

Holiness in Process

by James Blaine Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of ongoing holiness in the believer's life as essential for sound doctrine, joyful worship, and fruitful service.

Topics: "Sanctification", "Holy Living"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches on 'Holiness in Process' based on Acts 2:42-47. He emphasizes the importance of continuing in holiness as an ongoing experience, highlighting the progresses and processes that come with a sanctified life. Chapman discusses the regret of delaying sanctification and the need to seek God's blessing early in life to fully enjoy and live in holiness. He explores how holiness preserves sound doctrine, keeps the heart in fellowship, makes worship a delight, sustains in Christian service, and ensures fruit for Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:42-47).

In the last message we gave attention to "Holiness in Crisis," using the first paragraph of this second chapter of the Book of Acts. Today we have turned to the last paragraph of this wonderful Pentecost chapter, and are studying "Holiness in Process." In the former instance we were thinking of the beginning of holiness as an experience; today we are thinking of the continuation of holiness as an experience, and the progresses and processes which appertain to the sanctified life.

Some people receive the experience in crisis and die soon afterwards, so that with them the crisis seems to be all. But not many are like that, and some who are like that should have received the experience sooner; for it is a matter of regret that so many, either because of being incorrectly taught or because of their own reluctance to press their claims, do not get sanctified until near the end of their lives. Undoubtedly it is God's design that His people should get the blessing early, and that they should live it and enjoy it and increase in it until the end of life comes. If people can have regret in heaven, then surely

there will be many in heaven who will regret their not having obtained this blessing at an earlier date. For while the instant possession of the blessing does prepare us for the presence and fellowship of God in heaven, there must be much that is missed by those who are not permitted to live the sanctified life in this world.

It has been said that this present world is not adapted to holy living. If the meaning is that "the world is no friend to grace to help us on to God," then the statement goes without denial. But if the statement means that one cannot live a holy life in this world, then the sentiment is in error; for, although the world does not help, "he giveth more grace," and the joy of holy living is increased by the larger measure of help that our situation requires from God.

In pointing out some of the effects that this experience of holiness has in the hearts and lives of those who possess it, we lift the following items from the paragraph before us:

I. PRESERVES SOUND DOCTRINE

The text says, simply, "They continued in the apostles' doctrine. The apostles doctrine is the true doctrine, and to continue in it one must run the gauntlet of many heresies.

Teachers of false doctrines usually make their way sound appealing by making it either easy or spectacular, that is, by divorcing its promises from moral requirements, or else by extending its benefits to other than the spiritual sphere. Health and wealth and popularity appeal to many who cannot see large advantage in holiness.

It has been observed that in religion men have a tendency to believe what they want to believe, and that the condition of their hearts has more to do with their doctrines than does the disposition of their intellects. Mere intellectual rest does not go deep enough, so that even those who have been taught the doctrines of the gospel from childhood are likely to be led astray if their hearts are left empty. Dr. Daniel Steele, Boston University, used to call the Holy Spirit "the Conservator of orthodoxy," and his argument was that, when the Holy Spirit comes in and sanctifies and satisfies the soul, "the old paths" of the gospel become one's delight, and the appeal of the sirens of the world is lost upon the ears that are accustomed to better music.

Unsatisfied hearts are easy prey to heresies of the mind. But when the ideal of the soul is reached in the grace and blessing of a pure heart, there is not much for false doctrine to feed upon. The truly sanctified are like well-fed people -- not easy to entice.

I had an experience once in trying to be sociable. I was invited out to dinner. The table was spread with such an abundance of good food that the temptation to overeat was very strong, especially in view of the fact that the hostess seemed most solicitous to have us try every dish that was on the table. Toward the close of the meal, by inquiry, the host and hostess found that we would not be leaving until about time for another meal. At once they both set in to urge us to tarry, and to share with them again. The hostess finally asked, "What would you like to have for supper?" Then, to be honest, I had to say: "Dear friends, I cannot think of a single thing that I would care to eat. The fact is, I will not eat any more until I can develop an appetite, beginning right now. And you will have to wait awhile before I can make any suggestions about food." And that is the way with a truly and fully sanctified Christian. The offers of "other religions" do not come with any force because the sanctified soul is satisfied. And it has often been observed that people who are fresh in the fullness of the blessing do not take up with new and false doctrines.

