

Article in Response to Troy Presbytery

by Charles Finney

The doctrine of Christian Perfection is a subtle combination of truth and error, and its advocates have not provided sufficient evidence to prove their claim.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Holiness"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the Troy Presbytery's stance on 'Christian Perfection,' arguing that their critique misrepresents the true issue at hand. He emphasizes that while the Presbytery acknowledges the possibility of higher holiness, they fail to recognize the attainability of complete sanctification in this life. Finney contends that the arguments against perfection are based on logical fallacies and misinterpretations of scripture, asserting that believers can indeed strive for and achieve a state of entire sanctification. He calls for a fair examination of the doctrine and urges the Presbytery to reconsider their position in light of biblical truths.

Transcript

TROY (N.Y.) PRESBYTERY.--The following editorial note is taken from the New-York Evangelist of July 10; the same number which contains the "Action of the Troy Presbytery," published below. It is a little remarkable, that the same paper from which the editor extracts our "wish" that he would copy Mr. Finney's letters, states, so conspicuously that it could not well be overlooked, that in the next number we should commence the publication of Dr. Woods' review. How then could he say, "It is hardly fair that we should be expected to publish both sides, while that paper confines itself entirely to one?"

"QUOTATIONS.-- The Oberlin Evangelist, referring to our notice of Mr. Finney's letters on Perfection, expresses a wish that we would copy them. We shall with pleasure publish any thing which comes from the pen of Mr. Finney, indicating a wish to return to correct views on this subject. We have a strong confidence that the logical mind of that distinguished preacher will not long retain its present position, and that his known frankness and humble disposition will lead him to declare his conviction of the error, as soon as he shall feel it. In the mean time, will not the Oberlin Evangelist insert the action of the Troy Presbytery? It is hardly fair that we should be expected to publish both sides while that paper confines itself entirely to one."

In the same connection is the following editorial note:

"TROY PRESBYTERY ON PERFECTION.--We cannot omit to call special attention to the able and convincing document which we publish on the first page, from this ecclesiastical body. The style is chaste, clear, and forcible. The real point at issue is stated with great precision. It gives us great pleasure to see the truths on which we have so strenuously insisted, vindicated by so much abler hands. We hope all our readers will give this important article a candid perusal. We consider that it finishes the question, and is unanswerable. Nobody can object to its manner and spirit."--New-York Evangelist.

Immediately on the receipt of the paper, Prof. Finney wrote to Bro. Johnson, the editor, asking him if he would publish a review of the Troy Presbytery article. In the same letter we wrote to him, stating that we should comply with his request, and publish the article itself, as soon as our columns were relieved from Dr. Woods' articles and Pres. Mahan's reply. We stated to him, that an article which "finishes the question, and is unanswerable," ought certainly, and should be given to our readers. Accordingly we give the article entire below. We copy from the New-York Observer, as the Evangelist's version contained many mistakes. Our readers can see whether it "finishes the question."

It should also be stated, that no letter has been received from Bro. Johnson, nor has he in his paper given any answer to the request to publish Mr. Finney's review. For this reason we publish that in connection with the article. It was prepared some six weeks since, for the New-York Evangelist, and is published as prepared for that paper. Is it too much to ask Bro. Johnson to insert the review, or to recall his statement, that the Oberlin Evangelist "confines itself entirely to one side?"

ACTION OF THE TROY PRESBYTERY.

[Copied from the N.Y. Observer.]

Messrs. Editors: The Troy Presbytery, at its recent session in Hoosic Falls, adopted the following statement and resolutions, in relation to the subject of "Christian Perfection."

STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE.

In the progress of human investigation it not unfrequently happens, that truth and error are so connected, that the work of distinction becomes as indispensable, as that of refutation. In this form error is always the most dangerous, not only because it is least likely to be perceived, but because, from its relation it is liable to share in that confidence, which the mind is accustomed to assign to admitted truth. In this form, also, it is often, relatively to our perceptions, the same as the truth; but the moment this unnatural union of repellant elements is sundered, both assume their distinctive and peculiar marks.

These prefatory thoughts find an ample illustration in the present state of opinion, in some sections of the church, relative to the doctrine of "Christian Perfection." That all the sentiments of this system are false, it would be difficult to prove; and as difficult to show their entire truth. The system is a subtle combination of truth and error. Any partial prevalence that it may have had, is easily explained on this principle. Where the truth is made most prominent, the whole assumes an imposing aspect; but an inversion of this error will as signally mark its defects. The work, therefore, of exposing the one without injury to the other, becomes a duty with every devout and honest inquirer. This is what your committee propose to undertake; and for this purpose it will be sufficient to answer the two following questions: 1. What is the controverted point in this system? 2. What is truth in relation to that point?

Let us take up these questions in the above order.

