The advices which follow were published in a separate tract in the year 1762, under the title of “Cautions and Directions given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies,” with the following motto: --

“Set the false witnesses aside,
Yet hold the truth for ever fast.”

It was evidently intended to guard the people against the mischievous extravagances of George Bell and his friends, a particular account of whom is given in Mr. Wesley’s Journal about that period. -- EDIT.]

“Q. 32. What is the First advice that you would give them?

Answer: Watch and pray continually against pride. If God has cast it out, see that it enter no more: It is full as dangerous as desire. And you may slide back into it unawares; especially if you think there is no danger of it. ‘Nay, but I ascribe all I have to God.’ So you may, and be proud nevertheless. For it is pride, not only to ascribe anything we have to ourselves, but to think we have what we really have not. Mr. L---, for instance, ascribed all the light he had to God, and so far he was humble; but then he thought he had more light than any man living; and this was palpable pride. So you ascribe all the knowledge you have to God; and in this respect you are humble. But if you think you have more than you really have; or if you think you are so taught of God, as no longer to need man’s teaching; pride lieth at the door. Yes; you have need to be taught, not only by Mr. Morgan, by one another, by Mr. Maxfield, or me, but by the weakest Preacher in London; yea, by all men. For God sendeth by whom he will send.

Do not therefore say to any who would advise or reprove you, ‘You are blind; you cannot teach me.’ Do not say, ‘This is your wisdom, your carnal reason;’ but calmly weigh the thing before God.

Always remember, much grace does not imply much light. These do not always go together. As there may be much light where there is but little love, so there may be much love where there is little light. The heart has more heat than the eye; yet it cannot see. And God has wisely tempered the members of the body together, that none may say to another, ‘I have no need of thee.’ ‘To imagine none can teach you, but those who are themselves saved from sin, is a very great and dangerous mistake. Give not place to it for a moment; it would lead you into a thousand other mistakes, and that irrecoverably. No; dominion is not founded in grace, as the madmen of the last age talked. Obey and regard ‘them that are over you in the Lord,’ and do not think you know better than them. Know their place and your own; always remembering, much love does not imply much light.

The not observing this has led some into many mistakes, and into the appearance, at least, of pride. O beware of the appearance, and the thing! Let there ‘be in you that lowly mind which was in Christ Jesus.’ And. ‘be ye likewise clothed with humility.’ Let it not only fill, but cover you all over. Let modesty and self-diffidence appear in all your words and actions. Let all you speak and do show that you are little, and base, and mean, and vile in your own eyes. As one instance of this, be always ready to own any fault you have been in. If you have at any time thought, spoke, or acted wrong, be not backward to acknowledge it. Never dream that this will hurt the cause of God; no, it will further it. Be therefore open and frank, when you are taxed with anything; do not seek either to evade or disguise it; but let it appear just as it is, and you will thereby not hinder, but adorn, the gospel.

Q. 33. What is the Second advice which you would give them?

Answer: Beware of that daughter of pride, enthusiasm. O keep at the utmost distance from it! Give no place to a heated imagination. Do not hastily ascribe things to God. Do not easily suppose dreams, voices, impressions, visions, or revelations to be from God. They may be from him. They may be from nature. They may be from the devil. Therefore, ‘believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God.’ Try all things by the written word, and let all bow down before it. You are in danger of enthusiasm every hour, if you depart ever so little from Scripture; yea, or from the plain, literal meaning of any text, taken in connexion with the context. And so you are, if you despise or lightly esteem reason, knowledge, or human learning; every one of which is an excellent gift of God, and may serve the noblest purposes.

I advise you, never to use the words, wisdom, reason, or knowledge, by way of reproach. On the contrary, pray that you yourself may abound in them more and more. If you mean worldly wisdom, useless knowledge, false reasoning, say so; and throw away the chaff, but not the wheat.
One general inlet to enthusiasm is, expecting the end without the means; the expecting knowledge, for instance, without searching the Scriptures, and consulting the children of God; the expecting spiritual strength without constant prayer, and steady watchfulness; the expecting any blessing without hearing the word of God at every opportunity.

Some have been ignorant of this device of Satan. They have left off searching the Scriptures.

