

Entire Holiness Distinct in Degree From Regeneration

by Randolph S. Foster

Regeneration and entire sanctification are two distinct states, with regeneration being a high and blissful state, and entire sanctification being a state of complete holiness.

Scripture: Romans 7:18

Topics: "Sanctification", "Regeneration"

Description

Randolph Sinks Foster preaches about the new birth and justification, emphasizing that while the new birth is a sublime and holy change of nature, it does not signify complete freedom from sin. He highlights the common experience of believers in acknowledging the presence of sinful tendencies even after being born again. Foster discusses the distinction between sin removed in regeneration and the sin that remains, pointing towards the importance of striving for entire sanctification. He challenges Christians, especially ministers, to reflect on their own sanctification and the need for a clear understanding of the sin that lingers within believers.

Transcript

There are those who hold the theory that the new birth which attends pardon is not simply all that is possible, but more, that it is also all that is necessary. We cannot think this is true either to Scripture or consciousness; and it is certainly not in accord with the general sentiment of the Church from the beginning.

Justification is a high and blissful state. The new birth, its concomitant, is a sublime and holy change of nature. It is called a translation "out of darkness into marvelous light," a new creation, a being made meet "to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints," a being "born of God," "born again," "born of the Spirit," a passing "from death unto life," quickened with Christ, and many like expressions, indicating newness and sanctity of nature, and resultant security.

But though all these things are true, we cannot for one moment doubt that the persons described by those and similar phrases are persons in whom there is remaining sin. The grounds of the conviction are, the teaching of the word of God, personal consciousness, the common confession of all believers, including the most holy, and observation.

I need scarcely insist upon this, it is so universally the faith of the Church. The difficulty, indeed, is not to convince believers that they have not yet attained to such a state of freedom from sin; but to persuade them that such a state is their privilege. They not only generally insist that they are not yet holy, but more, that they do scarcely expect to be in this life.

Let any Christian closely interrogate his experience and consciousness upon this point, and see whether the immediate response will not be, that, though "pardoned" and consciously born of the Spirit, and though living in the daily enjoyment of this grace, and going forward to perfection, still there are sinful tendencies and dispositions lurking in his heart; he is not entirely empty of sin; he is not a perfectly holy character. Let him enter into a close, faithful, and prayerful analysis of his passions, his affections, his will, his motives, and see if he will not discern remains of the sinful nature within him not entirely dead but still alive, and seeking the ascendant; as pride, envy, jealousy, anger, impatience, love of the world, dissimulation, self-willfulness, and such like. If these do not dominate or find favor, as certainly they do not, still, do they not have some place and power within him, rising up to give evidence of their presence; though bound, struggling for the mastery, often bringing him into straits, and disturbing his peace and comfort? We are conscious that such has been our experience, and must believe that it is the common experience of Christians.

But it is asked with earnestness, "Is not the work of God perfect in regeneration?" If you mean, Is not the soul regenerated? we answer, Certainly it is; but if you mean, Is it not thereby perfectly holy? we must answer, It does not so seem to us. When a soul is regenerated, all the elements of holiness are imparted to it, or the graces are implanted in it, in complete number, and the perfection of these graces is entire sanctification; and hence, we insist that entire sanctification does not take place in regeneration, for the graces are not then perfect.

With this the teachings of Scripture fully accord. Take a single passage, found in the Apostle's letter to the Christians at Corinth: "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal; as unto babes in Christ. Ye are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you envyings and strife, are ye not carnal?" (1 Corinthians 3:1). This is precisely in point. It exhibits, upon authority of inspiration, the doctrine above expressed. For first, it is certain that the persons here addressed were believers, justified and regenerate. How else could an Apostle address them as brethren; much more, how could he expressly declare them to be "babes in Christ"? Is it possible to be a "babe in Christ" without justifying and regenerating grace? Surely no one can think so. These persons then were in Christ -- they were born again. But what next? Were they entirely holy? free from sin, inward as well as outward? Certainly the Apostle does not say so; on the contrary, he expressly says they were yet "carnal." He could not speak to them as completely spiritual, but as partly carnal; nay, he specifies what of carnality he found remaining among them, and impairing their spirituality or holiness; "for whereas there is among you envyings and strife, are ye not carnal?" Are not these "envyings and strife" tokens of a sinful nature? Indulged, are they not actual sins? are not the inward dispositions thereto inward sins? This passage then fully corroborates our expressed views, and fully authorizes us to say, that evils, opposed to complete spirituality, remain in the hearts of persons in the possession of justifying and regenerating grace.

To argue with them would only seem to be a mockery, a taunt, an aggravation of their sorrow and shame. Tell me, they would exclaim, tell me, not that I am unholy! I know it too well; but tell me, is there deliverance? show me where I may find rest. Such, I am persuaded, would be the conscious, the spontaneous view and feeling of all Christians who would be at the pains for a few moments to look within, at the heart, and back, at the experience of their pilgrimage. Such, reader, if you have not attained already

that great experience set before you in the Gospel, is your present consciousness; and if you are now rejoicing in sanctifying grace, such is your recollection of the past.