I. In the first place, What is the controverted point--what is the real issue?

That there is some issue, admits of no doubt. What is it? It is not, whether by the requirement of the moral law, or the injunction of the gospel, men are commanded to be perfectly holy; not whether men are under obligations to be thus holy; not whether, as moral agents, such a state is to them a possible state; not whether the gospel system is competent to secure actual perfection in holiness, if its entire resources be applied; not whether it is the duty and privilege of the church; to rise much higher in holy living, than it has ever yet done in our world. To join issue on any, or all of these points, is to make a false issue; it is to have the appearance of a question without its reality. Some, or all of these points, form a part of the scheme of "Christian Perfection;" but certainly they do not invest it with any peculiar character, for they involve no new sentiment differing from the ground taken by the great body of orthodox Christians in every age. It cannot be supposed that their advocacy has led to the various and fearful solitudes of learned and pious men in regard to the truth and tendency of this system. It must therefore be fraught with some other element. What is that element? The assertion that Christian men do attain in some cases during the present life, to a state of perfect holiness, excluding sin in every form, and that for an indefinite period they remain in this state. This position requires a moment's analysis, that it may neither suffer, nor gain, by an ambiguous use of terms.

1. A state of perfect holiness is the general thing affirmed under several relations--such holiness, as leaves not a solitary point of the divine requirements, either in kind or degree, that is not absolutely and completely met by the subject of this predicate--such holiness as involves entire conformity to God's law, and excludes all sin. Any thing short of this is not perfect holiness, even at the time when its possession is alleged; such a state would be one of imperfect or incomplete sanctification. In establishing the reality of this assumed attainment it is not allowable to abate, or decrease the purity and rigor of the Divine law--this would at once change the nature of both categories involved in this question, that is, sin and holiness. We must take the law as it is, and use it as the infallible standard of measurement.

2. This affirmation of a fact is made under several relations. The first is one of speciality, that is, that some Christians have reached this state. It is not contended that it is the state of all Christians, and by consequence, that none are Christians, but those who are perfectly sanctified. The second involves two relations of time, that is, that this attainment has been made in the present life, and that it has remained the permanent state for a period more or less indefinite, as a day, a week, a month, a year, or years. It is not denied that it is a state in which defection is possible; hence a Christian in this state may relapse into one of imperfect sanctification. Such a phenomenon would be apostacy from perfect to imperfect holiness, and might be succeeded by a return to the former state. These relapses and restorations may be of an indefinite number, for they admit of no necessary limitation, but the life of the individuals. They are not, however, to be confounded with that theory of moral action, which regards each as totally good, or totally bad, for they contemplate a longer period of time, than is assigned to the production of any given moral act.

Such is the real question at issue--such is the import of "Christian perfection," so far as it has any peculiarity. This is the question to be decided; to argue any other, is to lose sight of the real one--it is to meet an opponent where there is no debate, but entire agreement.

II. In the second place it is proposed to inquire, What is truth in relation to this point?

It is obvious that the burden of proof lies with him who affirms the truth of this sentiment. He must moreover direct his proof to the very thing affirmed, and not to something else. It is easy to carry a question by stating one proposition and proving another. If the proposition in debate be established, the discussion is at an end--the doctrine of "Christian Perfection" must be acknowledged.

1. It may be well therefore in the first place, to insist on our logical rights, and inquire--"has the proposition yet been proved?" This question involves a variety of subordinate ones, a brief allusion to which is all that can be made.

(a.) It has sometimes been urged, that because perfection in holiness is attainable in this life, therefore it is actually attained. How much validity this argument possesses, we shall be able to judge, if we state it in a syllogistic form. It would be thus: whatever is attainable in this life is actually attained in this life; a state of perfect holiness is attainable in this life; therefore, it is actually attained in this life. It must be confessed, that this syllogism has the attribute of logical conclusiveness; but ere we grant the truth of the inference, it may be well to decide the truth of the premises. Is the first or major premise true? If so, then every sinner who hears the gospel, must attain to actual salvation; then not some, but all believers must be perfectly sanctified in the present life: then every man actually reaches in the present life, the highest possible, intellectual and moral good of his being. It must be palpable to every discriminating mind, that this reason takes for granted a false premise; and although conformable to the rules of logic, it is liable to prove an untruth; it confounds the broad distinction between what is merely possible and what is actual.

(b.) Again, it is urged in defense of this system, that the gospel contains adequate provisions for the perfect sanctification of believers in this life, and therefore, some believers are thus sanctified. The logical formula will place this reasoning in its true light. It will stand thus: whatever is possible by the provisions of the gospel in this life, will take place in this life; the perfect sanctification of some believers in this life is possible by these provisions; therefore it will take place in this life. This is a most extraordinary method of reasoning. With some slight changes, it will prove, what the advocate of "Perfection" himself will be slow to admit. In the second or minor proposition, substitute the word "all" for "some," and then it proves, that all believers are perfectly sanctified in the present life. Again, in the same proposition, in place of some or all believers, insert the words, all men, then it proves, that all are perfectly sanctified in this life. There must, therefore, be some radical difficulty in the first or major proposition. What is that difficulty? It lies in a limitation which is not expressed, but which the moment it is seen, overturns the whole argument. The provisions of the gospel are sufficient for perfect sanctification at any time and place, if they be fully applied, and not otherwise. Their partial or full application contemplates the action of a rational and voluntary agent. Hence, while competent, they may fail of this effect, owing to the non-application, and not any fault in the provisions themselves. Before, therefore, this argument is entitled to the least weight, it must be proved that some believers, or all, fully appropriate these provisions in the present life. This being done, then all is clear. This has never yet been done; but it has been lately assumed, as if it were an undisputed truth. The main argument of President Mahan on "Perfection" is embarrassed with this very fallacy.

