

A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Mr. Benjamin Seward, Esquire.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of regarding good men as a contrast to the wicked, and highlights the imperfection of even the best of men in their struggle with sin and the exercise of grace.

Scripture: Job 3:17, Psalm 37:37, Isaiah 62:1, Matthew 6:11-12, Romans 6:14, Philippians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:9, 1 John 1:8

Topics: "Righteousness", "Peace in Death"

Description

John Gill preaches a heartfelt sermon in memory of Mr. Benjamin Seward, emphasizing the characteristics of a truly good man as perfect and upright, and the peace that comes at the end of such a life. He reflects on the importance of observing and marking the lives of those who embody these qualities, particularly in light of Mr. Seward's exemplary character and his calm acceptance of death. Gill encourages the congregation to aspire to these virtues, reminding them that the end of the righteous is peace, and that true believers can find comfort in their faith amidst life's trials.

Transcript

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

BENJAMIN SEWARD, ESQ;

Preached April 8, 1753.

PSALM 37:37.

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.

THE occasion of my reading these words to you, at this time, is the decease of BENJAMIN SEWARD, Esq; late of Bengworth in Worcestershire. The last Lord's day he worshipped in public with saints below, was in this place; just five weeks ago. It is at the request of his surviving relations that I preach on this solemn occasion: no passage of scripture being left by the deceased for this purpose, and none given me by his friends; but this being suggested to me by a relation; and no other more proper to the occasion, or more suitable to the character of the deceased, occurring to my mind; I determined to make use of it, and improve it in the best manner I can to your profit and edification.

The general view of the Psalmist in this psalm is to dissuade men truly good from envy, fretfulness, and impatience at the prosperity of the wicked; and to exhort them to be still and quiet; to wait patiently on the Lord, and trust in him; showing the care God takes of such, and the good things he does, or will bestow upon them; and also the sure and sudden destruction of the wicked: a beautiful contrast between the righteous and the wicked may be observed throughout the whole psalm, and particularly in the text and context.

I have seen the wicked in great power, says the Psalmist; having in his mind, it is highly probable, some particular person, as Saul, or Doeg the Edomite, or Ahitophel, or some such one, in great authority, in an exalted station of life, when he was in low circumstances: such an one spreading himself like a green bay-tree; in a very flourishing condition, in a seemingly settled state of outward felicity, and glorying in it, and striking terror into all around him: yet he passed away, and lo he was not; either his power, and riches, and honor, were suddenly taken from him; or he was taken by death from them, and was no more the man he had been; or was no more in the land of the living: yea I sought him, but he could not be found; in the place where he formerly was, that knowing him no more; he could not be found on earth, from whence he was taken; nor in heaven, where there is no place for such persons: he was gone to his own place, as is said of Judas, of whom Jerom, an ancient writer, interprets the whole passage: but, on the other hand, mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace: observe the truly sincere and gracious man, in his character, principles, and practices; trace him throughout the whole of his conversation; view him in every light, in life, and at death; and you will find the issue of all to be solid peace, prosperity and happiness.

In the words may be observed, I. The character of a real good man, described as perfect and upright. II. The regard which is to be had unto him, he is to be marked and observed, beheld, looked at, and attentively considered. III. The reason assigned for this, and which is expressive of his future happiness; for the end of that man is peace. I. The character of a truly good man, who is described, First, As perfect:[1] some such there have been in all ages. Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and walked with God.

Job was a perfect and upright man; both the characters met in him which are given of the good man here. The apostle Paul spake the wisdom of God among them that were perfect; (Gen. 6:9, Job 1:1, 8, 1 Cor. 2:6) but the question is, in what sense they may be said to be perfect. And they are so both with respect to sanctification and justification. 1st, With respect to sanctification. This is what the people of God are chosen to as an end, and chosen through as a means of eternal happiness: it is called the sanctification of the spirit, (2 Thess. 2:13) because he is the author and efficient cause of it; if any man is sanctified, it is in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God: (1 Cor. 6:11) it lies in an implantation of principles of grace and holiness in the heart, and in the exercise of them, and appears in the outward walk and conversation.

