

Means for the Attainment of Entire Holiness

by Randolph S. Foster

Entire sanctification is a progressive work that requires effort and faith, not just time and ordinary endeavor.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:15, Hebrews 6:1, 1 Peter 2:1, 2 Peter 1:5

Topics: "Entire Sanctification", "Christian Holiness"

Description

Randolph Sinks Foster delves into the topic of entire sanctification, exploring whether it is instantaneous, progressive, or both, and if it is distinct from regeneration. He emphasizes that while entire sanctification is not a different kind of holiness from that received at conversion, it is a consummate holiness that differs in degree. Foster illustrates this by comparing the growth in holiness to the stages of a seed growing into full corn, highlighting the importance of recognizing the distinction between the two stages. He stresses the necessity of specific effort, distinct faith, and complete consecration in the pursuit of holiness, cautioning against the misconception that sanctification depends on a profession of sanctification.

Transcript

There is a phase of the subject which may better be introduced at this point than later. It is this, Is the attainment of entire sanctification instantaneous or progressive, or both? It is obvious that the question as to the means of attainment must be affected by the answer that shall be given. And there is yet another question of much importance, in order to perfect clearness, which may best be introduced here. It is this, Is entire sanctification distinct in kind from regeneration?

Entire sanctification, when attained, is not a discriminated kind of holiness from that which is imparted to the believer; it is not an experience different in its genus from that which he obtained when he was converted; it is not a birth into another kind of grace, or estate, or life, from that given before. But while regeneration and entire sanctification are the same in kind, the one being partial holiness, the other being consummate holiness, they are evidently different in degree, and are differentiated as the complete is distinguished from the incomplete. When the second stage of experience is reached, therefore, it is distinct in degree from the first, and may in a true and proper sense be called a second blessing. The cases are really different, and ought so to be recognized. The one is the culmination of the other, and ought not to be described as identical with it. If an injustice is done to the first by depreciating its kind, an injustice is done to the second by depreciating its degree. If a small aperture should be made through a wall into a dark room, some light would be admitted; if the walls were made perfectly translucent, it would be filled with light. In both cases there would be the same kind of element taken in, but in the one case it

would be partial, in the other complete. There would be no difference in kind, but a marked and most important difference in degree. The second stage would be very distinguishable from the first. The blade differs from the full corn in the ear. It is the precursor of the corn, has the identical life in it which the corn has, and the corn cannot be without it; but it is not the corn. The end of the seed life is not the blade, but the corn. It is a great mistake and a great wrong to ignore this obvious distinction. Most fatal would be the blunder if the farmer should garner his blades. He might say it is the same as the corn, since it has the same life as the corn; but the mistake would be disastrous. Content with the blade, he might fail of the corn. The answer to the next question will still further illustrate this point.

Is entire sanctification a progressive or instantaneous work? This, like the former question, has been greatly confused by indiscreet words and hasty and crude generalizations.

That there is growth in holiness, we cannot imagine any Christian doubts. That growth in holiness, from the degree of it imparted in regeneration, is progress toward the completeness of it in entire sanctification, we cannot conceive a Christian understandingly to deny. All real advances along a line in the direction of a point must be approximating the point. The rill that keeps ever widening and deepening is coming to be the river. The river in its flow must be ever nearing the ocean; but the point sought differs from the several points along the line of approach; the rill differs from the river; the river is not the ocean.

Christian development differs from natural development, but there is some analogy. A seed contains a life, which when it germinates tends to maturity in a regular and fixed order of growth, and must pass over determinate and uniform stages, from the blade to the full corn, or fail and die.

If there is any analogy to this in the order of Christian development, it is not perfect. When a soul is born of God, its goal is holiness. The principle implanted in it is a principle of holiness.

The seed has germinated; it is a living seed. Its life tends to the goal of maturity, but whether it will reach that point ever or today, depends not on the seed or any determinate order of growth. There is not in the life implanted the principle of necessary growth, which determines either that it must infallibly become consummate, or in what order of time it will reach perfection. It may be blasted entirely, or it may be of starved and stunted growth, or scarcely grow at all, or it may be of healthy and thrifty growth, or it may spring from germ to ripeness with great rapidity, or it may in a single bound of life exhibit the full corn in the ear. In this it is only somewhat analogous to nature. Many conditions combine to determine the order of development both in nature and in grace. The seed must have a perfect living germ, or it will not grow at all; it must be placed in good and sufficient soil, or it will wither and die before it comes to ripeness; it must have light and warmth and rain; it must be protected from violence and encouraged by culture. The seed may be good, but if any of these other conditions be wanting it will bring forth either no fruit, or small fruit, or late and imperfect fruit, when it comes to the reaper's bosom. We think in all these respects the analogy holds substantially, and must hold, therefore, that the way to the end, or full corn in the ear, in the spiritual as in the natural, is along the line of growth; it is reached by and not without progress; it is growing up into Christ; it is first babes, then men; it is going on to perfection; it is hungering and thirsting and being filled.

