

Entire Sanctification as Taught by John

by Dougan Clark

The sermon emphasizes the importance of entire sanctification, perfect love, and the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and provides guidance on how to obtain these experiences through prayer and consecration.

Scripture: John 3:3-4, 1 John 1:7, 1 John 4:13, 1 John 4:18, 1 John 5:14

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

Dougan Clark preaches on the transformation of John, from a Son of Thunder to the apostle of love after Pentecost, emphasizing the importance of love for God and one another. The sermon delves into the profound truths in the Gospel of John, highlighting the necessity of the new birth, God's love as the source of salvation, and the role of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. John's writings also touch on the freedom from sin through Jesus, the promise of the Comforter, and the attainment of perfect love through faith and consecration.

Transcript

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John, before Pentecost, was emphatically a Son of Thunder. He could forbid a man to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, because the man was not of his own particular fold. He was ready to imitate Elijah by calling down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans who would not extend the rites of hospitality to his Master. He was eager to have the highest possible place in the coming kingdom of his Lord, and this at whatever cost. But after Pentecost, John was par excellence the apostle of love. Not that his character became anything like putty. He could still rebuke evil and denounce Diotrefes, and forbid the elect lady to receive or countenance any who did not uphold the true, sound doctrines of the gospel. He was still a son of thunder against heresy and immorality, but he was preeminently, after his baptism with the Holy Ghost, a son of consolation. His soul seems absolutely absorbed in the love of God, and his exhortations to the churches, seemed all to concentrate in two special points, love God and love one another. His heart was made perfect in love on the day of Pentecost, and he never lost the blessed experience. He retained the blessing because he retained the Blessor. The Holy Comforter was his abiding guest and keeper.

The gospel of John contains many of the most profound and spiritual truths that ever fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus. And the only distinction which John accords to himself, and that always with the greatest modesty and humility, is "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

He begins his gospel with a sublime assertion of the Deity and preëxistence of Christ as the Eternal Word, then tells of the incarnation, how the Word became flesh, and we beheld His glory, how although He was the Light of the world, yet the world knew Him not, and though He came unto His own (the Jews) yet His own received Him not, but as many as did receive Him, whether Jews or Gentiles, to them gave He power to become the children of God, and this through a new birth, not of human blood, or title, or pedigree, not of man in any way whatever, but of God. It is not sufficient, therefore, to be a child of God by creation, which, indeed, all men are, but by adoption, by the reception of the Divine nature by birth. And this new birth is more fully unfolded to the Jewish Sanhedrist, Nicodemus, both as to its necessity and its nature. "Ye must be born again." "The Son of man must be lifted up." The new birth is of water and the Spirit. The water is the water of life, the gospel offered freely to all, with its cleansing and refreshing and vivifying properties so well symbolized by water, and the Holy Spirit is the effective personal agent by whom the regeneration is wrought in the heart of the penitent sinner, though His operations may be as inexplicable as the wind, which bloweth where it listeth, and is known only by its results. Then we have the hinge-text of salvation, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Thus, in this marvelous discourse with Nicodemus, we have God's love or God's grace as the source of our salvation, Christ crucified as the ground of it, and the Holy Spirit as the Divine Agent of its accomplishment. Glory be to the Triune God.

Not only the discourse of our Lord with Nicodemus on the new birth, but His discourse, also, with the woman of Samaria on true worship is given by John alone. It is remarkable that not to a Jewish Rabbi, not to the Scribes and Pharisees, not to a Jew at all, but to a heathen or semi-heathen woman, Jesus made the first recorded, positive declaration of His Messiahship, and showed her that as God is a Spirit, so they that worship Him must do so, not in any specific locality, such as Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim, and not by any prescribed form or any outward ritual, but in spirit and in truth. No wonder that her heart was immediately and completely captivated by so grand and glorious a revelation, and that, at once, she left her waterpot and went her way to become a preacher of righteousness to her fellow-townsmen.