It is of so much importance and consequence, and so absolutely requisite to eternal life, that without it no man shall see the Lord, (Heb. 12:14) even without perfect holiness; and yet no man is so perfect in it, in the present state, as to be entirely free from sin, complete in grace, or in-deficient in the discharge of duty. 1. Not so perfect as to be entirely free from sin. A good man is indeed free from the governing power of sin, under which he was before conversion. Sin is a king, a tyrant which reigns unto death; and to whose laws, which are lusts, men in a state of nature are voluntarily subject; they readily serve divers lusts and pleasures: but in conversion the power and force of sin is broken, and men are delivered from its thralldom and tyranny; they are translated into another kingdom, and are under another influence; they are not

under the power of sin as a law, but under grace as a governing principle; and therefore sin shall not have dominion over them: (Rom. 6:14) it is indeed still in them, and has great power and prevalence at times; it threatens the ascendant over them, and sometimes so far prevails as to lead them captive; when with their flesh, or corrupt part, they serve the law of sin, though with the mind or spiritual part the law of God: (Rom. 7:23, 25) they are also free from the damning power of sin, both original and actual; though they sinned in Adam, and the sentence of death passed on them; judgment came upon all men, and so on them to condemnation; (Rom. 5:12, 18) and by their actual sins and transgressions they become obnoxious to the curse and condemnation of the law; yet there is, ouden katakrima, "not one condemnation to them that are in Christ:" (Rom. 8:1) were there as many sentences of condemnation as there are sins, not one of them can be executed on those that belong to Christ; the reason is, because sin is condemned in his flesh; he has bore the condemnation himself; it has been executed upon him, and therefore who or what shall condemn? it is Christ that died; (Rom. 8:3, 33) and there is more virtue and efficacy in the blood and sacrifice of Christ to save, than there is in sin to damn.

Moreover, upon the sacrifice and satisfaction of Christ, God does not impute sin to his people; but he imputes the righteousness of his Son, by which they are justified from all their sins, and in that sense free from them; but then, no man, no not the best of men, are free from the being of sin in them. The apostle Paul, that holy man, than whom no mere man on earth was more holy, speaks of his indwelling sin; it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me; (Rom. 7:20) it was an inmate of his; sin not only dwelled with him, but dwelled in him.

John, the beloved disciple, says, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us: (1 John 1:8) and the apostle James put this question, Do ye think the scripture faith in vain, the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? (James 4:5) and not only by the mouth of three such witnesses is this truth established, but by the experience of all the saints in all ages: sin is like the spreading leprosy in the house, which could not be cleansed of it, without pulling down every stick and stone; sin will never be removed entirely from the saints, until this earthly house of their tabernacle is dissolved.

Nor are they free from the actings of sin; sin that dwells in them is always present with them; when they would do good; and often hinders them in the performance of it, so that they cannot do what they would; and it puts them upon the doing of that which is evil. It is an observation made long ago, and it is to be remarked in all ages; that there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (Eccl. 7:20) Every man sins in thought, word, or deed, and is continually sinning, even every good man.

He daily sins in thought; since the fall, every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). What evil thoughts are in it may be learnt in some measure by what comes out of it, which are expressed by the lips, and in actions; and though when a man becomes a spiritual man, he becomes spiritually-minded, and thinks good thoughts, which he cannot do of himself, only under the influence of the grace of God, yet he is not always under that influence; and though he hates vain thoughts, yet these lodge within him, of which he complains; and there is no man that is capable of looking into his own heart, but must observe the vanity, folly, and impurity of his thoughts.

He sins in word also, and very frequently: indeed, if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man; (James 3:2) but where is the man to be found that does not offend God, his neighbor, and his own conscience, by his words, at one time or another? Let a man be as circumspect as he can; let him keep his mouth as with a bridle, (Ps. 39:1) as David did, and hold the reins ever so strait; let him be as wise as Solomon, some idle word, imprudent, unsavory, and unbecoming expression or another will at times drop

from him; and when provoked, let him be as patient as Job, and as meek as Moses, he will be tempted to speak unadvisedly with his lips: (Ps. 106:33) and as to deeds or actions, who can understand his errors, (Ps. 19:12) they are so many? in many things we all offend (James 3:2) or fall; fall into sin, as the righteous man does, seven times a day; and he would fall oftener, did not the Lord uphold him: and the true reason why he does not fall totally and finally, is, because he is in the arms of everlasting love, secured in the covenant of grace, kept by the power of God, and is in the hands of Christ, who is able to keep him from falling.

That the best of men are not entirely free from sin, and the commission of it, in this life, is clear from their confessions of it; none are more frequent at confession of sin, or more free and ingenuous in it than they are; yea, even such who in a proper sense may be said to be perfect. Plain-hearted Jacob owns, that few and evil had been the days of the years of his pilgrimage. (Gen. 47:9) Job, that perfect and upright man, says, I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? (Job 7:20) David, the man after God's own heart, was often at this work; I acknowledge my transgression, says he, and my sin is ever before me. (Ps. 51:3) The church in Isaiah's time confesses, we have sinned--and are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags. (Isa. 64:6) Daniel, that man greatly beloved of God, we read of confessing his sins, and the sins of his people. (Dan. 4:4, 5, 20) And saints indeed find their account in so doing; for as it is promised, that if men confess their sins, God will be faithful and forgive them; so David attests it from his own experience; I acknowledged my sin unto thee--and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin (Ps. 32:5).

