

# The Fruits of Perfect Love

by Daniel Steele

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*The sermon explores the concept of perfect love and the joy that comes from it, emphasizing the importance of seeking the Giver, not the gift, and the role of confession in glorifying Christ.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 27:8, Romans 14:17, 2 Corinthians 6:6, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Thessalonians 2:10, Hebrews 12:2, 1 Peter 1:5, 1 John 1:3, 1 John 3:20

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Joy In Christ"

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## Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the joy of the abiding Comforter, emphasizing that true joy comes from Christ Jesus glorified in the soul by the Holy Ghost, filling hearts with joy-inspiring presence. He distinguishes between unnatural, natural, and supernatural joys, highlighting the joy of the Holy Ghost as a miraculous spring implanted in the believing soul. Steele discusses the importance of seeking the Giver, not just the gift, and cautions against seeking joy selfishly. He also explores the significance of a confessing mouth as evidence of a believing heart, and the necessity of the Holy Spirit's communion for a deeper understanding of God and victory over sin.

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## Transcript

### I. The Joy of the Abiding Comforter.

The Gospel is glad tidings of great joy. It was an outgush of song in a sad world -- a burst of sunshine after ages of darkness. Paganism today is not jubilant, but gloomy and despondent. When, in a Christian land, any class of people discard Christ, their songs die out because their joy has withered. Spiritualism has no exultant songs because it has no gladness in Jesus. It may gather in the tented grove, under the inspiration of waving trees, singing birds, verdant fields, glittering stars, and azure skies, but it confesses that it cannot counterfeit the Christian psalmody which rolls down the ages, lifting the heart of the believer nearer to God. Sceptics and Free Thinkers assemble in conventions and argue, denounce, and blaspheme. But when they try to sing, the voice is like the gibbering of a ghost in a sepulchre.

Christ Jesus glorified in the soul by the Holy Ghost, is the fountain of true joy. The kingdom of God is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." When the blessed Comforter fills the hearts of a people with his joy-inspiring presence, they burst out into spontaneous singing. But where formalism, worldliness, and unbelief have crowded the Comforter out of their hearts, they pay thousands of dollars to a quartette to perform the service which their backslidden souls refuse to render. Hence joy is a very good test, not only of orthodox opinions, but of the strength of our faith in Christian truth, and our personal devotion to

Christ. But not all joy is Christian. Joys may be classified as, 1) unnatural, 2) natural, 3) supernatural. The first is the exhilaration resulting from the application of stimulants to the nervous system. Lord Bacon credits drunkenness with intense pleasure. This is the secret of the fatal fascination of the cup. It awakens a delirious, evanescent, and fatal joy, which momentarily lifts up the soul to ecstatic heights, and then plunges it into the depths of despair. The daydreams of the opium eater, and the serene composure of the slave to tobacco, belong to the class of unnatural and injurious delights. The joy which ends in the scorpion's sting must be ranked as the lowest in the scale of rational satisfactions. Yet all nations and generations have plucked this apple of Sodom and tasted its ashes.

2.) There is a mere animal joy which flows from the healthful condition of the body. The animal spirits overflow in their exuberance. The lambs frisk upon the sunny hillside, and the horse, in the very fullness of life, prances through the pasture with arched neck and nimble foot. So men may be joyful by reason of their good physical condition. There may be not only "no rebellion when the stomach is full," but there may be an outflowing stream of animal joy. Higher than this is the gladness of worldly success, when the corn and the wine increase, the joy of sordid gain, the joy of the miser, the joy of the harvest. Above this is the intellectual triumph of the student, the gladness incident to the victories of mind, the solution of a mathematical problem, or the discovery of the missing truth which was necessary in order to convert an hypothesis into a science. Still higher is ethical joy, the approval of a good conscience pronouncing on a good action. This is no small joy. It is all that many have to cheer their sojourn in this vale of tears. More excellent still is the gladness of beneficence, the joy of awakening gladness in another heart, or of mitigating another's sorrows. Many who are not Christians have learned the secret of this semi-Christian joy, and by a charitable use of money have opened fountains of felicity for themselves along their earthly path. All these kinds of joy are natural; they lie on the dead level of the plain of nature. They are transient, and limited to this world.

