

Objections Considered

by Randolph S. Foster

The doctrine is supported by the word of God and is not dependent on human opinions or majority support.

Scripture: Romans 6:14, 1 Corinthians 2:5, Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 4:13, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 12:14, James 4:6, 1 John 1:8

Topics: "Christian Holiness", "Biblical Authority"

Description

Randolph Sinks Foster addresses objections to the doctrine of holiness, emphasizing the importance of addressing and answering these objections to arrive at the truth. He discusses objections related to the acceptance of the doctrine by Christians, the experience of the Church, the alignment with the word of God, the accusation of promoting pride, and the belief in the possibility of living without sin. Foster highlights the need to rely on the word of God as the ultimate authority in determining the validity of the doctrine of holiness.

Transcript

To the doctrine taught in the foregoing chapters it is admitted there are some seeming objections, and to what truth is there not? Nor would we account them insignificant. They are not. They are weighty and serious; they are put forward by men of the highest respectability, both for scholarship and piety, and representatives of much the larger number of Christian thinkers; and however clear and conclusive we may think the reasonings upon which the doctrine is based, it is by no means complete until these objections are candidly and completely answered. The work is but half done when what we conceive to be a clear chain of scriptural and argumentative proof is presented to the reader. It is due the subject, due ourselves, and due our readers, that we give full attention to objections. If they are real, there must be some defect in our views; and no dogmatism, no assurance, no chain of reasoning will meet the case if they remain unanswered. Errorists declaim much about evidence, make great show of proof, adduce long lists of arguments, flourish trumpets of reasoning, but they avoid the rencounter with objections; they find no heart for this. The reason is obvious; much that is plausible may be said in favor of any proposition, but a real objection overturns all its sophistries, and reduces to nothing its million proofs. But the objection must be real. It is by the comparison of the reasons, pro and con, the arguments and the objections, that we shall arrive at the truth. By this patient method we shall be able to detect where the error lies, whether it be in the affirmative or negative side. Truth has no real objections, error has many. Nor would we, in meeting objections, present them in a weakened and impaired form. Let us study them in all their strength, and state them in their utmost force. This, because it is our welfare to know the truth and nothing less,

nothing else.

1. The first objection offered is this: The doctrine cannot be true, because many Christians do not receive it; whole denominations of Christians do not receive it; the most learned and excellent divines in great numbers do not receive it; it is not now, and has not been, the belief of the majority of the Church. Many, who with undoubted ability and sincerity have studied the Scriptures for a whole lifetime, have never found this doctrine therein taught, but an opposite and antagonistic doctrine. How is this to be explained? Were these men, the majority, in error? Were they not equal in ability to arrive at the truth with their opposers? Were they not as candid and sincere? Why, then, must we believe they were in error?

But what, then, have we to weigh against this objection to break its force? An array of other great names, an equal amount of learning, and respectability, and candor, and application? No. This might balance, but would not settle the difficulty. We meet it with the word of the Lord! One "Thus saith the Lord," is more powerful than all the opinions of all the men the world ever contained. The objection is apparently strong, but really feeble. Feeble, because it carries the doctrine to an improper tribunal. It brings incompetent evidence. It is not a question dependent on human opinions, however respectable and worthy of credit; it appeals to one single and transcendently higher umpire -- the word of God. But what then? Who shall judge what the word of God is? Let every man examine for himself, as he that must give an account, and so judge. If he find the doctrine therein, let him embrace it; if not, let him reject it!

2. A second objection not unlike the former is alleged against this doctrine. It is this: The doctrine cannot be true because it does not accord with the experience of the Church! But few in any age have pretended to so much, and they have generally given sad and abundant proof that they were deluded. Admit all this, and what then? Does the objection destroy the doctrine? Does it impair it in the slightest degree? Certainly not. No more than the unanimous experience of all sinners that justifying grace has not been realized to them, is proof that there is no such state possible. The doctrine is not what the Church has attained, but what it is her privilege to attain; not how unholy she has been, but how holy she might have been. The experience of the Church, as stated by the objector himself, is not that the state is not attainable, but that it is not attained. And again, it is not a question to be settled by want of experience, but by the word of the Lord, and experience corroborating the word when there is experience. Experience is not competent evidence against, but it is good proof in favor of, this doctrine. This objection, then, weighs nothing.

3. But, third, it is objected that it is contrary to the word of God. Now, if this can be shown we shall admit our error, and renounce even what we think we are conscious is the truth.

But there must be some mistake here. We have shown in a manner which our adversaries cannot gainsay, that the Scriptures authorize the doctrine, and this in a great variety of methods, with great clearness and frequency. It is not readily to be credited that the same inspired authority teaches another doctrine contrary to this so explicitly inculcated; still there may be something resembling it.

4. It is objected further, that the doctrine is promotive of pride, Phariseeism, self-righteousness: leading the possessor of this high experience to say to his brother in an inferior state of grace, "Stand by thyself; I am holier than thou." But there could not be a greater mistake than this. One of the elements of holiness is perfect humility. If any profess it, and yet are proud and Pharisaical, it is proof that they are deceived. Those, indeed, who enjoy this state of grace, may in truth believe themselves to be in a higher state than the merely justified Christian; but they know it is of grace, and, with respect to themselves, the clearer light they have received leads them to true discoveries of their own utter unworthiness.

5. It is objected, that those who make profession of holiness are not better than other people. Suppose this were admitted, (and, in many instances, there is but too much ground for the charge,) yet how does it bear against the doctrine? If all were hypocrites, or deluded, who make the profession, it does not affect the merits of the case in the slightest degree. It condemns them, but militates nothing against this. Its truth stands upon the authority of God's word -- not upon human professions. Who made us judges in the case? There is but one that judgeth, and who has said to us, Judge not. May not much that we charge as sin against good men at last be nothing more than weakness and infirmities? And again, amid the many deluded and deceived, have you found none, in the judgment of charity, who gave good evidence that they had entered into this high and holy state? Not one? If not, your position must have been unfortunate indeed. If so, you admit yourself, that in some cases there is good proof that holiness is attainable and has been attained.

6. But after all, you object the thing is impossible; that in this world a man cannot live without sin. Has God said so? If man were left to himself it might be admitted; but cannot God empower him to be free from sin? Reflect: Cannot you, by the grace of God, live one minute without sin? If a minute, can you not an hour? if an hour, a day? if a day, a year? You overlook the power of the grace of God. O that you may be led to right conclusions, and know and enjoy all that is your privilege to realize of grace here, and finally come to the enjoyment of eternal glory hereafter! Amen.

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