

Love Militant

by Daniel Steele

The sermon 'Love Militant' explores the conquest of the soul by love divine, discussing justification, regeneration, entire sanctification, and the witness of the Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 32:1, John 14:16, Romans 3:23, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6, Ephesians 1:7, Titus 3:5, 1 John 3:24, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the continuous battle of love against sin in the world, emphasizing Jesus' mission to bring a sword against evil. The sermon discusses the stages of love's conquest over sin in the soul, starting with the offer of pardon through Jesus Christ's atoning blood, leading to justification and the removal of guilt. It then progresses to regeneration, where the Holy Ghost creates a new spiritual life of loyalty and love within the believer, culminating in entire sanctification and the eradication of evil from the heart through perfect love.

Transcript

So long as sin is in the world love must make war against it. Jesus came forth from the bosom of the Father's love to send a sword upon the earth. The cross is a center of forces hostile to sin. The sinful soul is a fortress filled with armed enemies to Immanuel. The successive approaches of love to its conquest and complete possession are --

1. The offer of pardon through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

Justification, or the pardon of sin through faith in Jesus Christ, is an act which takes place in the mind of the Moral Governor of the universe, whereby he removes guilt, or severs the link between sin and punishment, and accounts the penitent believer in Christ as if he had never sinned. It does not change the nature from wicked to just, as its Latin etymology -- justus and facio would signify. It is a work wrought for the soul, and wholly external to it, and is by faith only. No member of the human family, Jesus excepted, can successfully plead that he has perfectly kept the law of God, and is in consequence of his good works worthy of His approval." By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." From making this plea "every mouth is stopped." We are in no sense of the term acquitted. We are, after conviction and condemnation, pardoned through executive clemency, induced by the mediation of the Son of God.

But a pardoned criminal is not necessarily a good citizen. Pardon has changed his relation to the law, but not his hostility toward the governor. A change must take place within him. He must be reconstructed. We now come to the second step in the conquest of the soul by love divine.

2. Regeneration, or the New Birth, is a change wrought within the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, creating within the soul a new spiritual life, a life of loyalty and love.

By nature men are the children of wrath. They are spiritually dead. The faith faculty exists, but is in a paralysis so far as spiritual objects are concerned. The divine life begins with the seed of God implanted in the soul. This is the new principle of love. "For the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." The phrase "love of God " may signify either God's love to me or my love to God. In this quotation it has the former meaning. The Scriptures teach us that God is love. But this is not enough to give me assurance of his favor so long as I read that he is angry with the wicked every day. Therefore, so long as I have a tormenting sense of guilt, I must be filled with painful forebodings till I have a positive and personal assurance that I am taken out of the class of the condemned, and am reconciled to God, who loves me, even me. This is the witness of the Spirit, the third advance toward the complete conquest. He is styled the Spirit of Adoption, because as such his chief message is to attest to the believer his pardon and sonship. When this glad evangel resounds within, love to God springs up responsive to his great love to me. This is a new motive power. It reinforces the ethical feeling, the sense of obligation to right action. The bare perception of right, with no strong impulse toward it, while the appetites and passions are drawing in the opposite direction, constitutes the painful warfare between the flesh and the spirit, entailing upon the latter the sense of degrading bondage.

"I see the right, and I approve it too;

I see the wrong, and yet the wrong pursue."

But this new motive makes it easy to obey the law, because we love the Lawgiver. Hence love is the fulfilling of the law; not as a substitute for keeping the precepts and abstaining from the prohibitions of the moral law, but as an inspiration of the very spirit of obedience. But this new principle is spoken of by St. John as only a seed when first implanted. It implies future germination, growth, and fruitage. It is to spread its branches till it fills the heart, and by absorbing all the fertility of the soil, and by completely overshadowing all other plants, destroys their life. Till this maturity of the seed, the moral condition of the heart will be mixed; good and evil will struggle for the ascendancy. Nevertheless, if faith in Christ -- the weapon of victory -- continues, the actions will be right, though the result of painful effort to keep the moribund evil within from breaking out into manifestation. For manifestation is the tendency of every principle. After the maturity of love, the Divine seed, all its antagonists will be excluded. Evil will still be presented to the choice, but from no foothold within. Perfect love will cast out, not only fear, but all the hateful progeny of depravity. This is entire sanctification. It began with the seed-grain of holiness sown in regeneration.

