

Stumbling-Blocks in the King's Highway

by Daniel Steele

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, surrender, and watchfulness in attaining entire sanctification and living a life of victory over sin.

Scripture: John 6:29

Topics: "Full Salvation", "Consecration"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the challenges believers face in experiencing full salvation, emphasizing the need to move beyond speculative difficulties and intellectual reasoning to fully surrender to God through faith. He addresses the misconception that perfect love is a special gift not attainable by all believers, highlighting that God's grace is available to all who seek it. Steele also discusses the practical difficulties of consecrating all to the Lord while still retaining control, encouraging believers to become faithful stewards of their possessions for the glory of Christ.

Transcript

The largest of these lies before the very gate of this highway: -- 1. Full salvation, as an experience, is begirt with speculative difficulties. Metaphysical quiddities perplex and bewilder many believers, and they never emerge from the fog into the clear atmosphere of truth till their hearts are filled with all the fullness of God. The purified heart clarifies the head. We can never philosophize ourselves into that "perfect love" which 'casteth out all fear that hath torment."

Faith is the only door through which God enters the soul. Cease philosophizing and take up the great work of believing. "This is the work of God, (which God approves,) that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." No sinner would ever find Jesus if he should stubbornly seek him with the lantern of reason, refusing the lamp of faith. No imperfect believer can grasp Jesus as the complete Saviour so long as he leans upon speculative reason as a supplement of his defective faith. Pride of intellect, the subtlest form of pride, is keeping thousands of Christians from that higher knowledge of God which is obtained only by climbing up the ladder of faith. It is not necessary for the penitent sinner to be able to define repentance with theological exactness before he repents of sin, nor to have unquestionable views of the atonement in its relations to God and to man. All that he is required to do is, to abandon every other hope and plea, and to cry, "For me, for me, the Saviour died." It is not necessary for any soul to discriminate intellectually between regeneration and entire sanctification, or between the stream of love shed abroad by the Spirit of adoption and the ocean of love which the abiding Comforter pours around the purified soul, in order to

enter upon this great salvation. As it is enough for the penitent to know that he is guilty, and Jesus can pardon, so it is enough for the longing Christian to know that he is hungry, and that there must be perfect satisfaction somewhere in the universe correlated to that intense and painful appetency. It is sufficient for him to know that God is a satisfying portion, and to insist that he should completely satisfy our spiritual cravings, as he has abundantly promised.

We find in some honest minds a theoretical difficulty which constitutes a stone of stumbling in the way of their seeking full salvation. It is the notion that the grace of perfect love is of the nature of a charism, or special gift of the Holy Ghost, dispensed by the Father according to his own will, and hence not attainable by all believers.

Are there not instances in which the fullness of the Spirit, or perfect love, is dispensed in a sovereign manner without compliance with the usual conditions? We dare not say that there are not; for (1.) We read in the Scriptures of one who was to be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. (2.) We believe that the souls of infants, defiled by inborn depravity, are, without faith on their part, entirely cleansed before death by the blood of sprinkling because they are included in the new covenant which is ratified by that universal atonement which saves all souls which do not willfully reject it by unbelief. (3.) For the same reason we believe that all justified souls, all persevering believers in Jesus Christ, who, through imperfect apprehension of the "exceeding greatness of his power" to save to the uttermost," are painfully conscious that they are not cleansed from all inward unrighteousness, are, before death, entirely sanctified by the sovereign will of Him who stands pledged "to finish the good work which he has begun" in them, and "to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy "

Nevertheless we must be careful not to fall into the great error of supposing that a blessing sometimes sovereignly bestowed is not attainable by all who seek it in the way prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. We are not to suppose that because God fed Elijah by the ravens, and the Israelites with manna from heaven, the ordinary and regular mode of obtaining supplies by sowing and reaping is no longer available to the human race. Says Mr. Wesley, "God's usual method is one thing, but his sovereign pleasure is another. He has wise reasons for hastening and retarding his work. Sometimes he comes suddenly and unexpectedly, sometimes not till we have long looked for him." Yet Wesley strongly and constantly urges all the justified to press forward and grasp this greatest prize this side of Glory, saying, that "it is neither wise nor modest to affirm that a person must be a believer for any length of time before he is capable of receiving a high degree of the Spirit of holiness."