Passing over the fifth chapter, with the appeal to the Jews to search the Scriptures and the assurance that they testified of Him; and the sixth chapter, with its story of complete self-abnegation, when after a stupendous miracle, the people were disposed to take Him by force and make Him a king, but He departed into a mountain Himself alone, and the next day, the wonderful discourse upon the bread of life, which sifted away from Him a large proportion of those who had been so ready to proclaim Him King, and brought out of the core of His heart those pathetic words to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?", we come to the seventh chapter and the feast of Tabernacles, at which, on the occasion of the priest pouring water from the pool of Siloam, out of a golden pitcher into a trumpet-shaped receptacle above the altar, amid the rejoicings of the people, Jesus stood and cried, "If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink." "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water." The Scripture referred to is, probably, Isaiah 58:11, and, perhaps, other similar passages. "And the Lord shalt guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."

But the beloved disciple himself gives us an extremely valuable inspired commentary on these words of the Lord Jesus, in order that readers in all ages might make the true spiritual application which is intended by them. "But this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." These remarkable words seem to clearly imply that notwithstanding the presence and operation of the Spirit in the former dispensations of God's

grace, yet He was to be poured out on all God's children under the gospel in a sense and to an extent, which so far transcends the highest manifestation of His power in Old Testament times that in comparison it is said the Holy Ghost was not yet given, or, literally, the Holy Ghost was not yet. And this wondrous outpouring was to be after the glorification of Jesus and as a consequence of that glorification. So that Pentecost, with its untold wealth of privilege, could not be realized till after the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we are clearly informed that what the church of the hundred and twenty received on the day of Pentecost, namely, the purifying of their hearts by faith and the enduement of power, that is to say, entire sanctification, with all its blessed accompaniments, was not a privilege confined to apostolic times, and to the opening of the Holy Ghost dispensation; for Peter boldly assured the wondering multitude that the promise of the same blessed experience "is to you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." And thus it is for the church and for every individual believer, until Christ Himself shall come again. God help all Christians everywhere to see and to believe and to realize it. Amen.

In the eighth chapter, we are told how Jesus showed the slavery of sin. "Every one that committeth sin is the bond-servant of sin," and coupled with this the glorious announcement that, "If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Yes, Jesus came to free us not simply from the guilt and the condemnation and the penalty of sin, but from that which brings guilt and condemnation and penalty, even from sin itself.

Here is true Christian liberty, and it does not mean license, it does not mean do as you please, it does not mean the liberty of making your own choices, but it does mean be pleased with what pleases God, and in this manner after all you will do as you please, it means the glad acceptance of God's choices. And so, after all, you do have your own way because it is God's way, it means liberty and choice to do everything right and nothing wrong, or to do right in all directions and wrong in none. May God bring all His children out of slavery and into freedom for Jesus' sake.

In the memorable discourse of the Lord Jesus with His disciples at the last supper, as given by John in the 14th, 15th and 16th chapters of his gospel, He told them of the blessed Comforter, "which is the Holy Ghost," whom the Father would send in His name, and as to the method of His coming He says, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him." Here, I think, beyond a doubt, that the "We" refers to the Father and the Son, and the manner of Their coming and indwelling in the heart of the believer is through Their representative, the Holy Spirit. And if this be true, how is it possible that such a heart in which Father, Son and Holy Ghost abide, should not be sanctified wholly?

In his first Epistle, the beloved apostle develops beautifully the doctrine of perfect love. He declares that God's children must not walk in darkness or sin, and that those who do so cannot, truthfully, claim to have fellowship with Him. "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another," (which implies fellowship with God) and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth from all sin."

This is a very striking and all-important statement. The verb is in the present tense, and denotes a present and a continuous action. It cleanseth persistently and continuously. You trust in Jesus this moment, and the blood cleanseth now, another moment and it cleanseth, and thus on, without intermission or cessation. And the cleansing is from all sin, sin committed and sin inbred, sin in act, word or thought, sin outward and

sin inward, sin open and sin secret, sin of knowledge and sin of ignorance, literally and truly all sin. If this does not mean entire sanctification, what use is there in language as an expression of thought? Surely none.

