

Achieving Harmony of Life

by Lewis T. Corlett

The sermon emphasizes the importance of finding a higher center in life, beyond material things, to achieve true harmony and peace.

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Lewis T. Corlett preaches about the harmony of Christian perfection in individual steps of Christian experience, emphasizing the psychological reactions and requirements for man in obedience to God's will. The sermon delves into the inner nature of man, the struggles with self, and the need for complete surrender to God's character and laws. It highlights the importance of spiritual problems over mechanical contrivances and the necessity of finding security and satisfaction in a higher power beyond material things.

Transcript

In the first chapter we discussed the matter of the adaptability of God's program in its harmony as related to Christian perfection. In the second, the subject was presented from the background of its source, accessibility, and anticipation for man. Now we wish to discuss the harmony of Christian perfection in the individual steps in Christian experience and some psychological reactions in the requirements for man in his obedience to the will of God.

Man's greatest problem, as well as his worst enemy, is himself. Likewise, the self is the greatest benefit the individual has. If he did not have his ego, he would have neither a problem nor an opportunity. More is known today about the operations of the inner nature of man than ever before. The science and field of psychology has opened, to a great degree, man's interior faculties for objective observation. As stated in a former chapter, great benefits have come to humanity because of this research, and the end is not in sight. More and better methods will be found to measure the intelligence, aptitudes, reactions, and inclinations of the individual. During the last war, tests for almost every phase of man's immaterial life were developed. Scholars in research are working on the improvement of these tests as well as the development of others to try to reach a clearer norm in each group to help classify each person. As they progress in these studies they become more conscious of a realm beyond what they are measuring which has not yet been touched. Also many scientists are disturbed because this greater knowledge of man's inner life is not producing an improvement in man individually and a stabilization of society and civilization in general. It seems as if the more detailed the knowledge, the greater the chaos and confusion.

Psychology is seemingly at a loss to explain why it is that as rapidly as man discovers new inventions, beneficial and constructive for the race, there is something in the individual and the race which takes this potentially beneficial invention and turns it into an instrument to hasten the destruction of the race. Also coupled with this is the startling fact that, at his highest point of understanding himself, man concedes the point that he has not found in psychological measurements that which would meet his basic problems and satisfy his deepest longings. The reason these have failed is that the ideal of perfection in God has been scoffed at, ridiculed, and ruled out as impossible, or not considered. God made man, and He placed more in the self life than mere man will ever be able to understand and measure. If he will endeavor to operate in harmony with God's character and His irrevocable laws, he will come nearer to understanding himself. D. Elton Trueblood says: "It is important to make it abundantly clear at this point that the crucial problem is the spiritual problem, and we here mean by spiritual that area which is the object of attention in philosophy and theology as against that area in which the object of attention is mechanical contrivance. The fact that our life is so gravely threatened in the brightest day of technical achievement is not a criticism of the engineers qua engineers, but it is a criticism of all of us as men. The paradox of failure at the moment of success is by no means a condemnation of technical progress, for such progress is morally neutral. It gives the surgeon's knife, and it gives the gangster's weapon. Our predicament is a commentary, not on instruments and instrument makers, but on the human inability to employ both scientific knowledge and technical achievement to bring about the good life and the good society. Man is an animal who is peculiarly in need of something to buttress and to guide his spiritual life. Without this, the very capacities that make him a little lower than the angels lead to his destruction. The beasts do not need a philosophy or a religion, but man does." [1]

It is rather difficult to give a clear definition of the self-life. Various psychologists use one terminology or another, and we will not take time to discuss the different definitions. By the self-life in this discussion we will include the immaterial or spiritual part of man -- that which man received when God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." [2] Just what were the full powers of the self-life at that moment is a matter of some speculation, as today it must be viewed in its depraved state and the effects of the depravity of the race through the centuries. But whether the full capacities can be comprehended or not, it is very evident that this ego is the center of the conflict between the Lord and the devil. God endowed man with this self-life which, in the state of original holiness, enabled man to have congenial fellowship with his Creator. Satan came and made his assault on Eve at the core of this self-life, and the conflict for the loyalty of sovereignty has been continued in each generation and in every individual.

