

# The Assurance of Purity

by Daniel Steele

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*The speaker argues that a person can know that their heart is thoroughly cleansed through the subjective proofs of the Holy Spirit.*

**Scripture:** 1 John 2:27

**Topics:** "Entire Sanctification", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

In one of Father Taylor's Bethel sermons, Daniel Steele addresses the peril facing Christian purity today, comparing it to a ship lost in the region of icebergs, emphasizing the need for a skillful pilot to steer the ship to safety. Steele challenges the denial of entire sanctification by questioning the limitations of consciousness and the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing inward purity. He delves into philosophical arguments regarding free will, consciousness, and the nature of man's depravity, highlighting the importance of spiritual illumination and self-awareness in the believer's journey towards complete purification.

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## Transcript

IN one of Father Taylor's inimitable Bethel sermons, finding himself drifting into abstruse metaphysics, he raised his strong hand, and, in a stentorian tone called out: "Hard down the helm! I've lost my reckoning! we're in the region of the icebergs." This is the peril of the cause of Christian purity today. The winds of discussion have driven our good ship into the polar seas, where she is in danger of being frozen in or crushed to atoms. Some skillful pilot is needed to seize the helm and steer the noble ship into the open sea.

Meanwhile we who are on board must do the best we can, with our limited resources, to rescue our vessel from impending destruction. The enemies of the doctrine of entire sanctification as a present obtainable experience, are not content with mystifying the nature of this distinct work of the Holy Spirit; they boldly deny its subjective proofs, and assert that no man can ever know that his heart is thoroughly cleansed. Their assertions are two: First, that consciousness cannot bear witness to perfect inward purity, for that is a quiescent state, while consciousness cognizes only activities.

The second declaration is, that the Holy Spirit, because He is the appointed witness of adoption, cannot disclose to the soul the cleansing which He has wrought through faith in Jesus' blood. Let us examine the first assertion, and see whether it does not prove altogether too much. Is human free agency a quiescent state, or an activity? If it is answered that it is an activity, because the mind is always active in its choices,

we reply that the will is active in the choices which it actually makes.

But how is it with the counter choice of good or evil which it does not make at all? Could the will have made this alternate choice? If so, how do you know? Are you conscious of a potency? Are you conscious of something which never comes forth into actuality? Then you must be conscious of a quiescent state, the ability to choose between two opposite courses. Hence consciousness is the fundamental proof of freedom against the theory of necessity. Says sturdy Dr. Samuel Johnson, "I know that I am free, and that's the end of it."

Are those who are eager to tear down the doctrine of entire sanctification willing to employ an instrument which inevitably subverts the whole structure of Arminian theology when in the hands of a predestinarian? That this is no mere bugbear, see what a damaging use the arch-materialist, J. Stuart Mill, made of a precisely similar assumption of Sir W. Hamilton. Hamilton had declared that consciousness cognizes only the actual and not the possible. In another lecture he shows that the regulative faculty, or the pure reason, rejects the freedom of the will as utterly unthinkable, in accordance with his "philosophy of the conditioned," which is, that reason can admit neither the absolute nor the infinite.

If the will is free, its acts are absolute; that is, uncaused. And, on the other hand, if its acts are caused, there must be an endless chain of causation running beyond God's volitions into the infinite. Hamilton thus avers that the philosophy of the conditioned rejects alike freedom and fate, or the absolute and infinite.

But Hamilton nevertheless endeavors to cling to freedom, because it is a dictum of consciousness. After arraying reason and consciousness in a deadlock on the question of free agency, he announces his belief in liberty on the ground of consciousness. But the faulty limitation of consciousness to the actual, excluding potency, did not escape the keen eye of the logical Mill. His spear finds this joint in Hamilton's coat of mail, and his philosophy is pushed into fatalism. For, if Hamilton should tell a willful lie, he never could prove from consciousness that he might have told the truth, because that ability to speak the truth was a quiescent potency, beyond the sphere of consciousness. It would be well for those who talk so carelessly about consciousness failing to cognize a quiescent state, to remember that, though Mill is dead, he has many followers, who wish no better sport than the easy task of overturning human freedom and responsibility with the lever that the opponents of entire sanctification are now putting into their hands.

