

Objections Answered

by Daniel Steele

The sermon addresses objections to the experience of entire sanctification, emphasizing the importance of consecration, the bond of Christian communion, and the fullness of the Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Proverbs 27:17, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 7:7, John 14:13, 1 Corinthians 2:12, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 1 John 1:7

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Christian Perfection"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the objections to the experience of entire sanctification, addressing the imperfections of some who profess this higher Christian life and the misconceptions surrounding it. He emphasizes the need to understand that criticism from others is inevitable, as even Christ faced hostile criticism. Steele encourages believers to seek full salvation with unwavering persistence, highlighting that God blesses those who earnestly seek Him. He also discusses the challenges faced by those who advocate for holiness and the importance of maintaining fellowship and unity among believers.

Transcript

My dear fellow-Believer in Christ: You have honest objections to the experience of entire sanctification as a distinct blessing. Let me help you to remove them. You may be stumbling over the glaring imperfections of some who profess to be walking in this higher path of Christian life. In the first place, remember that impenitent men are using the same argument against all our endeavors to turn them to Christ. You invariably tell them that Christianity is liable to be counterfeited by hypocritical professors; that all valuable things are exposed to base imitations; and that the most valuable is the most exposed. Please apply your own logic to yourself when reasoning on the question of the higher Christian life.

Again, the Holy Spirit, in his most intense illumination, does not insure infallible moral judgments. John Newton, while master of a slave-ship, blinded by the darkness of his times, said that while enjoying intimate communion with God, "he never had the least scruple as to the lawfulness of the slave-trade;" and the seraphic piety of George Whitefield did not deter him from pleading before the trustees of Georgia for the introduction of slaves, on the ground of "the advantage of the Africans." Hence a man whose heart is full of love, and whose intellect is darkened by ignorance, may appear unconscientious to one favored with high moral culture.

You should constantly bear in mind this fact, that a man can never appear above the criticism of his fellow-men. Did Christ, the absolutely sinless man, escape hostile criticism? Was he not called a

winebibber, a Sabbath-breaker, a Beelzebub, and a subverter of the law? The difficulty was not in Jesus, but in his green-eyed critics. Perhaps this is the solution of your perplexity about the imperfect exemplifications of the love "that passeth knowledge." God once said to Abraham, "Walk before me and be thou perfect." He did not command him to be perfect in the estimation of fallible men. Suppose that Abraham had interpreted the command to include men as well as the heart-searching Jehovah? He is commanded to go to Mount Moriah, and to offer Isaac in sacrifice. He goes and exhibits to God a heart perfectly obedient, as proved by the severest test. God is satisfied. But suppose that some of Abraham's jealous neighbors wonder what the mysterious three days' journey means, and that they follow on the patriarch's track afar, and, at last, they see him actually seize his son and cruelly bind him hand and foot; and then, O horrible! he draws out from his belt a great sheath knife and raises it on high and attempts to plunge it into the throbbing heart of innocence. But something seemed to prevent the wicked purpose -- the spies are too far away to see what it was but they saw enough of Abraham's harsh conduct in his family to satisfy them that his profession to be an especial "friend of God" is a stupendous piece of hypocrisy. "Perfection on earth," say they, "is all a myth; we have proved it." Yet, while this damaging misconstruction of Abraham's conduct is whispered from one to another of the neighboring Canaanites, the patriarch is in the enjoyment of the inward testimony that his ways please Jehovah; he walks before him and is perfect. It may be thus with many a living friend of God, maligned of men, while approved of Heaven.

False professions of this blessed experience should be expected, and due allowance should be made by all candid minds. But where there is a secret disrelish for an experience so high, it is natural to magnify such instances out of all due proportion to the number of the genuine professors, as wicked men magnify the hypocrisies in the Christian Church till they hide the multitude of true Christians.

Are you stumbled at the fact that many seek the fullness of Divine love and do not find? Do not many feebly seek regeneration and fail? There are no instances of persons seeking with their whole heart, with an unappeasable hunger and a tireless persistence, who have not received this greatest of Divine benefactions. In the distribution of his spiritual blessings God is no respecter of persons. "Every one that asketh receiveth."