We have no favor for the sentiment that growth in grace is not growth toward entire holiness. Every earnest and thrifty Christian is advancing directly toward the goal of that great experience. So taught Jesus and the Apostles:

"Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted

that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:1-3). "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5-8). "But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20, 21). "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15). "Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6:1).

But conceding all this, and dissenting with any, if there are such, who deride the doctrine of progress in holiness, or progressive sanctification, we fear that many just at this point miss their way. If the work of entire sanctification may be the end of a line of progressive sanctification, they infer that it cannot be instantaneous. This, we doubt not, is a dangerous mistake. A traveler may reach a point which lies near him by going round the globe to get to it, and every step he takes may be precisely along a line that will bring him to it, but the long journey will be a great waste of time and force. He might have reached it by a single step the day he started. We doubt not it is so in this case. There is no intelligent Christian who does not believe that advances in ripeness and holiness may be more or less rapid, varying from the slowest and most tedious, to the most vigorous and swiftest paces. This given, the problem is to find the quickest possible attainment. That the earliest possible attainment of the end is most desirable -- is duty -- we must believe.

Moreover, it is important to remember that while earnest Christians are ever advancing toward entire holiness, they will never attain it without specific effort. If they reach the goal it must be by distinct and masterful faith, by great and special seeking, not by mere lapse of time and ordinary endeavor. No one will cross this Jordan at a common pace. He must smite the waters. He must be taken into the Mount. He must be apart and alone with the Master. His soul must feel its need so urgently that nothing short of immediate and complete salvation will satisfy its craving. It must no longer be content with progressive successes, or it will never come into this Canaan. The Gospel it will need and demand is one of immediate help. Woe to the messenger who, by his teaching, encourages delay by discouraging the hope of immediate victory. Entire holiness, not at death, not at the end of a long journey, not by slow growth, however possible it may be, and even certain, but entire holiness now, the privilege and duty of all believers, we must hold is the doctrine of God, and the doctrine which needs most to be urged upon the Church which is his bride.

We hope, reader, unless you have already entered and become a dweller in the land, that you are now anxious to "pass over." But if it should be that, like Reuben, and Gad, and Manasseh, you have been content to settle down on this side the Jordan, finding it a goodly and pleasant country; and if, even yet, you should be satisfied to remain here, because "of its fertility" and abundance, we trust you will remain content no longer. Goodly, and pleasant, and abundant as you have found "Heshbon," and "Gilead," and "Bashan" -- more glorious by far than Egypt -- places of delightful rest from the toils and dangers of the wilderness; yet they are not the promised inheritance; their richness and fertility is not the exuberance of the heritage of God's people; they abound not with the "figs and pomegranates and clusters" of the covenanted possession; they are not as "Hebron" and "Bethel," as "Eshcol" and "Beulah" -- as that "Hephzibah" in which the Lord delighteth, "and which floweth with milk and honey."

Thank God, some have gone over, and are marching through the length and breadth of the land; many are going over; and many more are looking wishfully after their brethren, who have courageously advanced and taken possession. O that there may be a general movement, a simultaneous uprising, and shout of "onward" among the "sacramental host."

It is universally well enough known that faith is the condition; but where assistance is needed is, at these points; What is faith, and how may it be exercised? How often have we exclaimed, and how often have we heard others, with agonizing distress, exclaim, when exhorted to believe, to exercise "simple faith," What must we believe? how can we believe? This common, we had like to have said universal, exclamation indicates where the true difficulty lies.

While we point out certain things to be done as aids to faith, let it be remembered that these things are not supposed to be either meritorious, or performed or performable in our own strength. We can do nothing without gracious aid; we distinctly attribute all our power to work, in the way of seeking, to a gracious ability bestowed upon us, and so acknowledge whatever is done to be of grace. But as we are dependent upon grace for ability, so grace is always furnished for our use, and we need never be in any want. Thus distinctly acknowledging the whole to be of grace, we shall now state what by the aid of grace we are to do as coworkers with God: "Working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, while he worketh in us to will and do of his own good pleasure."