(c.) Again, in support of this scheme, much use has been made of the commands, promises, and prayers recorded in the Bible.

In relation to the commands, it will be sufficient to say, that, although the Bible does command a state of perfect holiness in the present life, it does not follow, that the command is in any instance fully obeyed on earth. Before we can arrive at this conclusion, we must adopt the following principle, that is, that whatever

is commanded in the Bible is actually performed by the subjects of that command. This would exclude the existence of all sin from the world; it would prove all men to be holy, without a single exception; it would establish the perfect sanctification, not of some, but all believers. It is certainly a most formidable engine of demonstration, too potent for an ordinary hand to wield.

So also the argument based on the promises of God involves fallacies of reasoning not less apparent. It is a glorious truth, that God has promised to all believers, a final victory over sin, which undoubtedly will be accomplished in some period of their history. But does it follow that because believers are to be perfectly sanctified at some time and somewhere, the present life will be the time and place of this perfect sanctification? Let a promise be adduced, if it can be, that fixes the period of this event to the present life. The divine promises, like the provisions of the gospel, are conditioned as to the degree of their results, by appropriative acts on the part of the believer. Hence the fallacy of the argument is apparent, in that it takes for granted that some believers in the present life do fully comply with all the conditions contemplated in the promises themselves. Without this assumption, it proves nothing. Besides, it is not to be forgotten, that the promises are general, addressed alike to all believers; and hence the rules of reasoning by which they are made to prove the perfect sanctification of some Christians in the present life, equally proves of all, in every period of time, past, present, and future. The argument from promises has no relation to, or limitation by, any specific time. But two alternatives seem to be possible: either the reasoning must be abandoned as not valid, or we must admit that every regenerated man is sinless, and that too, from the moment of his conversion.

Similar defects characterize the arguments drawn from the prayers which the Bible records, as well as those which it authorizes Christians to make. It is true, that Christ prayed for his disciples in language the most elevated--"Sanctify them by thy truth." The same may be said of the great Apostle, when he prayed: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly." We are directed to pray that God's will may be done on earth as in heaven; and in general authorized to pray for a perfect victory over all sin at every time. These are the facts. Now, what is the inference? The advocate of "Perfection" responds--that some believers are perfectly sanctified in the present life. These and kindred facts we offer, to prove this conclusion. Is there then between the two a certain connection? If we admit the one, must we logically admit the other? Facts speak a very different language. Were those included in the prayer of Christ, thus sanctified, and that from the moment of its utterance? Was the same true of all the Christians of Thessalonica? Has the will of God yet been done on earth as perfectly as in heaven? Has every believer, who has hungered and thirsted after righteousness, attained to sinless perfection in this life? Did not Paul most fervently pray for the salvation of Israel; and have not thousands of Jews died since in their sins? Did he not pray that the thorn in his flesh might be removed, and was it removed? The grand mistake in this reasoning is, that it fixes what the nature and terms of prayer do not fix; that is, the time when and the place where the sought blessing shall be obtained. Applied as evidence to any believer who claims to be wholly sanctified, it would prove his sanctification an hour, a week, month, or year before he was thus sanctified, as really as at the moment in which he professed to have made this high attainment. Contemplated in its most general form, it would prove, that every thing which is a proper object of prayer, and which will be obtained in some state of being, will actually be obtained in the present life. There is a vast abyss between the facts and conclusion, which the utmost ingenuity is unable to remove.

(d.) Finally, on this branch of the argument, we remark that a variety of proof-texts has been summoned to the service of this system. A critical examination of all these is inconsistent with the limits of the present statement. It will be sufficient to advert to the false principles of interpretation to which they have been

subject. These are three in number:

(1.) The first consists in a misapplication of passages; as when Paul says, "I take you to record this day, that I am free from the blood of all men"--or when Zacharias and Elizabeth are spoken of as "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

(2.) The second consists in regarding certain terms as proofs of perfection in holiness, which are merely distinctive of Christian character, as contrasted with the state of the unregenerate. These are such words as "holy, saints, sanctified, blameless, just, righteous, perfect, entire, &c." That these and kindred terms are designed to be characteristic, and not descriptive of the degrees of holiness, is proved by the fact that they are indiscriminately appropriated to all Christians, and that in many cases they are applied, when the context absolutely charges sin upon their subjects.

(3.) The third false principle consists in interpreting certain passages in an absolute and unrestricted sense, where evidently they are designed to have only a qualified sense. This error may perhaps be best illustrated by a single passage. Take that remarkable saying of the Apostle John: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Stronger language, or a better proof-text cannot well be conceived. In an unrestricted sense, it affirms not only that every regenerated man is sinless, but an impossibility that he should be otherwise; it dislodges all sin and moral agency from a converted mind, at a single blow. What will the advocate of Perfection do with this passage? Will he acknowledge either or both of these consequences? This can hardly be supposed. How then will he escape them? There is but one way for him--this lies in placing a restricted and qualified sense upon the passage, and in a moment all is plain and harmonious. But why subject so plain a passage to the law of interpretation, and deny it to others much less obvious and decisive? No reason can be perceived but the one which grows out of the necessities of a favorite theory. Indeed, there is logically no stopping place to this system, short of the bold affirmation, that all believers are perfectly sinless from the moment of conversion. Every argument in its last analysis must terminate in this extraordinary result. To arrest the inference at any other point, is to betray a logical inconsistency. Are the advocates of "Perfection" prepared for this bold and unbiblical doctrine? If not, it is time they had reviewed their arguments and abandoned principles fraught with such a conclusion. Their weapons of defence are not less destructive than constructional in their character.