They said, `God writes all the Scriptures on my heart. Therefore, I have no need to read it.' Others thought they had not so much need of hearing, and so grew slack in attending the morning preaching.

O take warning, you who are concerned herein! You have listened to the voice of a stranger. Fly back to Christ, and keep in the good old way, which was `once delivered to the saints;' the way that even a Heathen bore testimony of: `That the Christians rose early every day to sing hymns to Christ as God.'

The very desire of `growing in grace' may sometimes be an inlet of enthusiasm. As it continually leads us to seek new grace, it may lead us unawares to seek something else new, beside new degrees of love to God and man. So it has led some to seek and fancy they had received gifts of a new kind, after a new heart, as, (1.) The loving God with all our mind; (2.) With all our soul; (3.) With all our strength: (4.) Oneness with God: (5.) Oneness with Christ: (6.) Having our life hid with Christ in God: (7.) Being dead with Christ: (8.) Rising with him: (9.) The sitting with him in heavenly places: (10.) The being taken up into his throne: (11.) The being in the New Jerusalem: (12.) The seeing the tabernacle of God come down among men: (13.) The being dead to all works: (14.) The not being liable to death, pain, or grief, or temptation.

One ground of many of these mistakes is, the taking every fresh, strong application of any of these scriptures to the heart, to be a gift of a new kind; not knowing that several of these scriptures are not fulfilled yet; that most of the others are fulfilled when we are justified; the rest, the moment we are sanctified. It remains only to experience them in higher degrees. This is all we have to expect.

Another ground of these, and a thousand mistakes, is, the not considering deeply, that love is the highest gift of God; humble, gentle, patient love; that all visions, revelations, manifestations whatever, are little things compared to love; and that all the gifts above-mentioned are either the same with, or infinitely inferior to, it.

It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this, -- `the heaven of heavens is love.' There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, `Have you received this or that blessing?' if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. [1 Cor. 13] You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham's bosom.

I say yet again, beware of enthusiasm. Such is, the imagining you have the gift of prophesying, or of discerning of spirits, which I do not believe one of you has; no, nor ever had yet. Beware of judging people to be either right or wrong by your own feelings. This is no scriptural way of judging.

O keep close to `the law and to the testimony!'

**Q. 34. What is the Third?**

**Answer:** Beware of Antinomianism; `making void the law,' or any part of it, `through faith.' Enthusiasm naturally leads to this; indeed they can scarce be separated. This may steal upon you in a thousand forms, so that you cannot be too watchful against it. Take heed of everything, whether in principle or practice, which has any tendency thereto. Even that great truth, that `Christ is the end of the law,' may betray us into it, if we do not consider that he has adopted every point of the moral law, and grafted it into the law of love. Beware of thinking, `Because I am filled with love, I need not have so much holiness. Because I pray always, therefore I need no set time for private prayer.

Because I watch always, therefore I need no particular self-examination.’ Let us `magnify the law,’ the whole
written word, ‘and make it honourable.’ Let this be our voice: ‘I prize thy commandments above gold or precious stones. O what love have I unto thy law! All the day long is my study in it.’ Beware of Antinomian books; particularly the works of Dr. Crisp and Mr. Saltmarsh. They contain many excellent things; and this makes them the more dangerous. O be warned in time! Do not play with fire. Do not put your hand on the hole of a cockatrice’ den. I entreat you, beware of bigotry. Let not your love or beneficence be confined to Methodists, so called, only; much less to that very small part of them who seem to be renewed in love; or to those who believe yours and their report. O make not this your Shibboleth! Beware of stillness; ceasing in a wrong sense from your own works. To mention one instance out of many: ‘You have received,’ says one, ‘a great blessing. But you began to talk of it, and to do this and that; so you lost it. You should have been still.’ ‘Beware of self-indulgence; yea, and making a virtue of it, laughing at self-denial, and taking up the cross daily, at fasting or abstinence. Beware of censoriousness; thinking or calling them that anyways oppose you, whether in judgment or practice, blind, dead, fallen, or ‘enemies to the work.’ Once more, beware of Solifidianism; crying nothing but, ‘Believe, believe!’ and condemning those as ignorant or legal who speak in a more scriptural way. At certain seasons, indeed, it may be right to treat of nothing but repentance, or merely of faith, or altogether of holiness; but, in general, our call is to declare the whole ‘counsel of God, and to prophesy according to the analogy of faith. The written word treats of the whole and every particular branch of righteousness, descending to its minutest branches; as to be sober, courteous, diligent, patient, to honour all men. So, likewise, the Holy Spirit works the same in our hearts, not merely creating desires after holiness in general, but strongly inclining us to every particular grace, leading us to every individual part of ‘whatsoever is lovely.’ And this with the greatest propriety: For as ‘by works faith is made perfect; so the completing or destroying the work of faith, and enjoying the favour, or suffering the displeasure, of God, greatly depends on every single act of obedience or disobedience.

