

Prayers for the Sanctification of Believers.

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the vital role of love and the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of believers, culminating in the understanding of holiness and joy.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 16:9, Galatians 5:22, Philippians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 3:12

Topics: "Sanctification", "Sacrificial Love"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the importance of love as the secret to bliss, emphasizing the overflowing joy that comes from sacrificial love for others, especially for the souls of people. He highlights the strong bond of love between a pastor and converts, forged through self-denial and toil for those dead in sin, leading to an intensified love and joy. Steele delves into the concept of love continually increasing in knowledge of God, emphasizing that love is the element in which holiness exists and must have a man-ward as well as a God-ward direction.

Transcript

"Blest are the pure in heart; wouldst thou be blest?

He'll cleanse thy spotted soul; wouldst thou find rest?

Around thy toils and cares he'll breathe a calm,

And to thy wounded spirit lay a balm;

From fear draw love! and teach thee where to seek

Lost strength and grandeur, with the bowed and meek."

The Epistle to the Philippians has been called the joyful epistle. It is full of commands to rejoice. This is because it is the outgushing of love, the fountain of joy in the heart of the writer. No epistle is so warm in its expressions of affection. In some passages St. Paul seems to exhaust the words of endearment in the Greek language, in his eagerness to pour out the impetuous river of his love. Read in proof of this chapter 4:1, "Wherefore, my brethren, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved."

Love of a worthy object is the secret of bliss. The apostle had found that secret. The Holy Spirit had penetrated his heart to its very depths, and had abundantly shed abroad love to God and men, especially to believers in Jesus Christ. There was a very strong tie which bound him to the brethren in Philippi: he had suffered for them in the stocks, under the lash. and in the nether prison. Sacrifice and suffering for others invest them with a peculiar preciousness. In a course of lectures at Yale University on pastoral duties, the speaker insisted that love is the only adequate motive to a successful ministry -- love of the souls of the people.

He was asked, "How can I get this love?" The answer was defective, because it did not recognize the Holy Ghost as the Inspirer of love. The speaker, H. W. Beecher replied "Go to work in earnest for the salvation of souls, and make sacrifices for them, and you will begin to love them." This is true in the case of a pastor already filled with the Spirit of God. In the absence of the Spirit-baptism, self-sacrifice for others, especially the vile and thankless, is a difficult if not impossible achievement.

It requires great love to prompt to self-abnegation and voluntary suffering: and this love is of God. But where such love has been enkindled by the breath of God, it becomes amazingly intensified by our self-denial and patient toil for those who are dead in sin. When they are raised to newness of life by the resurrection power of the Spirit, and are wearing the image of Christ, a bond of love is knit between the pastor and the converts stronger than can be found elsewhere on earth.

Hence St. Paul's love for the churches which he had planted amid tribulations, and also his overflowing joy. In the beautiful procession of the fruit of the Spirit, in Gal. 5:22, joy follows love. Wishing the Philippians to mount up to the highest and purest joy, he prays that their "love may abound yet more and more in knowledge." -- chapter 1:9. There is no such thing in earth or heaven as love in a finite being becoming perfect in volume or degree of strength. The more that men and angels know of God the more they will love him.

As knowledge of God is capable of eternal increase, so there will be scope for endless advancement in love and joy. Mathematicians prove that there is a curve of such a nature (the hyperbola), that it will forever approach a straight line in the same plane, but never touch it. Such a curve is the human soul in its capacity for ever-increasing knowledge and love of God. Among finite aptitudes this talent of eternal growth is a faculty having semi-divine dimensions. In it God's image gleams out most clearly.

The knowledge, in this text, in which love mounts up to higher and higher degrees, is epignosis, experimental, certain, and clear. It is the heart of the believer touching the heart of God. The head of pride is always agnostic, the heart of love is always epignostic (not in the dictionary, but signifies knowing certainly).

Turning now to another prayer of St. Paul in 1 Thess. 3:12, 13, we find that there is to be an ever "increasing and abounding love one toward another, and toward all men," in order to establishment in holiness. It is taught elsewhere in St. Paul's epistles that love is the element in which holiness exists (Eph. 1:4; 1 Tim. 1:5); but here we are assured that this love must have a man-ward, as well as a God-ward direction. Hence, a tart holiness, a bitter holiness, a sour holiness, an envious holiness, is a contradiction and an impossibility. Nor will the careful student of Paul's magnificent lyric on love, in 1 Cor. 13, find any such combination possible as perfect love and arrogance, or censoriousness, or self-conceit, or headstrongness. "Love," when purged of all dross, "suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, and doth not behave itself unseemly." Professors of heart purity

especially those who associate themselves together almost exclusively, are in danger of taking on some of these unamiable qualities, and of cherishing uncharitable feelings toward those Christians whose weaker wings of faith have not borne them up to the Pisgah tops of grace. As a safeguard against this peril we recommend a frequent and searching self-examination, with this chapter as a touchstone. The result would be an increase in the number of "hearts unblamable in holiness before God," whose "eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them whose hearts are perfect towards him." -- 2 Chron. 16:9.

The interpretation is erroneous, that the establishment in holiness, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus," signifies the completion of our sanctification at that time. Rather, it will be in that day that the result of the Spirit's perfect purifying work in this life will be exhibited to the universe. The same remark applies to that strong proof-text (1 Thess. 5:23, R. V.), "And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The aorist tense of the verb "sanctify," denoting singleness of action, as distinguished from continuance or repetition, strengthens our position that there is no post mortem cleansing taught in these passages. This remark is for the special benefit of some good, and otherwise orthodox, theologians, who reject the modern philosophical inference that a change of relation to God's law from condemnation to justification, in certain cases, may take place after death, but look with favor on the doctrine of the completion after death of the sanctification which began in the new birth. The latter is as destitute of scriptural foundation as the former. The only purgatory for sin is in the blood of Christ. To assert that this purgatory stretches out from death to the Day of Judgment is to pass over the gulf between Protestantism based on the Bible, and Romanism built on traditions. Prayer for the unsanctified dead would logically follow. Let me rather pray --

"O thou great Power! in whom I move,
For whom I live, to whom I die,
Behold me through thy beams of love,
Whilst in this vale of tears I sigh;
And cleanse my sordid soul within
By thy Christ's blood, the Bath of sin!
No hallowed oils, no grains, I need;
No rags of saints, no purging fire;
One crimson drop of David's seed
Is all the cleansing I desire."

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