

Difficulties About Christian Perfection

by Samuel Chadwick

Christian perfection is a present experience of being made perfect in every good thing to do God's will, and it is a gift of grace through faith.

Scripture: Matthew 5:48, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 3:12, Hebrews 7:25, Hebrews 13:20, 1 Peter 1:15, 1 John 3:3

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Sanctification"

Description

Samuel Chadwick addresses the common misconception that holiness comes through gradual growth in grace, emphasizing that it is a gift of grace through faith, not achieved by human endeavor. He highlights the experience of full salvation as a crisis and epoch, received as a gift without striving. Chadwick refutes objections about humility and sympathy, explaining that holiness does not lead to pride but rather to compassion and a passion for souls. He clarifies the term 'perfection' in different senses, distinguishing between present perfection in grace and future perfection in glory.

Transcript

Among the many letters received on the above subject, here is one that expresses in a typical way the difficulties of many devout and earnest Christian people:

"I have been much interested, and more than interested by your article, 'The Spirit of Holiness.' It has moved me to a deeper yearning for holiness.

"I am one of those people you speak of, whose mistake it is to suppose that holiness comes by a gradual growth in grace, and I quite agree, from my inner experience, that 'its mischief is that it never gets there.' One is always hungering and thirsting, but just as surely, one is always conscious of deep defilement of nature which constantly prevents anything approaching the 'heart made perfect.' If I could realize that this perfection is really as you say, not a thing to be attained, but a gift of grace in the Holy Ghost, how gladly would I claim it!

"Yet, to be quite candid, I feel that the consciousness of a heart made free from all inner sinfulness, would soon lose its humility, and perhaps lose its sympathy with sinful people. I have in mind one Christian worker who claimed the blessing of holiness some years ago, and is never tired of telling how she has been kept without sin for this period. But her testimony never moves me, as does the cry of some heart yearning after more of God, and if one must be quite honest, this good woman is rather avoided.

"I can quite understand, regarding the positive side of holiness, that health never hinders growth; but to have health means to be free from disease, free from sin. Would you be so good as to explain to my dense mind the difference between the freedom from sin which you term 'Perfection,' and which you term 'Finality,' for I fear I am partly guilty of this 'most common and senseless confusion.' I know I am almost hopelessly ignorant, but, believe me, I really desire to know, if it be possible, to be made perfect. So if you should feel that you can make it the matter of some future article -- this difference between perfection of grace and perfection of glory -- maybe it would vastly help other ignorant and struggling sinners like myself."

THE CONFESSION

Perhaps it will be best to begin with the confession. For years my correspondent has supposed that holiness comes by a gradual growth in grace, but testifies from experience "that it never gets there." That is the experience of everybody who hopes to grow into the blessing. It never comes by growth, either un urged or forced. The evil grows with the good until the evil is purged out. Surely it cannot be consistent with the gospel of a Saviour who is able to save to the uttermost, that we should be for ever striving and for ever failing! His purpose is that we should be saved with a present, free, and full salvation, and His grace is equal to His purpose. Salvation is not of works, but of grace through faith. The work is not begun in grace and perfected in works. It is the gift of God.

I am quite aware of the fascination of evolution in spiritual life. Professor Drummond's Natural Law in the Spiritual World captures by its charm rather than convinces by its logic. The theory of evolution breaks down, both in Nature and in Grace. There are creative epochs which lift life into a new plane, implant a new quality, and impart a new power. The experience of the perfecting of grace is a crisis and an epoch. Tens of thousands have testified to the experience, and not one of them ever achieved it by endeavor. Without exception, they received it as a gift of grace through faith.

THE OBJECTION

A definite objection is raised. It is a strange comment on the growth and the hungering and thirsting of the soul, to be told that a perfect salvation is neither believed in nor desired. There is a fear lest "the consciousness of a heart made free from all inner sinfulness would lose its humility." That is rather confused logic. How can salvation from the disposition to pride lead to the loss of humility? Is it the sense of sin that makes us humble? If so, how was our sinless Lord meek and lowly in heart? It is not the presence of sin that makes the heart lowly. On such a basis of reckoning, the more sin would yield the greater humility. The blood that cleanses from all sin purges out of the heart all pride. Lowliness and meekness come of the vision by which the pure in heart see God. The blessing of full salvation saves from pride and envy and all false estimates of worth and virtue. It is stranger still, to imagine that holiness makes us hard and unsympathetic toward sinful people. A heart of compassion is the fruit of holiness. The yearning pity of Romans 9 has its springs in the experience of the eighth chapter. The sinful cannot love sinners unto salvation. The unsatisfied has nothing to give to those who perish of hunger. Holiness brings the soul into fellowship with the redeeming Son of God. When believers rejoice in its possession, sinners are awakened and saved. John Wesley has left it on record as his deliberate judgment that, "when Christian Perfection is not strongly and explicitly preached, there is seldom any remarkable blessing from God; and consequently little addition to the Society, and little life in the members of it." My friend should read some Methodist biographies, and see how the experience of holiness brought to the heart a consuming passion for souls.

THE TERRIBLE EXAMPLE

We are all familiar with the ghastly caricatures of the doctrine, and it is hardly worthy of an enlightened believer to judge an experience by its failures. It has its true witnesses, and it is by them it must be judged. Spirituality has its perils, and our Lord warned us against censoriousness and hypocrisy. Every doctrine has its cranks who regard something important as all-important, but ignorance should not be confused with intention, and it is for those who know better to judge discreetly and set a better example. Counterfeits argue actual genuineness, and it is for us to find the true. Holiness does not make people repellent, but radiant. They are the people of the singing heart and the shining face.

THE DIFFICULTY

The real difficulty seems to be in the term "perfection." I have been explaining it for thirty years, and failure to understand the use of the term in two different senses is amazing. Take Philippians 3. The apostle disavows perfection in verse 12, and affirms it in verse 15. The two cannot mean the same in such contradictory statements. The first obviously refers to a future perfecting in the glory of the resurrection; the other is a present experience. In the present he is perfect, but not perfected. There is no finality in the perfection of grace, but in the resurrection grace will be perfected in the consummation of redemption. The great prayer for perfection in Hebrews 13:20, 21, is the best statement of both the doctrine and the experience. It is being made perfect in every good thing to do His will, and if grace cannot do this it is useless to talk of an uttermost salvation.

Now, e'en now, I yield, I yield,

With all my sins to part;

Jesus, speak my pardon sealed,

And purify my heart;

Purge the love of sin away,

Then I into nothing fall;

Then I see the perfect day,

And Christ is all in all.

Jesus, now our hearts inspire

With that pure love of Thine;

Kindle now the heavenly fire,

To brighten and refine;

Purify our faith like gold,

All the dross of sin remove;

Melt our spirits down, and mold

Into Thy perfect love.

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