

Holiness in Introspection

by James Blaine Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of experiencing holiness to combat inbred sin and maintain a consistent Christian life.

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:10, Proverbs 4:23, Romans 7:15, Hebrews 12:14, 1 John 3:1

Topics: "Bible Holiness", "Sanctification"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches on the importance of holiness as an experience, emphasizing that it is more than just a doctrine or holy conduct, but a necessary purification of the heart by divine grace. He warns against the heresy of equating sanctification with consecration, highlighting the need for a deeper deliverance from inner foes and the purification of both the will and affections. Chapman stresses the significance of maintaining a consistent Christian influence and living a life that reflects the grace and blessing of Bible holiness, especially in times of trial and pressure.

Transcript

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled (Hebrews 12:14-15).

In introducing our general theme, we said that the holiness without which no man shall see the Lord is neither the doctrine of holiness nor a life involving holy conduct, seeing that the former would make salvation unavailable to the humble in mind, and the latter would require an indefinite period of time, making immediate preparation for heaven impossible. Our deduction was that it must of necessity be holiness as an experience, seeing this is the only conclusion that meets all the promises and requirements of the Scriptures. And now, as a further consideration, we find that this holiness is more than any human virtue or self-acquired state. It must be so; otherwise, final salvation is by good works and not by grace.

Some time ago I listened to a sermon on sanctification in a church where one would scarcely expect to hear a sermon on such a subject. The preacher spoke very approvingly of John Wesley and his coadjutors, and said they recognized, themselves, that their special work was to "spread scriptural holiness over the land." He then said that this theme had been neglected by churches and preachers, and that this neglect had given occasion for the organization of churches and denominations set to the same task as were the Wesleys, and he expressed regret that his own church and brethren in the ministry were in the class that had been delinquent. All was regular and inspiring until he came to the heart of his thesis,

which he introduced with the question, "What then is sanctification?" Answering his own question, he replied, "Why, sanctification is just consecration -- nothing more and nothing less. Is there any Christian that would not desire to be consecrated to God? And there are none who have attained to anything more." From being surprised by the preacher's boldness in selecting his theme, and by his straightforward manner of introducing it, I became shocked, dazed, and disappointed by his sudden collapse, and by his quick descent into the beaten path of heresy.

To say that sanctification is nothing more and nothing less than consecration is parallel with the statement that justification and regeneration are nothing more and nothing less than repentance. Both statements are rank heresy, and serve to demote our holy religion to the plane of mere human preparation.

Justification does indeed involve true and genuine repentance. But justification takes place in the heart of God and regeneration the heart of man upon the basis of repentance as a prerequisite, and are not to be identified with the condition, as the divine is not to be identified with the human. The same pertains to consecration and sanctification, for consecration is the human prerequisite, and sanctification is the divine act of purifying the heart.

Those who identify consecration as sanctification make the fundamental error of interpreting sin as existing only in the will, for consecration at its highest point is simply a correction of the will. But the truth is that man is fallen and debased in his affections, as well as warped and misdirected in will. The affections require purification before the Christian can love God with all his heart and love the will of God without mixture. And it is of the affections, as much as of the will, that the warning is, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." For men do not always do what they know they ought to do, but they often are guided by their desires. A man is not a truthful man because he tells the truth: he is a truthful man because he desires to tell the truth. He may tell the truth because of fear, or for hope of reward; but his desire is what counts. And it is so with regard to all manner of conduct and conversation.

Paul, in the seventh chapter of Romans and in other instances, describes the mixed estate of Christians who are justified but not fully sanctified; and of such he makes the observation that their minds always approve the law of God, but they find within themselves a something or somewhat that conflicts with their better judgment and seeks to lead them astray by means of unholy affections. This is what gives rise to inward conflicts, and it is the occasion of varied conduct which compels many to describe their own Christian lives as "an up and down life." And just as the truthful man is the man who desires to tell the truth so the holy man is the man who desires to be holy, not simply the man who is determined to be holy.

Our central text, therefore, means simply this, speaking in paraphrase: "Give all diligence to pressing into that divine grace by which we are sanctified wholly." And the portion which we have added to the reading today sets forth the first fundamental reason for this insistent exhortation, and says, "Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Speaking again in paraphrase, and in summary of today's thesis, "Get sanctified wholly, lest the root of inbred sin which remains in the heart of the regenerated spring up and give the individual himself trouble and defeat, and bring an occasion for stumbling to many who observe his unbecoming outbreak."