This ego, or self-life, was not evil in its origin but contained in its intrinsic nature powers of assertion or urges which were seeking avenues and objects of expression. Personality is so constituted that an individual can be both the subject and the object himself. God is absolute in personality and so great that in becoming the subject and object of himself it does not affect His basic nature. Man, being a relative, finite, dependent personality, cannot make himself the goal or end in the contemplation of himself, as object with himself as the subject, without bringing serious injury to his basic nature. Yet man has the privilege of choosing to center himself in the contemplation of himself. In fact, the realm of man's choices, either as sinner or saint, is never between good or evil directly, but where these powers of personality shall be centered. They cannot be centered specifically in material things but must be directed through personality to material things. Thus man's choices always lie within the realm of personalities, and all his basic choices are centered in one or the other of two personalities -- God or himself. This is true not only of man but also of all of God's creatures who were endowed with volition. It is in this area that the origin of

sin will be found. Created angels, being relative and limited in faculties and dependent upon God for the sustained moral quality of holiness, could not, by nature, become the object of their own choice in self-indulgence without depriving themselves of the life line of the Personality who gave holiness. Thus they became depraved, and this explains the origin of Satan and demons. Man fell by committing the similar type of error-centering himself in himself as the object of his choices -- and by so doing deprived himself of the sustaining Personality who made finite beings holy. He could have done this without an external tempter, as he did not choose Satan. Satan chose to satisfy his own urges for his own desire rather than to keep them centered in God. He thus became depraved and plunged the race into the quagmire of inherited sin. Yet in this state man's choices still are in the alternative of God or self. Satan works on and through the cravings of the self-life to plunge man to greater despair and captivity. The manifestation and variety of these choices will vary as much as one individual differs from another.

The real problem of each person is to find that which will do two things. First, he must seek until he discovers that which will deliver him from the bondage of his past and at the same time satisfy his deep-seated craving for some power beyond material things. Second, he must get that which will fill the aching void of the ego, and in this filling provide the motivation and guidance necessary to keep him from becoming the object of his own thoughts.

Man has tried various ways to meet these two basic requirements of his own nature, but all human efforts come short. Increase of knowledge has brought only greater confusion to many lives. Suggestion after suggestion has been followed with the hope of finding peace, satisfaction, and happiness. Instead the person found more internal strife, more fear of making decisions, and more uncertainty regarding the whole meaning of life. There seems to be more of a sense of lostness in the world than when man knew less. Man has learned in bitter experience that general progress does not always carry with it religious progress. Man has tried to satisfy these basic demands on what is termed power culture, but came short. D. Elton Trueblood says: "It is convenient to refer to this alternative proposal for the human race as power culture. The essential notion of power culture is the effort to organize human life independent of moral inhibitions. It is the non-ethical creed. It is the supposition, which Mussolini and his pupils have acted on thoroughly, while the rest of us have acted on it amateurishly, that civilization consists primarily in scientific, technical, and artistic achievements and that it can reach its goal without ethical consideration... The first item in this creed is the accent on sheer power." [3]

Can an answer be found to these demands except in the realm of religion? Henry C. Link says: "There can be no solution of life's deeper problems, no increased happiness for the individual, through the development of greater scientific knowledge alone. More science only adds more confusion. Unless the sciences are integrated and subordinated to the homely facts of everyday living, they will destroy rather than liberate the minds which created them. This integration must come from without the sciences themselves, it is not inherent in them and it is not a subject for scientific proof. It must come from a faith, a belief in certain values of life which is fundamental and which no logic can displace." [4]

Freud, in his book on Psychoanalysis, states that man must look at these basic requirements from a religious viewpoint to find security. "If one wishes to form a true estimate of the full grandeur of religion, one must keep in mind what it undertakes to do for men. It gives them information about the source and origin of the universe, it assures them of protection and final happiness amid the changing vicissitudes of life, and it guides their thoughts and actions by means of precepts which are backed by the whole force of its authority. It fulfills, therefore, three functions. In the first place, it satisfies man's desire for knowledge; it is here doing the same thing that science attempts to accomplish by its own methods, and here, therefore,

enters into rivalry with it. It is to the second function that it performs, that religion no doubt owes the greater part of its influence. Insofar as religion brushes away men's fear of the dangers and vicissitudes of life, insofar as it assures them of a happy ending, and comforts them in their misfortunes, science cannot compete with it. Science it is true teaches how one can avoid certain dangers and how one can combat many sufferings with success; it would be quite untrue to deny that science is a powerful aid to human beings, but in many cases it has to leave them to their suffering and can only advise them to submit to the inevitable. In the performance of its third function, the provision of precepts, prohibitions, and restrictions, religion is furthest removed from science. For science is content with discovering and stating the facts. It is true that from the applications of science, rules and recommendations for behaviour may be deduced. In certain circumstances they may be the same as those which are laid down by religion, but even so the reasons for them will be different." [5]