**Q. 35. What is the Fourth?**

Answer: Beware of sins of omission; lose no opportunity of doing good in any kind. Be zealous of good works; willingly omit no work, either of piety or mercy. Do all the good you possibly can to the bodies and souls of men. Particularly, ‘thou shalt in anywise reprove thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.’ Be active. Give no place to indolence or sloth; give no occasion to say, ‘Ye are idle, ye are idle.’ Many will say so still; but let your whole spirit and behaviour refute the slander.

Be always employed; lose no shred of time; gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost. And whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. Be ‘slow to speak,’ and wary in speaking.

‘In a multitude of words there wanteth not sin.’ Do not talk much; neither long at a time. Few can converse profitably above an hour. Keep at the utmost distance from pious chit-chat, from religious gossiping.

**Q. 36. What is the Fifth?**

Answer: Beware of desiring anything but God. Now you desire nothing else; every other desire is driven out; see that none enter again. ‘Keep thyself pure;’ let your ‘eye’ remain ‘single, and your whole body shall be full of light.’ Admit no desire of pleasing food, or any other pleasure of sense; no desire of pleasing the eye or the imagination, by anything grand, or new, or beautiful; no desire of money, of praise, or esteem; of happiness in any creature. You may bring these desires back; but you need not; you need feel them no more. O stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.

Be patterns to all, of denying yourselves, and taking up your cross daily. Let them see that you make no account of any pleasure which does not bring you nearer to God, nor regard any pain which does; that you simply aim at pleasing him, whether by doing or suffering; that the constant language of your heart, with regard to pleasure or pain, honour or dishonour, riches or poverty, is,

‘All’s alike to me, so I
In my Lord may live and die!’

**Q. 37. What is the Sixth?**

A. Beware of schism, of making a rent in the Church of Christ. That inward disunion, the members ceasing to have a reciprocal love ‘one for another,’ (1 Cor. 12:25,) is the very root of all contention, and every outward separation.
Beware of everything tending thereto. Beware of a dividing spirit; shun whatever has the least aspect that way. Therefore, say not, ‘I am of Paul or of Apollos;’ the very thing which occasioned the schism at Corinth. Say not, ‘This is my Preacher; the best Preacher in England. Give me him, and take all the rest.’ All this tends to breed or foment division, to disunite those whom God hath joined. Do not despise or run down any Preacher; do not exalt any one above the rest, lest you hurt both him and the cause of God. On the other hand, do not bear hard upon any by reason of some incoherency or inaccuracy of expression; no, nor for some mistakes, were they really such.

Likewise, if you would avoid schism, observe every rule of the Society, and of the Bands, for conscience’ sake. Never omit meeting your Class or Band; never absent yourself from any public meeting. These are the very sinews of our Society; and whatever weakens, or tends to weaken, our regard for these, or our exactness in attending them, strikes at the very root of our community. As one saith, ‘That part of our economy, the private weekly meetings for prayer, examination, and particular exhortation, has been the greatest means of deepening and confirming every blessing that was received by the word preached, and of diffusing it to others, who could not attend the public ministry; whereas, without this religious connexion and intercourse, the most ardent attempts, by mere preaching, have proved of no lasting use.’

