

The Fullness of the Blessing Defined

by Bishop W. F. Mallalieu

The sermon defines the fullness of the blessing of the gospel as the experience of being filled with all the fullness of God, and explores the concept of Christian perfection and the second blessing.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, John 17:23, Ephesians 3:16, Philippians 3:15, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 6:1, James 1:4, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Sanctification"

Description

Bishop W. F. Mallalieu preaches about the pursuit of Christian perfection, emphasizing the desire for a deeper connection with God, the need for inner transformation, and the prayer for God to cleanse and set free our hearts from sin. He delves into the concept of full sanctification, using various terms like 'perfect love,' 'entire salvation,' and 'Christian perfection' to describe the state of being fully surrendered to God. Mallalieu highlights the importance of seeking God's fullness and experiencing His love and power in our lives.

Transcript

Ever fainting with desire,

For thee, O Christ, I call;

Thee I restlessly require;

I want my God, my all.

Jesus, dear redeeming Lord,

I wait thy coming from above;

Help me, Savior, speak the word,

And perfect me in love.

-- Charles Wesley

O Thou, to whose all-searching sight

The darkness shineth as the light,
Search, prove my heart, it pants for thee;
O burst these bonds, and set it free!
Wash out its stains, refine its dross,
Nail my affections to the cross;
Hallow each thought; let all within
Be clean, as thou, my Lord, art clean.

-- Charles Wesley

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. -- Eph. ii, 14-21.

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. -- James i, 4.

UNQUESTIONABLY, if the wonderful prayer of the Apostle Paul should be fulfilled in behalf of any regenerated soul, there would be experienced the fullness of the blessing of the gospel. Paul knew for what he prayed, and yet it will be noticed that the climax of his prayer calls for all the fullness of the Godhead to be imparted. No soul has ever yet been able to express in words all that was in the mind of Paul when he said, "That ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." It is not an unreasonable prayer, or Paul would not have uttered it. It implies that every believer in Ephesus might claim the blessing sought, and so also it implies that every believer from the time the prayer was offered until the time when probation closes, may claim an interest in all that it embraces.

It seems unfortunate that in the discussion of any subject there should arise confusion and misunderstanding from using the same words, expressions, or terms with a varying signification. This is especially to be deprecated in scientific or theological matters; and yet we find in both constant occasion for regret that we do not use words with a definite and fixed meaning. It is only left for us to do the best we can with the words that are employed, always remembering that it not infrequently happens that the different words sometimes express certain peculiar phases of a general work of grace.

Mr. Wesley used a great variety of terms expressive of this work of grace. In those given we have 'Perfect love,' 'glorious liberty,' 'the whole image of God,' 'full salvation,' 'pure love of God,' 'second change,' 'renewed in love,' 'full sanctification,' 'holiness,' 'a clean heart,' 'entire salvation,' 'Christian perfection,' 'perfected in love,' 'saved from sin,' 'the root of sin taken away,' 'sanctification,' 'full renewal in His image,' and 'cleansed from all sin.' He used the term 'renewed in love' more frequently than any other.

Not only these terms employed by Mr. Wesley, but others are employed by various writers, to express that state of grace, or that condition of Christian experience, which is implied in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

It will surely be profitable to note carefully the definitions which are given by Mr. Wesley, whatever the term he may use to designate the experience. Defining perfection, he says:

What is, then, the perfection of which man is capable, while he dwells in a corruptible body? It is the complying with that kind command, "My son, give me thy heart." It is the "loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind." This is the sum of Christian perfection; it is all comprised in that one word, love. The first branch of it is the love of God; and as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets;" these contain the whole of Christian perfection. -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. II, p. 168.

I believe it to be an inward thing, namely, the life of God in the soul of man; a participation of the Divine nature; the mind that was in Christ; or, the renewal of our heart, after the image of Him that created us. -- Journal, September, 1739.

But what is the perfection here spoken of? It is not only a deliverance from doubts and fears, but from sin; from all inward as well as outward sin; from evil desires and evil tempers, as well as from evil words and works. Yea, and it is not only a negative blessing, a deliverance from all evil dispositions, implied in that expression, "I will circumcise thy heart," but a positive one likewise, even the planting all good dispositions in their place, clearly implied in that expression, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." -- John Wesley, Journal, March, 1775.

What is the meaning of perfection? is another question; but that it is a Scriptural term is undeniable. Therefore, none ought to object to the use of the term whatever they may do to this or that explication of it. I am very willing to consider whatever you have to object to what is advanced under the first head of that sermon. But I still think that perfection is only another term for holiness or the image of God in man. "God made man perfect," I think, is just the same as "He made him holy," or, "in his own image." -- John Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 535.

The moment a sinner is justified his heart is cleansed in a low degree; but yet he has not a clean heart, in the full, proper sense, till he is made perfect in love. -- John Wesley, Journal, 1744, Vol. V, p. 284.

There is scarce any expression in Holy Writ which has given more offense than this -- the word perfect is what many can not bear. The very sound of it is an abomination to them, and whosoever preaches perfection (as the phrase is), i. e., asserts that it is attainable in this life, runs great hazard of being accounted by them worse than a heathen man or a publican.

