

How to Retain the Blessing

by Thomas Cook

To retain the blessing of holiness, we must walk in the light, keep a life of simple trust, take time for prayerful meditation of the Word of God, and engage actively in Christian work.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Philippians 2:12, Philippians 3:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 2 Timothy 2:15, Hebrews 10:23, James 1:27, 1 Peter 1:5, 2 Peter 3:18, Jude 1:21

Topics: "Christian Living", "Sanctification"

Description

Thomas Cook preaches on the collaborative effort between God and man in the Christian life, emphasizing the importance of both Divine intervention and human action in the work of salvation. While salvation is a gift from God, it requires our compliance with certain conditions to receive His gifts and graces. The sermon highlights the need for believers to persevere in order to be preserved, to work out their salvation while availing themselves of the means of grace, and to stay within the boundaries of strict obedience to God's will. It stresses the continuous act of consecration, the life of simple trust in God, the importance of prayerful meditation on the Word of God, and active engagement in Christian work for spiritual growth and joy.

Transcript

There is no step in Christian life that God and man do not take together. From beginning to end in the work of salvation there must be both Divine and human action. The words preserve and persevere are so much alike that the one can be spelt from the other. If we are to be preserved we must persevere. It is true that salvation in one sense is all of God, but it is also true that the gifts and graces of the spirit are only ours when certain conditions are complied with. Peter declares that in Christian life "we are kept by the power of God," but St. James teaches that the godly man must "keep himself unspotted from the world." The Bible does not contradict itself. To careful readers it explains itself, and the explanation is that while grace is altogether the gift of God, we ourselves have an important part to play. We are to "work out" the salvation which God works within. To grow in grace we must avail ourselves of the means of grace. Christ's promise to keep us involves the condition that we do not go needlessly into the way of temptation. We are only on covenant ground when we keep within the borders of the land of strict obedience to the Divine will. If we leave this prescribed territory, presuming that God will deliver us, we shall find ourselves sadly mistaken. We are to keep ourselves in the love of God. This is true of entire sanctification as it is of any other state of grace. A few suggestions as to how we may do this may help save some from spiritual downfall.

I. WE MUST WALK IN THE LIGHT

Our consecration must keep pace with the ever-widening circle of illumination. As we rise higher in Christian life we shall have clearer vision, quickened sensibilities, and increasingly clear perception of what the will of God is. This means that we shall discover that many a course we had pursued, or a state of mind we had indulged, which we did not understand at the time to be wrong or questionable, will have to be rectified. Clearer apprehensions of truth resulting from enlightenment and cultivation of conscience will necessarily lead to scrutiny of motive, temper, speech and conduct. There is no need that we should be condemned when we are made aware of evils which we had never known or suspected; but when more accurate perceptions of duty and danger are granted, we must be immediately obedient to the heavenly vision. Those who walk with God will see as they look back on the path they have trodden all sorts of "doubtful" and "inexpedient" abandonments, which with senses not "exercised to discern between good and evil" were once indulged in without condemnation or self-reproach. Not until the wrong or the hindrance was seen was it forsaken, but when the light came they followed it. There is safety in no other course. The obedience of those who walk with God will often be tested by new revelations of His will.

The primary act of consecration need not, be repeated, but it must be daily reorganized and confirmed. "It is a constant, an uninterrupted and unending consecration, a point carried on into an endless line." It must continue complete, corresponding with increasing light, through all our life. Nearly all who once experienced entire sanctification, and have lost the blessing, are conscious of having refused obedience to some distinct command which came into their life and from which they shrank. Some duty was borne upon them, and they knew it to be of God, but they hesitated to obey. When they left the narrow track of implicit obedience to the leadings of the Spirit, fellowship with God ceased, and the sense of the abiding of the Comforter was gone. Since then a shadow has been over their lives, they have made no progress, and have lacked both power and joy. Nor will they ever find the blessing again until they go back to the place where they dropped the thread of obedience, and perform the thing which God then demanded. From beginning to end, the Bible rings out with one long demand for uncompromising obedience.

