

The Witness of the Spirit

by George Ridout

George Ridout's sermon emphasizes the critical importance of the Witness of the Spirit in the life of believers, urging a return to foundational doctrines of the early church.

Scripture: Matthew 5:14, John 14:26, Romans 8:15-16, Galatians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, Hebrews 10:14

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

George Ridout preaches about the importance of holding firmly to the foundation doctrines of the early Christian church in the midst of a falling away from Bible standards. He emphasizes the unchanging nature of God's covenant and the need for believers to maintain a steadfast attitude towards the doctrines taught in the Word. The sermon highlights the significance of seeking and obtaining a clear 'Witness of the Spirit' for both justification and sanctification, urging all Christians to press on after God until they receive this divine assurance.

Transcript

In these closing days of the Church Age, surrounded by a fearful "falling away" from Bible standards and the teaching of the early Christian church, we are prone to forget or neglect to hold rigidly to the foundation doctrines that were blessed to the fathers. We have an unchanging God, who says, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips;" and since he never changes his attitude toward truth, we must never let down, alter, or change our attitude toward the doctrines taught in his Word. All the doctrines that God blessed in the early Christian church are ours to keep and give out to this generation -- not one of them may we safely neglect! The Bible doctrine of the "Witness of the Spirit" was much emphasized in the early church, and all those seeking for either justification or sanctification were urged to press on after God until they received a clear "witness," and not to profess any state of grace without a definite "witness of the Spirit" that God had given them that grace.

If all pastors, evangelists, and Christian workers today would seek and obtain, for their own hearts, a clear "witness of the Spirit," and then insist, as was universally done in early Methodism, that all their converts seek until they received a definite "witness" to the grace they were seeking; and then also persuade the church members to go down before God through repentance, prayer, and fasting, until they obtained a clear "witness" to the grace of justification or sanctification. If the Christian world would do this, then the joy and freedom that characterized the early holiness movement would return; and what is of the greatest

importance, old-time conviction for sin, almost unknown today, would seize the sinner world. Dare we meet this blind generation, drunken on alcohol, saturated with nicotine, mad with lust, bewitched with worldly sports and pleasures, at the judgment, unless we, with burning hearts of love, have done our utmost to get them saved during their day of probation?

"The Witness of the Spirit," properly speaking, is not a "blessing" or a "feeling." It lies in the realm of fact. The Christian is "blessed" when on the mountain top, but the "blessing" disappears when he reaches the valley of sorrow and trial. But "The Witness of the Spirit" glows on through both experiences.

"Walking by faith" does not supplant the "Witness of the Spirit." We "walk by faith" in God's Word, in his goodness, in his faithfulness, in his providences, in his omniscience, in his lovingkindness, in his tender mercy, etc., and while we "walk" the "witness" assures our hearts that God is with us and that he will keep that which is committed to his care. We find the doctrines of the New Testament church clearly represented by the types of the Old Testament. Israel's miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage is a type of "justification." God, through Moses, commands Israel, many times, to observe the Passover by "an ordinance forever." Any Hebrew who would fail, only once, to observe the Passover was "cut off" from Israel. The Passover clearly is a type of our "justification." The continual and "forever" keeping of this type of our "justification", by God's command, reveals to us that the "Witness of the Spirit" to our "justification" is to be kept clear and continuous. Apollos was God's example of a New Testament, justified Christian. He was "fervent in spirit." God's standard for the grace and experience of justification is "fervent" (hot), or he would not have given us this example in his Word. Another type of the "The Witness of the Spirit" is found in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle. In Ex. 25:21, 22 God says, "And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark: and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat."

