

Christian Perfection in Relation to Sins and Mistakes

by Samuel Chadwick

Christian perfection is not infallibility, but sanctification, and is a call to live a sinless life through prayer and claiming God's promise of aid and deliverance.

Scripture: 1 John 3:5

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Sin And Forgiveness"

Description

Samuel Chadwick delves into St. John's teachings on sin, emphasizing that sin is lawlessness and that Jesus Christ came to take away sins. He highlights the distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil, stating that those born of God do not continue in sin. Chadwick explores the complexity of sin, explaining that it is an attitude within the heart, not just actions, and that God provides forgiveness and cleansing for those who confess their sins. He clarifies that while Christians can fall into sin, their overall stance is against sin, as they have been made partakers of the divine nature.

Transcript

St. John's teaching concerning sin settles some things for all time. Chapter 3 of his First Epistle emphatically declares:

1. That sin is lawlessness.
2. Jesus Christ was manifested to take away sins.
3. Whosoever is begotten of God, and abideth in Him, does not commit sin.
4. The difference between the children of God and the children of the devil is that one sins and the other does not. Nothing can be plainer than that. Every man born of God quits sin. If a man sins, he is not a child of God but a child of Satan.

There is no escape from that alternative. He that is not with God is with the devil. It is often asserted that all are of God and none of the devil. God is the universal Father, and therefore every man is His child. Jesus did not so teach. When the Jews claimed God for their Father, Jesus denied the claim and declared them to be the children of the devil. They said "... We have one Father, even God. Jesus said ... Ye are of your father, the devil" (John 8:41, 44). They claimed sonship with God through Abraham their father. They

forgot that soul-relationships rest, not upon lineal descent, but on spiritual affinities. Spiritual kinship is not of blood, but of spirit. Though men belong by right to God they may be by choice the possession of the devil. No man is the devil's by any right of creation. He did not make us. We are the work of God's hands and the people of His pasture. Neither is any man the devil's by birth. We may have been born in sin and shapen in iniquity, but for all that we belong to God, not Satan. Whatever the power of heredity, it lays no such curse upon the child, and establishes no such right for the prince of darkness. Original sin is counterbalanced by original grace. No soul belongs to Satan either by any vestige of right or by any law of necessity. Neither is any man a child of God by reason of any of these things. The relationship of the creation is forfeited by sin. The sonship of the covenant avails only till moral responsibility is attained. The Timothys need to be born again as truly as the Ishmaels. No rite of baptism can secure it, neither is any man the Lord's any more than the devil's of necessity. Spiritual parentage is by adoption. There can be no adoption without consent. Therefore, choice settles sonship. In the spiritual realm every man chooses his own Father.

On the other hand, in the first chapter of the same Epistle John says:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

These passages present a real difficulty. They seem to absolutely contradictory, that if one be true the other must be false; and it is between these two statements we find the most contention. Some contend for the absolute deliverance of the soul from sin, and others for the inevitable continuance of sin in the soul.

WHAT IS SIN?

The explanation will be found in a complete study of St. John's treatment of the doctrine of sin. He defines it as lawlessness. It is not the violation of a commandment, but a principle of evil within the soul. Sin is not an act, but an attitude. Man is not so much a sinner because he is a transgressor, as he is a transgressor because he is a sinner. Its seat is neither in the body nor in the mind; it is in the heart. In the first chapter he exposes three false views of sin. If we deny the reality of sin under cloak of fellowship with God, we lie and do not the truth (1:6). If we deny our responsibility for sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1:8). If we deny the fact of sin and say we have not sinned, we make God a liar and His Word is not in us (1:10). None of these passages teach that sin must always be in us, or that we must inevitably keep on sinning. On the contrary, they make plain God's provision for sin. He pardons and cleanses those who confess their sins, and the blood of His Son cleanses from all sin those who walk in the light. Jesus Christ came to save sinners from sin, and He does what He came to do. "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him." "He that doeth sin is of the devil."

