

How Entire Holiness May Be Retained

by Randolph S. Foster

To maintain a sanctified state, one must constantly watch against sin, refuse temptation, live in the use of all the ordinary and instituted means of grace, and maintain a perpetual consecration, all of which is rooted in faith.

Scripture: Psalm 1:2, Proverbs 13:20, 1 Corinthians 10:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Hebrews 4:12, Hebrews 10:25, Hebrews 11:6, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Randolph Sinks Foster preaches about the importance of maintaining a sanctified soul amidst the temptations and frailties of life. He emphasizes the need for constant vigilance against sin, absolute refusal to comply with temptation, and the use of all means of grace to sustain spiritual growth. Foster also highlights the significance of consecration, faith, living by the minute, and the possibility of regaining sanctification if lost through sincere repentance and returning to God.

Transcript

We may not discuss here the mooted question of the possibility of a believer's final apostasy. Whatever may be the truth upon that point, all agree that during life, amid the enticements of the world and the seductions and temptations of sense, and the frailty of human weakness, the best men are liable to fluctuations of character; now drifting away and anon recovering; now aglow with holy fervors, now declining and cold; now in the mount of sacred fellowship, breathing and living the very spirit of heaven, anon in the valley, and bowing down under heaviness and manifold darkness. In these diverse states, we must believe the soul varies in sanctity, and cannot doubt that it suffers in its actual character as well as feelings. Doubtless mere changes of the emotions may exist without radical changes of character. Neither sorrow, nor temptation, nor even great heaviness of spirit, nor yet absence of conscious fellowship with God, necessarily imply either backsliding or sin. It is not of these we speak, as among the changes by which character suffers, but of those yieldings to evil influence by which we grieve the Spirit and consciously depart from God. Placed in the midst of these external evil influences, and beset with human frailties, what, we now particularly inquire, can be done in order that a sanctified soul may preserve its state and character; that it may be in the evening what it was in the morning; this week, what it was last; this year, what it was the former year? A more interesting practical inquiry could scarcely be started. We will endeavor briefly to answer it.

And we should never, when contemplating the subject of actual salvation, lose sight of the fact, that we are coworkers with God; he works, and we work with him. It is so in the incipient motions of the soul toward salvation, and so throughout all subsequent stages of the work; so in the beginning, so in the progress; so in attaining, and so in maintaining, each several state of grace. This is so plain as to need no illustration. But the question recurs, What must we do in order to retain the grace of entire sanctification?

1. We answer, first: we must acquire the habit of constant watching against sin. The tempter is a vigilant and insidious foe, ever on the alert, ever cunning, and full of artifice. We need to be as wakeful and vigilant. There is no time when he may not approach us, no place so sacred that he will not dare to intrude himself. Even in the privacy of the closet, at the communion, in the sanctuary -- when we are alone, when in society, when musing, when conversing, when preaching, when praying, when praising, when engaged in business, when seeking pleasure, when employed, when idle -- he ever lurks near us, and seeks our ruin. He often disguises his true character; sometimes appearing to us as an angel of light, using the honied tones of friendship, professing love, consulting our good, wearing the mien of disinterestedness; now flattering, that we may become vain; persuading, that we may consent; raging, that we may yield; and with a thousand other modes, seeking either to surprise, conciliate, or overwhelm us.

Some are ready to exclaim, But such watching would become wearisome, and render the service a hard and impracticable duty. No, not if the soul is free to it. No duty is oppressive if we love it. By the grace of God, inwardly helping us, and the instincts, if I may employ the term, of a sanctified soul -- by which I mean no more than its ready, almost spontaneous effort -- it may be done, and done with ease -- but even though it were wearisome, this is not our rest; and if holiness be worth possessing, it is worthy of the effort requisite to its attainment and preservation.

2. Would you maintain a sanctified state? Then must there be on your part an absolute refusal to comply with temptation under any circumstance, to any degree. The slightest compliance is death. We would impress this deeply upon your minds. It is a very different thing from the watchfulness advised above. A sentinel may be very watchful, but not faithful; he may see the enemy, but not sound the alarm; nay, may make terms with him. You are not only to watch the approach of sin, but absolutely and totally to refuse it! It matters nothing though the temptation be powerful, though the indulgence be venial, you may not yield. You may not parley if the case is unequivocal. If doubtful, you must shun the appearance of evil. Let the purpose be inflexible, that you will not go one step -- not even look with a desire -- toward the path of the transgressor; "avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away. This is your only safety, if you would maintain your relation to God.

3. Live in the use of all the ordinary and instituted means of grace. Some who, perhaps, were truly sanctified, have committed a deplorable and fatal error upon this point. Finding themselves greatly sustained and strengthened they have vainly imagined that they need no longer employ the ordinary means. Some have been heard to say that they found no further occasion for prayer and other helps that were indispensable in a merely justified state. However sincere such may have been in the outstart of their experience, they have evidently reached a dreadful state of delusion and fanaticism. The means of grace, as instituted of God, are undoubtedly essential to spiritual sustenance when they are practicable, that is, when within reach. To neglect them is a contempt of God's gracious provisions, which must induce his displeasure; and it is a direct violation of his order, which includes the use of means as a duty, the neglect of which, therefore, is sinful.

