



"You will know them by their fruits." Mt. 7:16

How To Go On Unto Perfection

By John Fletcher (1729-1785)

From The Works of John Fletcher "The Last Check to Antinomianism" Section 19.

Antinomianism (from the [Greek](#) *αντι*, "against" + *νομος*, "law"), or lawlessness (in the [Greek Bible](#): [ανομια](#), [1] which is "unlawful"), in [theology](#), is the idea that members of a particular religious group are under no obligation to obey the [laws of ethics](#) or [morality](#) as presented by religious authorities.[2] Antinomianism is the polar opposite of [legalism](#), the notion that obedience to a code of religious law is necessary for [salvation](#).

The term has become a point of contention among opposed religious authorities. Few groups or sects explicitly call themselves "antinomian", but the charge is often leveled by some sects against competing sects.

He was John Wesley's choice for a successor due to his superlative spiritual beauty. A short biographical sketch can be found at: <http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/Heritage/Fletcher.htm>

An address to imperfect believers, who cordially embrace the doctrine of Christian perfection.

Ye see the absolute necessity of personally "fulfilling the law of Christ;" your bosom glows with desire to "perfect holiness in the fear of God;" and, far from blushing to be called perfectionists, ye openly assert that a perfect faith, productive of perfect love to God and man, is the pearl of great price, for which you are determined to sell all, and which (next to Christ) you will seek early and late, as the one thing needful for your spiritual and eternal welfare.

Some directions, therefore, about the manner of seeking this pearl, cannot but be acceptable to you, if they are Scriptural and rational; and such, I humbly trust, are those which follow:—



1. Firmly Stand Upon the Promise

If ye would attain an evangelically sinless perfection, let your full assent to the truth of that deep doctrine firmly stand upon the evangelical foundation of a precept and a promise.

A precept without a promise would not sufficiently animate you; nor would a promise without a precept properly bind you; but a Divine precept and a Divine promise form an unshaken foundation.

Let then your faith deliberately rest her right foot upon these precepts:

Old Testament Precepts

“Hear, O Israel—thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might, Deut. 6:5. Thou shalt not hate thy neighbour in thy heart. Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people: but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. I am the Lord. Ye shall keep my statutes, Lev. 19:17, 18. And now, Israel, what does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord God, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good, &c? Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff necked, (Deut. 10:12 and following) Serve God with a perfect heart, and a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth the imaginations of the thoughts,” 1 Chron. 28:9.

New Testament Precepts

Should unbelief suggest that these are only Old Testament injunctions, trample upon the false suggestion, and rest the same foot of your faith upon the following New Testament precepts:—”Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, &c, that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, &c. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect, Matt. 5:17, 44, &c. If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments, Matt. 19:17. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ, Gal. 6:2. This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you, John 15:12. He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law: for this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, &c.

Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill, &c, therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law, Rom. 13:8, 10. This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God, love his brother also, 1 John 4:21. If ye fulfil the royal law, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors, James 2:8-9. Circumcision is nothing, uncircumcision is nothing [comparatively speaking:] but [under Christ] the keeping of the commandments of God [is the one thing needful,] 1 Cor. 7:19. For the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned, 1 Tim. 1:5. Though I have all faith, &c, and have not charity, I am nothing, 1 Cor. 13:2. Whosoever shall keep the whole law [of liberty] and yet offend in one point [in uncharitable respect of persons] he is guilty of all, &c. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty,” [which requires perfect love, and therefore makes no allowance for the least degree of uncharitableness,] James 2:10, 12.

When the right foot of your faith stands on these evangelical precepts and proclamations, lest she should stagger for want of a promise every way adequate to such weighty commandments, let her place her left foot upon the following promises, which are extracted from the Old Testament:

Old Testament Promises

“The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, Deut. 30:6. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, [in a new and peculiar manner,] for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my

law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people, Jer. 24:7; 31:33. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you: a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them,” Ezek. 36:25-27.

And let nobody suppose that the promises of the circumcision of the heart, the cleansing, the clean water, and the Spirit, which are mentioned in these scriptures, and by which the hearts of believers are to be made new, and God’s law is to be so written therein, that they shall “keep his judgments and do them;” let none, I say, suppose that these glorious promises belong only to the Jews; for their full accomplishment peculiarly refers to the Christian dispensation. Beside, if sprinklings of the Spirit were sufficient, under the Jewish dispensation, to raise the plant of Jewish perfection in Jewish believers, how much more will the revelation of “the horn of our salvation,” and the outpourings of the Spirit, raise the plant of Christian perfection in faithful, Christian believers!

And that this revelation of Christ in the Spirit as well as in the flesh, these effusions of the water of life, these baptisms of fire which burn up the chaff of sin, thoroughly purge God’s spiritual floor, save us from all our uncleanness, and deliver us from all our enemies; that these blessings, I say, are peculiarly promised to Christians, is demonstrable by the following cloud of New Testament declarations and promises:—

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,—for he hath raised up a horn of salvation for us,—as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets,—that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without [unbelieving] fear, [that is, with perfect love,] in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life, Luke 1:68-75. Blessed are the poor in spirit, who thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled, Matt. 5:3-6. If thou knewest the gift of God, &c, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water: and the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up to everlasting life, John 4:10-14. Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on me, [when I shall have ascended up on high to receive gifts for men,] out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water, [to cleanse his soul, and keep it clean.] But this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, [in such a manner as to raise the plant of Christian perfection,] because Jesus was not yet glorified,” [and his spiritual dispensation was not yet fully opened,] John 7:37, &c.

Mr. Wesley, in his Plain Account of Christian Perfection, has published some excellent queries, and proposed them to those who deny perfection to be attainable in this life. They are close to the point, and therefore the two first attack the imperfectionists from the very ground on which I want you to stand. They run thus:

“(1.) Has there not been a larger measure of the Holy Spirit given under the Gospel than under the Jewish dispensation? If not, in what sense was the Spirit not given before Christ was glorified? John 7:39.”

“(2.) Was that glory which followed the sufferings of Christ, 1 Peter 1:11, an external glory, or an internal, viz. The glory of holiness?” Always rest the doctrine of Christian perfection on this Scriptural foundation, and it will stand as firm as revelation itself.

It is allowed on all sides that the dispensation of John the Baptist exceeded that of the other prophets, because it immediately introduced the Gospel of Christ, and because John was not only appointed to “preach the baptism of repentance,” but also clearly to point out the very person of Christ, and to give knowledge of salvation to God’s people by the

remission of sins, Luke 1:77; and nevertheless, John only promised the blessing of the Spirit, which Christ bestowed when he had received gifts for men. "I indeed," said John, "baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I,— he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire," Matt. 3:44. Such is the importance of this promise, that it is particularly recorded not only by the three other evangelists, see Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; and John 1:26, but also by our Lord himself, who said just before his ascension, "John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence," Acts 1:5.

So capital is this promise of the Spirit's stronger influences to raise the rare plant of Christian perfection, that when our Lord speaks of this promise, he emphatically calls it, "The promise of the Father"; because it shines among the other promises of the Gospel of Christ, as the moon does among the stars. Thus, Acts 1:4, "Wait," says he, "for the promise of the Father, which ye have heard of me." And again, Luke 24:49, "Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you." Agreeably to this, St. Peter says, "Jesus being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this:" he has begun abundantly to fulfil "that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, that I will pour out [bestow a more abundant measure] of my Spirit upon all flesh. Therefore repent and be baptized [i.e. Make an open profession of your faith] in the name of the Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is unto you and to your children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call" to enjoy the full blessings of the Christian dispensation, Acts 2:17, 33, 38. This promise, when it is received in its fulness, is undoubtedly the greatest of all the "exceeding great and precious promises, which are given to us, that by them you might be partakers of the Divine nature," [that is, of pure love and unmixed holiness,] 2 Peter 1:4. Have therefore a peculiar eye to it, and to these deep words of our Lord: "I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth [and power] whom the world knows not, &c, but ye know Him, for He remaineth with you, and shall be in you. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you: for if any man [i.e. Any believer] love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him," John 14:15, 23: "Which," says Mr. Wesley, in his note on the place, "implies such a large manifestation of the Divine presence and love, that the former, in justification, is as nothing in comparison of it." Agreeably to this the same judicious divine expresses himself thus in another of his publications. "These virtues [meekness, humility, and true resignation to God] are the only wedding garment; they are the lamps and vessels well furnished with oil. There is nothing that will do instead of them: they must have their full and perfect work in you, or the soul can never be delivered from its fallen, wrathful state. There is no possibility of salvation but in this. And when the Lamb of God has brought forth his own meekness, &c, in our souls, then are our lamps trimmed, and our virgin hearts made ready for the marriage feast. This marriage feast signifies the entrance into the highest state of union that can be between God and the soul in this life. This birthday of the Spirit of love in our souls, whenever we attain it, will feast our souls with such peace and joy in God, as will blot out the remembrance of every thing that we called peace or joy before." To make you believe this important promise with more ardour, consider that our Lord spent some of his last moments in sealing it with his powerful intercession. After having prayed the Father to sanctify his disciples through the truth, firmly embraced by their faith, and powerfully applied by his Spirit, he adds, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them who will believe on me through their word." And what is it that our Lord asks for these believers? Truly, what St. Paul asked for the imperfect believers at Corinth, "even their perfection," 2 Cor. 13:9. A state of soul this, which Christ describes thus:—"That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they may be made

one in us, &c, that they may be one as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected in one, and that the world may know that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me," John 17:17, 23. Our Lord could not pray in vain: it is not to be supposed that the Scriptures are silent with respect to the effect of this solemn prayer, an answer to which was to give the world an idea of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, a specimen of the power which introduces believers into the state of Christian perfection; and therefore we read that on the day of pentecost the kingdom of Satan was powerfully shaken, and the kingdom of God, "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," began to come with a new power: then were thousands wonderfully converted, and clearly justified; then was the kingdom of heaven taken by force; and the love of Christ and of the brethren began to burn the chaff of selfishness and sin with a force which the world had never seen before: see Acts 2:42, &c.

