

Going on to Perfection

"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection"—Hebrews 6:1

WHAT the apostle means by the above statement is that we should not stop merely with the knowledge of first principles, but that we must develop to spiritual depth and maturity. Or as Peter says—

"Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18)

Let us then, together, consider some of the problems we meet as we strive to reach spiritual maturity, and then take a comforting and inspiring glance into the Future Age when the full joy of perfection will be reached in the Kingdom of God.

By a careful and painstaking study of the Scriptures, we have become fully persuaded that the Bible is the Word of God; that it is infallible; that it is wholly God-inspired. Therefore, we have thankfully inclined our ears unto wisdom: we have cried after knowledge, and have lifted up our voices for understanding.

WE HAVE FOUND THE TRUTH: AN EXALTED POSITION

And this has not been in vain, for in the love and mercy of God we have found the Truth of the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ. It is the "Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God" (1 Tit. 1:11).

Having made such a wonderful discovery, we have obeyed the call of the Gospel, in the appointed way, and through our belief and obedience we have become part of the Ecclesia of the Living God. We are not saved. We are not participants in the Kingdom of God: but we are "heirs according to the promises" that God made to Abraham: "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."

What an exalted position to be in! What a lofty height indeed for creatures of dust! Having been baptized into Christ, we have gone forth rejoicing to "walk in newness of life" as sons and daughters of the Eternal Father. John describes our elevated position—

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God! And it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

"WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM"

"We shall be LIKE HIM"! What does this signify? It means, first of all, that we are not like him now. No, sad to say, we are not. But, nevertheless, we are in a very exalted position. Wonderful as that position is, it is only too true that we live today in an imperfect state. Who among us has not felt that bitter power of imperfection? Have we not all, and often, cried out with Paul—

"O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

As we strive to "walk in the Truth," do we not all share in a similar experience with Paul that—

"When we would do good, evil is present with us."

We all "delight in the law of God after the inward man," but we discover "another law in our members, warring against the law of our minds and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members." Therefore, says Paul—

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19).

But therein lies the secret of our endurance. Our hope is NOT in this life, but in the life to come. That is the life to be manifested at the appearance of Jesus Christ. This is the Hope set before us, which Hope we have—

"As an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."

TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

What a precious heritage is ours! But this great treasure is held in an imperfect state, as Paul expressed it—

"For God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us"

(2 Cor. 4:6-7).

How descriptive of our present state! What a wealth of meaning in those words! How true it is to be likened to perishable earthen vessels: Abraham recognized this fact, styling himself a creature of dust and ashes. And Job, when the majesty of God was unfolded before him, said—

"Behold, I am vile . . . Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 40:4 & 42:6)

If a righteous man like Job could feel such abasement, is it any wonder that we should feel broken in heart and contrite in spirit as we think about the joy that is set before those who believe and obey the Gospel? There are many ways in which our present lot is hard to bear at times, yes, and even grievous; and sometimes we think we must feel as Jacob did as he was about to meet Esau, for he prayed:

"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant" (Gen. 32:10).

It is certainly vitally important to constantly think on these things, and upon our position before the Great Creator of the universe Who has condescended to call us and speak to us. In this way the spiritual mind is developed.

"PERPLEXED, BUT NOT IN DESPAIR"

But even in our most difficult trials we should not let ourselves become dejected in spirit, for this is a reflection upon the assured love and wisdom of God. If we recognize our present evil state, and turn to God for help, such action on our part is pleasing to Him. Many times, in His Word, God has declared that His favor is toward those who place themselves by the standard He has set for them. The example we give is Isa. 66:2—

"But for this one will I look around: for him who is humbled and smitten in spirit, and so careth anxiously for My Word" (Rotherham).

It is not enough, however, that we merely recognize our imperfect state. We must go further than that. We must take positive action, and show positive results—

"Every branch that beareth not FRUIT, he taketh away."

This is the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, etc. We must therefore be keenly distressed about our sins and weaknesses and shortcomings, so that we will realize the necessity of humbling ourselves in the sight of the Lord, and fervently seeking His help to overcome them.

Why is it that the people of the world do not feel so? Because they do not understand that—

"They are without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise; having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

In their ignorance of the way of salvation, they think that God is indebted to them, and so much so that when they die it will be His duty to crown them with honor and great glory, though they have never really set themselves to find out what He desires, and obey it.

WE MUST STRIVE AGAINST THE FLESH

But our position is different (or certainly should be, and MUST be). We love God, and reverence His Name, and think upon His will continually. His Word is precious in our sight, and constantly meditated upon, and we honestly strive against the flesh to walk in the paths of righteousness as He has pointed them out to us. We look and long—hope and pray—for the appearance of His beloved Son.

