

Strivings Within.

by Harmon A. Baldwin

The sermon explores the internal struggles faced by believers after conversion and emphasizes the importance of seeking God's grace for deliverance from sin.

Scripture: Genesis 21:9

Topics: "Internal Struggle", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches about the journey of a new convert, highlighting the initial victory and joy experienced after conversion, followed by the revelation of internal struggles and the need for cleansing. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing inbred sin, the internal warfare between flesh and spirit, and the process of praying through for deliverance. Baldwin encourages believers to press forward, seek peace from God amidst the internal strife, and not limit the timing of God's work in their lives.

Transcript

Usually when persons are first converted they have such remarkable victory that they are unconscious of the fact that there is anything in their hearts contrary to the love of God. Joys flow like a river, or, at least, like gurgling streamlets, almost constantly; nothing ruffles the peace and quietness of the love which reigns supreme and unfettered. This state of things lasts for different lengths of time in different individuals. Generally it continues less than a month, but sometimes may continue for even a year; and in other cases, where there has been unusually clear light and more than the ordinary perception of divine things, light on internal conditions and needs is given almost immediately after conversion; but such cases are exceptional.

Here is how it comes about. All is going on smoothly; peace flows undisturbed; there is freedom in prayer, in testimony, in the heart; provocations are met and conquered with astonishing ease. But, as the poet says,

"Some days must be dark and dreary,"

and such a day comes to this happy convert. In spite of every effort to the contrary complications arise; different obstacles throw themselves across his path; trials of the most vexing kind press in from every side; and right in the midst of all this his eyes are drawn from without, and he is given a view of the workings of his soul. To his astonishment he sees an element that rebels, or that at least grows impatient and complains. It may not be very great, almost imperceptible at first, but it is enough to cause grief and

something like a sting mingles with the holy thrill of joy so lately experienced. This never leaves for any great length of time till the heart is cleansed. He may have a struggle to quiet the inward troubler, but the grace of God assisting, he conquers.

Or, the vision of inbred sin may come suddenly. All at once some trying event occurs. Some tale-bearer repeats in your ears a vile report that has been told about you; or, you are insulted to your face; or some one offers to strike you. Whatever it is, it comes suddenly, takes you off your guard, and in an instant anger arises and thrusts sore at you. You may feel your fists clench and your tongue ready to utter perverse words; but you remember that you are saved and do not yield to the trial even in your heart, but shut your lips tightly and hurry away to some retreat where you can pray and get the victory. And you do get it, but are much troubled, and say, "O God, what does this mean? I thought that such things were forever past. Must I forever endure this?" But while you will mourn, you need not mourn as those that have no hope. The promise is yours. Here let me say that it is positively unnecessary that you get your head down and allow melancholy brooding to take possession of you or to hinder you in any degree. You are not to blame for these things, and you ought to rejoice that the Lord has been so kind as to open your eyes to see your condition. God does nothing to tantalize us, and this sight of sin is given that you may be delivered, and you should praise him for it all.

Wesley asks the question,

But may we not continue in peace and joy till we are perfected in love?and answers it as follows:Certainly we may; for the kingdom of God is not divided against itself; therefore, let not believers be discouraged from 'rejoicing in the Lord always.' And yet we may be sensibly pained at the sinful nature that still remains in us. It is good for us to have a piercing sense of this, and a vehement desire to be delivered from it. But this should incite us the more zealously to fly every moment to our strong Helper, the more earnestly to press forward to the mark, the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. And when the sense of our sin most abounds, the sense of his love should much more abound. There is no doubt that this is the best time to begin to urge your case for deliverance. Many persons have wandered weary years with these carnal traits staring them in the face, without gaining the deliverance they needed, simply because they either failed to push forward (through lack of energy or earnestness), or because they were not properly led by their teachers.

Here is where a great many holiness teachers and seekers fail. Quite often the seekers would not be so apt to make mistakes if they were let alone, for in the ardor of their desires after God they would find the sore of their hearts and confess and deplore it until deliverance would be given. But as soon as a little earnestness is manifested, a few tears shed, and a strong desire for holiness is expressed, they are straightway thrown from the track and run off in the wrong direction. Instead of being urged to press their suit before God earnestly, they are set to consecrating their time, talents, etc., or to presuming that the work is done, till they get into the fog and must struggle, perhaps for weeks, to get out into clear sailing again.

The following from Wesley is to the point concerning the first movings of carnality after conversion:

How naturally do those who experience such a change, imagine that all sin is gone; that it is utterly rooted out of their hearts, and has no more any place therein? How easily do they draw that inference, 'I feel no sin; therefore I have none: it does not stir! therefore it does not exist; it has no motion; therefore it has no being.'

But it is seldom long before they are undeceived, finding sin was only suspended, not destroyed. Temptations return, and sin revives; showing it was but stunned before, not dead. They now feel two principles in themselves, plainly contrary to each other; 'the flesh lusting against the Spirit;' nature opposing the grace of God. They cannot deny, that, although they still feel power to believe in Christ, and to love God; and although his 'Spirit [still] witnesses with their spirits, that they are children of God;' yet they feel in themselves sometimes pride or self-will, sometimes anger or unbelief. They find one or more of these frequently stirring in their hearts, though not conquering; yea, perhaps, 'thrusting sore at them that they may fall'; but the Lord is their help.