To keep thy conscience sensitive,

No inward motion miss;

But go where grace entices thee,

Perfection lies in this.

II. WE MUST KEEP A LIFE OF SIMPLE TRUST

The life we live in the flesh must be by the faith of the Son of God. The same faith by which we received and relied upon the Lord Jesus as our Saviour is that by which we abide in Him. That act was not performed once for all. It needs perpetually to be renewed. We retain the blessing of holiness by the constant repetition of the faith by which we received it. We must believe moment by moment that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. On the first approach of temptation, doubt, or perplexity, it is well to define our position immediately; that is, to declare in our hearts in spite of all the mutiny of doubt, reason, or sense, that the blood of Jesus does now cleanse from all sin. We must hold on there by simple faith, insisting that God is true, until the trial is over.

The Holy Spirit is an abiding guest in the heart of every sanctified Christian, but times will come when the sense of His Presence will be dulled. Our spiritual sky will be darkened. It will seem as though every emotion had subsided, and to an inexperienced soul the absence of desire, joy, and peace, will cause alarm. The temptation will come that perhaps you have fallen and grieved away the Spirit of God. But do not be disturbed. Such experiences are permitted for our chastening and strengthening, and that Christ may be everything to us, rather than any of His gifts. When such experiences occur those who have learned to live the life of faith hang on to the unchangeable promise like a drowning man to a lifebuoy, and say, "I will trust and not be afraid." Sooner or later God is sure to reveal Himself again to such a soul, with more glorious manifestations of His love than ever before, to reward faithful clinging to the naked word. God is still true, though for brief periods we may have no evidence of His presence in our feelings.

No greater mistake can be made than to measure our piety by our emotions. As the etymology of the word indicates, emotion is always moving, waxing and waning continually. Our feelings are changeable as the wind and the tides, and fickle as April weather. Health, education, natural temperament, and much else apart altogether from religion, combine to modify them. But faith, while it rests upon the promise, knows no change. "The Lord has taught me," says Lady Maxwell, "that it is by faith and not joy I must live." The holy Fenelon says, "Naked faith alone is a sure guard against illusion." We must cease to consider how we feel, and build upon the immovable rock of God's Word and faithfulness. We may tremble, but the Rock of Ages never does. None of our changeable moods can affect or alter the fact that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin. We must meet every suggestion of doubt by the decisive answer that God is faithful and must do as He has said. Faith is "an affirmation and an act, which bids eternal truth be present fact."

III. WE MUST TAKE TIME FOR PRAYERFUL MEDITATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

Richard Watson says, "The Word of God is the food of faith." This is true especially of the state of full trust in Christ; it is rooted in the soil of the Divine Word. We must take time to read, mark and inwardly digest spiritual truth, if we would promote spiritual growth and strengthen all the elements of spiritual life. The best devotional literature is only truly helpful so far as it has its roots in "the true sayings of God." Hasty snatches of this Heavenly manna are not without benefit, but if we would "dwell on high places" we must make the Bible Our chief Book. The higher life takes root only in a deeper knowledge of God's Word. Eating the Word is like Jonathan's honey, the instrument of enlightenment. It is astonishing what new beauties are unfolded, what new wonders are discovered, what strength and comfort are derived, when we obey the command to Ezekiel, "Son of Man, eat the roll."

Dr. Horace Bushnell voiced the experience of many when he said, "My experience is that the Bible is dull when I am dull. When I am really alive and set in upon the text with a tidal pressure of living affinities, it opens, it multiplies discoveries and reveals depths even faster than I can note them. The worldly spirit shuts the Bible; the Spirit of God makes it a fire, flaming out all meanings and glorious truths." There is no more certain sign of ill-health in spiritual as in physical life than to have no appetite for our food. Those are already on the path to spiritual declension who have ceased to feed regularly upon the Word of God. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." To cultivate the devotional spirit, to strengthen conviction, and to draw strength and life from the Fountain of Life in God, there is nothing more essential than a constant and prayerful study of the Holy Scriptures. It is not the careless or listless reading of the Book, but its entrance into the soul, that produces spiritual illumination and strength. "The entrance of Thy Word giveth light."