On the great Day of Atonement, the great high priest went into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled the blood seven times before the mercy seat, and God communed with him there. The Shekinah Glory glowed above the mercy seat, and God talked to the high priest there as long as Israel obeyed God. When Israel became disobedient, God withdrew his presence and, the Shekinah Glory no longer glowed above the mercy seat although the high priest would still go in and sprinkle the blood, there was no Shekinah Glory and no communion with God. As long as the Christian earnestly walks with God and carefully and fully obeys his voice, he will retain the "Witness" in his heart; but disobedience to God, in any measure causes the "Witness" to disappear. The high priest could have gone into the Holy of Holies as in other years and said, "God is here as he used to be, even though I do not see the Shekinah Glory nor hear him speak to me as he used to do. We are walking by faith now" -- but God was gone! When the "Witness" disappears from the heart of the child of God -- that holy glow that used to assure him that God was with him -- then God is gone! God, it seems, divides the world into three groups. He says, in substance, "I would that you (Laodiceans) belonged to the 'hot' group, or to the 'cold' group, but you belong to neither of these two groups; you belong to the third group, the 'lukewarm.' The lukewarm group are not sinners. They have spiritual heat and are living good lives, but they have lost that fervent "witness" that once glowed in their hearts -- they have let down a little. God is grieved and commands these good folks to "repent" or he will remove his presence from them entirely. It is a good rule to listen to and obey the message that comes from God's messengers whom he blesses.

The early Methodists and some in other groups were blessed of God in that early day. The doctrines taught by the early holiness leaders are safe because God blessed those doctrines, and holy lives and great genuine revivals resulted. In this book you will be listening to the messages from some of the

greatest men of God that this world has had since Pentecost, on a most vital subject -- "The Witness of the Spirit." The church of God stands or falls according to its acceptance or rejection of this doctrine. The holiness movement is at the crossroads -- or almost past it; but will it swing back to the teaching and vital doctrines that God blessed when taught by the fathers? Will the holiness movement "ask for the old paths .and walk therein"? The aim of this book is to give only enough from the sermons and testimonies of the early holiness leaders to make plain the Bible teaching on this doctrine. If their attitude seems too strong on vital salvation and too hard to measure to, compare it with the Bible, not with modern standards in the Laodicean church. All the great holiness leaders of the early Methodists believed and taught that all Christians received and kept a clear "Witness." Bishop R. S. Foster, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was a great soul winner, preacher and writer.

The following is from his great book, Christian Purity. Writing to regenerated Christians, he says, "They cannot deny, that though they still feel power to believe in Christ, and love God, and though his Spirit still witnesses with their spirit that they are children of God, yet they feel in themselves sometimes pride or self-will." Writing on the subject, "Means for the Attainment of Sanctification," he says, "In this connection there is unfortunate, and injurious advice sometimes given, in some such language as the following: 'Bring your all and lay it on God's altar; believe it is accepted; and though you may have no direct witness, no special sensible change, do not doubt but it is done; the altar sanctifieth the gift; whatsoever toucheth the altar is holy,' and much more of this kind. We must believe that such instructions tend to delusion, and have been the fruitful source of many spurious though sincere professions. It is well, nay, it is indispensable to make an entire surrender of all to God; and when this is done, God will acknowledge it by sending the witness of his acceptance;' but let no one, at his peril, conclude that he has made this surrender, and is consequently sanctified, without the requisite "witness:" he will only deceive himself, and receive no benefit. His faith, however strong, being false, will do him no good. It is the Spirit that sanctifies, and he sanctifies through faith -- faith not in any act of ours, but faith in God; and when by faith he sanctifies, he will impart the "witness." "It is meet, when we have consecrated our all as well as we can, that we should trust in God, not in our act, but in God; not that he has sanctified, because we have consecrated ourselves, but that he will accept the consecration and both sanctify and send us the "witness."

Until the witness comes, we will not say we are entirely sanctified. We will not even 'believe we are; we will look to be, and wait in expectation until we are, and then we will rest in God aye, we will rest while we wait in the faith that it shall be done. "Religious experience is authenticated to the mind in two modes; First, inwardly, by the Witness of the Divine Spirit, conjointly with our own spirit; Second, outwardly, by the external manifestations the fruits of the life. "Let us now consider some of the evidences by which one may conclude himself to have attained the grace of holiness. "When entire sanctification takes place, it will be evidenced directly and indirectly. "Directly, by the joint witness of God's Spirit with our spirits that the work is done. Where this witness is given, it is conclusive and complete. "When it is certain God's Spirit attests a work, that attestation needs no corroboration. The doctrine of the direct witness of the Holy Spirit conjointly with our spirit needs no vindication here, it is clearly a Bible doctrine.

