

Christian Privilege or Entire Holiness Defined

by Randolph S. Foster

The sermon defines and explains the concept of entire holiness, distinguishing it from other Christian doctrines and emphasizing its positive and practical implications.

Scripture: Matthew 5:48, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Philippians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 6:1

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Christian Perfection"

Description

Randolph Sinks Foster preaches on the concept of entire holiness, sanctification, perfection, purity, and freedom from sin, distinct from regeneration and justification, emphasizing the need for a clear understanding of these terms and experiences. He clarifies that this state of holiness does not imply infallibility of intellectual processes, physical perfection, impeccability, freedom from temptation, exemption from liability to sin, freedom from sorrow, or perfection of degree. Instead, he asserts that entire holiness involves being entirely free from sin, both inward and outward, and includes the perfection of spiritual graces like love, meekness, and humility.

Transcript

We assume the practicability of "entire holiness, sanctification, perfection, purity, freedom from sin," properly so called -- that these terms imply a state, distinct alike from regeneration and justification, embracing each, and superior to both. Now, how obviously proper the inquiry! What do we exactly mean by these terms? What is our idea of the state, or work, or experience they describe?

What avails argument, what profits reasoning, if the point discussed be not clearly apprehended? To prevent all reasonable ground of misapprehension as to the significance we attach to the words we employ; to leave no excuse for misconceiving the doctrine we teach, believing that when understood rightly it will find ready acceptance; to harmonize its friends and disarm its enemies; and to impress all Christians and all candid and sincere minds who have some appreciation of the blessings of our holy religion with its certain truth and surpassing beauty and loveliness, we subjoin a minute and particular statement of our meaning.

For the utmost explicitness we ask special attention to some ideas which we disclaim. If any hold them we do not.

1. We do not include in our idea of the highest attainable state of "holiness," or "entire holiness," (and we employ the phrases entire holiness, entire sanctification, perfect purity, Christian perfection, and freedom

from all sin in precisely the same sense,) infallibility of the intellectual processes or faculties. We constantly admit that this is not to be expected in this life; nay more, we affirm that the most perfect and holy men are always subject to imperfections in these respects while they remain in the body; liable to be imposed upon by deceptive appearances -- to arrive at false conclusions -- to perpetrate incorrect and sophistical reasoning -- to be misled by unfaithful memory, illusory observations, erratic imaginations -- to form unauthorized surmises and suspicions -- to entertain incorrect, and even absurd opinions about many things. These we do not regard as having any more moral quality than defective sight or maimed feet. They are infirmities, or results of infirmities, of the intellectual nature, and express nothing of the moral or spiritual state of the subject.

We do recognize a direct connection between the moral condition of the soul, and the mental powers, and their operations. Sin obscures and weakens, and holiness strengthens and invigorates; sin confuses, distracts, and leads to error; holiness tranquilizes, imparts candor and carefulness, and leads to truth; but there is no such connection between holiness and infallibility of the intellectual powers, that the former insures the latter. There is nothing in a simple natural infirmity, whether of mind or body, of the nature of sin, as there is nothing in the perfection of either a faculty of the mind or a member of the body of the nature of holiness.

2. We do not include in our idea of entire holiness physical perfection. On the contrary, we think it consistent with the greatest bodily infirmity, weakness, disease, deformity, and organic and structural imperfection. These are not looked upon separately, in themselves considered, as affecting, either to completeness or diminution essential spiritual character. In our code a perfect physical man may be an imperfect spiritual man, and under most defective physical conditions may be a most complete spiritual development.

3. Our idea of a perfectly holy character does not include the idea that he will make no mistakes in the conduct of his life -- that he will always act wisely and discreetly -- or that he will never feel the risings of propensities or passions which he may not indulge. Actions and feelings result from the views the mind takes, or the influence of unavoidable constitutional tendencies. When an improper judgment is formed, an improper or incorrect action or feeling may follow. And so long as the mind is subject to err and come to wrong conclusions, so long conduct and emotions resulting may be also improper.

4. We do not include, in our idea of entire holiness, freedom from temptation to sin and suggestions of evil. These, we firmly believe, will follow us to the last. Our Saviour "was tempted of the devil" (Matt. 4:1). "The disciple is not above his Lord" (Matt. 10:24).

It is not the office of grace to eradicate human passions. There is nothing in them, when existing in a normal state, of the nature of sin. They were at first implanted in the holy pair. They will remain in humanity while the earthy life remains. Holiness requires their proper subjugation and use. They are in their nature physical, and wholly void of moral character except as they become instruments of righteousness or unrighteousness. All temptation to evil, so long as it is external, is without sin. It becomes sin only when it finds concurrence within.

5. We do not include in our idea of holiness, impeccability, or exemption from liability to sin. On the contrary, we believe that one who is entirely sanctified may fall away, so as to lose his state -- may sin, and bring guilt and condemnation again upon his soul -- is ever liable to this, and consequently under constant need of personal watchfulness and of Divine assistance.

6. We do not include in our idea of holiness freedom from sorrow. Had there never been sin, possibly there had never been sorrow; but the holy Jesus sorrowed, so while upon earth may his disciples. "The servant is not above his Lord" (John 13:16).

7. We do not include in our idea of holiness perfection of degree, or attainment beyond which there is no progress -- a state in which the soul has gained the highest summit of holiness, the greatest reach of perfection; at which its progress will be stopped, and where it will linger in monotonous equipoise through eternity. On the contrary, we exult in the hope and belief of ceaseless progress, of interminable and everlasting advancement -- progress while we live, progress after death.