The arbitrary bestowment, in rare instances, of the Holy Spirit in the fullness of his power for the accomplishment of some great work in the spiritual kingdom, has led our non-Arminian brethren in past days to regard this high blessing as a charism, a special gift, not attainable by every earnest seeker. Not a few Arminians who repudiate, with great zeal for the honor of the impartial God, the insinuation that the graces of repentance, pardon, and adoption are dispensed only to a favorite few elected to life from eternal ages, are, on purely Calvinistic grounds, excusing themselves from strenuous and persistent endeavors to obtain entire sanctification by imagining that only those receive full salvation before death whose constitutions were peculiarly constructed for its reception. This as effectually paralyzes effort as the old doctrine of the continuance of inbred sin till Death, the great sanctifier, comes to the aid of Jesus. To exhort a thousand to seek the higher life because it is possible that one of that number -- the ratio fixed by this theory -- has the inherent qualities necessary for its attainment, sounds very much like advice to invest in a lottery ticket which has one chance in a thousand of drawing the prize. But this experience of perfect love is not a race, where here and there one of a thousand lawful racers receives the crown. The blessed

Jesus has for every head, even in the present life, a diadem resplendent with those precious stones called by Mr. Fletcher "a spiritual constellation made up of these gracious stars -- perfect repentance, perfect faith, perfect humility, perfect meekness, perfect self-denial, perfect resignation, perfect hope, perfect charity, for our visible enemies as well as for our earthly relations, and, above all, perfect love for our invisible God, through the explicit knowledge of our Mediator, Jesus Christ." This crown, O ye generation of worldly professors, ye busy tribe of muck-rakers, intent upon your straws, the Angel of the New Covenant, the adorable Son of God, is holding over each of your heads and begging you to wear as the badge of your present sonship and future kingship unto the Lord God Almighty. Look up, and see and grasp this crown designed to adorn your earthly life before that life has vanished like a vapor, and you have irretrievably lost the crown of graces on earth fitting for a more resplendent crown of glory on high.

Some good Christian people are alarmed at what they deem the incipient fanaticism of those who testify that, through the abiding of the Sanctifier in their hearts, they feel no proneness to sin. This is another stumbling-block which should be removed. We apprehend that a little attention to the meaning of the terms "prone" and "proneness" will remove all cause for alarm. Turning to Webster's Dictionary we find that prone signifies "bending forward, inclined, not erect, headlong, running downward; applied to the mind or affections, usually in an evil sense, as prone to intemperance." Wesleyanism has always taught that the believer may be graciously delivered from that sin which is described in the seventh of Romans as "another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

There is no difference on this point between the advocates of the theory of gradual sanctification and those who preach the possibility of an instantaneous deliverance from this proneness to sin. There would be just ground for alarm were any persons in the present state of probation proclaiming that they had attained a condition of grace in which they were no longer liable to sin. There is a very great difference between the possibility of sin and proneness to it. Adam in Eden came from his Maker's hands with no proclivity toward disobedience, yet there was that possibility of sinning which is implied in free agency. The same is true of the angels in their first or probationary estate. But the entirely sanctified soul is neither angelic nor Adamic, but is human, with all the disabilities of powers crippled and dwarfed by sin. Hence, his liability to sin is grounded on both his free agency and on these disabilities. If you ask how a perfectly holy soul may sin, you strike upon the vexed question with which theologians and philosophers have wrested for ages -- the origin of sin. To give a reason for sin is to justify it. Sin is the most unreasonable thing in the universe. Yet it is possible for the holiest soul in probation to perform that unreasonable act. The most that grace can do for us here is to enable us to abstain from sin -- "posse non peccare," as the old theologians express it. We may approximate, but in this world shall never reach, the state of inability to sin -- "non posse peccare." Practical inability to sin is attained in that fixed state of character in which holy souls will exist after death, when all the motives are so manifestly preponderating toward virtue that sin is a glaring act of suicide, from which the recoil is as immediate as that of a sane man from precipitating himself down a precipice. We have used the word practical to indicate the certainty of the continued obedience of souls after probation, confirmed in holiness, and yet, as free agents, theoretically free to fall. There is another Latin formula by which the fathers used to express the awful state of character toward which impenitent sinners are all hastening, lurid foregleams of which we see in the present life -- "non posse no peccare," inability not to sin. May not this self-induced and culpable inability to obey the law of God be the ground of the final sentence to everlasting punishment?