2. Having tried the merits of the positive testimony on this subject, we remark in the second place, that in the present state of the question, the position is absolutely incapable of proof. When a man affirms his own sinless perfection for any given period, as a day, a week, or a year, he affirms his own infallible knowledge on two points; that is, that at the present moment he can recall every moral exercise during that period, every thought, feeling, desire, purpose, and that he does infallibly judge of the moral character of each exercise. Will any pretend to this knowledge? To do so, manifests the last degree of presumption, as well as ignorance, both of facts, and the truths of mental science. Every effort to recall the whole of our mental exercises for a single day, must always be a failure; it can only be partially successful. This shows how little weight is due to the testimony of a man who asserts his own perfection; he may be honest but this is no proof of the truth of his statement. If a case of "perfection" were permitted to be real, still it is impossible in the present state of our faculties, to find it and predicate certain knowledge of it. The evidences of "Christian Perfection," are then not only inconclusive, but its main proposition is absolutely unknowable to us.

3. In the third place we remark, that this proposition is disproven by an amount of evidence that ought to be considered conclusive. To secure the greatest brevity of statement, this evidence may be condensed into the following series of propositions: The Bible records defects in the characters of the most eminent saints, whose history it gives; it speaks in moderate terms of the attainments of the pious, when put in contrast with those of Christ, who hence is an exception to our race; it points the believer to the heavenly world, as the consummation of his hopes, and exemption from all sin and sorrow; it describes the work of grace as going forward by successive and progressive stages, and fixes no limit to these stages antecedent to the period of death; it speaks of those as being self-deceived, who deny their own sinfulness--"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;" it represents Christians here as in an imperfect state--"For in many things we offend all" [the word "all" in the original, qualifies "we," and not "things";] it exhorts Christians to lowly and humble views of their own attainments; it declares Christians in the present life to be under a process of providential discipline, the object of which is to make them more fully partakers of God's holiness; the most eminent saints that have lived, since the days of the Apostles, have uniformly expressed a painful consciousness of remaining sin, and spoken of their attainments, in language far different from that of self confidence; the higher Christians have risen in holiness, the more deeply have they been humbled with their own sinful imperfections, owing to a clearer discernment, both of God and themselves. These propositions might, each of them be amplified into as many arguments. Taken together, they seem conclusively to set aside the pretensions of any class of men, who claim for themselves sinless perfection in the present life. We cannot but think, that, however sincere such persons may be, they labor under a most dangerous delusion. With them we have no controversy; our controversy is with their system. It appears to us in no other light than that of a system, totally disconnected with its proposed evidence, demonstrably unknowable, by the present state of our faculties, and in direct contravention to an amount of proof, biblical and experimental, that must forever discredit its claims.

RESOLUTIONS.

1. Resolved, That in the judgment of this Presbytery, the doctrine of "Christian Perfection" in this life, is not only false, but calculated in its tendencies, to engender self-righteousness, disorder, deception, censoriousness, and fanaticism.
2. Resolved, That it is contrary to the Faith, adopted by the Presbyterian church in the United States. See chap. 12, sec. 2.
3. Resolved, That it is the duty of all orthodox ministers to acquaint themselves with this error, and at such times and in such measures, as may seem to them most expedient, to instruct their people on this point.
4. Resolved, That we view with regret and sorrow, the ground taken on this subject by the Theological Professors at Oberlin.
5. Resolved, That we hail with joy every improvement in human opinion that conforms to the Bible, and promises in its practical tendency, to decrease the sins, or increase the moral purity of the church.
6. Resolved, That the above statement and resolutions be signed by the Moderator and Stated Clerk, and published in the New York Evangelist, New York Observer, the Christian Observer, and the Presbyterian.

Fayette Shipherd requested that his dissent from the above report of the Committee be appended to it, entered on the records of the Presbytery, and published with it. All the other members present voted in the

affirmative.

THOMAS J. HASWELL, Moderator.

N. S. S. BEMAN, Stated Clerk.

"Troy, June 20, 1841.

TO THE TROY (N. Y.) PRESBYTERY.

Dear Brethren:

Permit me to make a few remarks upon your report on the subject of Christian Perfection. I have read with attention most that has come to hand upon the subject of your report, and have thought it of little or no use to reply, until some opponent of our views should throw his objections into a more tangible form than any one had hitherto done. Your report embraces, in a condensed form, almost all that has been said in opposition to our views. For this reason, as well as for the reason that I have a high respect and fervent love for those of your number with whom I am acquainted, I beg leave to be heard in reply.