This is also evident from the continual war there is in good men; they find a law in their members warring against the law of their minds, the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and indeed, there is nothing to be seen in the Shulamite, in the perfect one,[2] as that word may be rendered, but as it were the company of two armies; (Song 6:13) flesh and spirit, sin and grace set in battle array against each other: likewise, the same appears from the groans and complaints of the saints; one says, There is no soundness in my flesh--nor rest in my bones, because of my sin; (Ps. 38:3) another says, wo is me, I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips; (Isa. 6:5) a third says, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death! (Rom. 7:24) and all agree and join in this, We that are in this tabernacle groan, being burdened (2 Cor. 5:4) with the weight of sin and corruption; and so they do and will, as long as they are in the tabernacle of the body.

Once more, this is plain and manifest from the prayers of good men, that God would cleanse them from secret faults; keep them back from presumptuous sins; pardon their iniquities, for they are great; blot them out, according to the multitude of his tender mercies; purge and wash them, that they might be whiter than snow. (Ps. 19:12, 13 and 25:11 and 51:1, 7, 9) And our Lord, knowing that his disciples sinned, and would sin daily, taught them to ask for the forgiveness of their sins, for the application of pardoning grace to them, as often as they asked for their bread, even their daily bread; (Matt. 6:11, 12) yea, it is easy to observe, that those very men, said to be perfect, were not without sin: and though it is not pleasing to rake into the sins of good men, yet since these stand on record, to teach us that there is no absolute perfection in the best of men, and to encourage us, notwithstanding our sins and imperfections, to hope for acceptance with God through Christ, as they had, it cannot be wrong to observe them.

Thus Noah, who was a perfect man; was guilty of intemperance; Job, another perfect man, when convinced of his evil, abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes; and it may be remarked, that frequently good men fail in that very thing for which they have been most eminent: thus Abraham was famous for his faith, being the father of them that believe; and yet the principal failure recorded of him is,

his unbelief and distrust of the care of divine providence over him, which put him on saying, Sarah was his sister.

Moses was the meekest man on earth, and yet spoke very rashly and hastily; ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock? (Num. 20:10) You have heard of the patience of Job, and how eminent he was for that; and yet, what great impatience was he guilty of when he cursed the day of his birth? Solomon was the wisest of men, and yet never man acted so foolish a part, to be drawn into such gross idolatry as he was by his wives. 2. Nor are any good men so perfect as to be complete in the exercise of grace.

All grace indeed is seminally in the heart at once; the Spirit of God, the author of it, is given at once; Christ formed in the heart, the subject-matter of it, is done at once; all grace is implanted at one and the same time: it is a seed which is cast into the heart, and there abides; where there is one grace, there is every grace; where there is faith, there is hope; and where there is hope, there is faith; and where there are both faith and hope, there is love: as there is a strict connection between vices, where there is one, there are all; though they are not all in act in everyone, yet the seeds of all sin are in every man; such a connection there is between the graces of the Spirit, where one is, all are.

They may not indeed be in exercise together, at least to the same degree; a man can truly say he loves Christ, when he cannot say, my beloved is mine, and I am his; (Song 2:16) which is a strong expression of faith: there may be hope of eternal salvation by him, when a man is not able to say with Job, I know that my Redeemer liveth. (Job 19:25) one grace may be more visible than another, as to exercise; repentance may be discoverable when faith is not, yet there is no true repentance without it: a man first looks to Christ by faith, and then mourns and repents in an evangelical manner; whence it has been said, that "repentance is a tear that drops from the eye of faith."

Yet though they are all seminally cast into the heart at once, like seed they spring up, and arrive to maturity by degrees; grace is like feed, which first springs up in the stalk, and then appears in the ear, and at last in the full corn in the ear: it is with men in grace, as it is with them in nature, they are first children, then young men, and then fathers; and there is at first a perfection of parts, though not of degrees; as in a new-born infant, that has its proper shape, and all its members, it is perfect in all its parts; but not yet grown up to a perfect man; that is, by degrees: and so one born again is a new creature, and has all the parts of one, a new heart, and a new spirit, new eyes to see with, new ears to hear with, new hands to work with, new feet to walk with; but as yet not come to a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13) If we consider the several graces of the Spirit, it will appear that they are not in perfection as to exercise.

