

Sanctification--No. 7

by Charles Finney

The doctrine of entire sanctification is a biblical teaching that emphasizes the work of God in the believer's life, resulting in a life of perfect obedience to God.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Topics: "Holiness", "Sanctification"

Description

In his sermon 'Sanctification--No. 7', Charles Finney addresses the doctrine of entire sanctification, emphasizing that it is attainable in this life and does not lead to the errors of modern perfectionism. He argues against common objections, asserting that the Wesleyan Methodists have upheld this doctrine without falling into such errors, and that true sanctification leads to humility rather than pride. Finney highlights the importance of understanding the moral law and the role of consciousness in recognizing one's sanctified state, asserting that entire sanctification is a present reality for believers who fully consecrate themselves to God.

Transcript

TEXT.--1. Thess. 5:23, 24: And 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.

There are many objections to the doctrine of entire sanctification, besides those derived from the passages of scripture I have considered. Some of these objections, are doubtless honestly felt, and deserve to be considered. I will then proceed to notice such of them as now occur to my mind.

6. It is objected that the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, tends to the errors of modern perfectionism. This objection has been urged by some good men, and, I doubt not, honestly urged. But still I cannot believe that they have duly considered the matter. It seems to me that one fact will set aside this objection. It is well known that the Wesleyan Methodists have, as a denomination, from the earliest period of their history, maintained this doctrine in all its length and breadth. Now if such is the tendency of the doctrine, it is passing strange that this tendency has never developed itself in that denomination. So far as I can learn, the Methodists have been perfectly exempt from the errors held by modern perfectionists. Perfectionists, as a body, and I believe with very few exceptions, have arisen out of those denominations that deny the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life.

Now the reason of this is obvious to my mind. When professors of religion, who have been all their life subject to bondage, begin to inquire earnestly for deliverance from their sins, they have found neither sympathy nor instruction, in regard to the prospect of getting rid of them in this life. Then they have gone to the Bible, and there found, in almost every part of it, Christ presented as a Savior from their sins. But when they proclaim this truth, they are at once treated as heretics and fanatics by their brethren, until, being overcome of evil, they fall into censoriousness; and finding the Church so decidedly and utterly wrong, in opposition to this one great important truth, they lose confidence in their ministers and the Church, and, being influenced by a wrong spirit, Satan takes the advantage of them, and drives them to the extreme of error and delusion. This I believe to be the true history of many of the most pious members of the Calvinistic churches. On the contrary, Methodists are very much secured against these errors. They are taught that Jesus Christ is a Savior from all sin in this world. And when they inquire for deliverance, they are pointed to Jesus Christ, as a present and all-sufficient Redeemer. Finding sympathy and instruction, on this great and agonizing point, their confidence in their ministers and their brethren, remains and they walk quietly with them.

And here let me say, that it is my full conviction, that there are but two ways in which ministers of the present day can prevent members of their churches from becoming perfectionists. One is, to suffer them to live so far from God, that they will not inquire after holiness of heart; and the other is, most fully to inculcate the glorious doctrine, that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and that it is the high privilege and the duty of Christians, to live in a state of entire consecration to God.

It seems to me impossible that the tendency of this doctrine should be to the peculiar errors of the modern perfectionists, and yet not an instance occur among all the Methodist ministers, or the thousands of their members, for one hundred years.

I can say, from my own experience, that since I have understood and fully taught the doctrine as I now hold it, I see no tendency among those who listen to my instructions to these errors, while in churches not far distant, where the doctrine which we inculcate here is opposed, there seems to be a constant tendency, among their most pious people to Antinomian perfectionism. How can this be accounted for on any other principle than the one above stated? I can truly say that those persons here, who have been the first to lay hold of the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, and who give the highest evidence of enjoying this blessing, have been at the farthest remove from the errors of the modern perfectionists. I might state a great many facts upon this subject, but for the sake of brevity I omit them.

But aside from the facts, what is the foundation of all the errors of the modern perfectionists? Every one who has examined them knows that they may be summed up in this, the abrogation of the moral law. And now I would humbly inquire, what possible tendency can there be to their errors, if the moral law be preserved in the system of truth? In these days a man is culpably ignorant of that class of people, who does not know that the 'head and front of their offending,' and falling, is the setting aside the law of God. The setting aside the Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, proceeds upon the same foundation, and manifestly grows out of the abrogation of the law of God. But retain the law of God, as the Methodists have done, and as other denominations have done, who from the days of the Reformation have maintained this same doctrine, and there is certainly no tendency to Antinomian perfectionism.

