

Definition.

by Harmon A. Baldwin

Christian Perfection is loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and implies the absence of all moral defilement and inherent tendencies to sin.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Isaiah 1:18, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Galatians 5:22, Philippians 2:15, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, James 4:8, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Holiness"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches about Christian Perfection as the perfect love for God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, where all thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love. He explains the journey from justification to holiness, highlighting the eradication of inherent sinful tendencies and the attainment of a heart made holy. Baldwin emphasizes that holiness is the absence of all moral defilement and the perfect presence of inbred sin, requiring a complete removal of all wrong tendencies. He delves into the power of purity, manifested in self-control, victory over temptations, influence with men, and a deep connection with God, leading to a life filled with the fruits of the Spirit.

Transcript

Wesley defines Christian Perfection as The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love.

When a person is justified, or converted, his past transgressions are blotted out, and he is "born again, or regenerated;" he is born into the family of God, thus becoming "a son of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ;" he receives the witness of the Spirit testifying to this fact, from whom also he receives "power," ability, or "grace" to walk henceforth In the commandments of God. He lives a new life. "Old things are passed away and, behold, all things are become new." He "rejoices In God his Savior," and has "this testimony, that he pleases God." He has peace and love and all "the fruits of the Spirit." He loves God supremely, and loves his "neighbor as himself."

But while all this is true, yet he sees in his heart an element, or a principle, that is contrary to this. He loves God, but realizes that his love is not perfect; he loves his neighbor, yet must struggle against inherent principles that are the opposite to this love; he rejoices, but sees that his joy is liable to run Into levity; he is sober, but his sobriety is mixed with melancholy; he has peace, but maintains it amid inward strife, or feels himself settling into stagnation; he is longsuffering, but sees a tendency to be so for policy's sake, or, on

the contrary, to lose his patience; he is faithful, but continually reproaches himself for the unfaithfulness of his heart, and sees a tendency to be firm because of stubbornness, or for the sake of contention; he has faith, but must constantly struggle against the infidelity of his own heart; in short he has all the fruits of the Spirit, but sees that every one of them is opposed by a contrary element, and that there remains in him a tendency to some inordinate leaning that has a semblance to genuine piety (and is called genuine by the world), but which is ruinous to grace.

But when the heart is made holy all this is changed. Negatively, holiness is the absence of all moral defilement, of inherent tendencies to sin. This means exclusion of all wrong tendencies. Sin is a unit, i.e., the nature of sin is such that where one of its attributes appears every other attribute is present -- even "the body of sin" itself. So if there is one carnal manifestation in the soul, all the rest are there, though they may lie dormant for the time being, and, it may be, will never show themselves. Carnality is indivisible; it cannot be taken out in the way of one thing at a time, and those who think that they can thus get rid of their heart sins find that when they suppose they have conquered one manifestation and begin on another the conquered one will rise up and thrust at them with the same viciousness as before. Inbred sin must be removed as a whole. True, it manifests itself to the mind's eye as pride, envy, jealousy, lust, and such like, but we cannot have pride cast out and retain envy; and, if impatience remains, so does jealousy, though these manifestations may be so weak as to cause the person to think that they do not remain.

Since the "man of sin" can only be seen by those outcroppings which reveal its inherent nature, as the swaying of trees tells which way the wind blows, it follows that the only way to reach the center of this disease, or to find out the real condition of the soul, is carefully to observe the tendency of the desires springing from and expressing the nature within. If there is the least movement of the desires contrary to the love of God, or the least inclination toward gratification unlawfully or to an inordinate degree, there is back of this inclination a "body of sin" that will, unless held in check by the power of God or cast out, create in time a whirlwind of passion and unholiness which will be fatal to grace. So it behooves us to be careful. [See Chapter XIX: "Conflicts of the Entirely Sanctified."]

Negatively, then, holiness is the perfect absence of inbred sin. The blessings which so delight the soul are received as a result of purity, and may be present in the experience to a greater or less degree. A sense of purity inwrought by the Holy Ghost is the abiding evidence of holiness, from the negative side.