Saving, spiritual and experimental knowledge of Christ, and divine things, is a considerable part of sanctification; and the apostle says, in understanding be ye men, or be ye, teleioi, "perfect:" (1 Cor. 14:20) There are means, such as reading, hearing, praying, and meditating, to be used, in order to a greater degree of it; and truly gracious souls will not stick or rest satisfied in the first measure of knowledge, but leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, will go on unto perfection; (Heb. 6:1) and yet come short of it in the present state.

Some may have a greater degree of it than others, and be comparatively perfect; and in this sense we are to understand some passages, (1 Cor. 2:6, Phil. 3:15) which speak of men as perfect: and they are such who have their spiritual senses exercised, being of full age; (Heb. 5:14) have a clearer sight of Christ; a quicker hearing of his voice, so as to distinguish it from the voice of a stranger; a better relish and taste of

the grace of God, and more skill in handling the word of life; and yet those that know the most, know but in part, as even the apostle Paul, who knew so much of Christ, and him crucified; yet desired to know more, and did not think he had already attained to a perfection of it, though he greatly desired it, and pressed after it; but this is reserved to another state, when we shall see no more through a glass darkly, but face to face, and know as we are known. (1 Cor. 13:9, 12, Phil. 3:10-14) Faith is another part of sanctification, and so considerable a one, that men are said to be sanctified by it. (Acts 26:18) This, when unfeigned, true, and genuine, may be said to be perfect; and in that sense is opposed to an hypocritical faith, a mere profession of it; and which is but a bare assent to things, and but temporary; and in this sense it is said to be made perfect by works; (James 2:22) that is, to be declared true and genuine, by its working by love to God, Christ, and his people, and by being attended with works of righteousness done from right principles, and with right views: and in some it is to a greater degree than in others; for though all have like precious faith, (2 Pet. 1:1) as to its nature, object, and use, yet not as to exercise; some are strong in faith, and others weak, but in none is it absolutely perfect; there are some, *ta usirhmata*, deficiencies, or things lacking in it to be perfected: (1 Thess. 3:10) even in Abraham himself it was not perfect, as appears by his acts of unbelief, before hinted at; nor in Peter, a man so famous for his faith in Christ, who is complained of by him at a certain time as of little faith; (Matt. 14:31) and all the disciples saw reason to use such a petition, Lord increase our faith: (Luke 17:5) and in those who may arrive to a full assurance of faith, I greatly question whether it is always in full exercise; even in these may arise some doubts and hesitations, though they may continue but for a short time, which cause some perturbation and uneasiness in them.

Hope, that lively grace, which is in exercise when others are not, yet sometimes is so reduced as that a man puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope; yea says, my strength and my hope are perished from the Lord: (Lam. 3:18) and there is always need of the power of the holy Spirit to be afresh exerted, to cause a sinner to abound in the exercise of this grace. Love, which is sometimes very ardent and fervent, waxes cold; first love is left, though not lost; and though it may be made perfect, (1 John 4:17) that is, declared to be true and genuine, yet is not absolutely perfect, but has its allays.

The same may be observed of patience, humility, and self-denial, and every other grace. That believers are not completely perfect in grace, is evident from their standing in need of fresh supplies of it: as they are poor and needy, and find themselves so, there is a throne of grace provided for them continually to come unto for grace, to help them in time of need; and they are encouraged to expect it from the promise of God, that he will give more grace to the humble, and supply all the need of his people, according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:16, James 4:7, Phil. 4:19).

Moreover, this is still more evident from the saints disclaiming perfection in the present state; and even such who in some sense are said to be perfect; as Job, who expresses himself thus, if I say I am perfect, it (my mouth) shall prove me perverse. (Job 9:20) David says, he had seen an end of all perfection; (Ps. 119:96) which he judged unattainable by him, because of the largeness and spirituality of the law. And the apostle Paul, who had as large a measure of grace as ever any mere man had, yet says, not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect; (Phil. 3:12) and which may be further confirmed from the eager desires and earnest endeavors of the saints after it. 3.

Nor are they so perfect as to be indeficient in the performance of duty: how backward are they oftentimes unto it? none stir up themselves to diligence in it, but make idle excuses to free them from an attendance on it; saying as the church, I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them? (Song 5:3) What, sleepiness and drowsiness attend them in it! as in the disciples, who could not watch one hour with Christ; the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak: (Matt. 26:41) when duties are

performed in the best manner, there are such defects in them, as that saints are ashamed of them; and so far from concluding any merit in them, that they judge themselves unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10) on account of them: there is the iniquity of their holy things; sins in their most solemn and religious performances; for the atonement of which, provision is made in Christ, their antitypical Aaron, who has bore them, and satisfied for them: in a word, though they are desirous of perfecting holiness in the fear of God, (2 Cor. 7:1) they come short of it.

