



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

FREEBORN GARRETTSON

(1752 – 1837)

The Year 1777 Garrettson, about 25 years old

Stirred Up To Seek Perfect Love

“In this circuit I conversed with some deeply experienced Christians, and by their humble walk and heavenly conversation, I was much stirred up to seek a deeper work of grace; especially by the experience of sister B_____. I believed there was such a thing as perfect love to be attained in this world; and I likewise knew I was not in possession of it: I saw a beauty in the doctrine, and preached it, but it was at a distance.

“Respecting Christian perfection, I believed such a thing to be attainable in this life; I therefore, both in public and private, contended for it, and had often felt the need of it in my own soul: but I never had such a view of it in my life as while in this circuit. The Lord, in a very powerful and sudden manner, gave me to see and feel the need of this blessed work. Every heart corruption was discovered to me by the blessed Spirit, at the house of that dear afflicted mother in Israel, Mrs. Y. I have had many sweet moments with that precious family; but she has since gone to Abraham’s bosom. This discovery was made to me while I was alone in the preachers’ room. I expected in a few moments to be in eternity; and the cry of my heart was, Lord, save me from inbred sin (my sinful heart). The purity of God, heaven, and the law, with the impurity of my heart, were so disclosed to my view, that I was humbled in the very dust; and expected never to enter into the kingdom of heaven without a greater likeness to my blessed Lord. I rejoiced that the cold hand of death was not upon me. For more than a week an earnest struggle continued in my heart for all the mind which was in Christ. My appointments were made, or I am apprehensive I should have declined preaching so pure a Gospel, till the heart corruptions which I felt were washed away. The enemy strove very hard to rob me of my confidence; but although I was at times brought very low, yet I did not let go my hold of the dear Redeemer, the witness of my justification, &c.

1777 – Entirely Sanctified, But The Experience Not Claimed

“One day I went to my appointment, and while the people were gathering, I withdrew about a quarter of a mile from the house, and wrestled with the Lord in prayer: I thought I could not meet the congregation, unless I was delivered from my inbred sins. However, after the people had waited about an hour, I went to the house, but my struggle seemed to be at the height. I thought I would pray with the people and dismiss them. After prayer my Lord gave me this text, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ Never had I such freedom before that time, to describe, 1st, the impurity of the heart: 2dly, how it is to be purified: and 3dly, the blessing resulting therefrom – that they shall see God. While I was speaking of the travail of a soul for purity, all my inward distress vanished, and I felt a little heaven on earth. I know that the Lord deepened his work; but I did not claim the

witness of 'perfect love;' yet my soul was happy from day to day.

1778 – A Comfortable Hope That He Was Sanctified Wholly

“We had a comfortable conference in Leesburg, and May 20, 1778, I set out for my destined place. After preaching a few sermons, and visiting my old friends and relations, on the 30th of May I crossed the Chesapeake, and in the evening had a delightful opportunity of pressing the necessity of holiness on the minds of many. Blessed be God! There was a shout in the camp among our blessed Saviour’s despised followers; and I have no doubt but that the Lord directed my lot into this part of the work.

“On Sunday I spoke in Kent preaching house with much liberty, and we had a sweet refreshing season. This was the first Methodist preaching house that was built on this shore. In the evening I was much drawn out in prayer and self-examination; and felt the sweet beams of the blessed Spirit, and experienced the bliss of prayer, with a comfortable hope that my Lord had deepened his work of grace in my heart.

1778 – Received the Witness

Excerpt from a letter to John Wesley:

“The second year I traveled, I was powerfully convinced of the necessity of holiness. For a considerable time I waded through deep, but sweet distress. I had a discovery of the purity of the law, and the impurity of my own heart: being conscious it was my privilege to become pure in heart, I determined not to stop short of it. Sensible I was it came by faith. I was under deep exercises to preach no more, till I received that blessing. There was a time when I had a greater nearness to God, but I did not receive the witness till a twelve-month afterward. -- F. Garrettson.”

1789 – Another Strong Witness to Perfect Love:

July 23, he came to the town of Sharon, in Connecticut, where he found a number of precious souls, to whom he preached in the open air, there being so many assembled that no house could accommodate them ... Many of the inhabitants of the town came in to see me, and my soul was so happy that I was constrained with tears to exhort all that came near. I think I never had so strong a witness of perfect love.

1809 – Preaches Holiness At A Camp Meeting

“Friday 11. A very rainy day. I preached in a large tent, on the necessity of holiness. Mr. Harris fell under the word, cried for mercy, and found peace. He is not a member of our Church. Brother Chalmers got under such a deep travail of soul for holiness, that he fell under the power of God, and lay for hours; and when he came to, rejoiced in the perfect love of God. I was requested by some of my old friends to call this meeting; among others was Mrs. Bruff and her sister Ward. These holy women are full of the perfect(ed) love of God. This meeting held several hours. I likewise called a meeting in the preachers’ tent at the same time; -- the tents rang with the praises of God. The poor Blacks seemed almost ready to fly. There is, nevertheless, a probability we shall have a great meeting. Many of our good friends have come from Baltimore. I must leave you. This minute I have been conversing with Mrs. Bruff; -- she tells me, at the above-mentioned meeting three beside Mr. Chalmers were brought out, and several led to feel the necessity of holiness.