'We know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.'

'The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.'

'We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we may know the things that are freely given us of God.'

'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.'

'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of love, and of power, and of a sound mind.'

'There is no dispute as to the fact, that the passages cited teach the doctrine of 'The Witness of the Spirit.'

The method of the Spirit's witness we do not conceive to be by sensible signs. It may be accompanied by such, but is not ordinarily; not by an audible voice, not by a visible manifestation, not by a sensible touch, not by anything of this kind: and yet the witness is direct and assured, as much as though accompanied with outward manifestations. It is a consciousness wrought in the soul that a change is affected.

"We are conscious, or by some means assured, that such an impression is made, and made by the divine Spirit, and though we cannot tell how, yet the soul knows, beyond a doubt, that the impression is from God. Thus God's Spirit, conjointly with ours, attests the change; and in their combined testimony thus rendered, without any external signs, the soul reposes with the consciousness of entire certainty.

"But may one rely on the witness here indicated? Is there no great probability of mistake?

"Take the blind man, whose eyes have been sealed in darkness for a lifetime, whose sightless balls have rolled in rayless night; who, amid outward things, has groped his cheerless way for half a century, ever wondering what they were, what their appearance, what the beauties of color and form of which others spoke: take him out amid the splendors of the starlit sky, where millions of resplendent worlds bewilder the gaze; or lead him to the forest, or the mountain, or the river, or the ocean; or to a garden of flowers, or galleries of art; suddenly lift the veil: will he know the change? Open, among the ravishing strains of a cathedral choir, the ears of one born deaf; will he know it? Quiet the sufferings of the child of affliction, who has spent sleepless nights of pain; bring glad tidings to the broken heart; pour joy into the bosom filled with sorrow; hush the storm to the tempest-beaten voyager; lift the burden from the shoulders of the fainting; will they know it? And shall it not be known when the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are become the children of God when the heart that was broken is bound up? when the heart that was dead is made alive? when the heart that fainted under the burden of sin, and trembled at the impending wrath of God, is lifted up, and beholds, by faith, a smiling Savior? If the watcher knows when midnight is past, the sailor when the tempest subsides, surely the soul shall know when the morning of the peace breaketh, and the storm of guilt is hushed."

How shall one discriminate between the witness of the Spirit in justification and entire sanctification? The difference in the Spirit's witness in the work of justification and entire sanctification is not in the manner so much as the thing witnessed to. It is the same Spirit; the phenomena are the same, but the testimony is to different facts, and consequently differs.

"When one is pardoned, the testimony is to precisely that fact, that he is pardoned, made alive to God; but it is not that he is entirely sanctified. When he is entirely sanctified, the same Spirit bears witness again, just as he did before, but now it is to another fact, not that he is pardoned, but that he is entirely sanctified. Thus the Spirit witnesses with our spirits to our religious state whatever it may be. Nor can it be shown that his witness in the one case is either more comprehensible or more important than in the other.

"When God passes sentence of pardon on the soul of man, he witnesses to the fact, and the pardoned soul receives the testimony, but it has no way of explaining how. When he empties the soul of sin, and fills it with his own fullness of love, again he imparts assurance of the fact, but again the soul cannot tell how it

receives the testimony. It knows it is so. In each he will find, perhaps, that no words can advance beyond the inspired formula: 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' -- Romans 8:16."

Bishop Foster now considers the results of having entered into the experience of entire sanctification. "Attending this wonderful faith is an immediate assurance wrought as above described, by the Divine Spirit, and attested by the soul, that sin is all gone and the soul is purified. This assurance amounts to entire certainty in the conviction of the soul enjoying it. There follows, in some instances, great joy and ecstasy. Ordinarily the soul at this crisis is filled with peace rather than joy; simple rest, tranquillity, a sense of complete satisfaction.

"All this is accompanied with a sense of the Divine presence; of communion with God, and intimacy.... oneness . . . peculiar to this grace; a feeling that God is all in all, and calm repose upon him . . . and now the soul being brought into this sense of union and communion with God, its life will be in him, and this will be evidenced further by its fruits Sanctification is evidenced by its fruits. 'By their fruits ye shall know them' is a good rule; and we might, with great propriety, " add, by your fruits ye shall know yourselves. There are certain fruits which proceed from sanctification, which must exist where that grace itself exists, as evidence of its presence By fruits of sanctification we mean both certain states of experience and certain products of these states; . . . fruits manifested in the inner man, and fruits manifested in the outer man.

