

Past and Present Characteristics of Methodism

by Milton Haney

The sermon highlights the decline of Methodism and the importance of genuine repentance, sanctification, and testimony in the church.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:18, Matthew 5:16, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:10, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Ephesians 4:22, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 1 Peter 3:15, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Church Revival", "Entire Sanctification"

Description

Milton Haney reflects on the spiritual decline in the church, comparing the purity of the primitive church to the corruption that followed. He questions the shift towards rituals, complexity in worship, and the focus on church membership over repentance and faith. Haney highlights the importance of genuine repentance, saving faith, and the new birth, emphasizing the need for entire sanctification through faith in Jesus. He points out the decline in preaching on key gospel truths and the lack of testimony on real Holy Ghost experiences, leading to self-deception and spiritual compromise.

Transcript

In the previous chapter we were summing up the characteristics of present spiritual decline, in the points of contrast between the primitive church in her purity, and after her corruption by the influx of a million worldlings, in the days of Constantine. The first of these was great darkness in the official church and ministry. A darkness which largely obscured the sacred oracles, found a sepulcher for the doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus, and sent millions blundering through the ages in the effort to save themselves by repeating human rituals, complying with heathen rites, inflicting self-tortures, and "working" their way back to God!

Would it be wise to study the rapid development of nearly all these features in our history in the past thirty years? Are we increasing rituals? Are we drifting from the simplicity of primitive worship? Are we substituting church membership and service for repentance, saving faith, and the new birth? Are we bringing God's children now to be sanctified wholly by an act of faith in Jesus, as we taught for sixty years, or are we sending multitudes of hungry souls, through an endless series of their own performances, to make themselves holy?

Is there now a premium put on completely sanctified men and ministers, as in the days of our simplicity, or are such men and ministers, held at a discount by a great majority of our leading ministers and official boards? Is it true that we now mourn if a sufficient number of holy men cannot be found in a single church

to constitute a board of stewards, or, as a rule, are these now chosen for their business capacities, or wealth, or both, regardless of their spirituality? Is it true that a brother who has testified to God's sanctifying grace is therefore preferred and chosen to be a trustee of church property? Is it true that a pastor responding to a call from a first-class church should state, that if he come, he was sure he would come in the "fullness of the blessing," be thereby more certainly chosen? None can deny that these questions are plain, practical and appropriate, and that the answers we are compelled to give would be exactly opposite to what we would have given, if applied to the Methodist Church seventy years ago.

Who that is intelligent, as to her past and present history, can fail to see the wondrous trend toward spirituality in the former, and the trend toward unspirituality in the latter? Holiness then at a premium; holiness now at a discount! God took the church of the Wesleys out of labyrinths of formalism, and the consequent reign of spiritual death (for formalism and spiritual death are never separate long), as He brought the church of Pentecost out of the darkness and ritualistic bondage of fallen Judaism. He gave to her a tongue of fire and heart of flame, when infidelity had crept like a pestilence into the pulpits and pews of Christian Protestantism, and boasted that God's holy book would never be read after another century had gone! Despite the rage of skeptics and the scorn of fallen prelates, with well nigh the confederate opposition of the Christian world, Wesley organized his little holiness bands, and one day, coming out of the holy of holies, he gave utterance to those triumphal, prophetic words: "The World Is My Parish!"

Holiness being the central truth of the Bible, it now became the central doctrine of the Wesleyan system. Wesley, with the historians of an hundred years, have united in declaring that God raised up Methodism to spread Scriptural holiness. He, with the Methodist Episcopal Church, for a like period have declared that we are first justified and afterwards sanctified, and that entire sanctification was the act of God's grace by which we are made holy. He and it, also thought that as we are justified by faith, we are sanctified by faith, and that new converts should be pressed right on into this holy experience. Surely no intelligent man in the teachings of Wesley and this church will think of denying either of the above statements.

