

# Correspondence on Holiness

by James Blaine Chapman

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*The sermon explores the complexities of sanctification, the nature of inbred sin, and the importance of the Holy Spirit in maintaining a holy life.*

**Scripture:** John 14:26, Romans 8:13, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 1:13, Philippians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 10:26, James 4:8, 1 John 1:9

**Topics:** "Sanctification", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

Dr. J. B. Chapman addresses theological questions regarding sanctification, emphasizing the eradication of inbred sin through entire sanctification. He explains that sanctification is conditional upon receiving and keeping the Holy Spirit, and that one can lose this grace through known sin or neglecting one's duty. Chapman encourages believers to seek a clean heart, trust in God's power, and persevere in their pursuit of holiness, despite doctrinal complexities and personal struggles.

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## Transcript

New York Dr. J. B. Chapman

Dear Brother:

A certain portion of our doctrine, pertaining to sanctification, is not clear to me. Does sanctification really eradicate "inbred sin"? If sanctification removes inbred sin, how then can a sanctified person backslide? If a sanctified person does backslide, will he not have Adamic sin in his heart again? If so, how can it be there if God removed it? If sanctification removes Adamic sin, can a person who backslides be sanctified again? What would be removed the second time if God had already removed Adamic sin the first time and remembers it no more? We are taught that God forgives, not only the sins for which we are responsible, but also those for which we are not responsible. But would not a backslider of the class described be responsible for inbred sin? and would not that result in two classes: one responsible for inbred sin and the other not so responsible? I cannot explain to my own satisfaction how inbred sin can ever be found in one's heart again if God once removes it. I believe in sanctification, but I cannot explain how it includes the eradication of inbred sin. I have invented several mechanical devices. But when I found certain features were not workable, I reconstructed the model. Shall I not do the same in the spiritual realm?

My Dear Brother:

Your letter of recent date has reached my desk and I have read it very carefully and sympathetically. My counsel first of all is, Do not be discouraged over theological difficulties. Some people are not as good as their doctrine implies and some are much better than their doctrine requires. Theology is a necessity of the intellect, but salvation is a demand of the heart. Dr. Carradine used to tell about a cage which held a number of dogs of various breeds. There was a big-headed bulldog and a thin-headed greyhound among the rest. A gentleman came one day and set a dish of milk just outside the bars of the cage. The big-headed bull dog was unable to reach the milk, because his head was so large and unyielding. But the thin-headed greyhound thrust his head out between the bars and drank the milk. Dr. Carradine used to say that men are like that. Some are hindered by their heads, and others go after the blessings of God heart first and get what they seek. He used to say we should give first attention to the satisfaction of our hearts. We should send our hearts through on the fast express, he used to say, even though it may be necessary for our heads to come in on the slow freight. Be sure to get saved and sanctified wholly, even though you cannot explain all the questions involved in the doctrinal construction involved in the profession of holiness. Get a clean heart and keep a clean heart, even though a little more time and sincere effort may be required to obtain a clear head. Perhaps I can do just as well by approaching your difficulties from the dogmatic side, so I will make the statements first, and then enlarge on them somewhat later. If the emphatic statements appear abrupt, I am sure you will be patient until you have considered the fuller arguments with which I shall support the statements. Here then are the statements:

1. Entire sanctification does really eradicate inbred sin.
2. One who has obtained this state of grace can, by the power of the grace given, live a life of inner holiness and outward righteousness all the days of his life.
3. One who has obtained this state of grace is still in a state of trial or probation and can lose this grace, either by committing known sin or by failing to do what he realizes is his duty to do.
4. If a person who was once sanctified does backslide, he gets inbred sin back in his heart again.
5. A person who backslides from the grace of entire sanctification can be restored to the experience again, on the same conditions and by the same means that he obtained the blessing the first time.
6. There is a degree of difference in the responsibility of those who have had the blessing and those who have not had it. But I would scarcely divide all men, or even all Christians, into two sections just at this point. Responsibility is a variable thing, and only God knows how many classes there are regarding it. The fact is, I would not make men into classes at all on the basis of responsibility, but would rather say that each individual is in the nature of a class himself, seeing no one else in all the world has just the same light and the same degree of responsibility as he has.
7. You say you believe in sanctification, but cannot explain how it involves the eradication of inbred sin. Well, sanctification that does not involve the eradication of inbred sin is just Old Testament sanctification, which is really just consecration. And there is no middle ground between Old Testament sanctification or consecration and New Testament sanctification or Pentecostal sanctification which involves the eradication of inbred sin. Justification and regeneration do all that can be done in the way of adjusting relations and making the soul alive unto God. There is then no moral change that remains to be made except the purging out of the dross of fallen human nature, which dross is variously dubbed as inbred sin, Adamic sin, the sin of the world, the old man, the sin that doth so easily beset us, etc., according to the approach of the theologian. Therefore the line should be straightly drawn and one should be classed as

