

What James and John Said About Holiness

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

We have already seen in previous chapters what Jesus and Paul and Peter seemed to think of the importance of the Pentecostal experience. The evidence is ample, yea, superabundant. They undeniably regarded the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace subsequent to regeneration.

This being true, we might naturally expect so important a Christian doctrine would find expression in the writing of James and John. We are not disappointed. Although James's epistle is not distinctly doctrinal, yet unmistakable traces of this doctrine are there.

In James 1:4 we read: "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Here is a most manifest reference to that Christian perfection or life of perfect love, induced by the Holy Spirit, which John Wesley so mightily magnified. Godbey says: Pride is the Satanic mother of all impatience. It is the baptism with the Holy Spirit that kills this Satanic pride in Christian hearts, and makes us meek and humble."

In James 3:2 we read: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." Here, again, is this evangelical perfection, or sanctification, evidenced by a holy conversation.

In James 4:8, 9 we have the commands: "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and PURIFY your hearts, ye DOUBLE MINDED." In this message the doctrine of the second work of grace is clearly implied. (1) Here are two classes named -- sinners and double-minded people. Sinners have no double mind. Their mind is single -- set on sin, hostile to Jesus and loyal to the devil. Sanctified people have no double mind. Their mind, also, is single -- wholly set on righteousness, wholly loyal to Jesus, and hostile to the devil and all his works. It is the regenerated, justified but unsanctified Christians, who have the double mind. When they would do good, evil is present with them. For the flesh [sarx] lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye Would." It is this double-minded man that is so unstable in his ways. They love Jesus and His truth and His service; but the carnal mind often betrays them into sudden acts sadly at variance with the general tenor of their life. They suddenly do things over which they sadly grieve, and for which they heartily repent, and seek the forgiveness of God. It makes them appear inconstant and double. (2) James commands these sinners to cleanse their hands, that is, forsake their outward sins; but he commands the double-minded to get their hearts purified by the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost. It is never sinners, but always regenerated children of God, who are exhorted in the Scriptures. to become "purified," and "sanctified," and "perfected."

I John

We now turn to the First Epistle of John. Here we are on the old battlefield, where those who fight holiness think they get their weapons from the arsenal of God's Word. It is only by a shocking misinterpretation of scripture that anything can be found here against the doctrine of sanctification.

To understand the epistle, one must know what led the Apostle John to write it. A class of heretical teachers had arisen in the Early Church called in history Docetae. They held these errors:

1. All sin was connected with the physical body, but not at all with the spiritual nature. Matter was essentially impure.
2. Christ did not have a real body, but only a phantom body. He was born without any participation of matter.
3. All the acts and sufferings of His human life, including the crucifixion, were only apparent. They denied accordingly His resurrection and ascent to heaven.
4. It would follow logically that the Savior made no real atonement for sin by the shedding of His blood.
5. Having led them so far into error, Satan induced them to plunge into riotous excesses and licentiousness. And when Christian teachers urged them to forsake their sins and accept Jesus, they replied that they had no need of a Savior, and had no sins, and no sin. Only their physical body had done anything out of the way; their souls, their real beings, were still clean and pure, and had no need of saving grace.

These awful errors were seducing believers and corrupting the Early Church.

The Apostle Peter (II Peter 2:13, 14) wrote of their reveling in their love feasts, "while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from in; beguiling unstable souls."

Jude said of them (verse 4): "There are certain men crept in unawares . . . ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness."

John explains his epistle by saying (I John 2:26): "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you." "Little children, let no man deceive you" (3:7).

Now let us see how and what the apostle wrote.

In the first paragraph (I John 1:1-4) he says we know Jesus was no phantom Christ, a man only in appearance; for we have "seen [Him] with our eyes," and "handled" Him with our hands, and "we have heard" Him, etc.

In the second paragraph there are six verses -- written in pairs. The first member of each pair contains the truth of the gospel of full salvation, justification and sanctification by the all-sufficient, cleansing Blood.

These three alternate verses, put together, read as follows:

Verse 5. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

Verse 7. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Verse 9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to FORGIVE us our sins, and to CLEANSE us from all unrighteousness."

Here are the two blessings stated in unmistakable language, forgiveness which is received in justification, and cleansing which is received in sanctification. This great truth, the possibility of being cleansed "from all unrighteousness" (unrighteousness), is the mainspring of the holiness movement of our day.

Now we turn to the second members of these three pairs of texts, which administer a crushing blow to the awful error that was sweeping over the churches like a tidal wave of destruction from the bottomless pit.

Verse 6. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness [indulging in orgies of lusts, as these vile teachers are doing], we lie, and do not the truth."

Verse 8. "If we say we have no sin [as these Christ rejecters are saying while still practicing vice], we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Verse 10. "If we say that we have not sinned [as these wretched profligates are saying while steeped in iniquity and full of lasciviousness], we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

I John 2:4. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments [as these seducers are doing while full of disobedience], is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

2:22. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?"

We could quote many more passages to show the meaning and intent of this epistle.

It is passing strange that the opponents of holiness should quote these verses which St. John wrote against the teachings of licentious heretics, to oppose the blessed truth of full salvation. By so doing they make the eighth verse flatly contradict the seventh, and the tenth contradict the ninth. No sane author, even though uninspired, would thus contradict himself.

We now proceed to show what further the beloved disciple said about sanctification.

I John 2:5. "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God PERFECTED."

3:3. "Every man that hath this hope in him [Christ] PURIFIETH himself, even as he is pure."

3:5, 6. "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him SINNETH NOT."

3:8. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that HE MIGHT DESTROY the works of the devil." No work of the devil is so peculiarly malignant and so awfully harmful as this implanting of the germ of sin, the poison of depravity, into the moral nature of every child of Adam. This gave to each member of the race a spirit of alienation from God, a satanic relish for evil. This disaster, if not repaired, would be absolutely fatal to the kingdom of God. But Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, to correct this depravity and restore the race to its rightful heritage of holiness. It would be an awful reflection on Jesus to say that Satan could inflict an evil on the soul which the infinite Son of God could not repair.

4:12. "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his LOVE IS PERFECTED in us.

4:17. "Herein is our love made PERFECT, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment."

Here we touch that love that is the "fulfilling of the law," and makes us wholly acceptable to God. This is the evangelical perfection of love, for which John Wesley contended, and which he so strenuously urged upon the regenerated children of God. It comes only by the sanctifying baptism with the Holy Spirit. Conclusion

We have seen that James and John, in describing the work of grace in the heart, used the word "perfect" four times; "perfected" twice; and such phrases as "purify your hearts," "cleanseth," "cleanse from all unrighteousness" "purifieth himself " "take away sins," and "destroy the works of the devil" -- eleven passages in all.

If such Words and phrases do not teach heart-cleansing and sanctification, human language could not do it.

And When we add to these the words of Jesus and Paul and Peter, we have more than a full hundred passages of scripture, by every variety of expression, teaching that it is the privilege of the regenerated child of God to receive the sanctifying baptism with the Holy Ghost.

Whoever does or does not have this experience, this certainly is the teaching of the Word of God. There is nothing for the honest soul to do but to bow to the truth and seek a clean heart. If we walk in the light, led by the Spirit, the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse us from all sin. "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." And, "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."