3.) At the disparity of an infinite distance is the joy of the Holy Ghost. It is supernatural -- an outgushing fountain from a rock stricken by the rod of a greater than Moses. It is a joy not springing up in the course of nature, but handed down from heaven, and implanted in the believing soul. It is really a miraculous spring opened by the Holy Spirit in the Sahara of the human breast. It may be surprising that the fullness of the Spirit is several times in the Scripture contrasted with fullness of wine. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Contrast always implies some point of likeness. This seems to consist in three facts: (1.) Exhilaration and elevation of feeling; (2.) Out of the course of nature; and (3.) By an agent from without the man entering and exciting his sensibilities. The universal appetency of the fallen race of Adam for some external stimulant argues the loss of the true excitant, the Holy Spirit, which filled the hearts of the unfallen pair with satisfying joy, just as He fills now all who regain the Eden of perfect love. Christian joy exists in every degree. There is the joy of penitence, described by the poet as "the sweet distress," "the pleasing smart." There follows the joy of conscious pardon -- a radiant angel standing out on the dark background of condemnation like a thundercloud overcasting all the sky. The Spirit of adoption, crying in the heart, Abba, Father, is the source of gladness above the negative joy of forgiveness. Adoption is positive, and entitles to heirship with Christ. But when we enter upon the fullness of the Spirit, in the words of Mr. Wesley, "it will feast our souls with such peace and joy in God as will blot out the remembrance of every thing we called peace or joy before." This is strong language, but it is justified by all who have been led to this banqueting house, and have read on the banner floating over them! the new, best name of Love -- Perfect Love.

'O, what a heaven of heavens is this,

This swoon of silent love!

How poor the world's sublimes" bliss

Compared with joys above!"

To portray this bliss by words would be like representing the rainbow by a charcoal sketch. If the meagerness of human language fails to convey to a blind man the vastness of that ocean which lies in the hollow of the Creator's hand, how much more is its poverty seen when it attempts to set forth to an inexperienced soul all the plenitude of God himself.

No simple emotion of the soul can be indicated in any other way than by stating the circumstances under which it arises, as the sense of beauty in the presence of the rose, the feeling of sublimity where Niagara pours down its avalanche of waters before our eyes. The heart that has never felt the throb of love and the gladness that follows, as the shadow follows the substance, can never learn it from the most graphic writer in the whole range of literature. It is thus with the joy of the Holy Ghost in the fullness of his abiding presence. It differs from the joy of the justified, from the gladness of the adopted, in degree, if not in kind. These seem like gifts liable to decay, while the joy of the Divine fullness is the possession of the Giver -- the perennial fountain of all blessedness. Jesus intimated to the woman begging the mysterious water which he had, that she might not only taste but carry away the well with her. "But the water which I will give you shall be in you a well of water springing up to everlasting life." This promise, rightly interpreted, is, that the love to Christ and the attendant joy shall become ingrained, inherent in the fully believing soul as a second nature; faith, love, and joy becoming as natural and involuntary as breathing. Hence permanence is a marked characteristic of perfect love. Mr. Wesley was fifty-five years old before he became "thoroughly convinced that it is amissible, capable of being lost."

Yet our discussion of this theme would not be exhaustive, if several grave errors were not marked by buoys for the benefit of future voyagers on this sea.

1. Do not seek joy. Seek not the gift but the Giver. There is a subtle selfishness in crying for joy. If you receive the Giver you will insure all his gifts. But beware lest you fix your eye on the gift aside from the Giver. "God is a jealous God." He must be sought for his own infinite worthiness. The penitent sinner may find the gift of forgiveness while imploring this, without a distinct apprehension of the supreme excellence of the Divine character. His sins rise like mountains and fill all the field of his vision. Nor has he had that spiritual discipline which has disclosed to him the absolute purity of God in contrast with his inward depravity. But the believer has had such a flood of light poured by the Spirit upon his own inherent vileness and the spotless holiness of God, that, in his further approaches, he must be attracted by the incomparable beauty of his character, and not by any mere gift at his disposal. He must utterly renounce all selfish motives and cry,

"Suffice that for the season past

Myself in things divine I sought;

For comforts cried with eager haste,

And murmured that I found them not.

I leave it now to thee alone;

Father, thy only will be done!

"Thy gifts I clamour for no more,

Nor selfishly thy grace require,

An evil heart to varnish o'er;

JESUS, the Giver, I desire,

After the flesh no longer known;

Father, thy only will be done!"

Having anchored a buoy on a rock on which many have struck in attempting to sail into the harbor of perfect love, we proceed to place another on a rock which lies in the very harbor itself.