"By what 'fruit of the Spirit' may we 'know that we are of God'? By love, joy, peace always abiding; by invariable long-suffering, patience, resignation; by gentleness, triumphing over all provocation; by goodness, mildness, sweetness, tenderness of spirit; by fidelity, simplicity, godly sincerity; by meekness, calmness, evenness of spirit; by temperance, not only in food and sleep, but in all things natural and spiritual.

"Entire sanctification is a state of absolute freedom from sin, properly so called, as above described . . . Any sin, whether of the motive, of the will, of the desire, of the life, negatives its existence. Either it must be admitted that it is possible to men to be without sin and to live without it, or the doctrine of entire sanctification must be surrendered; for sin cannot be a consistent element of entire sanctification.

"Are your motives pure? Your volitions in harmony with the will of God?" Your desires single? Your acts holy? "Your tempers. How are they? Do you become impatient under trial; fretful, when chided or crossed; angry, revengeful, when injured; vain, when flattered; proud, when prospered; complaining when chastened; unbelieving, when seemingly forsaken; unkind, when neglected? Are you subject to discontent, to ambition, to selfishness? Are you worldly? covetous of riches, of vain pomp and parade, of indulgence, of honor, of ease? Are you unfeeling, contemptuous of others, seeking your own, boasters, proud, lovers of your own selves? Beware! These are sediments of the old nature! Nay, if they exist in you, in however small degree, they are demonstrative that the old man of sin is not dead.

"It is a sad mistake if you detect these evils within and yet close your eyes to them and continue to make profession of holiness. These are not infirmities; they are indications of want of grace. Remember that secret sins . . . sins unknown to all without . . . sins of imagination, of the thought, of the heart. ... sins of desire and affection are sins Your duties. How, with regard to these? Do you delight in them? Are they your pleasure? Do they constitute your chief joy? When God evidently calls, do you go willingly though it be through the furnace, through persecutions, through losses, reproaches; sorrows? In the midst of all, is God your joy and rejoicing, and can you say, 'The will of God be done'? ... Does he find in you no

murmuring, no drawing back, no displeasure; but on the contrary, submission and joy?

"Your experience. How upon this point? Have you an unwavering confidence in God? Is your peace of mind full? Have you joy in the Holy Ghost? Do you have free communion with God? Do you realize within a consciousness of purity? Though, without, there be tempest or calm, sorrow or joy, trial or triumph, do you still, in every case, find a full communion between your soul and the Divine Spirit? By this we do not mean that you are always to be happy, ecstatic; but always to realize union with God, whether you sorrow or rejoice. Do you rejoice in tribulation?

"Are you entirely the Lord's? . . . Have you anything which you do not hold in God? Are you separate from him at any point? Are you opposed to him in anything? Are your actions and enjoyments all in union with him? In your work, in your rest, in your indulgences, in your denials, in your affections, in your volitions, in your associations, in your endeavors, are you always, everywhere, by intention and effort, in union with God?

"If to the above questions you can with honesty return a favorable answer, then you may conclude that you are one with the Lord, that you are entirely sanctified. These are severe tests, but they are not more searching than truth and honesty require. If you shrink from the ordeal, you furnish the best proof that you are cherishing delusion as to this high state. . . . Only be faithful to yourself and allow no temporizing, no tenderness toward real faults, and all will yet be well. Remember how great a thing you aspire to; to be holy; to be holy in a sinful world, among sinful men, with innumerable infirmities and temptations to hinder and harass you. Remember, too, that while you need evidence that will be sufficient to support such a profession to your own satisfaction, you must also furnish the proof of the genuineness thereof to others. This you are morally bound to do. In the world, you live above the world; a man, you bear in your bosom an indwelling God; alive, you are dead; and dead, you are alive. Sublime privilege! Glorious state! The life of heaven infused into a soul upon earth! Well may you rejoice, for great is your reward in heaven, yea, upon the earth. Even now you have the foretaste of the feast ineffable; the first-fruits of the glorious harvest of immortal joys."