II. KEEPS THE HEART

They "continued stedfasty in the ... fellowship," as well as in their doctrine. It is one thing to force oneself to co-operate; it is another thing to have unity and fellowship in deed and in truth. Co-operation and united action may be attained as an art, but fellowship is a product of grace. United effort may be maintained by effort of the will, but fellowship requires purity of affection. One can tolerate as a matter of policy, but love is an inwrought principle, and St. John (I John 3:14) makes love of the brethren an evidence of the possession of that inner grace which is attached only to the new life.

Next to one's personal relationship with and state before God, nothing is of greater consequence than fellowship with the people of God. And, like other precious things, this keen, happy fellowship is easy to mar and lose. When it is threatened, we usually seek an alibi in the carelessness or wrongdoing of others, overlooking the fact that strain in this relation is a demand for more grace on our part. While we cannot always induce others to mend their ways, that we may find them easier to love, we can always draw for that larger supply of love that will enable us, as the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians tells us, to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and never fail in the crisis.

The ancients used to say, "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make angry." This was in order to make it appear that the victim deserved the judgment that came upon him. By a slight paraphrase, we may truthfully say, "Whom the devil would defeat, he first divides." At least, division among the people of God is invariably a prelude to defeat. And whence come wars and strife among professing Christians? Why, they come from unsanctified roots yet remaining in the hearts of those who profess to love God, and a good experience of holiness will hold one steady in time of trial and in time of pressure. Often, more often than we like to confess, the real reason why we do not succeed in keeping steadfast "in the apostles' fellowship" is not in others so much as it is in ourselves -- not in that the others are so difficult to bear, but in that we ourselves are too thin-skinned and wanting in grace to be able to rise above the petty faults we see in others.

III. MAKES WORSHIP A DELIGHT

The text describes the various items of worship, and concludes the list with "praising God, and having favour with all the people." Their worship was punctuated with praise. Their religion was a joy. Prayer was a pleasure. All that went into their worship was a delight.

Most things can be divided into two parts -- this is one of the very simplest divisions there is -- division into halves. The Christian life is no exception. All it involves may be classified under two heads: (1) worship and (2) service. Worship is addressed direct to God. Service is directed to God by way of His creatures.

Worship is both a duty and a privilege. It is a duty because the only way for us to become like God is to "think often upon His name"; and it is a privilege, for it is in prayer that God comes near to commune with us and to reveal to us His will. And because it is both a duty and a privilege, we should be regular and constant in our worship, whether we feel like it or not, and we should find joy in it because of the returns it brings to our hearts and lives.

Candor compels us to say that many Christian people do not get much out of worship. Some keep up the forms of worship from a sense of duty, while too many neglect worship because their interest in it cannot be sustained. Worship always serves to discover our own hearts to us, for it is like bringing ourselves into the presence of a great light. And if our inner selves do not present an agreeable picture, our tendency is

likely to be to shun such sights as much as we can. Either this or else we must set about to improve our premises within. Bud Robinson, speaking of sinning and repenting, said: "Not many people continue long sinning every day and repenting every night; for pretty soon their sinning will stop their repenting or their repenting will stop their sinning." And we may apply this pretty well to worship. If seeing our hearts in the presence of God is disagreeable, we will either quit going into the presence of God so often, or we will set about changing the things that look disagreeable when we go there.

Holiness of heart results in increasing the joy of worship, and leads to delight in prayer, in testimony, in the hearing of God's Word, in singing God's praises in the company of others, and in "sitting together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The Christian whose heart is clean from sin and filled with the love of God can truly say, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

IV. SUSTAINS IN CHRISTIAN SERVICE

The text pictures to us a rejoicing people engaged in using their goods to help those who are less fortunate than themselves, and in devoting their time to the service of others, and doing it with impressive happiness.

