

Articles and Sermons :: NEW TESTAMENT HOLINESS - By Thomas Cook**NEW TESTAMENT HOLINESS - By Thomas Cook, on: 2007/12/16 15:00****NEW TESTAMENT HOLINESS**

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PREFACE

At one of our Theological Institutions the students asked their Tutor in Theology to give them a definition of Scriptural holiness. The Professor replied that the holiness he found in the Bible seemed to him to be not so much a definite experience to be reached immediately, as "an eternal approximation toward an unrealizable ideal." "But," he continued, "there is, beyond doubt, an experience attainable by faith, which some describe as holiness, and which has brought to many Christians a great spiritual uplifting so as to mark an epoch in their spiritual life. This was taught by Wesley and the early Methodist Preachers, and the teaching was intimately associated with the early successes of our Church." He advised the students to make themselves familiar with the works of Wesley and Fletcher, and to use their own judgment as to which aspect of the subject they would preach, and concluded with this testimony: "In my last Circuit an Evangelist conducted a series of Mission Services in the Church over which I had pastoral charge and emphasized the definite view of holiness which Mr. Wesley teaches, and urged the people to believe and enter in. Several of the most thoughtful members of my congregation were so greatly blessed that from that time their Christian life seemed to be on a higher plane. Because of this, I have never spoken other than respectfully of that form of teaching, though I have never been able to teach holiness in that way myself."

The Evangelist referred to by the Tutor is the writer of this book. It contains the substance of the addresses which were so much blessed to the congregation mentioned, and which have been used of God to help Christian people into the higher Christian life in many parts of the world. Testimonies received from those who have been definitely helped and blessed are so numerous that no apology is needed for their publication.

May He who has condescended to bless so richly the spoken word, still more abundantly crown with His favor that which is written.

"From long experience and observation, I am inclined to think that whoever finds redemption in the blood of Jesus -- who ever is justified -- has the choice of walking in the higher or the lower path. I believe the Holy Spirit at that time sets before him the "more excellent way," and incites him to walk therein -- to choose the narrowest path in the narrow way -- to aspire after the heights and depths of holiness -- after the entire image of God. But if he do not accept this offer, he insensibly declines into the lower order of Christians; he still goes on in what may be called a good way, serving God in his degree, and finds mercy in the close of life through the blood of the covenant." -- John Wesley

BLAMELESS, NOT FAULTLESS, on: 2007/12/16 15:01**Chapter 1****BLAMELESS, NOT FAULTLESS**

C. H. Spurgeon once wrote as follows: "There is a point of grace as much above the ordinary Christian as the ordinary Christian is above the world." Of such he says: "Their place is with the eagle in his eyrie, high aloft. They are rejoicing Christians, holy and devout men doing service for the Master all over the world, and everywhere conquerors through Him that loved them." The experience to which Mr. Spurgeon refers has been described as the higher life, entire sanctification, Christian perfection, perfect love, the rest of faith, and by numerous other names or terms. Modes of expression have been selected by various Christians which have best coincided with their theological views. There may be shades of difference in their import, but, generally speaking, the terms mean one and the same thing. We do not contend for names. It is immaterial which expressions are employed; the main point is, do we possess the experience designated by these terms, and which is recognized and professed by Christians representing all our Churches? A profound and widespread interest has been awakened in this subject, and one of the most hopeful signs of the times is the obvious endeavor which is being made by teachers of various schools of thought to preserve the "unity of the spirit," and harmonize any conflicting views which may remain.