And hence some have advised wholly to lay aside the use of those expressions, "because they have given so great offense." But are they not found in the oracles of God? If so, by what authority can any messenger of God lay them aside, even though all men should be offended? We have not so learned Christ, neither may we thus give place to the devil. Whatsoever God hath spoken, that will we speak, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, knowing that then alone can any minister of Christ be "pure from the blood of all men," when he hath "not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God"

-- John Wesley, Sermons, Vol. I, p. 355.

Perhaps the general prejudice against Christian perfection may chiefly arise from a misapprehension of the nature of it. We willingly allow, and continually declare there is no such perfection in this life as implies either a dispensation from doing good and attending all the ordinances of God, or a freedom from ignorance, mistake, temptation, and a thousand infirmities necessarily connected with flesh and blood -- John Wesley: "Plain Account."

The perfection I teach, is perfect love; loving God with all the heart, receiving Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King, to reign alone over all our thoughts, words and actions. -- John Wesley.

In the year 1764, upon a review of the whole subject, I wrote down the sum of what I had observed in the following short propositions:

"(1) There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture.

"(2) It is not so early as justification; for justified persons are to 'go on unto perfection.' (Heb. vi, 1.)

"(3) It is not so late as death; for St. Paul speaks of living men that were perfect. (Phil. iii, 15.)

"(4) It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone.

"(5) It does not make a man infallible; none is infallible, while he remains in the body.

"(6) Is it sinless? It is not worthwhile to contend for a term. It is salvation from sin.

"(7) It is 'perfect love.' (I John iv, 18.) This is the essence of it; its properties, or inseparable fruits, are, rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in every thing giving thanks. (I Thess. v, 16, etc.)

"(8) It is improvable. It is so far from lying in an indivisible point, from being incapable of increase, that one perfected in love may grow in grace far swifter than he did before." -- John Wesley.

In 1749, he taught:

"1. Christian Perfection is that love of God and our neighbors which implies deliverance from all sin.

"2. That this is received merely by faith.

"3. That it is given instantaneously, in one moment.

"That we are to expect it, not at death, but every moment; 'that now is the accepted time, now is the day of this salvation.' " -- Wesley's Works, Vol. VI, p. 500.

Look at it again; survey it on every side, and that with the closest attention. In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all, our soul, body, and substance, to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. Now, take it in which of these views you please (for there is no material difference), and this is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which

I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765. -- Wesley's Works, Vol. VI, p. 483.

Now let this perfection appear in its native form, and who can speak one word against it? Will any dare to speak against loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves? against a renewal of heart, not only in part, but in the whole image of God? Who is he that will open his mouth against being cleansed from all pollution both of flesh and spirit; or against having all the mind that was in Christ, and walking in all things as Christ walked? What man, who calls himself a Christian, has the hardiness to object to the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God? What serious man would oppose the giving God all our heart, and the having one desire ruling all our tempers? I say again, let this Christian perfection appear in its own shape, and who will fight against it? -- Wesley's Works, Vol. VI, p. 483.

The pure in heart are those whose hearts God hath purified even as he is pure; who are purified through faith in the blood of Jesus, from every unholy affection; who, being cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfect holiness in the (loving) fear of God. They are, through the power of his grace, purified from pride, by the deepest poverty of spirit; from anger, from every unkind or turbulent passion, by meekness and gentleness; from every desire but to please and enjoy God, to know and love him more and more, by that hunger and thirst after righteousness, which now engrosses their whole soul; so that now they love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and mind, and strength. -- John Wesley, Sermons, Vol. 1, p. 199.

Tyerman Says, in his "Life of Wesley," that at the first Conference, in 1774, Christian perfection was defined:

A renewal in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. To be a perfect Christian is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, implying the destruction of all inward sin, and faith is the condition and instrument by which such a state of grace is obtained. -- Tyerman, Vol. I. p. 444.

It is not easy to conceive what a difference there is between that which he experiences now, and that which he experienced before. Till this universal change was wrought in his soul, all his holiness was mixed. He was humble, but not entirely; his humility was mixed with pride; he was meek, but his meekness was frequently interrupted by anger, or some uneasy and turbulent passion. His love of God was frequently dampened by the love of some creature; the love of his neighbor. by evil surmising, or some thought, if not temper, contrary to love. His will was not wholly melted down into the will of God; but although in general he could say, I come, "not to do my own will, but the will of of Him that sent me;" yet now and then nature rebelled and he could not clearly say, "Lord, not as I will, but as thou wilt." His whole soul is now consistent with itself; there is no jarring string. -- John Wesley, Sermons, Vol. II p. 222.

Certainly sanctification (in the proper sense) is "an instantaneous deliverance from all sin;" and includes "an instantaneous power then given, always to cleave to God." Yet this sanctification (at least, in the lower degrees) does not include a power never to think a useless thought, nor even speak a useless word. I, myself, believe that such a perfection is inconsistent with living in a corruptible body: for this makes it impossible "always to think right." While we breathe, we shall, more or less, mistake. If, therefore, Christian perfection implies this, we must not expect it till after death.

