

# Evidence by Which One May Know That He Is Entirely Sanctified

by Randolph S. Foster

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*The sermon discusses the evidences of entire sanctification, including the direct witness of the Holy Spirit and the indirect evidence of the fruits of the Spirit, and provides practical tests for determining if one is entirely sanctified.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:20, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:12, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 12:14, 1 John 3:24, 1 John 5:10

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

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## Description

Randolph Sinks Foster delves into the question of how one can know if they have truly attained holiness after following the prescribed means, emphasizing the importance of seeking a reasonable certainty in matters of personal holiness. He discusses the distinctive marks of each stage of religious progress, from conviction for sin to entire sanctification, highlighting the necessity of inward and outward authentication of religious experiences. Foster also explores the direct and indirect evidences of sanctification, including the joint witness of the Divine Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit, and the absence of sin as proof of sanctification.

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## Transcript

How may one know, after he shall have employed the means prescribed in the foregoing chapter, that they have been effectual -- that he has attained the object of his desires?

This is obviously an important question, contemplated in whatever light it may be viewed. To any who may be anxious upon this great subject of personal holiness it must be invested with peculiar interest. In the goodness of God, we are so constituted that we cannot rest short of a reasonable certainty in matters we deem of moment. Doubt torments before the time; uncertainty generates despair; suspense, who can bear! But bad as uncertainty is, it is better than false security! Better to be disquieted than rest upon a volcano! Unrest is preferable to slumbers beneath the avalanche!

In calling attention, therefore, to some of the evidences upon which one may conclude himself to have attained unto the experience of holiness, and in which he may securely rest, we hope to accomplish two objects. First, to prevent security upon false grounds; and, second, to encourage and lead forward trembling faith to solid rest; so aiding to convince the deluded, and comfort the sincere; to rebuke the hypocrite, and build up the true, but hesitating disciple.

Every stage of religious progress has its distinctive marks, and may be ascertained with great certainty by giving heed to these. The incipient work of the Spirit, conviction for sin -asserts itself in an unmistakable manner; penitence has its infallible signs; justification is accompanied with its appropriate witness; entire sanctification is not without proof.

One may be a child of God, possibly, without a clear and definite witness to himself; nay, we doubt not, this is so in some instances, but such cases are not common, and may generally be traced to some peculiarity of the mind itself, or to untoward circumstances.

As men differ in natural traits, habits of mind, education, and physical health, their spiritual experiences may vary; but, with few exceptional cases, a genuine experience will not fail to be supported by sufficient proof. The manner and time of the great change will not always be manifest; but the fact, as a rule, will be unquestionable.

Religious experience is authenticated to the mind in two modes: First, inwardly, by the witness of the Divine Spirit conjointly with our own spirit. Second, outwardly, by the external manifestations -- the fruits of the life. Where these are found coexisting, there will be but slight probability of delusion. The great danger is unfaithfulness in applying the tests. Under most unfortunate teaching some are hurried on to profession without a clear understanding of their own case, and perhaps, in some instances, against their own convictions, with the vain hope that it will do them good; and having made profession, under the influence of pride, and a vague conception that it will in some way help them, they are induced to continue it; meantime they give sad proof to themselves, if they would observe it, and to others, who will not fail to see it, that they are laboring under a fatal mistake. If this is so with regard to regeneration itself, it is much more likely to be so with respect to entire holiness.

When entire sanctification takes place, it will be evidenced directly and indirectly.

1. Directly, by the joint witness of God's "Spirit with our spirits" that the work is done. Where this witness is given, it is conclusive and complete. Other testimony is only requisite to assure us that we are not mistaken in supposing this. When it is certain God's Spirit attests a work, that attestation needs no corroboration. The doctrine of the direct witness of the Holy Spirit conjointly with our spirit needs no vindication here, it is clearly a Bible doctrine. "We know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us" (1 John 3:24). "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:16). "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (1 John 5:10). "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of love, and of power, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). There is no dispute as to the fact, that the passages cited teach the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. There is, however, a question as to whether they refer to a justified state alone. This has come to be a point of so much importance as to require extended notice.

There is no doctrine of the Scriptures more difficult to formulate than this of the witness of the Spirit, so as to make it clearly understood in what precisely it consists, and how it is rendered and cognized.

This much we may say, the method of the Spirit's witness we do not conceive to be by sensible signs. It may be accompanied by such, but is not ordinarily; not by an audible voice, not by a visible manifestation, not by a sensible touch, not any thing of this kind; and yet the witness is direct and assured, as much so as though accompanied with outward manifestations. It is a consciousness wrought in the soul that a change is effected.