Suffer not one thought of separating from your brethren, whether their opinions agree with yours or not. Do not dream that any man sins in not believing you, in not taking your word; or that this or that opinion is essential to the work, and both must stand or fall together. Beware of impatience of contradiction. Do not condemn or think hardly of those who cannot see just as you see, or who judge it their duty to contradict you, whether in a great thing or a small. I fear some of us have thought hardly of others, merely because they contradicted what we affirmed. All this tends to division; and, by everything of this kind, we are teaching them an evil lesson against ourselves.

O beware of touchiness, of testiness, not bearing to be spoken to; starting at the least word; and flying from those who do not implicitly receive mine or another’s sayings! ‘Expect contradiction and opposition, together with crosses of various kinds. Consider the words of St. Paul: ‘To you it is given, in the behalf of Christ,’ -- for his sake, as a fruit of his death and intercession for you, -- ‘not only to believe, but also to suffer for his sake.’ (Phil. 1:29.) It is given! God gives you this opposition or reproach; it is a fresh token of his love. And will you disown the Giver; or spurn his gift, and count it a misfortune? Will you not rather say, ‘Father, the hour is come, that thou shouldest be glorified: Now thou givest thy child to suffer something for thee: Do with me according to thy will?’ Know that these things, far from being hinderances to the work of God, or to your soul, unless by your own fault, are not only unavoidable in the course of Providence, but profitable, yea, necessary, for you. Therefore, receive them from God (not from chance) with willingness, with thankfulness. Receive them from men with humility, meekness, yieldingness, gentleness, sweetness. Why should not even your outward appearance and manner be soft? Remember the character of Lady Cutts: ‘It was said of the Roman Emperor Titus, Never any one came displeased from him. But it might be said of her, Never any one went displeased to her: So secure were all of the kind and favourable reception which they would meet with from her.’ ‘Beware of tempting others to separate from you. Give no offence which can possibly be avoided; see that your practice be in all things suitable to your profession, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour. Be particularly careful in speaking of yourself: You may not, indeed, deny the work of God; but speak of it, when you are called thereto, in the most inoffensive manner possible. Avoid all magnificent, pompous words; indeed, you need give it no general name; neither perfection, sanctification, the second blessing, nor the having attained. Rather speak of the particulars which God has wrought for you. You may say, ‘At such a time I felt a change which I am not able to express; and since that time, I have not felt pride, or self-will, or anger, or unbelief; nor anything but a fulness of love to God and to all mankind.’ And answer any other plain question that is asked with modesty and simplicity.

And surely He will again lift up your head, and cause the bones that have been broken to rejoice.
“Q. 38. What is the last advice that you would give them?

“Answer. Be exemplary in all things; particularly in outward things, (as in dress,) in little things, in the laying out of your money, (avoiding every needless expense,) in deep, steady seriousness, and in the solidity and usefulness of all your conversation. So shall you be ‘a light shining in a dark place.’ So shall you daily ‘grow in grace,’ till ‘an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.’

“Most of the preceding advices are strongly enforced in the following reflections; which I recommend to your deep and frequent consideration, next to the holy Scriptures: --

(1.) The sea is an excellent figure of the fulness of God, and that of the blessed Spirit. For as the rivers all return into the sea; so the bodies, the souls, and the good works of the righteous, return into God, to live there in his eternal repose.

Although all the graces of God depend on his mere bounty, yet is He pleased generally to attach them to the prayers, the instructions, and the holiness of those with whom we are. By strong though invisible attractions He draws some souls through their intercourse with others.

The sympathies formed by grace far surpass those formed by nature.

The truly devout show that passions as naturally flow from true as from false love; so deeply sensible are they of the goods and evils of those whom they love for God’s sake. But this can only be comprehended by those who understand the language of love.

The bottom of the soul may be in repose, even while we are in many outward troubles; just as the bottom of the sea is calm, while the surface is strongly agitated.

The best helps to growth in grace are the ill usage, the affronts, and the losses which befal us.

We should receive them with all thankfulness, as preferable to all others, were it only on this account, -- that our will has no part therein.

The readiest way to escape from our sufferings is, to be willing they should endure as long as God pleases.

If we suffer persecution and affliction in a right manner, we attain a larger measure of conformity to Christ, by a due improvement of one of these occasions, than we could have done merely by imitating his mercy, in abundance of good works.

One of the greatest evidences of God’s love to those that love him is, to send them afflictions, with grace to bear them.