Hazen G. Werner comes directly to the point when he says: "With so many of us it's a matter of an incorrect center. We are votaries of the wrong gods, obviously because they are easier on us. Things are wrong at the circumference because the center isn't right. 'The sense that men make out of life,' says Dean Wicks, 'is determined by what claims their deepest attention.' The center, to be effective, must be one that can stir the imagination with a conception of an elevated life, where well-being and happiness, founded upon inner unity, yield constantly the feeling, This is what I have really wanted. Each one of us must learn to make his instincts and ideals work together for ends that will make for lasting self-harmony. Satisfaction can never come while there is conflict within. The whole man must be brought into oneness and that on the highest plane that can be reached. The physical and psychological forces were meant to rise above their level, guided by a higher center. 'The first underlying cause of all sickness, weakness, or depression,' says one of the witnesses quoted by William James, 'is the human sense of separateness from that Divine Energy which we call God. The soul which can feel and affirm in serene but jubilant confidence, as did the Nazarene: 'I and my Father are one,' has no further need of healer or of healing.' If this is true, certainly the new ideal must be found in other than the self and on higher than the material, physical, or even human level." [6]

Many other quotations could be found, but these are sufficient to direct our present thinking. With these general statements man must always remember that true religion is the expression of a perfect God, and that His entire plan for the solution of man's problems is the expression of His perfection and can only be understood in that light. God's program of salvation guiding to holiness of heart and perfect love is the only means whereby man may meet these two basic problems.

God's operations are planned to meet fully every phase both of man's nature and his problems. Also, as stated in the first chapter, He always operates according to psychological laws but is always superior in His method to the best in each generation. Man's chief source of fear is unconfessed sin. God's program for meeting and solving that is definite and certain -- the Holy Spirit awakens man's mind to a memory of sin and brings the past into the present light of God's purity. This is the only satisfactory means by which the mind of man can reach a true decision regarding the nature and effects of sin. This is a basic method of modern psychology, but too often the psychologist is helpless beyond that point. The Spirit of God solves man's helplessness at this point by directing his attention to the means and power of deliverance, and insists that the solution can be instantaneously received at that moment. But notice how fully the ideal of perfection is held before the person, for all of these steps in the plan of salvation are harmonized with God's standard of perfection. The Spirit requires a perfect penitent spirit. The convicted person must fully acknowledge his wrong and his need and in that need make a definite decision to obey the Holy Spirit

fully, completely, perfectly in each detail of repentance. God will not operate on a partial spirit of repentance. He demands a perfect repentance. He may not make all details of the repentance clear at that moment, but the seeker has so reached the attitude of complete penitence that from that time on forever he plans to maintain a perfect repentance toward wrong.

Before God can perform a work of righteousness in a seeker, the person must take a penitent attitude not only toward the past but also toward the present and future. He must purpose to react toward all acts and attitudes both of himself and others with the willingness to confess his personal faults and forgive and adjust those related to others. This is what Paul meant when he wrote: "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." [7]

Also the Spirit requires a complete reversal of direction, a full turning about in purpose and the swearing of a full, perfect allegiance to God. God will not be satisfied with a partial shifting; it must be a full conversion. The perfection of His nature will not permit Him to accept any less. When a seeker reaches this point, a complete faith for salvation will accept God's provision for his personal deliverance. It is well to repeat what was stated in the first chapter: The steps necessary for man to prepare himself for God to perform a work of righteousness in his heart will take him beyond the best that psychology in psychoanalysis can give him.

The same completeness of operation is true regarding the work of the Spirit in regenerating and justifying the penitent seeker as he exercises faith. The scriptural promise is: "If we confess our sins, he.... [will] forgive us our sins." [8] Does He forgive only part or does He forgive all? His nature of perfection demands that He do a complete work; so He forgives all, every one, and goes a step further and remembers them against us no more forever. Also in making the seeker a child of His, a member of the family of God, His son, it is not a partial admittance. He makes the individual a full son, and an heir with Christ. One time I heard Dr. E. E. Angell emphasize the fact that when God saved a person in any age He did it as thoroughly and completely as He did it for the Apostle Paul. There is no respect of persons with Him. His nature will not permit Him to do less than a complete work of grace in initial Christian experience. The same can be said of the assurance through the witness of the Spirit.

