



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

An Address To Perfect Christians

by John Fletcher

who was John Wesley's very effective apologist. He would have been appointed as Wesley's successor if he had lived long enough. Historic language left intact in respect.

YE have not sung the preceding hymns in vain, O ye men of God, who have mixed faith with your evangelical requests. The God, who says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" the gracious God who declares, "Blessed are they that hunger after righteousness, for they shall be filled;" that faithful, covenant-keeping God has now filled you with all "righteousness, peace, and joy in believing." The brightness of Christ's appearing has destroyed the indwelling "man of sin." He who had slain the lion and the bear (he who had already done so great things for you) has now crowned all his blessings by slaying the Goliath within. Aspiring, unbelieving self is fallen before the victorious Son of David. "The quick and powerful word of God, which is sharper than any two-edged sword, has pierced even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." The carnal mind is cut off: the circumcision of the heart, through the Spirit, has fully taken place in your breasts; and now "that mind is in you which was also in Christ Jesus; ye are spiritually minded:" loving God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourselves, "ye are full of goodness, ye keep the commandments," ye observe the law of liberty, ye fulfil the law of Christ. Of him ye have "learned to be meek and lowly in heart." Ye have fully "taken his yoke upon you;" in so doing ye have found a sweet, abiding rest unto your souls; and from blessed experience ye can say, "Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light. His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." The beatitudes are sensibly yours: and the charity, described by St. Paul, has the same place in your breasts which the tables of the law had in the ark of the covenant. Ye are the living temples of the trinity: the Father is your life; the Son your light; the Spirit your love; ye are truly baptized into the mystery of God, ye continue to "drink into one spirit," and thus ye enjoy the grace of both sacraments. There is an end of your Lo here! And Lo there! The kingdom of God is now established within you. Christ's "righteousness, peace, and joy" are rooted in your breasts "by the Holy Ghost given unto you, as an abiding guide, and indwelling comforter. Your introverted eye of faith looks at God, who gently "guides you with his eye" into all the truth necessary to make you "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." Simplicity of intention keeps darkness out of your mind, and purity of affection keeps wrong fires out of your breast: by the former, ye are without guile; by the latter, ye are without envy. Your passive will instantly melts into the will of God; and on all occasions you meekly say, "Not my will, O Father, but thine be done!" Thus ye are always ready to suffer what you are called to suffer. Your active will evermore says, "Speak, Lord; thy servant heareth: what wouldst thou have me to do? It is my meat and drink to do the will of my heavenly Father!" Thus are ye always ready to do whatsoever ye are convinced that God calls you to do; and "whatsoever ye do, whether ye eat, or drink, or do any thing else, ye do all to the glory of God, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; rejoicing evermore; praying without ceasing; in every thing giving thanks;" solemnly looking for and hastening unto the

hour of your dissolution, and the “day of God, wherein the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved,” and your soul, being clothed with a celestial body, shall be able to do celestial services to the God of your life.

In this blessed state of Christian perfection the holy “anointing, which ye have received of him, abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you, unless it be as the same anointing teacheth.” Agreeably, therefore, to that anointing, which teaches by a variety of means, which formerly taught a prophet by an ass, and daily instructs God’s children by the ant, I shall venture to set before you some important directions which the Holy Ghost has already suggested to your pure minds: “for I would not be negligent to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance,” and giving you some hints, which it is safe for you frequently to meditate upon.

I. Beware lest Satan cause you to lose the grace you now experience. Adam, ye know, lost his human perfection in paradise; Satan lost his angelic perfection in heaven; the devil thrust sore at Christ in the wilderness, to throw him down from his mediatorial perfection: and St. Paul, in the same epistles where he professes not only Christian, but apostolic perfection also, (Phil. 3:15; 1 Cor. 2:6; 2 Cor. 12:11,) informs us that he continued to “run for the crown of heavenly perfection” like a man who might not only lose his crown of Christian perfection, but become a reprobate, and be cast away, 1 Cor. 9:25-27. And, therefore, “so run ye also, that no man take your crown” of Christian perfection in this world, and that ye may obtain your crown of angelic perfection in the world to come. Still keep your body under. Still guard your senses. Still watch your own heart, and, “steadfast in the faith, still resist the devil that he may flee from you;” remembering that if Christ himself, as Son of man, had conferred with flesh and blood, refused to deny himself, and avoided taking up his cross, he had lost his perfection, and sealed up our original apostasy.

