

Evidence of Entire Sanctification

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the importance of human freedom and responsibility in moral actions, and the role of consciousness as a witness to Christian purity.

Scripture: Isaiah 43:7, Romans 14:12, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Galatians 5:13, 1 Peter 2:16

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Free Will"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the cardinal truth of Methodism, emphasizing the absolute freedom of man in his moral acts, attributing moral actions solely to man's own choices and character. He refutes theories that make God the author of sin or lead to fatalism, such as Calvinism and materialism, by highlighting the importance of consciousness in acknowledging freedom and responsibility. Steele defends Methodism against errors like materialistic pantheism and theological necessitarianism, asserting the significance of consciousness in recognizing freedom, moral sense, and the witness of the Holy Spirit to sanctification.

Transcript

ONE of the cardinal truths of Methodism is the absolute freedom of man in all his moral acts. This word "absolute" is used to cut off all causation anterior to volition, which would make it an effect and not a cause. We teach that man is the sole and original cause of his moral actions; that he is a cause uncaused and a creator of his own moral character and destiny. All other theories either make God the author of sin or they land us in fatalism. Calvinism without its modern alleviations insists that God foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. Sin comes to pass, therefore it is decreed by God. What is the Arminian answer? Consciousness. I am conscious when I tell the truth that I might have told a lie, to which I was tempted, but I resisted the temptation and uttered the truth. Says sturdy Dr. Samuel Johnson "I know I am free, and that is the end of it." There is no argument against human consciousness. Consciousness killed Calvinism. But the denial of freedom and responsibility is not dead, but is alive and active for evil under other forms. One of these is materialism, which makes everything physical, even thought, feeling, and volition. These are the results of changes in matter governed by the invariable laws of mechanical necessity. This system -- sometimes called positivism, which reduces all there is of a man to gas -- excludes ethics. There can be no distinction of right and wrong where there is no freedom. What answer has Methodism to materialism? She goes down into the soul and listens to the voice of truth within. That voice cries out : "I am not a part of the material universe, for I am free to obey or disobey the dictates of conscience," which is not an attribute of matter, but of mind. Consciousness is a voracious and stubborn witness against all the fallacies of materialists and positivism, the supreme delusion of the nineteenth

century, professing to weigh and measure everything, while entirely omitting the phenomena of revelation and man's moral and religious nature.

There is still another error widely prevalent arising from the attempt to reduce all things and all beings to one substance. If this is matter we have materialistic pantheism, which we have just described. If the sum total of being is spirit, we have blind, nondescript force, impersonal and unethical, a fragment of which is man, who is incapable of morality, because destitute of freedom. Some minds are fascinated with pantheism, because it relieves the difficulty of the distinct coexistence of the finite and the infinite. When Spinoza says that it is "mathematically demonstrated," what answer have we but the primary intuitions of consciousness, personality, freedom, and moral sense? Thus is dispelled what has been styled "the grandest delusion of the human mind." All these forms of error are confuted by an appeal to consciousness cognizing a mental state. I know that I am a free and responsible personality. This is the Gibraltar of true Christian philosophy, especially of Methodism in upholding the standard of truth lifted up by James Arminius. We are called upon by a few Methodist writers to abandon our Gibraltar and surrender to all these enemies of the Gospel. This was the attitude of a strong Methodist thinker -- with Calvinistic leanings -- of a past generation when magnifying the difficulties of the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification. He alleged that this radical purification could not be known, because, first, it is not the scriptural office of the Holy Spirit to witness to it; and secondly, consciousness cognizes only acts, and not quiescent states. This second proposition Methodism must resist with all her might or surrender to every form of theological and philosophical necessitarianism. There is no alternative. This is so obvious that I was surprised to see the second proposition assumed as an undisputed axiom of philosophy by Dr. James Mudge in his book on Progress in Holiness, that "consciousness is a valid witness only to the active operations of the mind, not to its quiescent states."