The following quotations are from the "Works of John Wesley, Vol. 1," a sermon on the subject, "The Witness of the Spirit." -- Rom. 8:16.

"But I contend not (for a certain text of scripture), seeing so many other texts, with the experience of all real Christians, sufficiently evince that there is in every, believer, both the testimony of God's Spirit, and the testimony of his own that he is a child of God

"The manner how the divine testimony is manifested to the heart, I do not take upon me to explain..... But the fact we know, namely, that the Spirit of God does give a believer such a testimony of his adoption, that while it is present to the soul, he can no more doubt the reality of his sonship, than he can doubt the shining of the sun, while he stands in the full blaze of its beams.

"How this joint testimony of God's Spirit and our spirit may be clearly and solidly distinguished from the presumption of a natural mind, and from the delusion of the devil, is the next thing to be considered. And it highly imports all who desire the salvation of God, to consider it with the deepest attention, as they would not deceive their own souls. An error in this is generally observed to have the most fatal consequences: the rather, because he that errs seldom discovers his mistake, till it is too late to remedy it.

"How then may the real testimony of the Spirit with our spirit be distinguished from this damning presumption? I answer, the holy scriptures abound with marks, whereby the one may be distinguished from the other. They describe in the plainest manner the circumstances which go before, which accompany, and which follow, the true, genuine testimony of the Spirit of God with the spirit of a believer. For instance, the scripture describes repentance, or conviction of sin, as constantly going before this witness of pardon. 'Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.'

"The testimony now under consideration is given by the Spirit of God to and with our spirit. He is the person testifying. What he testifies to us is, that we are children of God. The immediate result of this testimony is the fruit of the Spirit: namely, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness. And without these the testimony itself cannot continue. For it is inevitably destroyed, not only by the commission of any outward sin, or the omission of known duty, but by giving way to any inward sin: in a word, by whatever grieves the Holy Spirit of God.

"By the testimony of the Spirit, I mean an inward impression of the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately, and directly, witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God, that Jesus Christ had loved me, and given himself for me. That all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.

"He so works upon the soul by his immediate influence, and by a strong, though inexplicable operation, that the stormy wind and troubled waves subside, and there is a sweet calm: the heart resting as in the arms of Jesus, and the sinner being clearly satisfied, that God is reconciled, that all his iniquities are forgiven, and his sins covered.

"Ye have received, not the spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

"Because ye are sons (Gal. 4:6), God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.'

"And here comes in, to confirm this scriptural doctrine, the experience of the children of God: the experience not of two or three, not of a few, but of a great multitude which no man can number. It has been confirmed, both in this and in all ages by a cloud of living and dying witnesses. The Spirit itself bore witness to my spirit that I was a child of God, gave me an evidence hereof, and I immediately cried, Abba, Father.

"Every one, therefore, who denies the existence of such a testimony, does in effect deny justification by faith.

"To secure us from delusion, God gives us two witnesses that we are his children. And this they testify conjointly. And while they are joined, we cannot be deluded: their testimony can be depended on. They are fit to be trusted in the highest degree, and need nothing else to prove what they assert.

"By two witnesses shall every word be established. And when the Spirit witnesses with our spirit, as God designs it to do, then it fully proves that we are children of God.

"The true witness of the Spirit is known by its fruit; love, peace, joy; not indeed preceding, but following it

"The Spirit of God witnessing with our spirit does secure us from all delusion: and lastly, we are all liable to trials, wherein the testimony of our own spirit is not sufficient; wherein nothing less than the direct

testimony of God's Spirit can assure us that we are his children.

"Two inferences may be drawn from the whole. The first: Let none ever presume to rest, in any supposed testimony of the Spirit, which is separate from the fruit of it. If the Spirit of God does really testify that we are children of God, the immediate consequence will be the fruit of the Spirit, even love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance. And however this fruit may be clouded for a while, during the time of strong temptation, so it does not appear to the tempted person, while Satan is sifting him as wheat, yet the substantial part of it remains, even under the thickest cloud. The second inference is: Let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness."