“We do not find,” says Mr. Wesley, in his Plain Account of Christian Perfection, “any general state described in Scripture, from which a man cannot draw back to sin. If there were any state wherein this is impossible, it would be that of those who are sanctified, who are fathers in Christ, who ‘rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks.’ But it is not impossible for these to draw back. They who are sanctified may yet fall and perish, Heb. 10:29. Even ‘fathers in Christ’ need that warning, ‘Love not the world’ 1 John 2:15. They who ‘rejoice, pray, and give thanks without ceasing,’ may nevertheless ‘quench the Spirit,’ 1 Thess. 5:16, &c. Nay, even they who are sealed unto the day of redemption, may yet ‘grieve the Holy Spirit of God,’ Eph. 5:30.”

The doctrine of the absolute perseverance of the saints is the first card which the devil played against man:—“Ye shall not surely die, if ye break the law of your perfection.” This fatal card won the game. Mankind and paradise were lost. The artful serpent had too well succeeded at his first game to forget that lucky card at his second. See him “transforming himself into an angel of light on the pinnacle of the temple.” There he plays over again his old game against the Son of God.

Out of the Bible he pulls the very card which won our first parents, and swept the stake—paradise—yea, swept it with the besom of destruction:—“Cast thyself down,” says he, “for it is written, [that all things shall work together for thy good, thy very falls not excepted,] he shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” The tempter (thanks be to Christ!) lost the game at that time, but he did not lose his card: and it is probable that he will play it round against you all only with some variation. Let me mention one among a thousand:—He promised our Lord that God’s “angels should bear him up in their hands, if he threw himself down;” and it is not unlikely that he will promise you greater things still. Nor should I wonder if he was bold enough to hint, that when you cast yourselves down, “God

himself shall bear you up in his HANDS, yea, in his ARMS of everlasting love.” O ye men of God, learn wisdom by the fall of Adam. O ye anointed sons of the Most High, learn watchfulness by the conduct of Christ. If he was afraid to “tempt the Lord his God,” will ye dare to do it? If he rejected, as poison, the hook of the absolute perseverance of the saints, though it was baited with Scripture, will ye swallow it down as if it were “honey out of the rock of ages?” No: “through faith in Christ, the Scriptures have made you wise unto salvation:” you will not only flee with all speed from evil, but from the very appearance of evil: and when you stand on the brink of a temptation, far from “entering into it,” under any pretense whatever, ye will leap back into the bosom of him who says, “Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation; for though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak.” I grant that, evangelically speaking, “the weakness of the flesh” is not sin; but yet the “deceitfulness of sin” creeps in at this door: and in this way not a few of God’s children, “after they had escaped the pollutions of the world, through the” sanctifying knowledge of Christ, under plausible pretenses, ‘have been entangled again therein and overcome.” Let their falls make you cautious. Ye have “put on the whole armour of God;” O keep it on, and use it “with all prayer,” that ye may to the last “stand complete in Christ, and be more than conquerors through him that has loved you.”

II. Remember that “every one who is perfect shall be as his Master.” Now if your Master was tempted and assaulted to the last; if to the last he watched and prayed, using all the means of grace himself, and enforcing the use of them upon others; if to the last he fought against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and did not “put off the harness” till he had put off the body; think not yourselves above him; but “go and do likewise.” If he did not regain paradise, without going through the most complete renunciation of all the good things of this world, and without meekly submitting to the severe stroke of his last enemy, death, be content to be “perfect as he was:” nor fancy that your flesh and blood can inherit the celestial kingdom of God, when the flesh and blood which Emmanuel himself assumed from a pure virgin, could not inherit it without passing under the cherub’s flaming sword: I mean, without going through the gates of death.