Faith, in order to its exercise, presupposes the knowledge of sin, and sorrow for it; the knowledge that there is a Saviour, and a readiness to embrace him. The following advices are intended to assist you to find out the way more clearly:

1. And first, endeavor to have a clear and distinct view of the thing at which you aim -have the mark definitely in your mind. How shall you obtain this definite idea? By reading, (particularly the Scriptures,) conversation, meditation, and prayer. With sincere desire, and humble prayer, you will not need to linger long; the discovery will be made.

By far the best means at this point is earnest prayer. The Holy Ghost alone can furnish the light you need. He shines most brightly in the praying soul. He best reveals sin. He most clearly presents the remedy. "He helpeth our infirmities." Linger at the gracious throne until you comprehend clearly the precise point you aim at. If we would avoid sad and hurtful blunders, great and earnest painstaking will be required here. Delusion and sin will inevitably follow hasty generalization, and the last state may be, nay, will be, worse than the first.

2. And now, having obtained a clear discovery of your privilege, in the second place, endeavor to realize your need. If you have no sense of need, you will assuredly make no progress. If, with them of Laodicea, you say, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," -- I have religion enough, I see no special reason for making so much ado about the matter, -- if such, or any thing resembling this, is your feeling, you will not soon occupy advanced ground. Seek to realize your wants. But how shall you do this? There is but one way. O that we could prevail upon you to be faithful here! Taking the twin lamps of truth, the Bible and conscience, with sincere prayers for the guidance of the Holy Ghost, make that diligent search which the importance of the case requires. Be candid with yourself. Make no extenuation, no apology, use no tenderness. Ferret every recess thoroughly; probe to the bottom; pass through every chamber of your soul; search it through and through, with a determination to know your case, to look at yourself stripped of every disguise. What do you find? Are there no idols in the sacred temple? No "images

of gold?" no "Babylonish garments?" no concealed "spies"? No pride, no envy, no jealousy, no anger, no malice, no undue love of the world, no undue desire for the praise of men, no improper ambition? Does God possess your heart without a rival? Are you wholly the Lord's? O for faithfulness! Would you attain to holiness? Linger at this point. Have no mercy on yourself, be resolved to know the worst! You may have such discoveries as will astonish and distress you; still, make diligent search. What is your example? Is it all that a Christian's ought to be? Do you daily exhibit, in the family, in the social circle, in your business, everywhere, those tempers which should adorn the Christian character? What is your influence? Is it, so far as it is under your control, always decidedly and undividedly for Christ?

And upon this point let us add, that this discovery of your destitution of holiness and sense of want should be accompanied with the deepest contrition and self-abasement -- penitence for having so long lived beneath privilege, below duty. If the work of forgiveness is preceded by godly sorrow as well as confiding faith, so also is the greater and still more glorious work of holiness; a sorrow, it may be, not attended with the same bitterness, and doubt, and fear, which usually attend initial repentance, but possessing quite as much, aye more, of grief and self-abnegation. And what more can be necessary to gain this penitence than a discovery of facts? Surely, when we see ourselves our hearts will melt within us. We shall see, nay, we shall feel, 'Tis worse than death our God to love, and not our God alone.

3. Having thus obtained a distinct view of holiness, and having made a discovery of your own wants and defects, and remaining sinfulness, you have gained an important point. The next thing to be secured is willingness. Are you now willing and desirous to be made holy? It is possible for a man to perceive his sins, and yet be unwilling to give them up. Many do this. How is it with you? Are you now willing to give up all your idols, to "cut off right arms," to "pluck out right eyes," to put to sacrifice dearest and most cherished indulgences? Look well to this! How vain to expect, or pretend even to desire, salvation from all sin, at the same time that you are harboring some in the heart! Would you be holy, you must make up your mind to the crucifixion of . every sin; the very last must be surrendered, and given to the cross and spear.

Holiness! Are you willing to receive it, with all its consequences, of watchfulness, and sacrifice, and self-denial, and entire devotion of the soul and life to God? Not only are you willing, thus to be freed from sin, and to take the responsibility of holiness, but are you desirous to do so? Is it the supreme wish of your heart? Are you willing, in proof of your sincerity and preference, to accept it in lieu of every thing besides?

4. Still further; it is not only needful that you become willing and desirous upon the subject, but you must likewise come to the firm purpose and resolution that through grace you will be holy; that you will never rest short of this state; that at all hazards you will persevere, and never cease the effort until you attain. If you find it difficult to . form the purpose -- if there is discernible a remaining feeling that, if you should not immediately succeed, perhaps you may give over the struggle -- pray and agonize, for the victory here; never rest until your mind is determined. Nothing great can be accomplished without resolution. An "unstable" or "double mind" cannot prosper. Be firmly resolved, therefore, that you will contend for and claim your privilege -- that you will attain.