Fanaticisms have attended the profession of this high grace. True. Extremists and unbalanced minds have abused justification by faith. Yet this doctrine resounds in all our churches. In all attempts to promote experimental godliness there is danger that some one may go astray from the path of sobriety. Our Protestantism, which accords to every soul the right of studying the Bible and of access immediately to God without the intervention of a Latin-mumbling priest, must run the risk of more or less abuse of freedom, and eccentricity in doctrinal belief. There is no cure but the iron railroad track of papal infallibility prescribing the exact grooves in which all religious thought and devotion shall run. The remedy is a thousand-fold worse than the evil. The fanaticisms which have attended the people who have devoted themselves wholly to Christ, and who have been filled with the fullness of the Spirit, have been greatly exaggerated by the imaginations of unsympathizing enemies. They are not half so disastrous as the heresies that spring up in a cold and worldly Church, void of the Spirit of Truth.

Again, the people who profess holiness are generally unpopular. They are secretly hated. A very accurate observer of human nature has suggested the reason. He asks and answers this question:

"Are we not apt to have a secret distaste to any who say they are saved from all sin?" Answer: "It is very possible we may, and that upon several grounds; partly from a concern for the good of souls, who may be

hurt, if there are not what they profess; partly from a kind of implicit envy at those who speak of higher attainments than our own; and partly from our natural slowness and unreadiness of heart to believe the works of God."

-- Wesley's "Plain Account of Christian Perfection."

This answer could very easily be intended to include other reasons for this distaste. A holy life is a rebuke to all unholiness. Jesus was a perpetual rebuke to the Jews. In the intense light of his pure life, their spots and stains were made manifest through the whitewash of ceremonialism. Their hatred of the light was turned against the light-bearer, and Jesus of Nazareth was the best abused man of his times. In this respect the servant must not expect to be above his Lord. A person entirely dead to the world, and thoroughly alive unto Christ through every fiber of his being, will make all conformers to this world so uncomfortable that they will begin to hate him, and to pick all manner of flaws in his life. They are not willing to give up their idols, and holiness comes to kindle a destroying fire among them. They are averse to strenuous effort, to earnest wrestlings with God at Peniel, and hence they dislike those who point to the sunlit heights of life above the clouds, and urge them to mount up thither, as disturbers of their repose. Again, since all love to God is in antagonism to the spirit of this world, the higher the degree the more intense that antagonism.

Another reason may be found in the activity of Satan, who seeks to plunder the Gospel of that element which gives it the highest efficiency in its warfare with his kingdom. He blinds the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shine unto them. He succeeds so well with unbelievers that he applies the same method to believers, blinding their eyes to their highest Gospel privilege, the fullness of the Spirit, lest the light of this blessing should gladden their eyes, strengthen their hearts, and intensify their zeal against his kingdom. Says John Wesley, in a letter to a Christian woman respecting her preacher, in 1771:

I hope he is not ashamed to preach full salvation, receivable now by faith. This is the word which God will always bless, and which the devil peculiarly hates; therefore he is constantly stirring up both his own children and the weak children of God against it.

Hence the difficulty which the great Head of the Church has in keeping this doctrine in the pulpit. It dropped out of the English pulpit, and Methodism was raised up to bring it back. Wesley, true to the great light, "the grand depositum intrusted to the Methodists," found his preachers inclined to abandon this precious theme. Even now, after the inquiry on this subject among the laity has become so general, the majority of preachers pass over the subject like a slurred note in music, as if it was a demi-semi-quaver in the jubilant song of our Christianity, and not its very key-note.

Some believers may be warped by the influence of those who are mistaken in their profession of this blessing. Many, quickened and gladdened by some manifestation of the Saviour's love, jump to the conclusion that they are entirely sanctified through the fullness of love, shed abroad in their hearts, and, under injudicious advice, rush into a declaration of full salvation before they have the witness of the Spirit to this great work. (1 Cor. 2:12.) Such persons soon become what Mr. Fletcher styles "land-flood" or freshet "professors," left high and dry by the evanescent emotions of which they are the subjects.

The injudicious presentation of this blessing by some of its advocates has contributed to the eclipse of faith in its reality. Mount Sinai, instead of Mount Calvary, has been taken for the pulpit, and the terrors of the Lord have been denounced upon the Lord's children, although heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus

Christ. Let not this offend you. The wise counsel of the founder of Methodism has not always been heeded in preaching on this subject, "Always by way of promise; always drawing rather than driving." Thus injudicious advocates have awakened prejudice. All these causes combined have almost wrested this doctrine as a great vital, practical truth from the pulpits of Christendom, and driven it into select meetings in parlors; from the candle-stick to the bushel. O Lord! how long, how long, must this precious light be hidden from the faith of thy people? Speedily lift it up from under the bushels to the candle-sticks, there to shine till its splendors blend in the brightness of thy coming!