III. Ye are not complete in wisdom.

Perfect love does not imply perfect knowledge; but perfect humility, and perfect readiness to receive instruction. Remember, therefore, that if ever ye show that ye are above being instructed, even by a fisherman who teaches according to the Divine anointing, ye will show that ye are fallen from a perfection of humility into a perfection of pride.

IV. Do not confound angelical with Christian perfection.

Uninterrupted transports of praise, and ceaseless raptures of joy, do not belong to Christian, but to angelical perfection. Our feeble frame can bear but a few drops of that glorious cup. In general, that new wine is too strong for our old bottles; that power is too excellent for our earthen, cracked vessels; but weak as they are, they can bear a fulness of meekness, of resignation, of humility, and of that love which is willing to “obey unto death.” If God indulge you with ecstasies, and extraordinary revelations, be thankful for them: but be “not exalted above measure by them;” take care lest enthusiastic delusions mix themselves with them; and remember that your Christian perfection does not so much consist in “building a tabernacle” upon Mount Tabor, to rest and enjoy rare sights there, as in resolutely taking up the cross, and following Christ to the palace of a proud Caiaphas, to the judgment hall of an unjust Pilate, and to the top of an ignominious Calvary. Ye never read in your Bibles, “Let that glory be upon you which was also upon St. Stephen, when he looked up steadfastly into heaven, and said, Behold! I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” But ye have frequently read there, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled

himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

See him on that ignominious gibbet! He hangs—abandoned by his friends—surrounded by his foes—condemned by the rich—insulted by the poor! He hangs—”a worm and no man—a very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people!

All that see him laugh him to scorn! They shoot out their lips and shake their heads, saying, He trusted in God, that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, if he will have him!” There is none to help him: one of his apostles denies, another sells him; and the rest run away. “Many oxen are come about him: fat bulls of Bashan close him on every side; they gape upon him with their mouths as it were a raging lion; he is poured out like water; his heart in the midst of his body is like melting wax; his strength is dried up like a potsherd; his tongue cleaveth to his gums; he is going into the dust of death; many dogs are come about him; and the counsel of the wicked layeth siege against him; his hands and feet are pierced; you may tell all his bones; they stand staring and looking upon him; they part his garments among them, and cast lots for the only remains of his property, his plain, seamless vesture. Both suns, the visible and the invisible, seem eclipsed. No cheering beam of created light gilds his gloomy prospect. No smile of his heavenly Father supports his agonizing soul! No cordial, unless it be vinegar and gall, revives his sinking spirits! He has nothing left except his God.

But his God is enough for him. In his God he has all things. And though his soul is seized with sorrow, even unto death, yet it hangs more firmly upon his God by a naked faith, than his lacerated body does on the cross by the clenched nails.

The perfection of his love shines in all its Christian glory. He not only forgives his insulting foes and bloody persecutors, but, in the highest point of his passion, he forgets his own wants, and thirsts after their eternal happiness. Together with his blood, he pours out his soul for them; and, excusing them all, he says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” O ye adult sons of God, in this glass behold all with open face the glory of your Redeemer’s forgiving, praying love; and, as ye “behold it, be changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the loving Spirit of the Lord.”

V. God may call you to deep suffering.

This lesson is deep; but he may teach you one deeper still. By a strong sympathy with him in all his sufferings, he may call you to “know him every way crucified.” Stern justice thunders from heaven, “Awake, O sword, against the man who is my fellow!” The sword awakes; the sword goes through his soul; the flaming sword is quenched in his blood. But is one sinew of his perfect faith cut, one fibre of his perfect resignation injured by the astonishing blow? No; his God slays him, and yet he trusts in his God. By the noblest of all ventures, in the most dreadful of all storms, he meekly bows his head, and shelters his departing soul in the bosom of his God. “My God, my God!” says he, “though all my comforts have forsaken me, and all thy storms and waves go over me, yet ‘into thy hands I commend my spirit. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life, in thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand [where I shall soon sit] there are pleasures for evermore.’” What a pattern of perfect confidence! O ye perfect Christians, be ambitious to ascend to those amazing heights of Christ’s perfection: for hereunto are ye called; because Christ also suffered for us; leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps, who knew no sin, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” If this is your high calling on earth, rest not, O ye fathers in Christ, till your patient hope, and perfect confidence in God have got their last victory over your last enemy—the king of terrors.