When used in a general sense, the word "holiness" includes whatever is connected with Christian life and character. Thus interpreted, it may be applied to any and all stages of religious life and development. But the term is used in a more definite sense to describe an experience distinct from justification -- a sort of supplemental conversion, in which there is eliminated from the soul all the sinful elements which do not belong to it, everything antagonistic to the elements of holiness implanted in regeneration. It includes the full cleansing of the soul from inbred sin, so that it becomes pure or free from sinful tendency. Says Thomas Carlyle: "Holy in the German language -- Heilig -- also means healthy; our English word whole -- all of one piece, without any hole in it -- is the same word. You could not get any better definition of what holy really is than healthy, completely healthy." We do not say that this definition embraces all that we mean by holiness -- it does not. The experience includes also the gracious endowment of perfect love, and the abiding fullness of the Holy Spirit. To explain more in detail in what sense the Scriptures teach this to be a present duty and privilege and to meet the difficulties of those who really and honestly desire to understand the doctrine, is our purpose in these pages. To hit a mark we must know where it is. We walk faster when we see plain, definite steps. We must know what we want, and seek that. Unless we can separate the experience from its accidental surroundings, confusion is sure to follow. We may not be able to understand the doctrine in all its relations and bearings, but we need to have before our minds some distinct point of attainment. Just as the pressing of men to an immediate and definite point of conversion produces immediate and definite results, so it is with Christians. When a definite point is presented as immediately attainable, distinct and definite experiences follow. Prayer is no more at random. The blind man cried for "mercy," but "mercy" was too general a prayer. Jesus wanted to know what special kind of mercy the man desired. When he asked for mercy which took the form of the gift of sight, that special bestowal was granted.

It will help us to understand what holiness is if we mention a few things which are often mistaken for it. It is told in the life of Tauler that a layman, rich in the grace of God, who had heard him preach, asked him, "Sir, I beg you for God's sake to preach us a sermon showing us how a man may attain to the highest and utmost point it is given to us to reach in this present time." Tauler's discourse giving his answer was in twenty-four divisions. All who seek the highest degree of holiness feel that there must be limitations. To be holy is to be

BLAMELESS, BUT NOT FAULTLESS

Grace does not make men infallible. Sin has so perverted our moral and spiritual powers, that we shall never in this present life be free from infirmities of human nature. Whatever our experience of the grace of God may be, the liability to error will cling to us until this mortal puts on immortality. Infirmities have their ground in our physical nature, aggravated by intellectual deficiencies. They are the outflow of our imperfect moral organization--the scars of sin which remain after the wound has been healed. Smallpox may be healed, but it leaves its mark. A cut limb may be cured, but the scar remains forever. The pitcher of our human nature, which was broken when Adam fell, may be put together again, but it will never have the true ring it had before it was broken. To regain that it must be handed over to the Potter to be ground to powder and entirely reconstructed. Then, when death has reduced us to dust, and the Divine Potter has re-made us, body as well as soul, we shall be "presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy;" but "until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," all we can hope for is to be preserved without blame.

Before his fall Adam was complete in his mental structure, in the enthronement of his moral sense, and in the harmony and balance of all his faculties. He could reason rightly and always judge correctly, and therefore was adapted to the law of perfect obedience. He might be without fault, and because he might be was required to be so. But through lack of knowledge, defective memory, a fallible judgment, slowness of understanding, and numerous other infirmities, we are as liable to err as it is natural for us to breathe; and every error is a breach of the perfect law which allows no deviation from perfect rectitude. It is because it is impossible for us to keep the old Adamic law -- the law of innocence, or the Paradisaical law, as it is called -- of which every mistake and infirmity is a breach, that we are placed under another law -- the law of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. This law is graciously adapted to our diminished moral and intellectual capacity, dwarfed and crippled as it is by original and actual sin. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." "Fulfill ye the law of Christ, the perfect law of liberty." The only perfection possible on earth is a perfection of love; of motive, of intention. Our service of perfect love may be marred and defective, but God looks now not so much at what we do, as at what we intended to do. Given a pure and devoted heart, it is not so much successful achievement He looks for as right motives and intentions. If we want to sin is sin, may we not say that the purpose or the want to please God is accepted, even when we blunder and make mistakes? See that blind girl arranging strings across a sheet of paper. She wishes to write a letter to her father. By means of the strings she feels the way to keep as straight as possible. When the father receives that letter is he angry because here and there it is disfigured by a little blot or crooked line? Of course he is not! He prizes that marred, defective writing of his blind child more than the most clerk-like communication of that week. He keeps it among his treasures. The perfection of it, in his eyes, is not the beauty of the well-formed letters or the cleanliness of the page, but the beauty of love, which just did its best to spell out its heart despite its blindness.

