

Why Shouldest Thou Destroy Thyself?

by George Whitefield

George Whitefield warns against the dangers of pursuing perfection in righteousness to an extreme degree, and against being deceived by flattering speeches that promote worldly maxims.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 7:16, Matthew 5:48, Romans 8:13, Philippians 3:20, Colossians 3:2

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "False Teachings"

Description

George Whitefield preaches about the dangers of being led astray by false teachings and the importance of pursuing true Christian piety. He warns against the extremes of irreligion and fanaticism, emphasizing the need to stand firm in the faith and avoid being swayed by worldly influences. Whitefield highlights the necessity of striving for perfect righteousness in Christ, despite the opposition and ridicule one may face. He urges believers to reject worldly maxims and embrace a life of self-denial and pursuit of Christian perfection, even in the face of criticism and persecution.

Transcript

Ecclesiastes 7:16, "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?"

To all the Members of Christ's Holy Church.

Dear Fellow Christians,

The great, and indeed the only motive which prompted me to publish this sermon, was the desire of providing for your security from error, at a time when the deviators from, and false pretenders to truth, are so numerous, that the most discerning find it a matter of the greatest difficulty to avoid being led astray by one or by other into downright falsehood. There is no running divisions upon truth; like a mathematical point, it will neither admit of subtraction nor addition: And as it is indivisible in its nature, there is no splitting the difference, where truth is concerned. Irreligion and enthusiasm are diametrical opposites, and true piety between both, like the center of an infinite line, is at an equal infinite distance from the one and the other, and therefore can never admit of a coalition with either. The one erring by defect, the other by excess. But whether we err by defect, or excess, is of little importance, if we are equally wide of the mark, as we certainly are in either case. For whatever is less than truth, cannot be truth; and whatever is more than true must be false.

Wherefore, as the whole of this great nation seems now more than ever in danger of being hurried into one or the other of these equally pernicious extremes, irreligion or fanaticism, I thought myself more than ordinarily obliged to rouse your, perhaps drowsy vigilance, by warning you of the nearness of your peril; cautioning you from leaning towards either side, though but to peep at the slippery precipice; and stepping between you and error, before it comes nigh enough to grapple with you. The happy medium of true Christian piety, in which it has pleased the mercy of God to establish you, is built on a firm rock, "and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it." While then you stand steadily upright in the fullness of the faith, falsehood and sin shall labor in vain to approach you; whereas, the least familiarity with error, will make you giddy, and if once you stagger in principles, your ruin is almost inevitable.

But not I have cautioned you of the danger you are in from the enemies who threaten your subversion, I hope your own watchfulness will be sufficient to guard you from any surprise. And from their own assaults you have nothing to fear, since while you persist in the firm resolution, through God's grace, to keep them out, irreligion and enthusiasm, falsehood and vice, impiety and false piety, will combine in vain to force an entrance into your hearts.

Take then, my dearly beloved fellow members of Christ's mystical body, take the friendly caution I give you in good part, and endeavor to profit by it: attend wholly to the saving truths I here deliver to you, and per persuaded, that they are uttered by one who has your eternal salvation as much at heart as his own.

"And thou, O Lord Jesus Christ, fountain of all truth, whence all wisdom flows, open the understandings of thy people to the light of thy true faith, and touch their hearts with thy grace, that they may both be able to see, and willing to perform what thou requirest of them. Drive away from us every cloud of error and perversity; guard us alike from irreligion and false pretensions to piety; and lead us on perpetually towards that perfection to which thou hast taught us to aspire; that keeping us here in a constant imitation of thee, and peaceful union which each other, thou mayest at length bring us to that everlasting glory, which thou hast promised to all such as shall endeavor to be perfect, even as the Father who is in heaven is perfect, who with thee and the Holy Ghost lives and reigns one God, world without end! Amen, Amen.

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Ecclesiastes 7:16, "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?"

