

PERFECTION IN FAITH

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A SERMON
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“For by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified.”
Hebrews 10:14.

THINK of this morning’s text—“The Lord WILL perfect that which concerns me.” Is it not very grateful to observe, that what is just in one part of Scripture presented to us as a matter of *faith*, is in another place stated as a matter of *fact*? Think of this evening’s text—“He HAS perfected us forever.” This morning we went downwards, from faith to prayer. After having said in confidence, “The LORD will perfect that which concerns me,” we meekly besought Him—“Forsake not the works of your own hands”—sinking as it were to a lower note in the scale of music. Then we beheld Perfection in the dim obscurity of the future, like the sun veiled behind a cloud. Our faith rested on it as a thing at present unseen, our hearts yearned after it as an inheritance yet in reserve for us. Now tonight, this perfection is brought nigh to us, a thing accomplished, as an ever-present fact, whose eternal reality shines upon us with unclouded luster. It is thus I read this verse—“By one offering our Lord Jesus Christ HAS perfected forever them that are sanctified.”

I have been turning this text over, and over, and over in my mind, and praying about it, and looking into it, and seeking illumination from the Holy Spirit, but I was a long time before I could be clear about its exact meaning. It is very easy to select a meaning, and then to say, that is what the text means, and very easy also to look at something which lies upon the surface, but I am not quite so sure that after several hours of meditation any brother would be able to ascertain what is the Spirit’s mind in this particular verse, “By one offering Christ has perfected forever them that are sanctified.”

When I was trying to find out what this meant, I thought I would read the chapters before it, and if I should happen to find any word that should seem to be the key to this verse, I would then under the Spirit’s guidance, seek to open this lock and mystery with the pick-lock which was there furnished to me. Well, I read the chapters and I did find out a word which seemed to me to explain the whole of this verse. You must have patience with me, while I try to show you what I think it means, and then I think it will stand out in a very clear and glorious light.

First, *the condition of the child of God—what he is*. He is *a sanctified person*, “Them that are sanctified.” Secondly, *what Christ has done for him*, “He has perfected forever them that are sanctified.”

I. First, then, THE CHILDREN OF GOD ARE HERE INTENDED, UNDER THE TERM “SANCTIFIED,” they are described as sanctified persons.

What does this mean? We usually say there are two meanings to the term “sanctified.” One is, “*set apart*.” God has set apart His people from before the foundation of the world, to be His chosen and peculiar inheritance. We are sanctified by God the Father. There is a second signification, which implies not the decree of the Father, but the work of the Holy Spirit. We are sanctified in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit when He subdues our corruptions, imparts to us graces, and leads us onward in the divine walk and life of faith. But the word here, I think, includes both of these senses, and I must try if I can to find a figure which will embrace them both. And what is the apostle speaking about?

In the ninth chapter he is speaking about the tabernacle, and the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread, and the sanctuary, and the golden censor, and the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold, and the pot of manna, he is talking about priests, and about priestly things, and holy things, and he is

declaring that all these things of which he speaks were sanctified things, but that though they were sanctified things, they wanted to be made perfect by the sprinkling of blood.

Now, I believe, the sanctification of our text is to be understood in this sense. There were certain golden vessels that were used in the sanctuary which were never used for anything else but for the service of God. They were set apart, they were made holy, and they were kept strictly to be the vessels of the sanctuary of the Lord God. *They* were sanctified things.

Again, in the sanctuary there were persons who did nothing else but wait upon the Lord. These were consecrated to their offices, for God chose the tribe of Levi, and out of the tribe of Levi He chose the house of Aaron. These persons were chosen, and then they were prepared. They underwent certain ceremonies, and divers washings, and so they were made ceremonially holy, and these priests were therefore sanctified persons, because they were set apart, dedicated and reserved to the special service of the Lord God.

Now, brethren, that is just what you and I are, and what we ought to be. We are sanctified persons, that is to say, we are chosen by God to be the peculiar vessels which He will use in pouring out His mercy, and to be the special priests whom He shall employ in His divine worship in this world. No man had any right to take wine for his own drinking, and drink it out of the golden cups of the sanctuary. If he did so, he did it to his own destruction—witness Belshazzar. He took the cups, and the golden candlesticks, and so forth, and used them in his debaucheries, and lo! he was swept away, and the handwriting on the wall foretold his doom. Even so, beloved brethren, Christian men are not to be used for anything but for God. They are a set-apart people, they are vessels of mercy, they are not for the devil's use, not for their own use, not for the world's use, but for their Master's use. He has made them on purpose to be used entirely, solely and wholly for Him.

Now, that is what is meant in this text by "sanctified." We are sanctified persons, set apart for God's use, consecrated, just as the vessels, the cups, and the candlesticks, and the tables, and the altars of the sanctuary, were sanctified unto God and set apart for His service, and I said, we that are priests are sanctified persons, not because of any holiness in our character, seeing there were some of them that were not holy in their character. My text does not touch character—it touches position in the sight of God. We are not perfect in character, any one of us—we are only perfect in position.

There were two men who officiated as priests before God, namely the sons of Eli, who committed sin and iniquity before God, and yet they were set apart for God's service, mark you, and when they offered the sacrifices as priests, because they had been washed with water and sprinkled with blood, they were officially accepted as being sanctified persons.