I have many things to say upon the tendency of this doctrine, but at present this must suffice.

By some it is said to be identical with Perfectionism; and attempts are made to show in what particulars Antinomian Perfectionism and our views are the same. On this I remark:

(1.) It seems to have been a favorite policy of certain controversial writers for a long time, instead of meeting a proposition in the open field of fair and Christian argument, to give it a bad name, and attempt to put it down, not by force of argument, but by showing that it is identical with or sustains a near relation to Pelagianism, Antinomianism, Calvinism, or some other ism, against which certain classes of minds are deeply prejudiced. In the recent controversy between what is called Old and New School Divinity, who has not witnessed with pain the frequent attempts that have been made to put down the New School Divinity, as it is called, by calling it Pelagianism, and quoting certain passages from Pelagius, and other writers, to show the identity of sentiment that exists between them.

This is a very unsatisfactory method of attacking or defending any doctrine. There are, no doubt, many points of agreement between Pelagius and all other orthodox divines, and so there are many points of disagreement between them. There are also many points of agreement between modern Perfectionists and all Evangelical Christians, and so there are many points of disagreement between them and the Christian Church in general. That there are some points of agreement between their views and my own, is no doubt true. And that we totally disagree in regard to those points that constitute their great peculiarities, is, if I understand them, also true.

But did I really agree in all points with Augustine, or Edwards, or Pelagius, or the modern Perfectionists, neither the good or the ill name of any of these would prove my sentiments to be either right or wrong. It would remain after all, to show that those with whom I agreed were either right or wrong, in order, on the one hand, to establish that for which I contend, or on the other to condemn that which I maintain. It is often more convenient to give a doctrine or an argument a bad name, than it is soberly and satisfactorily to reply to it.

(2.) It is not a little curious, that we should be charged with holding the same sentiments with the Perfectionists; and yet they seem to be mere violently opposed to our views, since they have come to understand them, than almost any other persons whatever. I have been informed by one of their leaders, that he regards me as one of the master builders of Babylon. And I also understand, that they manifest greater hostility to the Oberlin Evangelist than almost any other class of persons.

(3.) I will not take time, nor is it needful to go into an investigation or a denial even of the supposed or alleged points of agreement between us and the Perfectionists. But for the present it must be sufficient to request you to read and examine for yourselves.

With respect to the modern Perfectionists, those who have been acquainted with their writings, know that some of them have gone much further from the truth than others. Some of their leading men, who commenced with them and adopted their name, stopped far short of adopting some of their most abominable errors; still maintaining the authority and perpetual obligation of the moral law, and thus have been saved from going into many of the most objectionable and destructive notions of that sect. There are many more points of agreement between that class of Perfectionists and the orthodox Church, than between any other class of them and the Christian Church. And there are still a number of important points of difference, as every one knows who is possessed of correct information upon this subject.

I abhor the idea of denouncing any class of men as altogether and utterly wrong. I am well aware that there are many of those who are termed Perfectionists, who as truly abhor the extremes of error into which

many of that name have fallen, as perhaps do any persons living.

7. Another objection is, that persons could not live in this world, if they were entirely sanctified. Strange! Does holiness injure a man? Does perfect conformity to all the laws of life and health, both physical and moral, render it impossible for a man to live? If a man break off from rebellion against God, will it kill him? Does there appear to have been any thing in Christ's holiness, inconsistent with life and health? The fact is, that this objection is founded in a gross mistake in regard to what constitutes entire sanctification. It is supposed by those who hold this objection, that this state implies a continual and most intense degree of excitement, and many of those things which I have shown in my first lecture, are not at all implied in it. I have thought, that it is rather a glorified than a sanctified state, that most men have before their minds whenever they consider this subject. When Christ was upon earth, He was in a sanctified but not a glorified state. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master." Now what is there in the moral character of Jesus Christ, as represented in His history, aside from His miraculous powers, that may not and ought not to be fully copied into the life of every Christian? I speak not of His knowledge, but of His spirit and temper. Ponder well every circumstance of His life that has come down to us, and say, beloved, what is there in it, that may not, by the grace of God, be copied into your own. And think you, that a full imitation of Him in all that relates to His moral character would render it impossible for you to live in this world?