2. Do not imagine that the sudden subsidence of ecstatic joy is the withdrawal of the abiding Comforter. You retain him by faith and not by feeling. The highest Christian experience is subject to variations. Joy, like the tide, ebbs and flows. There are times when the soul, without effort, apprehends the love of God, and joy unspeakable fills, floods, and overwhelms it. Suddenly this bright manifestation is withdrawn, while no testimony of the Spirit is left behind against any act of ours as the cause. While there is no cloud nor doubt, there is no direct assurance. All is a waveless, breathless calm. Then is the time to walk by the lamp of faith, since the sunlight of the direct and joyful witness of God's love is withdrawn. Beware lest you admit the thought that the fullness of God has left you with the cessation of the exultant joy of the Holy Spirit. These alternations of feeling are doubtless regulated by hidden but benevolent laws. They may be requisite for the development of higher faith, when the soul, humbled and hungering, cries out,

"My heartstrings groan with deep complaint,

My flesh lies panting, Lord, for thee."

These inexplicable vacations of the manifestation of Divine love may be necessary for the more deliberate examination of our hearts. It is said that in the early days of railroading the careful engineer would occasionally stop his train in order to tap the wheels and test their soundness and safety. So God may at times interrupt the current of conscious love, to afford us an appropriate occasion for spiritual introspection. The man who walks by faith through these intervals will soon find even a clearer and more joyful outbeaming of the Saviour's countenance to reward his faithful clinging to the Divine promise.

To these cautions an objection may arise in the mind of the reader that we are encouraged by Christ to ask for joy when he says, "Ask and receive, that your joy may be full." The evident design of the Lord Jesus is to indicate one of the blissful consequences of the prayer of faith, rather than its direct aim. Seek ME, and as an incidental result, your joy will be full. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, not in order that food and raiment may be added unto you; but "all things shall be added," as an incidental consequence. Another objection is urged, derived from the example of the Son of God, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb. 12:2. If Jesus made his own joy the highest end of his actions and sufferings, may not his followers who are commanded to walk in his steps? This objection is answered by recourse to the original, where we find anti, "instead of," in place of "for," the joy. This reading represents the Son of God, when the

alternative was before him of sharing with the Father the worship of angels, and enjoying the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, or of enduring the abasement of the incarnation and the sufferings of Gethsemane and Calvary, as deliberately choosing the cross "instead of the joy which was lying before him" as his inheritance in the immediate future. As Jesus chose the will of God, and not his own will or selfish joy, so are we to walk in his steps, and to pray, not beatify myself, but glorify thyself, O thou adorable Saviour! While it is true that we cannot act in utter disregard of our own happiness, it is also true that we may have a conception of Christ so exalted, and a faith in him so strong, as to identify our joy with his, assured that our highest delight will be conserved while we aim not at it, but at the glory of the Lamb, who is worthy of all honor, and glory, and blessing.

## 2. The Tongue Unloosed.

A confessing mouth always attends a believing heart. As in the world of matter occult forces manifest themselves in their effects, so in the world of mind an unloosed tongue is the infallible result of the hidden Transformer, the Holy Spirit. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." This declaration, constantly put forth by living men, is perpetual testimonial to the spiritual medicine advertised in the word of God. A specific held up before the public from year to year, unaccompanied by attested cures, comes to be distrusted and neglected. Hence even the blood of sprinkling, potent to cleanse the heart from all unrighteousness, needs something more than the advertisement of the inspired penman; it needs the joyful voice of the healed leper, crying, "It hath cleansed me!" The aggressive, conquering power of Christ in this fallen world, and his final triumph over "Satan, who deceiveth the whole world," depend upon the agency of his friends. "And they overcame him by (on account of) the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." Without the blood of the Lamb they could not have retained the witness of the Spirit that "Jesus died for me, and that he shed his blood for even me, and that all my sins are blotted out and my nature is renewed." Without both the blood and the Lamb and the word of the testimony the victory cannot be ours; both together form its ground. It is evident that the testimony is to be equal in extent to the cure. Pardon and regeneration experienced are to be attested also. The destruction of inbred sin and the fullness of the divine life apprehended within are to be attested for the benefit of those still beneath the yoke, and for the glory of the great Emancipator. The chief motive to confession is to glorify Christ. If we have not a blessing, it is preposterous to profess in order to receive. It is selfish to profess any state of grace in order to retain it. He who loves Jesus Christ with all the intensity of a sanctified heart will feel a mighty constraint to confess him for his own sake.