“The ground of a thousand mistakes,” says Mr. Wesley, “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.”

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 any thing 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 any thing 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 but more of that love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham’s bosom.”

VI. Love is humble. “Be therefore clothed with humility,” says Mr. Wesley: “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 farther it. Be therefore open and frank when you are taxed with any thing: let it appear just as it is; and you will thereby not hinder, but adorn the Gospel.” Why should ye be more backward in acknowledging your failings, than in confessing that ye do not pretend to infallibility? St. Paul was perfect in the love which casts out fear, and therefore he boldly reprov'd the high priest: but when he had reprov'd him more sharply than the fifth commandment allows, he directly confessed his mistake, and set his seal to the importance of the duty, in which he had been inadvertently wanting. Then Paul said, “I knew not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.” St. John was perfect in the courteous, humble love which brings us down at the feet of all. His courtesy, his humility, and the dazzling glory which beamed forth from a divine messenger (whom he apprehended to be more than a creature) betrayed him into a fault contrary to that of St. Paul: but, far from concealing it, he openly confessed it, and published his confession for the edification of all the Churches:

“When I had heard and seen,” says he, “I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not, for I am thy fellow servant.” Christian perfection shines as much in the childlike simplicity with which the perfect readily acknowledge their faults, as it does in the manly steadiness with which they “resist unto blood, striving against sin.”

A sinner pardoned and sanctified must, in the very nature of things, be considered as a sinner

VII. If humble love makes us frankly confess our faults, much more does it incline us to own ourselves sinners, miserable sinners before that God whom we have so frequently offended. I need not remind you that your “bodies are dead because of sin.” You see, you feel it, and therefore, so long as you dwell in a prison of flesh and blood, which death, the avenger of sin, is to pull down; so long as your final justification, as pardoned and sanctified sinners, has not taken place: yea, so long as you break the law of paradisiacal perfection, under which you were originally placed, it is meet, right, and your bounden duty to consider yourselves as sinners, who, as transgressors of the law of innocence and the law of liberty, are guilty of death,—of eternal death. St. Paul did so after he was “come to Mount Sion, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” He still looked upon himself as the chief of sinners, because he had been a daring blasphemer of Christ, and a fierce. Persecutor of his people. “Christ,” says he, “came to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” The reason is plain. Matter of factis, and will be matter of fact to all eternity. According to

the doctrines of grace and justice, and before the throne of God's mercy and holiness, a sinner pardoned and sanctified must, in the very nature of things, be considered as a sinner; for if you consider him as a saint absolutely abstracted from the character of a sinner, how can he be a pardoned and sanctified sinner? To all eternity, therefore, but much more while death (the wages of sin) is at your heels, and while ye are going to "appear before the judgment seat of Christ, to receive" your final sentence of absolution or condemnation, it will become you to say with St. Paul, "We have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely [as sinners] by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ;" although we are justified JUDICIALLY as believers, through faith; as obedient believers, through the obedience of faith; and as perfect Christians, through Christian perfection bear the burdens of the weak.

VIII. Humble love "becomes all things [but sin] to all men," although it delights most in those who are most holy. Ye may, and ought to set your love of peculiar complacency upon God's dearest children; upon "those who excel in virtue;" because they more strongly reflect the image of "the God of love, the Holy One of Israel." But, if ye despise the weak, and are above lending them a helping hand, ye are fallen from Christian perfection, which teaches us to "bear one another's burdens," especially the burdens of the weak. Imitate then the tenderness and wisdom of the good Shepherd, who "carries the lambs in his bosom, gently leads the sheep which are big with young," feeds with milk those who cannot bear strong meat, and says to his imperfect disciples, "I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now."

Keep at the utmost distance from the shackles of a narrow, prejudiced, bigoted spirit.

IX. "Where the loving Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Keep therefore at the utmost distance from the shackles of a narrow, prejudiced, bigoted spirit.