Upon the whole, it may be seen by all this, in what sense the saints are perfect as to their sanctification, and in what sense not; they may be said to be perfect, as they are sincere, and their grace true and genuine, which is the frequent sense of the word here used. It is said of Jacob, that he was a plain man, where is the same word^[3] as here; he was an honest, plain-hearted, sincere man, and in such sense perfect; as all those are, who have received the grace of God in truth; who have the root of the matter in them; whose faith is unfeigned, whose hope is without hypocrisy, and whose love is without dissimulation.

They are not absolutely, but comparatively perfect, in comparison of what they were themselves before conversion; in comparison of what others are who are walking in the vanity of their minds; in comparison of hypocrites, and formal professors; in comparison of such who are only outwardly righteous before men; and some are so in comparison of other real Christians, having a larger degree of knowledge, faith and experience. They are perfect, not in themselves, but in Christ, in whom they are sanctified; and who is made unto them sanctification, (1 Cor. 1:2, 30) as well as other things; who has the whole stock and fund of grace and holiness in him for them, from whence they receive grace for grace: (1 Thess. 5:23) so that though they are at present imperfectly sanctified, the God of peace will sanctify them wholly; the Spirit of God from Christ will finish his work of grace and holiness on them at the hour of death, and make them perfectly meet for the enjoyment of the divine presence. 2dly, They may be said to be perfect with respect to their justification.

We read of perfect men in Christ, and of the saints being compleat in him, the head of all principality and power, and of their being perfected by him; (Col. 1:28 and 2:10, Heb. 10:14) all which respects their justification through his righteousness. He has perfectly redeemed them from all sin, and from the curse and condemnation of the law: he is a rock, and this work of his is perfect; (Deut. 32:4) it is finished, and an eternal redemption (Heb. 9:14) it is; the efficacy and fruits of it will always continue, and it needs nothing to be added to it.

Christ has made full atonement for the sins of his people; he has bore them all, and took them away; he has put them away by the sacrifice of himself; he has finished, and made an end (Heb. 9:26, Dan. 9:24) of them, that they are no more; he has procured an entire pardon of them; God, for Christ's sake, forgives all trespasses; he heals all diseases, and forgives all iniquities; the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin; he has fulfilled the whole law in the room and stead of his people; that requires and demands perfect obedience, and nothing short of that will it allow to be a righteousness; but curses such who continue not in all things to do them.

Now what the law could not, or men could not do in obedience to the law, through the weakness of the flesh, God has sent his own Son, made under the law, to fulfill it, in the room and stead of his people, that so it might be fulfilled in them; and accordingly he has fulfilled it, and is the fulfilling end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believes: and thus having brought in a perfect and everlasting righteousness, which is commensurate to the demands of law and justice; whereby justice is satisfied, the law magnified and made honorable, and this accepted of God, and imputed to his people; they are

completely justified from all sin, and secure from all wrath and condemnation.

They are in this sense so perfect, that no sin is to be seen in them, or found upon them, for they are covered with Christ's righteousness, out of the sight of avenging justice. Though God sees all sin in his omniscience, and chastises and corrects for it in his providence; yet in the business of justification he sees no iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel: (Num. 23:21) when the sins of these are sought for, they shall not be found, because they are pardoned; they are covered with the blood and righteousness of Christ; they are removed from them to him, and from him, by his satisfaction for them, as far as the east is from the west; they are cast by the Lord behind his back, and into the depths of the sea, never more to be brought against them to their condemnation: in this sense they are perfect, or without blemish, as a word of the same root signifies, and is sometimes so rendered:[4] they are the undefiled in the way, unblameable and irreproveable in the sight of God, without fault before the throne.

As to their sanctification, they are like the moon, which has its spots; but with respect to their justification, they are clear as the sun; (Song 6:10) being clothed with the sun of righteousness, and so without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; they are all fair, and there is no spot in them; they are a perfection of beauty, made perfectly comely through that comeliness which Christ has put upon them; and so will be presented to himself, and to his divine Father another day, and at present are acceptable in his sight.

Secondly, Another character of truly good men is that of upright. As I have been so large upon the former, I shall say the less to this, and the rather, as there is a very great agreement between them; for an upright man is one that has the uprightness or righteousness of Christ shown unto him, and put upon him: if there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness; (Job 33:23) not the uprightness of the man himself, at least not his own external righteousness; but either the strict justice of God requiring satisfaction for sin; or rather the satisfactory righteousness of Christ, the messenger and interpreter, one among a thousand.[5] This is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, and is brought near, and shown unto a sensible sinner, by the blessed Spirit, who works faith in him to receive it, and to walk in this uprightness.