Dropping for a moment all speculation, all theorizing, all thoughts of the subject as a general matter, let us come home, and hold with ourselves a practical, personal conference. We are by profession Christians; we have passed through that experimental crisis by which we know that we have passed from death unto life. We have not lost the grace of God out of our hearts. We rejoice now with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. Nothing on earth is so dear to us as our hope in Christ. But are we entirely sanctified? The question is too sacred to be either dismissed irreverently, or answered without profound thoughtfulness. That we may bring the subject directly home, let us drop the plural and bring it directly to each soul. Are you holy? Has the work of entire sanctification by grace been wrought in your heart? Are you now living in the enjoyment of this Divine state? You will not trifle with these questions; you cannot: you may not treat with even the levity of seeming indifference to yourself, a subject of such sacred moment. Are you a minister? ponder, as in the immediate presence of God, this question: Called of God, as you are, to the most holy work of preaching holiness to men, are you yourself holy? Realize that God, the great, the adorable, is now present, looking upon you, waiting your answer. We are hurrying on to the judgment -- passing like an arrow through the air. A step, and the grave will contain us: an instant, and we shall stand before the throne: before the throne of Him who has commanded us to be holy; before the throne of Him who died for our sanctification; before the throne of Him who is ready, waiting, willing, and able to sanctify us! Are we ready?

Still, though I am constrained, for the reasons above named, to give in my adhesion to the doctrine that regeneration does not suppose entire sanctification, yet every effort I have made to define clearly to my own mind precisely what is meant by sin in believers has deepened the conviction that the subject is one of manifold difficulty, and about which there is great confusion of thought. I find evidence of obscurity in all the writings about it. The most eminent divines are not clear. They all agree in the fact; but when they attempt to explain, they become confused. The difficulty is to make plain what that sin is, from which Christian men are not free, which remains in, or is found still cleaving to, believers; how to discriminate between the some sin that is removed in regeneration and the some sin that remains. And it is just around this point that revolves the whole question of entire sanctification, both as to what it is and its possibility. It has to do with that sin that remains. It removes that remainder of sin. Regeneration took some sin away; entire sanctification takes away what was left. How importance is it that the subject should be made clear.

There are a few phrases which have come into common use, which indeed have been of ancient use, which cast a little light on the subject so far as this, that they seem to imply a generic difference between the sin which remains and the sin which is removed. The phrases are employed as descriptive of the kind of sin that remains; they are the following: "inbred sin," "remains of the carnal mind," "roots of bitterness," "seeds of evil."

They do convey some light, they furnish a hint. By examining the phrases more particularly we may find what we seek. They are like the scent which, followed, may lead to the game.

We might find still further aid by raising the fundamental question, What is sin? but our space and the object of this work forbid. The words "sin removed," and "sin remaining," are suggestive of substance; for instance, of some esse that is carried away, and of some esse that is left behind, thus grossly debauching the mind at the very start.

Here, then, we take our departure, with the remark that the term sin is used of precisely the same thing when it is predicated of that which is taken away in regeneration, as when it is predicated of that which remains to be taken away; or it is used to describe things generically different. This is . a point of some importance. If it means precisely the same thing in both cases, the explanation will be one; if it designates things generically different, it will be another.

How much cure is effected when the soul enters its heritage of pardon?

This, it seems to me, is the answer. First, God, who withdrew himself from the sinful and sinning soul, now, along with the pardon, restores himself to it, bringing light with him into it, and bringing also comfort and strength. The soul now sees things in their true light, and its disordered faculties are reduced to order; conscience is quickened and strengthened, and crowned and put on the throne, and made the recognized sovereign of the new soul; the spiritual affections are made alive and grasp their objects; a new controlling and regulating life manifests itself; it is the eternal life springing into being. The new life awakened is a life of supreme love to God and right, and its expression is worship and obedience.

But is the new life so complete as immediately to effect a perfect cure? as to remove the tokens of the old depravity? Is a perfect harmony and easy normal action of the soul's faculties at once secured? We answer, No. The disorder, in part, remains. The old rebel and usurping propensities are not cured; they are only chained. They are still alive, and make war; they clamor, and sometimes, in moments of weakness, prevail. The new order is preserved by struggle. The natural pre-eminence of sins and the power of long habit make the subjective passions like caged beasts beating against their bars; the new masters maintain their thrones with much and tireless watching. Am I not right?

This shows the soul not yet to be in a perfectly normal state; it is not just as it ought to be, and must become, in consummate holiness. When it becomes perfectly cured the propensities will no longer rebelliously strive with the conscience -- no longer have undue power; like a frenzied patient, but remaining, and becoming restored to their right condition, will ask only their normal indulgence and exercise; as was their primeval design, will awaken only their appropriate desires, and lead to their appropriate effects. Just that and no more. And what is that which will hold all in such exact and perfect equipoise and order? The undisputed supremacy of God within the soul -such an elevation and exaltation of the spiritual faculties that any prompting to any sinful act will not simply find no acquiescence, but will awaken immediate recoil, and meet with spontaneous rejection -- such a restoration of lost power that evil habits and Satanic influences will equally fail to disturb the deep and sacred equanimity. God will be all in all.

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