

# Repression Not Sanctification

by Daniel Steele

---

*The repressive theory of sanctification is a flawed understanding of entire sanctification, which is the extermination of sin in this life, and it is not supported by Scripture.*

**Scripture:** Romans 6:6, Romans 8:13, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Galatians 5:24, Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:16, 1 John 1:5

**Topics:** "Sanctification", "Holiness"

---

## Description

Daniel Steele preaches against the theory of sanctification by repression, arguing that it does not align with the consciousness of entirely sanctified individuals who experience inward purity and freedom from sinful desires. He highlights the lack of a Scriptural basis for the repressive theory, emphasizing that the Bible speaks of cleansing, purifying, and destroying sin rather than repressing it. Steele also points out that the repressive theory of holiness contradicts the nature of God's unmingled purity and confuses the distinction between holiness and virtue. He challenges the idea that sanctification through repression can lead to complete eradication of sin and questions the timing and nature of entire sanctification.

---

## Transcript

IT is the purpose of this chapter to set forth several insuperable objections to that definition of entire sanctification which makes it consist in the power of the Holy Spirit repressing inbred sin, choking down the old man instead of crucifying him till he is stone dead.

1. Our first objection is that it does not harmonize with the consciousness of entirely sanctified persons. These testify with Arvid Gradin to "the highest tranquility, serenity, and peace of mind, with a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and a cessation of all, even inward, sins."

We admit that if we are entirely passive in sanctification we might not be conscious of this repressive force, holding in check our sinful proclivities. But it is a principle of the great scheme of gospel salvation to employ the agency of the subject. He is to be a co-worker with God. Hence he would be conscious of his share in the work of repression even if he were not conscious of the work performed by the Spirit.

The uniform testimony is to a delightful sense of inward purity, the absence of all risings of malice, envy, and self-seeking. Now, if all these still exist within, but only neutralized by a superior force crushing them down, consciousness must attest to a falsehood when she bears witness to entire inward purity.

2. Lack of a Scriptural basis. It is a remarkable fact that while the Greek language richly abounds in words signifying repression, a half score of which occur in the New Testament, and are translated by to bind, bruise, cast down, conquer, bring into bondage, let, repress, hold fast, hinder, restrain, subdue, put down, and take by the throat, yet not one of these, *sunecho*, *katecho*, *koluo*, *sunkleio*, *katapauo*, is used of inbred sin; but such verbs as signify to cleanse, to purify, to mortify or kill, to crucify, and to destroy. When St. Paul says that he keeps under his body and brings it into subjection, he makes no allusion to the *sarx*, the flesh, the carnal mind, but to his innocent bodily appetites. In Pauline usage body is different from flesh. We have diligently sought in both the Old Testament and the New for exhortations to seek the repression of sin. The uniform command is to put away sin, to purify the heart, to purge out the old leaven, and to seek to be sanctified throughout spirit, soul, and body. Repressive power is nowhere ascribed to the blood of Christ, but rather purifying efficacy. Now, if these verbs, which signify to cleanse, wash, crucify, mortify, or make dead, and to destroy, are all used in a tropical or metaphorical sense, it is very evident that the literal truth signified is something far stronger than repression. It is eradication, extinction of being, destruction.

3. The repressive theory of holiness is out of harmony with the Divine purity. Holiness in man must mean precisely the same as holiness in God, who announces Himself as holy, and then founds human obligation to holiness upon this revealed attribute: "Be ye holy, FOR I AM HOLY." Who dares to say that God's holiness is different in kind from man's holiness, save that the one is original and the other is inwrought by the Holy Ghost?

We know that Mansell, in his "Limits of Religious Thought," has carried out the Hamiltonian philosophy of the relativity of human knowledge, and his philosophy of nescience in regard to the absolute and infinite, to this fatal point, that it is possible that we know nothing of the real moral attributes of God, and that goodness in man may signify an utterly different thing from goodness in God.\* We confess to a lenient feeling toward John Stuart Mill, when he says of Mansell's God that he cannot worship this unknown and forever unknowable Being, and that he will go to hell first.

Well does Professor Shedd say: "How can a man even know what is meant by justice in the Deity, if there is absolutely nothing of the same species in his own rational constitution, which, if realized in his own character as it is in that of God, would make him just as God is just? If there is no part of man's complex being upon which he may fall back with the certainty of not being mistaken in his judgments of ethics and religion, then are both anchor and anchorage gone, and he is afloat upon the boundless, starless ocean of ignorance and scepticism. Even if revelations are made, they cannot enter his mind."

Who can confidently adore and sincerely love a being who may, in the inmost essence of his being, be pure malignity in the outward guise of benevolence? Now, if holiness in man is the same in kind as holiness in God -- and it is perilous to deny it -- what becomes of the repressive theory?

