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HOLINESS.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.

The Ministers and Messengers of the Central Baptist Association, to the members of the several churches represented.

BELoved BRETHREN.

The subject of this our annual address is Holiness. We mean that holiness which should be developed by christians, in the purity of their character, and propriety of their conduct. There are other terms in Theology which convey to us the same idea with holiness; or if indeed there is a distinction of meaning, it is so faint that we shall not attempt to define; those terms are 'pure,' as required in christian purity; and 'perfect' as God's people should be perfect. Our conceptions of holiness originate in our knowledge of the attribute of holiness in the Deity. We learn that God is holy from general manifestations of his purity; especially from his moral law; from sacrificial declarations, and requisitions; and mainly from the substitution of Christ, comprising the perfection of his life, and involving the agonies of the garden, and the cross. All our knowledge of God is in harmony with the more perfect knowledge of angels, who continually cry, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.

The subject is presented as a christian grace, and a christian duty. Our holiness originates in the grace of God, and is graciously conveyed to us through the interposing love of Christ; and is consummated by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. These graces are endowments of saints, which are given to make them holy; and which they are required to cultivate until they result in real personal holiness. Holiness as a christian grace is very comprehensive, including all other christian graces; and as a duty it comprises the practice of every other christian duty; hence the uniformity of christian character.

The subject is enjoined in the following scriptures. 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' Matt. 5: 48. 'Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God' Matt. 5: 8. 'Follow peace with all men; and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.' Heb. 12: 14. 'Be ye holy, for I am holy.' 1 Peter 1: 16.

Beloved, these Scriptures enjoin upon us absolute holiness. There is here no compromise with sin—no allowance for human weakness—no abatement for human depravity. God having devoted for us his well beloved Son, who died not only to deliver us from the wrath to come, but also from this present evil world; and having sent forth his own Spirit, whose sanctifying influences are imparted to believers; and having given the word of his grace, to admonish, and guide, he expects that we, in return for his goodness, should be holy. And if the passages read, do not require absolute purity, real holiness, characteristic perfection, there is no meaning in plain language. In these passages there are no figures of speech, no dark and doubtful parables, the expressions are so plain, that only a perverted mind can misunderstand them. Let us read the inspired declarations—let us interpret rationally, and bow to the behests of Jehovah. The desire to misinterpret these Scriptures, and cut down their sacred import, is a desire to furnish the mind with an excuse for sin. We really require the opposite to excuses.

The standard of perfection is Deity. The model of holiness is Jesus Christ. The admeasurement of purity, is the bliss of heaven. If the standard of holiness for christian character is less than Divine purity, where shall we place it? If the holiness of Deity is not the standard, who shall define what it is? If the admeasurement of christian attainment, be left to men, who are the men that shall perfect the arrangement? Is the standard for holiness to be changed at the will of human combinations—or is every man at liberty to receive a standard of piety or worldliness for himself? Man thus left to his own weak judgement, subject to sinful inclinations, and exposed to powerful temptations, on a wide sea of uncertainty; is like the ship on the ocean, without chart, or compass, or helm. Shipwreck in both cases is the expected result. The objection may be pressed that in consequence of the remains of depravity, surrounded as we are by sinful influences, we cannot be pure. If we cannot would our Father enjoin it—would God require it? We cannot be pure because we will not. And we will not because we prefer impurity. The imperfections and sins of saints, registered in Scripture will now be presented to your minds as an excuse for your sins. Are not those imperfections faithfully recorded, to admonish us to avoid their faults and to imitate their virtues? The best of men we know are charged with grave offences, but the best of men ought to have avoided all those offences. They ought to have been holy as God is holy—pure in heart, as God is pure—perfect as their Father is perfect. The best of men we suppose were never so good as they ought to have been—never so elevated in purity as they should have been. Enoch may be an exception. He may have been as good as under the circumstances he could be. Joseph too is an exception. Whilst some things in his history are inexplicable, his general character is admirable and no charge is preferred against him. The beloved disciple who reposed on the breast of the Savior was uniformly a good man. But Christ is the perfect model for our imitation: 'He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.' And he has given us his example that we should walk in his steps. The objection is still pressed that in this imperfect state man cannot

live without sin. This is bare assertion but not proof. We know the word says 'no man liveth and sinneth not,' and, 'if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves.' These scriptures teach us what man is, and not what he ought to be. He ought to be pure—holy—perfect.