Positively, holiness is:

1. Abandonment to all the will of God, without even involuntary objections to that will. In such a state one can praise God in afflictions, in necessities, in temptations, in slanders, as well as in prosperity, and can turn every providence, no matter how bitter and mysterious, to spiritual profit.

2. Holiness is purity of motive, or, as the Bible says, "a single eye." The holy heart is saved from all mixture in its motives of the vile with the precious things of the Spirit, and has constantly a pure desire for God's glory. If its possessor makes a mistake, as he sometimes will, he can examine the most secret workings of his soul, and, after the most critical search, can conscientiously say, "I made a mistake, but my motives were pure." In order to make the claim that his motives are pure he will not be forced to fall back on the fact that he professes holiness and say, "I profess holiness, my heart is clean, therefore this motive must be all right." No; he can hold his motives before God, independent of his standing or professed standing in God, and see that they are pure. This means much but it is blessedly possible.

3. "Purity is power." This statement is often made, but there is much confusion as to what this power is, as to what it will do for its possessor, and as to what its possessor will be able to accomplish. This is an important question, as a misunderstanding one way or another might cause one to give up his hope in God if his accomplishments did not come up to his ideal.

The power which springs from purity is neither eloquence nor the force of intellectual supremacy. Some men can sway great audiences at their pleasure; that is power, but not necessarily the power of the Holy Ghost. Cicero did that, and he was a heathen. Patrick Henry, Daniel Webster and Stephen A. Douglas possessed remarkable ability in this direction, but they used it only in secular matters. The fact that some preachers of today possess the same ability, of necessity proves nothing, but merely indicates their personal magnetism or intellectual superiority. Beware of following a person because he manifests such power unless his advice is biblical. We must search deeper than the intellect for real power, for power in the Bible sense.

The power of purity is manifested in four directions.

(1) In the ability to control one's own life; to gain easy victory over temptations and circumstances; to live with a single eye and a victorious heart.

(2) Although its possessor rejoices not because devils are subject unto him, yet he can gain a comparatively easy victory over them. When the prince of this world cometh he hath nothing in the clean, devoted soul; it is a dry place to him, and he must go elsewhere to find rest.

(3) Power with men. Its possessor may or may not realize its exercise, but, consciously or unconsciously, he is wielding an influence that is deeper than mere human supremacy, and which lays hold of the heart of the onlooker. He may be inferior in intellectual capacity, and like Paul, his "bodily presence may be weak, and his speech contemptible;" but he can have so much of the Holy Ghost that he will rise above all this and compel people to respect the God in him.

The power of purity is not in the outward form of utterance, but in the deep undercurrent that silently but effectually cuts to the heart and convinces of sin. This is because the Holy Ghost accompanies the pure in heart more than others, since these can be trusted. It is said of James Caughey that he lived next door to heaven, and the celestial powers acquainted him with things they did not let everybody know.

The sermons and testimonies of the pure in heart will stir the hearers up to more holy living. How many people there are who can preach and testify well, even eloquently, but all they say flies over the people's heads like sky rockets, till men almost become dizzy watching the shining paths in the sky, but when the enraptured hearers come down to the dull realities of living they find they have not been strengthened in the least, and, it may be, are grievously disappointed with the cold, hard facts of life after such a dizzy, ethereal flight, and find themselves even weakened when they meet severe temptations. But the power of purity lies in its ability to go straight to the mark, and, with holy unction and fervor, point out the lack in people's lives and set them all on fire for greater achievements.

Its power also lies in its force of example. Godly humility will incite honest people to emulation. Earnestness will produce a like zeal in others, and love will catch in devoted hearts like fire in standing corn. One's eminent attainments in this direction will cause a pressing forward in others.

Again, its power is manifest in its holy, steadfast confidence. Realizing its own innocence, purity fears not to proclaim the whole truth of holy living, and to express its entire confidence that others can receive a like benefit.

Its possessor feels the importance of what he says. That person who has spent the most of the day in idle chit-chat must not expect much of the power of God at night. The purified person so realizes the importance of his words that he is choicé in using them; then each word is more likely to burn with holy fire as it goes home to some needy heart. "Let thy words be few," and the few will be more likely to be honored of God.