8. Again, it is objected against our professing a state of entire sanctification, on the ground that it not only implies present obedience to the law of God, but such a formation and perfection of holy habits, as to render it certain that we shall never again sin. And that a man can no more tell when he is entirely sanctified, than he can tell how many holy acts it will take to form holy habits of such strength that he will never again sin. To this I answer:

(1.) The law of God has nothing to do with requiring this formation of holy habits. It is satisfied with present obedience, and only demands at every present moment, the full devotion of all our powers to God. It never, in any instance, complains that we have not formed such holy habits that we shall sin no more.

(2.) If it be true that a man is not entirely sanctified until his holy habits are so fixed, as to render it certain that he will never sin again, then Adam was not in a state of entire sanctification previously to the fall, nor were the angels in this state before their fall.

(3.) If this objection be true, there is not a saint nor an angel in heaven, so far as we can know, that can, with the least propriety profess a state of entire sanctification; for how can they know that they have performed so many holy acts, as to have created such habits of holiness as to render it certain that they will never sin again.

(4.) Entire sanctification does not depend upon the formation of holy habits, nor at all consist in this. But both entire and permanent sanctification are based alone upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Perseverance in holiness is to be ascribed entirely to the influence of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, both now and to the end of our lives, instead of being secured at all by any habits of holiness which we may or ever shall have formed.

9. Another objection is, that the doctrine tends to spiritual pride. And is it true indeed that to become perfectly humble tends to pride? But entire humility is implied in entire sanctification. Is it true that you must remain in sin, and of course cherish pride in order to avoid pride? Is your humility more safe in your own hands, and are you more secure against spiritual pride in refusing to receive Christ as your helper,

than you would be at once to embrace Him as a full Savior?

10. Again it is objected that many who have embraced this doctrine, really are spiritually proud. To this I answer:

(1.) So have many who believed the doctrine of regeneration been deceived and amazingly puffed up with the idea that they have been regenerated, when they have not. But is this a good reason for abandoning the doctrine of regeneration, or any reason why the doctrine should not be preached?

(2.) Let me inquire, whether a simple declaration of what God has done for their souls, has not been assumed as itself sufficient evidence of spiritual pride on the part of those who embraced this doctrine, while there was in reality no spiritual pride at all? It seems next to impossible, with the present views of the Church, that an individual should really attain this state, and profess it in a manner so humble as not of course to be suspected of enormous spiritual pride? This consideration has been a snare to some who have hesitated and even neglected to declare what God had done for their souls, lest they should be accused of spiritual pride. And this has been a serious injury to their piety.

11. But again it is objected that this doctrine tends to censoriousness. To this I reply:

(1.) It is not denied that some who have professed to believe this doctrine have become censorious. But this no more condemns this doctrine than it condemns that of regeneration. And that it tends to censoriousness, might just as well be urged against every doctrine of the Bible as against this doctrine.

(2.) Let any Christian do his whole duty to the Church and the world in their present state--let him speak to them and of them as they really are, and he would of course incur the charge of censoriousness. It is therefore the most unreasonable thing in the world to suppose that the Church, in its present state, should not accuse any perfect Christian of censoriousness. Entire sanctification implies the doing of all our duty. But to do all our duty, we must rebuke sin in high places and in low places. Can this be done with all needed severity, without in many cases giving offence, and incurring the charge of censoriousness? No; it is impossible; and to maintain the contrary, would be to impeach the wisdom and holiness of Jesus Christ Himself.

12. It is objected that this doctrine lowers the standard of holiness to a level with our own experience. It is not denied that in some instances this may have been true. Nor can it be denied, that the standard of Christian perfection has been elevated much above the demands of the law, in its application to human beings in our present state of existence. It seems to have been forgotten, that the inquiry is, what does the law demand?--not of angels, and what would be entire sanctification in them; nor of Adam, previously to the fall, when his powers of body and mind were all in a state of perfect health; not what will the law demand of us in a future state of existence; not what the law may demand of the Church in some future period of its history on earth, when the human constitution, by the universal prevalence of correct and thorough temperance principles, may have acquired its pristine health and powers;--but the question is, what does the law of God require of Christians of the present generation; of Christians in all respects in our circumstances, with all the ignorance and debility of body and mind which have resulted from the intemperance and abuse of the human constitution through so many generations?