The moment ye confine your love to the people who think just as you do, and your regard to the preachers who exactly suit your taste, you fall from perfection and turn bigots. "I entreat you," says Mr. Wesley, in his Plain Account, "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." On the contrary, as ye have time and ability, "do good to all men." Let your benevolence shine upon all: let your charity send its cherishing beams toward all, in proper degrees. So shall ye be perfect as your heavenly Father, "who makes his sun to shine upon all;" although he sends the brightest and warmest beams of his favour upon "the household of faith," and reserves his richest bounties for those who lay out their five talents to the best advantage.

Beware of desiring any thing but God.

X. Love, pure love, is satisfied with the Supreme Good—with GOD. "Beware then of desiring any thing but him. Now you desire nothing else. Every other desire is driven out: see that none enter in again. 'Keep thyself pure: let your eye remain single, and your whole body shall remain full of light.' Admit no desire of pleasing food, or any other pleasure of sense; no desire of pleasing the eye or imagination; no desire of money, of praise, or esteem; of happiness in any creature. You may bring these desires back; but ye need not; you may 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, is, All's alike to me, so I in my Lord may live and die!"

God will give you contradiction, opposition and crosses of various kinds.

XI. The best soldiers are sent upon the most difficult and dangerous expeditions: and as you are the best soldiers of Jesus Christ, ye will probably be called to drink deepest of his cup, and to carry the heaviest burdens. “Expect contradiction and opposition,” says the judicious divine, whom I have just quoted, “together with crosses of various kinds. Consider the words of St. Paul,

‘To you it is given in 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. I:23. 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 shouldst 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 hindrances to the work of God, or to your souls, 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 and thankfulness. Receive them from men with humility, meekness, yieldingness, gentleness, sweetness.”

Love can never do, nor suffer too much for its Divine object.

Love can never do, nor suffer too much for its Divine object. Be then ambitious, like St. Paul, to be made perfect in sufferings. I have already observed that the apostle, not satisfied to be a perfect Christian, would also be a perfect martyr; earnestly desiring to “know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.” Follow him, as he followed his suffering, crucified Lord. Your feet “are shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace;” run after them both, in the race of obedience, for the crown of martyrdom, if that crown is reserved for you. And if ye miss the crown of those who are martyrs in deed, ye shall, however, receive the reward of those who are martyrs in intention—the crown of righteousness and angelical perfection.

Never neglect doing the duty that God’s providence is now giving you.

XII. But do not so desire to follow Christ to the garden of Gethsemane, as to refuse following him now to the carpenter’s shop, if Providence now call you to it. Do not lose the present day by idly looking back at yesterday, or foolishly antedating the cares of tomorrow: but wisely use every hour; spending it as one who stands on the verge of time, on the border of eternity, and one who has his work cut out by a wise Providence from moment to moment. Never, therefore, neglect using the two talents you have now, and doing the duty which is now incumbent upon you. Should ye be tempted to it, under the plausible pretense of waiting for a great number of talents: remember that God doubles our talents in the way of duty, and that it is a maxim, advanced by Elisha Coles himself, “Use grace and have [more] grace.” Therefore, “to continual watchfulness and prayer, add continual employment,” says Mr. Wesley, “for grace flies a vacuum as well as nature; the devil fills whatever God does not fill.” “As by works faith is made perfect, so the completing or destroying of the work of faith, and enjoying the favour, or suffering the displeasure of God, greatly depend on every single act of obedience.” If you forget this, you will hardly do now whatsoever your hand findeth to do. Much less will you do it with all your might, for God, for eternity.

Humbly and discretely share what God has done for you.

XIII. Love is modest: it rather inclines to bashfulness and silence, than to talkative forwardness. “In a multitude of words there wanteth not sin;” be therefore “slow to speak;” nor cast your pearls before those who cannot distinguish them from pebbles. Nevertheless, when you are solemnly called upon to bear testimony to the truth, and to say “what great things God has done for you;” it would be cowardice, or false prudence, not to do it with

humility. Be then “always ready to give an answer to every man who [properly] asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness [without fluttering anxiety] and with fear” [with a reverential awe of God upon your minds,] 1 Pet. 3:15.