Some commence seeking God, or engage in the pursuit of holiness, without a decided purpose to succeed. They have a will to commence working, but not a will to do all that may be necessary, to make all requisite sacrifices, to persevere through every opposition. This may be your case; if so, stop short, and resolve firmly, irrevocably, that you will be for God wholly.

The work of resisting every sin-crucifying every improper desire, being entirely for God -will meet with opposition, strong opposition; a feeble purpose will soon yield; the soul will relapse into its former state. The work will not be accomplished; not because it was impossible, but because there was not the requisite resolution. A man is dying of a tumor; he wishes it removed, and goes to a surgeon; but the knives intimidate him -- his resolution fails; he returns with the fatal tumor still upon him. Would you be holy? Learn by this illustration the value of resolution; resolution that will not cower when the knife is laid to the heart to amputate its idols!

5. The purpose now being formed, the next point is entire consecration -- the giving up of yourself to God -- your soul, your body, your time, your talents, your influence, your all; withdrawing all from the world, and from sin, and from self, and giving all in complete sacrifice to God, to be his, and his alone, forever. Will you do this? Examine yourself closely in this connection. Are you willing to devote all, entirely, forever, to the Lord? Holiness implies this: if we are not willing to make the consecration, we are not willing, and hence not ready, to receive holiness. Here, again, you will need grace to enable you to make the consecration. You cannot do it in your own strength. You will need to pray, and look to God for the assistance of the Spirit. Thus doing, bring forth every thing separately -- yourself, your family, your reputation, your property; and, with all sincerity, relinquish all claim, and surrender the whole to God, to use and enjoy them only as he directs, and with reference to his glory; never to withdraw again what you thus solemnly covenant shall be only his. Will you now do this? Is this your mind?

A word more upon this point: consecration is not sanctification, it is a part of it. Consecration is your work, God giving the requisite grace; when it is complete, entire sanctification, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, must immediately follow. But more particularly, What is consecration? It is the entire dedication of the whole person to God; in other words, -- the complete subordination of the human will to the Divine will, complete acquiescence in his will, and reference in all things to his glory. It does not imply that we retire from the world; that we give our whole time to religious exercises; that we withhold communion from our fellowmen; that we give our entire thoughts, affections, and efforts to technically religious duties; such a thing would be impracticable in this world, would conflict with the expressed will of God, and would be itself therefore sinful. We have business to do, to provide for our households and to enable us to gain property wherewith to do good; our thoughts may be given to this; we have families and friends, we may love them, and minister to them, and enjoy them; nay, these things are a part of our duty. By consecration to God, therefore, we mean simply a supreme reference to the will and glory of God in all things; using and enjoying all as he wills we should; disclaiming any rights that conflict with his rights; pursuing such business, and in such manner, as from our best light we believe is according to the will of God; using all the proceeds of our labor precisely as we believe God directs; loving those objects, and in that degree, which he approves; doing those acts which will be for his glory; living in the world, but living for God.

6. Have you a definite view of holiness? Do you realize your need of it? Are you willing to receive it? Is it your desire and purpose to persevere until you obtain it? and, in order thereto, do you realize a readiness to give up all to God, in entire consecration? If this should be your mind, one thing more and the work will be done; "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Faith is the only condition upon which the blessings of the Gospel are offered. "Justification" is by faith; "regeneration" is by faith; "sanctification" is by faith; "glorification" is by faith; by faith as the instrument, and by the blood of Jesus as the merit, and by the Spirit as the agent. Whenever faith is exercised, the work will be done. The preceding advices are only prescribed as means of assisting, as co-operating with the grace of God to bring the mind up to the point of faith, to prepare us for this saving exercise. And let it

not be supposed that a long process is necessary in order to this preparation. With diligent application, and by Divine assistance, the work may soon be accomplished.

It may be important to be still more explicit at this point. Faith includes the ideas both of "belief and trust," and exists in various stages.

1. A general belief in Christ, as the Saviour and sanctifier; 2. Belief that he is able to sanctify you; 3. Belief that he is willing to do it; 4. Belief that he is able and willing to do it now, not tomorrow; 5. Belief that he has promised to do the work, and that his promise will not fail; 6. Belief that if I now have faith, he will now, this moment, do it; 7. Reliance, or trust in him now, this moment, to do, accompanied with a belief that he doeth it. Mark, that he now, when you believe according to his promise, doeth it; not a belief that it is done, but, accompanying my faith, it being a sound faith, that he doeth the work.