The book, A Memoir Of Mr. William Carvosso, has blessed untold thousands. Mr. Carvosso was a class leader for sixty years in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Describing his conversion, he says,

"The very moment I formed this resolution (to never cease crying to God for mercy), Christ appeared within, and God pardoned all my sins, and set my soul at liberty. The Spirit itself now bore witness with my spirit that I was a child of God. This was about nine o'clock at night, May 7, 1771; and never shall I forget that happy hour."

Mr. Carvosso retained this clear "Witness" through his long life. He was a successful soul winner. It seems he had almost a continuous revival wherever he traveled in England. His converts always received a clear "Witness" to the work God did for them. Following are extracts from his diary: Carvosso, beginning to realize his need of holiness, says, "My inward nature appeared so black and sinful, that I felt it impossible to rest in that state. Some, perhaps, will imagine that this may have arisen from the want of the knowledge of forgiveness. That could not be the case, for I never had one doubt of my acceptance; the witness was so clear that Satan himself knew it was in vain to attack me from that quarter. I had kept in remembrance: "The blessed hour when from above, I first received the pledge of love."

Carvosso testified that God had enabled him to keep a clear and continuous "Witness of the Spirit" to his justification from the time of his conversion to his entire sanctification. Carvosso, describing his sanctification, after some time of earnest seeking, says, "Just at that moment a heavenly influence filled the room; and no sooner had I uttered or spoken the words from my heart, 'I shall have the blessing now,' than refining fire went 'through my heart illuminated my soul scattered its life through every part, and sanctified the whole.' I then received the full Witness of the Spirit that the blood of Jesus had cleansed me from all sin."

Carvosso relates the following experience that God had given him about thirty years previous: "Many years before, perhaps not fewer than thirty, I was sealed by the Spirit in a somewhat similar manner. While walking one day between Mousehole and Newlyn, I was drawn to turn aside from the public road and under the canopy of heaven kneel down to prayer. I had not long been engaged with God, before I was so visited from above, and overpowered by the divine glory, that my shouting could be heard at a distance . Giving glory to my God, I can say to the present moment, I feel the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth me from all sin."

He testifies that the "Witness" of his cleansing had been kept clear for these thirty years. He says, "Several who had, through unbelief, lost the Witness of Sanctification, were enabled again to lay hold on to the blessing." Again he says, "I have the 'testimony of my own conscience and the Witness of the Spirit, that I am wholly and unreservedly his."

This testimony was given forty-nine years after his conversion, May 7, 1820, he says, "Yes, on this day I believed with my heart unto righteousness; on this day I was justified by faith and had peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: on this day I received the Spirit of adoption, and was enabled to say, 'Abba, Father'; on this day my name was written in heaven. "

At Mr. K's, I one day met with two who were earnestly longing to be delivered from the plague of an evil heart of unbelief . . . and, blessed be his holy name, before we parted, they both received the witness that they were saved from sin. "My mind has recently been pained to meet with so many who have long been professors of religion, and still know nothing of their interest in Christ. Of justification by faith, and the Witness of the Spirit, they seem just as ignorant as if they had never heard a gospel sermon in their lives.

"This day I unexpectedly met with a Christian friend from a neighboring society. I felt our conversation on the things of God was particularly profitable. It turned on the necessity of our retaining a clear witness of perfect love, not only on account of our own happiness, but of our usefulness also.' "This blessed witness of the Spirit, both in justification and sanctification, is what I see the necessity of more than ever. For my own part, I do not see what progress professors of religion can make without this. Did I say religion? Can they be deemed the possessors of true religion at all till they so believe as to have the Witness in themselves? Till they have this gospel faith, they can only be denominated 'seekers of religion.' It is extremely painful for me to reflect on the multitudes who are stopping short of their inestimable privilege.

"This morning I have felt an increased vigor of spirit, and a fresh resolution to devote myself more fully unto the Lord, and to urge on others the great necessity of their receiving and retaining the Witness of the Spirit. What I mean by the Witness of the Spirit, Mr. Wesley very clearly explains in his excellent sermon of this subject. 'The testimony of the spirit,' says he, 'is an inward impression on the soul whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that my sins are blotted out and that I, even I, am a child of God'."

