

Excerpts

by Daniel Steele

“Be particularly careful in speaking of yourself; you may not, indeed, deny the work of God, but speak of it, when you are called thereto, in the most inoffensive manner possible. Avoid all magnificent, pompous words; indeed, you need give it no general name, neither sanctification, perfection, the second blessing, nor having attained. Rather speak of the particulars which God has wrought for you. You may say,

‘At such a time I felt a change which I am not able to express; and since that time I have not felt pride, or anger, or unbelief, nor any thing but a fullness of love to God!’

And if any of you should at any time fall from what you now are, if you should again feel pride or unbelief, or any temper from which you are now delivered, do not deny, do not hide, do not disguise it at all, at the peril of your soul. At all events go to one in whom you can confide, and speak just what you feel.”

Finally, if you must neglect any means of grace, be sure that it is not the ordinary meetings of the Church, the preached word, the class, the prayer-meeting, and the Sunday-school. Separate meetings for the promotion of holiness, under proper supervision, have been useful, but without such supervision they have been detrimental. By exclusive association with one another there is engendered the feeling that they monopolize all the piety of the Church, and they insensibly begin to withdraw sympathy from those of weaker faith, who, most of all, need the association and aid of those who are stronger. Nevertheless, where there is great opposition to the preaching of full salvation in the ordinary means of grace it may be expedient, for the sake of peace, to appoint a special meeting.

The purpose of this advice is to avoid every divisive tendency, every entering wedge of schism in the body of Christ. We believe there are few evangelical Churches where a modest, guarded declaration of the wonderful work of God in higher Christian experience, with exhortations drawing, not driving, justified souls toward the same sunny heights, would not be received with gladness. There is an intense hunger for the fullness of the Spirit in all the Churches, as is evinced by the widespread popularity of the hymn, “Nearer, my God, to thee.”

Another reason for our advice is, that no truth in the Gospel scheme was designed to be isolated from its connection with the whole system, and magnified out of due proportion by being exclusively dwelt upon. Such treatment of a most vital truth creates error. Justification by faith, preached alone, without the safeguard set up by St. James, runs into the rankest Antinomianism. But justification by works exclusively preached begets Pharisaism. The sovereignty of God may be magnified into the iron scheme of fatalism; the merit of Christ’s suffering and death may be preached to the total neglect of the regenerating and sanctifying offices of the Holy Spirit, and result in Universalism. So there may be so long and so absorbing a contemplation of the doctrine of Christian perfection as to lose sight of the duty of calling sinners to repentance. We may linger with Jesus so long on the mount as to forget that, at its foot, is a world lying in the “wicked one,” greatly needing our added faith to expel the devil from his usurped possession.

Hence, while the whole Gospel is preached, the wise workman will be careful rightly to divide the word of truth. Yet there is in every living Church a felt necessity for a meeting, under competent supervision, for the promotion of advanced Christian experience. Wesley, with an admirable sagacity, met this need by his “select societies” and “bands.” Where there is no provision for this want, hungry souls may [27] fall into the hands of ill-balanced and unskillful teachers of these deep mysteries.

The universal disuse of these in America, and their removal from the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1856, is the natural consequence of the general decline of preaching evangelical perfection as a distinct work of the Spirit. We earnestly hope that some substitute for the “select society” will be devised by the next General Conference, and that it will incorporate into its itinerancy evangelists, who, like Paul and Wesley, shall go flaming through the Church calling sinners to Christ, and believers to the fullness of the Spirit.

[20 We do not deny that some souls have been brought into communion so intimate as to distinguish the persons of the Trinity. There is indisputable testimony on this point. The Marquis De Renty, the most spiritual mind which France has produced, professed “to carry about with him an experimental verity of the Holy Trinity.” Rev. Thomas Collins, an eminently successful Wesleyan preacher, who dwelt ever on the serene summits of perfect love, whose words were thunderbolts to the hearts of sinners and worldly professors, had a similar power of discriminating between the persons of the Trinity. Hester Ann Rogers, Lady Maxwell, William Bramwell, John Smith, and Charles Perronet, intimate that they have communion with each Divine Person distinctly. We are of the opinion that these are exceptional and abnormal experiences, notwithstanding that Dr. Owen, in his quarto on Communion teaches that the earliest and purest Christian ages held that this experience is attainable by all advanced believers. The Scriptures which come the nearest to a promise of such an experience are John 14:17, 23. It is a fair interpretation of the first that under the illumination of the Comforter, revealing and glorifying Christ in the believer’s consciousness, his supreme Deity shall be demonstrated: “Then shall ye know that I am in my Father.” The second text assures the believer that the Father and the Son shall come and abide with him. But to only a few is the telescopic power given to resolve this double star into two distinct orbs. To every other retina turned toward it the two appear as one.

At the age of eighty-five he (J. Wesley) writes thus to a circuit preacher:—“No circuit ever did, or ever will flourish, unless there are bands in the large societies.” At first the united societies embraced the awakened, the bands, the justified: and *the select societies the entirely sanctified*. At the date of Wesley’s letter the select societies seem to have been merged in the bands, which aimed at the edification of those whom Fletcher styles “adult believers.”

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