

Causes of Confusion

by Harmon A. Baldwin

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and preaching on holiness, and the need to avoid confusion in our understanding of this subject.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, James 1:12, 1 Peter 1:7

Topics: "Trials And Temptations", "Sanctification"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches on the importance of enduring trials and temptations, emphasizing that the trial of our faith is more precious than gold, leading to a reward for firmness under temptation. He highlights the need for definite preaching and seeking of holiness, focusing on the practical manifestations of the experience in our lives rather than dry doctrinal treatises. Baldwin encourages earnest study of the Word of God and personal experience with the Holy Spirit as the ultimate teachers of sanctification, cautioning against exaggerated statements that may lead to confusion.

Transcript

We are in the habit of saying that the present world is a place of trial. If this is true, and there is no doubt that it is, then there must be enough lack of comprehension to cause at least some degree of uncertainty or there would be no need of faith, our patience would never be exercised, and, as for consequence, there could be no reward for firmness under temptation. The trial of your faith is much more precious than gold. Blessed is he that endureth temptation.

When we say "uncertainty" we do not mean to cast any cloud around the witness of the Spirit, for this is God-given and positive. But the uncertainty arises from the peculiar feelings, movements, aversions, temptations, suggestions, and erroneous standards of measurement which are inseparable from us during our earthly sojourn. If all of these things could be immediately and unerringly analyzed on every occasion, one can readily see that the soul would become infallible, and trial would be a thing of the past.

Because we fail to preach definitely and intelligently on the subject of holiness we leave people in darkness and confusion. Notwithstanding our strong professions, yet it remains a fact that the doctrine of holiness is not emphasized as strongly as it should be; very few ever expound the doctrine in a series of sermons; more mention it often in the course of their public ministrations, but, sad to say, we have heard of some who never preach definitely on the experience or insist on its necessity. Definite preaching should cause definite seeking, and definite seeking should produce definite results.

Then some who do preach holiness seldom, or never, bear down on the experimental side of the question, but instead advance dry doctrinal treatises. The common people care little for theological definitions, but they want to know concerning the practical manifestations of the experience in their own lives. Doctrinal definitions are at times a necessity, but if they are not carefully worded and properly explained, they confuse more than enlighten. Theology and experience are two different things, and very often the Holy Ghost ignores all our wise doctrinal theories and cuts cross lots to sanctify a soul. The old lady cried, "O Lord, take the grumble and growl out of my heart." And the Lord did it.

Again, we would state that if dry theological definitions are unsatisfactory, on the other hand, dry and stereotyped experimental definitions are even more unsatisfactory and confusing. The thing that is meat for one is poison for another. To illustrate: It is stated, without any explanation, that trifling and jesting are not compatible with the highest degree of grace. This is true -- but, one person who has been devil-driven because he smiles at something ludicrous, or because some word has escaped that appears ludicrous, is immediately cast down and almost thrown into despair; to this man the undefined truth is poison. On the other hand, the man who is guilty of transgression along these lines should be warned by the same truth and caused to amend; it is his food.

Then we sometimes fear that there is a lack of earnest, conscientious study of this all-important subject by the prospective teacher. Good books, such as, Wood's Perfect Love, Wesley's Christian Perfection and Fletcher's Christian Perfection are helpful, but, above all we would emphasize the Word of God, and that learning which comes alone through actual contact with the cleansing blood, diligent prayer, and personal observation of the things of the Spirit. God can teach you more in five minutes than you can get out of the best books written, after the most careful and arduous study. Then draw close to the Holy Ghost, the mighty Teacher, and learn of Him; He will guide you into all truth.

Even such great teachers as Wesley, Fletcher and Clarke do not always adequately define some of the most essential points of experience, and after the most diligent study we feel dissatisfied because of their indefiniteness. Just two examples: Wesley says:

1. "One commends me. Here is a temptation to pride. But instantly my soul is humbled before God. And I feel no pride; of which I am as sure as that pride is not humility."

Is this always the case? We think not, for if this humbling of the soul always followed as definitely as is here supposed there would be no real temptation to pride. We have heard three classes of testimonies: (1.) That the soul was immediately humbled, as Wesley says. (2.) That there was no conscious response to the suggestion, but the soul continued in quiet indifference. (3.) Some have testified to a great inward struggle before the enemy was conquered. Not a struggle against enemies in the soul, but against the pressure of the enemy from the outside. All these are consistent with the highest degree of grace.

2. "A man strikes me. Here is a temptation to anger. But my heart overflows with love. And I feel no anger at all, of which I can be sure as that love and anger are not the same."

Again we ask, Is this always true in practical life? To be sure there will be no anger or resentment, if the heart is clean, but there may be a feeling of grief or of physical suffering, that, for the moment, may be so prominent as to hide the natural overflowing of love for the offender.

One great source of confusion is found in the exaggerated statements of teachers as to the power and character of the grace of entire sanctification. With an honest fear of destroying the foundation of the

experience, men are led to make strong claims which neither they nor their hearers ever will fulfill. Then, again, these statements are made to stir people to action. The plain truth concerning holiness should be sufficient to move any honest soul to seeking, and anything which falls short or overreaches the truth is not the truth, no matter how great the pretensions.

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