What I have said was prepared for and should have been published in the New-York Evangelist. I wrote to the editor, making the request to be heard through his columns; to which he made no reply. I still hope he will not fail to do me, yourselves, and the church the justice, to give this article a place in his columns. The truth demands it. For no other reason, I am sure, than to subserve the interests of truth, would I say one word. Without further preface. I quote your statement of the real point at issue. You say:

"That there is some issue, admits of no doubt. What is it? It is not, whether by the requirements of the moral law, or the injunctions of the gospel, men are commanded to be perfectly holy; not whether men are under obligations to be thus holy; not whether as moral agents, such a state is to them a possible state; not whether the gospel system is competent to secure actual perfection in holiness, if its entire resources be applied; not whether it is the duty and privilege of the church to rise much higher in holy living, than it has ever yet done in this world. To join issue on any, or all of these points, is to make a false issue; it is to have the appearance of a question without its reality. Some, or all of these points, form a part of the scheme of "Christian Perfection;" but certainly they do not invest it with any peculiar character, for they involve no new sentiment differing from the ground taken by the great body of orthodox Christians in every age. It cannot be supposed that their advocacy has led to the various and fearful solitudes of learned and pious men in regard to the truth and tendency of this system. It must therefore be fraught with some other element. What is that element? The assertion that Christian men do obtain in some cases, during the present life, to a state of perfect holiness, excluding sin in every form, and that for an indefinite period may remain in this state."

Upon this I remark:

I. You have made a false issue. Proof:

1. What our position is. It is, and always has been, that entire sanctification is attainable in this life, in such a sense as to render its attainment a rational object of pursuit, with the expectation of attaining it.

This proposition, it would seem, you admit; but on account of "the various and fearful solitudes of learned and pious men," you take it for granted, there must be a heresy somewhere, and accordingly proceed to

take issue with us, upon one of the arguments we have used in support of our proposition; and reply to our other arguments, as if they had been adduced by us in support of the proposition, upon which you have erroneously made up the issue.

2. Some of the arguments by which we have attempted to establish this proposition are--

(1.) That men are naturally able to obey all the commandments of God.

(2.) That this obedience is unqualifiedly demanded of men in this life.

(3.) That the gospel proffers sufficient grace to secure their entire sanctification in this life; and that nothing is wanting but "appropriative acts," on the part of Christians, to realize this result.

(4.) That the entire sanctification of Christians in this life was made the subject of prayer by inspired men, and also that Christ taught his disciples to pray for it.

(5.) That this state has actually been attained.

These are among our arguments: and as they are the only ones to which you have professed to reply, I will mention no others.

3. I will put our arguments in the form of syllogisms in their order.

First Argument. Whatever is attainable in this life, on the ground of natural ability, may be aimed at with a rational hope of success. A state of entire sanctification in this life is attainable on the ground of natural ability. Therefore, it may be aimed at with a rational hope of success.

Again. Whatever men are naturally able to do in this life, they may aim at doing with a rational hope of success. Men are naturally able to do all their duty, which is to be entirely sanctified. Therefore, they may aim at entire sanctification with a rational hope of being entirely sanctified.

You admit both the major and minor premises, in these syllogisms. Can the conclusion be avoided?

Second Argument. Whatever God commands to be done by men in this life, may be done by them. God commands men to be entirely holy in this life. Therefore, a state of entire holiness in this life is possible. You admit both the major and minor premises. Can the conclusion be avoided?

Third Argument. Whatever attainment the gospel proffers sufficient grace to secure in this life, may be made. The gospel proffers sufficient grace, should any one "apply its entire resources," to secure a state of entire sanctification in this life. Therefore, this state may be secured, or this attainment may be made. Here again, you admit both premises. Can the conclusion be denied?

Fourth Argument. Whatever was made the subject of prayer by the Spirit of inspiration may be granted. The entire sanctification of the saints in this life was prayed for by the Spirit of inspiration. Therefore, Christians may aim at and pray for this state, with the rational expectation of being entirely sanctified in this life.

Again. What Christ has made it the universal duty of the church to pray for, may be granted. He has made it the duty of all Christians to pray for the entire sanctification of the saints in this life. Therefore, these petitions may be granted, and Christians may expect to be entirely sanctified in this life. Both premises in

these syllogisms are admitted. Are not the conclusions inevitable?

Fifth Argument. Whatever men have done, men can do. Men have been entirely sanctified in this life. Therefore, they may be so sanctified. The minor premise, in this syllogism, you deny; and, strange to tell, you affirm, over and over again, that this one argument of ours is the main proposition to be established! And you reply to all our other arguments in support of the main proposition as if they had been adduced to prove this! Now it would have been equally fair, and just as much in point, so far as our argument in support of the main proposition is concerned, if you had made an issue with us on any other argument adduced by us in support of that proposition--insisted that that was the main question--and replied to our arguments as if they had been adduced in support of that.

4. You misrepresent our logic. Assuming that the fact of actual attainment is the main proposition which we are laboring to establish, and in support of which we adduce the fact of actual attainment only as an argument, you misrepresent our reasoning. To put this matter in the clearest light, I will place, side by side, the syllogisms which you put in our mouths, and our own syllogisms.