An exhaustive discussion of the relation of a completely sanctified soul to the possibility of sinning, involves the theory of temptation. Some teach that sin enters the soul when the sensibilities are stirred by the cognition of the forbidden object by the intellect. We are not of that class. The activity of the emotional nature in the presence of its proper objects is just as inevitable as that of the perceptive faculties. An apple presented to the gaze of a hungry child necessarily awakens, not only a perception, but a desire. This desire is as innocent as the impression on the retina, or the cognition in the mind. Sin comes in when the will indulges the desire, or even fosters it against the remonstrance of conscience. Yet this state of excited sensibility in the presence of a forbidden object is full of peril, for here is where sin is conceived. "Lust when it is conceived bringeth forth sin." Into this region the Sanctifier enters, and does his work, by exterminating every incentive to sin which is culpable in itself, such as pride and malice; by preventing the improper excitement of the innocent sensibilities, and by reinforcing the will, and inclining it to obey the mandates of the moral sense, the eye of which is now purged from the film of sin. The abiding Comforter is, therefore, the keeping power within the soul. The vigilance enjoined by our Saviour is obligatory upon the entirely sanctified, and consists in that habit of faith which holds the soul in communion with God, and links it to that spiritual force which gives it constant victory, "being kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Hence we indirectly, yet most effectually, watch against all sin, while we maintain that believing attitude of soul which retains the Holy Spirit in the fullness of his purifying and keeping power. A rupture in the continuity of this life of faith is the breach through which the forces of Satan enter and recapture the city of Mansoul. He has already passed over the boundary between Christian discretion and fanaticism who imagines that St. Paul did not write for him "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," and that our Saviour did not have in view the highest state of grace attainable under the Gospel when he said, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch."

"Hang on His arm alone,
With self-distrusting care,
And deeply in the Spirit groan,
The never-ceasing prayer."

We cannot commend the scruples of those who say that they have reached a religious experience in which they cannot join with the congregation in the use of every hymn in our excellent collection. I can blend my voice with that of every worshipping assembly in singing hymns expressive of every phase of experience. I can sing the language of the penitent, because, though conscious of forgiveness, I wish to remember with gratitude the miry pit from which my feet have been taken. I would not for my closest devotion select, --

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
The world can never fill:"

yet I sing these words in order to increase thanksgiving to God for filling this "aching void." For the same reason, while conscious that all the currents of my soul have been graciously made to flow heavenward, I may properly sing, "Prone to wander." In public no one worships for himself alone, but for the benefit of all the congregation.

2. There are also practical difficulties. How may I consecrate all to the Lord, and yet retain the control over all? How, for instance, can I surrender all my property to God and still retain some of it for life's uses? The question is pertinent. No man can live without appropriating something to his own personality. Property is one of the great natural rights with which we have been invested by our Creator. We could not exist without it. What are we to do when we consecrate possessions to the Lord? Not to shovel our money into the streets, or to pour it indiscriminately into the treasuries of the nearest institutions, but to become Christ's stewards for the faithful custody and expenditure of this property, making it accomplish the greatest possible good in the well-being of men and the glory of Christ. So much as we can spare from our business and the proper maintenance of our families we must make immediately productive for good in some department of Christ's service, for the Lord at all times condescends to use consecrated substance. But so much as is requisite for the conduct of our business and decent support of those dependent on us may be retained and administered solely for the glory of Him who gave himself for us. Here we must depend each on his own Judgment under the illumination of the word and the Spirit of God.

How may I know that I have laid all on the altar? Self generally rallies on some one point -- defends itself in some last ditch. When that is surrendered, the struggle is felt to be over. We know that we have yielded and hung out the white flag, the token of our capitulation. Besides, with all honest souls God is under covenant to reveal to them the state of their hearts. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to hold up a mirror and to furnish a lamp with which we may see our exact visage.

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