One may be ready to exclaim, "How can these things be?" This is no new question. One of old, and he a ruler in Israel, propounded it to our Saviour, not, indeed, concerning the witness, but concerning the work itself. We borrow our Lord's answer: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." The fact you cannot question; the mode is a mystery. The manner of one spirit's communion with another spirit is shut away from our knowledge, but the fact of such communion is a matter of undoubted experience; the mode of the contact unknown, but the thing itself a part of consciousness.

But may one rely upon the witness here indicated? Is there not great probability of mistake? Take the blind man, whose eyes have been sealed in darkness for a life-time; whose sightless balls have rolled in rayless night; who, amid outward things, has groped his cheerless way for half a century, ever wondering what they were, what their appearance, what the beauties of color and form of which others spoke: take him out amid the splendors of the starlit sky, where millions of resplendent worlds bewilder the gaze; or lead him to the forest, or the mountain, or the river, or the ocean; or to gardens of flowers, or galleries of art; suddenly lift the veil: will he know the change? Open, among the ravishing strains of a cathedral choir, the ears of one born deaf; will he know it? Quiet the sufferings of the child of affliction, who has spent sleepless nights of pain; bring glad tidings to the broken heart; pour joy into the bosom filled with sorrow; hush the storm to the tempest-beaten voyager; lift the burden from the shoulders of the fainting; will they know it? And shall it not be known when the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are become children of God? when the heart that was broken is bound up? when the heart that was dead is made alive? when the heart that fainted under the burden of sin, and trembled at the impending wrath of God, is lifted up, and beholds, by faith, a smiling Saviour? If the watcher knows when midnight is past, the sailor when the tempest subsides, surely the soul shall know when the morning of peace breaketh, and the storm of guilt is hushed!

But how shall one discriminate between the witness of the Spirit in justification and entire sanctification? The Spirit is given when we are justified; what more may we expect when we fully attain when holiness is brought in? When he is entirely sanctified, the same Spirit bears witness again, just as he did before; but now it is to another fact, not that he is pardoned, but that he is entirely sanctified. And if the former change was known to his own consciousness, so also will this latter be. Thus the Spirit witnesses with our spirits to our religious state whatever it may be, whether of justification merely or entire sanctification.

In this connection, and before we pass to consider the fruits of this state distinctly, we may say a word with respect to the more general spiritual phenomena immediately attending it.

In the moment of sanctification the emotive experience is doubtless various: some are exercised in one way and some in another; some have one class of emotions, some another. There is diversity of operation both with respect to the Divine and human spirit. We may venture to suggest, however, some things very generally attending this wonderful change.

(1.) It is, perhaps, generally immediately preceded and accompanied with unusual illumination of mind, imparting clearer and more distinct views of the atonement, the nature of holiness, and the depth of internal corruption.

(2.) This is associated with a marked increase of faith. The soul, favored with this glorious illumination, realizes a strength of faith at which itself is astonished, which claims the promises with a certain assurance, and without a waver.

(3.) Attending this wonderful faith is an immediate assurance wrought, as above described, by the Divine Spirit, and attested by the soul, that sin is all gone and the soul is purified. This assurance amounts to entire certainty in the conviction of the soul enjoying it.

(4.) Then follows, in some instances, great joy and ecstasy; but this, I think, is not the general experience. Ordinarily the soul at this crisis is filled with peace rather than joy; simple rest, tranquillity, a sense of complete satisfaction, attended, in most instances, with almost no emotion, in exceptional cases only, with great rapture. The expectation of great rapture is common; this not infrequently leads to difficulty.

(5.) All this is accompanied with a sense of the Divine presence; of communion with God, and intimacy -- oneness -- peculiar to this grace; a feeling that God is all in all; a total abandonment of self and the creature, and a delightful acquiescence in the will of God, and calm repose upon him.

And now, the soul being brought into this sense of union and communion with God, its life will be in him, and this will be evidenced further by its fruits.

II. Hence we proceed to state, in the second place, that sanctification is evidenced indirectly by its fruits. "By their fruits ye shall know them," is a good rule; and we might, with great propriety, add, by your fruits ye shall know yourselves. There are certain fruits which proceed from sanctification, which must exist where that grace itself exists, as evidences of its presence, and certain other and counter fruits, proceeding from unsanctified dispositions, which must necessarily exist where it does not, as manifestations of its absence. Now these fruits, if carefully considered, must constitute a most important branch of evidence in the case.