Some time after, another glorious baptism, or capital outpouring of the Spirit, carried the disciples of Christ farther into the kingdom of grace which perfects believers in one. And therefore we find that the account which St. Luke gives us of them after this second, capital manifestation of the Holy Spirit, in a great degree answers to our Lord's prayer for their perfection. He had asked "that they all might be one, and that they might be one as the and he are one, and that they might be perfected in one," John 17:17, &c. And now a fuller answer is given to his deep request. Take it in the words of an inspired historian:—"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were [once more] filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word with [still greater] boldness; and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul; neither said any of them, that aught of the things which he possessed were his own; but they had all things common, &c, and great grace was upon them all!" Acts 4:31-33. Who does not see in this account a specimen of that grace which our Lord had asked for believers, when he had prayed that his disciples, and those who would believe on him through their word, might be "perfected in one?"

It may be asked here, whether "the multitude of them that believed," in those happy days, were all perfect in love? I answer, that if pure love had cast out all selfishness, and sinful fear from their hearts, they were undoubtedly "made perfect in love:" but as God does not usually remove the plague of indwelling sin till it has been discovered and lamented; and as we find, in the two next chapters, an account of the guile of Ananias and his wife, and of the partiality or selfish murmuring of some believers, it seems that those chiefly, who before were strong in the grace of their dispensation, arose then into sinless fathers; and that the first love of other believers, through the peculiar blessing of Christ upon his infant Church, was so bright and powerful for a time, that little children had, or seemed to have, the strength of young men, and young men the grace of fathers. And, in this case, the account which St. Luke gives of the primitive believers ought to be taken with some restriction. Thus, while many of them were perfect in love, many might have the imperfection of their love only covered over by a land flood of peace and joy in believing. And, in this case, what is said of their being "all of one heart and mind, and of their having all things common," &c, may only mean that the harmony of love had not yet been broken, and that none had yet betrayed any of the uncharitableness for which Christians in after ages became so conspicuous. With respect to the "great grace which was upon them all," this does not necessarily mean that they were all equally strong in grace; for great unity and happiness may rest upon a whole family where the difference between a father, a young man, and a child, continues to subsist. However, it is not improbable that God, to open the dispensation of the Spirit, in a manner which might fix the attention of all ages upon its importance and glory, permitted the whole body of believers to take an extraordinary turn together into the Canaan of perfect love, and to show the world the admirable fruit which grows there, as the spies sent by Joshua took a turn into the good

land of promise before they were settled in it, and brought from thence the bunch of grapes which astonished and spirited up the Israelites, who had not yet crossed Jordan.

Upon the whole, it is, I think, undeniable, from the four first chapters of the Acts, that a peculiar power of the Spirit is bestowed upon believers under the Gospel of Christ; that this power, through faith on our part, can operate the most sudden and surprising change in our souls; and that when our faith shall fully embrace the promise of full sanctification, or of a complete “circumcision of the heart in the Spirit,” the Holy Ghost, who kindled so much love on the day of pentecost, that all the primitive believers loved or seemed to love each other perfectly, will not fail to help us to love one another without sinful self seeking; and as soon as we do so, “God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us,” 1 John iv, 12; John xiv, 23.

Should you ask, how many baptisms, or effusions of the sanctifying Spirit are necessary to cleanse a believer from all sin, and to kindle his soul into perfect love? I reply, that the effect of a sanctifying truth depending upon the ardour of the faith with which that truth is embraced, and upon the power of the Spirit with which it is applied, I should betray a want of modesty if I brought the operations of the Holy Ghost, and the energy of faith, under a rule which is not expressly laid down in the Scriptures. If you ask your physician how many doses of remedy you must take before the ailment of your stomach can be carried off, and your appetite perfectly restored; he would probably answer you, that this depends upon the nature of that ailment, the strength of the medicine, and the manner in which your constitution will allow it to operate; and that in general you must repeat the dose, as you can bear, till the remedy has fully answered the desired end. I return a similar answer: if one powerful baptism of the Spirit “seal you unto the day of redemption, and cleanse you from all [moral] filthiness,” so much the better. If two or more be necessary, the Lord can repeat them: “His arm is not shortened, that it cannot save;” nor is His promise of the Spirit stinted: he says, in general, “Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely. If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father [who is goodness itself] give his Holy [sanctifying] Spirit to them that ask him!” I may, however, venture to say, in general, that before we can rank among perfect Christians,

We must receive so much of the truth and Spirit of Christ by faith, as to have the pure love of God and man shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us, and to be filled with the meek and lowly mind which was in Christ.

And if one outpouring of the Spirit, one bright manifestation of the sanctifying truth, so empties us of selfism, as to fill us with the mind of Christ, and with pure love, we are undoubtedly Christians in the full sense of the word. From the ground of my soul I therefore subscribe to the answer which a great divine makes to the following objection:—“But some who are newly justified, do come up to this [Christian perfection:] what then will you say to these?” Mr. Wesley says with great propriety: “If they really do, I will say, they are sanctified, saved from sin in that moment; and that they never need lose what God has given, or feel sin any more. But certainly this is an exempt case. It is otherwise with the generality of those that are justified. They feel in themselves, more or less, pride, anger, self will, and a heart bent to backsliding. *And till they have gradually mortified these*, they are not fully renewed in love. God usually gives a considerable time for men to receive light, to grow in grace, to do and to suffer his will before they are either justified or sanctified. But he does not invariably adhere to this. Sometimes he ‘cuts short his work.’ He does the work of many years in a few weeks; perhaps in a week, a day, an hour. He justifies, or sanctifies both those who have done or suffered nothing, and who have not had time for a gradual growth either in light or grace. And may he not ‘do what he will with his own? Is thine eye evil, because he is good?’ It need not therefore be proved by

forty texts of Scripture, either that most men are perfected in love at last, or that there is a gradual work of God in the soul; and that, generally speaking, it is a long time, even many years, before sin is destroyed. All this we know. But we know, likewise, that God may, with man's good leave, 'cut short his work,' in whatever degree he pleases, and do the usual work of many years in a moment. He does so in a great many instances. *And yet there is a gradual work both before and after that moment.*

So that one may affirm, the work is gradual; another, it is instantaneous, without any manner of contradiction." (Wesley's "Plain Account", page 115 and following) On Page 155, the same eminent Divine explains himself more fully thus: "It [Christian perfection] is constantly preceded and followed by a gradual work. But is it in itself instantaneous or not? In examining this, let us go on step by step. An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers. None can deny this. Since that change, they enjoy perfect love. They feel this, and this alone. They rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks. Now this is all that I mean by perfection.

Therefore these are witnesses of the perfection which I preach. 'But in some this change was not instantaneous.' They did not perceive the instant when it was wrought; it is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies. Yet there is an instant in which life ceases. And if ever sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence, and a first moment of our deliverance from it.

'But if they have this love now, they will lose it.' They may; but they need not. And whether they do or no, they have it now; they now experience what we teach. They now are all love. They now rejoice, pray, and praise without ceasing.

'However, sin is only suspended in them; it is not destroyed.' Call it which you please. They are all love to-day; and they take no thought for the morrow." To return:—



2. Know Where The Mark Is

When you firmly assent to the truth of the precepts and promises, on which the doctrine of Christian perfection is founded; when you understand the meaning of these scriptures, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth. I will send the Comforter, [the Spirit of truth and holiness,] unto you; God hath chosen you to [eternal] salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:" when you see that the way to Christian perfection is by the word of the Gospel of Christ, by faith, and by the Spirit of God; in the next place, Get tolerably clear ideas of this perfection. This is absolutely necessary.

If you will hit a mark, you must know where it is. Some people aim at Christian perfection; but mistaking it for angelical perfection, they shoot above the mark, miss it, and then crossly give up their hopes. Others place the mark as much too low; hence it is that you hear them profess to have attained Christian perfection, when they have not so much as attained the mental serenity of a philosopher, or the candour of a good-natured, conscientious heathen.

In the preceding pages, if I am not mistaken, the mark is fixed according to the rules of Scriptural moderation. It is not placed so high, as to make you despair of hitting it, if you do your best in an evangelical manner; nor yet so low, as to allow you to presume that you can reach it, without exerting all your abilities to the uttermost, in due subordination to the efficacy of Jesus' blood, and the Spirit's sanctifying influences.



3. The Way to Perfection

Should you ask, “Which is the way to Christian perfection? Shall we go on to it by internal stillness, agreeably to this direction of Moses and David? ‘The Lord will fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace; stand still and see the salvation of God. Be still and know that I am God. Stand in awe and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.’ Or shall we press after it by an internal wrestling, according to these commands of Christ? ‘Strive to enter in at the strait gate: the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.’” &c.

According to the evangelical balance of the doctrines of free grace and free will, I answer, that the way to perfection is by the due combination of prevenient, assisting free grace; and of submissive, assisted free will.