Righteousness over-much! May one say; Is there any danger of that? Is it even possible? Can we be too good? If we give any credit to the express word of God, we cannot be too good, we cannot be righteous over-much. The injunction given by God to Abraham is very strong: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." The same he again lays upon all Israel, in the eighteenth of Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt be perfect, and without blemish, with the Lord thy God." And lest any should think to excuse themselves from this obligation, by saying, it ceased when the old law was abolished, our blessed Savior ratified and explained it: "Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." So that until our perfection surpasses that of our heavenly Father, we can never be too good nor righteous over-much; and as it is impossible we should ever surpass, or even come up to him in the perfection of goodness and righteousness, it follows in course that we never can be good or righteous in excess. Nevertheless Doctor Trapp has found out that we may be righteous over-much, and has taken no small pains, with much agitation of spirit, to prove that it is a great folly and weakness, nay, a great sin. "O Lord! Rebuke thou his spirit, and grant that this false doctrine may not be published to his confusion in the day of judgment!"

But if what this hasty, this deluded man advances had been true, could there be any occasion, however, of warning against it in these times, "when the danger (as he himself to his confusion owns) is on the contrary extreme; when all manner of vice and wickedness abounds to a degree almost unheard of?" I answer for the present, that "there must be heresies amongst you, that they who are approved may be made manifest."

However, this earthly-minded minister of a new gospel, has taken a text which seems to favor his naughty purpose, of weaning the well-disposed little ones of Christ from that perfect purity of heart and spirit, which is necessary to all such as mean to live to our Lord Jesus. O Lord, what shall become of thy flock, when their shepherds betray them into the hands of the ravenous wolf! When a minister of thy word perverts it to overthrow thy kingdom, and to destroy scripture with scripture!

Solomon, in the person of a desponding, ignorant, indolent liver (resident), says to the man of righteousness: "Be not righteous over-much, neither make thyself overwise: Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" But must my angry, over-sighted brother Trapp, therefore, personate a character so unbecoming his function, merely to overthrow the express injunction of the Lord to us; which obliges us never to give over pursuing and thirsting after the perfect righteousness of Christ, until we rest in him? Father, forgive him, for he knows not what he says!

What advantage might not Satan gain over the elect, if the false construction, put upon this text by that unseeing teacher, should prevail! Yet though he blushes not to assist Satan to bruise our heel, I shall endeavor to bruise the heads of both, by showing,

- I. FIRST, The genuine sense of the text in question.
- II. The character of the persons, who are to be supposed speaking here: And
- III. The character of the persons spoken to.

From whence will naturally result these consequences.

FIRST, That the Doctor was grossly (Lord grant he was not maliciously) mistaken in his explanatory sermon on this text, as well as in the application of it.

SECONDLY, That he is a teacher and approver of worldly maxims.

THIRDLY, That he is of course an enemy to perfect righteousness in men, through Christ Jesus, and, therefore, no friend to Christ: And therefore, that no one ought to be deluded by the false doctrine he advances, to beguile the innocent, and deceive, if possible, even the elect.

I. To come at the true sense of the text in question, it will be necessary to look back, to the preceding verse, where the wise man, reflecting on the vanities of his youth, puts on for a moment his former character. "All things, have I seen in the days of my vanity: (and among the rest) there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongeth his life in his wickedness." Now it is very plain, that he is not here talking of a man, who is righteous over-much, in the Doctor's manner of understanding the words, that is, "faulty, and criminal by excess." For on one side he commends him for being a just man, and full of righteousness, and yet on the other tells us, that his righteousness is the shortening of his life. Whereas, had he looked upon his perishing in righteousness to be an over-righteousness, he would never have called him a just man. Neither by a wicked man, can he mean a

man given up to the utmost excess of wickedness, since he tells us, that he prolongeth his life in (or by) his wickedness. Who does not know, that the excess of almost every kind of vice, is of itself a shortener of life. So that the whole opposition and contrast lies between a good man, and a bad man. A good man whose goodness shortens his life, and bad man whose iniquity lengthens his life, or at least is not excessive enough to shorten the thread of it. Solomon, absorbed in these reflections, speaks here by way of prosopopeia, not the sense of Solomon, the experienced, the learned, the wise; but of the former Solomon, a vain young fellow, full of self-love, and the strong desires of life. In the quality of such a one then, he looks with the same eye upon the righteous man, who perishes in his righteousness, as he would on a wicked one, who should perish in his wickedness. For it is neither the righteousness of the one, nor the wickedness of the other, that offends him, but the superlative degrees of both; which tending equally to shorten life, he looks upon them as equally opposite to the self-love he fondles within him. And, therefore, he deems an excess of debauchery as great an enemy to the lasting enjoyment of the pleasures of life, as an extraordinary righteousness would be. Well then might he say to the latter, in this character, "Be not over-much wicked, neither be thou foolish; why shouldst thou die before thy time?" And to the former: "Be not righteous over-much, neither make thyself over-wise: Why shouldst thou destroy thyself?"

