

Entire Holiness Attainable

by Randolph S. Foster

Randolph S. Foster's sermon emphasizes that entire holiness is attainable in this life through biblical teachings and the power of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 5:6, Luke 10:27, Romans 6:22, Romans 8:3, Ephesians 3:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, Hebrews 13:20, 1 Peter 1:16, Revelation 14:5

Topics: "Christian Holiness", "Spiritual Excellence"

Description

Randolph Sinks Foster delves into the attainability of the high state of moral and spiritual excellence described in the preceding chapter of Isaiah. He emphasizes the importance of seeking proof from the Bible as the foundation of religious tenets, highlighting that holiness is not only a present duty and privilege but also an achievable state in this life. Through numerous direct and inferential proofs from various passages, Foster argues that holiness is not only taught but also experienced, making it a central truth of the Christian faith. He challenges believers to embrace the possibility of attaining holiness, as rejecting this doctrine would lead to dire consequences and render God's requirements meaningless.

Transcript

Is the high state of moral and spiritual excellence described in the preceding chapter attainable in this life? This is the question we are now about to discuss.

Many specious and beautiful theories have perished for want of proof. The most magnificent structure may be valueless because of the insecurity of its foundation. Not all that is beautiful is true.

In this chapter it is our intention to present the proof upon which we rely for the support of the foregoing views. . And whence shall the proof be derived? "To whom shall we go?" Not to creeds, or decretals, or ecclesiastical canons, or councils, nor even to the testimony of those who profess to know by personal experience. There is but one foundation upon which any religious tenet can stand. To the Bible! -- what saith the Lord? All will admit the propriety of the appeal. We do not discard or disparage the opinions of the wise and good; but, however much we may esteem them, they are of no authority in matters of religious faith. We may thankfully employ them as helps, but dare not rest in them as infallible guides. We adhere to that sentiment of the illustrious Chillingworth -- a sentiment worthy to be written upon the sky, and read by all generations -- "The Bible, the Bible alone, is the religion (authoritative creed) of Protestants." Employing all lesser lights as aids, and rejoicing in them, we look away, and beyond them, for fuller illumination and sufficient instruction to Him who is the light of the world and the teacher of his

people. Let us, therefore, immediately address ourselves to the study of the holy oracles, and find what they teach upon the subject.

In this treatise we shall employ both these methods for eliciting the Divine teaching; and we hope to sustain our position, not by a single and isolated declaration only, or a single inference only, but by a great number of both direct and inferential proofs of the most unequivocal and irresistible authority: declarations so various, contained in commands, promises, prayers, exhortations, statements, and narratives; and inferences so multiplied, arising from so many sources, as to convince every candid reader that the doctrine we contend for is not limited to a bare and questionable place, a doubtful and uncertain existence in the holy records, but is repletely and abundantly, as well as explicitly, embodied as a cardinal feature throughout the whole system. It breathes in the prophecy, thunders in the law, murmurs in the narrative, whispers in the promises, supplicates in the prayers, resounds in the songs, sparkles in the poetry, shines in the types, glows in the imagery, and burns in the spirit, of the whole scheme, from its alpha to its omega -- its beginning to its end. Holiness! Holiness needed! Holiness required! Holiness offered! Holiness attainable! Holiness a present duty, a present privilege, a present enjoyment, is the progress and completeness of its wondrous theme! It is the truth glowing all over and voicing all through revelation; singing and shouting in all its history, and biography, and poetry, and prophecy, and precept, and promise, and prayer; the great central truth of the system. The truth to elucidate which the system exists. If God has spoken at all it is to aid men to be holy. The wonder is, that all do not see, that any rise up to question, a truth so conspicuous, so glorious, so full of comfort.

1. This truth is directly taught in the Scriptures.

For the convenience of our readers, we will cite, in connection, a large number of passages in which the doctrine is taught.

Passages in which it is taught by command. -- "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27). "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). "Hear, O Israel: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and with all thy might." "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and his statutes, which I command thee this day, for thy good?" (Deut. 6:5; 10:12, 13). "Serve God with a perfect heart and willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth the imagination of the thoughts" (1 Chron. 28:9). "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:5). "Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). "Sanctify yourselves, therefore, and be ye holy. . . . And ye shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the Lord which sanctify you" (Lev. 20:7, 8). "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15, 16).

Passages in which it is taught in exhortation. -- "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). "Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection" (Heb. 6:1).

Passages in which it is taught in promise. -- "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah i 18). "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with -- another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John -1:7-9). "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18). "Whoso hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28).

"And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (Psalm 130:8). "But whoso keepeth his word, in him is the love of God perfected" (1 John 2:5). "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 2:1; 3:8).

"If, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6:22). "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). "And this also we wish, even your perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9). "To the end that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God" (1 Thess. 3:13). "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess. 4:7). "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3).

"God hath chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:11-16).

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3, 4).

Passages in which it is taught in prayer. -- "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him

be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:14-21). "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:20, 21). "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. . . . I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:21, 23). "Sanctify them through thy truth" (John 17:17). "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven; deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:10, 13).

Passages in which it is taught as having been experienced. -- "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace" (Psalm 37:37). "Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man" (Job 8:20). "And Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and a holy" (Mark 6:20). "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom. 6:22). "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:24). "They were both [Zacharias and Elisabeth] righteous before God, walking in all the commandments of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6). "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). "And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. 14:5). "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isaiah 6:5-7). "Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6).