Antinomian stillness, therefore, which says that free grace must do all, is not the way.

Pharisaic activity, which will do most, if not all, is not the way. Join these two partial systems, allowing free grace the lead and high pre-eminence which it so justly claims, and you have the balance of the two Gospel axioms. You do justice to the doctrines of mercy and justice, of free grace and free will, of Divine faithfulness in keeping the covenant of grace, and of human faithfulness in laying hold on that covenant, and keeping within its bounds: in short, you have the Scripture method of waiting upon God, which Mr. Wesley describes thus:—

Restless, resign’d, for God I wait,
For God my vehement soul stands still.

To understand these lines, consider that faith, like the Virgin Mary, is alternately a receiver and a bestower: first, it passively receives the impregnation of Divine grace, saying, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord: let it be done to me according to thy word;” and then it actively brings forth its heavenly fruit with earnest labour. “God worketh in you to will and to do,” says St. Paul: here he describes the passive office of faith, which submits to, and acquiesces in every dispensation and operation. “*Therefore work out your salvation with fear and trembling,*” and, of consequence, with haste, diligence, ardour, and faithfulness: here the apostle describes the active office of that mother grace, which *carefully submits the talent she has already received for His completing work.*

Would you then wait aright for Christian perfection? Impartially admit the Gospel axioms, and faithfully reduce them to practice.

In order to this, let them meet in your hearts, as the two legs of a pair of compasses meet in the rivet, which makes them one compounded instrument. Let your faith in the doctrine of free grace and Christ’s righteousness fix your mind upon God as you fix one of the legs of your compasses immovably in the centre of the circle which you are about to draw: so shall you “stand still,” according to the first text produced in the question, and then let your faith in the doctrine of free will, and evangelical obedience, make you steadily run the circle of duty round that firm centre: so shall you imitate the other leg of the compasses, which evenly moves around the centre, and traces the circumference of a perfect circle. By this activity, subordinate to grace, you will “take the kingdom of heaven by force.” When your heart quietly rests in God by faith, as it steadily acts the part of a passive receiver, it resembles the leg of the compasses which rests in the centre of the circle; and then the poet’s expressions, “restless—resigned,” describe its fixedness in God. But when your heart swiftly moves toward God by faith, as it acts the part of a diligent

worker, when your ardent soul follows after God as a thirsty deer does after the water brooks, it may be compared to the leg of the compasses which traces the circumference of the circle; and then these words of the poet, “restless and vehement,” properly belong to it. To go on steadily to perfection, you must therefore endeavour steadily to believe, according to the doctrine of the first Gospel axiom; and (as there is opportunity) diligently to work, according to the doctrine of the second; and the moment your faith is steadily fixed in God as in your centre, and your obedience swiftly moves in the circle of duty from the rest and power which you find in that centre you have attained, you are made perfect in the faith which works by love.

Your humble faith saves you from Pharisaism, your obedient love from Antinomianism, and both, in due subordination to Christ, constitute you a just man made perfect according to your dispensation.



4. Growth or Gift?

Another question has also puzzled many sincere perfectionists; and the solution of it may remove a considerable hinderance out of your way:—”Is Christian perfection,” say they, “to be instantaneously brought down to us, or are we gradually to grow up to it? Shall we be made perfect in love by a habit of holiness suddenly infused into us, or by acts of feeble faith and feeble love so frequently reported as to become strong, habitual, and evangelically natural to us, according to the well-known maxim, A strong habit is a second nature?” Both ways are good; and instances of some believers gradually perfected, and of others [comparatively speaking] instantaneously fixed in perfect love, might probably be produced, if we were acquainted with the experiences of all those who have died in a state of evangelical perfection. It may be with the root of sin, as it is with its fruit: some souls parley many years before they can be persuaded to give up all their outward sins, and others part with them, as it were, instantaneously. You may compare the former to those besieged towns which make a long resistance, or to those mothers who go through a tedious and lingering labour: and the latter resemble those fortresses which are surprised and carried by storm; or those women who are delivered almost as soon as labour comes upon them. Travelers inform us that vegetation is so quick and powerful in some warm climates, that the seeds of some vegetables yield a salad in less than twenty-four hours. Should a northern philosopher say, “Impossible!” and should an English gardener exclaim against such mushroom salad, they would only expose their prejudices, as do those who decry instantaneous justification, or mock at the possibility of the instantaneous destruction of indwelling sin.

For where is the absurdity of this doctrine? If the light of a candle brought into a dark room can instantly expel the darkness; and if, upon opening your shutters at noon, your gloomy apartment can instantaneously be filled with meridian light; why may not the instantaneous rending of the veil of unbelief, or the sudden and full opening of your faith, instantly fill your soul with the light of truth, and the fire of love; supposing the Sun of righteousness arise upon you with powerful healing in his wings? May not the Sanctifier descend upon your waiting soul, as quickly as the Spirit descended upon your Lord at his baptism? Did it not descend “as a dove,” that is, with the soft motion of a dove, which swiftly shoots down, and instantly lights? A good man said once, with truth, “A mote [splinter] is little, when it is compared with the sun; but I am far less before God.” Alluding to this comparison, I ask, If the sun could instantly kindle a mote; nay, if a burning glass can in a moment calcine a bone, and turn a stone to lime; and if the dim

flame of a candle can in the twinkling of an eye destroy the flying insect which comes within its sphere, how unscriptural and irrational is it to suppose that, when God fully baptizes a soul with his sanctifying Spirit and with the celestial fire of his love, he cannot in an instant destroy the man of sin, burn up the chaff of corruption, melt the heart of stone into a heart of flesh, and kindle the believing soul into pure, seraphic love! An appeal to parallel cases may throw some light upon the question which I answer. If you were sick, and asked of God the perfect recovery of your health, how would you look for it? Would you expect to have your strength restored to you at once, without any external means, as the lepers who were instantly cleansed; and as the paralytic, who at our Lord's word took up the bed upon which he lay, and carried it away upon his shoulders? Or by using some external means of a slower operation, as the "ten lepers" did, who were more "gradually cleansed as they went to show themselves to the priests?" Or as King Hezekiah, whose gradual, but equally sure recovery, was owing to God's blessing upon the poultice of figs prescribed by Isaiah? Again: if you were blind, and besought the Lord to give you perfect human sight, how should you wait for it? As Bartimeus, whose eyes were opened in an instant? Or as the man who received his sight by degrees? At first he saw nothing; by and by he confusedly discovered the objects before him, but at last he saw all things clearly. Would ye not earnestly wait for an answer to your prayers now, leaving to Divine wisdom the particular manner of your recovery? And why should ye not go and do likewise with respect to the dreadful disorder which we call indwelling sin?

If our hearts be purified by faith, as the Scriptures expressly testify if the faith which peculiarly purifies the hearts of Christians be a faith in "the promise of the Father," which promise was made by the Son and directly points at a peculiar effusion of the Holy Ghost, the purifier of spirits; if we may believe in a moment; and if God may, in a moment, seal our sanctifying faith by sending us a fulness of his sanctifying Spirit: if this, I say, be the case, does it not follow, that to deny the possibility of the instantaneous destruction of sin, is to deny, contrary to Scripture and matter of fact, that we can make an instantaneous act of faith in the sanctifying promise of the Father, and in the all-cleansing blood of the Son, and that God can seal that act by the instantaneous operation of his Spirit? Which St. Paul calls the "circumcision of the heart in [or by] the Spirit," according to the Lord's ancient promise, "I will circumcise thy heart, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Where is the absurdity of believing that "the God of all grace" can give an answer to the poet's rational and evangelical request?

Open my faith's interior eye;
Display thy glory from above:
And sinful self shall sink and die,
Lost in astonishment and love.

If a momentary display of Christ's bodily glory could, in an instant, turn Saul, the blaspheming, bloody persecutor, into Paul, the praying, gentle apostle; if a sudden sight of Christ's hands could in a moment root up from Thomas' heart that detestable resolution, "I will not believe," and produce that deep confession of faith, "My Lord and my God!" what cannot the display of Christ's spiritual glory operate in a believing soul, to which he manifests himself "according to that power whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself?" Again: if Christ's body could in an instant become so glorious on the mount, that his very garments partook of the sudden irradiation, became not only free from every spot, but also "white as the light, shining exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on the earth could whiten them;" and if our bodies "shall be changed, if this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and if this mortal shall put on immortality, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump;" why may not our believing souls, when they fully submit to God's terms, be fully changed—fully turned from the power of Satan unto God? When the Holy Ghost says, "Now is the day of salvation," does he exclude salvation from heart

iniquity? If Christ now deserves fully the name of JESUS, “because he fully saves his believing people from their sins;” and if now the Gospel trumpet sounds, and sinners arise from the dead, why should we not, upon the performance of the condition, be changed in a moment from indwelling sin to indwelling holiness? Why should we not pass, in the twinkling of an eye, or in a short time, from indwelling death, to indwelling life?