But the objection is strongly urged by some that the next verse assures us that "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." But why sunder this verse from its appropriate connections? Were there not Pharisees in the time of Christ who would not admit that they were sinners, and would not accept the baptism of repentance from John the Baptist? And did not the Apostle John live to see the germs of incipient gnosticism showing themselves in the church, assuming, like modern Christian science, that all evil is in matter, the soul is immaculate, and some Gnostics even believing that it was possible to have fellowship with God while living in all kinds of sensual indulgence and licentiousness, and moreover denying the reality of the incarnation of Christ, as also of the crucifixion and resurrection? These were the Docetists or Phantasiasts, so well described by Longfellow:

"Ah, to how many faith has been

No evidence of things unseen,

But a dim shadow, which recasts

The creed of the Phantasiasts,

For whom no man of sorrows died:

For whom the tragedy divine

Was but a symbol and a sign,

And Christ a phantom crucified."

Now John in the passage referred to, tells us that on certain conditions it is possible to experience through the blood of Christ, which means simply the merits of His atoning and vicarious sacrifice, a complete cleansing from all sin, and then turning to those who deny that they are sinners, he exclaims, and if we say that we have no sin, and therefore do not need this cleansing, and can do without this atonement, then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. How much more rational is such an interpretation than the exposition which makes one verse contradict the other, and represents the apostle as first assuring us that we may be cleansed from all sin, and then declaring in effect. "But be sure to remember that this cleansing is never really affected, and you are never really without sin."

There are so many rich and blessed teachings in this epistle that we must needs make selection and leave many passages to be carefully and prayerfully pondered by the reader, with the assurance that there is very much gold to be found for the digging; but we would call attention in a special manner to John's description of perfect love. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

It is clearly to be inferred from these expressions that whilst all Christians do and must love God, yet there is a stage denominated perfect love, which many Christians have not yet reached. And this stage of religious experience is marked distinctly by the absence of fear. Most certainly our apostle does not mean for us to understand that we shall ever get beyond that reverential and filial fear, which is the right and

proper accompaniment of our childlike relation to our Heavenly Father. But he specially describes the fear that will be gotten rid of as tormenting fear, and this fear he declares that "perfect love casteth out." Now we can readily see the reasonableness of this statement. Fear about the future, whether as to temporal or spiritual things, fear of evil tidings, fear of man, fear of death, in short, all tormenting fear is caused by the presence of inbred sin. As a matter of course, therefore, when sin is cast out, fear is cast out with it. Now perfect love is the positive side of entire sanctification; it implies the absence of inbred sin and the unmixed love of God occupying the soul. Such love, therefore, most truly must cast out fear.

The impenitent sinner neither fears nor loves God. The awakened sinner fears him, but does not love Him. The justified believer both fears and loves. Sometimes the fear is in the ascendant and sometimes the love. The entirely sanctified believer loves with all his heart, and has no tormenting fear. Praise the Lord.

And the beloved apostle instructs us also as to the method of obtaining the blessing of perfect love. It is by the prayer of faith, and the prayer of faith involves the idea of a preceding entire consecration. "For," says John, "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart," which probably signifies that He also will condemn us, and, therefore, we cannot utter a believing prayer for such a blessing as entire sanctification while we are not wholly given up to the Lord, for while that is our case, our heart will continue to condemn us.

But he continues, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." And again, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."

Nowhere is the philosophy of the plan of full salvation more beautifully portrayed than in these precious words. We are shown here that (1), the seeker of entire sanctification must be wholly consecrated to God. (2), That he must pray in faith. (3), That he must pray according to God's will. (4), That then he may know that he has the very thing he asks for. Here is wisdom. Let every seeker act upon it. Amen.

Nor does John leave us in doubt as to the witness of the Spirit to our conscious cleansing. "If we love one another" (i.e. with a true and pure and unselfish and self-sacrificing Christian love) "God dwelleth in us and His love is perfected in us." "Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit." Now to have God's love perfected in us, and to have Him to dwell in us, can mean nothing less than entire sanctification, and we know this, as John tells us, by His Spirit. We have, therefore, the witness of the Spirit to perfect love as well as to adoption.

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