Are you afraid that if you embrace Jesus as a whole Saviour you will lose your broad sympathy for the whole body of believers and become clannish? Are those who have found full salvation inclined to clannishness from choice or from necessity? Is there not such a chilly temperature in many Churches that ardent believers can no more dwell safely in them than they can in a sepulcher? They prefer the light and warmth of a sympathizing Christian fellowship. Suppose, now, that all the Church were rejoicing in the increased grace given to each victorious soul, and, as in the case of St. Paul who had been caught up to the third heavens, they were glorifying God in him, we should hear no more of the segregation of those who are fully saved, than we hear in the New Testament Church of the withdrawal of the Spirit-baptized from the neophytes who had not yet received the Holy Ghost since they believed.

My dear brother or sister in Jesus, the fault may be more in your prejudice, your apathy, your love of the world, and lack of consecration to Christ, than in the souls drawn together by the mighty magnetism of love to Christ, the ruling passion of their bosoms. Do you not suppose that the Jews accused the disciples of clannishness when they persisted in their ten days' upper-room meeting before pentecost, and afterward in their breaking bread from house to house? The cure for the fault-finding Jew would have been to secure the pentecostal blessing, and feel the mighty attraction of Christian love. Your remedy is, to attain that perfect love which will bind you to all believing souls with a threefold cord.

But this intense fellowship, which has been stigmatized as clannishness, may be one of the strong scriptural evidences of Christian purity. Hear what St. John says will invariably result when a number of fully-consecrated souls walk arm in arm with Jesus, robed in the spotless linen of his righteousness: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Those in whom the bond of Christian communion is so weak that Church sociables must be resorted to for the promotion of Church feeling in the absence of true spiritual sympathy, which died with the forgotten prayer-meeting and the disbanded class-meeting, may well wonder at the mysterious magnetism which draws together devout persons, and holds them with hooks of steel, without ice-cream, oysters, smokes, or other sensuous attractions of the club-room.

Let that Church which is vexed with a clique devoted to the higher Christian life take the following course, and the clique will be killed and buried beyond hope of resurrection. Let them no longer forsake the assembling of themselves together, but exhort one another daily, while with one accord and in one place they seek to be filled with the Spirit. Then let them give free expression to His voice within them, not by a hired quartette, but by speaking to themselves "in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs," making melody in their hearts to the Lord. (Eph. 5:18, 19.) Let them evince the genuineness of the Spirit-baptism by a life ever victorious over the world through faith in Jesus Christ, a beneficence which comes from "first giving yourselves unto the Lord," and a daily practice in harmony with the moral code of the Gospel. Under such treatment clannishness would speedily disappear, and the longest-lived "holiness meeting" would not survive a month. Again, you are stumbled by professors of a full trust in Christ, who still keep their purse-strings closely drawn. The secretaries of our various benevolent societies do not make this

indiscriminate charge against those who have professed to find Jesus a complete Saviour. They know that recently, in consequence of the revival of this doctrine and experience, living springs of beneficence have been opened which are pouring constant streams into the Lord's treasury. Here and there a narrow-minded man has not been brought up to the standard, either because his intellect has not been sufficiently enlightened or his heart copiously anointed.

But you see no reason why you, after a score of years in the average Christian life, should rein up your soul to this one definite aim -- full salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ -- and go through a mighty struggle to attain that which only a minority of the justified profess to receive before they are laid on the bed of death. You think that if such a glorious experience had been designed for you you would have been led into it long ago, especially since in your daily prayers you have constantly prayed for the fullness of the Spirit. It may be that a subtle skepticism has kept you from vigorous efforts to grasp this great prize, which you might have seized in any day of your past Christian life, if you had sincerely believed in Christ's power to do this work, and distinctly aimed at it with all the intensity of spirit of which you were capable. The fact that you have gone so long without this pearl of great price is a reason why you should now earnestly seek it; that thus both your own happiness and your usefulness to your fellow-beings may be increased, and your God honored. The heaven on earth of heart purity cannot be entered by chance. There must be a definite aim uniting all the forces of the soul. "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Jer.29:13.

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