No one would affirm that there are explosive elements in the Divine nature, or that there is some outside power holding down sinful tendencies in His heart, or that He is Himself holding them down. Let St. John speak: "In Him is no darkness" -- moral evil -- "at all." His nature is unmingled purity. This must be the pattern of our holiness. "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, EVEN AS HE IS PURE." Hence, if any one should ask us to insure his admittance into a holy heaven, into the presence of a holy God, with inbred sin in his heart, though held down by the Holy Ghost himself, we should demand a very large premium; for the risk is very great. In fact, we should decline the risk altogether, and send the applicant to some other office, for instance, Universalism.

4. Our next objection to this hypothesis is that it confounds the distinction between holiness and virtue. We never call God the Father virtuous, nor angels, nor Jesus Christ, nor "the spirits of just men made perfect." We do not magnify the Son of God to ascribe to him only virtue. He "is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." What is the specific difference between virtue and holiness? Repression. Virtue is the triumph of right against strong inward tendencies toward the opposite. Jesus triumphed over outward temptations to sin, and was holy. Mary Magdalene, by divine grace, triumphed over strong inward tendencies toward vice, and was virtuous. The repressive theory of holiness, involving, as it must, the co-working of the human soul with the divine Represser, confounds the broad distinction between holiness and virtue, and banishes holiness from the earth, substituting virtue instead. In fact, we do not see any possibility, by this theory, for a fallen man ever to become holy in the sense of the entire extinction of inbred sin. If this is only repressed here it may be only repressed for ever hereafter. If the Holy Spirit cannot eradicate original sin now, through our faith in the blood of Jesus, what assurance have we that He can ever entirely sanctify our souls? But if by repression is meant the right poisoning of the innocent passions of sanctified human nature after the extinction of ingratitude, unbelief, malice, self-will, and every other characteristic of depraved human nature which is sinful, per se, we accept it as Wesleyan and Scriptural.

Some advocates of the repressive theory, include not only the innocent appetites, but also the flesh, the carnal mind; and they say that we are not to be really dead unto sin, but only to reckon ourselves dead, making entire sanctification an imputed, and not a real and inward, work. With this definition they can earnestly preach entire sanctification, that is, completeness in Christ, but not the completeness of His work in us; but how a believer in inwrought and inherent holiness can preach the repressive theory of entire sanctification honestly, with no mental reservation, is to the writer a great mystery. The phrase italicized is an evident contradiction in terms.

5. An unanswerable objection to the theory of sanctification by repression is found in demonstrating when entire sanctification, by the destruction of depravity, takes place. To say that it may occur in this life is to abandon this theory; to say that physical death annihilates sin is to discrown Jesus as the Saviour to the uttermost; while a sanctification after death involves the papal error of purgatory and the favorite doctrine of modern Universalism, a second probation, more favorable to holiness than the first. As the only scriptural time of moral purification is the present life, it follows that either entire sanctification is a real eradication of depravity, or, that such uprooting will never take place under any dispensation, present, or future. Hence, if repression is the only possible sanctification here, it follows that it is the only possible state of holiness hereafter. But against this conclusion are the following objections: (1) The holiness of God as the model of holiness in man; (2) The insecurity of the saved even in their heavenly state; (3) The impossibility of fullness of joy to a soul devoid of real and unmingled purity; (4) The absence of scriptural proofs.

The advocates of the theory of repression urge as an objection to the doctrine of the extermination of sin in this life, that this puts the soul beyond real temptation. "For," say they, "there can be no real temptation to a soul which has nothing in its nature responsive to the sollicitation to sin." But this assumption is too broad. It renders angels in probation, Adam in Eden, and Jesus Christ on the pinnacle of the temple incapable of real temptation. But the fact that some angels fell, that Adam sinned, and that the Son of God "was in all points tempted like as we are," is a sufficient proof that a holy soul is capable of real temptation. But it is said that when the reformed drunkard falls away from entire sanctification he returns to his cups, the reclaimed harlot resumes her moral leprosy, and the converted rationalist, cut loose from Christ, drifts

into his old scepticism. Does this not prove that in these entirely sanctified persons there were lingering vicious propensities, held in check by divine grace? No. It proves only this, that entire sanctification may annihilate sin without destroying those idiosyncrasies in which each person's probation lies. The special moral test of one man, by the constitution which God has given him, is in his sensual nature, that of another in his intellectual difficulties with Christianity. Entire sanctification does not change men's natural constitutions in these particulars. A sanctified Gibbon in falling from grace would naturally fall into rationalism, and not into servile vices. The sanctified slave in his descent from grace to nature would find his master's hen-roost a greater test than the question of the Christian miracles.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/daniel-steele/repression-not-sanctification/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**