What wonder then, that a youth of sprightliness and sense, but led away by self-love to be fond of the pleasures and enjoyments of life, when attained without hurry, and possessed without risk; what wonder, I say, that such a youth should conceive an equal dislike to the superlative degrees of virtue and vice, and, therefore, advise such of his companions as give into the excess of debauchery, to refrain from it: as it must infallibly tend to clog their understandings, stupify their senses, and entail upon their constitutions a train of infirmities, which cannot but debilitate their natural vigor, and shorten their days? "Be not over-much wicked, neither be thou foolish: Why shouldst thou die before thy time?" What wonder, that the same self-love should prompt him to dissuade such of his friends or acquaintance, as he wishes to have for companions, and countenancers of his worldly-minded pursuits, from pursuing righteousness and wisdom to a degree that must destroy in them all taste of earthly pleasures, and may possibly impair their constitutions, and forward their end? "Be not righteous over-much, neither make thyself overwise: Why shouldst thou destroy thyself?"

This is the sense in which Solomon (placing himself in the state of vanity of his youth) speaks to the one, and the other: to the righteous, and to the ungodly. This is the true, genuine sense of the letter; and every other sense put upon it, is false and groundless, and wrested rather to pervert than explain the truth of the text. O Christian simplicity, whither art thou fled? Why will not the clergy speak truth? And why must this false prophet suffer thy people, O Lord, to believe a lie? They have held the truth in unrighteousness. Raise up, I beseech thee, O Lord, some true pastors, who may acquaint them with the nature and necessity of perfect righteousness, and lead them to that love of Christian perfection which the angry-minded, pleasure-taking Doctor Trapp, labors to divert them from, by teaching, that "all Christians must have to do with some vanities."

Is not the meaning of this text plain to the weakest capacity? I have here given it to you, as I have it from the mouth of the royal preacher himself. I have made use of no "philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ," to impose a fleshly sense upon you, for the sense of the word of God. No, I have given you a natural exposition obvious from the very words themselves. Hence you may see, my fellow-strugglers in righteousness, how grossly our angry adversary is mistaken in his explanation of this text. Lord! Open his eyes, and touch his heart; and convert him, and all those erring ministers, who have seen vain and foolish things for thy people, and have not discovered

their iniquity, to turn away thy captivity. For they have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way! The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink, they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.

It is plain from the words of the text, that the royal Preacher was speaking in the person of a vain worldling, when he said, "Be not righteous over-much;" whereby he meant to exhort the truly righteous not to be dismayed, terrified, or disturbed from their constant pursuit of greater and greater perfection of righteousness, until they rest in Christ; notwithstanding the derision, fleshly persuasion, ill-treatment and persecution of worldly men: Who, one day, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, "These were they whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools, accounted their lives madness; and their end to be without honor. How are they numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints!"

How blind then is the application (not to say perverse) which this self-wise clergyman makes from the text, to such as, following the advice of the apostle (Coloss. 3:2) "set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth." Must hastiness in anger get the better of sense and truth? Must the people be misled because the pastor cannot, or will not see? Or must the injunction of Christ, "Be perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect," give place to the maxim of the heathen Tully: The greatest reproach to a philosopher, is to confute his doctrine by his practice; if this be the case, alas, what a deplorable, unspeakably deplorable condition is that of some Christians? Wherefore, "thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets who make his people to err, that bite with their teeth and cry peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him: therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision, and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine, and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.

But I will leave these lovers of darkness, and turn to you, O beloved, elect of God! I beseech you, by the bowels of Christ, suffer not yourselves to be deceived by their flattering, sin-soothing speeches. "Be not of that rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord: who say to the seers, see not; and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." Follow not those, who flatter you in the vanities they practice themselves. O may you never be of the number of those, in the person of whom Solomon here says, "Be not righteous over-much;" for their character is the character of the beast.