Carvosso, like all the spiritual leaders in the early holiness movement, insisted that all the converts receive clear "Witness of the Spirit" to their pardon and that they keep that "Witness" clear until they received the grace of entire sanctification; their after the destruction of carnality, the "Witness" thereto must be kept inviolate until their translation to heaven. If they lost the "Witness" they were backslidden; if they had never received a "Witness," they were not converted at all.

"Today I had a conversation with one of the members of our society, on the subject of 'Witness of the Spirit.' Like too many others, he was resting short of this privilege. Finding he had not read Mr. Wesley's sermons on this subject, I earnestly requested him to procure and read them as soon as possible. "Several who had lost the 'Witness of the Spirit, or let slip the blessing of full salvation, were encouraged to again lay hold on Christ for a supply of all their wants. "Soon he was enabled to believe with his heart unto righteousness and with his mouth he made confession unto salvation. He received the inward witness, and testified that God, for Christ's sake, had pardoned all his sins.

"Our privilege is to enter now into the enjoyment of the salvation we need: and, having once apprehended, never to lose it but hold it fast unto the end." Speaking of the conversion of his grandson, he says, "He did not long groan under the burden of guilt, and his evidence of pardon and adoption was very clear."

William Carvosso died in great triumph in his eighty-fifth year. He kept a clear "Witness" to the hour of his translation and God made him a soul winner to the last. Rev. Seth C. Rees, the great warrior, saint and soul winner of the last generation, in his book, "The Ideal Pentecostal Church," says, "The Witness of the

Holy Spirit will let us know it, when we are really regenerated; and so satisfactory is this 'Witness' to him who receives it that he would not thank a committee from the upper skies to appear and confirm it."

Again he says, "Thousands say they have taken Christ by faith, but that they never had a clear witness of the Spirit to their pardon. What a farce!" Rev. B. Carradine says, "Some tell us that there is no divine inward testimony to the fact of sanctification. Paul says (Heb. 10:14, 15), 'He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.' Let no seeker cease his importunities and waiting on God until he obtains the Witness of the Spirit to his sanctification. With the Witness comes perfect assurance of faith, unruffled tranquillity of mind, abiding light and joy in the heart, steadfastness of life, and great boldness and power in the Gospel. He that impresses a man to preach, that testifies to a man that he is converted, can he not let a man know when he is sanctified? I knew I was sanctified, just as I knew fifteen years before that I was converted He, the Holy Ghost, bore witness clearly, unmistakably and powerfully to his own work; and, although months have passed away since that blessed morning, yet the Witness of the Holy Spirit to the work has never left me for a moment."

Rev. William Bramwell, a great soul winner and one of Wesley's preachers, testifies: "The Lord, for whom I had waited, came suddenly to the temple of my heart, and I had an immediate evidence that this was the blessing I had been for some time seeking. My soul was all wonder, love and praise. It is now about twenty-six years ago. I have been kept by his power. Mrs. Jonathan Edwards (wife of the great pioneer preacher) gives her experience in these glowing words: "So conscious was I of the joyful presence of the Holy Spirit that I could scarcely refrain from leaping with transports of joy. My soul was filled and overwhelmed with light and love and joy in the Holy Ghost, and seemed just ready to go away from the body."

Dr. Daniel Steele, relating his experience, writes: "Very suddenly, after about three weeks of diligent search, the Comforter came with power and great joy to my heart. He took my feet out of the realm of doubt and weakness, and planted them forever on the Rock of assurance and strength . . . in the language of Dr. Payson I daily exclaim, 'O that I had known this twenty years ago!'"

Bishop Foster writes of his experience thus: "The Spirit seemed to lead me into the innermost sanctuary of my soul. . . . into the chambers where I had before discovered such defilement..., and showed me that all was cleansed; that the corruptions which had given me such distress were dead taken away. . . . that not one of them remained. I felt the truth of the witness; it was so; I was conscious of it; as conscious of it as I had been of my conversion."

