heart. The same doctrine is taught in Col. iii, where the persons addressed are assumed to "be risen with Christ" and to be regenerate, and yet various propensities to sin linger in them which they were to "mortify" (aorist), to kill, not to be perpetually choking down and repressing. This looks very much like a second experience more effectual than the first. A study of the Greek tenses in this chapter is a confirmation of the doctrine of a final crisis of purification after

entering into newness of life, especially verses 5, 8, and 12.

If there is in Paul's epistles any synonym for depravity it is "the flesh," when used in a bad sense. That this exists in the regenerate, and is to be put entirely away in the present life by an instantaneous and entire purification, is taught in 2 Cor. vii, 1, taken with the preceding verse. "Having therefore these promises," or things promised, having become "sons and daughters," "let us cleanse [aorist] ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." This is a thorough purgation of the whole nature, removing the seed of sin which finds expression in sensual forms, and which may exist independent of the body in the spirit only, as pride, malice, and unbelief. The adhortative form, "let us cleanse," does not imply the impurity of the writer, but a rhetorical softening of the command.

Just what depravity there would be left to be put away at the glorification of soul and body united, after "all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" is cleansed, it is difficult for me to see.

In Gal. v, 17, we have a struggle going on in the regenerate before one of the contestants is slain, "the flesh lusting against the Spirit." In verse 24 the crucifixion of the flesh is the end of this intestine war. It is evident that Paul here presents the ideal of a true Christian in the present world after he has through faith in Christ entirely crucified the flesh. Many exegetes, doubtless influenced by the general prevalence of an imperfect type of Christianity, are inclined to say that Paul describes a character never completely realized in this life, when he writes, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts." Rather, the apostle portrays all Christians on earth at their climax, being viewed in their concrete actuality, having appropriated their full heritage in Jesus Christ.

In Heb. xii, i, this exhortation is given to believers : "Let us lay aside ... the sin which doth so easily beset us." Delitzsch calls this "an inward inclination. Our first duty is to cast off sin as an indwelling evil, a weight, a burden, a cumbersome garment or tormenting chain." He is not speaking of a guilty past which has been forgiven, but an "evil inclination" existing after the new birth which we are to "lay aside" (aorist) by a definite and decisive act once for all. This looks very much like "a finality entirely removing all depravity after regeneration."

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