There are few, if any, explicit professions of holiness or of Christian perfection in the Holy Scriptures. We search in vain for such testimonies as these: "I am holy;" "I am sanctified;" "I am perfect." Even the sinless Son of man, who could rightfully make these explicit declarations, chose other ways of professing his spotless purity and faultless perfection. Jesus implies his holiness when he puts to the caviling Jews the interrogatory, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" and when he describes himself as one whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, he said, "I and my Father are one." He asserted his absolute perfection without giving needless offence. He avoided all appearance of boastfulness. St. Paul's professions of entire sanctification, after the same style, are implied and not explicit. To the Thessalonians he says, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." "For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us; for we behaved ourselves not disorderly among you." To Felix he declares, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and man." He says to the Church in Corinth, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity\* and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the

grace of God, we have had our conversation (anestrophamen, conducted ourselves) in the world. Giving no offense in any thing, but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, by pureness, by the Holy Ghost, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." "We have wronged no man." To Timothy, who had been most intimately associated with him in public and private -- no man is a hero to his valet de chambre -- he confidently appeals, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purity, faith, longsuffering, love, and patience." But the most remarkable implication of the attainment of the higher life is found in his letter to the Philippians, wherein, after disclaiming the perfection of the resurrection, he admits that he had attained unto the evangelical perfection of love. "Let us therefore as many as be perfect, be thus minded. Brethren, be ye followers, imitators, together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample, for our conversation (politeuma, citizenship) is in heaven." Rendering the plural us and our by me and my, as in Conybeare's version, what have we here but the declaration that the character of St. Paul as an ensample is, in purity of purpose and manifestation, like that of the angels in heaven, who perfectly do the will of God? "Imitate me, for I, amid innocent infirmities and thorns in the flesh, am living the life of a citizen of heaven."

St. John most plainly implies his own purity when he says, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." That this implies holiness is evident from the fact of God's holiness, with whom there is a participation. But John does not leave this subject without adding the statement, "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, (that is, sin,) we lie." It is difficult to resist the inference that St. John records his own experience and spiritual attainments in such hypothetical sentences as these: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." St. John was not a theorizer, but a practical man. He speaks out of the depths of his own experience when he says, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he (Christ) is pure." St. John must have had a heart perfectly free from condemnation, and hence from inward sin, or he could not have known the blissful consequences, "confidence toward God," and the ability to pray in such faith as "to receive whatsoever we ask of him." I John 3:20-22. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, because as he is so we are in this world." "Perfect love casteth out fear." This cannot be the conclusion of a syllogism, nor of any logical process, but the utterance of a heart made glad by love so strong as to bind the strong man, fear, and cast him out forever.

St. Peter's implied profession of entire sanctification is found in such expressions as, "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." It is certain that Peter was not so inconsistent as to exhort others to climb to heights unscaled by himself, when he says, "Be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless."

### 3. The Uplifted Veil.

It is not by accident that, in the apostolic benediction, the communion of the Holy Ghost comes last. It is the crowning blessing of the Triune God. Without it the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God," could not be satisfactorily and joyfully known. These might exist as a matter of inference from the gracious dispositions and holy aspirations of the soul. They cannot be immediately known by a knowledge excluding all doubt, except as they are uncovered by the Holy Ghost. "He shall receive of mine and show it unto you." "He shall testify of me." All views of Christ, without the Spirit's illumination, are mere cold,

intellectual conceptions, awakening by his moral beauty such esthetical emotions as arise when we gaze on the marble creations of Phidias or Angelo. To set the soul on fire with love as a consuming passion, this Christ must be brought into personal relations with me; he must be revealed in me by a process wholly inexplicable, but affording absolute assurance, and joy unspeakable. "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given us of God." No gracious attainment can be otherwise brought into consciousness in the soul of the believer. If the sins of the wicked man are set before him in terrific array, calling for the thunders of wrath Divine, it is the work of the Spirit. If the believer is freely justified through faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit, as the carrier-dove of heaven, brings down to the condemned culprit the assurance of pardon. The same Spirit pours down light into the hidden depths of the soul after regeneration, and reveals the hideous deformities of a nature not yet wholly conformed to the pattern of Christ's spiritual beauty. Then, by a distinct exertion, he fashions that soul into a form of Christlike symmetry and loveliness, and the great Transformer reports his completed work to the consciousness as something "freely given to us of God." The conscious residence of the Holy Spirit within is the power which gives victory over sin. Sin, whether as an act or a state, cannot consist with the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Hence He is called "the Sanctifier." They who hold daily communion with him walk the paths of the higher life. They are purified. For how can purity commune with impurity? Hence uninterrupted joyful communion of the Holy Ghost is Christian perfection. Such a soul "rejoices evermore, prays without ceasing, and in every thing gives thanks." How many professed Christians are ignorant of this bliss!

