

Holiness and Humanity

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the importance of watchfulness and self-denial in living a holy life, and the need for personal practice and virtuous habits to avoid sin.

Scripture: Matthew 7:21, Romans 5:5, 1 Corinthians 9:27, 1 Corinthians 10:12, 1 John 3:9

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Holy Living"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the possibility of living without sin, addressing the concerns raised by high Calvinists against Arminius' teachings. He emphasizes the importance of vigilance and self-denial even for those who have experienced entire sanctification, highlighting the need to watch against temptations and sinful tendencies. Steele explains the difference between sins arising from natural appetencies and those rooted in Adamic depravity, stressing the necessity of regulating emotions and strengthening the will through divine love and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

James Arminius nearly three hundred years ago announced that "it is possible for a regenerate man to live without sin." This startled the high Calvinists, who charged him with a grave heresy. It was alleged that the ability not to sin, even though it be of grace through a persevering trust in Christ, placed the man beyond the power of temptation, destroyed the motive to watchfulness, and tended to loose living. It is the purpose of this chapter to prove that there are incentives to vigilance in those regenerate souls in whom the love of God is perfected and depravity is eliminated. The grace of entire sanctification does not change men into angels. They are still human, having appetites, passions, and affections. These are innocent so long as they are normal. They are normal only when gratified within the limits of the Creator's will made known by natural and revealed religion, conscience, and the holy Scriptures. Says Bishop Butler: "When we say men are misled by external circumstances of temptation, it cannot but be understood that there is somewhat within themselves to render those circumstances temptations, or to render them susceptible of impressions from them. Therefore temptations from within and from without coincide and mutually imply each other." The "somewhat within" is not necessarily depravity. Where immediate ratification of a normal appetite does not consist with innocence there is danger of sinning. Hence watchfulness and self-denial are necessary to holy souls so long as they are in a state of probation. If it were not so the charge of immoral tendency would be valid against the tenet of Arminius, and both wisdom and benevolence would conspire to warn the regenerate against holiness.

Here it may be well to say that some professors of this grace have fallen into the mistake of supposing that all tendencies to sin are eradicated from their hearts, and they have no longer need of circumspection amid the moral perils encircling them. The possession of appetencies tending to a vicious indulgence, but easily held in check by the sanctified will, is of itself a tendency to evil. A controlled tendency to sin is not sin. A thought of sin is not a sinful thought till it is welcomed and detained with pleasure. Concupiscence is not sin, but it carries in its bosom the fuel of sin. It is the business of the Christian to be ever on the watch, lest the spark fall into the powder magazine. Nobody in this world is out of bow-shot of the devil. No class of believers, however advanced in spirituality, can safely divest themselves of "the whole armor of God," and hang it up in some museum of antiquities as an outgrown relic of an inferior religious experience. What I say unto you. I say unto all, watch." Jesus himself not only prayed but watched. "Tarry ye here and watch with me." -- Matt. 26:38. He was perfectly human as well as perfectly divine, and had need to be on his guard against the weakness of shrinking from the awful agonies in the cup which he must drink in redeeming the sinful race. Such shrinking from pain was innocent because it was instinctive. But since the bloody cross was the appointed instrument of redemption, to avoid it and yield to a human impulse, innocent in itself, would have been to fail to do his Father's will. In the wilderness he hungered. It would have been right for him to gratify his craving for food, but not right, at the suggestion of the tempter, to use his omnipotence to relieve himself from personal discomfort. Hence, the sinless Christ had need of self-denial and watchfulness against sensibilities in themselves holy. He pleased not himself. In this respect the servant is not above his Lord. Yet, while thus walking in his footsteps on the earth, he may be in righteous character as his risen Lord is in heaven.

Thus we have given a description of those whom Dr. Pope styles the "perfectly regenerate," in whom the entire removal of iniquity in the present life" has been effected (vol. 2. 85). This has not been accomplished in all who have been born of God, only in those in whom the new life has reached this consummation. Both alike "do not commit sin," and both have need to deny the unlawful gratification of innocent natural impulses. (1 John 3:9.) But in one class there is a struggle to overcome an inborn repugnance to obedience still existing, but not dominant, thank God, while in the other the native resistance is absent. The expulsive power of the new affection of love divine has taken such possession of the believer that it neutralizes the sinward inclination, as the inflated balloon, overcoming gravitation, mounts upward toward the zenith. The other class is like the balloon which has cleared the earth, but does not majestically rise. The earth has still a strong grasp upon it and pulls it down. It seems to have more affinities for the world beneath than for the sky above. What is the secret of this strange downward tendency which hinders the ascent? The sand-bags have not been emptied. The earth in the basket of the aeronaut has a strong pull upon the great globe which it is trying to leave. Buoyancy only slightly overcomes gravity. Diminish the latter and increase the former, and the ascent is accomplished. Yet gravitation is still its normal attraction. It is overcome, not destroyed. To interpret our figure to the simplest reader we would say that the completest victory over the world is twofold -- negative in the extinction of inherited proneness to sin, and positive in the infusion of love to God to the utmost capacity of the soul. Both of these are accomplished by the Holy Spirit simultaneously when we by faith claim the full heritage of the believer, with the will in the attitude of perfect self-surrender to Christ. But the natural desires, implanted by our Creator, are not annihilated, but held within limits prescribed by him.