This is not all. If you deny the possibility of a quick destruction of indwelling sin, you send to hell, or to some unscriptural purgatory, not only the dying thief, but also all those martyrs who suddenly embraced the Christian faith, and were instantly put to death by bloody persecutors, for confessing the faith which they had just embraced. And if you allow that God may “cut his work short in righteousness” in such case, why not in other cases? Why not, especially when a believer confesses his indwelling sin, ardently prays Christ would, and sincerely believes that Christ can, “now cleanse him from all unrighteousness?” Nobody is so apt to laugh at the instantaneous destruction of sin as the Calvinists, and yet (such is the inconsistency which characterizes some men!) their doctrine of purgatory is built upon it. For, if you credit them, all dying believers have a nature which is still morally corrupted, and a heart which is yet desperately wicked. These believers, still full of indwelling sin, instantaneously breathe out their last, and, without any peculiar act of faith, without any peculiar outpouring of the sanctifying Spirit, corruption is instantaneously gone. The indwelling “man of sin” has passed through the Geneva purgatory, he is entirely consumed! And behold! The souls which would not hear of the instantaneous act of a sanctifying faith, which receives the indwelling Spirit of holiness—the souls which pleaded hard for the continuance of indwelling sin, are now completely sinless; and, in the twinkling of an eye, they appear in the third heaven among the spirits of just Christians made perfect in love! Such is the doctrine of our opponents: and yet they think it incredible that God should do for us, while we pray in faith, what they suppose death will do for them, when they lie in his cold arms, perhaps delirious or senseless!

On the other hand, to deny that imperfect believers may and do gradually grow in grace, and of course that the remains of their sins may, and do gradually decay, is as absurd as to deny that God waters the earth by daily dews, as well as by thunder showers: it is as ridiculous as to assert that nobody is carried off by lingering disorders, but that all men die suddenly or a few hours after they are taken ill.

I use these comparisons about death, to throw some light upon the question which I solve, and not to insinuate that the decay and destruction of sin run parallel with the decay and dissolution of the body, and that of course sin must end with our bodily life. Were I to admit this unscriptural tenet, I should build again what I have all along endeavoured to destroy, and, as I love consistency, I should promise eternal salvation to all unbelievers; for unbelievers, I presume, will die, i.e. Will go into the Geneva purgatory, as well as believers. Nor do I see why death should not be able to destroy the van and the main body of sin’s forces, if it can so readily cut the rear (the remains of sin) in pieces.

From the preceding observations it appears, that believers generally go on to Christian perfection, as the disciples went to the other side of the sea of Galilee. They toiled some time very hard, and with little success. But after they had “rowed about twenty-five; or thirty furlongs, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. He said to them, It is I, be not afraid: then they willingly received him into the ship, and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.” Just so, we toil till our faith discovers Christ in the promise, and welcomes him into our hearts; and such is the effect of his presence, that immediately we arrive at the land of perfection. Or, to use another illustration, God says to believers, “Go to the Canaan of perfect love: arise, why do ye tarry? Wash away the remains of sin, calling, i.e. Believing, on the name of the Lord.” And if they submit to the obedience of

faith, he deals with them as he did with the Evangelist Philip, to whom he had said, “Arise and go toward the south.” For when they “arise and run,” as Philip did, “the Spirit of the Lord takes” them, as he did the evangelist; and they are found in the New Jerusalem, as “Philip was found at Azotus.” They “dwell in God, [or in perfect love,] and God [or perfect love] dwells in them.” Hence it follows, that the most evangelical method of following after the perfection to which we are immediately called, is that of seeking it now, by endeavouring fully to lay hold on the promise of that perfection through faith, just as if our repeated acts of obedience could never help us forward.

But, in the meantime, We should do the works of faith, and repeat our internal and external acts of obedience with as much earnestness and faithfulness, according to our present power, as if we were sure to enter into rest merely by a diligent use of our talents, and a faithful exertion of the powers which Divine grace has bestowed upon us.

If we do not attend to the first of these directions, we shall seek to be sanctified by works like the Pharisees; and if we disregard the second, we shall fall into Solifidian sloth with the Antinomians.

This double direction is founded upon the connection of the two Gospel axioms. If the second axiom, which implies the doctrine of free will, were false, I would only say, “Be still, or rather do nothing; free grace alone will do all in you and for you.” But as this axiom is as true as the first, I must add, “Strive in humble subordination to free grace: for Christ saith, ‘To him that hath’ initiating grace to purpose, ‘more grace shall be given, and he shall have abundance:’ his faithful and equitable Benefactor will give him the reward of perfecting grace.”



5. Be Resolved

Beware of unscriptural refinements. Set out for the Canaan of perfect love with a firm resolution to labor for the rest which remains on earth for the people of God. Some good, mistaken men, wise above what is written, and fond of striking out on paths which were unknown to the apostles,—new paths marked out by voluntary humility, and leading to Antinomianism: some people of that stamp, I say, have made it their business, from the days of heated Augustine, to disapprove of making resolutions. They represent this practice as a branch of what they are pleased to call legality. They insinuate that it is utterly inconsistent with the knowledge of our inconstancy and weakness: in a word, they frighten us from the first step to Christian perfection; from an humble evangelical determination to run till we reach the prize, or, if you please, to go down till we come to the lowest place. It may not be amiss to point out the ground of their mistake. Once they broke the balance of the Gospel axioms by leaning too much toward free will, and by not laying their first and principal stress upon free grace. God, to bring them to the evangelical mean, refused his blessing to their unevangelical willing and running; hence it is that their self-righteous resolutions started aside like a broken bow. When they found out their mistake, instead of coming back to the line of moderation, they fled to the other extreme. Casting all their weights into the scale of free grace, they absurdly formed a resolution never to form a resolution; and, determining not to throw one determination into the scale of free will, they began to draw all the believers they met with into the ditch of a slothful quietism and Laodicean stillness.

You will never steadily go on to perfection, unless you get over this mistake. Let the imperfectionists laugh at you for making humble resolutions; but go on “steadfastly

purposing to lead a new life,” as says our Church; and in order to this, “steadfastly purpose” to get a new heart in the full sense of the word: for so long as your heart continues partly unrenewed, your life will be partly unholy. And, therefore, St. James justly observes that “if any man, offend not in word, he is a perfect man,” he loves God with all his heart, his heart is fully renewed; it being impossible that a heart, still tainted in part with vanity and guile, should always dictate the words of sincerity and love. Your good resolutions need not fail: nor will they fail, if, under a due sense of the fickleness and helplessness of your unassisted free will, you properly depend upon God’s faithfulness and assistance.

However, should they fail, as they probably will do more than once, “Be not discouraged, but repent, search out the cause, and, in the strength of free grace, let your assisted free will renew your evangelical purpose, till the Lord seals it with his mighty fiat, and says, “Let it be done to thee according to thy resolving faith.” It is much better to be laughed at as “poor creatures, who know nothing of themselves,” than to be deluded as foolish virgins, who fondly imagine that their vessels are full of imputed oil.

Take therefore the sword of the Spirit, and boldly cut this dangerous snare in pieces.

Conscious of your impotence, and yet laying out your talent of free will, say with the prodigal son, “I will arise and go to my father:” say with David, “I will love thee, O Lord my God: I will behold thy face in righteousness: I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress: I will keep it, as it were, with a bridle: I have said that I would keep thy word: the proud,” and they who are humble in an unscriptural way, “have had me exceedingly in derision, but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments:” say with St. Paul, “I am determined not to know any thing save Jesus, and him crucified.” And with Jacob, “I will not let thee go, unless thou bless me!” And, to sum up all good resolutions in one, if you are a member of the Church of England, say, “I have engaged to renounce all the vanities of this wicked world, all the sinful lusts of the flesh, and all the works of the devil: to believe all the articles of the Christian faith; and to keep God’s commandments all the days of my life;” that is, I have most solemnly resolved to be a perfect Christian. And this resolution I have publicly sealed by receiving the two sacraments upon it: baptism, after my parents and sponsors had laid me under this blessed vow: and the Lord’s Supper, after I had personally ratified, in the bishop’s presence, what they had done. Nor do I only think that I am bound to keep this vow; but “by God’s grace so I will; and I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that he has called me to this state of salvation [and Christian perfection;] and I pray unto him to give me his grace, that I may not only attain it, but also continue in the same unto my life’s end.” (Church Catechism.) “Much diligence,” says Kempis, “is necessary to him that will profit much. If he who firmly purposeth, often faileth, what shall he do who seldom or feebly purposeth any thing?” But, I say it again and again, do not lean upon your free will and good purposes, so as to encroach upon the glorious pre-eminence of free grace. Let the first Gospel axiom stand invariably in its honourable place. Lay your principal stress upon Divine mercy, and say with the good man, whom I have just quoted, “Help me, O Lord God, in thy holy service, and grant that I may now this day begin perfectly.”

In following this method, ye will do the two Gospel axioms justice: ye will so depend upon God’s free grace as not to fall into Pharisaic running: and ye will so exert your own free will as not to slide into Antinomian sloth. Your course lies exactly between these rocks. To pass these perilous straits, your resolving heart must acquire a heavenly polarity. Through the spiritually magnetic touch of Christ, the corner stone, your soul must learn to point toward faith and works, or, if you please, toward a due submission to free grace, and a due exertion of free will, as the opposite ends of the needle of a compass point toward

the north and the south.