We are calling our theme for today "Holiness in Introspection," and our thought is to consider the subject of holiness from the subjective approach. Not being familiar with Biblical or theological terminology, many Christians admit that they themselves are their own worst enemies in the task of living the Christian life. Their meaning is that the source of their difficulties is in their own hearts. And in this, as in most matters,

the common man is the best juror. The expert, in attempting to explain, more frequently explains away and mystifies more than he illuminates. The common man knows and feels that what he needs is a deeper deliverance from inner foes; and if left to his own lead, he will quite often find his way to divine deliverance. It has often occurred that sincere Christians have found the blessings of heart holiness before they had been very much instructed, and when as yet they were uninformed as to names and terminology.

During our war with Spain at the close of the last century, the captain of a certain American warship became suspicious that one of his crew was an enemy spy. A crewman whose loyalty was unquestioned was detailed to keep watch of the suspected one, and ordered to report any details that he could not readily understand. One day the suspected man was found hiding sticks of dynamite in the coal-bin of the ship. He was immediately arrested, was speedily court-martialed, and the next morning at daylight he was shot. In reporting the matter to his superior officer, the captain said, "One spy on my own ship is a greater menace than the whole Spanish fleet on the high seas;" And that is the situation with the Christian -- the enemy in the heart is a greater menace than all the enemies without.

It is not, it seems to me, necessary that we should produce proof of the claim that inbred sin continues to exist in the heart of the regenerated. Such proof is available both in Scripture and in the history of Christian thought and testimony. But I appeal to the consciousness of the interested soul. If there are those who are unaware that there is within their hearts a something or somewhat that wars against their efforts to love God with all their hearts, I shall not be able by the present method to convince them. And if there are those who insist on covering and explaining away their awareness of this painful fact, I can only beg them to desist. But the confession is so general as to encourage me in the hope that we can begin upon it as a basis. Our hopes are especially strong for those with whom the consciousness of inbred sin within their hearts has become so real and so moving that they are wont to cry betimes, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The picture here is that of an ancient prisoner condemned to die by the horrible method of being bound fast to a putrefying corpse which he must bear about with him wherever he turns. In his extremity he cries for deliverance. In the passage in which the cry is recorded, there is an immediate gleam of hope, for the distressed man quickly exclaims, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It is a wonderful thing to be born again of the Spirit of God, to have the burden of guilt for sin rolled away from the heart, and to be conscious of the new life within the soul. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1). It is certainly the deep desire of everyone so blessed to maintain this estate and relationship ever fresh and abounding. If one is a practical Christian, he needs little urging to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure by whatever means are available for the purpose. None but the inexcusably careless will depend upon any theory of present or future security that promises entrance into heaven without the fulfillment of proper conditions.

In the old days when a good horse and buggy were the acme of private transportation, a certain young man took his old mother out for a drive. The road was good, the horse was spirited, the buggy was new, and the harness was strong. But when the young man let his horse out to top speed, the old mother laid hold upon the young man's arm with a strong grip. The young man protested his mother's fear, and assured her there was no danger. But the mother said, "If it does not trouble you, my son, I will hold on just the same, for it does your old mother a lot of good." And that is good sense for Christians of any faith. Even if some think you can get to heaven on a low state of grace, do not depend on it. Make the matter sure by the most exacting tests.

The special warning under consideration regarding the danger of neglect in getting sanctified wholly involves both ourselves and those for whom we are responsible. We are urged to get sanctified lest the dormant inbred sin in us spring up like a root of bitterness and trouble the individual Christian. This word trouble carries the weight of understatement, as every Christian who has been the victim of the flare-up of unholy temper, pride, envy, or other evil, can bear witness.

Bud Robinson tells of a well-respected church member who became involved in an argument with a tenant on his farm regarding wages. The flash of evil temper in the man made a murderer out of him in a matter of minutes, brought upon him the odium of the criminal, and heaped disgrace upon his church and family. Consequences may not be so serious with you, but the danger of such an uprising's breaking your fellowship with God, destroying your inward peace and sense of security, and driving you to bitter regret and hot tears of repentance should be enough.

Thinking again of the story of the spy on shipboard, may we not rejoice in that sense of security that comes to the Christian who is inwardly conscious that the old spy has been driven out? How deep and real is the peace of him who enjoys the assurance that every thought and imagination of his inner heart has been brought into captivity of obedience to Christ!

We used to have a song that was sung to a popular tune, and which described in the first stanza the peace and joy of sins forgiven. Then the second stanza said:

But still the fires of carnal nature smoldered within.

They arose and flashed in angry tempers; it was my inbred sin.

Again I sought the blessed Saviour, once crucified.

He filled me with the Holy Spirit; thus I was sanctified."

