

A Holiness Catechism

by James Blaine Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of holiness as a vital experience for Christians, achievable through faith and consecration after justification.

Scripture: Acts 1:8, Romans 6:22, 1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 5:25, 1 Thessalonians 4:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:15, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches about the importance of holiness as taught in the Bible, emphasizing that holiness is a state of the heart resulting from receiving the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire. The doctrine of holiness is a standard for all God's people, and the experience of holiness is the full blessing of the gospel in response to our human need. The process of sanctification leads to holiness, described as Christian perfection, perfect love, heart purity, and the Spirit-filled life.

Transcript

Q. What do we understand to be the import of holiness as taught in the Bible and set forth in the testimony of thousands who say they are sanctified wholly?

A. We understand that holiness is that state of the heart which results from receiving the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire. The full meaning of this blessed experience cannot be described by one word, and so in the Bible and in Christian literature and hymnology we are supplied with a number of words which are more or less synonymous, and yet which serve to present a more complete picture of what the Christian enjoys who has entered into the full inheritance of the gospel. The doctrine of holiness is taught in the Bible. The standard of holiness is the standard for all God's people. The experience of holiness is the full blessing or grace of the gospel which is God's answer to our human need. The process by which we are made holy is called sanctification. The result of being sanctified is called holiness. But from various angles of approach the experience is described as Christian perfection, perfect love, heart purity and the Spirit-filled life.

Q. What are the prerequisites of this experience?

A. To be a proper candidate for this experience one must be definite in his experience as a justified, born-again Christian. The grace of holiness is not directly promised to the world, as we learn from the prayer of our Lord in the seventeenth chapter of John, but is reserved for those who have forsaken the

world and been made alive from the death of sin by the regenerating Spirit of God. One who has not been truly converted, or who has drifted into backslidings after having been saved, must seek and obtain the pardoning mercy of God, that he may be numbered among those who "are not of the world," to whom the promise of full salvation is made.

Q. Why do not people get sanctified wholly at the same time that they get converted or regenerated?

A. I think we will have to say there are no limitations on God's part. But we know from the Scriptures and from experience that practically all the promises of God are on conditions. Sometimes the conditions are clearly stated; sometimes they are just implied--but we can be sure they always exist. And because there are certain conditions required of those who seek to get sanctified which they cannot meet until they are justified, therefore sanctification invariably comes after justification. For example, to get sanctified wholly it is required of one that he consecrate himself fully to the Lord. But a sinner cannot consecrate until he has repented of his sins, and if he truly repents of his sins and believes on Christ he will be pardoned and born again. And because the conditions are essential to faith for the blessing, it follows without exception that sanctification is subsequent to justification. We do well to remember the old adage, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," and to think of it in connection with the desire to be sanctified. God takes up where we of necessity leave off. This means that God does not sanctify until we consecrate. In fact, consecration is human sanctification.

But we must not suppose that consecration is all there is of sanctification any more than we suppose that repentance is all there is of justification. In fact there is danger always of interpreting Christianity as entirely human. Some people are so afraid of becoming extremists that they really become humanists and make bold to say that they question the divine response altogether. But such an interpretation demotes Christianity to the level of Phariseeism. There is a divine response to the believing penitent. And this response comes in the form of the clear witness of the Holy Spirit to the sonship of the born-again soul. Likewise there is a divine response to the Christian who prays to be entirely sanctified, and that response is in the form of the fullness of the Spirit, comparable to that which took place in the hearts of those who tarried in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, which promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Those who say they have had "a thousand blessings," and therefore do not believe in the "second blessing," are unnecessarily confusing the issue. There are indeed blessings without number in the Christian life, but there are just two "works of grace" involved in the solution of the sin problem for the individual. The first of these works of grace is the one by means of which the sinner becomes a Christian, and the second is the one by means of which a Christian becomes a sanctified Christian. The first work is called justification and the second is called sanctification. The first experience is called being born of the Spirit, and the second is called being baptized with the Spirit. But all types and metaphors, as well as all direct statements, show that men must be justified before they are sanctified. For instance, one cannot by any stretch of imagination think of a baptism that is not preceded by a birth.