We may name as important -

Prayer -- Prayer of all kinds, as occasion may require; but particularly closet prayer, which is only another name for inward looking to God, generally performed in secret places. This, with a sanctified soul, will become a habit; its breath will be prayer. This will be a constant, though it may be, and doubtless to some extent will be, an unconscious or rather spontaneous exercise.

Meditation -- To preserve this state much meditation and inward looking is useful. Seasons of serious thoughtfulness of this kind are indispensable to spiritual growth, and even to the continuance of spiritual life. In such retired seasons the soul takes her reckoning, resolves upon her course, and strengthens her resolution for after contests.

Searching the Holy Scriptures -- with an humble, honest, teachable spirit. This we believe an important means, in proportion as it may be practicable. It will supply the soul with armor, enlarge its powers, help it for resistance and progress, and strengthen all the elements of its life.

The Sacrament -- the holy communion. Perhaps no means will be attended with so great comfort, so much profit. Let it, therefore, never be neglected, and never idly or inconsiderately attended to, but with due preparation, and much prayer, and humiliation, and thanksgiving.

Christian communion -- or conversation and intercourse with those who enjoy, or are seeking, a high spiritual state. This is of great value. It encourages, strengthens, and corrects. Reading religious biography is of this kind. It is communion with the holy dead, as conversation with the living is communion with them. Holy men of old "spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard" them! so let us do, and the Lord will hear us also, and, when he hears, will bless.

Still, much discrimination needs to be practiced here. Many excellent people are not judicious counselors. Some are wanting in judgment; some, fanatical, or morbid, or ignorant, or narrow-teaching for commandments the traditions of men; bearing self-invented burdens and imposing them upon others; not wise, however good. One needs to use discretion in no case so much as upon this subject in the choice of his friends. Beware of new lights -- of bold, confident, forward persons, self-constituted teachers -- separatists, censorious, opinionated Pharisees. Beware of cant, of sanctimoniousness, of party shibboleths, of names. These are not of Christ and tend to harm. Be simple, sincere, and earnest; and in quietness, and without a "Lo here!" or "Lo there" of ostentatious display, in the use of divinely appointed means pursue your course. You cannot fail of success.

4. Consecutive, or rather perpetual, consecration. This, to some, may seem to be included in the resolute resistance of every approach of sin. However this may be, it does not do away with the need of the remark we wish to make under this head. Entire consecration, as a means to the attainment of sanctification, has been explained in another connection; what we wish now to say is, that it is a means, and an indispensable one, of its preservation. It is so vital that the state cannot exist a moment in its absence. Hence, let it be remembered that the consecration which precedes this state is likewise to continue in the same degree after it is gained, for its perpetuation. It is a constant, uninterrupted, and unending consecration; a point carried on into an endless line.

5. The life of holiness is eminently a life of faith. We have before said it is attained by faith; we now say it cannot continue a moment without faith; faith is its very root and sap. The same faith which at first introduced the principle preserves it. But we are not, therefore, to suppose the soul must always be in painful endeavor. Faith, in the heart of a Christian, operates when he does not think of it, produces fruits without his consciousness.

Faith is not something which one having learned how to use, he is enabled to sin, and get rid of his sin dexterously -- enabled to renounce or soil, and then restore, sanctity at will. Rather, it is that mysterious hand by which the holy soul clings to God amid all temptation, and so is kept from sin.

6. Acquire the habit of living by the minute. Learn the secret of that wise counsel, when properly understood, "Be careful for nothing." Not that you are to be careless; but let each minute provide for itself. Let it not be supposed that you are not to act for the future, but act by the minute. Take care of this moment now, while you have it, and the next when it comes; you will not then neglect any. You can live this minute without sin! Is it not so? Do it, then. Never mind what is before you. Do not sin now. When each successive minute comes, do likewise. If you will do this, you will not sin . at all.

It is implied in all these advices, of course, not that your efforts efficiently keep you, but instrumentally: you employ the means, God is the efficiency. He gives you the power to work; and when you work, he co-works with you and in you. So you "are kept by the power of God, through faith."

We will append to this chapter a remark upon the subject of regaining this grace, if at any time it should be lost. There is some difference of opinion among Christians as to the extent of lapsing or falling away possible after conversion. We need not say that we are among the number who believe in the possibility of entire apostasy; upon this belief, however, in these connections, we do not insist. We only avow our belief that a merely justified Christian may sin against God and forfeit the grace of justification; and, further, that a sanctified Christian may lose the grace of sanctification, yet, and also of justification. Sanctification includes justification; it may be lost, and justification retained; or both may be lost at one and the same time. Not every thing that would mar a perfectly holy character would destroy the filial relation of the believer; as that relation subsisted prior to entire sanctification, so it may remain when that state is marred -- ceases.