The law levels its claims to us as we are, and a just exposition of it, as I have already said, under all the present circumstances of our being, is indispensable to a right apprehension of what constitutes entire sanctification.

To be sure, there may be danger of frittering away the claims of the law and letting down the standard. But I would humbly inquire whether, hitherto, the error has not been on the other side, and whether as a general fact, the law has not been so interpreted as naturally to beget the idea so prevalent, that if a man should become holy he could not live in this world? In a letter lately received from a beloved, and useful, and venerated minister of the gospel, while the writer expressed the greatest attachment to the doctrine of entire consecration to God, and said that he preached the same doctrine which we hold to his people every Sabbath, but by another name, still he added that it was revolting to his feelings, to hear any mere man set up the claim of obedience to the law of God. Now let me inquire, why should this be revolting to the feelings of piety? Must it not be because the law of God is supposed to require something of human beings in our state, which it does not and cannot require? Why should such a claim be thought extravagant, unless the claims of the living God be thought extravagant? If the law of God really requires no more of men than what is reasonable and possible, why should it be revolting to any mind to hear an individual profess, through the grace of God, to have attained that state? I know that the brother to whom I allude, would be almost the last man deliberately and knowingly to give any strained interpretation to the law of God; and yet, I cannot but feel that much of the difficulty that good men have upon this subject, has arisen out of a comparison of the lives of saints with a standard entirely above that which the law of God does or can demand of persons in all respects in our circumstances.

13. Another objection is, that as a matter of fact the grace of God is not sufficient to secure the entire sanctification of saints in this life. It is maintained, that the question of the attainability of entire sanctification in this life, resolves itself after all into the question, whether the Church is, and Christians are sanctified in this life. The objectors say that nothing is sufficient grace that does not as a matter of fact, secure the faith and obedience and perfection of the saints; and, therefore, that the provisions of the gospel are in fact to be measured by the results; and that the experience of the Church decides both the meaning of the promises and the provisions of grace. Now to this I answer:

If this objection be good for any thing in regard to entire sanctification, it is equally true in regard to the spiritual state of every person in the world. If the fact that men are not perfect, proves that no provisions are made for their perfection, their being no better than they are proves that there is no provision for their being any better than they are, or that they might have aimed at being any better, with any rational hope of success. But who, except a fatalist, will admit any such conclusion as this? And yet I do not see but this conclusion is inevitable from such premises.

14. Another objection to this doctrine is, that it is contrary to the views of some of the greatest and best men in the Church,--that such men as Augustine, Calvin, Doddridge, Edwards, &c., were of a different opinion. To this I answer:

(1.) Suppose they were;--we are to call no man father in such a sense as to yield up to him the forming of our views of Christian doctrine.

(2.) This objection comes with a very ill grace from those who wholly reject their opinions on some of the most important points of Christian doctrine.

(3.) Those men all held the doctrine of physical depravity, which was manifestly the ground of their rejecting the doctrine of entire consecration to God in this life. Maintaining as they seem to have done, that the constitutional susceptibilities of body and mind were depraved and sinful, consistency of course led them to reject the idea that persons could be entirely sanctified while in the body. Now I would ask what

consistency is there in quoting them as rejecting the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life, while the reason of this rejection in their minds, was founded on the doctrine of physical depravity, which notion is entirely denied by those who quote their authority?

15. But again it is objected, that if we should attain this state of entire consecration of sanctification, we could not know it until the day of Judgment, and that to maintain its attainability is vain, inasmuch as no one can know whether he has attained it or not. To this I reply:

(1.) A man's consciousness is the highest and best evidence of the present state of his own mind. I understand consciousness to be the mind's recognition of its own states, and that it is the highest possible evidence to our own minds of what passes in our minds.

(2.) With the law of God before us as our standard, the testimony of consciousness in regard to whether the mind is conformed to that standard or not, is the highest evidence which the mind can have of a present state of conformity to that rule.

(3.) It is a testimony which we cannot doubt any more than we can doubt our existence. How do we know that we exist? I answer: by our consciousness. How do I know that I breathe, or love, or hate, or sit, or stand, or lie down, or rise up--that I am joyful or sorrowful--in short, that I exercise any emotion or volition, or affection of mind--how do I know that I sin, or repent, or believe? I answer: by my own consciousness. No testimony can be "so direct and convincing as this."