II. The character of the persons, who are to be supposed speaking here in the text, is in a word the same with the character of those whom Solomon here personates: who, as is already shown, are a vain set of men, neither righteous enough to have an habitual desire of improving virtue to its perfection, nor quite so flagitious [sinful, unlawful, wicked] as to give into self-destroying vices: in a word, they are self-lovers, the sole end of whose pursuits, whether indifferent, bad, or laudable in themselves, is self-enjoyment. Insomuch that they look upon virtue and vice, righteousness and wickedness, with the same eye, and their fondness of aversion for both is alike, as their different degrees appear to be the means to enhance and prolong the enjoyment of pleasure, or to lessen and shorten those pleasures. Thus any virtue, while it is kept within such bounds as may render it subservient to the pleasurable degrees of vice, will meet with no opposition from them; on the contrary, they will even commend it. But the moment it becomes a restraint to vice in moderation (if I may be allowed to make use of terms adequate to their system) from that moment it gives offense, and they put it in their caveat, "Be not righteous over-much." In like manner, vice, while confined to certain limits, which rather improve than obstruct pleasures, is with them a desirable good; but no sooner does it launch out into any depth, sufficient to drown and diminish the relish of those

pleasures, than they declare open war against it; "Be not over-much wicked." And the reason they assign for their opposition in both cases, is the same: "why shouldst thou destroy thyself? Why shouldst thou die before thy time?" Such is the prudence of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Such the maxims of these refined libertines, so much that more dangerous as they are less obvious; so much the more insinuating, as they are removed from certain extra-vagancies capable of shocking every man who has the least sense and delicacy. O Lord, how true is it, that the sons of darkness are wiser in their generation than the sons of light!

You are not then, beloved in the Lord, to imagine that your greatest opposition, in struggling for perfect righteousness, is to come from profligates, from men whose enormous vices create horror even to themselves: no, your most dangerous, most formidable enemies, are the kind of men I have painted to you, who render vice relishable with a mixture of apparent virtue, and clothe wickedness in the apparel of righteousness; "Beware of them, for they come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

This perverse generation will ensnare you into ungodliness, by seeming oppositions to vice, and allow you to swallow the seemings of virtue and righteousness like an emetic, only to puke forth the reality of them. They paint black, white, and the white they convert into black. Not content with seeming what they are not, they labor to make you, what they are. Righteousness and wickedness they interweave in an artful tissue, capable of deceiving the very elect, and difficult for the most discerning among them to unravel; as almsgiving and avarice, pride and humility, temperance and luxury, are dexterously blended together; while as mutual curbs to each other, they combine to stem the tide of impediments to worldly enjoyment, which might flow from extraordinary degrees on either side. Thus "Almsgiving (you are told) is very excellent," and you believe the proposition, without knowing the particular sense it is spoken in, which is, that alms-giving is an excellent curb upon avarice, by preserving a rich man from such a superlative love of money as deprives him of the self-enjoyment of it. And upon the strength of this belief, the worldly-minded man, who labors to deceive you, gains credit enough with you to establish this maxim, that all superlative degrees of alms-giving, are GREAT SINS, and that a man must never sell all he has and give it to the poor, because some may have families of their own, and ought to make sufficient provision for them, according to that proverb, "Charity begins at home;" when no one, at least scarce any one, is wise enough to know, when he has a sufficiency. O Lord, which are we to believe, these worldlings, or thee? If thou dost deceive us, why dost thou threaten us with punishments, if we do not heed thee? And if the world is deceitful, shall we not flee from it to cleave to thee?