There is a great deal that is shadowy and dubious about the communion that many have with God. They have no such consciousness of having met and conversed with God, as they have of their communications with men. There has been no bright and animating manifestation of God to their souls. They have not felt the power of his present majesty; nor have his Divine perfections taken hold upon them as by a special revelation. They know that God is revealed in his word as gracious and merciful toward the race of men; but they have not considered that it is the province of faith to single out the believer, and bring him by himself into the presence of his Maker. He is to enter into peculiar and well-understood relations to God. God is his God; he is the child of God; and there must be a conscious acquaintance and intimacy quite distinct from the general goodness of God toward mankind. In order that we may draw nigh to God, we must become utterly dissatisfied with the vague sort of communion that so many are content with. We must resolve to be satisfied with nothing less than the bright shining of the Divine presence upon our individual soul. We must believe it attainable, and resolve to attain it at whatever cost.

Having begun to seek it earnestly, we shall perhaps experience many disappointments. The word of God unfolds itself, it is true, more richly to our souls than it once did, and we get juster conceptions of him. But the bright and soul-elevating discovery of him himself, we do not obtain. The more we seek, however, the more we perceive the importance of what we seek, and feel that life without this conscious union of the soul with God, is insupportable. We take this conviction as an encouragement from on high, to go on. As we continue striving in prayer we are led to examine ourselves earnestly to see if there is any thing in our way of life that is displeasing to God. We become very scrupulous, very severe with ourselves; we cut off one indulgence here and another there, and wonder how we should have formerly been so careless. Duties that we had not formerly dreamed of, now discover themselves to us; we find that we were before very ill-acquainted with the will of God. These discoveries perhaps only make us the more unhappy; for we feel that we need a strength such as we have not, in order to live the life we are called to. More and more we see the absolute necessity of drawing nigh to God and strengthening ourselves in the consciousness of our indissoluble union with him in Christ. Finally, in some hour long to be remembered, there falls down

as it were a great veil, and with joy unspeakable we behold the light of God's countenance, and are made glad by the assurance, deeply buried in the soul, that an Almighty Friend accompanies us along the journey of life.

This quotation from that garden of spiritual delights, "Bower's Daily Meditations," issued by the Presbyterian Publication Committee, most graphically describes the process of obtaining full salvation, while delineating the struggles of a believer to enter into communion face to face with God. The unrest and dissatisfaction, the search in the sacred oracles, the increasing hunger, the heart-searchings, the uncovering of sins before unknown, the surrender of indulgences, the consecration of all, the glimpses of the prize which makes all the world look cheap, further discoveries of corruption within, and the sense of utter helplessness and need of the Divine aid, all portray the pathway up to the plane called the Higher Life, while the sudden lifting of the veil fittingly describes the instantaneous uplift to that higher path where the "smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul." This search after, and discovery of, Peniel, the face of God, seen in open enraptured vision, passes unchallenged in a devotional book published for the use of a body of Christians who would lift up their hands in holy horror if the writer should substitute perfect love, or Christian perfection, for that communion with God just set forth as a distinct attainment by every earnest and persevering seeker. All the descriptions of high communion with God, whatever sectarian name they bear, are expositions of this great blessing by the use of different terms. The soul, fully resting in Christ, instantly recognizes the great blessing, in whatever guise it may appear.

"The o'erwhelming power of saving grace,

The sight that veils the seraph's face;

The speechless awe that dares not move,

And all the silent heaven of love."

To how many Christian souls is God veiled! They have need to pray, "Hide not thy face from me." Many of these do not know that God is pleased to make communications of grace which shall be like the removal of a veil from the face of one beloved and adored. Such manifestations of grace to others are believed to be exceptional, that only a few persons of a peculiar and delicate spiritual type can receive revelations of Christ's love; whereas we are living in a dispensation in which more glorious unveilings of God to every believing soul are possible than was ever enjoyed by Enoch, Abraham, Isaiah, or Daniel. "The light of the moon has become as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold." How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? This is our exalted privilege. What are the attainments of a majority of the modern Church? Says Professor Phelps,

Much of even the ordinary language of Christians respecting the joy of communion with God -- language which is stereotyped in our dialect of prayer -- many cannot honestly apply to the history of their own minds. A calm, fearless self examination finds no counterpart to it in any thing they have ever known. In the view of an honest conscience, it is not the vernacular speech of their experience. As compared with the joy which such language indicates, prayer is, in all that they know of it, a dull duty. Perhaps the characteristic of the feelings of many about it is expressed in the single fact that it to them a duty as distinct from a privilege. It is a duty which they cannot deny, is often uninviting, even irksome. Yet God's ideal of communion with his saints is this, "I will make them joyful in my house of prayer."

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