

The Witness of Our Own Spirits

by Harmon A. Baldwin

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a direct witness of the Spirit and the fruit of a holy life to confirm one's holiness.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Romans 8:16, Galatians 5:22, Philippians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, James 4:8, 1 Peter 1:16, 1 John 5:10

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches on the importance of the witness of the Spirit, emphasizing that the testimony of God's Spirit must precede our own testimony of holiness. He distinguishes between justification and sanctification, highlighting that sanctification purifies the heart and removes involuntary evil tempers. Baldwin explains that true holiness goes beyond outward actions, reaching the depths of the soul's motives and desires. He cautions against relying solely on emotional experiences or ecstasies as evidence of holiness, stressing the need for the witness of the Spirit and the fruits of a holy life to align.

Transcript

In his sermon on the "Witness of the Spirit," Wesley says,

That this testimony of the Spirit of God must needs, in the very nature of things, be antecedent to the testimony of our own spirits, may appear from this single consideration: We must be holy of heart and holy in life before we can be conscious that we are so; before we can have the testimony of our own spirit that we are inwardly and outwardly holy. But we must love God, before we can be holy at all; this being the root of holiness. Now we cannot love God till we know he loves us. 'We love him, because he first loved us.' And we cannot know his pardoning love to us till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit. Since, therefore, this testimony of his Spirit must precede the love of God and all holiness, of consequence it must precede our inward consciousness thereof, or the testimony of our spirit concerning them.

It will, perhaps, be profitable to tell what the witness of our own spirit is and to distinguish between the witness of our spirits in justification from the same witness in entire sanctification.

Justification and sanctification stand on different grounds, and, as a consequence, are different in their manifestations to the soul. That is, the evidence of the one is different from that of the other. Outside of the direct witness of the Holy Spirit, each one carries with it its own witness, and it is this "witness in himself" (1 John 5: 10) of which we wish to speak.

Justification being accompanied by regeneration, purifies the outward actions and the voluntary tempers of the soul; while sanctification entirely purifies the heart and removes the involuntary evil tempers of the soul.

It can readily be seen that it is easier to judge of actions than of conditions, of voluntary than of involuntary tempers. In this fact lies an explanation of the reason why so many people profess holiness who have never attained to its rich fullness. They know they are doing right, that their wishes are not contrary to God, and, as a consequence, naturally enough conclude that their hearts are cleansed. But holiness goes deeper than this, and purifies the condition of the soul -- the fountain-head from which motives proceed.

Since the evidence of holiness lies so deep it is clearly manifest, as James Caughey says, that "the temptations to doubt concerning one's purity are much more intricate and perplexing than those regarding the forgiveness of sins."

Both a justified and a sanctified soul have temptations and in a sense the same kind of temptations, but there is this difference in the way the soul meets them. Both have a feeling of aversion toward the thing offered; this is grace, -- "the Spirit." But the justified person also realizes a deep-seated something within that favors the idea of wrong; of course he immediately subdues it, but it is there, and almost involuntarily he groans for deliverance; but the sanctified soul has nothing within that favors the wrong suggestion, but experiences a pure feeling of aversion.

Followed down to its deepest facts the difference in the evidence of the two experiences is that the justified soul realizes the presence of a sinful nature from which the sanctified soul realizes that he is delivered.

That the soul is blessed and has certain emotional experiences like those of one whose heart is cleansed is no positive evidence that the former is also cleansed. God pours out his blessings as he pleases, and may give one justified person more joy than he does those in general who are sanctified. This is God's part, and we should consent for him to attend to it. Do not cover up the manifestations of carnality by saying, "I am wonderfully blessed, and therefore must be clean."

Again, the fact that, under certain circumstances which at one time would have overcome you, you keep free and do not even feel impatient within, is not positive proof of cleansing. It may or may not even be proof of growth in grace. Physical and mental conditions are liable to exercise a great influence over the way in which things are "taken;" and the attitude of the soul at the moment may be such as to exclude the probability of yielding just then, or even of being much tried at the circumstances, while at other times it would take all the grace obtainable to keep sweet.

The fact that you do not feel SOME things that are sinful is not a sure sign of purity. Everybody has weaknesses -- points where carnality is the strongest, and would naturally be tried there, while other things are hardly noticeable. Again, there are times when the devil makes special assaults on our patience; then he tries jealousy, evil speaking, etc., all in their turn; then with nearly everybody there come times when he tries all at once. This is terrible, but it is the enemy's business to make things as terrible as possible. If under the most severe trials there is found to be one sinful tendency remaining, your heart is still unclean, no matter how free you may be in other particulars.

The weakness or strength of the carnal manifestations has nothing to do with their presence. After an especial season of humiliation the movings of sin will of necessity be weaker than when one is loaded with

manifold temptations, and the consequence will naturally be fondly to think the soul delivered; but lo! in an evil hour they return with all their old venom and force.

The fact that, after a season of seeking holiness, a great blessing is received and the soul feels free for some time, shouting and testifying to being as free as a bird, is not proof positive of cleansing. Be careful. The devil knows his business well, and sometimes lets a person nearly alone and allows his "infernally offspring," as Adam Clarke says -- the carnal nature -- to rest for the time being. He well knows that when the person gets up high there will be a tendency to be off guard; then, like a flood, he will come sweeping in and attempt to arouse all the latent powers of the internal foe, and take the soul by storm. The Psalmist cautions us to "Rejoice with trembling" (Psalm 2:11).