Again, let us see what becomes of the doctrine of original or birth sin, if we admit the theory that consciousness cognizes only activities. Can it be proved that the nature of man is corrupt by any appeal to consciousness? How on earth, then, did Paul, or his convicted legalist, in the seventh chapter of Romans, come to have such a piece of information as this, "I am carnal;" not merely do I do wicked deeds, but "I am carnal" in my quiescent state, the fountain of all action. The law could not have been his informant, for it prescribes acts, saying, "Do this and live." But by some means he becomes aware of the painful fact that there is a being of sin back of the doing of sin. Can any one tell us how a man becomes convinced that his nature in its quiescent state is sinful? Here is a dilemma -- for this fact is either revealed by consciousness or by the Holy Ghost. If by the former, then consciousness grasps a quiescent state; but if by the Holy Ghost, then he gives other testimonies besides the fact of pardon and adoption. Which horn do you prefer to be gored by? Or will you abandon the doctrine of inborn sin, and become Pelagian, and say that Adam's sin consists in doing as Adam did? We, for our part, advertise the public that we prefer this doctrine to the doctrine of innate depravity so deeply ingrained in our nature, below the gaze of consciousness, that we may never, with all the light of the Holy Spirit promised in the Bible, certainly know that we are not knaves at the bottom of our nature. Our intelligence revolts at the thought that a wise and holy God should allow

beings to be born under His moral government and amenable to his law, with no knowledge, and no means of knowledge anywhere in the universe, of their real character as discerned by the all-seeing eye. We are shocked at such a conception of God as represents Him as holy, and hating all the traces and stains of sin, yet withholding from man that knowledge of his own depravity which is necessary to secure his co-operation in his complete purification. We must either take this view of God, or admit that he has made eyes in our soul by which, under spiritual illumination, we may gaze to the very depths of our sinful nature. If this be true, then it follows that consciousness may attest a quiescent state, and a believer's intuitions may know, by the light of the Holy Ghost, that he is cleansed from all inbred sin.

But the worst of this fallacious philosophy of consciousness limited to the sphere of activities remains to be shown. It renders it impossible for a man certainly to know that he is in a regenerate state. For this is either a quiescent or an active state. If it is the former, then it can never be cognized by consciousness, and the witness of our own spirit, is mere nonsense. But if the opponent says that the regenerate state is active, since it is the awakening of love within the dead soul, then it follows that entire sanctification is an intensely active state, in which the soul loves God to the full extent of its powers. In the Wesleyan theology perfect love is equivalent to perfect purity. If a soul can know that all its forces are moving Godward, it can know that self is crucified and sin is entirely destroyed.

Let us now examine the assertion that the Holy Spirit is not the witness of complete holiness. The first corollary from this doctrine is this: there is no such experience in this life. For it is the office of the Holy Spirit to hold up the mirror of truth to every soul, that he may see his moral visage. Now, if under the illumination of the Spirit, no one on earth, looking into the Gospel glass, discovers that he is depraved, then it follows that we cannot prove that depravity exists on the footstool of God. If no one perceives that he is partially sanctified, then there is no proof that there is a regenerate soul on earth. If no one in Christendom sees himself in the Gospel glass cleansed through the blood of Jesus Christ, then it cannot be proved that there is a soul entirely sanctified that is now in the body. It is evident that a denial of the subjective proofs amounts to a flat denial of the experience. How can a thing be known to exist without its proofs?

Second. Who is he that knows so much about the Holy Ghost that he can confidently set metes and bounds to his activities? How does he come by this amazing wisdom? The Bible does not set limits to the agency of the Spirit. So that if nothing were said in the Book of books of a positive character on this subject, so broad an inference as the denial of the Spirit's testimony to entire sanctification would be wholly unwarranted.

The fact that the Spirit, who purifies, also certifies the cleansing, is beautifully illustrated by the light which first pencils the photograph and then reveals it to the eye. It is first a magical, chemical agent, painting the picture in the camera, and then the medium of vision to the enraptured beholder.

Thirdly. But there is positive proof that the Spirit does bear this testimony. His very name, the Comforter, Monitor, Helper, or Teacher, implies this. What is the saddest fact in the consciousness of the regenerate, but the fact of lingering carnality? What greater comfort than the assured extermination of that carnality? In I John ii. 20, 27, we are informed that "we have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things." Let us take out of the "all" scientific and philosophical knowledge, and all the dogmatic truths authentically communicated by inspiration, and we have a residuum of truth relating to our personal standing before God and His law; truth which another can never communicate, for "ye need not that any man teach you." To say that this anointing teaches everything but the all-important fact of the eradication of inbred sin is to

render his mission useless and his message nugatory.

But in I Cor. ii. 12, we have a still more comprehensive statement of the teachings of the Spirit. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." The things is in the plural number, and includes all the operations of the Sanctifier. If, then, it is His office to sanctify, it is His mission also to certify that great and glorious work to the soul of the believer. This is Mr. Wesley's strong proof-text, which the flippant opposers in his age and in ours have never been able to disprove. In conclusion, we would recommend the captious opposers of a conscious salvation from inbred sin to study the context, and see whether they may not be unconsciously ranking themselves among "natural" men, to whom the things of the Spirit are "foolishness." For the cavils and objections of this class of writers indicate a lack of spiritual insight, which can be removed by the persistent utterance of the prayer which is found in the ordination service:--

"Enable with perpetual light

The dullness of our blinded sight."

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