"Pride is a great sin" even with these worldlings, inasmuch as the external excesses of it, may obstruct the way to many ambitious terminations of view, and its internal agitations are the destruction of that peace, to which even self-love aspires; besides, the frequent extravagancy of its motions may not only be prejudicial to health, but a shortner of life. And, therefore, no wonder they should object against it, "Be not over much wicked: why shouldst thou die before thy time?" For this reason, they look upon a little mixture of humility to be not only commendable, but even necessary to curb the extravagant follies of an over-bearing pride. But then a superlative degree of humility, that is, humility free from the least tincture of pride or vanity, which is the same with them, as "an over-strained humility, is a fault as well as folly;" because, forsooth, it is an expedient to the self-enjoyment of the world and its pleasures; "All Christians must have to do with some vanities, or else they must needs go out of the world indeed; for the world itself is all over vanity." 'Tis nothing, therefore, surprising, my brethren, to see a man of this cast of mind making a vain ostentation (act of display, show) of his little superficial acquaintance, with the ancient Greeks and Romans. What is

this but acting conformably to his own principle, that "all Christians must have to do with some vanities?" And shall we wonder to hear such a one prefer their writings, to those of an apostle; or be astonished to see him wound the apostle with raillery, (good-natured ridicule) through your sides, for wishing to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified? No, with him it is consistency to laugh and reprove you out of the perfection of righteousness, which, however he may play with terms, is with him the same as being righteousness over-much; but with you it would be inconsistency, who ought to know no difference between being righteous, and living in a perpetual, habitual desire of being superlatively so. It is no more than, than you ought to expect to hear such advocates for the world cry out to you, "Be not righteous over-much: why should you destroy yourselves?" But, O Lord, surely this is not the same voice which tells us, that unless we humble ourselves like unto children, we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven, and that he is greatest there, who humbles himself the most like a child! But what will not men advance who are drunk with passion, and intoxicated with self-love?

"The vice of intemperance in eating, and drinking, is plain to everybody," they own. And, therefore, they give it up as an excess which cannot but tend to the impairing of health, and shortening of life: nay, it drowns the very relish of pleasure in actual eating and drinking. Hence will every refined debauchee exclaim against it with Dr. Trapp: "Be not over much wicked: why shouldst thou destroy thyself?" Little sobriety, say they, is requisite to give a zest to luxury and worldly pleasures. But too much of it is too much, "to eat nothing but bread and herbs, and drink nothing but water, unless there be a particular reason for it (such perhaps as Doctor Cheyne may assign) is folly at best (that is, even though it be done for Christ's sake) therefore no virtue:" "Be not then righteous over-much, why shouldst thou destroy thyself?" And if you should answer those carnally-minded men with the words of the apostle, Rom. 8, "We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh; For if we live after the flesh, we shall die: but if we, through the spirit, do mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live." If you answer them thus, they will tell you, this is teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." And it will be to as little purpose to answer them, with what St. Paul says elsewhere (Rom. 14:17) "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost:" They will not blush to tell you, that "our blessed Savior came eating and drinking, nay worked a miracle to make wind (at an entertainment) when it is plain there had been more drank than was necessary." To such lengths does the love of the world hurry these self-fond, merry-making worldlings! Tell them of self-denial, they will not hear you, it is an encroachment upon the pleasures of life, and may shorten it of a few days, which you are never sure of possessing; it is being "righteous over-much: why shouldst thou destroy thyself?" Jesus, you will say, tells us (John 12:25) "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal." But this and the like, they will inform you, "are hyperbolical phrases." Now what signifies minding Jesus, when he speaks hyperbolically, that is, speaks more than is strictly true. Yet, O Lord Jesus, grant us to mind thee, whatever these worldlings may say; remind us, that if any man will come after thee, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow thee! O how enlarging is it to the soul, to take up the cross of Christ and follow him!

But you are charged, ye beloved lovers of perfect righteousness, with extravagances. You allow of "no sort of recreation or diversion; nothing but an universal mortification and self-denial; no pleasure but from religion only:" you teach "that the bodily appetites must not be in the least degree gratified, any farther than is absolutely necessary to keep body and soul together, and mankind in being: No allowances are to be made for melancholy misfortunes, or human infirmity: grief must be cured only by prayer;" (a horrid grievance this, to such as think prayer burdensome at best) "To divert it by worldly amusements is carnal." A heavy charge this: but left it should seem so only to those carnal persons, who are resolved to give way

to their carnal appetites; what you look upon as advisable only, these perverters of truth insinuate to be looked upon by you as indispensable duties. And lest prevarication should fail, downright falsehoods must be placed to your account, "so that to taste an agreeable fruit, or smell to a rose, must be unlawful with you," however you disown it. But O, my beloved Christians, be not discouraged from the pursuit of perfect righteousness by these or such vile misrepresentations. For "blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for the sake of Christ Jesus. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: For great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you."