IV. WE MUST ENGAGE ACTIVELY IN CHRISTIAN WORK

An old writer has said, "We must combine Bible diet with Bible duty, or we shall make no progress." Blessing is given as a motive to labor. We must pass on the blessing we have received or we shall soon have nothing to pass on. There is truth in the saying that "a Christian is like a live coal, he must set others on fire or he will go out himself," Whittier sings:-

Heaven's gate is closed to him who comes alone, Save thou a soul, so shalt thou save thine own,

This is not all truth, but there is a great truth in it; there can be no spiritual life or health apart from work for God and souls. The reflex influence of Christian work upon a man himself is scarcely less important and valuable than the direct influence upon unsaved souls. In it lies the secret of growth and joy. It is the same in grace as in Nature; standing water becomes stagnant, a man who takes no exercise becomes an invalid, the limb that is not used withers and shrivels, it is the still pond, not the running stream, that freezes. We can only save ourselves by trying to save others. We see with clearer eyes in trying to make others see. We lift our burdens more easily by helping others to bear their burdens. Unselfish toil for others always brings its own reward. God's law is use or lose. There is nothing good which is not lessened, and lost at last, by not using. In sending us to work God not only has the salvation of the lost at heart, but the best good of the Christian. "Mother," said a bright little girl of ten, who had just found the Saviour, "shall I run over the way and tell the old shoemaker that Jesus has pardoned all my sins?" "It would do him no good, my dear, he is an infidel and does not believe in these things," said the mother. "But it would do me good to tell him," said the child. And she was right. Selfishness and self-absorption swell our worst self, and shrink and shrivel our better nature, but interest in and effort for the benefit and salvation of others feed and develop that other and nobler self. That is a beautiful myth that represents birds as at first created without wings. They could sing, but they could not fly. Then God gave them wings and told them to fly. The birds at first complained that they were heavy, but they soon found that the burden they complained of was the means by which they could soar up to heights of cloudless day. Our duties are our wings. When we first assume them they seem like burdens, but cheerfully borne they become less and less heavy, and eventually become the wings by which we mount higher and higher into the life of God.

As we have already explained there is childhood in sanctification. Purity of heart is but the preparation for advancement in knowledge, love and holiness. There is no finality in this life of faith and charity. There are ever deeper depths to be fathomed and higher heights to be climbed. It is always from grace to grace, from strength to strength and from glory to glory. Growth is the great law of life in the spiritual as in the animal and vegetable kingdoms. By various figures and illustrations the Gospel represents growth as the Christian's privilege and duty. Now we have the leaven that works until the whole lump is leavened. Then we have the corn, with the blade first, then the ear, and the full corn at last. There are babes in Christian life and there are those with a robust, manly, well-developed Christian character.

Character is formed gradually. It has been well described as "consolidated habits." Acts often repeated become habits. But action is the outcome of condition. Holiness deals with the inner condition, it fills the soul with love, joy and peace. The result is right conduct, and right conduct has permanent effect upon the character. We shall develop gradually a full-orbed Christian character if we maintain day by day that purity of heart of which right conduct is the practical outcome. It is not enough that we "stand fast in the liberty wherewith God has made us free. We must add to our faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."

If we would grow in grace we must be always aiming at something above and beyond us. "A pupil from whom nothing is ever demanded which he cannot do, never does all he can." Even St. Paul had not reached his ideal which he described as "the mark," the "high calling," "that for which I am apprehended," but he was determined to press on until he realized the purpose of his calling. The last word is never said, the last effort is never made; to retain entire sanctification we must be ever "reaching forth unto those things which are before." We shall lose the grace we have unless we seek for more. Our motto must always be forward, onward, upward.

Beyond each hill-top others rise,

like ladder-rungs, to loftier skies.

Each halt is but a breathing-space for ... fresher pace,

Till who dare say, "ere night descend,

There can be such a thing as end"?

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