Again, an upright man is one that is upright in heart; (Ps. 11:2) who has a right spirit renewed in him; is an Israelite indeed; is right at heart; deals uprightly and sincerely with God and men; draws nigh to God with a true heart, and whose heart agrees with his mouth, and his actions with both: he is one that walks uprightly; (Ps. 84:11) that walks by faith in Christ, as he has received him, and as he has him, also, for an example; he walks according to the rule of the word, and has respect to all the commandments, and walks in all the ordinances of the Lord blameless.

If there is any difference between these two words, perfect and upright; the one may design the inward disposition of the soul, the sincerity of the heart, and the truth of grace there; and the other, the outward behavior and conversation agreeable thereunto. I proceed to consider, II. The regard that is to be had to such a man: He is to be marked, and observed, beheld, looked at, and attentively considered. Mark and observe how this man came to be perfect and upright; since, though God made man so, he sinned, and lost his perfection and uprightness: seeing that man now is a corrupt and depraved creature, conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity; there is none righteous and good, no not one; all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

Let it be observed and remarked then, that the perfect and upright man comes to be so by the grace of God, by which alone he is what he is; and by receiving grace out of the fullness which is in Christ, and by

the Spirit of God and his grace; for all this is not by might or power of man, but by the spirit and grace of God. Mark and observe such men, and look upon them with wonder and admiration; they are so many instances of the marvelous loving-kindness of God, of his amazing grace, and wondrous power; they are like Isaiah and his children, or rather like Christ and his; they are for signs and wonders; and as Joshua and his fellows, who were men wondered at. (Isa. 8:18, Zech. 3:8) It is astonishing that sinful creatures, so sadly corrupted, should be made perfect and upright.

Mark and observe such with great esteem and affection; for if you love God and Christ, you will love those that are begotten of them, and bear their image and likeness as these do: these are the precious sons of Zion; these are the excellent in the earth, in whom should be all your delight; and the more attentively you view them, the more you will love them. Mark and observe them as rare and uncommon persons, which are seldom to be found, and only here and there. Noah was perfect in the age in which he lived, but were there any other? we read of no more.

Job was perfect and upright; but then there was none like him in all the earth, and therefore the Lord would have him considered. There are but few, in all ages, whose persons and garments are undefiled, or who are such perfect and upright men. Mark and observe them, so as to imitate them; be followers of them, so far as they are followers of Christ; walk as they do, and as you have them for an example: we should be followers and imitators of them, who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.

Observe their conversation, how becoming the gospel of Christ it is; how by it they adorn the doctrine of God their Savior; how by the grace of God they have had it in the world; consider the end of their conversation, which issues in Christ, and in the glory of his name, and is to the honor of his interest. Take notice of their death, and the issue of it, and their end: this is not so generally considered as it should be; the righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart, and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come; (Isa. 62:1) that it is for their good they are removed, and that there are evil times coming on, they are taken from; it is to their profit and advantage, but to the loss of those who survive; who, as they live to see troublesome times, want their presence, counsel and assistance: hence such a complaint from one that marked these things; Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men: (Ps. 12:1) the happy exit of such may deserve special regard and attention; which leads me to consider, III.

The reason assigned why such should be marked and observed, and which is expressive of their future happiness; for the end of that man is peace; or there is an end to the man of peace: and many versions render it, the man of peace, or peaceable man;[6] particularly the Syriac version, there is a good end to men of peace; and so it carries on the description of the good man as a peaceable man. He is a man of peace, who enjoys much peace; the kingdom of God within him is peace and joy in the holy Ghost; he is filled with peace through believing in Christ; he has much peace with God through him, arising from a view of justification by his righteousness, pardon by his blood, and atonement by his sacrifice; yea, he is kept in perfect peace, having his mind stayed on the Lord, and his heart trusting in him; he enjoys a peace which passeth all understanding, which he has in Christ, and from him, and amidst all the tribulations that attend him in this world; and which the world neither gives, nor takes away.

He finds much peace of mind in waiting upon God, and worshipping him in the several duties of religion, both in private and public; in all the ways of Christ, which are ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace: he partakes of those joys and pleasures which a carnal man is a stranger to, and intermeddles not with. And he likewise follows after peace with all men, and after those things which make for it; he endeavors to

cultivate it everywhere, in the church, and in the world; and as much as in him lies, and if possible, would live peaceably with all mankind; peace rules in his heart, and is the temper and disposition of his mind.