believing in eradication of inbred sin or else as not believing in sanctification, seeing the day for 8.

Old Testament sanctification to be the standard is passed long ago.

Yes, I think your analogy is all right. The model should work, and if it just will not work, then the theory is wrong and should be corrected in keeping with the practical facts. But in this case the application turns the other way around. This model does work, and everyone who comes to God for the blessing on the conditions set forth in the Holy Scriptures and in the standards of Wesleyan theology is ready to add his testimony to my assertion that it is so. Perhaps you have in mind some instances in which those who claimed the blessing did not prove to your satisfaction that they had it. You may be even thinking of your own struggles and battles in connection with your profession of this grace.

But there are two possibilities in this matter:

(1) You may be correct in your deductions. Perhaps the ones you have in mind did not have the blessing. But this proves nothing except that these particular ones did not have it. It by no means proves that others making the same profession are also wanting in the reality of grace.

(2) It may be that you have set up tests of your own making, and that you judge people more harshly than God does. Perhaps those whom you would condemn do, in spite of all appearances, have the blessing, for none of us know just exactly how much light or how much grace any other person has. I think it was Newton who said he had observed that when people are "getting religion" they have a tendency to be hard on themselves and easy on other people. But when they are losing religion or are already backslidden they have a tendency to be easy on themselves and hard on other people. I do not know, of course, that you are tempted at all along this line, but I know it is a good point on which to be warned, lest we condemn those whom God does not condemn.

From your letter I should judge that you have been more or less in contact with that school of Christians whose error is that of literalizing the terms by which Christian verities are described, and that you have either consciously or unconsciously been influenced by them. One of their stock arguments is, "If one has been born of God, he cannot be unborn." But this is a fallacy too thin to bear the weight of the beginning of an investigation. For certainly one who has been born can die! But if one will stop for a moment he will realize that natural laws do not extend on into the spiritual world--the two worlds are often analogous, but they are not identical. Being regenerated by the Spirit of God is such a radical and definite change that it is like being born, since it initiates one into a new life. Therefore it is called "the new birth" or a being "born again." But to throw this metaphor down on all fours and make every detail of the natural birth and life apply to the change wrought by the Spirit in the heart of a penitent believer is to make the whole figure absurd. Let us see if we cannot state the facts of Christian experience, first without metaphors, and then in the form of illustrations.

First, as straightforwardly as we can say it: Man, since his fall and as we find him now without grace, is a sinner by practice and is sinful by nature. In order to please God and live happily with Him here and in heaven, man must be holy, and this requires that he shall be saved from guilt for sins committed and cleansed from sinful defilement within. Two distinct acts are involved here; one is pardon and the other is cleansing. Both of these necessitate the grace and power of God. But God is able to do both these miracles for and in everyone who will come to Him through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. When we say that sanctification is invariably subsequent to justification, we are stating a fact, the basis of which is in the human limitation and not in the power or will of God. Men cannot meet the conditions for being

sanctified until after they have been freely justified. Therefore sanctification must be subsequent to justification, and is, as John Wesley put it, "the second blessing, properly so called." Regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit; entire sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit. But there are human prerequisites and human conditions involved in each, and these prerequisites and conditions are such that, while a penitent sinner can meet those for regeneration, only a fully justified and regenerated Christian can meet those upon which the work of sanctification is promised.