Above everything else from the beginning, Methodism insisted on the necessity of genuine repentance, saving faith in Jesus, a full, free pardon of all past sins, a real regeneration, or the imparted life of God to the soul, adoption, and entire sanctification, to which the Holy Spirit is to witness. This necessity was always predicated on the fall of man, the inherited depravity of every human heart, and the fact that every man has been a sinner. That salvation was only made possible through the atonement made by Jesus Christ, and without the shedding of His blood there was no remission of sins. I have heard it stated by great and good men, from 1846 to 1900, I think every year, that Methodism had never had any divisions on doctrine; that, doctrinally, she had always been a unit. This statement was wondrously true, probably for nearly one hundred years; but who would dare to repeat it, as applied to the twentieth century?

The most efficient way to bury a Christian doctrine or any Christian experience, is simply to ignore it. What is true as to the majority of the leading pulpits of the Methodist Church, as to preaching on our inherited depravity, sin, the atonement, repentance, the new birth, adoption, the witness of the Spirit, entire sanctification, the judgment day, and the perdition of the ungodly? No question that there are many in the rank and file of her glorious ministry who are holding as best they can to her true centers, but these, every one of them, are more or less under pressure. Spiritual

declines have never been led by lowly people, in church or pulpit, but against their protest have God's altars been overturned. Spiritual people always forge toward the front when God is being sought; but unspiritual people never fail to get in lead when the trend is worldward. Hence the incalculable damage of

filling the church with unconverted people.

1. We thereby put them in a false relation. The church is the body of Christ, and is designed only for those who are in Christ Jesus. An earnest seeker might be consistently found in the ante-chamber of the church, as in a state of preparation for membership; but the church is for God's children, and you cannot be God's child till you are born of God.

2. This false relation tends to self-deception. Having put himself among God's people, he is more easily persuaded that he is God's child, when he is not. He has complied with Christian ordinances, is acting like a Christian in keeping with church order, and therefore concludes he must be a Christian.

3. The absence of preaching on the great gospel centers, involving sin and real Christian experience, makes it an easy task for the devil to persuade him that he is now all right, and has nothing to fear. This was almost impossible under the ministry of early Methodist preachers, as history shows. Their fearful denunciations of sin, the exactions of Divine righteousness, and the certainty of a judgment day, with the perdition of ungodly men to follow, furnished a bed of thorns for such men upon which rest was made impossible. Then Methodism was largely a hot-bed of prayer, and such hangers on would be either prayed in or out of the Church. Her ministers brought out the atonement, with the circumstances of Christ's death for sin and the sinner, in such a way as to make sin appear "exceedingly sinful." Their great insistence on the glad knowledge of forgiveness through atoning blood was a burning lamp held up before the unsaved church member.

4. The testimony of the early Methodists relating to real Holy Ghost experiences made it difficult for any to be deceived, and was probably the greatest instrument to save men they ever used. A learned Baptist minister said once in my hearing, and in presence of a throng of people:

"There is no use in talking. The Methodists have girt the world with power, and they have done it largely with their testimony!"

This was her great power, both in pulpit and pew, which made her invincible wherever she went, and it is only in proportion as she has lost it that she has been compelled to make compromises with the world. Nothing has ever been so convincing of the truth of Christian religion as the testimony of its saved subjects. The subtle subterfuge resorted to in all times of spiritual declension to release unsaved church members from being Christ's witnesses, is that they shall testify with their lives. Why not insist that this procedure be introduced into all the courts, and have the witness-boxes filled with silent men and women, living out their testimony before the judges, and juries of the country?

The Book and the Gospel bring Christ to us as a Saviour from sin. If he is not a Saviour from sin, he is an impostor. Millions of people have complied with His conditions, and He has saved them. They and they only, of all the human race, know Jesus Christ as a Saviour. These He has chosen to be His witnesses. His salvation, provided and promised, in distinct statements,

includes the complete pardon of all your past transgressions; and He has pardoned you. How can you testify to this great basal truth by your life? I am guilty and lost, and have heard that you have found Christ as a sin-pardoning Saviour, and go to you for light; you fear to testify about this with your lips, but refer me to your life. How can you show me by your life that God for Christ's sake has forgiven your past sins?

Then salvation includes the impartation of a new life from God, which you never had before, and I go to you knowing I am spiritually dead, and hungering for this promised life, to inquire if God has given it to you. I have much confidence in you, and if you testify that God has given it to you I can easily believe He will give it to me; but you do not dare to say that He has, but I must in the coming months, or years, spell it out through your holy living?!