Our discussion would not be complete without stating the difference between that hereditary proneness to sin called in theology -- not in the Bible -- original sin, and that tendency to sin which arises from our constitution itself as moral intelligences endowed with natural sensibilities.

1. Sins resulting from these natural appetencies are not sins per se (in themselves), but in the irregular exercise of innocent affections, as gluttony is excessive eating; while the offspring of Adamic depravity. Pride, envy, malice, hatred, disobedience to God, and unbelief, are not the excess of any innocent principle, but sins in themselves.

2. This difference in character argues a difference in origin. The one class springs from natural desire in the individual; the other class having their root not in nature in its rectitude, as it came from the Creator, but in nature twisted and bent by Adamic sin.

3. Hence, the normal appetites, passions, and affections awaken no self-aborrence in well-balanced and properly-instructed minds, showing that they are not products of the fall, notwithstanding Augustine's contrary view of concupiscence. But self-loathing always attends sins per se as not being the excess of a good thing, but the fruit of a bitter root in nature itself.

4. The safeguard against the first class of sins is not the extinction of our emotional nature, but its regulation by an enlightened intellect, and by strengthening the will in right action by the momentum of love divine "shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit given unto us." -- Rom. 5:5. The safeguard against the second class is the annihilation of the inborn "bent to sinning" by the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier.

It will be naturally inferred that I do not ascribe all the sin in the world of mankind to the sin of our first parents in Eden. I do not accept the theory that the offspring of the sinless pair would have been beyond the reach of personal sin each for himself under the stress of temptation. There is a sense in which Adam and Eve stood in probation for their entire race. Its perpetuation was involved in their moral choice, but not the moral character and destiny of their descendants. No one under the just government of God will ever be punished for another's sin. Adam's transgression damaged his descendants, but it did not damn them. It did not determine their eternal destiny.

At another point my article will be criticized -- my distinction between tendency and proneness. My authority for my use of tendency is Bishop Butler: "If particular propensions can be gratified without the allowance of moral principle, or by contradicting it, then they must be conceived to have some tendency -- in how low a degree soever, yet some tendency -- to induce persons to such forbidden gratification." He shows that this slight tendency may be increased "by frequency of occasions," till finally it ends in actual deviation from the right. This is his theory of the origin of sin in a holy universe. It is just as good for the origin of sin in an entirely sanctified person, in whom the so-called original sin has been extinguished. I have used proneness in its etymological sense as bending forward or headlong, as Milton describes the fallen angels -- "Down thither prone in flight." It means an habitual downward bent.

The moral lesson is, "Let him that thinketh he standeth [it may be on some lofty altitude of Christian experience] take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12.) "Mankind," says the bishop, "and perhaps all finite creatures, from the very constitution of their nature, before habits of virtue are formed, are deficient and in danger of deviating from what is right, and therefore stand in need of virtuous habits for security against this danger."

My moral lesson is not complete without another quotation for the benefit of myself and my brethren in the ministry of Christ, and all others who are brought into constant contact with Christian truth as teachers. In speaking of the formation of good habits as safeguards, the bishop says: "But going over the theory of virtues in one's thoughts, talking well, and drawing fine pictures of it, this is so far from necessarily or certainly conducing to form a habit of it in him who thus employs himself, that it may harden the mind in a

contrary course and render it gradually more insensible, i.e., form a habit of insensibility to all moral considerations." This is the philosophy of downfalls in the Christian pulpit. The safeguard is the personal practice of all the precepts which the preacher preaches and the teacher teaches. Especially should he follow the example of St. Paul in the sanctification of the body: "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage, lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected." (1 Cor. 9:27, R. V.)

It is spiritually healthful for the minister of Christ often to ponder that most solemn admonition of our Lord Jesus to evangelical preachers in Matt. 7:21-23. They are preachers because they prophesied; they are evangelical because they call Jesus Lord, thus confessing his supreme Divinity. They are revivalists and reformers because they cast out demons and wrought many miracles. Yet they meet the unexpected sentence in the final day, "Depart from me.

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