Q. How do we know about this blessing of holiness, and about the conditions upon which it may be obtained?

A. The Bible is our principal source for knowledge on this subject, and Jesus made reference to this dependable source of light when He said in His prayer, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." The Bible requires holiness in its commandments: "Be ye holy; for I am holy." It offers it in its promises,

"The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and...[preserve you] blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." It tells how holiness is provided in the atoning work of Jesus Christ: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." And there are numerous testimonies recorded of those who obtained this grace from God. Surely no one will dispute that to be a Bible Christian one must be holy without and within. But most of us have also been fortunate enough to know some people who have this blessing and live the life. I have been thus favored myself, and for this I am devoutly thankful. Those who claim that they never knew anyone that they thought had the blessing are more likely than not speaking from their own prejudices rather than from the reasonable deductions of experience and observation. And then there is within us all a deep sense of need that never finds satisfaction until we find it in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel. But whatever else we may doubt, we cannot deny the Scriptures, and from these we learn that we should be holy, and the terms upon which the blessing may be obtained.

Q. What merit do we have to bring that God may see it and make us holy within?

A. We have no merit except the blood of Jesus Christ, and we need no other than this. Men have often been led astray by the supposition that they must be good in order to be made good. To the sinner we have often said, "All the fitness Christ requireth is to feel your need of Him." Likewise with the Christian who would be sanctified wholly. Good pedigrees, good works, and meritorious words do not count. "The Blood, the Blood is all my plea." This is what is meant when it is said we are sanctified by the Blood. That is, it is the merit of the blood of Jesus which enables us to come in faith and confidence for the blessing.

Q. What are the conditions for obtaining the blessing of holiness?

A. There is just one prime condition, as in justification, and that condition is faith. We must come believing He is able to save to the uttermost, that He is willing to save to the uttermost, and finally (having fully consecrated ourselves to Him), that He does now save to the uttermost and at this moment does make us clean and holy within. In coming to the place where such faith is possible, we may find a good many prerequisites, like consecration with all that it involves; but when these are all finally met, the prime condition is faith. No one who believes ever fails to get the blessing and no one ever gets the blessing without believing. Sometimes people have said they will not believe until they know. But this is confusing. Faith is like the cable over which the electric current comes, in that it makes the way for God's blessing to be received. We must believe that we may know.

Q. When may we have this blessing of holiness?

A. It is promised to us right here in this world. We may have it any time after we are converted--any time we are willing and ready to pay the price. Some people get this blessing very soon--just a matter of weeks, days, or even hours--after they are born again. Others, usually because of a fault in their doctrine and expectation, go on a long time--sometimes for many years--before they enter into this glorious grace. Some do not get it sooner because of the idea that if God wants them to have it He will give it to them without their seeking for it. But, although it is the will of God for all His people to be sanctified, still there is a preparation for receiving this blessing that can be and is met only by those who set their hearts to have it.

Q. What is required of us after we obtain this blessing as to the manner of life we shall pursue?

A. It is required of sanctified Christians that they live in all good conscience before God and men. This means that holiness and righteousness--holiness with God and righteousness with men-- are inseparably connected. We are not made right by doing right, but we do right when we are made right. And we are not made holy by living holily, but we do live holily, having been made holy by the Spirit of God. But this is not to be interpreted as implying that the life of holiness is a strain. The fact is that sin is the irritation. Holiness is soul health and the holy life for a holy man is the normal life for such a man. Since he loves God supremely, he will find prayer and Bible reading and all worship a joy and a delight. Since he loves his neighbors as himself, he will delight to live in peace with them. He will even find joy in serving them. That interpretation of the Christian life which describes it as "a hard road to travel," as compared with other roads, is based upon the assumption that there is want of grace.