I am fully conscious that I am a child of the devil, and not a child of God, and the Book says that Christ has made provision to adopt me into the family of God and make me His child, so I come to you to find whether you have been adopted. In response to my inquiries, you say you would not dare to testify that you were now a child of God, but I might be helped by daily observing your future correct deportment. How long would my observations have to continue to convince me that you have been adopted into the family of God?

I see the Scriptures promise the witness of the Holy Spirit to all who are truly saved, and come to you to find whether He has thus witnessed with your spirit; and you are too humble to testify that He has, but hope by your holy life hereafter to convince me that He had -- could that convince me? Why, brother, if you were as holy in your life as St. John that could not prove to any soul in earth or heaven that you had the direct witness of the Spirit to your adoption. There is much in personal experience that can never be revealed to others but through the testimony of our lips, or through the use of words.

I am convinced of my need of a holy heart, and you have been sanctified wholly; so the Holy Spirit sends me to you for help. The devil is sorely thrusting at my wounded soul, and the way seems dark and difficult; but you have been over the road and know as to the truth of this experience. So I tell you of my longings and battle with doubts; and ask if you know the "blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth you from all sin?" Your meekness will not permit you to testify to this truth, but you urge me to watch your holy living, and I will find the promise is true by your life. But, brother, your life is what you do; but I am wanting to know as to what Jesus can do. I did not come to find what a wonderful man you are, nor as to what wonderful things you have done or proposed to do. I want to know as to the truth of this promise, that Jesus Christ is a complete Saviour from all sin! You know His blood has cleansed you from all sin. Correct and holy living is of great importance, and if I profess to be holy and live an unholy life my life will destroy my testimony; but correct living, unaccompanied with the testimony of your lips, can never prove that Jesus saved you.

People often live a correct outward life, on purpose to prove that Jesus is not needed as a Saviour. You offer Christ to any boasting moralist, as a Saviour, and he will practically tell you so.

1. Opposition to Christian testimony is largely urged against testifying to entire sanctification, but no man can show that it is right to witness for Christ as the justifier and wrong to witness for Him as the sanctifier of your soul. The opposition in that case is not primarily to Christian testimony, but to sanctification. Hence testimony has been cut off entirely in many cases from the prayer meeting, where it was cherished, because a few saints would testify to this glorious experience. Doctor Adam Clarke said if there were no other evidence to the depravity of the human heart than its opposition to Christian perfection, this alone would be sufficient.

2. Keep in mind that Christian testimony does not consist in testifying for yourself; what you have done, or propose to do, but for Christ. When people are intensely spiritual they cannot but witness for Christ. When He fills the heart with Divine love it is difficult to refrain from expressing it with your lips. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak! Hearts of flame cannot but touch the lips with fire. The real

state of holiness, well maintained, brings realself-abnegation, and exalts Christ. To such a soul He is always new and beautiful. We see, as we could not before, the depths of our obligation to Him. The glory of His character is made so real. The greatness of His love so thrills the whole realm of consciousness that we must speak!

3. The world cannot be saved if God's people refuse to testify with their lips. This is needed to enable you to testify with your life. I have been healed by a celebrated doctor of a dreadful malady that crippled my body throughout, and a thousand others are in like manner afflicted. My doctor alone can cure this malady. How can I get these sufferers to my physician? Do you say, "Go and show them that you are healed, and in presence of these sufferers I lift a 500-pound weight, run a mile in eight minutes and do the work of two common men each day for twenty days! Have I convinced them that I have been healed? No. I have shown them I am well and strong; but they insist I was never sick. Suppose I bring forty witnesses and prove to these sufferers that I was crippled just as they are now? Well, if they believe the testimony they now believe I am healed; but WHO healed me? Have I brought them to my doctor? No, I have brought them to myself; and my whole procedure has gone to show that everything I have done was to attract them to ME and my performances! Have I testified for my doctor in any sense whatever?

Not in the slightest. This parable illustrates the utter futility and unmeaningness, of testifying for Christ with your life, without the testimony of your lips. The former cannot be given without the latter, and the latter cannot stand if contradicted by the former. "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

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