

Mental Infirmities

by Harmon A. Baldwin

A sanctified personality is one that is governed by the will of God and tends to the edification of those around.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:7, Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:18, Galatians 5:22, James 4:12

Topics: "Holiness", "Sanctification"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin delves into the uniqueness of individuals in terms of personality, individuality, oddities, and temperamental differences, emphasizing that God has created each person distinctively. He explores how holiness does not eradicate natural dispositions but sanctifies them for God's use, highlighting the importance of embracing one's individuality for effective service. Baldwin also addresses the impact of education, environment, and judgment on holiness, urging believers to shine wherever they are placed and to refrain from passing harsh judgment on others.

Transcript

II. Mental Infirmities and Varying Dispositions of Holiness Professors. It is to be doubted if God ever made two persons exactly alike, either in appearance or mental characteristics. These differences often lie in the varying strength of our good points or the extent of our weaknesses. In what ways do men differ, and how far are these differences consistent with holiness of heart? This method of examining the strength and weakness of holy men is different from the course usually pursued in such investigations. But possibly by putting the truth in this new way it may help to a clear understanding of conditions.

1. Differences in personality. Personality is defined thus: "The attributes, taken collectively, that make up the character and nature of an individual; that which distinguishes and characterizes a person."

Modern society demands that men behave themselves by set rules, called the rules of etiquette. By following these rules the real man is often so hidden under their set forms that his genuine personality seldom comes to the surface. There is danger that such practices will make a person artificial to the extent of hypocrisy.

In their methods of administering truth preachers so often cut after the same pattern that one who leaves the rut and follows the course God has marked out for him is considered a curiosity. By following his God-given methods, or possibly we should say, the methods for which God has naturally fitted him, his life becomes so Spirit-anointed that it is a rebuke to those who possess nothing original.

A sanctified personality enables a man to fill the special place for which the wisdom of the all-wise Creator has fitted him, and when he consents to submerge his own personality in the generalities of social, religious or denominational etiquette he has consented to his own elimination as a factor in God's hands for bringing special things to pass, and to the extent he thus loses his personality he loses his power to do all the good he should do, and this all comes as a result of the fact that he has gotten out of God's order, -- and become common.

Men speak of pleasing and unpleasing, of strong and weak personalities. These discriminations only express the view-point of the individual who sits as a judge, and are not a certain criterion, neither are they of necessity a correct estimate of a man as God measures him. The strong man in God's sight may be the despised of earth, and the weak man in God's sight may be the world's hero. The wise man says that "he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." The man who takes a city is earth's hero, -- the man who rules his spirit is heaven's hero. Pride and humility, haughtiness and lowliness!

The manifestations of one's personal characteristics are consistent with holiness in so far as they are governed by the will of God, and most tend to the edification of those around. In every place where we learn that these ends are not gained we should seek to correct our methods, and, as far as possible, conform them to the divine plan for us. That even in the holy man the manifestations of strictly personal characteristics must at times be modified arises from the degenerating effects of forgiven and cleansed sin, which effects still remain in the very make-up of our beings. No man should be condemned for his unconscious and involuntary personality, but he should be taught to so govern his life as to please even his neighbor as far as possible to edification and the glory of God. No man, and no set of men, have a right to condemn any other man because he is himself, if he is sanctified and sincerely seeks the glory of God.

"There's so much good in the most of us,

And so much bad in the best of us,

That it hardly behooves any of us

To talk about the rest of us."

2. Differences in individuality. The individuality of a man is the sum total of those characteristics which distinguish him from every other man, not simply as a separate person, but as marking him as different from other men. Some people have a very marked individuality, while others are scarcely distinguishable from the crowd around them. God gives every man naturally a certain degree of individuality, but most men yield themselves so thoroughly to the leading of others that they lose about all personal initiative and become so near nothing, that, when they are gone, the best we can do is to say with Cowper that they have eaten up all their bread.

It is men of strongly manifest individuality who have moved the world and the church. As examples of the former we note Napoleon, Washington and Lincoln, and of the latter Paul, Luther and Wesley.

The weak points in a strong man are more liable to be copied than the strong ones, and here is a great danger. We have known of men who, by the exercise of their strong personality, have held others to the rigid line of their own ideas, with the unhappy result that when they withdrew their restraining hand their followers obeyed them no more and went their own way. The weakness in all this lies in the fact that the leader made the mistake of thinking that he must govern and give light by the pressure of his own spirit,

and thus assumed prerogatives which belong to the Spirit of God alone. Those who are converted and held by the influence of the presence of the pastor or evangelist are very apt to be only wood, hay and stubble, while those who are kept by the power of God are gold, silver and precious stones.