Now, in answering the question, How may one who has enjoyed the grace of entire sanctification, and lost it, be restored? it is obvious reference must be had to the extent of his lapse, the condition into which he has fallen. Much more may be necessary for one than for another -- a different kind and amount of effort. One has fallen from the summit of a mountain into a deep gulf at its base; another has just perceptibly declined slightly down its slope; one will need much more to regain the apex than the other.

Has one who was evidently a truly sanctified child of God fallen entirely away, become sevenfold more the child of the devil than he was before? In addition to the enormity of his sins, has he continued long in this state? How dreadful his condition! One is almost ready to conclude there is no mercy, no salvation for him; "that to renew him again to repentance is impossible." We would not go so far; yet we think the chances are, he never will be restored. Should he, however, in his abyss of sin, ever awake, and think of returning to his injured and dishonored Saviour, deep and painful will be his conviction; broken, indeed, will be his heart; his cry will ascend as from the very belly of hell; and the probabilities are, he will find trouble and sorrow. Not because the Saviour will be less merciful, but because he will find it hard to confide in mercy which has been so much abused. Not because the blood of Jesus will be ineffectual to wash away his sins, but because he will find it difficult to avail himself, by faith, of that blood which has been trampled beneath unhallowed feet. Should one who has fallen so deplorably chance to read this page, we would speak to him in behalf of his abused Lord; and yet our words shall be kind. See what you have done! How great is your sin! Think of other days. Call to mind the goodness of God. Behold yourself now! Are you overwhelmed? -- filled with shame and sorrow? It is well. Will you return? Will you come back to the arms of your slighted Saviour? Do you say, How can I? -- there is no mercy. Say not so. There is mercy, if you

have a heart to seek it. Come as first you came. The same Saviour can still save, his blood will still be efficacious. You need to commence again at the beginning, to relay the foundations; but do this, and all will be well. The cup is bitter, but you need to drink it, the path thorny, but you must travel it. It may be your sorrows will be greater than before: you must suffer them. But this one thing remember, and let it sustain you: if you will retrace your steps, if you will make the needful efforts, you may again be happy.

But your case is not that which is described above; the advice does not meet your particular want. You have not entirely forsaken the Saviour. You are still a Christian, in the enjoyment of a good hope, outwardly witnessing a good profession, and inwardly enjoying some of the sacred influences of the Spirit; but you are not in the high grace of a former experience.

The love of the world in an undue measure, yielding to the force of some temptation, neglect of some duty, want of watchfulness, has laid waste your confidence. You have departed in some degree from God; your thoughts, or your affections, have been given to an improper object; you have preferred your own will to the will of God in some particular, you have let in vanity or sloth, pride or impatience, uncharitableness or selfishness; you have ceased to be entirely the Lord's; guilt has ensued, condemnation is upon you. You feel it; you are unhappy. You do not doubt your relation, but all is not right within. Humble yourself before God, confess your fault, return: wherein you have departed in thought, affection, volition, or deed, at once correct the wrong, and expect God to renew you again. There may be times and circumstances when the confession of your departure to the Church may be necessary. If it has been manifest, it will bring your profession into discredit, and if secret, it must violate your own sense of propriety should you continue the profession without an admission of your temporary departure. So soon as you return heartily to God he will return to you: but it must be a full, hearty, entire return; not a mere desire, not a convulsive effort, not a declaration, not a semi-sincere and half-earnest thing; you must come as first you came, with an entire offering, and God will accept it. If you shall find great difficulty, as perhaps you may -- it is possible even more than at first, for your reproof -- you must overcome, overcome as at first, not in your own strength, but in the strength of God, which will become yours, by the use of the means with which you are sufficiently acquainted.

And should any who have lapsed from this blessed experience chance to read these pages, we would say to them, Return; retrace your steps. You cannot, whatever other Christians may do, find rest in an inferior state. You know the more excellent way. Duty calls you with a tenfold voice: do not turn away, be not overcome with discouragement, let not self-upbraidings hinder you. You now know the cause of your loss -- you may succeed better -- try again. Privilege invites, duty points the way, your unsatisfied heart urges, the Spirit moves -- do not delay.

Whatever be the extent of your departure, whether of long or short duration, into more grievous or less guilty backslidings; whether you have lost all, or only a part of your religious character, stop now. Go not one step farther. Turn at once to your dishonored Saviour; bring back your heart, guilty as it may be, and become his again. Think not your case is hopeless. It may be deplorable -- dreadful. You may have deeply grieved the Spirit, reproached the Redeemer, insulted the Father; still, if you will return, there is no occasion for despair. See how much is involved, and, as you would not risk your undoing, make haste to find what you have unhappily forfeited.

Look before you. It is high time that you awake out of sleep. What you do must be done now. A moment, and it may be too late. O that we might feel how much depends upon immediate and thorough action; how much and earnestly we are called to work now, and to work diligently, seeing that "the night cometh, in

which no man can work!"

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