But even so we fail—and, oh, so often—and it distresses us. But let us not fall under trial, for our Father is aware of our anxiety and tribulation, and has made provision for it. Listen to His Word—

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"

(1 John 1:9).

"If we walk in the Light, as He is in the Light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that COME UNTO GOD by Him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

As we read, in God's Word of the glory and majesty of the Kingdom of God, and the place the saints will occupy in association with Christ, we begin to wonder who could possibly qualify for such a position. Ah, but we are looking at these things from the human viewpoint. Let us get away from all that, and listen to His Word:

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called:

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty . .

" WHY?—

". . that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

As also the Psalmist hath said—

"He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people" (Ps. 113:7-8).

As we think of our exalted and lofty calling in the Gospel, we look at each other and say within ourselves, "Surely there is not one of us with qualification of being a king or priest in the Kingdom of God!"

WE MUST BE CHANGED

Well, brethren and sisters, that is all too true. In our present imperfect state, not one of us would be appointed to such an elevated position. How, then, are any of us to attain to a place of honor if we are accepted at Christ's judgment seat? Paul gives the answer—

"We must be CHANGED: this mortal must put on immortality."

This is our hope, and the joy is set before us, as we walk in the Truth—

"For our polity begins in the heavens, from whence also we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

"Who will transform the body of our humiliation into a conformity with his glorious body, according to the energy by which he is able even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).

With such a change in our natures, how different we would be! When we think of the dignity assumed by the angels who have appeared in the past, we realize that it is far superior to that exhibited by any mortal king that ever sat upon a human throne.

"FAITH THAT WORKS BY LOVE"

The gift will be of God, and will come through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast, says Paul. However, Jesus says his reward will be given—

"To every man according as his WORK shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

Are Paul and Jesus in agreement? Yes, by all means. Paul enlightens us further when he says—

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but FAITH that WORKS by LOVE" (Gal. 5:6).

All doubt on the subject is removed by James (2:21-22)—

"Was not Abraham our father justified by WORKS, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"

"Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect."

So then, faith that is not followed and manifested by WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, is dead. Let us heed the words of Paul, and—

"WORK out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

"WE OUGHT TO GIVE THE MORE EARNEST HEED"

Not the fear of the world, but holding God in reverence, and being daily exercised about His Word, for we know that He has magnified it above all His Name. Paul solemnly warns us regarding our conduct during these brief, soon-passing days of our probation, when he says (Heb. 2:1-3)—

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip . . ."

—or subtly glide away from us unnoticed—

"For if the Word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward . . ."

—and we see so many tragic times under the Law how transgression was punished—

". . . How shall WE escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

No, brethren and sisters, we will NOT escape, if we neglect to occupy until Jesus comes. He passed through the period of his probation with an imperfect body, the same as ours. He knows what we suffer. He understands the trials and tribulations that come on us.

THE WARNING TO THE ECCLESIAS

He knew what the imperfections of the members of the Ecclesia of the Living God would lead to, so he WARNED them in his Apocalyptic messages to the 7 Ecclesias in Asia. Through the mercy of God, these warnings have been preserved to this day as a great lesson to all believers who are striving to keep themselves on the narrow path that leads to the Kingdom of God. What did he say?

Some had left their first love. They were still plodding along, patiently doing many good works, but the heavenly, transforming power of spiritual love was no longer there. They were no longer the pillar and ground of the Truth. Therefore, said Jesus—

"If you do not reform and do your first works, I will come quickly and remove your lightstand, unless you reform."

Some came into the ecclesias who did not hold the Truth in purity. They called themselves Christadelphians—Christ's Brethren—but were actually members of the adversary.

Some taught false doctrine for self-advantage; that they might become leaders. They prided themselves in their great knowledge—even greater than the teachers God had given them.

"I WILL VOMIT THEE OUT OF MY MOUTH"

The ecclesias continued on the downward course until their zeal had disappeared, and they became lukewarm—insipid—tasteless—nauseating to their Master. Therefore, said Jesus—

"Because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit thee out of my mouth."

This is a very vivid, striking figure. It is not a pleasant picture: it is somewhat repulsive to contemplate. Why does Jesus use such language? To impress us with the repulsiveness of these characteristics in his sight. Faith WORKS energetically by love. That is zeal—

"The zeal of Thine House hath eaten me up!"

He cannot stand half-heartedness in such a glorious, tremendous thing as the service of God and the Gospel of eternal salvation.

"WILL HE FIND THE FAITH ON THE EARTH?"