The possessor of purity is burdened for souls. There is nothing so effectual in awakening souls as a God-given burden for them on the part of God's people. This the pure soul possesses. He knows what it is to weep for the lost, to groan in Gethsemane. The person who does not possess this burden would do well to search the ground of his heart and see if it is clean as he fondly imagines it to be.

The great source of the power of purity lies in the fact that its possessor is indwelt by the Holy Ghost. Although the hearer may not know anything about spiritual matters, and may even be skeptical as to their possibilities, yet in spite of contrary prejudices his heart is moved. This is the great thought that Jesus impressed on the minds of the disciples in connection with the reception of the heavenly Paraclete -- "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem till ye be endued with power from on high." "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." From the earnestness of the disciples in waiting for the fulfillment of this promise we naturally infer that they felt their great need of its accomplishment, and that they were not properly equipped without it. The results, when compared with their former weakness, fully justify the assumption. If you lack that holy anointing which makes you strong in the Lord and in the power of his might you are not to the bottom yet; dig deeper till your soul is filled with all the fullness of God.

(4) Power with God. Jacob had power with God, he wrestled and prevailed. Daniel prayed and the angel came to his rescue. Elijah prayed till it rained not for three years and six months; he prayed again and the heavens gave rain. Holy men of all ages have wrestled till God answered. Here is the real reason for all the power of purity. Its possessors tarry so much in the secret place that they prevail with God. And coming from this sacred presence how can they help but be a power with men and victorious in life? Such persons shed a sacred influence wherever they go. "As princes they have power with God." Oh, for the Pentecostal baptism of prevailing power!

4. The holy heart is filled with all the fruits of the Spirit it is entirely free from all the alloy that is found in the justified heart, and the graces of the Spirit, perfect in quality, reign alone. The development of these graces does not consist in a change or bettering of their nature, but in such a deepening and enrichment of them that they more and more perfectly control the outward actions, and even the most secret thoughts; changing and refashioning the whole life from day to day; utilizing every furnace, trial or temptation, every misunderstanding, every burden or perplexity, for the perfecting of outward and the maturity and enrichment of inward holiness, "till we all come * * unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" In respect to the possibilities of growth there is no end; and as a man is not physically perfect till he gets his growth, so the soul is never perfect in the sense of excluding further development; but, thank God, it can have not only perfect love, but also perfect faith, patience, resignation, humility, longsuffering, hope, and all graces of the Spirit, -- perfect in quality though not in degree.

Fletcher says, Christian perfection is a spiritual constellation made up of these gracious stars; perfect repentance, perfect faith, perfect humility, perfect meekness, perfect self-denial, perfect resignation, perfect hope, perfect charity for our visible enemies, as well as for our earthly relations; and, above all, perfect love for our invisible God, through the explicit knowledge of our Mediator Jesus Christ. And this last star is always accompanied by the others, as Jupiter is by his satellites. We frequently use, as St. John, the phrase 'perfect love,' instead of the word perfection; understanding by it the pure love of God shed abroad in the hearts of established believers by the Holy Ghost, which is abundantly given them under the fullness of the Christian dispensation.

The following definitions from Wesley will help to a proper understanding of the subject.

He says,

But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love 'rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks.'"

'The pure in heart,' are they whose hearts God hath 'purified even as he is pure;' who are purified through faith in the blood of Jesus, from every unholy affection; who, being 'cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfect holiness in the [loving] fear of God.' They are, through the power of his grace, purified from pride, by the deepest poverty of spirit; from anger, from every unkind or turbulent passion, by 'meekness and gentleness; from every desire but to please and enjoy God, to know and love him more and more, by that hunger and thirst after righteousness, which now engrosses their whole soul: so that now they love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and mind and strength."

What is then the perfection of which man is capable while he dwells in a corruptible body? It is the complying with that kind command: 'My son, give me thy heart' It is the 'loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind.' This is the sum of Christian perfection: it is all comprised in that one word, love. The first branch of it is the love of God: and as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself:' Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. 'On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets:' these contain the whole of Christian Perfection. * * * *

St. Paul, when writing to the Galatians, places perfection in yet another view. It is the one undivided fruit of the Spirit which he describes thus: 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity,' so the word should be translated here, 'meekness, temperance.' What a glorious constellation of graces is here! Now suppose all these things to be knit together in one, to be united together in the soul of the believer, this is Christian perfection.