There is no new principle involved. The oak is only the acorn unfolded. Yet regeneration, completed in sanctification, is not the highest up-reaching of the Divine life in the soul. It is only the beginning of its wholeness. All the forces of the soul for the first time, move Godward. "Unite my heart," says the Psalmist, "to fear thy name." He prayed for perfection in Divine love, when every warring foe shall be removed and all the powers be subsidized for the service of God. Up to this point the old nature, though dying, has lingered and mingled with the new. Dying unto sin and living unto God have co-existed. The destructive

and the reconstructive processes have gone on side by side. There is an absolute end to the former when there is nothing more to be destroyed: there is no end to the latter. The negative work must of necessity end when sin is dead; the positive work of spiritual adornment, strength, and growth, must go on so long as the soul is capable of advancement.

It becomes necessary at this point to indicate the salient points of difference between the new birth and that maturity of Christian character which St. Paul denominates the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

The relation of regeneration to entire sanctification is that of a part to a whole. There are other specific differences.

1.) In the state of mind preceding each. In the one case the eye is fixed on the past sins, and a sense of guilt and repentance fills the bitter cup; in the other, the soul looks inward upon itself, and self-abhorrence for the unlovely qualities disclosed to the anointed eye is the dominant feeling, without, however, a sense of Divine wrath.

2.) In the object for which the soul strives; pardon in the first case, and purity in the second.

3.) In the manner of attaining these blessings. Both are by faith: but the penitent sinner lays hold of Jesus dying on the cross, while the regenerated aspirant after a clean heart more distinctly apprehends Jesus living on the throne. The one thinks of his mercy, the other of his almightiness. There is a difference in the submission of the will. The sinner, thinking chiefly of his own salvation surrenders, grounding his weapons like a conquered rebel. The regenerate soul, like a patriot seeking the salvation of his country, gladly pours all his possessions into the treasury, a free-will offering, and counts it a privilege to enlist, soul and body, in the army. The one cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" the other prays, "Father, glorify thyself in me." The consecration of the latter is far more intelligent, deliberate, and in detail, because of his superior self-knowledge under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. His eager cry is,

"Welcome, welcome. dear Redeemer,

Welcome to this heart of mine.

Lord, I make a full surrender,

Ever thought and power be thine,

Thine entirely, through eternal ages thine."

4.) But the greatest difference is in the blessings received. Regeneration is a great and glorious change. It is the beginning of the new life. The regenerate man is a new creature in Christ Jesus. To him all things have become new. New heavens are above, and a new earth is beneath. He has been translated out of darkness into a marvellous light. The angel of mercy has descended and rolled away the stone from the sepulcher, and the dead soul has come forth. The great Emancipator has descended to the prison-door with the trump of jubilee at his lips and the key of deliverance in his right hand. Regeneration is a wonderful change -- a new creation, an emergence out of darkness -- a manumission from the most abject slavery, a resurrection from the dead. Yea, more than all this. By adoption he becomes a son of God, an heir, a joint heir with Christ. Like Joseph, he goes from the prison to the throne. Yet like Joseph, he is still in Egypt. A wilderness intervenes between him and the Land of Promise. Toward that Canaan he turns a

wistful eye, for to him it is

"A land of corn, and wine, and oil,

Flavored with God's peculiar smile,

With every blessing blessed."

He longs for that rest, and looks for the Joshua who shall lead him in, conquer his foes, and allot him his portion on the mountain of God. The justified state, glorious though it be, is eclipsed by the outbeaming splendors of a more excellent glory yet unattained. There is a sense of vacuity still in the soul, and a feeling that there is an attainable fullness in Christ correlated to this felt want. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so pants this unfilled soul after God. Unrest, hungerings and thirstings after righteousness, gratitude for the stream, and a longing to follow it up to the fountain, characterize the justified state. The marvellous light sometimes fades away into twilight, clouds often overcast the sky; and there are times when neither sun nor stars appear. O for an abode on some mountain summit, which lifts its head above the clouds into the eternal sunshine! a dwelling place in the land of Beulah, where the sun shines day and night all the year round!

5.) The witness of the Spirit is intermittent in the justified state, and abiding in entire sanctification, excluding every doubt. Here is a marked distinction. Constant assurance is requisite to perpetual rest in Christ. This comes only from the Comforter abiding in the fullness of his grace. Before regeneration the soul trusts in Jesus Christ; but before entire sanctification we must believe in the Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier, inasmuch as he has a distinct office.

