



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

JOHN FLETCHER

(Methodist)

In the galaxy of saintly heroes the pious Vicar of Madelay will ever shine as one of the most conspicuous. Born 1757, in Switzerland, educated at the University of Geneva, he soon became noted for his scholarly attainments, a theologian of marked ability, a pastor of tireless zeal and unmeasured self-denial; but above all, he was one of the most striking examples of the life of Christian Perfection, which doctrine he so ably defended and so forcibly stressed.

It is said that “his presence was a benediction. In his devotions he seemed to enter the holiest of holies; his face shone like that of Moses when he came down from the Mount where he had talked with God. In contact with him, every heart caught fire from the flame that burned in his soul.” In his daily living he did not fall below the high standard presented in his writings. Christian Perfection was more persuasively presented in such a life than it could be in any book. “A great company of believing souls in the generation just past have turned their faces and steps to the sunlit heights where he stands and beckons to them; and many who will read these lines, have loftier spiritual ideals, deeper joys, and brighter hopes because this man’s experience proved to them that holiness was a possible attainment.”

In these days when so many question the instantaneous sanctification of the heart through faith in Jesus, it is well to quote the following utterances from Mr. Fletcher:

If our hearts are purified by faith, as the Scripture expressly testifies; if the faith which peculiarly purifies the heart of Christians, is 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 fullness of his sanctifying Spirit; if this, I say, is 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 the heart.” Where is the absurdity of believing that the God of all grace can now 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 earth can white them;” and if our bodies shall be changed, if this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and 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 a case, why not in other cases? Why not, especially, when a believer confessing his indwelling sin, ardently prays that Christ would and sincerely believes that Christ can, now cleanse him from all unrighteousness?

In speaking of the various ways in which God may reveal himself in sanctifying the soul, he says:

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 ardor and resignation 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 is pleased to come softly to thy help; if he makes an end to thy corruption by helping thee gently to sink to previously unknown depths of meekness; if he drowns 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 and 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 all 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 means 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 colors, 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 is thy disposition, wonder not at the divine wisdom which thinks fit to disappoint thy 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 way 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.

In a sermon preached soon after Fletcher's death, John Wesley said:

"I was intimately acquainted with him above thirty years. I conversed with him morning, noon and night without the least reserve during a journey of many hundred miles, and in all that time I never heard him speak an improper word or saw him do an improper action. To conclude: Many exemplary men have I known, holy in heart and life within my four-score years; but one equal to him have I not known, one so unworldly and entirely devoted to God. So unblameable a character in every respect I have not found either in Europe or America. And I scarce expect to find another such on this side of eternity."

The following are some of Fletcher's meditations:

"Pray on my knees as often as possible.

"Sing frequently penitential hymns.

"Always speak gently.

"Neglect no outward duty.

"Beware of a fire thou kindlest thyself. The fire that God kindles is bright, mild, constant and burns night and day.

"Beware of relaxing and impotence. God is faithful, but he owes thee nothing.

"Speak only when necessary.

Do not surrender thyself to any joy.

Rise in the morning without yielding to sloth."

He once refused a good pulpit because the work was too easy and salary too large. One word reveals the secret of this marvelous life – HOLINESS.

Source: "Chosen Vessels" by J. O. McClurkan (July, 1901)

The fullest account of how Fletcher obtained this deeper inward experience is given in a letter written by the famous sanctified Hester Ann Rogers. Describing a meeting held in 1781, she says: "When I entered the room, where they were assembled, the heavenly man (Fletcher) was giving out the following verses with such animation as I have seldom witnessed –

"After singing a hymn, he cried, 'O to be filled with the Holy Ghost! I want to be filled! O, my friends, let us wrestle for a more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit! 'To me, he said, 'Come, my sister, will you covenant with me this day, to pray for the fulness of the Spirit? Will you be a witness for Jesus. I answered with flowing tears, 'In the strength of Jesus I will.' He cried, 'Glory, glory be to God! Lord, strengthen Thine handmaid to keep this covenant, even unto death!'

"He then said, 'My dear brethren and sisters, God is here! I feel Him in this place; but I would hide my face in the dust, because I have been ashamed to declare what He has done for me. For many years, I have grieved His Spirit; I am deeply humbled; and He has again restored my soul. Last Wednesday evening, He spoke to me by these words, 'Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' I obeyed the voice of God; I now obey it; and tell you all, to the praise of His love--I am freed from sin. Yes, I rejoice to declare it, and to be a witness to the glory of His grace, that I am dead unto sin, and alive unto God, through Jesus Christ, who is my Lord and King! I received this blessing four or five times before; but I lost it, by not observing the order of God; who has told us, With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. But the enemy offered his bait, under various colors, to keep me from a public declaration of what God had wrought.

"When I first received this grace, Satan bid me wait awhile, till I saw more of the fruits; I resolved to

do so; but I soon began to doubt of the witness, which, before, I had felt in my heart; and in a little time, I was sensible I had lost both. A second time, after receiving this salvation, I was kept from being a witness for my Lord, by the suggestion, ‘Thou art a public character – the eyes of all are upon thee – and if, as before, by any means thou lose the blessing, it will be a dishonor to the doctrine of heart-holiness.’ I held my peace, and again forfeited the gift of God. At another time, I was prevailed upon to hide it, by reasoning, ‘How few, even of the children of God, will receive this testimony; many of them supposing that every transgression of the Adamic law is sin; and, therefore, if I profess to be free from sin, all these will give my profession the lie; because I am not free in their sense; I am not free from ignorance, mistakes, and various infirmities; I will, therefore, enjoy what God has wrought in me; but I will not say, ‘I am perfect in love.’ Alas! I soon found again, He that hideth his Lord’s talent, and improveth it not, from that unprofitable servant shall be taken away even that he hath.

“Now, my brethren, you see my folly. I have confessed it in your presence; and now I resolve before you all to confess my Master. I will confess Him to all the world. And I declare unto you, in the presence of God, the Holy Trinity, I am now dead indeed unto sin. I do not say, I am crucified with Christ, because some of our well-meaning brethren say, by this can only be meant gradual dying; but I profess unto you, I am dead unto sin, and alive unto God; and, remember, all this is through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is my Prophet, Priest, and King – my indwelling Holiness – my all in all...”

Source: “Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians” by James G. Lawson

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