Rev. Benjamin Abbott, one of the early Methodist sons of thunder.... a great soul winner and powerful preacher, concerning his sanctification, wrote: "In three days God gave me a full assurance that he had sanctified me, soul and body. I found it day by day manifested to my soul by the Witness of the Spirit." Adam Clarke, the great Bible commentator of Methodism, commenting on the "Witness of the Spirit," Rom. 8:16, says: "If we take care to walk with God, and not grieve the Holy Spirit, we shall have an abiding testimony (witness); and while we continue faithful to our adopting Father, the Spirit that witnesses to that adoption, will continue to witness it."

Rev. Alfred Cookman, the eminent saint and preacher of Methodism, testified, "The evidence in my case was as clear and indubitable as the witness of sonship received at the time of my adoption into the family of heaven. Oh, it was glorious, divinely glorious! I could not doubt it. Need I say that the experience of sanctification inaugurated a new epoch in my religious life? Oh, what blessed rest in Jesus! What an

abiding experience of purity through the blood of the Lamb!"

Rev. Alfred Cookman died in great triumph, exclaiming: "I am sweeping through the gates, washed in the blood of the Lamb." All the great spiritual leaders of early Methodism and the holiness movement believed in, experienced, taught, and insisted on their converts receiving the "Witness of the Spirit" in both justification and sanctification. They, too, recognized that any professor of religion who had lost the "Witness" as being in a backslidden state. They taught that no one has a right to expect to have an entrance into the gates of pearl who, here in this life, fails to seek, obtain and keep a clear, continuous, definite and glowing "Witness of the Spirit" to the fact of iniquities forgiven and a heart purified from sin. "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Jesus asks. There will be, without a doubt, forms of faith, letter-of-the-law followers, on the earth when he comes; but the "faith" that Jesus asks about is a vital faith, a faith that transforms sinners into saints, that removes the mountains of sin, that purifies the heart, that turns lethargy and ease into passion, that makes soldiers out of cowards; that makes Christians to love like John, be constrained like Paul, and fervent like Apollos: saints out of whose souls pour rivers of living water into the barren deserts of a sinful world. Paul, the apostle, writing to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2: 2-3) declares that "the day of Christ shall not come except there come a falling away first." We believe the "falling away" period is now upon us. Holiness, in many places, is just living a real good life -- which is far below Bible justification. "Lukewarm" folks, who need repentance to get back to a Bible experience of justification, have spiritual heat and they are living wonderful lives. They are busy in the work of the church, but God will reject them in the judgment. The Bride of Christ, looking and waiting for His return, is described in song as, "With burning hearts are waiting For that meeting in the air." Comparatively few professors keep a clear and continuous "witness of the Spirit." It seems that few appreciate the "witness," so it soon disappears from their hearts. They are deluded into thinking that they are "walking by faith" after they have let the "witness" slip away.

John Wesley says, "Some have the testimony both of their justification and sanctification, without any intermission at all, which, I presume, more might have did they walk humbly and closely with God." In examining many that professed entire sanctification, Mr. Wesley says they testified to the following: "(1) That they felt no inward sin, and, to the best of their knowledge, commit no outward sin; (2) that they see and love God every moment, and pray, rejoice, give thanks evermore; (3) that they have constantly as clear a witness from God of sanctification as they have of justification. Now in this I do rejoice, and will rejoice, call it what you please". (Works, Volume IV, page 56.)

Mr. Wesley says, "I rode to Derry-Anvil, where are some of the liveliest Christians I have seen in the kingdom. Eight of them I examined closely, who testified that they had never lost the witness, nor felt any decay since the hour they were perfected in love". (Journal, June, 1773.) Quoting again from Mr. Wesley's Journal, "I met such a select society (at Whitby) as I have not seen since I left London. They were about forty, of whom I did not find one who had not a clear witness of being saved from sin". (Journal, 1784) Many anxious eyes are watching the Christians, and for them to fall or waver might mean eternal loss to the watchers! "Ye are the light of the world," said Jesus. We cannot afford to lose the "fervent" experience God gave us at the beginning of our Christian life and when He purified our hearts. It is a great calamity and disappointment to the sinner when a Christian cools off and lets down. The following chapter is written for the purpose of aiding Christians to continue to be "the light of the world" through a glowing and continuous experience of perfect love.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/george-ridout/the-witness-of-the-spirit/>

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