

Is Christian Perfection Attainable?

by Samuel Chadwick

Christian perfection is a state of adjustment and completeness, attainable in this life through a conscious reality in the soul of a believer.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:1, Philippians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:14, 1 John 4:12

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Entire Sanctification"

Description

Samuel Chadwick preaches on the attainability of Christian Perfection in this life, distinguishing it from the final perfection in glory that St. Paul spoke of. Christian Perfection is about adjustment and completeness in the heart, motive, and will, not physical or mental perfection. Despite objections, the love of God can be perfected in the soul as commanded by God. Wesley referred to it as Entire Sanctification, a scriptural and necessary term. The experience is based on Scripture promises and is an assured possession through the witness of the Spirit.

Transcript

Whether Christian Perfection is attainable in this life is a question of first importance. There is a perfection that is not. The final perfecting of grace awaits its consummation in glory. This is the perfection to which St. Paul said he had not yet attained, but to which he was ever pressing forward as the great end for which he was apprehended in Christ Jesus. That is the perfection of finality, whereas Christian Perfection is one of adjustment and completeness. It does not even imply maturity, much less finality. Christian Perfection is neither physical nor mental. It is in the heart, the motive, and the will. Can the love of God be perfected in the soul in this life? God commands it and expects it. The experience is described by a variety of terms, but they all represent the same truth from different aspects. Wesley spoke of it as Entire Sanctification; a term which is scriptural and intelligible. No honest believer in the Bible can deny the necessity for sanctification. Without it no man can see the Lord. Therefore, it must be attainable before the manifestation of God to the soul. There is nothing in the death of the body that can perfect the work of sanctification in the soul, and the Scriptures give no hope of purgatorial perfecting. If Christian Perfection is attainable at all it must be in the conditions of our present life.

OBJECTIONS TO PERFECTION

There are those, however, who do not believe it possible in our mortal state. Some objections are the result of confusion. For instance, it is argued that Christian Perfection involves finality. No heresy based upon the corruption of God's Word dies harder than this! It is amazing that Bible teachers should say that

this state would "admit of no progression," that if it were attained the Christian's "work would be finished and his obligations discharged"; that there would be no more warfare, "nor further need of prayer or the means of grace." Such teaching in some vague way regards the body as inherently antagonistic to God, and irreclaimably corrupt. It confounds moral corruption with physical limitation. The sinless life of Christ is the absolute denial of any such doctrine. The life of God has to be realized, appropriated and exemplified by those who are still in the flesh. Death has no saving efficacy. Not a single passage of scripture can be found that associates the cleansing of the soul with physical dissolution.

There is a theory which regards Christian Perfection as "metaphysically attainable," and denies the fact of actual attainment. It is too subtle and too devout to bluntly deny the doctrine, but it regards it as an imputed perfection and not an actual possession. In this teaching inbred sin is not eradicated but repressed, and holiness is not imparted but imputed. Here is a summary of this doctrine:

"He who is our Great High Priest before God is pure, without sin. God sees Him as such, and He stands for us who are His people, and we are accepted in Him. His holiness is ours by imputation. Standing in Him we are in the sight of God, holy as He is holy, and pure as Christ is pure. God looks at our Representative, and He sees us in Him. We are complete in Him who is our spotless and glorious Head."

Such a theory makes void the law through faith. It is a process of sheer make-believe, by which God shuts His eyes to our real state and agrees to accept a fiction for a fact. It makes man holy by exemption, instead of by righteousness. Such teaching contravenes the plainest statements of God's Word in which Christ is declared to have made provision for man's deliverance from all sin. Christ died not that He might secure our exemption from the law, but "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

HAS IT BEEN ATTAINED?