Now in order to know that my repentance is genuine, I must intellectually understand what genuine repentance is. So if I would know whether my love to God or man, or obedience to the law is genuine, I must have clearly before my mind the real spirit, and meaning, and bearing of the law of God. Having this rule before my mind, my own consciousness affords "the most direct and convincing evidence possible" of whether my present state of mind is conformed to the rule. The Spirit of God is never employed in testifying to what my consciousness teaches, but in setting in a strong light before the mind the rule to which I am to conform my life. It is His business to make me understand, to induce me to love and obey the truth; and it is the business of consciousness to testify to my own mind, whether I do or do not obey the truth when I apprehend it. A man may be mistaken in regard to the correctness of his knowledge of the law or truth of God. He may therefore mistake the character of his exercises. But when God so presents the truth as to give the mind assurance, that it understands His mind and will upon any subject, the mind's consciousness of its own exercises in view of that truth, is "the highest and most direct possible" evidence of whether it obeys or disobeys.

(4.) If a man cannot be conscious of the character of his own exercises, how can he know when and of what he is to repent? If he has committed sin of which he is not conscious, how is he to repent of it? And if he has a holiness of which he is not conscious, how could he feel that he has peace with God?

But it is said a man may violate the law not knowing it, and consequently have no consciousness that he sinned, but that afterwards a knowledge of the law may convict him of sin. To this I reply, that if there was absolutely no knowledge that the thing in question was wrong, the doing of that thing was not sin, inasmuch as some degree of knowledge of what is right or wrong is indispensable to the moral character of any act. In such a case there may be a sinful ignorance which may involve all the guilt of those actions that were done in consequence of it; but that blame-worthiness lies in the ignorance itself, and not at all in the violation of the rule of which the mind was at the time entirely ignorant.

(5.) The Bible every where assumes, that we are able to know, and unqualifiedly requires us to know what the moral state of our mind is. It commands us to examine ourselves, to know and to approve our own selves. Now how can this be done but by bringing our hearts into the light of the law of God, and then taking the testimony of our own consciousness, whether we are or are not in a state of conformity to the law? But if we are not to receive the testimony of our consciousness in regard to our sanctification, are we to receive it in respect to our repentance or any other exercise of our mind whatever? The fact is that we may deceive ourselves, by neglecting to compare ourselves with the right standard. But when our views of the standard are right, and our consciousness is a felt, decided, unequivocal state of mind, we cannot be deceived any more than we can be deceived in regard to our own existence.

(6.) But it is said our consciousness does not teach us what the power and capacities of our minds are, and that therefore, if consciousness could teach us in respect to the kind of our exercises, it cannot teach us in regard to their degree, whether it is equal to the present capability of our mind. To this I reply:

(a) Consciousness does as unequivocally testify whether we do or do not love God with all our heart, as it does whether we love Him at all. How does a man know that he lifts as much as he can, or runs, or leaps, or walks as fast as he is able? I answer: by his own consciousness. How does he know that he repents or loves with all his heart? I answer: by his own consciousness. This is the only possible way in which he can know it.

(b) The objection implies that God has put within our reach no possible means of knowing whether we obey Him or not. The Bible does not directly reveal the fact to any man, whether he obeys God or not. It reveals his duty, but does not reveal the fact whether he obeys. It refers this testimony to his own consciousness. The Spirit of God sets our duty before us, but does not directly reveal to us whether we do it or not; for this would imply that every man is under constant inspiration.

But it is said the Bible directs our attention to the fact of whether we obey or disobey as evidence whether we are in a right state of mind or not. But I would inquire, how do we know whether we obey or disobey? How do we know any thing of our conduct but by our consciousness? Our conduct as observed by others is to them evidence of the state of our hearts. But, I repeat it, our consciousness of obedience to God, is the highest and indeed the only evidence of our true character.

