

## Articles and Sermons :: The forgotten message of holiness by Evan Schiable

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### The forgotten message of holiness

by Evan Schiable

"Where Christian perfection is not strongly and explicitly preached, there is seldom any remarkable blessing from God...till you press the believers to expect full salvation now, you must not look for any revival." (John Wesley)

"What! Never speak one evil word?  
Or rash, or idle, or unkind?  
Oh how shall I most gracious Lord,  
This mark of true perfection find?

Thy sinless mind in me reveal;  
Thy Spirits plentitude impart;  
And all my spotless life shall tell  
The abundance of a loving heart."

(Charles Wesley, Methodist Hymns)

This pressing urgency upon the heart of John Wesley to urge Christians on to holiness was the driving force God the Holy Spirit employed to revive the people of England. This is irrefutable fact. Sadly in our day we are more scared of holiness than we are of sinfulness. The urgency of the modern preacher is lost, and the once known boldness that was characteristic of the pulpit has been replaced with a whimsical fancy for making sinners feel right at home in the house of God. Where is our boldness? It went out the door right behind our righteousness. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). Our timidity against sin is a direct result of our timidity at not only the proclamation of Christian perfection, but also the living of the doctrine.

It is a well known fact that a preacher who stands at a pulpit and preaches a message he does not live makes him a hypocrite. Remarkably, an indictment of hypocrisy is likely the only thing the church is innocent of, because no one preaches holiness. Why does no one preach a message of full salvation from all sin? There is but one answer—no one knows the full salvation from all sin. But I have to be careful when I use the word "all" as there may be a man somewhere in a small village church that still heralds boldly this message, and lives it. But in my experience across this great nation, in hundreds of churches, over 50 major universities, and numerous street corners, I have yet to see a man boldly declare a message that decries sin and uplifts a righteous standard.

I have been forced to ask a searching question, have we been guilty of bringing the Bible's doctrine down to our experience rather than lifting our experience up to the level of the Bible? Over and over again I hear it said, "This life of freedom from sin, I don't believe it because I just haven't experienced it, my experience is different, I sin all the time and can't help it". They herald it like this is a smashing argument that destroys the framework of my entire system of beliefs. But as they are yet speaking, deep in the recesses of my mind a simple thought flashes through which says, "That is exactly the point; that is why I preached the message, because it is not your experience and can be". Many seem to be blinded to the simplicity that is in Christ by our fast paced and over critical culture. If it does not tickle our logical fancies and stroke our intellectual pride we shun it as something to be avoided, and a deep experience of the heart is to be trampled under foot as a fanatical heresy.

Oh for a Wesley, a man not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. But we have to be careful not to get lost in the past. Those ancient landmarks are not there for our admiration, but for our imitation. This forgotten message is one that strikes at the very heart of Gospel salvation. When we remove the deep obsession with Jesus Christ that is created in the heart by the Holy Ghost, and reduce salvation down to a few doctrinal somersaults, then we defraud the Son of God. The heart of a man is not always wicked. The heart of a sanctified Christian is pure, loving, and one that yearns for the presence of God at every moment of every day.

Scripture speaks for itself on this wise. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Psalms 24:3-4). Now the smart theologian will tell me that this is a prophetic picture of the Messiah, but I wonder if that is all that it is. Could this be a picture of the pure in heart approaching the throne of God in holy surrendered worship? What saith the scriptures? "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (1 Timothy 1:5). "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Peter 1:22). When I read these scriptures I get agitated at the corrupted and hopeless teaching we hear spewed forth from most of our pulpits in America. What would the apostles say to our corrupted teachers today that throw the people of God into condemnation and self pity?

"And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9). That scripture is an indictment against our unholiness teaching today. These men were on fire with the Holy Spirit, they labored in the Holy words of the holy prophets; they served a holy God, and what then would compel them to ever tell a man he could not live holy in this life? God says, "Be ye holy for I am holy". The men that stand in our pulpits today are unholy, and therefore find it difficult to exhort men to holiness. It is boldly declared that sin is always present in the life of a Christian; no matter what you do you will live in sin. Is this the words of scripture? Are we all of our lives destined to be subject to an unbreakable bondage of sin? With the Gospel of Jesus there is great hope. The apostle John tells us, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9).

Oh the glorious liberty of the children of God. Not a liberty to indulge in sinful things without a fear of consequence, but a liberty to be freed from the sinful practices that are against God. The commandments of God are not grievous to the one who is truly born again, and the things that God hates, the believer hates. "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate" (Proverbs 8:13). This is the glorious heritage we have altogether forgotten. We have heard it, we have admired it from afar, but we have not obeyed it and therefore lost the prophetic urgency with which our faith has always been characterized.

The question has once been asked, "Is perfection a vague standard to which we are to aspire?" or does Jesus indeed insist upon a perfection that can be attained in this life? Not perfect knowledge, but a heavenly knowledge. Not perfect theology, but perfect hearts. Not perfect intellect, but perfect motives and actions. In other words, "perfect love, which casts out all fear". This love is the bond of perfectness (Colossians 3:14) and it is not some vague standard, it is very tangible and was seen in our Lord Jesus. In fact, the searing command to be perfect was uttered by the Lord we are claiming to obey. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:49). This is not suggestive in nature, but this is a command. This is not a standard to which man and his vain works can attain; this is not a standard that a man apart from Christ can attain to without divine aid. But the Holy Spirit indwelt child of God can attain this moral perfection of love by simple faith. If it is any other way, the Bible is a lie and Christianity is powerless and self contradictory.

Perhaps the largest stumbling block for the world and how they view Christianity is the hypocritical pastors and teachers that claim they follow Christ. It is sad when I can talk to a lost man on the streets and agree with everything he says against the church. The adultery among so called clergy, the pornographic addictions that plague our pulpits, the homosexuality of hypocritical evangelical leaders, these are the very things that hold back revival, and these are the main reasons why this world is sliding quickly into hell. I have a hard time finding Christian fellowship among professing Christian leaders. Those with whom the Holy Spirit bears witness have been shunned out of many, many evangelical churches for the message and life they live. We have to come to a place where we realize that we are drastically backslidden and much of what we have thought was true is entirely false, the world can see it, why cant we?