Again,

It is true, he has scarce any conception of this (the carnal mind and the necessity of deliverance from it) who now begins to know the inward kingdom of heaven. 'In his prosperity he saith, I shall never be moved; thou, Lord, hast made my hill so strong.' Sin is so utterly bruised beneath his feet, that he can scarce believe it remaineth in him. Even temptation is silenced, and speaks not again: it cannot approach, but stands afar off. He is borne aloft in the chariots of joy and love: he soars 'as upon the wings of an eagle.' But our Lord well knew, that this triumphant state does not often continue long: he therefore presently subjoins: 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.'

--- But they see temptation and sin, which they fondly supposed were gone never to return, arising again, following after them again, and holding them in on every side. It is not strange if their soul is now disquieted within them, and trouble and heaviness take hold upon them. Nor will their great enemy fail to improve the occasion; to ask, 'Where now is thy God? Where now the blessedness of which thou spakest? The beginning of the kingdom of heaven? Yea, hath God said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee?" Surely God hath not said it. It was only a dream, a mere delusion, a creature of thy own imagination. If thy sins are forgiven, why art thou thus? Can a pardoned sinner be thus unholy?' -- And, if then, instead of immediately crying to God, they reason with him that is wiser than they, they will be in heaviness indeed, in sorrow of heart, in anguish not to be expressed. Nay, even when God shines again upon the soul, and takes away all doubt of his past mercy, still he that is weak in faith may be tempted and troubled on account of what is to come; especially when inward sin revives, and thrusts sore at him that he may fall. Then may he cry out,

"I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun

My last thread, I shall perish on the shore.'

Now the battle has commenced in earnest, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). There is a good Bible illustration of this internal warfare in the two sons of Abraham -- Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac "the son of the free-woman" was "by promise," but Ishmael, "who was of a bondwoman was of the flesh." The two boys did not get along well together, for it is written, "He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit." Then it is added, "even so is it now." Finally, Abraham was commanded to "cast out the bondwoman and her son." Yes, "even so it is now" in the heart of every young convert until he, by the grace of God, "casts out the bondwoman and her son;" until he receives the second work of grace -- the cleansing of his soul from inbred sin.

When the Spirit of God within leads out to endeavor for him, the "flesh," or "carnality," or "depravity," by whatever name it may be called (some prefer one and some another), so "lusteth against" him that it is

hard to obey. The warfare is continual, grace against nature and nature against grace, till the heart cries out for peace at the hands of God. There is hope for you, brother, in such a case, and God, by these views of the internal strife, is calling, is wooing you on to greater things. Press forward; the goal is not far distant. "So run that ye may obtain."

A natural question that arises at this point is, how long will it take me to pray through? How long must I thus groan in sight of my corruptions before I may expect deliverance to come? At present let us quote a passage from Wesley and return to the question later.

But some who maintain this doctrine in its fullest extent are too often guilty of limiting the Almighty. He dispenses his gifts just as he pleases; therefore, it is neither wise nor modest to affirm that a person must be a believer for any length of time before he is capable of receiving a high degree of the Spirit of holiness.

God's usual method is one thing, but his sovereign pleasure is another. He has wise reasons both for hastening and retarding his work. Sometimes he comes suddenly and unexpectedly; sometimes not till we have long looked for him.

Indeed it has been my opinion for many years that one great cause why men make so little improvement in the divine life is their own coldness, negligence, and unbelief. And yet I here speak of believers.

--- God usually gives a considerable time for men to receive light, to grow in grace, to do and suffer his will before they are either justified or sanctified; but he does not invariably adhere to this; sometimes he 'cuts short his work;' he does the work of many years in a few weeks; perhaps in a week, a day, an hour. He justifies or sanctifies both those who have done or suffered nothing, and who have not had time for gradual growth either in light or grace. And 'may he not do what he will with his own? Is thine eye evil, because he is good?'

It need not, therefore, be affirmed over and over, and proved by forty texts of scripture, either that most men are perfected in love at last, that there is a gradual work of God in the soul, or that, generally speaking, it is a long time, even many years, before sin is destroyed. All this we know: but we know, likewise, that God may, with man's good leave, 'cut short his work,' in whatever degree he pleases, and do the work of many years in a moment.

Modern imperfectionists, or rather gradualists, take such passages as this from Wesley to prove that he believed in gradual sanctification. But this is not true. His writings as a whole are against any such doctrine. He simply means in this place that most people are not sanctified soon after they are saved, but that they grow in grace and gradually approach the experience for perhaps a number of years, but that at length the time comes when sin suddenly dies, and at that moment the heart is made perfect in love. The prominent thought of the above quotation is that God sometimes does the work of entire sanctification soon after conversion, and that if it is not thus received, it is because the seeker by his "coldness, negligence, and unbelief" limits the power of God, and not because God will not give it to him until he has grown or suffered his way into it. Now is God's accepted time, and he will perfect you in love as soon as you meet his reasonable requirements, and, by faith, get under the blood. Beware of putting off the matter too long, thereby grieving the tender Holy Spirit of God; and, on the contrary, beware of being too hasty, and rushing ahead of the Spirit. God will give you time to make sure work in the destruction of every vestige of the carnal mind. Carnality is his enemy, and he desires that you shall pursue it unrelentingly, till it expires on the cross by power divine.

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