(c) If a man's own consciousness is not to be a witness, either for or against him, no other testimony in the universe can ever satisfy him of the propriety of God's dealing with him in the final Judgment. Let then thousand witnesses testify that a man had committed murder, still the man could not feel condemned for it unless his own consciousness bore testimony to the fact. So if ten thousand witnesses should testify that he had performed some good act, he could feel no self-complacency, or sense of self-approbation and virtue, unless his consciousness bore its testimony to the same fact. There are cases of common occurrence, where the witnesses testify to the guilt or innocence of a man contrary to the testimony of his own consciousness. In all such cases, from the very laws of his being, he rejects all other testimony: and let me add, that he would reject the testimony of God, and from the very laws of his being must reject it, if it contradicted his own consciousness. When God convicts a man of sin, it is not by contradicting his consciousness; but by setting the consciousness which he had at the time in the clear strong light of his memory, causing him to discover clearly, and to remember distinctly, what light he had, what thoughts, what convictions; in other words, what consciousnesses he had at the time. And this, let me add, is the way and the only way in which the Spirit of God can convict a man of sin, thus bringing him to condemn himself. Now suppose that God should bear testimony against a man, that at such a time he did such a

thing--that such and such were all the circumstances of the case--and suppose that, at the same time, the individual is unable to remember, and appears never to have had the least consciousness of the transaction. The testimony of God in this case, could not satisfy the man's mind, or lead him into a state of self-condemnation. The only possible way in which this state of mind could be induced, would be to arouse the memory of past consciousness, and cause the whole scene to start into living reality before his mind's eye, as it passed in his own consciousness at the time. But if he had no consciousness of any such thing, and consequently no remembrance of it could possibly take place, to convict him of sin is naturally and for ever impossible.

(7.) Men may overlook what consciousness is. They may mistake the rule of duty--they may confound consciousness with a mere negative state of mind, or that state in which a man is not conscious of a state of opposition to the truth. Yet it must for ever remain true, that to our own minds "consciousness must be the highest possible evidence" of what passes within us. And if a man does not by his own consciousness know whether he does the best that he can, under the circumstances--whether he has a single eye to the glory of God--and whether he is in a state of entire consecration to God--he cannot know it in any way whatever. And no testimony whatever, either of God or man, could, according to the laws of his being, satisfy him, and beget in him either conviction of guilt on the one hand, or self-approbation on the other.

(8.) Finally, let me ask, how those who make this objection know that they are not in a sanctified state? Has God revealed it to them? Has He revealed it in the Bible? Does the Bible say to A.B., by name, you are not in a sanctified state? Or does it lay down a rule, in the light of which his own consciousness bears this testimony against him? Has God revealed directly by His Spirit, that he is not in a sanctified state? Or does He hold the rule of duty strongly before the mind, and thus awaken the testimony of consciousness, that he is not in this state?

Now just in the same way, consciousness testifies of those that are sanctified, that they are in that state. Neither the Bible, nor the Spirit of God, makes any new or particular revelation to them by name. But the Spirit of God bears witness with their spirits, by setting the rule in a strong light before them. He induces that state of mind that consciousness pronounces to be conformity to the rule. This is as far as possible from setting aside the judgment of God in the case, for consciousness is, under these circumstances, the testimony of God, and the way in which He convinces of sin on the one hand, and of entire consecration on the other.

Again, the objection that consciousness cannot decide in regard to the strength of our powers, and whether we really serve God with all our strength, seems to be based upon the false supposition that the law of God requires every power of body and mind to be excited at every moment to its full strength, and that too without any regard to the nature of the subject about which our powers are for the time being employed. In the first lecture on this subject, I endeavored to show and trust I did show, that perfect obedience to the law of God requires no such thing. Entire sanctification is entire consecration. Entire consecration is obedience to the law of God. And all that the law requires is, that our whole being be consecrated to God, and that the amount of strength to be expended in His service at any one moment of time, must depend upon the nature of the subject about which the powers are for the time being employed. And nothing is further from the truth than that obedience to the law of God requires every power of body and mind to be constantly on the strain, and in the highest possible degree of excitement, and activity. Such an interpretation of the law of God as this, would be utterly inconsistent with life and health; and would write MENE, TEKEL upon the life and conduct of Jesus Christ Himself; for His whole history shows that He was not in a state of constant excitement to the full extent of His powers.

16. Again it is objected that, if this state were attained in this life, it would be the end of our probation. Probation, since the fall of Adam, or those points in which we are in a state of probation or trial, are:

- (1.) Whether we will repent and believe the gospel;
- (2.) Whether we will persevere in holiness to the end of life.