When God justifies, He justifies fully and freely. When He sanctifies, He likewise sanctifies freely and fully. When He justifies there is no sin as guilt left, and when He sanctifies there is no sin as pollution left. When one is justified freely and sanctified wholly he is free from all sin without and within. But just as the obtainment of this state and grace is dependent entirely upon the response of God to our human needs, so the continuation of such a state is dependent upon our keeping the conditions for the abiding presence of the indwelling Spirit. For if we grieve the Spirit away, our spiritual dilapidation will follow without fail. There is no holiness apart from the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps you will not require illustration of the principal tenet --the one which holds to the possibility of obtaining the blessing, so I will pass on to the troublesome idea of how such a state may be forfeited. There is a well-beloved holiness preacher in England (sorry I cannot this moment recall his name) who upon being asked, "Is sanctification absolute or conditional?" replied, "It is conditional." Then when asked what he meant by its being conditional, he replied, "It is conditioned upon our receiving the Holy Spirit as our Sanctifier, and it is retained by our keeping the Holy Spirit as our abiding Comforter." He then offered this illustration: "This house in which we worship tonight would be dark except for the light that has been purposely brought in. That is to say, it is conditionally light in this house not absolutely light. It is light by reason of the light that has been brought in. But if you take away that light, darkness will again fill the place, even as it did before any light was brought in. We are sanctified by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We are made holy by His incoming and we are kept clean by His indwelling. But if He should depart, we would no longer be clean and holy. Our chance to be holy is by keeping the Holy Spirit. Let us not grieve Him, lest He depart and sin be again enthroned."

Perhaps you will recall the Master's parable about the strong man who keeps the house that his goods should not become a spoil to the robber. Well, that is it. The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier, and while He dwells and reigns within, the devil and sin must stay out. But if He is grieved away, we are then no match for our enemies. This whole life right on until death or until Jesus comes the second time, is a probation--a test period, and our choice is not fixed, our character is not established unchangeably, and our destiny is not sealed until we actually get to heaven. Let no doctor deceive you and let no doctrine ease your anxiety. Keep persistently on the heavenly race until you actually win the prize. Do not rest at any halfway house. The race is not finished until we get to heaven.

Seeing you have thought enough of me to write me of your doubts and struggles, I do not like to close without offering you my testimony. I was brought up as a member of a large family in which little attention was paid to religion and God. Nevertheless I was brought under conviction at the age of fifteen and was definitely converted in a holiness meeting. In that same meeting I was brought to feel my sense of need for a clean heart and the fullness of the Spirit of God, and while earnestly seeking such a grace, God answered prayer and gave me witness within that He had really and truly cleansed and sanctified my heart and had come in to abide with me. I have found His grace sufficient now these forty-three years. Using your illustration about the mechanical model, I am happy to say the experience has worked, and more and more I find its fruitage satisfying. My care is to be strictly obedient to God and to keep the Spirit ever

abiding within. The Holy Spirit abiding in His fullness in my heart becomes my enabling power. While He stays my heart is safe, and I rest in the blessed assurance that while I "trust and obey" He will never leave nor forsake me. May God bless you more and more and forevermore.

In His love and service.

From a Seeker for Holiness California Dr. J. B. Chapman

Dear Brother:

I am convinced from the reading of the Bible that we may and should be sanctified wholly. I feel in my own soul the need of this blessing and I am definitely hungry to have all the fullness of God in my heart. I have been fortunate in having been associated with some saintly people who have lived the life before me some of them have died in the triumphs of this living faith and made even the way through the valley of the shadow light with their faith and testimony. I have been definitely converted and am seeking earnestly to live the Christian life. My trouble seems to be that I cannot come to the definite crisis. I long for the blessing and pray to possess it. I am willing to pay the price for its obtainment. I do not doubt its reality, but I seem merely to approach the place of obtaining the blessing and never do actually grasp the faith by which the blessing is obtained. If there is any way you can help me, I would be most grateful. I have read the Bible, many holiness books, heard much holiness preaching and testimony, but I just do not seem to be able to claim the blessing for myself.

