

PERFECTION AND PROGRESSION

II Corinthians 6:14-7:1

(Joseph H. Smith)

Now the evils that are in the world and all of its vile and wicked things proceed from the heart of man. So says our Lord and Savior. In the seventh chapter of Mark He cites thirteen putrid streams which flow from an evil fountain within ourselves to corrupt the world without us. Hence the final and climactic injunction in order to the "perfecting of holiness is that we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit."

This suggests three things:

1. That Christians such as are recognized here as "brethren" (Ch. 8) and addressed as "dearly beloved" may still have "filthiness of flesh and spirit" from which they need to be cleansed.
2. There is provision that makes possible our complete cleansing, as is enjoined here, from "all" such filthiness.
3. This complete cleansing is imperative in order to the perfecting of holiness.

The truth indeed is that it is in this negative sense that our holiness may be perfected immediately. Our entire sanctification is not that constructive process whereby we are to build up ourselves in holy character like unto our Lord. It is rather that destructive fire baptism with the Spirit, whereby, in response to an act of faith in the Blood for cleansing, the inherent enmity and hindrance to holiness in our own being is consumed. That is to say, it is a perfect salvation from all that is unholy in ourselves rather than our final partaking of all possible measures of the holiness of God.

Since the danger of fellowship with the world is due to that within ourselves of which the evil of the world is made, and since, too, this affinity for unclean things arises from the corruption of our own nature, it follows that the whole matter now resolves itself into the cleansing of "ourselves" that there be "no thirsting for earth's pleasures, nor adorning rich gay", etc. The crucifixion of ourselves unto the world has crucified the world unto us. Total self abnegation has insured utter world renunciation.

We come then to note the promises by which God's word here would incite us to this yielding of ourselves to this "crucifixion of our old man that the body of sin might be destroyed". These are three in number:

1. "I will receive you."

Like when as penitent sinners we renounced our sins and came seeking His pardoning mercy we were accepted through Jesus' mediation, so now when in gratitude for His mercy and in love for Himself, and in our thirst for holiness we leave the world itself and the worldliness in the church, and severing our attachment with some things that had held us as to an idol, we seem to stand out alone, separated from them and they from us; He says, "I will receive you." From that instant we are taken by God into a different relationship with Himself than we had experienced before.

2. "I will be a Father unto you."

Verily our adoption by Jesus Christ had been predestinated since before the foundation of the world. Verily, accordingly at the moment our sins were blotted out we were "born again", and the Spirit has witnessed with our spirits that we are the children of God. But now this filial side of our relationship to God recedes into second place, second to the paternal relationship of God to us. Marvelous as is that wonder that the

Apostle John would have us stand and "Behold! . . . that we should be called the sons of God"; infinitely more so is this, that He who had seemed to vest His all in His one only begotten Son should now design to become likewise Father in both life-long and everlasting relations to us. Thus Jesus acknowledged when He said, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father." (John 20:27). His being a Father unto us implies a continuous relationship as such and assures His care, His counsel, His culture of us: so that we need not think or speak simply of an impersonal Providence, but lovingly and trustfully of our Heavenly Father. No longer are we absorbed simply in what we are as children to Him, but more in what He is as Father unto us. Wondrous as it must seem we are to share the patrimony with God's only begotten Son.

3. The crowning promise of all is that of His indwelling.

This is the same as the Savior Himself spoke, and that in this very connection, thus, "My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him." (John 14:23). Here the Father Himself hath spoken and says, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." This is true both collectively and individually. The "perfecting of holiness" has so insured the "unity of the Spirit" that we thus in fellowship with God have also "fellowship one with another", and this with those of all classes and colors and churches, and with saints of all ages as well, even back to and beyond where John includes us thus with the Apostles. (I John 1:3). In this larger sense we all may be "the temple of the living God", as He says, "I will dwell in them and walk in them." "Likewise, of us individually it may be said, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you." (1 Cor 6:19). And again, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you." (I Cor. 6:19). And again, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of the living God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you."

Thus we see that the unity of the Spirit among ourselves, and the indwelling of the Spirit within ourselves is the summit of the plane to be reached by our "cleansing from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." He is "able to keep us from falling", and upon this plane we may "keep ourselves in the love of God", as we keep "building up ourselves". For this, blessed be God, is the plane of our "most holy faith", that is, the plane of a state and relationship of holiness perfected by faith.

Finally, it remains for us to simply note and stress the fact that verbs addressed to ourselves in this Scripture are in the present tense, "Be not unequally yoked", "Be ye separate", "Come out", "Cleanse yourselves"; all of these call for immediate action. There are witnesses everywhere that their entrance to this grace was epochal. It was not by a process, but by a precipitation. See Cornelius! See Pentecost!

See, too, upon the other hand, that the verbs in God's promises here are in the future tense "I will receive you", "I will be a Father", "I will dwell in them." Any withholding upon His part must be due to some delay upon ours.

The place of supreme joy is ever in the center of God's will.

God is able to abundantly bless if we pray in faith.

OUR GLORIOUS HOPE

What is our calling's glorious hope,
But inward holiness?
For this to Jesus I look up,
I calmly wait for this.

I wait, till he shall touch me clean,
Shall life and power impart,
Give me the faith that casts out sin,
And purifies the heart.

This is the dear redeeming grace,
For every sinner free;
Surely it shall on me take place,
The chief of sinners, me.

From all iniquity, from all,
He shall my soul redeem:
In Jesus I believe, and shall
Believe myself to him.

When Jesus makes my heart his home,
My sin shall all depart:
And lo! he saith, I quickly come,
To fill and rule thy heart!

Be it according to thy word!
Redeem me from all sin:
My heart would now receive thee, Lord,
Come in, my Lord, come in!

—Charles Wesley.

WESLEY AND THE "SECOND BLESSING"

This letter, in Mr. Wesley's own handwriting, hangs on the wall of the room which he occupied in the building known as "The New Room," Bristol, England. The letter was written from Boston to Samuel Bardsley at Derby.

BOLTON,

Dear Sammy: April 3, 1772.

I am glad you are got into your circuit again. Now put forth all your strength. Never be ashamed of the old doctrine. Press all believers to go on to perfection. Insist everywhere on a Second Blessing as receivable in a moment and receivable now, by simple faith. Read again the plain account of Christian Perfection, and strive always to converse in a plain and unaffected manner.

I am,
Dear Sammy,
Yours affectionately,
J. Wesley.

DOES HE HEAR?

If Radio's slim fingers
Can pluck a melody
From night and toss it over
A continent or sea;

If petaled white notes
Of a violin
Are blown across a mountain
Or a city's din;

If songs like crimson roses
Are culled from thin, blue air,
Why should mortals wonder
If God hears prayer? —Ex.

There is only one way to keep the will active, and that is by exercising it.—J. J. Walsh.

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.—Eph. 2:10.