But in the sanctified life there is abundance of grace. Sanctified Christians are no better and no different from other people, just so far as natural goodness is concerned. They are also required to live under the same general conditions that others of their vicinity must face. The difference is on the inside. The burdens of the sanctified are just as heavy as the burdens of others, but they are spiritually stronger to bear them. The standard for all men, good and bad, is the standard of holiness. Sinners fall short of this standard, but this does not affect the standard. Justified Christians find the standard often irksome and impractical, but this does not affect the standard. Sanctified Christians find grace to enable them to delight in the will and ways of God, and to say, "His commandments are not grievous." In seeking an easier way in the Christian life, some have thought to bring the standard of requirements down to the place where they practically say, "Whatever is, is right." But this is not God's way. He would bring our lives up to the standard, and even keep us where we "are not under the law, but under grace"--and this means that we do God's will because we love Him, and not because of our being driven by fear of judgment.

Q. If once we get the blessing of holiness, is there any danger that we shall lose it?

A. Our whole life in this world is a probation or trial life, and the issue is not settled until death. It is wise for us all to listen to Paul who said, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We need to watch and pray and to guard our hearts and lips and lives always. We must always court the Comforter, that He may be pleased to abide with us. We need always to take full advantage of all "means of grace," that we may be strong enough to be overcomers all the days of our lives. Yes, there is always danger that we may fall back into sin, and we must not slacken our vigil until either Jesus comes the second time or calls us home unto himself.

Q. If we should be overcome of the devil and should yield to temptation, after we have obtained the blessing of holiness, and should find ourselves again separated from God, can we be restored to the fullness of the blessing again?

A. Backsliding in any degree is always a sad thing to contemplate. It is well that we should go on with God from day to day without allowing our peace to be broken with anxious fears. God is able to keep us always, and from the day we are pardoned from sin until the day when we shall see His face in heaven, it is God's plan that we shall be victorious. But there is pardon and restoration for the backslider, and if one should make a mistake by yielding to temptation he should certainly not follow this with the worse mistake of casting away his confidence and become a hopeless apostate. Yes, there is always pardon for the truly penitent, and there is restoration to the fullness of the blessing for one who has drifted in any degree whatsoever. Just as no state of grace which we can obtain in this world can make us absolutely proof against backsliding, so likewise there is no sin, except the sin against the Holy Ghost, that can bar us from

God forever, if we are willing and ready to repent. There are many testimonies of those who fell from the heights of grace to the low pits of sin and then came back again to as good an experience in the favor of God as they had at the beginning, and even better.

Q. Is this blessing of holiness for all Christians?

A. Yes, it is for all--ministers, missionaries, laymen, adults, and little children. Anyone who has been born again of the Spirit of God, and who desires to be sanctified wholly, may come in the full assurance that God will not deny his prayer or practice any reluctance in fulfilling to him the promise to make him every whit whole. Many people have an exaggerated idea of the force of chronology or geography. They scruple not to say that the baptism with the Holy Ghost was just for the apostles. Or if they allow for any closer approach to our own time than that, they say this is just for those who are called of God to some very special service. But the promise of God is without any such limitations. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter said, "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." We all need to be holy, no matter what the service we are expected to perform. Sometimes the grace of holiness is as much needed by one whose lot it is to be neglected and overlooked as for one whose place is in the limelight. Humility is as much a fruit of holiness as fluency of tongue or any gift whereby men are made to wonder.

Q. Why should we be so urgent about this matter of holiness of heart and life?

A. We should be eager to get sanctified wholly because God is eager to have us so. That word "follow" in Heb. 12:14 is a very strong word. The metaphor back of it is the practice of the good hunting dog which brooks all dangers and endures all hardships to overtake and apprehend the game. We know not the day of Christ's coming or of our own departure from the world of probation. All we know is that today is the day of salvation. We know only that the present opportunity is ours. Tomorrow belongs to God. Delay in seeking to be made holy may easily come to disobedience, and may result in the complete dimming of our spiritual vision. Today is the day of full salvation for the believer, just as it is the day of initial salvation for the penitent sinner. Today if you hear His voice calling you to holiness, delay not to obey.

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