6. Steward Your Vessel

From this direction flows the following advice. Resolve to be perfect in yourselves, but not of yourselves:

The Antinomians boast that they are perfect only in their heavenly representative. Christ was filled with perfect humility and love: they are perfect in his person: they need not a perfection of humble love in themselves. To avoid their error, be perfect in yourselves and not in another: let your perfection of humility and love be inherent; let it dwell in you. Let it fill your own heart and influence your own life: so shall you avoid the delusions of the virgins, who give you to understand that the oil of their perfection is all contained in the sacred vessel which formerly hung on the cross, and therefore their salvation is finished, they have oil enough in that rich vessel; manna enough and to spare in that golden pot. Christ's heart was perfect, and therefore theirs may safely remain imperfect, yea, full of indwelling sin, till death, the messenger of the bridegroom, come to cleanse them, and fill them with perfect love at the midnight cry! Delusive hope! Can any thing be more absurd than for a sapless, dry branch to fancy that it has sap and moisture enough in the vine which it cumbereth? Or for an impenitent adulterer to boast that "in the Lord he has" chastity and righteousness? Where did Christ ever say, "Have salt in another?" Does he not say, Take heed, that ye be not deceived! Have salt in "yourselves?" Mark 9:50. Does he not impute the destruction of stony ground hearers to their "not having root in themselves?" Matt. 13:21. If it was the patient man's comfort, that "the root of the matter was found in him," is it not deplorable to hear modern believers say, without any explanatory clause, that they have nothing but sin in themselves? But is it enough to have "the root in ourselves?" Must we not also have the fruit,—yea, "be filled with the fruits of righteousness?" Phil. I, 11. Is it not St. Peter's doctrine, where he says, "If these things be in you, and abound, ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ?" 2 Peter i, 8. And is it not that of David, where he prays, "Create in me a clean heart," &c? Away, then, with all Antinomian refinements! And if, with St.

Paul, you will have salvation and rejoicing in yourselves, and not in another, make sure of holiness and perfection "in yourselves, and not in another." But while you endeavour to avoid the snare of the Antinomians, do not run into that of the Pharisees; who will have their perfection of themselves; and therefore, by their own unevangelical efforts, self-concerted willings, and self-prescribed runnings, endeavour to "raise sparks of their own kindling, and to warm themselves" by their own painted fires and fruitless agitations. Feel your impotence. Own that "no man has quickened [and perfected] his own soul." Be contented to invite, receive, and welcome the light of life: but never attempt to form or to engross it. It is your duty to wait for the morning light, and to rejoice when it visits you: but if you grow so self-conceited as to say, "I will create a sun: let there be light:" or if, when the light visits your eyes you say, "I will bear a stock of light: I will so fill my eyes with light to-day, that to-morrow I shall be almost able to do my work without the sun, or at least without a constant dependence upon its beams;" would ye not betray a species of self-deifying idolatry and Satanical pride? If our Lord himself, as "Son of man," would not have one grain of human goodness himself; if he said, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good [self good, or good of himself] but God:" who can wonder enough at those proud Christians who claim some self-originated goodness; boasting of what they have received, as if they had not received it: or using what they have received without an

humble sense of their constant dependence upon their heavenly Benefactor. To avoid this horrid delusion of the Pharisees,

Learn to see, to feel, and to acknowledge, that of the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Ghost, are all your urim and thummim, your lights and perfections.

And while the Lord says, "From me is thy fruit found," (Hosea 14), bow at his footstool, and gratefully reply, "Of thy fulness have all we received, and grace for grace," (John 1:16). For thou art "the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift," (James 1:17) Of thee, and through thee, and to thee are all things: to thee, therefore be the glory for ever.

Amen," Romans 11:36.



7. Deepen The Roots of Your Repentance

You will have this humble and thankful disposition if you let your repentance cast deeper roots. For if Christian perfection implies a forsaking all inward, as well as outward sin; and if true repentance is a grace whereby we forsake sin, it follows, that, To attain Christian perfection, we must so follow our Lord's evangelical precept, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," as to leave no sin, no bosom sin, no indwelling sin unrepented of, and, of consequence, unforsaken.

He, whose heart is still full of indwelling sin, has no more truly repented of indwelling sin, than the man whose mouth is still defiled with filthy talking and jesting has truly repented of his ribaldry. The deeper our sorrow for, and detestation of indwelling sin is, the more penitently do we confess the plague of our hearts; and when we properly confess it, we inherit the blessing promised in these words: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

To promote this deep repentance, consider how many spiritual evils still haunt your breast.

Look into the inward "chamber of imagery," where assuming self love, surrounded by a multitude of vain thoughts, foolish desires, and wild imaginations, keeps her court. Grieve that your heart, which should be all flesh, is yet partly stone; and that your soul, which should be only a temple for the Holy Ghost, is yet so frequently turned into a den of thieves, a hole for the cockatrice, a nest for a brood of spiritual vipers,—for the remains of envy, jealousy, fretfulness, anger, pride, impatience, peevishness, formality, sloth, prejudice, bigotry, carnal confidence, evil shame, self righteousness, tormenting fears, uncharitable suspicions, idolatrous love, and I know not how many of the evils which form the retinue of hypocrisy and unbelief. Through grace detect these evils by a close attention to what passes in your own heart at all times, but especially in an hour of temptation. By frequent and deep confession, drag out all these abominations: these sins, which would not have Christ to reign alone over you, bring before him: place them in the light of his countenance; and (if you do it in faith) that light and the warmth of his love will kill them, as the light and heat of the sun kill the worms which the plough turns up to the open air in a dry summer's day.

Nor plead that you can do nothing: for, by the help of Christ, who is always ready to assist the helpless, ye can solemnly say upon your knees what ye have probably said in an airy manner to your professing friends. If ye ever acknowledged to them that your heart is deceitful, prone to leave undone what ye ought to do, and ready to do what ye ought to leave undone; ye can undoubtedly make the same confession to God. Complain to him

who can help you, as ye have done to those who cannot. Lament, as you are able, the darkness of your mind, the stubbornness of your will, the dulness or exorbitancy of your affections, and importunately entreat the God of all grace to “renew a right spirit within you. If ye sorrow after this godly sort, what carefulness will be wrought in you! What indignation! What fear! What vehement desire! What zeal! Yea, what revenge!” Ye will then sing in faith, what the imperfectionists sing in unbelief:—

O how I hate those lusts of mine,
That crucified my God:
Those sins that pierced and nail'd his flesh
Fast to the fatal wood!
Yes, my Redeemer, they shall die,
My heart hath so decreed;
Nor will I spare those guilty things
That made my Saviour bleed.
While with a melting, broken heart,
My murder'd Lord I view,
I'll raise revenge against my sins,
And slay the murderers too.



8. Self-Denial

Closely connected with this deep repentance is the practice of a judicious, universal self denial. “If thou wilt be perfect,” says our Lord, “deny thyself, take up thy cross daily, and follow me. He that loveth father or mother [much more he that loveth praise, pleasure, or money] more than me, is not worthy of me.” nay, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose it for my sake, shall find it.” Many desire to live and reign with Christ, but few choose to suffer and die with him. However, as the way of the cross leads to heaven, it undoubtedly leads to Christian perfection. To avoid the cross, therefore, or to decline drinking the cup of vinegar and gall, which God permits your friends or foes to mix for you, is to throw away the aloes which Divine wisdom puts to the breasts of the mother of harlots, to wean you from her and her witchcrafts: it is to refuse a medicine which is kindly prepared to restore your health and appetite: in a word, it is to renounce the Physician who “heals all our infirmities,” when we take his bitter draughts, submit to have our imposthumes opened by his sharp lancet, and yield to have our proud flesh wasted away by his painful caustics. Our Lord “was made a perfect Saviour through sufferings,” and we may be made perfect Christians in the same manner. We may be called to suffer, till all that which we have brought out of spiritual Egypt is consumed in a howling wilderness, in a dismal Gethsemane, or on a shameful Calvary. Should this lot be reserved for us, let us not imitate our Lord’s imperfect disciples, who “forsook him and fled;” but let us stand the fiery trial, till all our fetters are melted, and our dross is purged away. Fire is of a purgative nature: it separates the dross from the gold; and the fiercer it is the more quick and powerful is its operation. “He that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, &c, when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning,” Isa. Iv, 4. “I will bring the third part through the fire, saith the Lord, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God,” Zech. 3:9. Therefore, if the Lord should suffer the best men in his camp, or the strongest men in Satan’s army, to cast you into a

furnace of fiery temptations, come not out of it till you are called. "Let patience have its perfect work:" meekly keep your trying station till your heart is disengaged from all that is earthly, and till the sense of God's preserving power kindles in you such a faith in his omnipotent love as few experimentally know but they who have seen themselves, like the mysterious bush in Horeb, burning and yet unconsumed; or they who can say with St. Paul, "We are killed all the day long—dying, and behold we live!" "Temptations," says Kempis, "are often very profitable to men, though they be troublesome and grievous: for in them a man is humbled, purified, and instructed. All the saints have passed through and profited by many tribulations: and they that could not bear temptations, became reprobates and fell away." "My son," adds the author of Ecclesiasticus, (chap. ii, 1,) "if thou come to serve the Lord" in the perfect beauty of holiness, "prepare thy soul for temptation. Set thy heart aright; constantly endure; and make not haste in the time of trouble.

Whatever is brought upon thee take cheerfully; and be patient when thou art changed to a low estate: for gold is tried and purified in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity." And therefore, says St. James, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for, when he is tried, [if he stands the fiery trial,] he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him" [with the love which endureth all things, that is, with perfect love,] James 1:12. Patiently endure, then, when God "for a season (if need be) suffers you to be in heaviness through manifold temptations." By this mean, "the trial of your faith, being much more precious than that of gold which perisheth, though it be tried in the fire, will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ," 1 Pet. 1:7.