But the better reading of the words, and what gives the best sense of them, is, that the good man's end is peace; his latter end, as the word is sometimes rendered; the latter part of his life, as Job's was. Bildad told him, that were he pure and upright, his latter end should greatly increase; and as he was, so it did, the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning; in both which places the same word^[7] is used, as here: and sometimes the last days of a good man are more peaceable, prosperous, and happy than the first part of his life is: but however, if this is not the case, if his tribulations continue to the end of his days, and through many he enters into the kingdom of heaven, peace is the issue of all; he goes away in peace, as old Simeon desired he might; and if not in a transport of joy, in a triumph over death and the grave, saying, O death! where is thy sting?

O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, which hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ; (1 Cor. 15:55-57) yet he goes off in serenity and tranquillity of mind, trusting in the Redeemer, and desirous of being with him. And as soon as he is departed, he enters into peace, into the joy of his Lord; into his presence, in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.

There will be nothing then to disturb his peace; no pricking briar, nor grieving thorn, (Ezek. 28:24) in all the heavenly country he is gone into; no more sin and corruption in his own heart to distress him; no more any of Satan's temptations to annoy him; no more of the reproach, rage, and persecutions of wicked men to molest him; there the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest: (Job 3:17) there is everything that contributes to peace; there is the God of peace, that will be with him forever; there is the Prince of peace, that has made peace for him by his blood; there is the holy Spirit, whose fruit is peace; there are the angels of peace, who at Christ's incarnation sung glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good-will unto men; (Luke 2:14) and there are the saints, the sons of peace, with whom he shall live forever: and there will be everything that can come under the notion of peace and happiness; there will be perfect health of body and soul, and length of days, forever and ever; no more pain, sickness, sorrow, and death; there will be riches and honor; riches of glory, an eternal weight of glory, a crown and throne of glory, an everlasting kingdom, prepared from the foundation of the world; a paradise of pleasure, bliss, and joy, inconceivable and inexpressible.

This is the end of the perfect and upright man. Now if any man may be said to be perfect and upright, in the sense in which I have explained these characters, as I doubt not there are many, the person whose death has occasioned this discourse may be said to be the man; and who was an ornament to the Dissenting interest in general, and to the Baptist denomination in particular, of which denomination he was. I fear I shall not be able to do justice to the character of this worthy gentleman, for want of sufficient knowledge of him; for though I have had the honor to be acquainted with him for some years past; yet by reason of distance of habitation, and having but seldom an opportunity of conversation with him, I am not so well qualified to give you his true portrait, as a gentleman and a christian; however, what from my own observation, and the information of others, I will give you the best account of him I can.

Mr. SEWARD was a gentleman of fine natural parts and good sense; he had a peculiar sweetness of temper, scarce ever known to be ruffled, discomposed, fretful and impatient, upon any occasion; which singular good nature, as it is commonly called, adorned with the grace of God, set him in a most amiable light, and caused him to shine in a most pleasing manner to all that knew him. He had the advantage of a

liberal education, first begun in Westminster school, and then carried on in the University of Cambridge; where, as I am informed, he took a degree, and was designed for service in the Established Church, in which he was brought up; but this was frustrated by a call in Providence from thence to another employment in life.

When it pleased God effectually to call him by his grace, through consulting the sacred scriptures, and his own experience, as well as the writings of learned and godly men, he embraced and professed a set of principles, glorious in themselves, calculated to secure and increase spiritual peace and comfort, and to promote true and undefiled religion, and powerful godliness; and upon the same plan he received the doctrine of adult baptism, and submitted to the ordinance of it, an ordinance greatly despised by men; in which he acted the self-denying part, as well as in joining himself in the communion of a small society of christians, of the Baptist denomination, mean and despicable in the eyes of men; and this he publicly did before the whole world, as not being ashamed of Christ, his gospel, ordinances and people; esteeming reproach for Christ's sake greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt.

Humility, that truly Christian grace, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which so much adorns the believer, was eminently conspicuous in him; he was affable and courteous to the meanest person; would condescend to men of low estate, and submit to those that were inferior to him, esteeming others better than himself; not elated either with the affluence of life he was possessed of, or with his natural or acquired abilities, or his spiritual gifts; knowing from whom he received them; and therefore would not glory as though he had received them not.

As he was blessed, with plenty of this world's good things, and so capable of relieving the distressed; his ears were open to the cries and requests of the poor; his heart sympathized with them in their troubles; his hand was ready to distribute to their necessities; he was a cheerful giver; and took delight in every opportunity to do good; which he did to all, without respect to parties, having an heart benevolent to all mankind; which gained him the universal esteem of all that had knowledge of him.