YOUR SYLLOGISMS IMPUTED TO US.

OUR OWN SYLLOGISMS.

1. "Whatever is attainable in this life is actually attained in this life. A state of perfect holiness is attainable in this life. Therefore it is actually attained."
2. "Whatever is possible, by the provisions of the gospel in this life, will take place in this life. The perfect sanctification of some believers is possible by those provisions. Therefore, it will actually take place in this life."
3. "In relation to the commands, it will be sufficient to say, that although the Bible does command a state of perfect holiness in the present life, it does not follow that the command is in any instance fully obeyed on earth. Before we can arrive at this conclusion, we must adopt the following principle; that is, that whatever is commanded in the Bible is actually performed by the subjects of that command."

The syllogism would stand thus:

Whatever is commanded by God, is actually performed. Perfect holiness is commanded. Therefore, all men are perfectly holy.

1. Whatever is attainable in this life may be aimed at, with the rational hope of attaining it. Entire sanctification is attainable in this life. Therefore, the attainment of this state may be aimed at with a rational hope of success.
2. Whatever attainment is possible, by the provisions of the gospel in this life, may be aimed at by those under the gospel, with a rational hope of attaining it. The perfect sanctification of believers is possible by these provisions. Therefore believers may aim at making this attainment, with a rational hope of success.
3. Whatever the Bible commands to be done in this life may be done. The Bible commands Christians to be perfect in this life. Therefore, they may be perfect in this life.

Now, brethren, I ask if you will deny the major premise, the minor premise, or the conclusion, in either of the above syllogisms? You cannot deny either. I beseech you, then, to consider what injustice you have

done to yourselves, to us, your brethren, and to the cause of truth, by such an evasion and misrepresentation of our logic.

5. What your logic must be to meet our argument as we have stated it. If you would state, in syllogistic form, an argument that shall meet and set aside our reasoning, it must stand thus: That a thing is attainable in this life, is no proof that it can be attained. This must be assumed as a major premise, by any who would answer our logic. But who does not see, that this amounts to a denial of an identical proposition? The same as to say--that a thing being attainable in this life, is no proof that it is attainable in this life. But to waive this consideration, and state the argument as it must stand in syllogistic form, to meet and refute our logic, it must stand thus: 'That a thing is attainable in this life is no proof that it can be attained. Entire sanctification is attainable in this life. Therefore, its attainability is no proof that it can be attained.' Who does not see, that the major premise is false, and that therefore the conclusion is? Now observe, we admit, that its attainability is no proof that it will be attained. But we insist, that its attainability is proof that the attainment may be aimed at, with a rational hope of success.

Again, would you meet our second argument with a syllogism, it must stand thus: 'That God commands a state of entire sanctification in this life, is no proof that such a state is attainable in this life. God does command a state of entire sanctification in this life. Therefore, the command is no proof that such a state is attainable.' Brethren, this argument would have the attribute of logical conclusiveness, if the major premise was not false.

The very same course must be pursued by you, would you meet and set aside our reasoning in respect to our other arguments. This is so manifest, that I need not state the syllogisms.

II. In respect to our inference in favor of the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, drawn from the prayers of inspiration, and the fact that all Christians are commanded to pray for the entire sanctification of believers in this life, you say as follows:

"Similar defects characterize the arguments drawn from the prayers which the Bible records, as well as those which it authorizes Christians to make. It is true, that Christ prayed for his disciples in language the most elevated: 'Sanctify them by thy truth.' The same may be said of the great Apostle, when he prayed: 'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly.' We are directed to pray that God's will may be done on earth as in heaven; and in general authorized to pray for a perfect victory over all sin at every time. These are the facts. Now, what is the inference? The advocate of 'Perfection' responds--that some believers are perfectly sanctified in the present life. These and kindred facts we offer, to prove this conclusion. Is there then between the two a certain connection? If we admit the one must we logically admit the other? Facts speak a very different language. Were those included in the prayer of Christ, thus sanctified, and that from the moment of its utterance? Was the same true of all the Christians of Thessalonica? Has the will of God yet been done on earth as perfectly as in heaven? Has every believer, who has hungered and thirsted after righteousness, attained to sinless perfection in this life? Did not Paul most fervently pray for the salvation of Israel; and have not thousands of Jews since died in their sins? Did he not pray that the thorn in his flesh might be removed, and was it removed? The grand mistake in this reasoning is, that it fixes what the nature and terms of prayer do not fix; that is, the time when and the place where, the sought blessing shall be obtained."

On this I remark:

This appears to me a most remarkable paragraph. Here you quote a part of 1 Thess. 5: 23. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly," and then stop, assuming that nothing can be affirmed in respect to the time when the Apostle prayed that this blessing might be granted. Now, beloved brethren, why did you not quote the whole passage? When it would have been most manifest, that the Apostle actually prayed for this blessing to be granted in this life? I will quote it and see if this is not so: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

As the sanctification of the "body" as well as the "soul and spirit," is prayed for, and that the whole being may be "preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," how can you say as you do, "The grand mistake in this reasoning is, that it fixes what the nature and the terms of prayer do not fix, that is, the time when and place where, the sought blessing shall be obtained?" Does not this prayer contemplate the bestowment of this blessing in this life? Who can reasonably deny it? Again: You say, "We are directed to pray that God's will may be done on earth as in heaven, and in general authorized to pray for a victory over all sin at every time." Now how can you make this admission, and still add the assertion just quoted, that "prayer does not fix the time when this blessing is to be expected?" Certainly, the time when is, in this prayer, limited to this life. In order to meet our argument, based upon the prayer of the Apostles, and the injunction of Christ, to pray for the entire sanctification of believers in this life, you must argue as follows. Here again I put the syllogisms into separate columns, that you may see them in contrast.