9. Faith and Love

Deep repentance is good, Gospel self denial is excellent, and a degree of patient resignation in trials is of unspeakable use to attain the perfection of love; but As "FAITH immediately works by love," it is of far more immediate use to purify the soul.

Hence it is that Christ, the prophets, and the apostles, so strongly insist upon faith; assuring us that, "if we will not believe, we shall not be established;" that, "if we will believe, we shall see the glory of God; we shall be saved; and rivers of living water shall flow from our inmost souls; and that our hearts are purified by faith; and that we are saved by grace through faith." They tell us that "Christ gave himself for the Church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it—by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Now, if believers are not to be "cleansed and made without blemish" by the word, (which testifies of the all-atoning blood, and the love of the Spirit,) it is evident that they are to be sanctified by faith; for faith, or believing, has as necessary a reference to the word, as eating has to food.

For the same reason the apostle observes that "they who believe enter into rest; that a promise being given us to enter in, we should take care not to fall short of it" through unbelief; that we ought to take warning by the Israelites, who "could not enter" into the land of promise "through unbelief;" that we are "filled with all joy and peace in believing;" and that "Christ is able to save to the uttermost them who come unto God through him." Now "coming," in the Scripture language, is another expression for believing: "He that cometh to God," says the apostle, "must believe." Hence it appears that Faith is peculiarly necessary to those who will" be saved to the uttermost, especially a firm faith in the capital promise of the Gospel of Christ, the promise of "the Spirit of holiness" from the Father, through the Son.

For "how shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed?" Or, how can they earnestly plead the truth, and steadily wait for the performance of a promise, in which they

have no faith? This doctrine of faith is supported by Peter's words:—"God who knoweth the hearts [of penitent believers] bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, and purifying their hearts by faith," Acts 15:8-9. For the same Spirit of faith, which initially purifies our hearts when we cordially believe the pardoning love of God, completely cleanses them when we fully believe his sanctifying love.



10. Believe

This direction about faith being of the utmost importance, I shall confirm and explain it by an extract from Mr. Wesley's sermon, which points out the Scripture way of salvation: "Though it be allowed," says this judicious divine, "that both this repentance and its fruits are necessary to full salvation, yet they are not necessary either in the same sense with faith, or in the same degree. Not in the same degree; for these fruits are only necessary conditionally, if there be time and opportunity for them, otherwise a man may be sanctified without them. But he cannot be sanctified without faith. Likewise, let a man have ever so much of this repentance, or ever so many good works, yet all this does not at all avail; he is not sanctified till he believe. But the moment he believes, with or without those fruits, yea, with more or less of this repentance, he is sanctified.

Not in the same sense; for this repentance and these fruits are only remotely necessary in order to the continuance of his faith, as well as the increase of it; whereas faith is immediately and directly necessary to sanctification. It remains that faith is the only condition which is immediately and proximately necessary to sanctification. "But What is that faith whereby we are sanctified, saved from sin, and perfected in love?

(1.) It is a Divine evidence and conviction, that God hath promised it in the Holy Scriptures. Till we are thoroughly satisfied of this, there is no moving one step farther. And one would imagine there needed not one word more to satisfy a reasonable man of this, than the ancient promise, 'Then will I circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.' How clearly doth this express the being perfected in love! How strongly imply the being saved from all sin! For as long as love takes up the whole heart, what room is there for sin therein?

(2.) It is a Divine evidence and conviction, that what God has promised he is able to perform. Admitting, therefore, that 'with men it is impossible to bring a clean thing out of an unclean,' to purify the heart from all sin, and to fill it with all holiness; yet this creates no difficulty in the case, seeing 'with God all things are possible.'

(3.) It is an evidence and conviction that he is able and willing to do it NOW. And why not? Is not a moment to him the same as a thousand years? He cannot want more time to accomplish whatever is his will. We may therefore boldly say at any point of time, 'Now is the day of salvation! Behold! All things are now ready! Come to the marriage!'

(4.) To this confidence, that God is both able and willing to sanctify us now, there needs to be added one thing more, a Divine evidence and conviction that he doth it. In that hour it is done. God says to the inmost soul, 'According to thy faith, be it unto thee!' Then the soul is pure from every spot of sin; it is clean from all unrighteousness." Those who have low ideas of faith will probably be surprised to see how much Mr. Wesley ascribes to that Christian grace, and to inquire, why he so nearly connects our believing that God cleanses us from all sin, with God's actual cleansing us. But their wonder will cease, if they consider the definition which this divine gives of faith in the same sermon. "Faith in

general,” says he, “is defined by the apostle, an evidence, a Divine evidence ‘and conviction [the word used by the apostle means both] of things not seen;’ not visible, nor perceivable either by sight, or by any other of the external senses. It implies both a supernatural evidence of God and of the things of God. A kind of spiritual light exhibited to the soul, and a supernatural sight or perception thereof. Accordingly the Scriptures speak of God’s giving sometimes light, sometimes a power of discerning it. So St. Paul, ‘God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ And elsewhere the same apostle speaks of ‘the eyes of our understanding being opened.’ By this twofold operation of the Holy Spirit, having the eyes of our souls both opened and enlightened, we see the things which the natural ‘eye hath not seen, neither the ear heard.’ We have a prospect of the invisible things of God: we see the spiritual world, which is all round about us, and yet is no more discerned by our natural faculties, than if it had no being; and we see the eternal world, piercing through the veil which hangs between time and eternity. Clouds and darkness then rest upon it no more, but we already see the glory which shall be revealed.” From this striking definition of faith, it is evident that the doctrine of this address exactly coincides with Mr. Wesley’s sermon; with this verbal difference only, that what he calls faith, implying a two-fold operation of the Spirit productive of spiritual light and supernatural sight, I have called faith, apprehending a sanctifying “baptism (or outpouring) of the Spirit.” His mode of expression savours more of the rational divine, who logically divides the truth, in order to render its several parts conspicuous: and I keep closer to the words of the Scriptures, which, I hope, will frighten no candid Protestant. I make this remark for the sake of those who fancy that when a doctrine is clothed with expressions which are not quite familiar to them, it is a new doctrine, although these expressions should be as Scriptural as those of a “baptism, or outpouring of the Spirit,” which are used by some of the prophets, by John the Baptist, by the four evangelists, and by Christ himself.

I have already pointed out the close connection there is between an act of faith which fully apprehends the Spirit of Christ, which makes an end of moral corruption by forcing the lingering “man of sin” instantaneously to breathe out his last. Mr. Wesley, in the above-quoted sermon, touches upon this delicate subject in so clear and concise a manner, that while his discourse is before me, for the sake of those who have it not at hand, I shall transcribe the whole passage, and thus put the seal of that eminent divine to what I have advanced, in the preceding pages, about sanctifying faith and the quick destruction of sin.

“Does God work this great work in the soul gradually or instantaneously?” “Perhaps it may be gradually wrought in some: I mean in this sense; they do not advert to the particular moment wherein sin ceases to be. But it is infinitely desirable, were it the will of God, that it should be done instantaneously; that the Lord should destroy sin by the breath of his mouth, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And so he generally does; a plain fact, of which there is evidence enough to satisfy any unprejudiced person. Thou therefore look for it every moment. Look for it in the way above described; in all those good works, whereunto thou art created anew in Christ Jesus. There is then no danger: you can be no worse, if you are no better for that expectation. For were you to be disappointed of your hope, still you lose nothing. But you shall not be disappointed of your hope: it will come, and will not tarry. Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment. Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith. And by this token you may surely know whether you seek it by faith or by works: if by works, you want something to be done first, before you are sanctified. You think, “I must first be or do thus or thus.” Then you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you seek it by faith, you expect it as you are, and if as you are, then expect it now.

It is of importance to observe that there is an inseparable connection between these three

points,—expect it by faith, expect it as you are, and expect it now! To deny one of them, is to deny them all: to allow one, is to allow them all. Do you believe we are sanctified by faith? Be true then to your principle: and look for this blessing just as you are, neither better nor worse: as a poor sinner, that has still nothing to plead but Christ died. And if you look for it as you are, then expect it now. Stay for nothing: why should you? Christ is ready; and he is all you want. He is waiting for you: he is at the door!” “Let your inmost soul cry out,—

Come in, come in, thou heavenly Guest!
Nor hence again remove:
But sup with me, and let the feast
Be everlasting love.”



11. Group Prayer

Social prayer is closely connected with faith in the capital promise of the sanctifying Spirit: and therefore I earnestly recommend that means of grace, where it can be had, as being eminently conducive to the attaining of Christian perfection. When many believing hearts are lifted up, and wrestle with God in prayer together, you may compare them to many diligent hands, which work a large machine. At such times, particularly, the fountains of the great deep are broken up, the windows of heaven are opened, and “rivers of living water flow” into the hearts of obedient believers.

In Christ when brethren join,
And follow after peace,
The fellowship Divine
He promises to bless,
His chiefest graces to bestow
Where two or three are met below.
Where unity takes place,
The joys of heaven we prove;
This is the Gospel grace,
The unction from above,
The Spirit on all believers shed,
Descending swift from Christ their Head.

Accordingly we read, that when God powerfully opened the kingdom of the Holy Ghost on the day of pentecost, the disciples “were all with one accord in one place.” And when he confirmed that kingdom, they “were lifting up their voices to God with one accord:” see Acts 2:1, and 4:24. Thus also the believers at Samaria were filled with the Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier, while Peter and John prayed with them, and laid their hands upon them.