A great deal is said about the joy of serving others, but those who have tried know that one needs the power of an inner constraint to keep him encouraged in the face of the want of appreciation, the lack of comprehension, and the slights and rebuffs one meets in efforts to "do good to the bodies and souls of men."

Yesterday I received a letter from an earnest young college professor. He is now just forty-one years old -- just at that point where any man is likely to review his actual and prospective course in life with the realization that it will soon be too late for him to alter his choices very much. This young, educated man has come to question whether he is doing very much good or not. He is indirectly interested in teaching his pupils English, for his great concern is to make Christians out of them; and he thinks his efforts along that line, except for his example, are not very effective. His father is now ready to retire from the farm, and the young professor thinks perhaps he would do well to give up teaching and take up farming. He has asked me for advice. Now I grew up on the farm, and my feeling is that if God will let any man stay on the farm he is foolish if he leaves it for any calling in the world. But one of the reasons the farm is so desirable is that the farmer is concerned more with things than with persons. Things like soil, weather, calves, and pigs can be disappointing; but within the scope of a cycle, one can prophesy pretty accurately what they will do. But human beings are unpredictable; and those who work with people, whether it is to serve their bodies as doctors or nurses, their minds as teachers, or their souls as religious workers, must be prepared to stand a great deal of disappointment and unexpected, unfavorable reaction. And the higher the plane of one's service, the more the difficulties he encounters. He who seeks to save souls has the most difficult service of all. Some of his best intentions are bound to be misunderstood, and the net results of his work have no full form of expression that either he or others can see. Such a person needs that sense of inner approval that makes him sure God is pleased, and after that he need not fear what man can do unto him.

St. Paul offered as an explanation of his unseemingly zeal, "The love of Christ constraineth us" (II Corinthians 5:14). He used the word here with the meaning of urge, to compel and to push forward. The love of Christ stirs us to keep on working for the good of those who do not appreciate our efforts, who resent our efforts, and for whom our efforts do not seem to avail. The love of Christ sustains the Christian whose heart is clean and indwelt by the Holy Spirit when his own loved ones are indifferent to Christian

influence, when his neighbors shun, his enemies persecute, and when results are few. In times like that to be sustained by the indwelling Spirit is to be an overcomer, for it is to draw on resources that are not apparent to the eyes of men.

V. AND, FINALLY, INSURES FRUIT FOR CHRIST

The last statement in the text tells us that the Lord added to the Church daily the people who were saved. There was a big ingathering on the Day of Pentecost, and another even larger one a few days later. But here we have the mention of the continual garnering that the Pentecostal Christians enjoyed. "Daily such as should be saved." This group of Christians expected souls, and God gave them souls.

The most important equipment for soul winning is being filled with the Holy Ghost. Dr. Hills remarks that in four years at college where it was known that he intended entering the ministry, and then in three years in the seminary where he was making direct preparation for this work, he cannot recall that anyone ever said, "You need to be baptized with the Holy Ghost if you are to win souls for God." And yet this is, according to the Scriptures, the prime preparation for such work on the part of both ministers and laymen. Whatever other advantages we may have, the baptism with the Holy Ghost is yet indispensable. Charles G. Finney put it this way, "What you are without the Holy Ghost and what you would be filled with the Holy Ghost is the measure of the crime you commit if you do not receive Him." As we love the souls of others, with that zeal and earnestness should we clear the way for the coming of the Holy Ghost in Pentecostal fullness. Then, as we value the souls we might win for God, with that zeal we should keep everything clear that He may abide with us always in His fullness.

A humble old layman was given to praying God to send a revival into his community. One day when in the throes of earnest prayer, it occurred to him that if God sent the Holy Spirit He would have to send Him to someone in particular. And as he thought the matter over, he could not think of any of his neighbors whom he thought might be glad and willing to welcome the Spirit. So the old man opened his own heart, and cried to God to send the Spirit upon him. God answered this prayer, sent the Holy Spirit in sanctifying fullness upon the old man, and right away a revival broke out in the neighborhood, and many souls were brought to God. When we pray for a world-wide revival, the prayer is not complete until we have said, "And begin it in me."

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