Let us now state what we do include in perfection or entire holiness.

1. We believe it a Christian's privilege to attain to a state in which he will be entirely free from sin, properly so called, both inward and outward. It is not said that evil and vicious suggestions will not be made to the soul in such a state, but both that there will be no outward compliance nor inward sympathy with the suggestion.

Perhaps there is no point of the discussion where, more opportunely than here, we can consider the precise question, Where do sin and temptation touch? or, Where does temptation culminate into sin? This is one of the most difficult and delicate points in the entire discussion. There is no difficulty at all with the proposition that temptation is not sin; nor is there any with the other proposition, that a holy being may be tempted, since both the holy Adam and the holy Jesus were tempted; in the one case before sin, and in the other without sin. The exact point of difficulty is, at what precise point along the line of temptation it is that the tempted soul begins to sin; what of influence the temptation may be supposed to have before the soul becomes tainted. It is clear that it is not at the point where the evil is suggested that sin begins, for in that case the temptation and the sin would be inseparable, if not identical; but our Lord was tempted without sinning. Is it where the evil thing suggested awakens a movement of the passion to which it is addressed? Not necessarily, we think, since any thing to be a temptation must have a natural power to awaken impulse toward it, and sin does not reside in a mere impulse of nature. We think it is precisely at that point where the soul is conscious of a disposition to yield to what it supposes to be sin, that is discovered sinfulness, and the beginning of sin.

2. But, additionally, we include in our idea of entire holiness more than mere freedom from sin in the foregoing sense. That is merely a negative view; it has a positive character. We believe it to include, in the second place, besides this, the spiritual graces, as love, meekness, humility, and such like, in perfection -- perfection, not of measure, but of kind. By this we do not mean that these holy graces are so complete in measure and growth as to forbid higher development, so that the soul, in this state, can never love more, be more meek, more humble, more believing: in this direction we believe there will be constant progress.

There is one thing more which ought to be taken into the account here, as having a most important practical bearing on the subject; namely, physical and mental contrarieties among men and the influences thence arising on the expression of character. The great change which passes upon souls when they are translated from sinfulness into holiness does not destroy their original or natural differences -- their mental and physical peculiarities remain. We cannot rightly judge either of ourselves or others without keeping this fact in mind. Two men equally and, if you please, entirely holy, may, under certain circumstances, appear to be quite dissimilar as to moral qualities; the one impressing us as possessing transcendent virtue, the other as possibly really bad. The reason why they so differently impress us will be found to arise

from natural, and not moral, dissimilarities. One man is of a highly nervous temperament, another is as decidedly imperturbable; one is sanguine, another distrustful; one impulsive, another dispassionate: now let all these be brought under the influence of sanctifying grace; it will not change their temperaments, so that they will resemble as pieces of coin cut by the same die, or as vessels run in the same mold -- it will not remove the constitutional differences between them, but only control and regulate them.

But if the connection of the soul with the body operates these differences of manifestation, still more do the relations of the intellectual to the moral powers. One man has great wisdom, another is extremely ignorant; one understands all the proprieties of life, another is totally uninformed; one is highly cultivated, the other is untaught. . They may be, in point of fact, equally holy, but there will be a great disparity in the outward manifestations. One will appear to much better advantage than the other; one will fill our ideal of manly perfection, the other will awaken, possibly, our disgust -- not for his sins, but for his ignorance.

There is an infinite difference between an error and a sin. It is well to say, in this connection, that while holiness does not secure these nonessential accomplishments of manners, and while it does not produce in all cases precisely the same manifestations of amiability and grace, yet it imparts always, and in its fullness, the essence of all excellence, which is good will, pure love, which will constantly show itself, not perhaps in the rounded and graceful salutation, in the finished exterior, but in the unmistakable exhibition of a good and sincere heart; and further, the most accomplished and elegant character will be more accomplished by its superadded and crowning glory.

The seat of all moral quality is the soul. Properly, nothing can be said to possess moral quality but the soul. Acts indicate the moral quality of the person who performs them. They are the fruit which declares the nature of the tree. The tree nature is first and determinative of the fruit. But it is worthy of remark, that fruit is not always precisely what a superficial observer supposes it to be; and before it can be judged of properly, it needs to be critically tested by a correct standard. Equally good fruit may not be equally large and round and well-colored. The sting of an insect, or pressure of a twig, or some other exterior impingement may have blemished or dwarfed it, without damaging its flavor. It will be no fault of the tree, and will prove nothing against it, if something external has left such marks. In a world where error, and ignorance, and infirmity, leave their imprint on all that is human, it will not be wise to expect to find any thing free from such marks; but though these are found along with sin, they are not sin.

There are many phrases in common use to designate the grace of entire holiness. Perfect love, entire consecration, God reigning without a rival, perfect acquiescence in the will of God, deadness to sin, the higher life, the life of faith, entering into rest, the rest of faith, the second blessing, full salvation, are specimens. They are severally more or less descriptive, and since some form of expression must be employed to designate a specific phase of experience, it must be carping criticism that would object to the use of such or similar terms. It is not with names that we are concerned, but with that for which they stand. If any employ the above phrases, or any other of like purport, in any sense different from that which we have endeavored to set forth in the foregoing statement, we cannot be identified with them; nor can the great scriptural doctrine of Christian holiness be in any wise responsible therefor.

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