Even in the greatest afflictions, we ought to testify to God, that, in receiving them from his hand, we feel pleasure in the midst of the pain, from being afflicted by Him who loves us, and whom we love.

The readiest way which God takes to draw a man to himself is, to afflict him in that he loves most, and with good reason; and to cause this affliction to arise from some good action done with a single eye; because nothing can more clearly show him the emptiness of what is most lovely and desirable in the world.

(2.) True resignation consists in a thorough conformity to the whole will of God; who wills and does all (excepting sin) which comes to pass in the world. In order to this we have only to embrace all events, good and bad, as His will.

In the greatest afflictions which can befall the just, either from heaven or earth, they remain immovable in peace, and perfectly submissive to God, by an inward, loving regard to Him, uniting in one all the powers of their souls.

We ought quietly to suffer whatever befalls us, to bear the defects of others and our own, to confess them to God in secret prayer, or with groans which cannot be uttered; but never to speak a sharp or peevish word, nor to murmur or repine; but thoroughly willing that God should treat you in the manner that pleases him. We are his lambs, and therefore ought to be ready to suffer, even to the death, without complaining.

We are to bear with those we cannot amend, and to be content with offering them to God. This is true resignation. And since He has borne our infirmities, we may well bear those of each other for His sake.
To abandon all, to strip one’s self of all, in order to seek and to follow Jesus Christ naked to Bethlehem, where he was born; naked to the hall where he was scourged; and naked to Calvary, where he died on the cross, is so great a mercy, that neither the thing, nor the knowledge of it is given to any, but through faith in the Son of God.

“(3.) There is no love of God without patience, and no patience without lowliness and sweetness of spirit.

“Humility and patience are the surest proofs of the increase of love.

“Humility alone unites patience with love; without which it is impossible to draw profit from suffering; or indeed, to avoid complaint, especially when we think we have given no occasion for what men make us suffer.

“True humility is a kind of self-annihilation; and this is the centre of all virtues.

“A soul returned to God ought to be attentive to everything which is said to him, on the head of salvation, with a desire to profit thereby.

“Of the sins which God has pardoned, let nothing remain but a deeper humility in the heart, and a stricter regulation in our words, in our actions, and in our sufferings.

“(4.) The bearing men, and suffering evils in meekness and silence, is the sum of a Christian life.

“God is the first object of our love: Its next office is, to bear the defects of others. And we should begin the practice of this amidst our own household.

“We should chiefly exercise our love towards them who most shock either our way of thinking, or our temper, or our knowledge, or the desire we have, that others should be as virtuous as we wish to be ourselves.

“(5.) God hardly gives his Spirit even to those whom he has established in grace, if they do not pray for it on all occasions, not only once, but many times.

“God does nothing but in answer to prayer; and even they who have been converted to God without praying for it themselves, (which is exceeding rare,) were not without the prayers of others.

Every new victory which a soul gains is the effect of a new prayer.

“On every occasion of uneasiness, we should retire to prayer, that we may give place to the grace and light of God and then form our resolutions, without being in any pain about what success they may have.

In the greatest temptations, a single look to Christ, and the barely pronouncing his name, suffices to overcome the wicked one, so it be done with confidence and calmness of spirit.

God’s command to “pray without ceasing” is founded on the necessity we have of his grace to preserve the life of God in the soul, which can no more subsist one moment without it, than the body can without air.

Whether we think of; or speak to, God, whether we act or suffer for him, all is prayer, when we have no other object than his love, and the desire of pleasing him.

“All that a Christian does, even in eating and sleeping, is prayer, when it is done in simplicity, according to the order of God, without either adding to or diminishing from it by his own choice.

“Prayer continues in the desire of the heart, though the understanding be employed on outward things.

“In souls filled with love, the desire to please God is a continual prayer.

“As the furious hate which the devil bears us is termed the roaring of a lion, so our vehement love may be termed crying after God.

“God only requires of his adult children, that their hearts be truly purified, and that they offer him continually the wishes and vows that naturally spring from perfect love. For these desires, being the genuine fruits of love, are the most perfect prayers that can spring from it.

