

As Good as God

by Harmon A. Baldwin

People who claim holiness do not think they are as good as God, but rather acknowledge their own weaknesses and infirmities, and claim to be made perfect in love and cleansed from sin through Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Matthew 5:48, James 1:17, James 2:12, 2 Peter 3:18, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Holiness Movement", "Christian Perfection"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin refutes the misconception that those who profess holiness claim to be as good as God, emphasizing that holiness people acknowledge their imperfections and constantly attribute any goodness in them to God. He explains that holiness individuals recognize their limitations compared to God's nature of goodness, love, perfection, and knowledge. Baldwin clarifies that holiness people do not claim sinless perfection or absolute perfection, but rather strive for growth in grace and purity of heart, motives, and love according to the law of liberty.

Transcript

It is objected that those who profess holiness claim to be as good as God.

This statement is as false as it could possibly be. Professors of holiness never make such a claim; on the contrary they constantly assert that they are not and never will be divine nor as good as divinity. This is proven from the following considerations

I. The nature of God himself.

God is goodness. He has in himself independent of any other being the fountain of never failing goodness. No man ever makes such a claim for himself, but all holiness people constantly declare that any goodness in them is given by God.

God is love. This is his nature and ever will be. He is the very personification of love. Every professor of holiness declares "I love because he first loved me."

God is perfect. That is, in him every moral attribute is so complete that there is no possibility of adding any perfection to his character either in kind or degree. Holiness people continually bewail their littleness and are always seeking greater attainments.

God is perfect in knowledge, wisdom, power and glory. Nothing ever will add to him or detract from him; we can never teach him or hide anything from him. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through all the earth beholding the evil and the good. Professors of holiness are like other men, they lack knowledge, are liable to be unwise, are weak and are even called the filth of the world.

II. Holiness people not only do not claim to be as good as God but they assert that there are other beings that excel them in holiness and that there are laws that they cannot fulfill.

1. They do not claim to keep the angelic law of perfect obedience the Adamic or Mosaic laws of perfect innocence.

The prejudices of our opponents are increased by their confounding Adamic and Christian perfection; two perfections these, which are as distinct as the garden of Eden and the Christian church. Adamic perfection came from God our Creator in paradise, before any trial of Adam's faithful obedience: and Christian perfection comes from God our Redeemer and Sanctifier in the Christian church, after a severe trial of the obedience of faith. Adamic perfection might be lost by doing despite to the preserving love of God our Creator; and Christian perfection may be lost by doing despite to the redeeming love of God our Saviour. Adamic perfection extended to the whole man; his body was perfectly sound in all its parts, and his soul in all its powers, but Christian perfection extends chiefly to the will, which is the capital moral power of the soul; leaving the understanding ignorant of ten thousand things, and the body "dead because of sin." *

2. They do not claim what some call sinless perfection unless the word "sinless" is properly defined.

We believe that although adult, established believers, or perfect Christians, may admit of many involuntary mistakes, errors, and faults; and of many involuntary improprieties of speech and behavior; yet, so long as their will be bent upon doing God's will; so long as they 'fulfil the law of liberty' by pure love, they do not sin according to the gospel; because, evangelically speaking, 'sin is the transgression,' and 'love is the fulfilling,' of 'that law.' Far, then, from thinking that there is the least absurdity in saying daily, 'Vouchsafe to keep us this day without sin,' we doubt not but in the believers who 'walk in the light as Christ is in the light,' that deep petition is answered, the righteousness of the law which they are under is fulfilled; and, of consequence, an evangelically sinless perfection is daily experienced. I say, evangelically sinless,' because, without the word 'evangelically,' the phrase 'sinless perfection' gives an occasion of caviling to those who seek it; as Mr. Wesley intimates in the following quotation, which is taken from his Plain Account of Christian Perfection:-- "To explain myself a little farther on this head: 1. Not only 'sin,' properly so called, that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law, but 'sin,' improperly so called, that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown, needs the atoning blood. 2. I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions, which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality. 3. Therefore, 'sinless perfection' is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. 4. I believe a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions -- such transgressions you may call 'sins,' if you please; I do not, for the reasons above-mentioned. **

3. Persons who profess holiness do not claim to have attained such a measure of grace and of the fullness of the Spirit that they cannot grow in grace.

Another capital mistake lies at the root of the opposition which our Calvinian brethren make against Christian perfection. They imagine that, upon our principles, the grace of an adult Christian is like the body of an adult man, which can grow no more. But this consequence flows from their fancy, and not from our

doctrine. We exhort the strongest believers to 'grow up into Christ in all things;' asserting that there is no holiness, and no happiness in heaven, much less upon earth, which do not admit of a growth, except the holiness and the happiness of God himself; because, in the very nature of things, a being absolutely perfect, and in every sense infinite, can never have anything added to him. But infinite additions can be made to beings every way finite, such as glorified saints and holy angels are. ***

III. Holiness people do not lay claim to absolute perfection, for the following reasons:--

They are compassed about with infirmities, Their physical bodies are weak. Sickness and disease prey upon them. Because of their weakness they are often unable to do the things they desire.

Their fleshly natures possess appetites and desires which must be held in check, mortified or denied or they will become too strong, or take too prominent a place in the life and eventually overthrow spirituality. Paul says: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." And again, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

Their minds are infirm. Holiness does not teach a man the measurements of the heavens, the natures and virtues of plants, the laws of physics nor the intricacies of mathematical calculations. Holiness does not even insure that its possessor will be able to pass judgment as to what consequence will follow any given antecedent without error. That is, they are not infallible in judgment and do not claim to be.

Their spirits are infirm. An infirmity is defined as an involuntary lack of power. All are free to admit that they would be glad to be able to sense God's will and requirements more readily than they do. Their spiritual eyes are open but they do not always see all things clearly. Although growth in grace assures clearer vision yet perfect vision will never be given till they enter heaven.

IV. In what particular then do they claim to be perfect?

They do claim that their hearts are cleansed from the inbeing of sin.

They do claim that their motives are pure. When they know the will of God they desire to do it.

They claim to be made perfect in love. This is a Bible term and is the name of a Christian experience. Perfect love means love with no admixture of any contrary affection. If there is any admixture the love is not perfect.

They do claim to be perfect according to the law of liberty by which they shall be judged, "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." -- James 2:12. This law admits that human infirmities may exist even after the heart is cleansed from sin.

In view of all these acknowledgments of weakness and infirmity no one can truthfully accuse another of claiming divine prerogatives simply because he professes entire sanctification.

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