This does not mean that the Christian can never again fall away into sin. All scripture -John's writings included -- warns us that the child of God can fall into sin. God's saving power is conditioned on man's consent. What it does mean is that the whole attitude of the regenerate man is contrary to sin. He stands resolutely opposed to it. He antagonizes it. His nature is cleansed of that which hankered after it. He has been made partaker of the divine nature, and the bent of his nature is one with God's.

SINS IMPROPERLY SO CALLED

This is a hard saying, and it is not a matter of surprise if even John Wesley's logic faltered in the presence of the persistent criticism to which it is obviously exposed. Christian perfection has been regarded as

claiming, not only deliverance from sin, but from all error, limitation and defect. Such is manifestly impossible. Christian perfection is not infallibility. It does not deify men. It does not dehumanize humanity; it sanctifies it. A clean heart does not imply a perfect head. So long as we are in this world there will be unavoidable errors and imperfections of judgment. The mistake is in regarding such errors and imperfections as sins. The decalogue gives no pronouncement upon them. There is no explicit direction concerning them in either Old or New Testament. The Word of God is the standard of both doctrine and conduct, but in neither does it systematize and codify its teaching. In doctrine it reveals truth through the records of history, and in conduct it lays down principles, not rules. For doctrine the Scriptures need to be searched. In conduct the principles are to be discovered and applied.

Wesley speaks of these errors as "deviations from the perfect law, and need an atonement." They are inevitable, and sometimes even unconscious; and yet he declares, whether "known or unknown, they need the atoning blood." In his sermon on "Perfection," however, he says they are improperly called sins, and adds, "The word sin is never taken in this sense in Scripture." There is no scriptural warrant regarding either physical infirmities, or mental weaknesses, or any of their proper consequences as sins. They are not sins. Such imperfections are utterly destitute of moral character. They require no repentance. No man can repent of an act which is the result of pure ignorance, or of something which was unavoidable. He may regret these things, but regret and repentance are by no means the same. Neither do they need atonement. Deliverance from mistakes is not by the blood of the Cross, but by the discipline of experience. This is a perfection that is by suffering, and not by faith.

THE LEVITICAL LAW AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

The Levitical law required sacrifice for violations of the law committed in ignorance. This is the basis on which "unavoidable infirmities" are regarded as sins requiring atonement, but it proves too much. These sacrifices were for diseases, some of which were providentially inflicted. This standard would make motherhood a sin! It would include bricks and mortar among the things for which "atonement" had to be made (see Lev. 14:53). The new covenant has put away all these symbolical classifications. It is upon the heart that the perfect law is written, and it is in the heart that God perfects the love which is the fulfilling of the law. A mistake is a wrong act, in which the right was intended. Motive determines moral quality. Intention, not achievement, is the divine test. Sanctification reduces liability to error to a minimum, but it does not guarantee infallibility; and while we have an adversary so subtle and a nature so liable to sin, we shall never rise above the need to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses." The vision of the pure heart is always discovering new demands of grace and a new sensibility of sin. It is better to live a sinless life than to say we never sin.

Jesus, Thou art our King!

To me Thy succor bring;

Christ, the mighty One, art Thou,

Help for all on Thee is laid;

This the word; I claim it now,

Send me now the promis'd aid.

High on Thy Father's throne,

O look with pity down!
Help, O help, attend my call,
Captive lead captivity;
King of glory, Lord of all,
Christ, be Lord, be King, to me!
I pant to feel Thy sway,
And only Thee to obey,
Thee my spirit gasps to meet;
This my one, my ceaseless prayer,
Make, O make, my heart Thy seat,
O set up Thy Kingdom there!
Triumph and reign in me,
And spread Thy victory;
Hell, and death, and sin control,
Pride, and wrath, and every foe,
All subdue; through all my soul
Conquering, and to conquer go.

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