I want you to be all love. This is the perfection I believe and teach. And this perfection is consistent with a thousand nervous disorders, which that high strained perfection is not. Indeed, my judgment is, that (in this

case particularly) to undo is to undo; and that to set perfection too high (so high as no man that we ever heard or read of attained) is the most effectual (because unsuspected) way of driving it out of the world. -- Wesley's Works, Vol. VI, p. 718.

We have known a large number of persons, of every age and sex, from early childhood to extreme old age, who have given all the proofs, which the nature of the thing admits, that they were "sanctified throughout;" "cleansed from all pollution both of flesh and spirit," that they "loved the Lord their God with all their heart, and mind, and soul, and strength;" that they continually presented their souls and bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God;" in consequence of which, they "rejoiced evermore, prayed without ceasing, and in everything gave thanks." And this, and no other, is what we believe to be true, Scriptural sanctification. -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. II, p. 247.

By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favor of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as "a grain of mustard-seed, which at first is the least of all seeds," but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love of God and man. -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. II, p. 236.

To W. Churchey, 1771:

Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love; love expelling sin, and governing both the heart and the life of a child of God. -- Wesley's Works, Vol. VII, p. 82.

To Mrs. Elizabeth Bennis, in 1767:

The essential part of Christian holiness is giving the heart wholly to God; and certainly we need not lose any degree of that light and love which at first attend this: it is our own infirmity if we do; it is not the will of the Lord concerning us. Your present business is, not to reason whether you should call your experience thus or thus; but to go straight to him that loves you, with all your wants, how great or how many soever they are. Then all things are ready; help, while you ask, is given. You have only to receive it by simple faith. Nevertheless, you will still be encompassed with numberless infirmities; for you live in a house of clay, and therefore this corruptible body will, more or less, press down the soul, yet not so as to prevent your rejoicing evermore, and having a witness that your heart is his. -- Wesley's Works, Vol. VII, p. 51.

There is one term that is sometimes used to express the experience of full salvation, that is occasionally treated in a sarcastic manner that is altogether without excuse. Persons speak of the "Second Blessing," and say, "Why, how about the third blessing, and the fourth blessing, and the ninety-ninth blessing?" It is unfortunate that any term employed by sincere people should be made the subject of derision. Better by far avoid all such forms of speech, and treat this important phase of Christian experience with all candor, and give large liberty in the use of the common terms that are employed by those who profess to have found it. The Wesleys did not hesitate to use this term "Second Blessing," and they used it with a clear and definite meaning. It was used as the equivalent of perfect love, entire sanctification, holiness, and Christian perfection.

Lord, if I on thee believe,

The second gift impart;
With the indwelling Spirit give
A new, a contrite heart;
Take me into thee, my Lord,
And I shall then no longer rove:
Help me, Savior, speak the word,
And perfect me in love.

-- Charles Wesley.

Savior of the sinsick soul,
Give me faith to make me whole!
Finish thy great work of grace,
Cut it short in righteousness.
Speak the second time, "Be clean!"
Take away my inbred sin;
Every stumbling-block remove;
Cast it out by perfect love.

-- Charles Wesley .

To Miss Jane Hilton, 1766:

Do you now feel anything like anger, or pride, self-will, or any remains of the carnal mind? Was your second deliverance wrought while I was at Beverly? at the time of the sermon, or after it? You did not tell me, in what manner you found the change; and whether it has continued without any intermission from that moment. Certainly there never need be any decay: there never will, if you continue watching unto prayer. --Works, Vol. VII, p. 42.

To Miss Jane Hilton, 1774:

It is exceeding certain that God did give you the second blessing, properly so called. He delivered you from the root of bitterness, from inbred, as well as actual, sin. And at that time you were enabled to give Him all your heart; to rejoice evermore, and to pray without ceasing. Afterward, he permitted his work to be tried; and sometimes as by fire. For a while you were not moved; but could say in all things, "Good is the will of the Lord." But it seems you gave way, by little and little, till you were in some measure shorn of your strength." -- Works, Vol. VII, p. 45.

I had desired S. M. to give me some further account of the late work of God at Barnard Castle. Part of his answer was as follows: "Within ten weeks, at least twenty persons in this town have found peace with God, and twenty-eight the pure love of God. This morning, before you left us, one found peace, and one the second blessing." -- Journal, June, 1763.

Certainly these quotations abundantly justify the use of the term "Second Blessing" by all followers of John and Charles Wesley. And should not every sincere Christian avoid the sarcastic use of this term to throw reproach upon the doctrine of perfect love, or to discredit the experience of any child of God? Above all things, why not agree to seek for all the riches of grace that God has provided, and steadfastly refuse to contend about words and definitions? There are heights and depths and lengths and breadths that we may not be able to measure with our poor human words. Let us, then, following the leadings of the Spirit and the teachings of the Scriptures and the example of the saints of all ages, seek for the experience till we find it for ourselves.

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