YOUR REASONING PUT IN SYLLOGISTIC FORM.

OUR SYLLOGISMS.

That the Spirit of inspiration prayed for the entire sanctification of believers in this life, is no evidence that an answer to this prayer may be expected by saints in this life. Paul, under the spirit of inspiration, did pray for the entire sanctification of the saints in this life. Therefore, this prayer is no evidence, that saints may aim at being entirely sanctified in this life, with a rational hope of being so sanctified.

Again. That Christ has made it the universal duty of saints to pray for the entire sanctification of Christians in this life, is no evidence that they may offer this prayer, with a rational expectation of being answered. Christ has made it the universal duty of Christians to pray for entire sanctification in this life.--Therefore, this is no evidence that they may offer this prayer, with the rational hope of being heard and answered.

Whatever state was prayed for by the Spirit of inspiration, Christians may aim at with a rational hope of attaining it. The Spirit of inspiration prayed for the entire sanctification of saints in this life. Therefore, Christians may aim at this attainment with the expectation of success.

Again. Whatever state Christians are required to pray for in this life, they may pray for with the expectation of being heard and answered. Christians are required to pray for a state of entire sanctification in this life. Therefore, they may pray for this attainment with the expectation of being heard and answered in this life.

Now brethren, whose logic is the most conclusive?

III. In one paragraph of your report you admit and deny, at the same breath, that entire sanctification is promised in this life. You say--

"It is a glorious truth, that God has promised to all believers, a final victory over sin, which undoubtedly will be accomplished in some period of their history. But does it follow, that because believers are to be

perfectly sanctified at sometime and somewhere, the present life will be the time and place of this perfect sanctification? Let a promise be adduced, if it can be, that fixes the period of this event to the present life. The divine promises, like the provisions of the gospel, are conditioned as to the degree of their results, by appropriative acts on the part of the believer. Hence, the fallacy of the argument is apparent, in that it takes for granted that some believers in the present life do fully comply with all the conditions contemplated in the promises themselves. Without this assumption it proves nothing."

In the first part of this paragraph, you deny that God, any where in the Bible, promises a state of entire sanctification in this life, and request that one promise be adduced, that fixes the period of this event to the present life. And then you seem immediately to admit that the blessing is promised, on the condition of "appropriative acts on the part of the believer." This you must intend to admit, inasmuch as you have before admitted, that "should a believer avail himself of all the resources of the gospel," he might make this attainment. Certainly you will not pretend to have any authority for such an admission, unless the promises, when fairly interpreted, do proffer such a state to Christians, upon condition of 'appropriative acts.' How shall we understand such a denial and admission at the same breath as this paragraph contains?

But you request that one promise may be adduced that fixes the period of entire sanctification to the present life. I might quote many. But as you ask for only one, I will quote one, and the one, a part of which you have quoted--1 Thess. 2: 23, 24: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

That this prayer and promise relate to this life, I think cannot consistently be questioned. The prayer is, that the "body," as well as, the "spirit and soul," be wholly sanctified, and be "preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Then the promise--"Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." Does not this relate to this life?

IV. You deny that Christians can know that they are in a state of entire sanctification.

You say: "If a case of 'Perfection' were admitted to be real, still it is impossible, in the present state of our faculties, to find it and predicate certain knowledge of it."

Here, assuming as you do that the main proposition respects the fact of actual attainment, you insist that this fact, did such cases exist, would be entirely unsusceptible of proof. Indeed! Does God command man to do what he cannot know that he does, even if he does it? This would be passing strange. You admit that God requires men to be entirely sanctified--condemns them if they are not--but yet deny that they could know that they obeyed, even if they did. This would, indeed, be a singular requirement--to command a man on pain of eternal death, to do that which he could not by any possibility know that he did, even if he did it. This denial of ability to know, whether we are in a state of entire sanctification, is a total denial of the doctrine of natural ability as I presume it is held by every member of your body. Do not every one of you, my brethren, hold that natural ability to obey a command is the sine qua non of moral obligation to obey it? Do you not hold that a man cannot be under a moral obligation to do what he cannot understand--to use a power which he does not know himself to possess--to employ his faculties in any kind or degree of service which he cannot know to be his duty? Now if a man does all that he is able to know himself capable of doing, is he under a moral obligation to do any thing more? And if he is unable to know that he falls short of his duty, does he fall short of it? Brethren, will you give us light upon this subject? Do you,--will you

seriously maintain, that a man is naturally unable to know whether he obeys the commands of God, and yet, that he is condemned, and liable to be damned, for coming short, when he could not know that he came short? Brethren, will you maintain this?