Let the reader ponder these Scriptures. What an irresistible volume of evidence they contain. How full, how various, and how explicit! Is it possible for any one to give them even a cursory reading, and not feel that he is called unto holiness? Much more, can any one, seriously, and with devout and prayerful study, endeavor to comprehend and feel their import, and not realize that it is his privilege, his duty, to be a holy man? Surely we misjudge, or the thing is impossible. Suppose any one should appropriate these lucid and sublime Scripture expressions to himself, and profess to have attained the experience they adumbrate, would not all men understand him to make profession of holiness? Could he employ more explicit terms to declare the enjoyment of such a state, than those contained in the passages quoted? Were his object fullness, intensity, where would he go for a phrase stronger than this, "Sanctify you wholly"? or this, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin"? or this, "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God"? or this, "Perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect"? Were . there but a single passage intimating this glorious truth, there might be room for hesitancy; or a doctrine so wonderful, so replete with surprises -- though repeated at distant intervals -- might startle our incredulity; but when it comes in such resistless volume, and stands out with such commanding distinctness, upon what principle can we justify

suspicion or doubt?

O believer in Jesus, weary as you are of your sins, panting after deliverance from their cruel power, why shall you make limits against your own soul when God has made none? Wherefore should you take sides both against your Maker and yourself?

But shall it be assumed that strict rules of interpretation need not be applied to language uttered in prayer? that prayer is often the blind cry of want or desire, and is not always considerate of what is possible? This is no doubt true in many cases. But is it safe or wise to interpret the prayers here cited by such a rule? Is it proper for us to tone down our prayers to a less limit than the examples furnished us in the divine word? Or shall we be guilty of employing these or similar words with our lips, meanwhile in our hearts telling the Lord that we know the language is too strong, exaggerated? that we don't mean so much, and have no hope that it will be possible to grant what we ask?

Do not all Christians rather, in their holiest hours of prayer, find their souls inspired with similar enlarged desires? Whence come they? Does not the Holy Spirit plead in us, inspiring us? Are not these most sacred pleadings his inspiration and begetting? Will it answer to take the position that they mean nothing as to possible answer? that they simply present an impossible prize to our desires, that stretching forth after it we may approach nearer to it, but with no hope of ever reaching it? Why not reach it? What shall hinder? Has God limited us? Are we straitened in him? What doth he say?

The attainableness of holiness is argued from the declarations of the Scriptures: "Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom, and sanctification, and redemption." "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." "Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed." "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." In these passages holiness is declared to be the privilege and calling of Christians, a state which it is the will of God they should enjoy. The doctrine of its practicability is as undoubtedly taught as any other doctrine in the Bible. Now these declarations are true, or they are false. If true, which every Christian at least is bound to believe, then holiness is attainable; and so our doctrine stands upon the same ground as the truth of revelation. If these declarations are false, the whole scheme is a fabrication, and we are all most sadly, most deeply deceived. No one is prepared to embrace this alternative; and rejecting it, the truthfulness of all that we contend for must be admitted.

The doctrine we contend for is further argued from the fact that ample provision is made for it: "Wherefore Jesus, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." "For this cause the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come, in unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Here the attainment of holiness is declared to be an object to secure the realization of which certain provisions are made. If the means provided are competent -- and who shall say that God has instituted incompetent means? -then the object they provide for may be realized. If the death of Christ is not a failure, the works of the devil may be destroyed. If his suffering without the gate does not come short in its ability of his intent, the people may be sanctified.

There are a few additional considerations important in these connections, constituting inferential arguments or proofs; and these, it is believed, are sufficient, without the volume of Divine evidence set forth above, to produce conviction in every candid mind. The consequences of rejecting the doctrine for

which we contend are alone sufficient, in our estimation, to cause its acceptance. We subjoin a few inferential proofs.

1. God is holy. All sin is infinitely offensive to him. He cannot prefer its existence. He must desire its nonexistence, and, as far as possible, its utter destruction. But what then? Why, manifestly this: if sin is so offensive to God that its entire removal would please him, then it may be so removed, unless it can be shown that it is a thing absolutely impossible in itself, or inconsistent with his plan of government that it should be so removed. That the thing is impossible to infinite wisdom and infinite power no one will assume. That it is inconsistent with his plan of government to bring sin to an end, is scarcely to be inferred, particularly since he has declared that his Son was given to destroy the works of the devil. But if God, from his holiness, hates sin, and from his goodness is inclined to rescue his people from its evils, and by his wisdom understands how it may be accomplished, and by his power is able to achieve it, and if the thing is not in itself impossible, nor inconsistent with his government, then certainly it may be done.

2. Again: if holiness is not attainable in this life, then it cannot be required; or if it is not attainable, and yet is required, then an impossibility is required. if the last consequence is assumed, then it follows that God requires an impossibility.

3. A further consequence of the assumption is: if freedom from sin cannot be attained in this life, it should not be sought or prayed for. To pray for that which it is impossible, in the conviction of the mind, should be granted, is mockery -- the sheerest hypocrisy. No absurdity can be conceived of greater than that of seeking what it is certain, and known so to be, cannot be found. The consequence, therefore, of the belief that entire freedom from sin cannot be attained, must be to discourage all efforts in that direction as useless and vain; nay, to render the idea of such efforts ridiculous and absurd, and so to reconcile the mind to a sinful state.

Is the reader convinced that God requires men to be free from sin? Is he also convinced that God requires no impossibility? Then he must allow that the required state is possible. Does he believe a state of freedom from sin ought to be aspired to -- sought after? Then he must believe that it may be gained if sought.

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