

The Probation for Holiness

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of trials and faith in the pursuit of entire sanctification and the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Matthew 15:28, John 14:16, Acts 1:8, Ephesians 3:16, James 1:2

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the challenges and misconceptions surrounding the doctrine of entire sanctification, emphasizing the need for earnest seekers to diligently study and seek God's highest blessings. He compares the process of understanding sanctification to the gradual revelation of truth to hungry souls, requiring intense pursuit and overcoming obstacles. Steele highlights the importance of faith as the key to receiving the fullness of the Spirit, drawing parallels to the disciples' journey towards receiving the Comforter at Pentecost. He addresses the struggles faced by believers in grasping the concept of sanctification and the necessity of a robust, active faith to attain this profound experience.

Transcript

THE advocates of entire sanctification, with Wesley, Fletcher, and Watson at their head, affirm that this blessing "is as distinctly marked and as graciously promised in the Holy Scriptures as justification, regeneration, adoption, and the witness of the Spirit." [Watson's "Institutes," Vol IV., page 450.] Nevertheless, many honest inquirers are perplexed with intellectual and scriptural difficulties on this very point of the distinctness of this work; and they are led to ask why God has not set this great blessing above the mists of doubt and the possibility of controversy. If this glorious privilege is to the other benefits of the atonement as Mt. Blanc is to the lesser mountains of Europe, why does it not tower up so manifestly before all eyes as to render misconception and unbelief impossible? Infidels make a similar demand upon Christianity, that she shall stand forth so radiant with divinity that the dullest eye may instantly, without any examination, discover the unmistakable seal of heaven on her brow. They say that if a man really wished his absent servant to do a piece of work, he would make his meaning so plain, and his signature so characteristic, that the servant could have no excuse for any mistakes. Bishop Butler well replies that, if the Master's intent is to secure the mere doing of the work, He would write thus plainly, but if he wished to test the fidelity of the servant, he might purposely leave some obscurities, which could be made plain only by patiently studying the letter. [Butler's "analogy," Part II., Chap. VI.]

Now, since God's message to man has difficulties in it, and since Christianity descends from the skies with her seal partially hidden, and with the purpose of disclosing it only to candid and earnest seekers, sceptics reject her claims. We reply to them: God certainly wishes His Gospel to be received, but in such a manner as to confer the highest benefit on man, and to reflect the highest glory on His Son. This will not be realized by a mere passive reception of clearly demonstrated truth, but by stimulating man's highest powers of research to the most intense activity, and the most eager desire.

It is the divine order that truth of every kind should fully reveal itself only to hungry souls. The long research and the hot pursuit whet the appetite, and prepare the discoverer for a proper appreciation of the treasure which he has found. The more valuable the truth, the higher the barriers which hedge it in and appall all timid seekers, leaving the toilsome search to those dauntless souls whose unconquerable persistence makes all opposition bow before them.

The coming of the Comforter to the believer's heart, and His indwelling as the Sanctifier, is a greater event, in its immediate practical benefits, than the advent of the Messiah to the world. This John the Baptist saw as the culminating blessing of Christ's coming. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." Jesus was ever pointing to that crowning gift. The disciples could not understand how Jesus could, through the Comforter, manifest himself to them, and be invisible to the world. Their faith had a probation with respect to this great coming event. The trial of their faith continued through that ten days' prayer-meeting before Pentecost. This protracted test was necessary to enlarge their faith to its utmost capacity for the fullness of the Spirit. They endured the test, and received the greatest gift that the Father and the glorified Son could bestow.

We meet with Christians who are unable to formulate the doctrine of entire sanctification. They are puzzled with the apparent contradiction of a work of the Spirit in regeneration and the witness of the Spirit, before the abiding Comforter is received. It seems to them as absurd as to talk of a carpenter's doing a work within the house before his entrance. But we have a precisely similar difficulty in formulating the doctrine of the Holy Ghost. How could he be in the patriarchal and Jewish Church, and the inspirer of all its piety, before he was sent down from on high at the Pentecost? Multitudes who hand over this greater mystery from reason to faith are still tasking reason with the lesser mystery, and keeping themselves spiritual paupers in consequence. For no man ever yet received the Holy Ghost through a syllogism. He always enters through the door of faith.