V. Your answer to our proof-texts is a very summary one. It consists simply in affirming that we have misapplied them--that we regard certain terms as proof of perfection, which are only distinctive of Christian character--and, that we interpret them in an absolute and unrestricted sense--without so much as naming one of them. You have, indeed, quoted one passage, and affirmed, that a 'better proof-text cannot well be conceived.' But we have never regarded nor quoted it as a proof-text at all. Your disposal of our proof-texts is really a short-hand method of getting over them. But there was one difficulty in the way of your quoting and answering them, which was--that had you quoted them, it would have appeared to every body, that they were used by us to prove another proposition than that which you were controverting.

VI. Our arguments in support of the fact of attainment you have passed over, almost in silence. At the same time, you have taken our arguments, adduced to prove the practical attainability, and replied to them as if adduced to prove the fact of actual attainment. Brethren, we think we have reason to feel grieved with this.

VII. You find yourselves obliged to be exceedingly indefinite in regard to the measure of attainment which Christians may rationally hope to make in this life. You say: "The question is not, whether it is the duty and privilege of the church to rise much higher in holy living than it has ever yet done in this world." Now, brethren, I ask you, how much higher attainments Christians may make in this world than they have ever yet made? This is, with us, and must be with the church, a question of all absorbing interest. Do you answer to this question, that Christians may make indefinitely higher attainments than they have yet made? I ask again, on what authority is this affirmation made? Do you argue it from the fact, that the gospel has promised sufficient grace to Christians, on condition of "appropriative acts," to secure in them a much higher state of holiness than has yet been attained? But if Christians may rationally hope to attain a higher state of holiness than has ever yet been attained, by appropriating to themselves promises which proffer entire sanctification in this life, why may they not rationally aim at attaining all that the gospel has promised to them? Brethren, will you answer this question?

Appended to your report is a resolution, expressing "regret and sorrow, at the ground taken on this subject, by the Theological Professors at Oberlin." Will you permit us to reciprocate your "regret and sorrow," and express our deep grief that the Presbytery of Troy have taken such ground upon this subject--so misapprehended, and of course so misrepresented the arguments of their brethren?

I must close this communication with a few

REMARKS.

1. We admit, you had a right to take issue with us on the question of actual attainment, if you were dissatisfied with our course of argument on that position. But you had no right to represent our argument in support of another position, as you have done. You had no right to represent our argument, in support of the practical attainability, as having been adduced in support of the fact of actual attainment. This you have done, and by so doing, you have done your brethren and the cause of truth great injustice.

2. To what I have said in this article, you may reply, that you never denied the practical attainability of a state of entire sanctification, and that, therefore, on that question, you have no controversy with us. Why,

then, my brethren, did you not admit, that in our main position you agree with us, and that you only deny one of the arguments by which we attempted to support that position? This, as Christian men, you were bound to do. But instead of this, you have said nothing about admitting our main position; but made the transfer of our arguments from the support of one proposition to the support of the one upon which you take issue, and thus represent our logic as absurd and ridiculous.

We shall be happy to discuss the question of actual attainment with our brethren, when they ingenuously admit that the main position we have taken, (namely, the practical attainability of a state of entire sanctification in this life,) is a truth of the Bible.

3. Permit me to ask, my brethren, what opponent, or course of argument, might not be rendered ridiculous, by the course you have taken--that is, by stating another proposition than that intended to be supported, and then representing the whole course of argument as intended to support the substituted proposition?

4. Should you say, that your report was not intended as a reply to our course of argument, I ask, who has ever argued in support of this doctrine in the manner you represent? Who ever inferred, that, because men have natural power to obey God, that, therefore they do obey Him? I have read, with attention, almost every thing that has come to hand upon this subject, and I never saw or heard of any such course of argumentation as that to which you profess to reply.

5. Will your Presbytery, in reply to what I have written, excuse themselves, by saying, that their treatment of our argument was an oversight--that they had supposed us to reason in the way they have represented us as reasoning? To this I must reply, that you were bound to understand our argument, before you replied to it, in your public, or in any other capacity. And especially were you under this obligation, inasmuch as I had twice written to a leading member of your body, beseeching him, in the bowels of Christian love, to examine this subject, and to be sure he did it in a spiritual frame of mind, before he committed himself at all upon the question.

6. Will you, dear brethren, permit me to ask, how long the opposers of the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life expect to retain the confidence of the church, and prevent their understanding and believing this doctrine, by such a course of procedure as this? You are, no doubt, aware, that your course is not a novel one; but that it has been substantially pursued by several other opposers of this doctrine.

And now, beloved brethren in the Lord, do not understand me as entering into a war of words with you, or as entertaining the least unkind feeling in my heart towards you. I most cheerfully leave to your deliberate and prayerful consideration, the remarks I have freely made upon your report. I cannot, however, refrain from saying, that when I saw the name of one whom I greatly loved, and with whom I had often taken sweet counsel, attached to that report, my heart felt a kind of spontaneous gushing, and I almost involuntarily exclaimed, "Et tu, Brute!"

Yours in the bonds of Christian love,

C. G. FINNEY.

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