"By what 'fruit of the Spirit' may we 'know that we are of God,' even in the highest sense?"

"By love, joy, peace, always abiding; by invariable long-suffering, patience, resignation; by gentleness, triumphing over all provocation; by goodness, mildness, sweetness, tenderness of spirit; by fidelity, simplicity, godly sincerity; by meekness, calmness, evenness of spirit; by temperance, not only in food and sleep, but in all things natural and spiritual.

Entire sanctification is a state of absolute freedom from sin, properly so called; it will, therefore, evidence itself by the absence of sin. Any sin, whether of the motive, of the will, of the desire, or of the life, negatives its existence. To conceive of entire sanctification as coexisting with sin properly so called, is to conceive of the truth of contradictory propositions. Either it must be admitted that it is possible to men to be without sin and to live without it, or the doctrine of entire sanctification must be surrendered, for sin cannot be a constituent element of entire sanctification. Man as man is, and must continue while in the body and when out of it, a finite and limited being in all his powers. But finiteness is not sin; limitation of perfection is not unholiness. There is no need that he should remain contaminated by sin. Here is good and plain ground upon which to test ourselves; and with sincerity and care we shall be very likely to arrive at the truth. Are your motives pure? your volitions in harmony with the will of God? your desires single? your acts holy, according to your gracious ability? are these things so unintermittently?

Your tempers. How are they? Do you become impatient under trial; fretful, when chided or crossed; angry, revengeful, when injured; vain, when flattered; proud, when prospered; complaining, when chastened; unbelieving, when seemingly forsaken; unkind, when neglected? Are you subject to discontent, to ambition, to selfishness? Are you worldly? covetous of riches, of vain pomp and parade, of indulgence, of honor, of ease? Are you unfeeling, contemptuous of others, seeking your own, boasters, proud, lovers of

your own selves? Beware! These are the sediments of the old nature!

Nay, if they exist in you, in however small a degree, they are demonstrative that the old man of sin is not dead. It will be a sad mistake if you detect these evils within and yet close your eyes to them, and continue to make profession of holiness. These are not infirmities; they are indications of want of grace. Remember that secret sins -- sins unknown to all without -- sins of the imagination, of the thought, of the heart -- sins of desire and affection -- are sins. Men may not see them; in their eyes you may be blameless -- but the pure and holy God sees them, and condemns them. Until grace shall have thoroughly purged your soul, and you are made conscious thereof, you will need to cry unclean, unclean.

Your duties. How with regard to these? Do you delight in them? are they your pleasure? do they constitute your chief joy? When God evidently calls, do you go willingly, though it be through the furnace; through persecution; through losses, reproaches, sorrows? In the midst of all, is God your joy and rejoicing, and can you say, "The will of God be done" -- enduring patiently, and performing joyfully, "as seeing Him who is invisible?" Is your will as God's will? Does he find in you no murmuring, no drawing back, no displeasure; but on the contrary, submission and joy?

Your experience. How upon this point? Have you an unwavering confidence in God? Is your peace of mind full? Have you joy in the Holy Ghost? Do you have free communion with God?

Do you realize within a consciousness of purity? Though, without, there be tempest or calm, sorrow or joy, trial or triumph, do you still, in every case, find a full communion between your soul and the Divine Spirit? By this we do not mean that you are always to be happy, ecstatic; but always to realize union with God, whether you sorrow or rejoice. Do you rejoice even in tribulation? and is the life that you live altogether by the faith of the Son of God?

Are you entirely the Lord's? Ponder this question. Look well to it. Have you any thing which you do not hold in God? Are you separate from him at any point? Are you opposed to him in any thing? Are your actions and enjoyments all in unison with him? Are your influence, your property, your entire position, and your whole life, so far as you can control them, with him? Are you wholly the Lord's? In your work, in your rest, in your indulgences, in your denials, in your affections, in your volitions, in your associations, in your endeavors, are you always, everywhere, by intention and effort, in union with God?

If to the above questions you can with honesty return a favorable answer, then may you conclude that you are one with the Lord, that you are entirely sanctified.

These are severe tests, but they are not more searching than truth and honesty require. If you shrink from the ordeal, you furnish the best proof that you are cherishing delusion as to this high state. If they should seem to condemn you, be not disconsolate. You are not therefore without hope. You are still a child of grace, and what is wanting may be at the eve of completion. Only be faithful to yourself and allow no temporizing, no tenderness toward real faults, and all will yet be well.

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