And again we say, God looks less at results than intentions. Perfect love is not always successful achievement; it is child like purpose, a sincere aim in all we do to please God. Your child may make a blunder and need a lesson, but for all that, win a kiss, as the child who put her mother's boots into the oven to warm, that she might be comfortable when she went out. The boots were altogether spoiled, but what mother could blame her child whose intentions were so good? And this is how God weighs our actions. The world often blames His people when He does not. Those around us look at outward appearances; God looks at the heart. They see what we do; He sees why we do it. What a mercy it is He did not command us to walk before the world and be perfect! Walk before Me is the command; and all who love Him with a perfect heart, and thus know "truth in the inward parts," are accepted of Him as fulfilling the law.

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Chapter 2

HOLINESS AND TEMPTATION

It is a mistake to suppose that there is any state of grace this side of heaven which puts a Christian where he is exempt from temptation. So long as a soul is on probation, it will be tested by solicitations to sin.

It is true, when the heart is cleansed from all evil, the warfare within ceases. The struggle with the flesh, or inbred sin, or depravity, by whatever name it may be called, comes to an end when all antagonisms to God are expelled from the soul, and Christ reigns without a rival. But there are other enemies than those which exist within, against whom we shall have to fight strenuously to the end. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness (wicked spirits) in high places." This implies temptation, but temptation cannot be inconsistent with holiness, because Jesus was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

The Christian life is a long battle, but that fact does not imply that we are sinful, or inclined to sin. The nearer we live to God, the thicker and faster will Satan's arrows fly. Some Christians do not live near enough to God to be the subject of a downright spiritual struggle. There is no better evidence of grace and progress than that we are much harassed by Satan's emissaries. He does not need to employ his forces against nominal and inconsistent professors of religion. Severe temptation often precedes, or follows, special and signal blessing. Christ's great battle with Apollyon occurred immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost at His Baptism. As soon as He had received the signal anointing, which was to prepare Him for His great mission, "then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil," His temptation was evidently a part of the Divine plan, not only permitted, but arranged for. Experience was gained in His conflict with Satan, which could not have been obtained in any other way. Having "suffered being tempted," He is now able to succor those who are tempted as would have been impossible had He not resisted Satan's fiery darts Himself.

Temptations are permitted for a purpose. None can come without Divine permission. Did not Satan complain that God had set a hedge about Job which he could not pass without a special permit? The Indians say that when a man kills a foe, the strength of the slain enemy passes into the victor's arm. In that weird fancy lies a great truth. Each defeat leaves us weaker for the next battle, but each conquest leaves us stronger.

"Did Jesus Christ know that Judas was a thief?" was a question asked at one of our recent holiness meetings. The reply was in the affirmative. "Then why did the Master, if He knew that, give him the bag?" continued the interrogator. The reply was as follows: God allows the bag to be put in every life -- by the bag is meant that which is constantly testing our loyalty to Him -- and usually the temptation comes in the weakest place of our character. God permits this because He knows we can only gain strength in the weak place by overcoming temptation at that point. Each new triumph brings an increase of moral power, and makes victory the next time easier. This is probably the reason why Bunyan places nearly all the great combats which Christian fought with Satan early in his journey. The first years of Christian life are the formative period of Christian character when the assaults of the tempter are fullest of possibilities of benefit to the believer.

Samuel Rutherford writes: "The devil is but a whetstone to sharpen the faith and patience of the saints. I know that he but heweth and polisheth stones all the time for the New Jerusalem."