12. Do Not Despair Because You Are Alone

But perhaps thou art alone. As a solitary bird which sitteth on the housetop, thou lookest for a companion who may go with thee through the deepest travail of the regeneration. But, alas! Thou lookest in vain: all the professors about thee seem satisfied with their former experiences, and with self-imputed or self-conceited perfection. When thou givest

them a hint of thy want of power from on high, and of thy hunger and thirst after a fulness of righteousness, they do not sympathize with thee. And indeed how can they? They are full already, they reign without thee, they have need of nothing. They do not sensibly want that “God would grant them, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, that they, being rooted and grounded in love, may comprehend with all saints [perfected in love] what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God,” (Eph. 3:16 and following) They look upon thee as a whimsical person, full of singular notions, and they rather damp than enliven thy hopes.

Thy circumstances are sad; but do not give place to despair, no, not for a moment. In the name of Christ, who could not get even Peter, James, and John, to watch with him one hour; and who was obliged to go through his agony alone;—in his name, I say, “Cast not away thy confidence, which has great recompense of reward.” Under all thy discouragements, remember that, after all, Divine grace is not confined to numbers, any more than to a few.

When all outward helps fail thee, make the more of Christ, on whom sufficient help is laid for thee—Christ, who says, “I will go with thee through fire and water;” the former shall not burn thee, nor the latter drown thee. Jacob was alone when he wrestled with the angel, yet he prevailed; and if the servant is not above his master, wonder not that it should be said of thee, as of thy Lord, when he went through his greatest temptations, “Of the people there was none with him.”

Should thy conflicts be “with confused noise, with burning and fuel of fire;” should thy “Jerusalem be rebuilt in troublesome times;” should the Lord “shake, not the earth only, but also heaven; should deep call unto deep at the noise of his water spouts; should all his waves and billows go over thee;” should thy patience be tried to the uttermost; remember how in years past thou hast tried the patience of God, nor be discouraged: an extremity and a storm are often God’s opportunity. A blast of temptation, and a shaking of all thy foundations, may introduce the fulness of God to thy soul, and answer the end of the rushing wind, and of the shaking, which formerly accompanied the first great manifestations of the Spirit. The Jews still expect the coming of the Messiah in the flesh, and they particularly expect it in a storm.

When lightnings flash, when thunders roar, when a strong wind shakes their houses, and the tempestuous sky seems to rush down in thunder showers; then some of them particularly open their doors and windows to entertain their wished-for Deliverer. Do spiritually what they do carnally.

Constantly wait for full “power from on high;” but especially when a storm of affliction, temptation, or distress overtakes thee; or when thy convictions and desires raise thee above thyself, as the waters of the flood raised Noah’s ark above the earth; then be particularly careful to throw the door of FAITH, and the window of HOPE as wide open as thou canst; and, spreading the arms of thy imperfect LOVE, say with all the ardour and resignation which thou art master of,—

“My heart strings groan with deep complaint,
My flesh lies panting, Lord, for thee;
And every limb, and every joint,
Stretches for perfect purity.”

But if the Lord be pleased to come softly to thy help; if he make an end of thy corruption by helping thee gently to sink to unknown depths of meekness; if he drown the indwelling man of sin, by baptizing, by plunging him into an abyss of humility; do not find fault with the simplicity of his method, the plainness of his appearing, and the commonness of his

prescription. Nature, like Naaman, is full of prejudices. She expects that Christ will come to make her clean with as much ado, pomp, and bustle, as the Syrian general looked for, “when he was wroth and said, Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me—and stand and call on his God—and strike his hand over the place—and recover the leper.” Christ frequently goes a much plainer way to work; and by this mean he disconcerts all our preconceived notions and schemes of deliverance. “Learn of me to be meek and lowly in heart, and thou shalt find rest to thy soul,” the sweet rest of Christian perfection, of perfect humility, resignation, and meekness. Lie at my feet, as she did who loved much, and was meekly taken up with “the good part, and the one thing needful.” But thou frettest; thou despisest this robe of perfection; it is too plain for thee; thou slightest “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which, in the sight of God, is of great price:” nothing will serve thy turn but a tawdry coat of many colours, which may please thy proud self will, and draw the attention of others, by its glorious and flaming appearance; and it must be brought to thee with lightnings, thunderings, and voices. If this be thy disposition, wonder not at the Divine wisdom which thinks fit to disappoint thy lofty prejudices; and let me address thee, as Naaman’s servants addressed him: “My brother, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he says to thee, I am the meek and lowly Lamb of God; wash in the stream of my blood—plunge in the Jordan of my humility, and be clean!” Instead therefore of going away from a plain Jesus in a rage, welcome him in his lowest appearance, and be persuaded that he can as easily make an end of thy sin, by gently coming in “a still, small voice,” as by rushing in upon thee in “a storm, a fire, or an earthquake.” The Jews rejected their Saviour, not so much because they did not earnestly desire his coming, as because he did not come in the manner in which they expected him. It is probable that some of this Judaism cleaves to thee. If thou wilt absolutely come to Mount Sion in a triumphal chariot, or make thine entrance into the New Jerusalem upon a prancing horse, thou art likely never to come there. Leave then all thy lordly misconceptions behind; and humbly follow thy King, who makes his entry into the typical Jerusalem, “meek and lowly, riding upon an ass, yea, upon a colt, the foal of an ass.” I say it again, therefore, While thy faith and hope strongly insist on the blessing, let thy resignation and patience leave to God’s infinite goodness and wisdom the peculiar manner of be-stowing it.

When he says, “Surely I come quickly to make my abode with thee,” let thy faith close in with his word; ardently and yet meekly embrace his promise. This will instantly beget power; and with that power thou mayest instantly bring forth prayer, and possibly the prayer which opens heaven, which humbly wrestles with God, inherits the blessing, and turns the well-known petition, “Amen! Even so, come Lord Jesus!” into the well-known praises, He is come, he is come, O praise the Lord, O my soul, &c. Thus repent, believe, and obey; and “he that cometh will come” with a fulness of pure, meek, humble love; “he will not tarry,” or if he tarry, it will be to give thy faith and desires more time to open, that thou mayest, at his appearing, be able to take in more of his perfecting grace and sanctifying power: beside, thy expectation of his coming is of a purifying nature, and gradually sanctities thee. “He that has this hope in him,” by this very hope “purifies himself even as God is pure:” for “we are saved [into, perfect love] by hope as well as by faith.” The stalk, as well as the root, bears “the full corn in the ear.”

Up then, thou sincere expectant of God’s kingdom! Let thy humble, ardent free will meet preventient, sanctifying free grace in its weakest and darkest appearance, as the father of the faithful met the Lord, “when he appeared to him on the plain of Mamre” as a mere mortal.

“Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and lo! Three men stood by him.” So does free grace (if I may venture upon the allusion) invite itself to thy tent: nay, it is now with thee in its creating, redeeming, and sanctifying influences. “And when he saw them, he ran to

meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground.” Go and do likewise: if thou seest any beauty in the humbling grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sanctifying love of God, and in the comfortable fellowship of the Holy Ghost, let thy free will run to meet them, and bow itself toward the ground. O for a speedy going out of thy tent, thy sinful self! O for a race of desire in the way of faith! O for incessant prostrations! O for a meek and deep bowing of thyself before thy Divine Deliverer! “And Abraham said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant!” O for the humble pressing of a loving faith! O for the faith which stopped the sun, when God avenged his people in the days of Joshua! O for the importunate faith of the two disciples who detained Christ, when “he made as though he would have gone farther! They constrained him, saying, Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.” He soon indeed vanished out of their bodily sight, because they were not called always to enjoy his bodily presence. Far from promising them that blessing, he had said, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you, that he may abide with you for ever. He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” This promise is “YEA and AMEN in Christ;” only plead it according to the preceding directions, and as sure as the Lord is the true and faithful Witness, so sure will the God of hope and love soon fill you with all joy and peace, that ye may abound in pure love, as well as in confirmed hope, “through the power of the Holy Ghost.” Then shall you have an indisputable right to join the believers who sing at the Tabernacle, and at the Lock Chapel, in the words of Messrs. J. and C. Wesley:—

“MANY are we now and ONE,
We who Jesus have put on.
There is neither bond nor free,
Male nor female, Lord, in thee.
Love, like death, hath all destroy’d,
Render’d all distinction void;
Names, and sects, and parties fall.
Thou, O Christ, art all in all.”

In the meantime you may sing with the pious countess of Huntingdon, the Rev. Mr. Madan, the Rev. Dr. Conyers, the Rev. Mr. Berridge, Richard Hill, Esq., and the imperfectionists who use their collections of hymns: ye may sing, I say, with them all, the two following hymns, which they have agreed to borrow from the hymns of Messrs. J. and C. Wesley, after making some insignificant alterations. I transcribe them from the collection used in Lady Huntingdon’s chapels, (Bristol edition, 1765, p. 239, &c.)

O for a heart to praise my God!
A heart from sin set free:
A heart that’s sprinkled with the blood
So freely spilt for me:
A heart resign’d, submissive, meek,
My dear Redeemer’s throne;
Where only Christ is heard to speak,
Where Jesus reigns alone:
An humble, lowly, contrite heart,
Believing, true, and clean;
Which neither life nor death can part
From him that dwells within:
A heart in every thought renew’d,
And fill’d with love Divine;
Perfect, and right, and pure, and good;

A copy, Lord, of thine!
My heart, thou know'st, can never rest.
Till thou create my peace
Till of my Eden repossess'd,
From self and sin I cease.
Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart,
Come quickly from above;
Write thy new name upon my heart,
Thy new, best name of LOVE.