(6.) It is scarce conceivable how strait the way is wherein God leads them that follow him; and how dependent on him we must be, unless we are wanting in our faithfulness to him.

“It is hardly credible of how great consequence before God the smallest things are; and what great
inconveniences some times follow those which appear to be light faults.

As a very little dust will disorder a clock, and the least sand will obscure our sight, so the least grain of sin which is upon the heart will hinder its right motion towards God.

“We ought to he in the church as the saints are in heaven, and in the house as the holiest men are in the church; doing our work in the house as we pray in the church; worshipping God from the ground of the heart.

“We should be continually labouring to cut off all the useless things that surround us; and God usually retrenches the superfluities of our souls in the same proportion as we do those of our bodies.

“The best means of resisting the devil is, to destroy whatever of the world remains in us, in order to raise for God, upon its ruins, a building all of love. Then shall we begin, in this fleeting life, to love God as we shall love him in eternity.

“We scarce conceive how easy it is to rob God of his due, in our friendship with the most virtuous persons, until they are torn from us by death. But if this loss produce lasting sorrow, that is a clear proof that we had before two treasures, between which we divided our heart.

“(7.) If, after having renounced all, we do not watch incessantly, and beseech God to accompany our vigilance with his, we shall be again entangled and overcome.

“As the most dangerous winds may enter at little openings, so the devil never enters more dangerously than by little unobserved incidents, which seem to be nothing, yet insensibly open the heart to great temptations.

“It is good to renew ourselves, from time to time, by closely examining the state of our souls, as if we had never done it before; for nothing tends more to the full assurance of faith, than to keep ourselves by this means in humility, and the exercise of all good works.

“To continual watchfulness and prayer ought to be added continual employment. For grace flies a vacuum as well as nature; and the devil fills whatever God does not fill.

“There is no faithfulness like that which ought to be between a guide of souls and the person directed by him. They ought continually to regard each other in God, and closely to examine themselves, whether all their thoughts are pure, and all their words directed with Christian discretion.

Other affairs are only the things of men; but these are peculiarly the things of God.

“(8.) The words of St. Paul, `No man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,’ show us the necessity of eyeing God in our good works, and even in our minutest thoughts; knowing that none are pleasing to him, but those which he forms in us and with us. From hence we learn that we cannot serve him, unless he use our tongue, hands, and heart, to do by himself and his Spirit whatever he would have us to do.

“If we were not utterly impotent, our good works would be our own property; whereas now they belong wholly to God, because they proceed from him and his grace: While raising our works, and making them all divine, he honours himself in us through them.

“One of the principal rules of religion is, to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since he is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve him in our neighbour; which he receives as if done to himself in person, standing visibly before us.

“God does not love men that are inconstant, nor good works that are intermitted. Nothing is pleasing to him, but what has a resemblance of his own immutability.

“A constant attention to the work which God entrusts us with is a mark of solid piety.

“Love fasts when it can, and as much as it can. It leads to all the ordinances of God, and employs itself in all the outward works whereof it is capable. It flies, as it were, like Elijah over the plain, to find God upon his holy mountain.

“God is so great, that he communicates greatness to the least thing that is done for his service.

“Happy are they who are sick, yea, or lose their life, for having done a good work.
“God frequently conceals the part which his children have in the conversion of other souls. Yet one may boldly say, that person who long groans before him for the conversion of another, whenever that soul is converted to God, is one of the chief causes of it.

“Charity cannot be practised right, unless, First, we exercise it the moment God gives the occasion; and, Secondly, retire the instant after to offer it to God by humble thanksgiving. And this for three reasons: First, to render him what we have received from him. The Second, to avoid the dangerous temptation which springs from the very goodness of these works. And the Third, to unite ourselves to God, in whom the soul expands itself in prayer, with all the graces we have received, and the good works we have done, to draw from him new strength against the bad effects which these very works may produce in us, if we do not make use of the antidotes which God has ordained against these poisons. The true means to be filled anew with the riches of grace is thus to strip ourselves of it; and without this it is extremely difficult not to grow faint in the practice of good works.