Say not that the standard is too high for imperfect christians. Christians we assume ought not to be imperfect. The standard is not raised by us, but by God. Say not that you must accommodate the claims of God's word to the state of christian people. You must rather elevate the condition of christian people to the word of God. Say not that when God requires purity of heart, he requires only partial purity—that when God requires perfection, he only requires what is called christian perfection. The standard is infinitely higher.

To members of baptist churches the subject can be rationally and faithfully applied. In your baptism you professed to die to sin, and to the sinful maxims and practices of the ungodly. When you arose from the baptismal waters you professed to rise to newness of life. How beautifully significant the ordinance, and how desirable that the christian life should correspond with the profession. Our life should be a perfect, living comment on the baptismal confession. In our baptism we virtually died, and were buried with Christ by baptism into death—how forcible then the appeal. How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein. The significant rite of baptism as performed by us at the age of intelligence with the profession of faith affords additional reason with many others—why we, baptists, should be holy. The imperfections of christian people are deplorable. The imperfections of baptists are inexcusable, and the standard must be elevated before the world on a broad scale can be enlightened, and sinners saved. How imperfect at present the moral influence of the Church, because it is so deficient in holiness.

We hasten to shew how you may approximate or attain to that purity which God requires.

First.—Believe that a high attainment in purity is obligatory. Say not that it is impossible. If you are true disciples of Christ, God is with you, and with God all things are possible. If you do not admit the necessity of this attainment, or the possibility you will not strive for its attainment. Saint Paul did not esteem himself perfect; but he felt the necessity of the attainment; and having the christian standard in full view, he says, 'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'

Secondly.—Never forget that God is with you. He sees your heart—He reads all your secret thoughts—He scans all your words and actions. Will you dare continue longer to sin under the searching—scorching eye of Deity? Forget not when you would cherish the unhallowed passion—when you would speak the idle word—when you would perpetrate the wicked act, 'Thou Lord seest me.' And under the light of his countenance say with holy detestation, 'How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God.' Remember that deeds of darkness will be brought to light and secret things will be proclaimed as from the housetops. Guard against the first bias of the mind toward the first temptation to sin. Stop the first leak, when first discovered, and save the ship. 'Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.'

Thirdly.—In being holy you must renounce all your sins. You sinful lusts—your villainous passions—your pride, your ambition, your worldliness, your deception, your prevarication, your over reaching, your coldness, your remissness, your selfishness must all be abandoned. 'Cease to do evil, learn to do well.' Keep yourselves pure in the sight of God and unspotted before men. 'Pluck out the right eye; cut off the right hand; do anything and every thing which God requires rather than that your soul should be lost, and your God dishonored.'

Fourthly.—As all your inducements to holiness must be drawn from the Bible, store your mind and memory with the word of God. 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.' It will refresh your memory with the extensive claims of God's law. It will strengthen and confirm your faith in the Redeemer. It will furnish you the motive power to overcome the world. Christ resisted the temptations of Satan by his familiar acquaintance with the scriptures. And for you he prays, 'Sanctify them through the truth; thy word is truth.'

Fifthly.—You must make your attainments in holiness by faith in Jesus Christ. 'This is the victory that overcometh even your faith.' To the humble believer all things are possible while to the unbelieving nothing is guaranteed. Let your confidence rest perpetually on the Savior. Place him always before your eyes in all his majesty and in all his humanity, in all his sufferings and in all his dying agonies. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of your faith. Have his cross and passion constantly on your mind. Behold him not superstitiously, but believing, as the atoning sacrifice for sin. A rational view of his cross and passion will as in the case of St. Paul 'Crucify you to the world and the world to you.'