Some sincere souls are in constant bondage because they have never been taught to discriminate between evil thoughts and thoughts about evil. We must discern between things that differ. So long as we are in this world, and so long as we have five senses coming in contact with a world abounding with evil, Satan will be sure to use these as avenues of temptation. But no taint comes on the spirit from temptation which is at once and utterly rejected. It may and should be instantly repelled.

Milton says:

Evil into the mind of God or man
May come and go, so unapproved, and leave
No spot or blame behind.

It may seem difficult to some to ascertain whether certain states of the mind are the result of temptation, or the uprisings of the evil of their own nature. But when suggestions of evil awaken no response and kindle no desire, when they cause a shudder and a recoil, when they are opposed to our usual inclinations and desires, and cause pain, we may safely conclude that they are from without and not from within, and no self-reproach need ensue.

An evil thought springs from evil existing in the heart, but a thought about evil is a suggestion, flashed upon the mind by what we see or hear, or by the law of association, or by the enemy of our souls. Those who are holy have no evil within, consequently no evil thoughts; but intruding thoughts and whispers of evil will often need to be resisted. These are an unchangeable condition of probation. Provided proper caution has been used to avoid occasion of temptation, "no spot or b lame" is left behind, any more than the shadow of a cloud passing over a beautiful lake disturbs or defiles it. It is not temptation, but the yielding to it, that is sinful, and there is a condition in which we may, with St. Paul, always triumph.

Temptation is first presented to the intellect, flashed it may be in a moment, the thoughts are appealed to-this is the earliest stage of temptation. Thence it is transmitted to the sensibilities, in which region it operates upon the senses, appetites, passions, or emotions. There is danger lest these be excited with a desire for gratification. A critical stage of temptation is now reached, but no guilt is necessarily contracted. In the case of those whose hearts are not entirely cleansed from sin, the temptation finds more or less inward sympathy, but there is no guilt incurred unless the evil suggestion is cherished or tolerated. The will has yet to be challenged, and upon its decision depends entirely whether the tempter is to be successful or not. If the will says "No" to the temptation, the tempter is foiled and defeated, and the soul comes off more than a conqueror.

Though it is possible for the fully-cleansed soul to listen to Satan, and to reason with him until he again ejects sin into the heart as of old -- he "beguiled Eve by his subtlety," whose heart was perfectly pure -- still it is not so likely that he will be successful as before the heart was cleansed from sin. There is no porter Parley within the citadel then, to open the castle gates to the enemy who is without. Holiness makes none so secure as that they cannot sin, but it gives them to possess all the elements of strength and stability. Though the warfare be long and severe, yet, by abiding in Christ, victory may be constant and complete; and as storms help to root the trees, we shall find that the best helps to growth in grace are the affronts, the crosses, and the temptations which befall us.

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Chapter 3

SIN NOT A NECESSITY

As explained in our last chapter, holiness does not bring exemption from temptation. It follows, therefore, that it is always possible for the entirely cleansed soul to sin. Holiness secures the safest possible condition on earth, but absolute security does not belong to this world.

Some assert that the doctrine of entire extirpation of sin from the heart puts the soul beyond real temptation. "There can be no real temptation," they say, "to a soul which has nothing in its nature responsive to solicitations to sin." But such an assumption is much too broad. It renders angels in probation, Adam in Eden, and our Lord Himself, incapable of real temptation. But the fact that some angels fell, that Adam sinned, and that Jesus Christ "was in all points tempted as we are," should be sufficient proof that holy souls are capable of temptation.

If angels and Adam fell, we shall need to watch and pray, and keep our hearts with all diligence. Though it be true that we are less likely to sin when our hearts are pure, our attitude must always be one of self-distrust, of vigilant observation of our spiritual foes, and of unceasing carefulness lest we become "entangled again in a yoke of bondage." Eternal vigilance is the price of safety. Grace never induces presumption. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

But while inability to sin does not belong to Christian experience, to be able not to sin does.