6.) A still more important difference lies in the sense of defilement which humbles and distresses the justified soul, and the delightful sense of inward purity which is felt when the Sanctifier makes his conscious abode within. The promise seems to be fulfilled on the earth." They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." This assurance of heart cleansing is something more than an inference drawn from the soul's easy victory over temptation; it is intuitively perceived under the illumination of the Spirit. The Sanctifier is not satisfied with doing his work only in the mysterious depths of our nature; he reveals the purification to our consciousness, filling us with joy unspeakable. Whether this revelation is the witness of the Spirit in the technical language of theology or not, it is the voice of the Comforter speaking very comforting words: "I have washed thee with water from all thy filthiness, and from all thy idols I have cleansed thee."

7.) The justified or regenerate person often finds it difficult to say sincerely and heartily, "Thy will be done." Self still asserts its existence as a force opposing the will of God. There is, at times, a painful duality in the soul, "the flesh (self-will) warring against the Spirit." At such times there is little peace and less joy. Entire sanctification completely harmonizes the conflict by enabling the human to acquiesce delightfully in the Divine will. "Christian perfection," says Fletcher, "extends chiefly to the will, which is the capital moral power of the soul, leaving the understanding ignorant of ten thousand things, and the body 'dead because of sin.'" (* Checks, vol ii, p. 489)

8.) The joy that attends perfect love, in its depth, solidity, richness, and permanency, far transcends the joy of the regenerate state. It is the testimony of many witnesses, that in point of ecstatic emotion the transition into entire holiness is far more wonderful than the translation of the penitent believer from the darkness of spiritual death into the kingdom of light. But this is not always the case. As some are

converted without a sudden and sharply defined joy, like a tropical sunrise ever memorable in their history, so some mount up into the heights of perfect love as gradually as the dawn climbs the eastern sky. But even in these cases, there is a moment when the rising sun pours his light upon their waiting eyes.

9.) An important distinction between these two states of Christian experience -- the new birth and the fullness of love -- lies in the distinction between the gift and the Giver. We may selfishly clamor for the gift, but with a perfect identity of interest with Christ do we welcome to our hearts the Giver of every good and every perfect gift. Hence the superior permanency of the Giver over the gift. The latter may be evanescent, while the former abides. The former is a lighted lamp, but the latter superadds the vessel filled with oil, which typifies the Holy Spirit. (* See Dean Alford on the Parable of the Ten Virgins.)

3. Adoption is the incorporation of a person into the family of God, with the investiture of all the prerogatives of sonship and rights of heirship. It is an exalted honor. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe on his name." "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Earth's highest dignities sink into meanness in contrast with "the row of glorified brothers, with the Son of God at the head." This adoption is simultaneous with justification and regeneration, and is attested by a special message from God to the believer's consciousness.

4. The witness of the Spirit, which has already been alluded to in this chapter, is the testimony of the Holy Ghost immediately to my soul, assuring me that I am born of God and that the blood of Christ has washed away my sins. The messenger is called the Spirit of Adoption, because it is one of his peculiar offices to inspire the joyful cry, "Abba Father." It differs from the testimony of the fruit of the Spirit in this, that in the latter there is an inference that we are sons of God because we see the correspondence between their characteristics as noted in the Bible, and those observed in ourselves. This inference will never be indubitable and satisfactory much less joyful, unless it be preceded by the direct witness as above defined. Both must go together. The inferential or corroboratory must always accompany the immediate testimony of the Spirit, as a safeguard against deception and fanaticism. While the direct voice must be added to the indirect testimony of the Spirit, which is the attestation of our own consciousness, in order to keep us from sinking into despair or falling into a flattering and fatal mistake, the direct testimony of the spirit of adoption must be preached and held up as the privilege of the child of God, in order to that faith requisite for its reception. In the great revival under the preaching of Whitefield and the Wesleys, ninety-nine out of every hundred of the converts attested their reception of the Spirit of adoption speaking directly to their hearts. This privilege was specially presented to penitents by those great evangelists, and emphatically by the Wesleys.

The direct witness of the Spirit is, in usual cases, especially in young converts, intermittent, either through fluctuations of faith, or through some mysterious, but doubtless beneficent, law of the mind. In Christians of eminent devotion to God and strong faith, these intervals are infrequent and brief, and the tendency is toward an uninterrupted testimony of the abiding Comforter, or the higher Christian life. This office of the Spirit is most plainly taught in St. Paul's epistles. (See Rom. 8:15,16; Gal. 4:6) (The same is taught in 1 John 3:24; 4:13; 5:6) In figurative language Jesus taught the same doctrine on various occasions. (See John 7:37-39) He explicitly unfolded this great privilege in the promise of the Comforter, John 14, although this comprises much more than the witness of adoption. The greater includes the less.

The Old Testament hints at this blessing in such expressions as this: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." It is the source of the blessedness of him "whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

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