In these steps of the process it must be kept in mind that there are no other means to take care of the problems of man's self-life except through the clear light and power of the Spirit of God. He always gives joy, peace, and certainty to the one who will follow Him wholeheartedly, completely in the steps of His process. There are so much uncertainty and chaos in man's nature today because he is evading God's program. Man's mind must be made at ease with his past in order for him to be positive about the present and courageous about the future. God's way is the only sure remedy.

Another psychological problem is the necessity of man facing his self-life to find a way or means which will keep him from centering his thoughts in himself. The process is commenced in regeneration when man's attention, purpose, and loyalty are centered in God. Also the motivation of "the love of God . . . shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" [9] provides the necessary motivation to follow the guidance of the Spirit. But one of the baffling problems to psychologists is the presence of

antagonistic motives in man which counteract his purpose and plan to live on the highest level of his levels. It is also as much a puzzling problem to many believers. It is difficult to find a name for this opposing nature in psychology, as most psychologists refuse to recognize it in the self. One called it a "false ego." The Bible and theology have called it "the nature of sin," "carnal mind," etc. Paul states that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." [10]

This is the inherent corruption of the self-life which each person received through being a member of a fallen race. Its tendency is to make a person self-centered and rebellious to higher authority. In regeneration man's motive life is not unified; rather, it is made unsettled in that the believer has what James termed a double mind. [11] A new nature is implanted in the motive or moral nature, and at times the old nature asserts itself in demands for the sovereignty over the loyalties of the new purpose life and plays upon the self-interests of the individual to make himself in his indulgences the object of his choices. The battle of loyalty to God with the urges to self-will and self-indulgence is on. The balance of personality is at stake. "Personality must be integrated to be stable" are the words of psychology. God makes a similar statement when He says that the believer must "set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"; [12] and that the believer must renounce self and be "hid with Christ in God." [13] There is only one way that this can be accomplished. The person must face himself in the light of all the possibilities of his faculties and powers, and volitionally sever all claims of himself to himself and center the control and direction of those faculties and powers in some object outside of himself. There is no other way to secure stable personality. Most of the time psychiatrists and others find themselves helpless in getting patients to do this because they cannot locate a proper objective. Paul was inspired to give God's method: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." [14] This is what the holiness preachers of the ages have called the "death to self" or "full consecration." This death to self is not only a necessity to unify or integrate man's personality. Man must sever all claims, good as well as evil, of the self-life and center himself, as the subject, in an objective outside himself to keep himself from becoming the object of his own considerations. There is no way, manner, or means for man's inner life to be unified except by that death to the self-claims.

All of this is done under the leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit as the divine Agent of the Godhead and is carried out in harmony with the perfection of God. The Spirit demands a complete severance of the claims of self to itself; not one tie can remain. It must be entire and perfect dedication and abandonment to God. Also the believer must present every good faculty, power, and possession as a sacrifice to God for Him to use and direct according to His wisdom. He requires a complete sacrifice, a full consecration. He always operates on the basis of His nature in the harmony of perfection. When this stage in the process is reached, the child of God is so hungering and thirsting for the fullness of God that a complete faith takes hold of the promise and provides God with a clear channel through which He may operate. And when He performs the divine operation He does it according to His nature of perfection. He cleanses from all sin. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." [15] He perfects in love. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" [16] He takes complete possession and sanctifies man through and

through. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." [17] He witnesses just as definitely to this work of grace as to justification. "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before." [18] All these steps are complete; there is not one imperfection in His operation. He could not do otherwise. His nature operates always on the basis of perfection.

All of these steps in the divine program lead to the integration of the individual personality and also the establishment of a more settled society and civilization. God's program works according to His ideal of perfection and leads mankind to a firm basis for both divine and human fellowship. The only foundation for agreeable fellowship must be one which renders null and void principles and elements which divide or bring discrimination. The only power in the human race which will do this is love. This is clearly seen in the equality which true love brings in marriage. So God, knowing the constitutional make-up of personality, arranged His plan in and on love. The plan of salvation arises in the love of His essential character, implants divine love in the heart in regeneration, and perfects the heart of the believer in love of God from which spontaneously flows a quality and stream of love and fellowship rather than a class or race distinction or classification. Here is God's solution for the race hatred, class or national strife, and discord of this, as well as any, generation. God's program is "charity out of a pure heart" and meets the need of the hour and

the age. "He also knew that the free spirit 'in his image' could only exist in its best estate in harmony with the law of love: for 'God is love.' . . . The same rank -- or a higher one -- in the creative mind is claimed for the law of love as for any mathematical principle: this law must be in force whenever a world of free intelligent spirits is called into being. This is the inner law between a free agent and its maker.

