

St. Paul's Perfect Faith.

by Daniel Steele

The sermon explores St. Paul's perfect faith and entire sanctification as a model for Christian living and ministry.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:12

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Christian Perfection"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about St. Paul's perfect faith and entire sanctification, emphasizing Paul's unwavering trust in Christ even in extreme circumstances like hunger and poverty, showcasing a faith that leads to victory over sin and evil. Paul's self-abnegation and sacrificial love for others reflect his holiness of heart and life, demonstrating his readiness to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. His complete deliverance from covetousness and love of human applause exemplifies his sanctified state and his dedication to serving Christ above all else.

Transcript

We continue our proof that St. Paul enjoyed and professed entire sanctification. This grace is implied in that perfect faith which never lapses into doubt. Such a faith gives perfect victory over the world, which is a comprehensive term for all moral evil or sin. This faith is confessed in

Phil. 4: 13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." One of the highest tests of faith to a man of taste and culture like Paul, who seems to have been brought up in the lap of plenty, is that extreme and pinching poverty that knows the keen cravings of hunger. The devil was cunning enough to assail Jesus when he was hungry. Hear what Paul says in the preceding verse, "I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want." (R. V.) Then follows the sublime confession of the great apostle that in such distressing circumstances he has a faith in Christ which keeps him from sinful repining and charging God foolishly. His is not the surly philosophic stoicism of Dr. Samuel Johnson in Grub Street, who, when in destitution, once closed a letter with "yours impransus" (without breakfast); but it was a cheerful, yea, even joyful, suffering of privations, because of his intense love to him who had not where to lay his head, was fed at other men's tables, and buried in a borrowed tomb. This perfect faith gleams out in

2 Tim. 1:12, "I know whom I have believed." Here faith is perfect because it has merged into knowledge. Faith is the only door through which a knowledge of God comes into the soul, the only path which leads to

a clear apprehension of spiritual realities. Paul well understood, from his own experience, this relation of faith to knowledge, and to evangelical perfection.

In stating the purpose of the Christian ministry to be "for the perfecting of the saints," he adds, "till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge [perfect knowledge -- Alford] of the Son of God." Here are not two unities, but one, made up of faith swallowed up in the full blaze of knowledge. He then intimates that this is a necessary element of a perfect man who receives "the fullness of Christ," or of that plenitude of grace which he communicates. See Eph. 4:11-14.

Paul makes his present knowledge of Christ the basis of faith that he will keep him from sin in the future -- "And I am persuaded that he is able to keep [or guard] that which I have committed unto him [my deposit -- Greek] against -- that day." If Paul's experience in the past had been one of sinful stumblings and sad falls, he could not have had so strong a trust in Christ to uphold him in the future.

In 2 Tim. 4:18, there is another outflashing of this perfect faith, "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom." "Every evil work" must include moral evil or sin. In answer to the question, What evil work? Dean Alford answers, "The falling into the power of the tempter; the giving way, in his own weakness and the desertion of all, and betraying the gospel for which he was sent as a witness." If he had complete confidence in the power of grace to keep him in the future, he certainly had faith to be cleansed from all present sinfulness.

The texts quoted in proof of Paul's perfect faith are only samples of many of the same kind.

If we can educe from Paul's epistles proofs of his entire self-abnegation in the interest of Christ, we shall demonstrate his holiness of heart and life. Turn to

Phil. 3:4-8. After enumerating the successive steps of vantage which he enjoyed as an ambitious Hebrew eager for ecclesiastical promotion, Paul says, "Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea, verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Such language is not a characteristic of the consciousness of inbred sin, in which there is always a coddling of self and a "provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." The Edwardian theology made selfishness the root of all sin. On this theory, perfect self-abnegation is entire sanctification, at least on its human side. Where this entire abandonment of self unto God exists, he will not be backward in performing the divine part of this work.

Rom. 14:7, 8, "For none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord."

This may by some people be considered as Paul's unattainable ideal of a true Christian. But who can prove that this ideal was not realized in Paul's experience? If there is nothing in his life and character contradictory to it, then it should be regarded as a reflection of his own spiritual visage sanctified by divine grace. That there is nothing of this kind we shall show, when we examine misinterpreted passages in Paul's epistles.

Acts 21:13, "For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

This is a veritable man, having flesh and blood, not an imaginary ideal. The statement is intensely personal and realistic, "I am ready to die." He does not say, "We are ready;" he could not speak for

another in such a positive manner. People conscious of a sinward bent are not perfectly ready to go to the judgment. Such a consciousness makes cowards of many Christians. All their days they are in bondage to the fear of death. Not so Paul. "I am ready to be offered." Such language proves two facts, (1) a total and irreversible self-surrender to Christ as both Savior and Lord, and (2) a conscious meetness for standing in the presence of the Holy God, surrounded by the holy angels and "the spirits of just men made perfect" (the spirits of perfected just men -- Greek). The dominion of the fear of death is broken when love is first inspired in the penitent believer; but fear itself is cast out when love is made perfect. This is why Paul was ready to die.

"His love, surpassing far

The love of all beneath,

We find within our hearts, and dare

The pointless darts of death."

-- C. Wesley.

St. Paul's spirit of self-sacrifice glows in every epistle, "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" --

1 Cor. 10:33. It was not spasmodic, but habitual and characteristic. A niggard can once in a while painfully screw himself up to a generous contribution, to fall back again into his dominant penuriousness. But Paul, by the grace of God, was so thoroughly transformed that self-abnegation for the good of others had become second nature. He was even happy in self-sacrifice. Hear him, "and I will very gladly spend and be spent for you" -- not to win your favor, -- "though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." If perfectly disinterested love ever dwelt in one human bosom, besides that of Jesus Christ, it dwelt in the Apostle to the Gentiles. Covetousness is usually the last of the brood of vipers to be utterly destroyed in the heart of man. In Paul the serpent was more than scotched, he was killed outright. Proof --

Acts 20:33, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." Wishing to have a free pulpit, perfectly independent of the pews, he adds, "Yea, these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." This witness cannot be impeached. The proof is complete. Paul was wholly saved from covetousness, which salvation is not only a long way toward entire sanctification, it is entire sanctification. We will arrive at the same conclusion if we demonstrate that he was completely delivered from a love of human applause.

Gal. 1:10, R. V., "Am I seeking to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ." Man-pleasing was not his ultimate aim. He employed it as a means to his lofty Christian end, "Even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved." This deliverance from a love of popular applause is a very great salvation of which Paul speaks again in

1 Thess. 2:4, "So we speak: not as pleasing men but God, which proveth our hearts." Paul's conquest of this evil propensity is seen in his style of preaching. "not with enticing words, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The Holy Ghost has very little use for fine writing. A florid style muffles his sword. It is impossible to tickle the fancy and pierce the heart at the same time.

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