Perfect Christians are “burning and shining lights,” and our Lord intimates that, as “a candle is not lighted to be put under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may give light to all the house;” so God does not light the candle of perfect love to hide it in a corner, but to give light to all those who are within the reach of its brightness. If diamonds glitter, if stars shine, if flowers display their colours, and perfumes diffuse their fragrance, to the honour of the Father of lights, and Author of every good gift; if without self seeking they disclose his glory to the utmost of their power, why should “ye not go and do likewise?” Gold answers its most valuable end when it is brought to light, and made to circulate for charitable and pious uses; and not when it lies concealed in a miser’s strong box, or in the dark bosom of a mine. But when you lay out your spiritual gold for proper uses, beware of imitating the vanity of those coxcombs who, as often as they are about to pay for a trifle, pull out a handful of gold, merely to make a show of their wealth.

XIV. Love or “charity rejoiceth in the [display of an edifying] truth.” Fact is fact, all the world over. If you can say to the glory of God, that you are alive, and feel very well, when it is so; why should you not also testify to his honour, that you “live not, but that Christ liveth in you,” if you really find that this is your experience? Did not St. John say, “Our love is made perfect, because as he is, so are we in this world?” Did not St. Paul write, “The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk after the Spirit?” Did he not, with the same simplicity, aver, that although” he had nothing, and was sorrowful, yet he possessed all things, and was always rejoicing?”

With respect to the declaring or concealing what God has done for your soul, the line of your duty runs exactly between the proud forwardness of some stiff Pharisees, and the voluntary humility of some stiff mystics.

Hence it appears, that, with respect to the declaring or concealing what God has done for your soul, the line of your duty runs exactly between the proud forwardness of some stiff Pharisees, and the voluntary humility of some stiff mystics. The former vainly boast of more than they experience, and thus set up the cursed idol, SELF: the latter ungratefully hide “the wonderful works of God,” which the primitive Christians spoke of publicly in a variety of languages; and so refuse to exalt their gracious benefactor, CHRIST. The first error is undoubtedly more odious than the second; but what need is there of leaning to either? Would ye avoid them both? Let your tempers and lives always declare that perfect love is attainable in this life. And when you have a proper call to declare it with your lips and pens, do it without forwardness, to the glory of God; do it with simplicity, for the edification of your neighbour; do it with godly jealousy, lest ye should show the treasures of Divine grace in your hearts, with the same self complacence with which King Hezekiah showed his treasures, and the golden vessels of the temple to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon, remembering what a dreadful curse this piece of vanity pulled down upon him: “And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord, Behold the days come, that all that is in thine house shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord.” If God so severely punished Hezekiah’s pride, how properly does St. Peter charge believers to “give with fear an account of the grace which is in them!” and how careful should ye be to observe this important charge!

Keep at the utmost distance from vanity, honor God for all He does in and through you.

XV. If you will keep at the utmost distance from the vanity which proved so fatal to good King Hezekiah, follow an excellent direction of Mr. Wesley. When you have done any thing for God, or received any favour from him, retire, if not into your closet, into your

heart, 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? Grant therefore, O Lord, that I may never appropriate thy grace to myself, any more than the air appropriates to itself the light of the sun which withdraws it every day to restore it the next; there being nothing in the air that either appropriates his 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 that the root from which they spring is in thee, and not in me." "The true means to be filled anew with the riches of grace, is thus to strip ourselves of it; without this it is extremely difficult not to faint in the practice of good works." "And, therefore, that your good works may receive their last perfection, let them 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."

XVI. Would ye see this deep precept put in practice? Consider St. Paul. Already possessed of Christian perfection, he does good works from morning till night.