“Good works do not receive their last perfection, till they, as it were, lose themselves in God. This is a kind of death to them, resembling that of our bodies, which will not attain their highest life, their immortality, till they lose themselves in the glory of our souls, or rather of God, wherewith they shall be filled. And it is only what they had of earthly and mortal, which good works lose by this spiritual death.

“Fire is the symbol of love; and the love of God is the principle and the end of all our good works. But truth surpasses figure; and the fire of divine love has this advantage over material fire, that it can re-ascent to its source, and raise thither with it all the good works which it produces. And by this means it prevents their being corrupted by pride, vanity, or any evil mixture. But this cannot be done otherwise than by making these good works in a spiritual manner die in God, by a deep gratitude, which plunges the soul in him as in an abyss, with all that it is, and all the grace and works for which it is indebted to him; a gratitude, whereby the soul seems to empty itself of them, that they may return to their source, as rivers seem willing to empty themselves, when they pour themselves with all their waters into the sea.

“When we have received any favour from God, we ought to retire, if not into our closets, into our hearts, and say, ‘I come, Lord, to restore to thee what thou hast given; and I freely relinquish it, to enter again into my own nothingness. For what is the most perfect creature in heaven or earth in thy presence, but a void capable of being filled with thee and by thee; as the air, which is void and dark, is capable of being filled with the light of the sun, who withdraws it every day to restore it the next, there being nothing in the air that either appropriates this light or resists it? O give me the same facility of receiving and restoring thy grace and good works! I say, thine; for I acknowledge the root from which they spring is in thee, and not in me.’”

26. In the year 1764, upon a review of the whole subject, I wrote down the sum of what I had observed in the following short propositions: --

- There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture.
- It is not so early as justification; for justified persons are to “go on unto perfection.” (Heb. 6:1.)
- It is not so late as death; for St. Paul speaks of living men that were perfect. (Phil. 3:15.)
- It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone.
- It does not make a man infallible: None is infallible, while he remains in the body.
- Is it sinless? It is not worth while to contend for a term. It is “salvation from sin.”
- It is “perfect love.” (1 John 4:18.) This is the essence of it; its properties, or inseparable fruits, are, rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks. (1 Thess. 5:16, &c.)
- It is improvable. It is so far from lying in an indivisible point, from being incapable of increase, that one perfected in love may grow in grace far swifter than he did before.
- It is amissible, capable of being lost; of which we have numerous instances. But we were not thoroughly convinced of this, till five or six years ago.
- It is constantly both 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, and 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.

“‘But this doctrine has been much abused.’ So has that of justification by faith. But that is no reason for giving up either this or any other scriptural doctrine. ‘When you wash your child,’ as one speaks, ‘throw away the water; but do not throw away the child.’ ‘But those who think they are saved from sin say they have no need of the merits of Christ.’ They say just the contrary. Their language is, --

`Every moment, Lord, I want
The merit of thy death!’

They never before had so deep, so unspeakable, a conviction of the need of Christ in all his offices as they have now.

“Therefore, all our Preachers should make a point of preaching perfection to believers constantly, strongly, and explicitly; and all believers should mind this one thing, and continually agonize for it.”

27. I have now done what I proposed. I have given a plain and simple account of the manner wherein I first received the doctrine of perfection, and the sense wherein I received, and wherein I do receive, and teach it to this day. I have declared the whole and every part of what I mean by that scriptural expression. I have drawn the picture of it at full length, without either disguise or covering.

