

The King's Highway

An Advocate of Scriptural Holiness

"And an highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness."

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CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

The words of this text form a part of what we commonly speak of as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, after a night in prayer, had chosen His disciples who were to be with Him during the three years of His public ministry while here on earth, and upon whose shoulders was to fall the greater share of the responsibility of carrying on His work after He should return to His Father. These men were unlearned, unschooled, except in the school of human experience and hard work. What religious teaching they had was perhaps warped by the traditions which the religious teachers of the day had wrapped around the truth of the Law and the Prophets. Realizing that these men needed a clear perspective of the standards and purposes of the Kingdom of God, Jesus took them up into a mountain, and in the discourse recorded in chapters 5-7 of Matthew, laid down for them the foundation principles of the Church which He came to found. We shall do well to remind ourselves of the simplicity as well as the sublimity of these teachings.

In this text, in fact, in this entire discourse, a very high standard of ideal and practice is held up. Just how high and holy is the standard set up by Jesus is seen in the comparison He used. We talk about the severity of the Law of Moses, but many forget that the Commandments of the Gospel are more exacting than those of the old Law. The Old Testament dealt largely with outward acts of unrighteousness, but the Gospel deals with the inner heart attitude toward God and man. Moses said, "Thou shalt not kill," but Jesus said, "He that hateth his brother is a murderer." Moses said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," but Jesus said, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

The Gospel of Jesus Christ was not given to license sin but to deliver men from the power of sin. Jesus himself said that He did not come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets, but to fulfill. Comparing His standards with those of the religious leaders of His day, Christ put it like this, in speaking to His disciples, "Except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." In direct opposition to the traditions of men, Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good

to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." What higher standard could be held up than that of the text, "Be ye perfect?"

The perfections of God are in evidence in all of His words and works. They are to be seen in the magnitude of all that He has done, and also in the minutest part of what He has wrought. Unlike the work of man, the closer you examine that which God has made, the more clearly you see the perfection of it. For one who believes in God, it is not difficult to accept the perfections of God. However, there is considerable confusion, controversy, and some denial of the teaching of Christian Perfection. Many, misunderstanding it, are afraid to claim such an experience of grace; nevertheless, the term is a scriptural one, and is used as much or more frequently than any other to describe the Christian experience of full salvation or grace. It occurs one hundred thirty-eight times in the Scriptures, and in fifty of these instances it refers to human character.

Early in the history of God's dealings with man, we find Him saying to Abraham, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." And again to Moses, "Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord." In Psalm 37 David speaks of "the perfect man." In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, as well as Christ, was a faithful advocate of the experience of Christian Perfection. He admonished the Church at Corinth in II. Cor. 13:11, "Be Perfect." He wrote, in his letter to the Ephesians, about coming "unto a perfect man." In Philippians he classifies some as being perfect, in these words, "Let us therefore as many as be perfect, be thus minded." In his letter to the Colossians he speaks about presenting every man perfect in Christ, and about standing perfect and complete in all the will of God. In II. Timothy he speaks about the "man of God" being "perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." With this abundance of scriptural emphasis, let us not decry or even neglect this experience, but seek to understand and obtain it for ourselves. Let us not view it as an unnatural, impossible state of grace, but as it is—a glorious possibility. First, I would have you note the realm of Christian Perfection:

It is not absolute perfection; that belongs only to God. It is not angelic perfection, for that belongs only to the order of angelic beings. As much as we love to talk about "sprouting wings," we shall never be angels, in this world or in the next. Neither is the perfection of the text physical perfection, for that belongs only to the resurrection. We must patiently await the second coming of

our Lord to receive the redemption of our bodies. St. Paul makes a very clear distinction between present Christian Perfection and Resurrection Perfection in the third chapter of Philippians where, in speaking of his relationship to Christ, he said, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Then, after saying he was not perfect (in resurrection perfection), he said, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." The perfection of the text is spoken of as being obtainable in this life.

Christian Perfection is not absolute, angelic or resurrection perfection, but present perfection of heart, through the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Let me make yet one more distinction in the realm of perfection. As it relates to the believer, the term "perfection" is used to describe three different things. The first is that of the text, referring to perfection of the heart and its attitudes, and is to be obtained instantaneously through faith in the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus, and the supply of the Spirit of God. The second is the perfection of maturity, referring to complete degree of development or full growth. It is to this that Paul refers in Ephesians 4, in these words, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, * * *

This perfection is the result of a life, and comes through a process of growth.

The third is the resurrection perfection, which is obtained in the redemption of our bodies at the second appearing of Jesus Christ. Some may object to this teaching on the various realms of perfection, by the statement that if a person or thing is perfect, he or it cannot be added to. Such objection can be explained by the growth of the physical body. A babe may be perfect, as such, yet demands years of growth to attain the state of maturity.—Gospel Banner.