In view of the deadly errors against which this very form of consciousness is our only safeguard, our very sheet anchor, this declaration by an evangelical writer must be regarded as a stupendous blunder. For freedom is a "quiescent state," as is also the imperative of moral obligation. The two states are binary stars in the firmament of every responsible human soul. Every soul has an eye with which to see these internal luminaries. Sir W. Hamilton, in his Notes on Reid, affirms that we are directly conscious of both free will and of obligation to do right. He admits that a free act is incomprehensible by us because it is a first cause, yet it is attested solely by consciousness, a witness which cannot be impeached. But in his Lectures on Metaphysics he had limited consciousness to mental acts only. John Stuart Mill eagerly pounces on this unfortunate limitation and turns it against Hamilton's only proof of freedom. He says: "What I am able to do is not a subject of consciousness. We never know that we are able to do a thing except from having done it;" that is, we are never conscious of what we can do, which is only "a quiescent state," a potency, and not an act. Thus the fatalist Mill adroitly turns the admission of Hamilton, that we are not conscious of "quiescent states," against his only proof of freedom. His only possible answer to Mill is to recall his blunder in excluding states from the objects of consciousness. Dr. Mudge and every other Methodist will find themselves in the same trap in which Mill caught Hamilton if, in arguing with a fatalist, they start with the admission that "consciousness is a valid witness only to the active operations of the mind, not to its quiescent states." Let me illustrate. Booth murdered President Lincoln. He was conscious only of the act, not of ability to refrain from the act. No man on earth can prove that he had such ability, if the assassin himself was not conscious of it. We must all become fatalists, or the highest style of Calvinian necessitarians, if we cannot say with Mansel, "I am fully conscious that I can at this moment act in either of two ways." If a man may be conscious of a state of "alternativity" (Whedon), he maybe conscious of a state of carnality, as was Paul before his conversion -- "I am carnal," and of inward and outward holiness,

as was Paul, the apostle, when he testified: "Alive no longer am I, but alive indeed is Christ in me." Here is a consciousness of a blissful quiescent state, which we may all enter into through the same strait gate, crucifixion with Christ.

St. Paul calls God and men to witness "how holily and justly and unblamably he had behaved among them that believe." His appeal to the Omniscient must have proceeded from a consciousness of perfect purity of heart. This gracious state is possible to everyone who will claim his full heritage in Christ, and a knowledge of it is possible also, for the Spirit shines on his own work, revealing it to our quickened spiritual perception.

Since writing the above I have read with great pleasure Dr. Miley's utterances on assurance, found in his great work on systematic theology, sent forth to the world after he was eighty years of age, and adopted by our bishops as the most suitable statement of Methodist doctrine. On the knowledge of perfected holiness his trumpet gives no uncertain sound:

We do not question the fact of an assurance of entire sanctification. There may be a direct witness of the Holy Spirit to such a gracious attainment; but without such a witness the assurance is still possible. The inner work of salvation is such that it clearly reveals itself in the consciousness of its subjects. Regeneration so reveals itself. The full salvation may reveal its fullness in the consciousness of the happy recipient.

Here is a man. although a score of years past his prime, so "fully abreast of current discussions" in philosophy as to escape an error into which some younger men have inadvertently fallen.

Theories in accordance with reason are valuable, but when in addition they are sustained by facts we are compelled to admit their truth. Various interior experiences are facts, the testimony to which is to be received according to the laws of evidence. Many thousands have testified to the consciousness of heart purity following a sense of moral defilement and of faith in Christ for complete cleansing. If it is objected that many of these are incapable of expressing their mental states in exact philosophical language, we will rule all these out and retain only the few who are experts in the analysis of mental phenomena and well skilled in the correct use of psychological terms. Such a man all who are acquainted with him or with his books will admit Bishop Randolph S. Foster to be. In detailing his deeply interesting advanced Christian experience, he says:

Here again the Spirit seemed to lead me into the inmost sanctuary of my soul -- into those chambers where I had before discovered such defilement, and showed me that all was cleansed, that the corruptions which had given me such distress were dead -- taken away -- that not one of them remained. I felt the truth of the witness; it was so; I was conscious of it, as conscious as I had ever been of my conversion. A change had been wrought in my heart --a radical, conscious change. I was not only peculiarly exercised, but I was changed. I was a new creature; my heart had entered into new and higher existence. This was as evident as transition from darkness to light.

This testimony confirms Wesley's statement, "The Spirit shines on his own work;" and in his light, as intense and penetrating into spirit as the marvelous X rays are into matter, no trace of impurity is seen.