Sixthly.—Cultivate the habit of fervent effectual prayer. 'Praying in the Holy Ghost.' Continuing instant in prayer. 'Pray without ceasing.' Seek by prayer the hallowed influences of the Holy Spirit. His office is to convince you of sin—his pleasure is to renew and sanctify you, to qualify you for his service on earth and to prepare you for the perfect bliss of heaven. How appropriate to our subject the prayer of the Apostle. 'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly;

and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless into the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Grieve not then the Spirit of God by whom you are sealed to the day of redemption. Cultivate, we say, the habit of praying always. Let every breath be a prayer. Let prayer be inter woven with all your worldly business—with all your domestic duties. Let it constitute a part of all your earthly pleasures. Let it sanctify all your earthly cares and sorrows. There is no necessity that in our heart we should ever cease praying. But in addition to mental prayer enter your closet and there transact with God your most important business. Go to the closet not only occasionally, to satisfy your conscience, but go frequently and let it constitute the highest gratification of your life.

Seventhly.—Engage with zeal and knowledge in some energetic useful employment, for the honor of God, and for the advantage of his kingdom. You can hardly be pure if you are indolent. 'The hand of the diligent maketh rich,' but the slothful are the agents of satan. Laymen as well as pastors, women as well as men, are now required to engage in the toil, and to share in the glory, of spreading abroad the knowledge of the Redeemer. Give yourself up unreservedly to the work of the Lord, in the sphere in which his providence hath placed you; in the Church, and in the world; in the Sabbath School, and amongst the poor, and sick, and ignorant, you may find ample employment. And whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, and do it now.

Finally, Brethren, if you would answer the purpose of your creation, and thereby glorify your Father who is in Heaven, you must be holy. If you would magnify the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for you, to redeem you from all iniquity, you must be holy. If you would cherish the hallowing influences of the Divine Comforter—if you would have him always near to comfort and to guide, you must be holy. If you would adorn the doctrines of our God and Savior, by holding forth the Word of life, you must be holy. If you would attract others to the Savior, and exert a highly beneficial influence during your earthly pilgrimage, you must be holy. If you would at last, when heart and flesh fail you, lie down on the bed of death, and repose your head on the breast of the Savior, as on a downy pillow, you must be holy. If in the day of Judgement you would lift up your head high among the favored throng, who hail his second advent, you must be holy. If you would enter that peaceful and blissful abode with God and the Lamb, where are the spirits of the just made perfect, amongst whom are your dear departed friends who sleep in Jesus! and where seraphim and cherubim, with an innumerable company of angels, do continually cry Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, you too must be holy.

Losses by Religion.

Near London there dwelt an old couple. In early life they had been poor; but the husband became a Christian, and God blessed their industry, and they were living in comfortable retirement, when one day a stranger called on them to ask their subscription to a charity. The old lady had less religion than her husband, and still hankered after the Sabbath earnings and easy shillings which Thomas had forfeited from regard to the law of God. So, when the visitor asked their contributions, she interposed and said:

"Why, sir, we have lost a deal by religion since we first began; my husband knows that very well. Have we not, Thomas?"

After a solemn pause, Thomas answered "Yes, Mary, we have. Before I got religion, Mary, I had an old slouched hat, a tattered coat, and mended shoes and stockings; but I have lost them long ago. And, Mary, you know that, poor as I was, I had a habit of getting drunk and quarreling with you; and that, you know, I have lost. And then I had a burdened conscience and a wicked heart, and ten thousand guilty fears, but all are lost, completely lost, and, like a millstone, cast into the deepest sea. And, Mary, you have been a loser too, though not so great a loser as myself. Before we got religion, Mary, you had a washing tray, in which you washed for hire; but since then you have lost your washing-tray. And you had a gown and bonnet much the worse for wear; but you have lost them long ago. And you had many an aching heart concerning me at times; but these you happily have lost. And I could even wish that you had lost as much as I have lost; for what we lose for religion will be an everlasting gain."

ONE WITH CHRIST.—One with Christ! "This is love which passeth knowledge." One righteousness, one peace, one joy. What loyalty and love are due to our royal Bridegroom! What a surrender of our hearts, and of our all, should we not make to him who "loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet smelling savor!"—*Hewitson.*

BLESSED TO GIVE.—The sun in the heavens scatters abroad his beams. The fountain sends forth its life-giving waters. The earth teems with its various productions. The birds sing for our pleasure. Man should copy the example, and live for the good of others. He is the happiest who does the most to make others happy. Experience verifies the words of our Saviour, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."