And I would now ask any impartial person, What is there so frightful herein? Whence is all this outcry, which, for these twenty years and upwards, has been made throughout the kingdom; as if all Christianity were destroyed, and all religion torn up by the roots? Why is it, that the very name of perfection has been cast out of the mouths of Christians; yea, exploded and abhorred, as if it contained the most pernicious heresy? Why have the Preachers of it been hooted at, like mad dogs, even by men that fear God; nay, and by some of their own children, some whom they, under God, had begotten through the gospel? What reason is there for this, or what pretence? Reason; sound reason, there is none. It is impossible there should. But pretences there are, and those in great abundance. Indeed, there is ground to fear that, with some who treat us thus, it is mere pretence; that it is no more than a copy of their countenance, from the beginning to the end. They wanted, they sought, occasion against me; and here they found what they sought. “This is Mr. Wesley’s doctrine! He preaches perfection!” He does; yet this is not his doctrine any more than it is yours, or any one’s else, that is a Minister of Christ. For it is His doctrine, peculiarly, emphatically His; it is the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Those are his words, not mine: Eseste oun teleioi, hOsper ho PatEr HymOn ho en tois ouranois teleios esti, -- “Ye shall therefore be perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” And who says, ye shall not; or, at least, not till your soul is separated from the body? It is the doctrine of St. Paul, the doctrine of St. James, of St. Peter, and St. John; and no otherwise Mr. Wesley’s, than as it is the doctrine of every one who preaches the pure and the whole gospel. I tell you, as plain as I can speak, where and when I found this. I found it in the oracles of God, in the Old and New Testament; when I read them with no other view or desire but to save my own soul. But whosoever this doctrine is, I pray you, what harm is there in it? Look at it again; survey it on every side, and that with the closest attention. In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our
heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. Now, take it in which of these views you please, (for there is no material difference,) and this is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765.

28. Now let this perfection appear in its native form, and who can speak one word against it? Will any dare to speak against loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves? Against a renewal of heart, not only in part, but in the whole image of God? Who is he that will open his mouth against being cleansed from all pollution both of flesh and spirit; or against having all the mind that was in Christ, and walking in all things as Christ walked? What man, who calls himself a Christian, has the hardiness to object to the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God? What serious man would oppose the giving God all our heart, and the having one design ruling all our tempers? I say, again, let this perfection appear in its own shape, and who will fight against it? It must be disguised before it can be opposed. It must be covered with a bear-skin first, or even the wild beasts of the people will scarce be induced to worry it. But whatever these do, let not the children of God any longer fight against the image of God. Let not the members of Christ say anything against having the whole mind that was in Christ. Let not those who are alive to God oppose the dedicating all our life to Him. Why should you who have his love shed abroad in your heart withstand the giving him all your heart? Does not all that is within you cry out, “O who that loves can love enough?” What pity that those who desire and design to please him should have any other design or desire! Much more, that they should dread, as a fatal delusion, yea, abhor as an abomination to God, the having this one desire and design ruling every temper! Why should devout men be afraid of devoting all their soul, body, and substance to God? Why should those who love Christ count it a damnable error, to think we may have all the mind that was in him? We allow, we contend, that we are justified freely through the righteousness and the blood of Christ. And why are you so hot against us, because we expect likewise to be sanctified wholly through his Spirit? We look for no favour either from the open servants of sin, or from those who have only the form of religion. But how long will you who worship God in spirit, who are “circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands,” set our battle in array against those who seek a entire circumcision of heart, who thirst to be cleansed “from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,” and to “perfect holiness in the fear of God?” Are we your enemies, because we look for a full deliverance from that “carnal mind which is enmity against God?” Nay, we are your brethren, your fellow-labourers in the vineyard of our Lord, your companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus.

Although this we confess, (if we are fools therein, yet as fools bear with us,) we do expect to love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. Yea, we do believe, that he will in this world so cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, that we shall perfectly love him, and worthily magnify his holy name.”

BRIEF THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

SOME thoughts occurred to my mind this morning concerning Christian perfection, and the manner and time of receiving it, which I believe may be useful to set down.

1. By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions.

   I do not include an impossibility of falling from it, either in part or in whole. Therefore, I retract several expressions in our Hymns, which partly express, partly imply, such an impossibility.

   And I do not contend for the term sinless, though I do not object against it.

2. As to the manner. I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently, in an instant.

   But I believe a gradual work, both preceding and following that instant.

3. As to the time. I believe this instant generally is the instant of death, the moment before the soul leaves the body. But I believe it may be ten, twenty, or forty years before.

   I believe it is usually many years after justification; but that it may be within five years or five months after it, I
know no conclusive argument to the contrary.

If it must be many years after justification, I would be glad to know how many. *Pretium quotus arroget annus?*  
*This quotation from Horace is thus translated by Boscawen: -- “How many years give sanction to our lines?” -- Edit.*

And how many days or months, or even years, can any one allow to be between perfection and death? How far from justification must it be; and how near to death?

LONDON, Jan. 27, 1767.