2. THE SPIRIT GIVES NO TESTIMONY TO PERFECTED HOLINESS.

The objection is made to the Wesleyan doctrine of the witness of the Holy Spirit to the fact of entire sanctification, that there is no Scripture which specifically mentions such a witness. To this we reply that this proves too much. There is in the Bible no specific witness of the Spirit to justification by faith or the pardon of sins. We are surprised at this, because pardon is an act taking place in the mind of God. It can be known only by the direct testimony of the Spirit, who searches the deep things of God. Myriads have received this testimony direct from the throne of God by the voice of the Spirit. I have yet to hear the first Methodist discredit it, because he could quote no text of Scripture expressly certifying that this is an office of the Spirit. But it may be said that the witness of the Spirit to adoption into the family of God so strongly implies pardon that we are justified in asserting that it includes pardon. May we not also, with equally good reason, insist that the permanent, conscious in-coming of the Spirit implies a conscious, thorough house cleaning? Jesus said of the promised Paraclete: "Ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." Shall we not know his works also? Again, we have never seen a valid objection to Wesley's use of I Cor. ii, 12, as including the witness to heart purity wrought by the Spirit: "Now we have received . . . the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." This use of the plural "things" implies that the Spirit attests facts other than adoption.

It is asserted in this book that the extension of the revealing power of the Holy Spirit or his testimony beyond the one fact of adoption opens the door to all kinds of fanaticism. But the universal Church -- papal, Greek, and Protestant, at least all which ordain their ministry by bishops -- asks this question: "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you the office of the ministry in the Church of Christ?" What is this but the Spirit's witness to a fact, the fact of a call? Does this promote fanaticism? If so, the Church from the apostolic age has been breeding fanatics. The celebrated English preacher, R. L. Horton, in his Yale lectures, tells the theological students in true Quaker style that, unless they by the Holy Spirit get their message from the mouth of God every time they preach, they have no business in the pulpit. Does that promote fanaticism? This advice, if followed, would make mighty men in the pulpit. If our Church could get that kind of preaching she could afford to risk an occasional fanatic.

My conclusion is that all truth necessary to salvation is found in the Bible, but that all facts of a personal nature, such as conviction of sin, pardon, entire sanctification, call to the ministry, and the message demanded by the occasion and the duty of the hour, where duties apparently conflict, facts which could not have been revealed in the Bible, are revealed by the Holy Spirit in answer to the prayer of faith. If in saying this I am called a fanatic I accept the epithet, thankful that I am counted worthy to suffer this reproach.

The Church owes much to men who while living bore that name. There is a call for more of the same sort. Paul asserts that "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." It is alleged that our doctrine, that facts necessary to our own highest spiritual development and usefulness may be indicated to us by the guiding Spirit, opens a wide door for fanaticism. It would were there no safeguards, such as a diligent study of the Bible, and a conformity of our conduct to its principles, a use of our God-given reason, a regard for providential indications, and believing prayer. He who thus does and then trusts God for the guidance of his Spirit has no other way to evince that he is a son of God. If it is said that we may mistake something else for the impression of the Spirit we reply, so may the seeker of salvation mistake some movement of his own feelings for the Spirit of adoption. It would be very foolish for us to refrain from preaching that doctrine which lies at the very foundation of the spirituality of Methodism, lest we give occasion for some mistaken confession of saving faith in Christ.

The longer, I live the more am I convinced that the children of God should seek this guidance more than they do in the perplexities of life. It is quite another thing to make positive assertion that any particular act is infallibly prompted by the Holy Spirit. Here is where fanaticism crops out. Yet it is the privilege of every Christian to commit his ways to the Lord and enjoy the comforting belief that God is leading him by the hand.

However, there is another sufficient witness to Christian purity, the testimony of consciousness.

Is there any advantage in knowing that depravity, the work of the devil in us, is destroyed? Would it not afford a strong safeguard against future defilement in the moment of temptation? We aver that a consciousness of inward purity is strongly protective of purity. Let me give a few homely illustrations. During the administration of Andrew Johnson, whose reconstruction policy was to withhold the ballot from the millions of freedmen, I heard Frederick Douglass, arguing that the elective franchise would elevate the black man, say: "If you wish to keep a man out of the mud, black his boots." If a mother wishes a daughter not to play hide-and-seek among coal carts and tar buckets, she dresses her in garments as white as snow. If the housewife wishes to keep her maid from using a certain china vessel from being used as a slop bowl, she calls her attention to its beauty, costliness, and cleanliness. It is certain that God, the blood of whose Son has made us pure, will apply every motive to keep us pure. The knowledge of inner whiteness is such a motive. Strong indeed is the presumption that this safeguard will not be withheld. It is not -- my soul attests. Glory to the ever blessed Spirit! On the other hand, our missionaries in the slums testify that the strongest grip of the devil against which they are striving in rescue work is the sense of inner vileness in the wretched victims of vice.

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