"Further the existence of a free spirit in relation to other similar spirits gives rise to this law: these beings must love or hate each other; indifference is only a mild form of hate and is likely to descend into veritable hatred at any time. They must take attitudes for or against each other; hence the absolute inescapableness of the moral law. Conduct not in harmony with the law of love, failures to keep it, are sin on an absolute standard." [19]

Psychological Dangers Incident to Second Blessing Holiness

It is not surprising that there are potential psychological problems involved in holding such a high standard of grace for man. The individual, being limited in knowledge and warped in judgment, even when sanctified and walking in all the light the Spirit gives, will sometimes reach wrong conclusions. The tempter and enemy of man, the devil, works upon these limited faculties to bring confusion and error into the life of a good person. Two possibilities will be mentioned as examples of the dangers involved.

First, there is the possible psychological misunderstanding of the term "perfect" or "complete." Some reach the conclusion that these imply or include the sense of having arrived at the desired destination. The altar may be so emphasized that it becomes the end instead of a material part of the means. God forbid that the day should ever come in holiness churches when the altar will be removed. There is great value in a seeker's coming forward for prayer. Yet some ministers have so preached that people have thought, when they went to the altar and testified to receiving the experience of Christian perfection, that now they were sealed for heaven and it was not necessary for them to do anything else about it. They have a feeling of completed living growing out of a misconstrued idea of perfection. This may be the explanation

for the apparent lifelessness and inactivity of professing sanctified people who take their religion so lightly. In accepting the experience of Christian perfection they took an attitude of security and unconsciously practice eternal security. The emphasis must always be that the experience of Christian perfection, received either at a public altar or elsewhere, is simply a step in God's onward leadership toward ideal perfection. The basic idea of Christian perfection is not the sense of "having arrived" but rather the consciousness of having the inner motive life purified from the sin nature, so that the believer can make better progress in spiritual things than before. The means of doing this will be discussed in the last chapter.

The other psychological danger is one which comes through the subtle suggestion of the tempter and may unconsciously make the believer self-centered again. It is the tendency that some sanctified people have of expressing their public testimony in terms of self-exaltation such as, "Thank God, I am sanctified"; "Thank God, the old man is dead"; "I am dead to self"; "I have the blessing"; "I know I am free from sin"; "I came in under the old constitution"; etc. Most of the time the individual is unconscious of what is happening. These statements may be spoken honestly and sincerely for a time; but in this method there is the danger of exalting the ego so much that, if the child of God is not careful, his testimony will breed the germ of religious pride. Holy pride is the manifestation of self-indulgence as much as any other outbreaking of carnality. The way to avoid this subtle psychological danger is to exalt God and keep Him uppermost in thought and expression. "God sanctified"; "The Holy Spirit purifies"; etc. This will glorify Him and bring better blessings to the believer and greater honor to Him and His cause. The self will continue to be sublimated to God, and the Blood will continue to cleanse the heart from all sin. The Spirit will lead the sanctified person in a maturing process of "perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

1 Trueblood, D. Elton, *The Predicament of Modern Man*, Printed Book Copyright 1944, Harper & Bros., pp. 16, 17

2 Genesis 2:7

3 Trueblood, *op. cit.*, p. 31

4 Link, *op. cit.*, p. 62

5 Reprinted from *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, by Sigmund Freud, by permission of W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., Printed Book Copyright, Sigmund Freud.

6 Werner, *op. cit.*, pp. 140, 141

7 II Corinthians 7:9-11

8 I John 1:9

9 Romans 5:5

10 Romans 8:7

11 James 1:8

12 Colossians 3:2

13 Colossians 3:3

14 Galatians 2:20

15 I John 1:7

16 I John 4:16-20

17 I Thessalonians 5:23, 24

18 Hebrews 10:15

19 Curtis, Charles Newman, An Epoch in the Spiritual Life, Printed Book Copyright 1908, Jennings & Graham

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