Here is undoubtedly an evangelical prayer for the LOVE which restores the soul to a state of sinless rest and evangelical perfection. Mean ye, my brethren, what the good people who dissent from us print and sing, and I ask no more. Nor can ye wait for an answer to the prayer contained in the preceding hymn, in a more Scriptural manner, than by pleading "the promise of the Father" in such words as these:—

Love Divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down!
Fix in us thine humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown:
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.
Breathe! O breathe thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled breast!
Let us all in thee inherit,
Let us find thy promised rest.
Take away the power of sinning,
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.
Come, Almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy life receive!
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave!
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thine hosts above;
Pray and praise thee without ceasing,
Glory in thy precious love.
Finish then thy new creation,
Pure, unspotted may we be;
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored by thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place;
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Lift up your hands which hang down; our Aaron, our heavenly High Priest, is near to hold them up. The spiritual Amalekites will not always prevail; our Samuel, our heavenly prophet, is ready "to cut them and their king in pieces before the Lord. The promise is unto you." You are surely called to attain the perfection of your dispensation, although

you still seem afar off.

Christ, in whom that perfection centres—Christ, from whom it flows, is very near, even at the door: “Behold, says he, [and this he spake to Laodicean loiterers,] I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open, I will come in and sup with him,” upon the fruits of my grace, in their Christian perfection; and he shall sup with me upon the fruits of my glory, in their angelical and heavenly maturity.

Hear this encouraging Gospel: “Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. If any of you, [believers] lack wisdom—indwelling wisdom, [Christ the wisdom and the power of God dwelling in his heart by faith,] let him ask of God, who giveth to all men, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask [as a believer] in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed: for let not that man think that he shall receive” the thing which he thus asketh. “But whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. For all things [commanded and promised] are possible to him that believeth.” He who has commanded us to be perfect “in love, as our heavenly Father is perfect,” and he who has promised “speedily to avenge his elect, who cry to him night and day;” he will speedily avenge you of your grand adversary, indwelling sin. He will say to you, “According to thy faith, be it done unto thee; for he is able to do far exceedingly abundantly, far above all that we can ask or think, and of his fulness we may all receive grace for grace”—we may all witness the gracious fulfilment of all the promises, which he has graciously made, that by “them we might be partakers of the Divine nature,” so far as it can be communicated to mortals in this world. You see that, with men, what you look for is impossible: but you show yourselves believers: take God into the account, and you will soon experience, that “with God all things are possible.” Nor forget the omnipotent Advocate whom you have with him. Behold! He lifts his once pierced hands, and says, “Father, sanctify them through [thy loving] truth, that they may be perfected in love:” and showing to you the fountain of atoning blood, and purifying water, whence flow the streams which cleanse and gladden the hearts of believers, he says, “Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name—whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Ask, then, that your joy may be full.” If I try your faith by a little delay: if I hide my face for a moment, it is only to gather you with everlasting kindness. “A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish for joy. Now ye have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” In that day ye shall ask me no question, for you shall not have my bodily presence. But my urim and thummim will be with you; and the “Spirit of truth will himself lead you into all [Christian] truth.”

O for a firm and lasting faith,
To credit all the Almighty saith,
To embrace the promise of his Son,
And feel the Comforter our own!

In the meantime be not afraid to give glory to God by “believing in hope against hope.” Stagger not “at the promise [of the Father and the Son] through unbelief:” but trust the power and faithfulness of your Creator and Redeemer, till your Sanctifier has fixed his abode in your heart. Wait at mercy’s door, as the lame beggar did at the beautiful gate of the temple. “Peter fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look to us: and he gave heed to them, expecting to receive something of them.” Do so too: give heed to the Father in the Son, who says, “Look unto me and be ye saved.” Expect to receive “the one thing now needful” for you,—a fulness of the sanctifying Spirit: and though your patience may be tried, it shall not be disappointed. The faith and power, which, at Peter’s word, gave the

poor cripple a perfect soundness in the presence of all the wondering Jews, will give you, at Christ's word, a perfect soundness of heart in the presence of all your adversaries.

Faith—mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, "It shall be done!"

Faith asks impossibilities;
Impossibilities are given:

And I—e'en I, from sin shall cease,
Shall live on earth the life of heaven.

Faith always "works by love,"—by love of desire at least; making us ardently pray for what we believe to be eminently desirable. And if Christian perfection appears so to you, you might perhaps express your earnest desire of it in some such words as these:—



A PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

How long, Lord, shall my soul, thy spiritual temple, be a den of thieves, or a house of merchandise? How long shall vain thoughts profane it, as the buyers and sellers profaned thy temple made with human hands? How long shall evil tempers lodge within me? How long shall unbelief, formality, hypocrisy, envy, hankering after sensual pleasure, indifference to spiritual delights, and backwardness to painful or ignominious duty, harbour there? How long shall these sheep and doves, yea, these goats and serpents, defile my breast, which should be pure as the holy of holies? How long shall they hinder me from being one of the worshippers whom thou seekest,—one of those who worship thee in spirit and in truth? O help me to take away these cages of unclean birds. "Suddenly come to thy temple." Turn out all that offends the eyes of thy purity; and destroy all that keeps me out of "the rest which remains for thy Christian people:" so shall I keep a Spiritual Sabbath,—a Christian jubilee to the God of my life. So shall I witness my share in the oil of joy with which thou anointest perfect Christians above their fellow believers; I stand in need of that oil, Lord: my lamp burns dim: sometimes it seems to be even gone out, as that of the foolish virgins; it is more like "a smoking flax" than "a burning and shining light." O! Quench it not: raise it to a flame.

Thou knowest that I do believe in thee. The trembling hand of my faith holds thee; and though I have ten thousand times grieved thy pardoning love, thine everlasting arm is still under me, to redeem my life from destruction; while thy right hand is over me, to crown me with mercies and loving kindness. But, alas! I am neither sufficiently thankful for thy present mercies, nor sufficiently athirst for thy future favours. Hence I feel an aching void in my soul, being conscious that I have not attained the heights of grace described in thy word, and enjoyed by thy holiest servants. Their deep experiences, the diligence and ardour with which they did thy will; the patience and fortitude with which they endured the cross, reproach me, and convince me of my manifold wants.

I want "power from on high;" I want the penetrating, lasting "unction of the Holy One." I want to have my vessel (my capacious heart) full of oil, which makes the countenance of wise virgins cheerful. I want a lamp of heavenly illumination, and a fire of Divine love, burning day and night in my breast, as the typical lamps did in the temple, and the sacred fire on the altar; I want a full application of the blood which cleanses from all sin, and a strong faith in thy sanctifying word,—a faith by which thou mayest dwell in my heart, as

the unwavering hope of glory, and the fixed object of my love. I want the internal oracle, —thy still, small voice, together with urim and thummim, —”the new name which none knoweth but he that receiveth it.” In a word, Lord, I want a plenitude of thy Spirit, the full promise of the Father, and the rivers which flow from the inmost souls of the believers, who have gone on to the perfection of their dispensation.

I do believe that thou canst and wilt thus “baptize me with the Holy Ghost and with fire:” help my unbelief: confirm and increase my faith, with regard to this important baptism. Lord, I have need to be thus baptized of thee, and I am straitened till this baptism is accomplished. By thy baptisms of tears in the manger—of water in Jordan—of sweat in Gethsemane—of blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke, and flaming wrath on Calvary, baptize—O, baptize my soul, and make as full an end of the original sin which I have from Adam, as thy last baptism made of the likeness of sinful flesh, which thou hadst from a daughter of Eve. Some of thy people look at death for full salvation from sin; but, at thy command, Lord, I look unto thee.

“Say to my soul, I am thy salvation:” and let me feel with my heart, as well as see with my understanding, that thou canst save from sin to the uttermost, all that come to God through thee. I am tired of forms, professions, and orthodox notions; so far as they are not pipes or channels to convey life, light, and love to my dead, dark, and stony heart. Neither the plain letter of thy Gospel, nor the sweet foretastes and transient illuminations of thy Spirit, can satisfy the large desires of my faith. Give me thine abiding Spirit, that he may continually shed abroad thy love in my soul. Come, O Lord, with that blessed Spirit: come thou, and thy Father, in that holy Comforter,—come to make your abode with me; or I shall go meekly mourning to my grave. Blessed mourning! Lord, increase it. I had rather wait in tears for thy fulness than wantonly waste the fragments of thy spiritual bounties, or feed with Laodicean contentment upon the tainted manna of my former experiences.

Righteous Father, “I hunger and thirst after thy righteousness:” send thy Holy Spirit of promise to fill me therewith, to sanctify me throughout, and to “seal me centrally to the day of eternal redemption” and finished salvation. “Not for works of righteousness which I have done, but of thy mercy,” for Christ’s sake, “save thou me by the complete washing of regeneration, and the full renewing of the Holy Ghost.” And in order to this, pour out of thy Spirit; shed it abundantly on me till the fountain of living water abundantly spring up in my soul, and I can say, in the full sense of the words, that thou “livest in me, that my life is hid with thee in God, and that my spirit is returned to him that gave it; to thee, the first and the last,—my author and my end,—my God and my all!”

From The Works of John Fletcher, “The Last Check to Antinomianism”- Section 19.



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