Thus far, then, may suffice to show clearly with what dangerous views the worldly-minded men, whom Solomon personates in the text before us, lay siege to your souls in fair speeches. What I have said, is enough to convince you, that their character is that of the beast, whom St. John, in the Revelations, "saw coming up from the sea (that is, the flagitious [sinful, unlawful, wicked] world) with seven heads." And what shall we say of a man, a clergyman, who teaches, and is an advocate for their perverse doctrines? May we not, nay, must we not, for the glory of God, and your good, inform you, that he is a "Teacher and approver of worldly maxims." May I not, nay, must I not, give you this caution with the royal preacher: "When he speaketh fair, believer him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart?" But how different is the character I have given you, from the character of the persons to whom the text under consideration is spoken! That is, the character of all such, as, like you, are resolved never to rest, 'till they rest in Christ Jesus. To show this, I shall now pass to my third point.

III. To what sort of persons does Solomon in the character of a worldling address himself, when he says, "Be not righteous over-much, neither make thyself over-wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself?" Not to the wicked, 'tis plain; for besides that it would have been an unnecessary precaution, he turns to these in the next verse with another kind of warning, which however has some analogy with this. "Be not over-much wicked, neither be thou foolish, why shouldst thou die before thy time?" Was it then to the righteous, in a common way; that is, to such as content themselves with the observance of the absolute essentials of God's laws? Surely our adversaries will not allow this, unless they be of opinion, that to be righteous at all, is to be righteous over-much. And yet it cannot possibly be supposed that the persons spoken to, are men perfectly righteous; since, as I proved to you, in the introduction of this discourse, till we come up to the perfection of our heavenly father, we can never be righteous enough, much less perfectly righteous: wherefore, as in this life, men cannot attain to the perfection of their heavenly father, it follows in course that the persons here spoken to, cannot be men perfectly righteous, there being no such men existing; for as St. John saith, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Alas, O Lord, when shall we be delivered from the body of this death?

It remains, that the persons spoken to, in the text, are such only, as persisting steadfastly in a firm adherence to all the essential laws of God, content not themselves with the practice of common virtues in a common degree, but live in a perpetual habitude of desires, struggles, and yearnings towards an intimate union with Christ, the perfection of righteousness. They are not of the number of those righteous with indifference, who would fain blend the service of God and mammon, would fain have Christ and the world for their masters, and halting between two, like the children of Israel of old, with their faces to heaven, and their hearts to the earth, are neither hot nor cold. Alas, would they were cold or hot! But "because they are luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, the Lord shall spew the out of his mouth."

Not so the persons spoken to in my text; not so you, O beloved in God, who having shaken off the world and worldly affection; to run the more swiftly after righteousness, hate your own lives for the sake of Christ. Happy, happy are all you, who put on our Lord Jesus, and with him the new man! "You are the true

circumcision which worship God in spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

What wonder then, Christians! To you I speak, all ye lovers and strugglers after the perfect righteousness of your divine Master Christ; what wonder is it, that you should be charged with enthusiasm, with folly, with fanaticism and madness? Were not the apostles so before you, when they preached Christ Jesus? Nay were they not reputed drunk with wine? Can you be amazed at it in an age, "when all manner of vice abounds to a degree almost unheard of," when the land is full of adulterers, and because of swearing the land mourneth. O how is the faithful city become an harlot! My heart within me is broken, because of the clergy, all my bones shake? I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome; because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness, perverted by this deluded clergyman.

When the clergy, whom Christ has appointed to teach his people "to walk before him and be perfect," become teachers of worldly maxims, what can be expected from the laity? It is notorious, that for the moralizing iniquity of the priest, the land mourns. They have preached and lived many sincere persons out of the church of England. They endeavor to make you vain: (as the prophets did in the day of Jeremiah) they speak a vision out of their own mouth, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. In a word, "both prophet and priest are profane, and do wickedness in the very house of the Lord." Nay, they say still to them who despise the Lord, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say to every one who walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.