It is a painful fact that many who profess faith in Jesus Christ, and evince a degree of spiritual life, are practically in the condition of the first twelve believers in Ephesus; they have not in the depths of their own hearts so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." They are living in the ante-pentecostal state, in the rudimentary dispensation of John. They do not know "the exceeding greatness of Christ's power to usward who believe." The Credo, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," is on their lips, but it is as ineffectual for spiritual transfiguration as the Binomial Theorem.

Their thirsty souls stand at the well of living water, and let down their buckets, and draw them up empty, not because the well is dry, but because their rope is not long enough to reach the water. An orthodox creed lying dead in the intellect is like a dry bucket hanging midway down the well. Merely intellectual believers lack a vigorous, appropriating faith. To develop this, difficulties are purposely set before their souls, to be mastered, and objections, seeming to tower to a mountain height, must be surmounted.

The whole subject of full salvation, as presented in the Scriptures, does not seem to them to stand forth distinct from justification and the new birth. The testimony of Paul, Peter and John is circumlocutory, and not direct. They drape their testimony in mystical phrases, as "dead unto sin," "the life hid with Christ," "risen with Christ," "the sealing," "the baptism," "the unction of the Spirit." They pray for others to be sanctified wholly; but they do not squarely avow that they have themselves grasped this prize.

Then, again, it seems to be impossible that a soul marred and dwarfed by sin should ever in any sense be perfect, in view of the unabated requirements of the law of absolute holiness. The glaring defects of some professors of holiness complicate the objections. The attitude of many in the Christian Church and ministry, their apathy, shyness, and manifest distrust of this experience, is a still greater lion in the pathway of holiness. The occasional fanaticisms which have sometimes broken out make the subject still more doubtful.

In view of these facts the whole question looks mystified, mixed, muddy, muddled, and mischievous. The Little-Faiths and the Weak-Hearts, not perceiving that this condition of things constitutes the very discipline which they need, sit timorously down before these giants standing across their path, as did the writer for twenty-five years, while the Faithfuls and the Great-Hearts, espying the glorious uplands of perfect rest, boldly encounter and rout these enemies, and enter in.

They find that the very grapple with these grim spectres constitutes the probation for holiness, and the discipline and upreaching of faith requisite for receiving so great grace. Hence the whole subject of instantaneous sanctification through faith is left in just that half-revealed and half-concealed state best adapted to stimulate research, sharpen insight, enkindle desire, and afford to all persistent believers an arena for heroic struggle and glorious victory. This is an entirely different probation, and more severe than that which precedes pardon.

An infantile faith may grasp justification, but only an adult faith can seize the prize of entire sanctification. Instead of repining at these tests, we are to count it all joy when we fall into manifold temptations, or puttings to the proof, since it is for the trial of our faith. For since the blessing sought is entire and not partial sanctification, there must be not an imperfect but a perfect faith. The trials which make faith perfect should, therefore, be joyfully received.

The case of the Syrophenician woman is an admirable illustration of the probation of faith. The boon desired -- casting the demon out of her daughter -- was incapable of degrees. The prayer could not be partly answered in accordance with a defective faith. The evil spirit must retain his full possession, or be cast out entirely. Jesus, seeing the mother's faith inadequate, gave it a schooling. He gave it a probation. The first request is met by a chilling silence. But faith, though repulsed, gathers strength, leaps the barrier, and is all the stronger for the effort.

Jesus now sets a higher wall before her: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." She falters not for a moment, but falls on her knees and cries, "Lord, help me?" and over this wall her heaven aided faith bears her. With a higher barricade Jesus now hedges himself in, more formidable than an iron picket fence bristling ten feet in height. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs" (puppies, Greek). That fence will surely stop the impertinent Canaanite asking mercies uncovenanted.

But look! She vaults over this barrier at a single bound, clearing its topmost picket, on which she might have been impaled. "Truth, Lord, but the dogs eat of the crumbs." Nobly has she stood her probation. She has developed a faith sufficient to drive out the biggest demon outside of Pandemonium. What could

Jesus withhold from that faith? "Take the key to My omnipotence, and help yourself." Thus the expulsion of the "old man" from the heart is a whole blessing and requires a whole faith.

This, not being sufficient at justification, is put to school, is set at wrestling with difficulties and slaying Goliaths in its way. When the last one is laid in the dust, God will deem us competent to guard the priceless pearl of perfect love.

Moral.--

1. Look not at objections, but beyond them.
2. Surmounted difficulties are the stairway up to the Higher Life.
3. How shall I get faith? Exercise it.
4. When am I prepared to believe fully? When you have fully yielded all to Christ.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/daniel-steele/the-probation-for-holiness/>

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