And that is the sentiment of my soul today. Lest this old root of bitterness springing up in you, my friend, and cause you to fail and to backslide, lose no time in pressing on into the grace and blessing of Bible holiness.

That metaphor which likens remaining sin to a root of bitterness is more striking to one, like myself, who spent his early years on a farm which always had a portion of "new ground" included in its cultivated area. This new ground was cleared of brush and trunks of trees during the winter and early spring, and then was plowed with a "stump plow," and planted with corn at the beginning of summer. When the crop was first planted the outlook was quite promising. But from the green stumps and roots of the oaks and the ash, the sprouts soon sprang up luxuriantly, robbing the farm boy of his Saturday afternoon's holiday, and requiring the dexterous swinging of the "eye hoe" and the "little ax" to the disgust of the farm boy and to the ruin of his temper. Such a fruitful root of evil is in the heart of the regenerated Christian; but, thank God, it need not be tolerated there. Our blessed Saviour, with the dynamite of His Spirit, is ready now to lift out that old root and thus destroy the springing sprouts at their very source.

The warning further says there is danger that "many be defiled." Thoughtless Christians have been known to say, "I do not care what people think of me." If they mean that they propose to go on with God regardless of opposition, it is a worthy saying. But if they mean that they do not value their Christian influence, then the saying is extremely faulty; for, after one's own personal experience with God, his greatest possession is his Christian influence -- and no one should treat his influence as a light matter.

Joseph Parker of London used to say, "The greatest need of our times is more sermons in shoes," meaning, of course, more people who live the religion they profess. Carlyle used to say, "What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say." Practically everyone who thinks of another as being instrumental in leading him to Christ thinks, not of eloquent words, but of consistent living.

Mothers who pray for the salvation of their sons and daughters help to make their prayers effective by backing them up with sweet Christian conduct, which constitutes the best commentary on the meaning of the Christian religion that has ever been written.

How tragic, then, that months and even years of consistent living should be nullified by five minutes of the upspringing of inbred sin! The excuse that the uprising did not last long loses its weight when we remember that the earthquake, too, may last but a few minutes, but may yet leave a ruined city in its wake.

Evangelist Sam Jones, speaking of his children, said: "If I had it within my power to leave my children an estate worth a million dollars, I would still elect to leave them the heritage of a Christian example. If I had it within my power to lift them to the highest circle of human society, I would still rather live before them in such a manner that when I am dead and they come to look into my cold face through the glass of the coffin top they will be able to say, 'There lies a man who loved God and hated iniquity all the years that ever we knew him.' " And I think we all feel that way.

A thoughtful preacher said: "I have scruples against urging a child to become a Christian for his mother's sake. But I have none against asking a mother or a father to become a Christian for his child's sake, for no parent's duty to his child is done until he has set before him an example of a Christian life. No matter how well the child may have been provided with food, clothing, housing, and the means of education, he is yet a neglected child if his parents have not both told and shown him the way to God."

Let none of us imagine we can live the life we should live without the grace God proposes to give. Such a thought is shot through with that pharisaism that Jesus so roundly condemned. If we are serious in our desire to live a victorious Christian life within our own hearts, and anxious to set a consistent and worthy example before those with whom we walk, then the way to prove that this is our desire is to make insistent application to God for that depositum of grace that will uproot the sin principle from our hearts and make us clean and holy within.

I came into the meeting after the service had started one night. The people were singing, and a man of humble mien was out in the aisle, keeping time and rejoicing with loud voice. I was uncertain of the consistency of the arrangement, and at first opportunity I asked the pastor about the man and his judgment of the wisdom of allowing the man to take such a prominent part in the meeting. The pastor said, "Oh, that is old Brother B____ from over in the edge of Texas. As you can see, he is not a very close relative of King Solomon's, but he is a good man. His neighbors have confidence in him. He lives the life before them. He is simple-minded, and they tell many odd stories about the things he says; but when any of the people of his country neighborhood are in serious trouble or are dying, they usually send for old Brother B____, for they say they have faith that God will hear his prayers. And, even though everybody here does not know him, enough people do know him that the word will be passed around and his jumping and shouting will not hurt the meeting. I tell my people that it does not matter how high a man jumps, just so he walks straight when he gets back on the ground."

Winston Churchill warned his nation that the test of any people is how they behave when they are tried. The test of any Christian is how he behaves under pressure. Anyone can smile when the sun is bright and

all is well; but in times when there are stark poverty, cruel disappointment, incurable illness, and unassuaged bereavement the Christian's true advantage over others appears. And it is in times like that, that we need to be holy and happy in the innermost citadels of our hearts. Such a grace will give us the victory over both the world within and the world without, for the "joy of the Lord is your strength."

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