Capacity to sin is involved in the idea of accountability, but capacity does not involve necessity. There is grace available

by which every regenerate soul, from the moment of regeneration, may go on in a career of victory, never falling into acts of sin.

Scripture, in revealing the future kingdom, tells us that here, in the earth-life only, shall we encounter sin. When all things are made new, and the Jerusalem, which is from above, becomes the home of the holy, into it shall in no wise enter anything that defileth. Therefore with earth ends, for the Christian, the conflict with sin. How strange, if during this one awful solitary season of temptation, our Father should design for us a long, drawn-out, continuous, miserable defeat. Commanded to depart from all iniquity, yet in this sole arena of trial left hopelessly saturated with it! How opposed to such pessimistic thought is the experience which exclaims, "Thanks be unto God who always leadeth us in triumph!"

Living without sin are words which shock many excellent persons, but how otherwise can the grand purpose of Christ's mission into the world be accomplished? He came "to save His people from their sins;" but if Christians cannot be saved from sinning, if the teaching of the Westminster Catechism is correct, "No man even by the aid of Divine grace, can avoid sinning, but daily sins in thought, word, and deed," then the plan redemption is a failure.

The New Testament distinctly teaches that the salvation which Jesus has provided includes grace to live without sinning. What says St. Paul: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" And again, in writing to the Thessalonians, he says, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." These were strong words for a mortal man to use -- but they were true. The life he lived was declared by the Holy Ghost to be holy, and just, and unblameable. St. John's teaching exactly coincides with that of St. Paul. The purpose of his Epistles was to warn believers against sin, and to keep them from it. "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not." To any unprejudiced reader the whole teaching of the third chapter of his first Epistle is to the effect that as certainly as we may be saved from the consequences of sin by faith in Christ, so may we be kept from sinning by abiding in Him. Because they need not, Christians must not sin; the possibility involves the obligation. The difference between Christians in a lower and higher state of grace is not that the one sins and the other does not. That is the essential difference between a sinner and a saint. "In this," says the apostle, "the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil," Some say, "This means habitual sinning," but the Scripture does not say habitual sin. St. John spoke in God's name when he said, "He that committeth sin," that is, knowingly and willingly, "is of the devil." No state of grace permits the committing of voluntary sin. Even the lowest type of Christian does not continue in sin.

Another point is also made clear in this chapter, viz., that permanent sonship and continual sinning are contradictions which cannot be combined in the same character. A person can no more remain born of God and continue in sin, than he can remain honest and steal, or truthful and tell lies.

When a soul is born of God, a new principle (the love of God) is admitted, and takes up its abode behind the will. The attitude of the will can never be hostile to God's law, so long as it is swayed by love to the lawgiver. This interprets the declaration, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him (this new principle of love) and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Such "cannot sin," in the sense that a dutiful son says "I cannot" when he is tempted to do his parents, to whom he is under deepest obligations, some great wrong. He cannot because he will not; the impossibility is not physical but moral. There is truth in the saying --

If we will we may, but if we won't we can't.

We recognize, of course, to some extent, a difference between sin committed as the result of momentary weakness or unwatchfulness, and that which is committed deliberately, with set purpose. In an unguarded moment, the best Christians may be surprised into some single act of sin; but for this there is merciful provision in our High Priest above. But even these "surprise sins," as they may be designated, are not a necessity. The if clearly implies they are not. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." What nonsense it would be to use this word if there were no room for a condition! How absurd it would be to say, "If any man sin, for every man does sin!" And how directly contrary to the tenor of the Epistle!

The Scriptural doctrine is undoubtedly this: Christians need not, and do not sin, but capability to sin remains. Should one be overtaken in a fault let him not despair. God, in His mercy, has made sufficient provision in Christ for his forgiveness and cleansing again, if he confesses the wrong he has done.