Such is the language, my beloved lovers of Christian perfection, which the indolent, earthly-minded, pleasure-taking clergy of the church of England, use to strengthen the hands of evil-doers, that none may return from his wickedness. Such is the doctrine of the letter-learned divine, who has dipped his pen in gall, to decry perfect righteousness, and to delude you from it, with a false application of that text so greatly misunderstood by him: "Be not righteous over-much, neither be thou over-wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself?" But suffer not yourselves, my fellow-Christians, to be deluded by him. For as I have already shown to you, he is grossly (Lord grant he was not maliciously) mistaken in his manner of explaining this text; and so far from making a right application of it according to the wise, the experienced Solomon's intention, he acts the character of a vain libertine, full of self-love, and earthly desires, whom Solomon but personates, to ridicule. But the doctor by realizing that character is himself, becomes the teacher and approver of worldly maxims, which he applies to you, on purpose to destroy in you the yearnings after perfect righteousness in Christ. May I not then, nay, must I not warn you, my beloved, that this man is an enemy to perfect righteousness in men through Christ Jesus, and, therefore, no friend to Christ? O that my head was an ocean, and my eyes fountains of tears, to weep night and day for this poor creature, this hood-winked member of the clergy.

Pray you, O true Christians, pray and sigh mightily to the Lord; importune him in the behalf of this erring pastor; pray that he would vouchsafe to open the eyes, and touch the stubborn heart of this scribe, that he may become better instructed. Otherwise, as the Lord said by the mouth of his true prophet Jeremiah, "Behold, I will feed him with wormwood, and make him drink the water of gall; for from him is profaneness gone forth into all the land."

This good, however, hath he done by attempting to show the folly, sin, and danger of that which he miscalls being righteous over-much, that is, being superlatively righteous, in desire and habitual struggles; he has thereby given me the occasion to show you, brethren, in the course of this sermon, the great and real folly, sin, and danger of not being righteous enough; which, perhaps, I should never have thought of doing, had not this false doctrine pointed out to me the necessity of doing it. Thus does the all-wise

providence of God, make use of the very vices of men to draw good out of evil; and choose their very errors to confound falsehood and make way for truth. Though this should be more than our angry adversary intended, yet, Lord, reward him according to his works: and suffer him no longer to be hasty in his words, that we may have room to entertain better hopes of him for the future.

Blessed be God for sending you better guides! I am convinced it was his divine will: our dear fellow-creature, Doctor Trapp, falling to such errors, has given so great a shock to the sound religion of Christian perfection, that unless I had opposed him, I verily believe the whole flock who listened to his doctrine, would have been scattered abroad like sheep having no shepherd. "But woe to you scribes and Pharisees! Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, saith the Lord."

Full well I know that this sermon will not be pleasing to my poor peevish adversary; but correction is not to pleasure but to profit: few children can be brought willingly to kiss the rod which rebuketh them; though, when they become of riper understanding, they will bless the hand that guided them. Thus shall this angry man, I trust, thank me one day for reprovng him, when his reason shall be restored to him by the light of the Holy Spirit. O Lord, grant thou this light unto him, and suffer him to see with what bowels of pity and tenderness I love him in thee, even while I chasten him.

Neither am I insensible, brethren, how offensive my words will be to worldlings in general, who loving falsehood better than truth, and the flesh before the spirit will still prefer the doctor's sin-soothing doctrines to the plain gospel verities preached by me. O how my soul pities them. But I have done my duty, I wash my hands, and am innocent of the blood of all. I have not fought to please my hearers, but have spoken plain truth though it should offend. For what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; and hope I shall ever do so. Not that I presume to think myself already perfect. But "I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

None of us, as I before told you, can boast of having attained the summit of perfection; though, he is the nearest to it, who is widest from the appetites of the flesh, and he stands the highest, who is the lowliest in his own esteem: wherefore, as many of us as have made any advances towards Christ and his kingdom, "whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

Walk not then, brethren, according to the ways of the world: but be followers of Christ together with me. And if any, even an angel of light, should presume to teach you any other gospel than that which I have here taught you, let him be accursed. "For you will find many walking, like such of whom I have told you already, and now tell you weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly: and whose glory is in their shame, for they mind worldly things. But your conversation is in heaven, from whence also you look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change your vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue even all things unto himself," even the stubborn heart of our perverse adversary.

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

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