The whole question centers in this one point again. Are there or are there not carnal tendencies in the soul? Not, do you have greater victory than formerly? And, from a strictly human point of view, the fact of deliverance can only be known by a careful analysis of the "workings of the soul." Here every man is his own judge, and God will most surely hold us accountable for our judgment. The Holy Ghost will be true to us, and if we honestly desire the whole truth of the matter he will reveal it.

Thus the evidence "in ourselves" of deliverance from carnality lies in the deep-seated consciousness that the motives and desires are pure, free from carnal bias. And if the heart is thus purified the most trying circumstances, and the most piercing gazes of divinity flashed through the soul, will only deepen that internal evidence; and each fresh evidence will be like the breaking of an alabaster box of ointment in the soul, spreading its delicious fragrance through the whole being. Hallelujah!

Taking it from another point of view, holiness is manifested in an added quickness to discern the approaches of evil. There are times when the justified soul unconsciously ponders illegitimate things, which are rejected as soon as detected; but the sanctified soul without an act of the will detects and with very little effort instantly rejects the approaches of evil. There is a never-sleeping monitor of the soul that sees danger from afar and wards it off. To some degree this is true in justification, but there are weaknesses in the shield that are manifest and groaned over. Charles Wesley expresses this thought thus in one of his hymns:

"I want a principle within,

Of jealous, godly fear;

A sensibility of sin,

A pain to feel it near.

"I want the first approach to feel,

Of pride, or fond desire;

To catch the wandering of my will,

And quench the kindling fire."

Again, holiness is manifested in a quickness to discern the leadings of the Holy Spirit. True, there is left a certain amount of dullness and sluggishness in this particular, caused by the infirmities of the flesh and mind, but to these is added the blinding, stupefying presence of carnality, in the justified soul, that is liable

to confuse him in his leadings. But the heavenly monitor which is enthroned in the holy soul consciously or unconsciously to the person, with comparative ease detects the leadings of the Spirit of God.

Again, holiness is manifested in a quickness and readiness to obey the slightest movements of the Spirit. It quickly recognizes his reprovings, and heeds his warnings, and gladly does or ceases to do as the Spirit directs. It has no struggle to subdue inward foes before obeying. Obedience is the only rule of life.

Holiness is manifest in a greater devotement to God. Devotion is its atmosphere. In this it lives and moves and has its being. The justified soul is devoted indeed, but struggles to subdue spiritual sloth and rebellion.

Holiness readily acknowledges that all things work together for the good of its possessor. The justified soul tries to do this, and to a great extent, no doubt succeeds; but it is done amid inbred tendencies to break away from perplexing circumstances, and from an environment that binds the Spirit; but holiness is resigned to all the providences of God,

"And in his hottest fire holds still."

Holiness is manifested in greater fervor along all lines of heavenly employment. We do not say greater exertion, for sometimes that would be impossible, but greater fervor. In that spirit that not only works but fully brings God into its work, and accomplishes with one stroke what it would have taken two to have done without this fullness. This fervor manifests itself in soul burden for the lost, in agonizing prayer, in deep yearnings after God, in carefulness and even rigidity of life, and every other kind of holy zeal.

Its possessor has a deep consciousness that the principle underlying each action is pure; that this principle abides and rules without a rival; that all this quickening of his spiritual powers follows upon the taking away of the vampire that has been sucking the vitality from his most sacred duties, and that grace sits sole monarch, with every enemy cast out of the kingdom within. Thank God for the possibilities of grace!

In Wesley's sermon on the "Witness of the Spirit," we read:

We are all liable to trials, wherein the testimony of our own spirit is not sufficient; wherein nothing but the direct testimony of God's Spirit can assure us that we are his children.

Two inferences may be drawn from the whole: the first, Let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit which is separate from the fruit of it. If the Spirit of God does really testify that we are children of God, the immediate consequence will be the fruit of the Spirit, even 'love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance.' And however the fruit may be clouded for a while, during the time of strong temptation, so that it does not appear to the tempted person, while Satan is sifting him as wheat; yet the substantial part of it remains, even under the thickest cloud. It is true, joy in the Holy Ghost may be withdrawn during the hour of trial; yea, the soul may be 'exceeding sorrowful,' 'while the hour and power of darkness' continue; but even this is generally restored with increase, till we rejoice 'with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

The second inference is, Let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness. There may be foretastes of joy, of peace, of love, and those not delusive, but really from God, long before we have the witness in ourselves,"

etc.

Do not trust in any supposed witness of the Spirit of God unless the fruit of a holy life, even the absence of heart sin and the presence of all the beautiful graces of the Spirit immediately follow; and do not trust in any imaginary graces unless the witness of the Holy Spirit is given, for these two agree. If God has accomplished the work in your heart, his witness will agree thereto, and he will inspire your heart with a consciousness of the fact that it is clean every whit. Do not trust ecstasies, no matter how wonderful they may be. Do not trust any state of the emotions, but be determined to have the direct witness of the Spirit, and be determined that this witness shall be accompanied by the fruits of a holy life, the testimony of your own spirit, agreeing thereto.

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