He warns every one night and day with tears. He carries the Gospel from east to west. Wherever he stops, he plants a Church at the hazard of his life. But instead of resting in his present perfection, and in the good works which spring from it, "he grows in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ;" unweariedly "following after, if that he may apprehend that [perfection] for which also he is apprehended of Christ Jesus,"—that celestial perfection, of which he got lively ideas when he was "caught up to the third heaven, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not possible for a man to utter." With what amazing ardour does he run his race of Christian perfection for the prize of that higher perfection! How does he forget the works of yesterday, when he lays himself out for God to-day! "Though dead, he yet speaketh;" nor can an address to perfect Christians be closed by a more proper speech than his. "Brethren," says he, "be followers of me—I count not myself to have apprehended [my evangelical perfection;] but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, [settling in none of my former experiences, resting in none of my good works,] and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the [celestial] prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."

Hymns for Perfect Believers

In the meantime you may sing the following hymn of the Rev. Mr. Charles Wesley, which is descriptive of the destruction of corrupt self will, and expressive of the absolute resignation which characterizes a perfect believer:—

To do, or not to do; to have,
Or not to have, I leave to thee:
To be or not to be, I leave:
Thy only will be done in me!
All my requests are lost in one,
"Father, thy only will be done!"

Suffice that for the season past,
Myself in things Divine I sought;
For comforts cried with eager haste,
And murmur'd that I found them not

I leave it now to thee alone,
Father, thy only will be done!

Thy gifts I clamour for no more,
Or selfishly thy grace require,
An evil heart to varnish o'er:
JESUS, the giver, I desire,
After the flesh no longer known:
Father, thy only will be done!

Welcome alike the crown or cross,
Trouble I cannot ask, nor peace,
Nor toil, nor rest, nor gain, nor loss,
Nor joy, nor grief, nor pain, nor ease,
Nor life, nor death; but ever groan,
“Father, thy only will be done!”

This hymn suits all the believers who are at the bottom of Mount Sion, and begin to join “the spirits of just men made perfect.” But when the triumphal chariot of perfect love gloriously carries you to the top of perfection’s hill; when you are raised far above the common heights of the perfect; when you are almost translated into glory, like Elijah, then you may sing another hymn of the same Christian poet...

Who in Jesus confide,
They are bold to outride
All the storms of affliction beneath:
With the prophet they soar
To that heavenly shore,
And outfly all the arrows of death.

By faith we are come
To our permanent home;
And by hope we the rapture improve:
By love we still rise,
And look down on the skies—
For the heaven of heavens is love!

Who on earth can conceive,
How happy we live
In the city of God, the great King?
What a concert of praise,
When our Jesus’s grace
The whole heavenly company sing!

What a rapturous song,
When the glorified throng
In the spirit of harmony join!

Join all the glad choirs,
Hearts, voices, and lyres,
And the burden is mercy Divine!

But when you cannot follow... to those rapturous heights of perfection, you need not give

up your shield. You may still rank among the perfect, if you can heartily join in this version of Psalm 131:—

Lord, thou dost the grace impart!
Poor in spirit, meek in heart,
I shall as my Master be,
Rooted in humility.

Now, dear Lord, that thee I know,
Nothing will I seek below,
Aim at nothing great or high,
Lowly both in heart and eye.

Simple, teachable, and mild,
Awed into a little child,
Quiet now without my food,
Wean'd from every creature good.

Hangs my new-born soul on thee,
Kept from all idolatry;
Nothing wants beneath, above,
Resting in thy perfect love.

That your earthen vessels may be filled with this love till they break, and you enjoy the Divine object of your faith without an interposing veil of gross flesh and blood, is the wish of one who sincerely praises God on your account, and ardently prays,—

“Make up thy Jewels, Lord, and show
The glorious, spotless Church below:
The fellowship of saints make known;
And O! My God, might I be on

O might my lot be cast with these,
The least of Jesus' witnesses!
O that my Lord would count me meet,
To wash his dear disciples' feet!

To wait upon his saints below!
On Gospel errands for them go!
Enjoy the grace to angels given;
And serve the royal heirs of heaven!”

The Works of John Fletcher, Vol 2, Last Check to Antinomianism, Sec 20, “An address to Perfect Christians” This historical work is found in full on the History page. It is an interesting read since it is made up of a long series of letters and Fletcher's replies that changed everything at the time.

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