Much controversy about sin results from the want of accuracy in the definition of the term. We do not in this chapter understand by sin involuntary deviation from the law of absolute right, but willing transgressions of the known law of God. W

What is commonly meant by committing sin, in the New Testament, is a willing and known transgression of a known law. We deny that unconscious and involuntary breaches of the Adamic law are sins. To a superficial observer they may seem like sins, but in lacking volition, they lack sin's essential characteristic. Sin is in the will and purpose rather than in the act. Ethical writers insist that guilt always involves a knowledge of wrong, and an intention to commit it. The moral sense of mankind pronounces innocent the inadvertent doer of an act wrong in itself. It discriminates between a sin, and a weakness or an error. And when we look into the Word of God we find this distinction always recognized. On the great day of Atonement, the errors (ignorances) of the people were put away through the blood which the High Priest offered for himself, and the errors of the people. (Hebrews ix. 7.) But where sin had been committed by the individual Hebrew, he needed to offer a special victim for himself. Sins demand a personal confession and personal resort to the blood of sprinkling, and an act of reliance upon Christ; but involuntary transgressions, so-called sins of ignorance, are covered by the blood of Christ without any definite act of faith on the part of the believer. In speaking of such involuntary transgressions, Mr. Wesley says, "You may call them sins if you please, I do not. What is sin? Sin is the transgression of the law. But is all transgression of the law sin? Prove it who can."

Evils arising out of unavoidable ignorance are certainly not sins in the sense of attaching guilt to the perpetrator. They are his misfortune, not his fault. Their penalty may be suffering, but it is not condemnation. If it were condemnation, we should always be in bondage, because we come short of God's absolute standard of right every moment of our lives.

It is true that all ignorances, infirmities, and mistakes need the atoning blood as much as sin does. However holy a man may be, if he thinks he can live a moment without the Atonement he is a mistaken man. To say that because our hearts are cleansed from all sin we do not need the Atonement, is as absurd to say because it is noon-day we do not need the sun. Even our best actions are so far short of God's absolute standard of right that we could not stand a moment if tried by the law as a covenant of works. We stand in grace alone -- accepted only in Christ -- every moment needing, and every moment enjoying the merit of His death. Apart from vital union with Him, we are required to keep the law of perfect obedience, as Adam was; but when in Him, so far as we come short, because of our imperfect moral organization, His merit meets our demerit. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." It is in view of this truth that the holiest soul on earth will always find that petition in the Lord's prayer appropriate, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Mistakes, infirmities, and involuntary offenses are inevitable so long as we are in the body. Sins, by the keeping power of Christ, are avoidable throughout every hour of our regenerate life. He will so energize the will, that it shall be able to stand as flint against every suggestion to act contrary to the will of God. No power on earth or in hell can compel a man to sin who relies upon God to be kept from it. Christ came not to cover over, make excuse for, or give liberty to sin, but to give us uninterrupted victory, to teach us that by continuous trust in Him we need never know defeat. There is almost excess and extravagance of victory implied in the word which the apostle coined to express his experience, "We are more than conquerors." Dr. Rendel Harris says: "We should render it exactly by saying, 'we over-over-conquer'." Coverdale gives the sense of it well in his translation, "We conquer far." This is in exact harmony with the assurance, "Where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound."

If man were left to himself we should all admit the thing is impossible, but it is not a question of what we can do, but of what He can do. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Cannot we, by the grace of God, live one minute without sin? If a minute, why not an hour? If an hour, why not a day? If a day, why not a year? Shall we limit "the Holy One of Israel"? There can be no continuous victory over sin unless such victory is expected, and no Christian will expect what he believes can not be experienced. We are weak, but "through Christ strengthening" us, "we are able to do all things."

"All things are possible to him that believeth."

The most impossible of all,
Is, that I e'er from sin should cease
Yet shall it be, I know it shall;
Jesus, look to Thy faithfulness!
If nothing is too hard for Thee,
All things are possible to me.