God wants men of strong individuality, but He wants them consecrated to Him. But here is the fly in the ointment: it is impossible to find a strong man without a weakness, and while some follow him blindly, faults and all, others make the mistake of making him an offender for a word, and forget his strength. These last set to throwing stones, and forget that they themselves live in glass houses. Let him that is without fault cast the first stone.

"What are another's faults to me?

I'm not a vulture's bill

To pick at every flaw I see

And make it wider still;

It's enough for me to know

I've follies of my own,

And on myself that care bestow,

And let my friends alone."

3. Oddities and Eccentricities of Holiness Professors. There is not a more original lot of people on the face of the earth than those who are entirely sanctified. When men throw off the restraint of custom their own native characteristics come to the surface, and people call them odd and eccentric. "Surely," they say, "this is a peculiar people." God can use a man the way He made him to much better advantage than when his own individualism -- personal independence of action -- or eccentricities, if you wish to call them by that name, are buried under a flood of generalities.

Perhaps it is true that every man has some oddity or eccentricity in his make-up. He may not know it, but his friends and his enemies do, and if they would be real honest they could tell him things that would surprise him. These peculiarities are so many proofs that we live in earthen vessels, and that any power we may have is of God and not of ourselves. Some would reject a man because of some real or fancied peculiarity. What a mistake! Why throw away the whole pot of beans because it happens that one black one has strayed in? And listen, friendly critic, -- there are a half dozen black beans in your mess, and the only reason why you stand is because you have been able to conceal them.

But who says that oddities and eccentricities are always wrong, and that in that proportion a man should be rejected? The Methodist Episcopal Church fought Lorenzo Dow all his life, but while they fought he plowed ahead and doubtless saw more good done than any of his miserable critics. Where can you find a more eccentric man than Peter Cartwright, but these very peculiarities made his spiritual successes all the more prominent. We have known of men, who, because of, or in spite of, their peculiarities (we have scarcely decided which), have done more good than any of those who are contented to be "average men," and take to riding the see-saw of public opinion and established custom.

Some men may not be Samsons, but they are at least Samson's foxes, and one thing is sure: wherever they go they will set fire to the standing corn of the Philistines and rout the devil and the old man in whatever hole they may be hiding; such men will slay more with the jawbone of an ass than some men will with all the regulation artillery that can be brought around.

Do not get discouraged and give up because these "average men" are all the while finding fault with you, or because you can not do things in the average way. When General Patterson suggested that he would seek redress for unmerited censure which he had received, Lincoln told him that he need not expect to escape abuse as long as he was of any importance or value to the community. How true of the Christian! So live for God, keep your special peculiarity sanctified, and go ahead; and when you get to heaven it may be that you can have a place with "weeping" Jeremiah, "singing" David, "enrapt" Isaiah, "burdened" Moses, "zealous" Phineas, "shut in" Noah, "sojourning" Abraham, "praying" Hannah, "dancing" Deborah, "denunciating" Amos, "groaning" Paul, "impulsive" Peter, or "ecstatic" John. Who knows?

4. Temperamental differences and weaknesses in holiness professors. Some one said that when God made a saint He threw the mold away and never made another just like him. Holiness people differ temperamentally just as much as they do in other ways. Some are quick, others slow; some are impulsive, others always look before they leap; some are open hearted, while others are more secluded; some are precise, while others are more inclined to be loose; some are very particular about their appearance, while others care very little for such useless details (as they call them), and so on to the end.

It would be hard to find two persons who were perfectly compatible temperamentally. Wesley tells of a mistress and maid, who, before they were sanctified, were a great trial to each other. When they both obtained this blessing he suggested that doubtless their differences were a thing of the past, but, to his surprise, he found that the same incompatibility remained.

Holiness does not change our natural dispositions or turn of mind, it takes us as we are, sanctifies us, and makes the best possible use of the material on hand. A philosophic mind will still reason and explore; an incredulous mind must still be shown, and will still find difficulty in accepting undemonstrated statements, while the credulous mind can easily be led and needs but very little demonstration; and the dogmatic mind will still state and define. The difference after being sanctified lies in the fact that evil principles are eliminated, and the renewed mind, which once served the devil the world and self, now serves God.