In his last illness he was calm and sedate, still and quiet, patient, and perfectly submissive and resigned to the will of God; not at all reluctant to death, or in any fear of it; entirely dependent on Christ as his Savior, and wholly looking to him for eternal life and salvation. In a visit I paid him, upon asking him how his faith stood, he replied, "his only view was to JESUS, and his trust was in him, knowing there was no other way to life and happiness; but added, that believing in Christ was a thing sometimes not so clear and manifest;" to which I replied, "it might be known, for to them that believe, Christ is precious; and as he is precious to every one that believes, so to whomsoever he is precious, that man does believe, or has true faith in Christ."

He observed, that this was an argument which he himself had made use of, to persuade some fearful christians that they did believe; and seemed greatly affected with it. I added, I hoped he would make use of the argument in his own favor. To a Reverend Minister^[8] that afterwards visited him, he declared, "that could he enjoy health and honor, and all the grandeur and good things of this world, they would be all nothing to him in comparison of a well-grounded hope of eternal glory and happiness."

As he had no immediate apprehensions of death, till he was at once seized by it, nothing dropped from him concerning that,--the last words he was heard to utter in a broken and almost inarticulate manner, were, "Dear Jesus,--Come--Come." Thus, without any violent struggle of nature, or any show of concern and uneasiness at death, this precious servant of Christ fell asleep in Jesus. The loss of him is great

indeed! A loss to his surviving relative, to whom he was a most indulgent husband, a most delightful companion, and a sympathizing partner in her afflictions; may the Lord sanctify it to her, and support her under it!

A loss to his dear children, to whom he was a tender and affectionate parent; who, by his bright example, hearty counsel, and wise directions and instructions, might have been of still greater advantage to them, had it pleased God to have continued him longer with them: May they tread in his steps and copy after him! A loss to his poor neighbors and others, both in the church and in the world, to whom he was a cheerful benefactor. A loss to the whole interest of Christ, of which he was an ornament and support!

He himself indeed is the gainer, and so is the church triumphant; which hereby has one more added to its shining number, which make that general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. To conclude: Let it be inquired whether these characters of perfect and upright belong to you, that have been hearing this discourse: are you partakers of the true grace of God? Have you a genuine faith in Jesus Christ, a good hope through grace of salvation by him, and a sincere love unto him?

Have you reason to believe that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to you, and you have interest in it, and are acceptable to God through it? Have you had clean hearts created, and right spirits renewed in you? And have you been enabled in any good measure to walk uprightly? And is it the desire of your souls, and the business of your lives to exercise a conscience void of offense towards God and men? Then, notwithstanding the imperfection that otherwise attends you, you are in a gospel-sense perfect and upright; and which you should ascribe to the grace of God, and be thankful for it.

Have you considered the men that bear these characters, as you should? When you behold them, do you find an affection for them, and does it create in you an esteem of them? Are you desirous of, and in some measure helped to imitate them, in whatsoever is praise-worthy in them? Have you observed the end of their conversation, and the issue of their holy lives, which is peace? Then may you hope that this also will be your end; which cannot but be a desirable one. Even Balaam desired to die the death of the righteous, and wished his last end might be like his: (Num. 23:10) Such who truly believe in Christ, and look to him for righteousness and life, shall receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. (1 Pet. 1:9)

FOOTNOTES:

[1] The Targum renders it, "atwmylç rfg keep perfection, and behold uprightness." The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions, "keep innocence, and behold uprightness." The Syriac version, "keep perfection, and chuse uprightness." The Arabic version, "keep meekness, and thou shalt see uprightness." The abstract is put for the concrete; perfection and uprightness for the perfect and upright man.

[2] From $\mu\lambda\chi$, compleri, perfici, Buxtorf.

[3] $\mu\tau$

[4] $\mu\gamma\mu\tau$, amwmov, Sept. in Leviticus 1:3.

[5] Ad officium Christi propheticum pertinet, ut indicet homini, per verbum externe, per spiritum interne, wrçy rectitudinem suam: quod intelligi potest, vel de rectitudine Dei exigentis satisfactionem pro peccatis, & castigantis etiam electos suos propter ea: vel de rectitudine ipsius Christi, id est, justitia sua satisfactoria, quae unica salutis nostrae meritoria causa est: vel denique de rectitudine hominis, id est praxi fidei & resipiscentiae. Nihil horum omnium est, quod suos, Christus non doceat. Witsius de

Oeconomia Foederum, 50:4. 100:3, §. 33. p. 464.

[6] μwlç çyal homini pacis, vel pacifico, Sept. Vulg. Lat. Arab.

[7] tyrja Job 8:7 and 42:12.

[8] The Reverend Mr. Joseph Stennett, senior.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-gill/a-sermon-occasioned-by-the-death-of-mr-benjamin-seward-esquire/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net