The things we have mentioned in this sad catalog of failure are some of the conditions that imperfection has led to in many today. Let us be warned. Let us examine ourselves. If Christ is to find THE Faith in the earth when he comes, he will find it in those who never forget the fact that they live today in the imperfect state and must be ever seeking God's strength; who never forget that the call (to be sons and daughters of God, and partakers of His divine glory—this greatest of all treasures) is held in earthen vessels, even frail and leaky vessels that must constantly be replenished with the water of life that flows through the Scriptures of Truth.

If these poor weak earthen vessels are not given daily attention, they become dry and parched, and soon fall and are broken to pieces. To prevent this, we must ever keep in mind the nature of the vessel, and keep it full of living water. Yes, full even to overflowing, with the joy that is set before us, looking to that time of perfection that awaits the Ecclesia of the Living God—that day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters now cover the great deep. It is the glorious time of perfection that lies just ahead for all who truly seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

LET US LOOK AT THE FUTURE GLORIES

BECAUSE of the sorrows which compass us on every hand, and the severe trials many of us encounter, let us close the eyes of imperfection and look, for a few moments, through the eye of faith to the time when the Master is established as King over all the earth. It is a portion of a word-picture drawn by the pen of bro. Roberts—

"What do we see? Ah, what beauty! The curse has been removed from the earth. Thorns have been replaced by fir trees, and briars have given way to myrtle trees. Rivers have been opened in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys, and the desert blossoms as the rose. The hills are clothed with pleasant woods, and the valleys rejoice with glorious vegetation.

"No smoke obscures the landscape—the sun shines in all its grandeur. Men no longer eat bread in the sweat of their faces. Each has his own peaceful home standing in a well-kept plot. Joy and gladness is found everywhere, also thanksgiving and the voice of melody, for the Lord has comforted His people.

"As we come to a turn in the road, a strange and unusual sight meets the eye. a little child romps through a field, and following close behind we see a wolf, a lamb, a leopard, a kid, a calf, and a young lion. Strange, yes, but do we not remember the words of the prophet: 'They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain.'

WHAT WONDERFUL CHANGES IN THE EARTH!

"After a long walk, we are not tired. Then another reminds us of the prophet's words: 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint' (Isa. 40:31).

"What wonderful changes have taken place! The people no longer groan under misrule, for the Law goes forth from Zion into the whole earth, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Implements of war have been changed into implements of agriculture, and peace has come upon the earth, and good will to all mankind.

"Death has been swallowed up in victory. There is no more sorrow, no pain or crying. All these things have passed away, for the ransomed of the Lord have returned to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. God has given them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

"We go on to Jerusalem. What a magnificent city! Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is mount Zion on the sides of the north—the City of the Great King."

THIS IS NOT FANCY, BUT DIVINELY-ASSURED REALITY

What a beautiful picture! WE ARE NOT DREAMING! It is not a fancy or fable, not some vision of impossible joy and perfection and release, mocking us in our weakness with its unattainability, for God has given it to us and revealed it in His infallible Word of Truth. Peter refers to these things, and we come within the scope of his words when he says (2 Pet. 1:2-4)—

"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

"According as His divine power hath given us ALL THINGS that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue,

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these we might be PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world thru lust."

Brethren and sisters, let us strive with all our might to keep these promises of God ever before our minds. If we do, we shall have to confess much imperfection and many failures within ourselves, and we shall have to forgive one another many trespasses. As Paul said:

"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

BUT REMEMBER that God, in His mercy for Christ's sake will forgive us and bless us beyond comprehension, for (1 Cor. 2:9)—

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things God hath prepared for them that love Him."

WE MUST BE MORE ENTHUSIASTIC

If, then, we are to share in these things, we must be watchful, and continually restore our first love-of God, and of the Truth, and of one another. As one brother has said—

"Let us try to revive the old Christadelphian spirit of enquiry and discussion of the Scriptures, before we fall asleep. Let us be more enthusiastic about it: we shall find that enthusiasm is infectious."

Let us try to catch the spirit of the Psalmist—

"Behold, I have longed for Thy precepts! . . . How love I Thy law: it is my meditation all the day.

"My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

Let us also try to be more enthusiastic about all our work in the Truth, and make ourselves a living testimony of our love for the Truth. There is no use talking about "keeping our fellowship pure," and saying we will not fellowship this one and that one—unless we ourselves, by our walk, manifest to the Body and to the world that we walk even as the Lord Jesus walked.

And when we come together, as we have this morning, let it be done with the spirit of deepest, most solemn reverence, our minds freed of other things and keenly alert to the greatness of our privileges and responsibilities, realizing that we are here to worship the Creator of heaven and earth, in the beauty of holiness. And—

"Let our minds be centered on His Word, upon His love, and upon our absent Lord."

— G.A.G.