Because of an error in a watch a train is missed. An impulsive man is apt to say, "I'll get rid of this watch, I can't afford to be fooled this way," but the quiet, reasoning man will sit down, correct the watch, get it fixed if necessary, and -- forget it. Both may have the experience of holiness; the difference is in their dispositions.

Two young men, both sanctified, are looking for a life partner. One is attracted by a sprightly, vivacious lassie whom he makes his own, while the other finds an unassuming, old-fashioned maid and immediately gives her his heart. No wrong is done, their temperaments differed and as a consequence they were suited by the different temperaments in a companion.

But sometimes we are thrown with persons whose temperaments are not to our liking -- what then? Bear and forbear. The man who can not look beyond his own likes and dislikes and see the good in those with whom he is not in agreement temperamentally has not passed very far along the road of perfect love, or even of brotherly kindness. The man who is still unable to feel kindly toward another who is not temperamentally to his liking, or who because of this lack of agreement will use his influence, great or

small, for the undoing of the one with whom he is tried, needs a new baptism of regenerating grace. Holiness will cover a multitude of sins, and this includes a multitude of incompatibilities in the dispositions or actions of others. This is a good way to measure your love: Have you love one for another? if so your love will cover a multitude of sins and infirmities in your brother, and your own preferences will not be so prominent.

One says, "I am of Paul. I like his wonderful philosophic mind, and his deep, searching truths." Another says, "I am of Apollos. I just love to listen to his oratorical flights, and to mark his well-rounded sentences and fine figures of speech." Another says, "I am of Peter. He always keeps you guessing, and just won't let you go to sleep." Another, "I am of James. I tell you he hews to the line, and besides he gives us all something to do." And still another, "I am of John. He is so kind and full of love." And, right here -- in these differences of opinion -- a rent is caused in the church. While preferences are natural, yet we can keep from making our preferences so prominent that we not only ruin the church of God, but forfeit our own experiences in the bargain.

5. Differences in education and environment. Most of us, perhaps all of us, have been trained in the wrong school. We are aware that some may resent this statement, but such resentment only helps to bear out the truthfulness of our premise. One man was reared in so-called high society. Naturally this man expects high positions and honor. Another man was reared in poverty. Generally he expects nothing and is often even too content to let the other man rule. This is an incipient autocracy presided over by the one who considers himself superior.

The man who leads is not always the best man. Such a doctrine would be an accommodation of the evolutionary rule of the survival of the fittest. There are various circumstances which place men in the lead.

(1) Real worth. This is the only legitimate method. (2) Educational advantages. An educated man may be a good ruler or he may not. (3) Financial advantage. There is still too much catering to cash. The gold ring still gets the best seat. The president of a certain state Sunday school association is a millionaire. Why does he occupy that position? Simply because of his cash. His predecessor was also a millionaire. (4) Accident of birth or circumstances. Some men are "born to be kings," some "chance" to be elected or otherwise to obtain positions they never were fitted for. (5) Politics advance some. Wire pulling is not all a thing of the past. (6) A determination to dominate places some in the lead while the meek man, no matter how great his ability, is most always ruled.

"The rank is but the guinea's stamp,

The man's the gold, for a that."

"I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth" (Eccl. 10:7).

But what about all this and holiness? Much every way. You can never judge a man's experience either by the position he holds or the esteem he is held in by others. Shine where you are, even though it should be on the back side of some desert.

Education has its disadvantages as well as its advantages, according to the system under which we are trained. Before we too harshly condemn any person would it not be well to ask ourselves the question, "Would I have done any better in my brother's circumstances?" But you say that he has the same

opportunities and light that you have. It may be, but we must remember that individuals differ greatly in their capacity for receiving and obeying light. The lord recognizes this as a fact, and says, "Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire."

An ignorant man can be as holy in the sight of God, if not as great in the sight of men, as his more highly favored brother. The way is before us and we can walk it even though we may be ignorant.

6. Then there is the matter of judgment. The Bible says that "every way of a man is right in his own eyes;" and that includes his own estimation of his own judgment. But when all has been said concerning the reliability of any man's judgment there is a vast chasm between it and perfection. Man knows no perfection except the perfection of love, and that is not of the human, it is God-given. Why should one mortal man look on another mortal man and pass sentence on the character of his judgment, and thus virtually say, "If I had been in his place," etc.? All men will err in judgment as long as they are in the flesh, no matter what position they may occupy, humble or exalted.

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