My Dear Brother:

I thank you for writing me. Paul, you know, reminded us that no temptation has come to us that is not common to men. I think of that when I hear of cases like your own. I suspect you are tempted to feel that you are alone in your inability to reach God for the needs of your soul. But such is by no means the case. Therefore, rather than answering your letter personally, I am answering it as I think I would do if none but you were supposed to read it, but then I am putting the answer in my little book, that others may read it and perhaps be helped, as I hope most sincerely you will

Your statement of your case is so clear and full that it saves much time, and enables us to come immediately to the crux of the matter. You do not harbor any doubts as to your conversion or present standing as a child of God, and you do not find yourself confused by doctrinal questions. I love to think of you as a Christian now kneeling at the altar praying that God may sanctify you wholly, and I love to think of myself as kneeling there with you and joining you in that prayer. In such a picture I can right well imagine the prayer we would offer. Since you have asked me to try to help you, I am just really going to pray for you, as I believe I would pray if we knelt at the altar together, as I have pictured our doing. And will you not please join me in this prayer, making the responses that are required to make the prayer your own, following on in the steps suggested, and finally claiming the promise for the promised blessing?

The Prayer: We come today, our Heavenly Father, to thank Thee for all the promises of mercy and grace which Thou hast made for us and for all men. We thank Thee for the blood of Jesus, which has been made an offering for us that we might come into Thy presence without fear, and we come today pleading that precious Blood. We have no worth or merit of our own to bring; simply to the Cross we cling.

We thank Thee for Thy Holy Spirit, who in answer to the Blood has come to regenerate, to sanctify, to indwell and keep our hearts forever more. There is no power on earth or in heaven that can reach and

transform our hearts except Thy Holy Spirit. He alone is the Executor of Thy will in the work of salvation, and we thank Thee for His presence and power which are available to us on terms that we are capable of meeting.

We thank Thee, O blessed Lord, for Thy Holy Word, the Bible, which Thou hast, through Thy Spirit and unsearchable providences, given to us to be our Waybill and Guidebook. We thank Thee for the unfailing promises of this Book. We come pleading these today, as we seek special favors at Thy hand.

And now, O blessed Lord, we bring to Thee this, our dear brother and Thy child. We come to join with him in the prayer that Thou wilt this hour sanctify him and cleanse his heart from all sin, and fill him with Thy perfect love. He has often prayed for this blessing. He believes this blessing is available to him, as to others who come seeking it with all their hearts. He feels his deep need of being thus sanctified and cleansed from sin. He is ready and willing this day to pay the price in full consecration that his heart may be made wholly and forever Thine.

Come this day, O blessed Lord, and enable this Thy child to place himself with all his ransomed powers upon Thy altar for time and for eternity. Give him grace to part in spirit with every loved one on earth, as such parting may be necessary to go with Thee. Give him grace to separate himself from every fond ambition that he has ever felt or thought or known. Give him grace to place himself at Thy disposal without any shadow of reservation or any trace of reluctance. He cannot know the future or what it will bring forth, but give him grace to say a yes that will cover every question Thou mayest ever ask him from now on to the day when he shall see Thy face in heaven.

And as he comes with his unlimited gift, we pray Thee, pour out upon him Thy unlimited blessing. Thou hast ever challenged us to come with the promise that in such case Thou wilt not cast us out. Thou hast challenged us to give our all to Thee that Thou mightest give Thine all to us, and we claim that promise today. Ready and willing now for Thy worst, we come in faith to claim Thy best. Wilt Thou come just now and sanctify this Thy child. Sanctify him wholly. Sanctify him now. We trust Thee to do it.

Thy promise is like a platform on which we are required to step in order that the springs of holy water may flow forth for us. And now we step out upon that platform--Thy promise. We have believed Thou art able to do it. We have believed Thou art willing to do it. But now we believe Thou doest it. We take it at Thy hand. We receive it at Thy touch. We possess it in Thy Spirit. It is true even now!

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift! The Comforter has come! He fully saves me now! Praise be unto the Triune God! Praise be to the Father, who has willed this blessing to us! Praise be unto the Son, who has worked the provisions for it! Praise be unto the Holy Spirit, who has now come to witness in our hearts that the work is done! Praise be to God forevermore. Amen and amen.

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