1819 – Preached on Christian Perfection – A Favorite Theme

On Wednesday evening he gave information that as he expected to depart next day, he would preach at sunrise on the doctrine of Christian perfection.

After preaching with much satisfaction in Providence, both in the Methodist church, and by request, in the one occupied by the Rev. Mr. Wilson, a pious Presbyterian clergyman,

Mr. Garrettson rode forward to Bristol, where he preached to a large congregation on the doctrine of Christian perfection, a favorite theme with him.

1824 – Reflects on Nearly 50 Years in Perfect Love

...Nearly half a century since I was happy in the perfect love of God ... Unworthy as I feel myself, I would not part with my hope of glory for a million of worlds.”

1827 – His Dying Testimony To Nathan Bangs

In the conversation to which I have alluded, he opened his heart with great freedom, rehearsed the goodness of God, which had been so abundantly manifested to him through every period of his life; at the same time, as was usual with him, expressed himself in terms of the deepest self-abasement. At one time he would express his admiration of the perfections of God, as manifested in creation, and more especially in the grand system of redemption, and then cry out with holy rapture, “I am filled with the perfect love of God.” With much feeling and emphasis he said, “My hope is all founded in the infinite merits of the Lord Jesus; in this hope I enjoy unspeakable consolation.” In this way he lingered, sometimes suffering exquisitely, for about five weeks. He did, indeed, pass through the furnace, but he came forth not only unhurt, but abundantly refined; and he died as he had lived, a witness of perfect love.

1827 – From The Account of His Death by His Daughter, Mary

To a friend he said, a short time before his death, ‘I feel the perfect love of God in my soul.’ ... His last sentence spoken, even in death, was, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!’ After that, though he lingered many hours, he could not speak articulately. Once only, clasping his hands, and raising his eyes to heaven, he uttered, ‘Glory! Glory!’ ... Just as the period of his departure approached, one of the preachers broke forth into prayer; -- prayer so elevated, so holy, that it seemed to wrap the hearers above all sublunary consideration, and as he commended the dying saint into the hands of God, he prayed that the mantle of the departing patriarch might rest on his surviving brethren. His prayer seemed answered; -- a divine influence pervaded the apartment; two of the preachers almost sunk to the floor, under a glorious sense of His presence who filleth immensity. My dear mother, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, exclaimed, ‘Yes, Lord! We give him up freely, freely give him up to thee!’ ... The spirit departed, leaving the body impressed with the sweetest expression of peace and tranquillity; an expression which it retained until the moment when it was shrouded from human observation. We could stand beside those dear remains, and imagine that their appearance of renewed youth and happiness was a pledge of that glorious resurrection, when death shall be swallowed up in victory, and the mortal put on immortality; and we could look on the grave as a sure and certain deposit; until that day when it shall give back its precious seed rejoicing.”

From Nathan Bangs’ Evaluation of Freeborn Garrettson as a Minister

If it be the chief business of a minister of the sanctuary to carry a conviction to the hearts of sinners of the truths of the Gospel, and to awaken within them a serious concern respecting the solemn realities of eternity; if the object of his mission be to point those “that mourn in Zion” to the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;” if he should not cease his exhortations until he lead the penitent sinner to the blood of atonement, “which cleanseth from all unrighteousness,” and until he so believe as to receive the witness in himself that he is born of God; if the end of his commission is to build up believers “in their most holy faith,” and never let them rest until they are filled with the perfect love of God; if to accomplish these objects be the principal aim of the minister, then we may pronounce the Rev. FREEBORN GARRETTSON to have been a

true minister of Jesus Christ.

From the time of his conversion to God, in the 23d year of his age, until his death, in the 76th year of his age, under the protection of “the everlasting arms,” the purity of his life, and the uprightness of his deportment, were never questioned, but acknowledged by all with whom he had intercourse; and for upward of fifty-one years he appeared before the public as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, during which time the words of his lips gained the more credence from the unimpaired confidence which every one had in the integrity of his heart and the righteousness of his life. And when he sunk into the grave, he was the oldest traveling minister of that Church, whose general economy he loved, whose doctrines he believed and preached, whose God and Saviour he adored, and served in “the fellowship of the Gospel,” and whose ramparts he left, after having defended them for more than fifty years, to take his seat in “that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, whose builder and maker is God.”

Finally, in contemplating his character, we may take the text on which he so often delighted to preach, and which was selected as the foundation of his funeral discourse, and say, “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.”

Source: “The Life of Freeborn Garrettson,” by Nathan Bangs



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