Next to the authority of the Scriptures is the testimony of them that believe. The question of fact as to the reality of this experience can be settled by testimony alone. Whether a man loves God with all his heart is known only to himself and his God. No man can search the heart of another. The only test we have is in such terms of scripture as: "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected," and "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." Ought surely implies possibility; and it is a sufficient test without inventing others. All hypothetical tests tend to morbid introspection or self-complacent Pharisaism. Apart from all fads, cranks, and absurdities, so often associated with the profession of this state of grace, we have to ask whether it has ever been a conscious reality in the soul of a believer. It is not a question whether some may not have been mistaken, but whether all are mistaken. The question cannot be settled by quoting the number of those who were leaders in the Church and conscious that they did not love God with all their heart. The deepest piety is not generally found among the leaders of the Church. The witness of one man whose eyes have been opened is of greater weight than the opinions of all the leaders of religious thought.

AN ASSURED POSSESSION

Thousands whose integrity was beyond reproach have testified to its possession. They were in a glorious succession. John Wesley bore a similar testimony, and thousands of his people professed a like experience. Wesley sifted their evidence. He found them sane, sincere, and saintly. Their intelligence was clear, and their logic sound. The facts could be verified, and the fruits were manifest. Either their witness must be received, or there is an end of credible testimony. The experience was based upon Scripture. It

came through the promises, and proved them to be Yea and Amen. They were sanctified in truth," and the truth was demonstrated in their sanctification. In a moment by appropriating faith they became conscious of heart purity and indwelling fullness of the divine Presence. The experience was assured to them by the witness of the Spirit.

It has been the chief glory of Methodism to proclaim this experience as the duty and privilege of all. Those who entered into the blessing were urged to bear definite witness to the experience, and to abide in fellowship with those who had received, or were seeking after this grace. The type of piety it produced became as distinctive as the witness. I would like to quote what Wesley says of Jane Cooper in his preface to her Letters:

"All here is strong sterling sense, strictly agreeable to sound reason. Here are no extravagant flights, no mystic reveries, no unscriptural enthusiasm. The sentiments are all just and noble; the result of a fine natural understanding cultivated by conversation, thinking, reading, and true Christian experience. At the same time they show a heart as well improved as the understanding; truly devoted to God, and filled in a very uncommon degree with the entire fruit of His Spirit. . . . This strong, genuine sense is expressed in such style as none would expect from a young servant maid; a style not only simple and artless in the highest degree but likewise clear, lively, proper: every phrase, every word being so well chosen, yea, and so well placed, that it is not easy to mend it. And such an inexpressible sweetness runs through the whole as art would in vain strive to imitate."

It would be difficult to find a more perfect delineation of the spiritual experience and character of a Methodist. You will observe that Jenny Cooper was a servant-maid. The Methodists insisted that this grace is without respect of persons, and that it does not depend upon natural endowments, intellectual culture, or on favorable opportunities. It is not a cult. The experience is neither purely intellectual nor purely emotional, but a mingling of sound understanding and deep feeling.

Sometimes in a rapture of unspeakable joy and at other times with a deep sense of humility and peace, men have realized that God sanctified their hearts by faith. Life was raised to a new plane of experience and power. Death was swallowed up in life more abundant. Defeat ended in the victory of overcoming power. Fellowship entered into more intimate communion and a larger inheritance. They lived with a new sense of the divine Presence, and served in the strength of the indwelling Spirit. It is attainable, for it has been attained.

O might I this moment cease

From every work of mine,

Find the perfect holiness,

The righteousness divine!

Let me Thy salvation see;

Let me do Thy perfect will;

Live in glorious liberty,

And all Thy fullness feel.

O cut short the work, and make
Me now a creature new!
For Thy truth and mercy's sake
The gracious wonder show;
Call me forth Thy witness, Lord,
Let my life declare Thy power;
To Thy perfect love restored,
O let me sin no more!
Fain would I the truth proclaim
That makes me free indeed,
Glorify my Saviour's name,
And all its virtues spread;
Jesus all our wants relieves,
Jesus, mighty to redeem,
Saves, and to the utmost saves,
All those that come to Him.

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