Some suppose that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, sets aside the idea of being at all in a state of probation after our conversion. They reason thus: If it is certain that the saints will persevere, then their probation is ended; because the question is already settled, not only that they will be converted, but that they will persevere to the end, and the contingency in regard to the event, is indispensable to the idea of probation. To this I reply:

That a thing may be contingent with man that is not at all so with God. With God, there is not and never was any contingency, with regard to the final destiny of any being. But with men, almost all things are contingencies. God knows with absolute certainty whether a man will be converted, and whether he will persevere. A man may know that he is converted, and may believe, that by the grace of God he shall persevere. He may have an assurance of this in proportion to the strength of his faith. But the knowledge of this fact is not at all inconsistent with the idea of his continuance in a state of trial till the day of his death; inasmuch as his perseverance depends upon the exercise of his own voluntary agency.

In the same way some say, that if we have attained a state of entire and permanent sanctification, we can no longer be in a state of probation. I answer, that perseverance in this state depends upon the promise and grace of God, just as the final perseverance of the saints does. In neither case can we have any other assurance of our perseverance than that of faith in the promise and grace of God; nor any other knowledge that we have arrived at this state, than that which arises out of a belief in the testimony of God, that He will preserve us blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this be inconsistent with our probation, I see not why the doctrine of the saints' perseverance is not equally inconsistent with it. If any one is disposed to maintain that for us to have any judgment or belief in regard to our final perseverance, is inconsistent with a state of probation, all I can say is, that his views of probation are very inconsistent with my own, and so far as I understand, with those of the Church of God.

Again, there is a very high and important sense in which every moral being will remain on probation to all eternity. While under the moral government of God, obedience must for ever remain a condition of the favor of God. And the fact of continued obedience will for ever depend on the faithfulness and grace of God; and the only knowledge we can ever have of this fact, either in heaven or on earth, must be founded upon the faithfulness and truth of God.

Again, if it were true, that entering upon a state of permanent sanctification in this life, were, in some sense, an end of our probation, that would be no objection to the doctrine; for there is a sense in which probation often ends long before the termination of this life. Where, for example, a person has committed the unpardonable sin, or where from any cause, God has given up sinners to fill up the measure of their iniquity, withdrawing for ever His Holy Spirit from them, and sealed them over to eternal death; this, in a very important sense, is the end of their probation, and they are as sure of hell as if they were already there.

So on the other hand, when a person has received, after that he believes, the en sealing of the Spirit unto the day of redemption, as an earnest of his inheritance, he may and is bound to regard this as a solemn

pledge on the part of God, of his final perseverance and salvation, and as no longer leaving the final question of his destiny in doubt.

Now it should be remembered, that in both these cases the result depends upon the exercise of the agency of the creature. In the case of the sinner given up of God, it is certain that he will not repent, though his impenitence is voluntary and by no means a thing naturally necessary. So on the other hand the perseverance of the saints is certain though not necessary. If in either case there should be a radical change of character the result would differ accordingly.

17. Again, while it is admitted by some that entire sanctification in this life is attainable, yet it is denied that there is any certainty that it will be attained by any one before death. For, it is said, that as all the promises of entire sanctification are conditioned upon faith, they therefore secure the entire sanctification of no one. To this I reply:

That all the promises of salvation in the Bible are conditioned upon faith and repentance, and therefore it does not follow on this principle, that any person ever will be saved. What does all this arguing prove? The fact is that while the promises both of salvation and sanctification, are conditioned upon faith as it respects individuals; yet to Christ and to the Church as a body, as I have already shown, these promises are unconditional. With respect to the salvation of sinners, it is promised that Christ shall have a seed to serve Him, and the Bible abounds with numerous promises, both to Christ and the Church, that secure without condition, as it regards them, the salvation of great multitudes of sinners. So the promises that the Church as a body, at some period of her earthly history, shall be entirely sanctified, are, as it regards the Church, unconditional. But, as I have already shown, as it respects individuals, the fulfillment of these promises must depend upon the exercise of faith. Both in the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of Christians, God is abundantly pledged to bring about the salvation of the one and the sanctification of the other, to the extent of His promises. But as it respects individuals, no one can claim the fulfillment of these promises without complying with the conditions.

These are the principal objections that have occurred to my mind, or that have, so far as I know, been urged by others. There may be and doubtless are others, of greater or less plausibility, to which I may have occasion to refer hereafter. Lest I should be tedious, these must suffice for the present.

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