An error has gained considerable prevalence, and has wrought not a little evil, in relation to this very subject -- the faith which brings the sanctifying grace.

It has been indiscreetly said, "We are to believe the work is done, and it will be done." Persons seeking the blessing have been told that they must believe they are sanctified, and they will be sanctified. What a misfortune that so great, so dangerous an error should be taught, in connection with so important a subject! What a manifest absurdity; Making our sanctification to depend upon the belief of an untruth; namely, a belief that it is now wrought, in order that it may be wrought! This is a great delusion. It is not the doctrine of the Bible. It is not, and never was, the doctrine of any branch of the Church. Some sincere and honest Christians have fallen into this delusion without perceiving its absurdity; and it has gained considerable currency. We trust it will no more find place in the language of the friends of this glorious doctrine.

The stages of faith immediately at the point of entire sanctification, and just before, and right after it, may thus be described. And let it be remembered, that when the exercise of faith takes place, it is not a mere intellectual calculation; it occurs when the soul is travailing for sanctifying power; when it is groaning for deliverance from distressing sinfulness; when it is giving up all to Christ; when it is feeling that "it is worse than death its God to love, and not its God alone"; when it is purposing to claim and obtain holiness, at all hazards. That is the state of the soul; it is now agonizing at God's altar; it is pleading for salvation, looking at the promises; the Holy Spirit is helping, imparting illumination, and strengthening the faltering faith. Now comes the moment when sanctification is about to be imparted. Now the soul believes it will be done; taking firmer hold of the promises, and looking steadfastly upon the atoning sacrifice, now the intercessor, it believes it is being done; the refining fire touches it, "as the coal Isaiah's lips"; it yields, it trusts -- the work is done; and now the soul, sanctified, believes it is done, and rejoices in the rest of faith. The belief that it will be done, that it is being done, is the trust which brings the blessing; the belief that it is done follows after. They are each distinct, though all may occur in the interval of a moment.

After noticing one more abuse we shall close the present chapter. The abuse to which I refer is, the rendering a profession of sanctification a condition of its attainment. Let those who are clear in the enjoyment of holiness declare it with becoming meekness and humility; if there is any need, when they are satisfied of their attainment, let them be advised to make a public confession. But let no man be urged to make a profession, the truth of which he does not know certainly, and which he even doubts, with the hope that profession under such circumstances will benefit. It may fasten delusion upon him, but cannot bring sanctifying grace. If you are sanctified, evidence is when it will be to the glory of God, and in a

manner befitting so high a state. If you have almost attained, so as to think perhaps you are entirely sanctified, confess so much, and look for more. If you desire to be entirely sanctified, confess your desire, and contend for the witness. But never fall into the delusion that you must profess beyond what you are persuaded is true.

It is implied, of course, in all the foregoing advices, that during the time this struggle is going on, whether a longer or shorter period, you are attentive to all the means of grace, particularly prayer, reading the holy word, attendance upon the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, meditation, conversation with those who may be able to give advice, perusing books on the subject, and all other means, public and private, such as God is wont to own and bless. These things must be done until we attain, and after we attain. But let us beware that we fall not into the error of depending on forms and means. There is no doing without them, but in themselves they are nothing. They are to be received only as aids to saving, to sanctifying faith; as scaffolding about the firm wall of confiding trust. But our only help is in God, who gives efficiency to means.

No distinct chapter has been assigned to the agency of the Holy Ghost in the accomplishment of this great change. But this is not because we esteemed it an unimportant point; on the contrary, we hold it to be a cardinal truth. The Holy Ghost is the great agent in the regeneration and sanctification of souls. His power alone effects the change. Do not lose sight of this. Do not fall into the delusion that what you do will effect the work. What you want to see is, that in you there is no help; that so far as making yourself holy is concerned you can absolutely do nothing -- that this work is of God, entirely. Here, means do nothing: they only bring you to God, and he sanctifies; without them you cannot come to God, and unless you come he cannot sanctify; but your coming does not sanctify, it brings you to him who does. You employ the means only to bring you in contact with the agency. It is the fire which refines the gold. Men dig it from the earth, and bring it to the crucible. If it is not put in the flame it will not be refined. The fire does not refine the gold unless it be brought; the bringing does not refine; it must be brought, and the fire must exert its agency. The soul is not sanctified by means, nor in the absence of them. The means are necessary to bring it to God; when it is brought, God does the work. Remember this, seeking soul; and now, having employed the means, expect God to touch you, and accomplish his promise. Look now away from means; look away from self; trust in him; yea, trust now! Fall at his feet, and he will make thee whole!

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