Wesley explains the difference between the experiences of justification and holiness thus:

In the same proportion as one grows in faith, he grows in holiness; he increases in love, lowliness, meekness, in every part of the Image of God; till it pleases God after he is thoroughly convinced of inbred sin, of the total corruption of his nature, to take it all away; to fulfil that promise which he made first to his ancient people, and in them to the Israel of God in all ages: 'I will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love' the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.'

It is not easy to conceive what a difference there is, between that which he experiences now, and that which he experienced before. Till this universal change is wrought in the soul, all his holiness was mixed. He was humble, but not entirely; his humility was mixed with pride: he was meek; but his meekness was frequently interrupted by anger, or some uneasy and turbulent passion. His love of God was frequently damped by the love of some creature; the love of his neighbor, by evil surmising, or some thought, if not temper, contrary to love. Ill will was not wholly melted down into the will of God: but although in general he could say, I come 'not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me;' yet now and then nature rebelled, and he could not clearly say, 'Lord, not as I will, but as thou wilt.' His whole soul is now consistent with itself; there is no jarring string. All his passions flow in a continual stream, with an even tenor, to God. To him that is entered into his rest, you may truly say,

'Calm thou ever art within,

All unruffled, all serene!'

There is no mixture of any contrary affections; all is peace and harmony after. Being filled with love, there is no more interruption of it than of the beating of his heart; and continual love bringing continual joy in the Lord, he rejoices evermore. He converses continually with the God whom he loves, unto whom in everything he gives thanks. And as he now loves God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength; so Jesus now reigns alone in his heart the Lord of every motion there."

Again he says, The apostle seems to mean by this expression, *telleioi*, Ye shall be wholly delivered from every evil work; from every evil word; from every sinful thought; yea, from every evil desire, passion, temper; from all inbred corruption, from all remains of the carnal mind from the body of sin; and ye shall be renewed in the spirit of your mind, in every right temper, after the image of him that created you, in righteousness and true holiness.

The following thoughts may be of service in giving the reader more exact understanding of what holiness will do for him. Holiness of heart does not consist in wonderful ecstasies and raptures, but in a heart in tune with the pure love of God; not in wonderful up-liftings, so much as in wonderful down-sinkings; not in wonderful witnesses, unless as they are accompanied with and followed by an absence of sinful tendencies; not in spiritual exaltations, but in ever-deepening self abasement. As the individual views himself and his efforts, holiness consists not necessarily in the fact that he sees the mighty power of God working through him, but in a deep sense of his own weakness and utter dependence on God.

Holiness does not consist in boldness and forwardness, but in meekness and gentleness; not in being headstrong and independent, but in being teachable and easily intreated; not in being loud and boisterous, even in manifestations of blessing, but in the possession of a "meek and quiet spirit;" not in the ability to lead, but in willingness to be led, and that even by an inferior; not in the ability to hold to and win our point, but in the ability to yield to another, even when in the right, and not feel crosswise toward the other person when he smiles at your seeming defeat.

Holiness does not consist in the ability to preach wonderful sermons, or to give powerful testimonies, but rather in the ability to hear some one excel you in these functions and not feel envious; not in the ability to gain the applause of the people, but in freedom from jealousy when the other man is applauded.

Holiness does not consist in the ability to disregard your faults and smile at reproof; but rather in the ability to look them squarely in the face and come out as clear as ever; not alone in victory over temptation, but in

a deep abhorrence of the thing offered in the temptation, in a conscious absence of the inward strugglings of sinful tendencies when tempted; not in the ability to disregard temptation, but in the ability when it confronts you to squarely face it and still know you are clean; not in the ability to hold an experience, but in the ability to seem to turn it loose, and then find it return clearer than ever; not in the ability to face temptation down, but in the ability when it faces you down and has done its best, to arise through it all into glorious light, as clear before God as when it came.

Holiness does not consist in being clear before man only, but in being clear before the omniscient eye of Jehovah.

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