Now, brethren, the children of God are sanctified persons, to offer spiritual sacrifices unto God through Jesus Christ, and we have no right to do anything else but serve God. "What!" say you, "have not I to attend to my business?" Yes, and serve God in your business. "Am I not to look after my family?" Assuredly you are, and serve God in your family, but you are still to be a set-apart person, you are not to wear the white robe nor the breastplate, but still you are to think of yourself as being as much a priest as if the breastplate were on your breast, and the white robe about your loins, for you are priests unto God and His Father. He has made you a peculiar generation, a royal priesthood, and has set you apart for Himself.

Now, I think that this first head of my sermon gives you an inkling of what the rest must mean. I have already hinted at what I think is the sense of the text. I have explained, I suppose, clearly enough in what sense God's people are a sanctified people, as understood in this verse. They are chosen and set apart and reserved to be God's instruments and God's servants, and thus they are sanctified.

II. Now comes the second thing, IN WHAT SENSE ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THAT CHRIST HAS PERFECTED THESE THAT ARE SANCTIFIED?

Why, just this. When the golden vessels were brought into the temple or into the sanctuary, they were sanctified the very first moment that they were dedicated to God. No one dared to employ them for anything but holy uses. But they were not perfect. What did they need, then, to make them perfect?

Why, to have blood sprinkled on them, and, as soon as the blood was sprinkled on them, those golden vessels were perfect vessels, officially perfect. God accepted them as being holy and perfect things and they stood in His sight as instruments of an acceptable worship. Just so was it with the Levites and the priests. As soon as ever they were set apart to their office, as soon as ever they were born, in fact, they were consecrated, they belonged to God, they were His peculiar priesthood.

But they were not perfect until they had passed through divers washings, and had the blood sprinkled upon them. Then God looked upon them in their official priestly character, as being perfect persons. They were not perfect in character, I repeat, they were only perfect officially, perfect in the sight of God, and they stood before Him to offer sacrifice as acceptably as if they had been pure as Adam himself. Now, then, how does this refer to us, and what is the meaning of this text, that “by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified.”? Turn back a moment or two. You will find in the ninth chapter of the Hebrews, at the sixth verse, “Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people.”

Mark here. The first meaning of my text is this. The child of God is a priest, and as a priest he is sanctified to enter within the veil. He is now permitted to go into the place which was once within the veil, but which is not so now because the veil is rent in two, but the high priest could not go within the veil because he was not perfect, he had to be sprinkled with the blood, and that made him officially perfect. It would not make him perfect merely to put on the breast-plate, or to wear the ephod, he was not perfect till the blood had been sprinkled upon him, and then he went within the veil. But when next year came round he was not fit to go within the veil till blood was sprinkled on him again, and the next year, though he was always a sanctified man, he was not always, officially, a perfect man. He had to be sprinkled with blood again. And so, year after year, the high priest who went within the veil, needed afresh to be made perfect, in order that he might obtain access to God.

Here is one sense of the text. The apostle says that we who are the priests of God have a right as priests to go to God’s mercy seat that is within the veil, but it were to our death to go there unless we were perfect. But we *are* perfect, for the blood of Christ has been sprinkled on us, and therefore, our standing before God is the standing of perfection. Our standing, in our own conscience, is imperfection, just as the character of the priest might be imperfect. But that has nothing to do with it. *Our standing in the sight of God is a standing of perfection*, and when He sees the blood, as of old the destroying angel passed over Israel, so this day, when He sees the blood, God passes over our sins, and accepts us at the throne of His mercy, as if we were perfect. Therefore, brethren, let us come boldly, let us “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

The apostle brings in, in the twenty-second verse of this tenth chapter, one inference which I have just drawn from my text. In having access to God, perfection is absolutely necessary. God cannot talk with an imperfect being. He could talk with Adam in the garden, but He could not talk with you or with me, even in paradise itself, as imperfect creatures. How, then, am I to have fellowship with God, and access to His throne? Why, simply thus—“The blood of Christ has perfected forever them that are sanctified,” and consequently we have access with boldness to the throne of the heavenly grace, and may come boldly in all our time of need.

And what is better still, we are always perfect, always fit to come to the throne, whatever our doubts, whatever our sins. I say not this of the priest’s character. We have nothing to do with that at present. We come before God in our station, not in our character, and therefore, we may come as perfect men at all times, knowing that God sees no sin in Jacob, and no iniquity in Israel, for in this sense Christ has perfected forever, every consecrated vessel of His mercy. Oh! is not this a delightful thought, that when I come before the throne of God, I feel myself a sinner, but God does not look upon me as one? When I approach Him to offer my thanksgivings, I feel that I am unworthy in myself, but I am not unworthy in

that official standing in which He has placed me. As a sanctified and perfected thing in Christ, I have the blood upon me, God regards me in my sacrifice, in my worship, ay, and in myself, too as being perfect.

Oh how joyful this is! And there is no need a second time to repeat this perfecting. It is an everlasting perfection, it allows a constant access to the throne of the heavenly grace. That is one meaning of the text.

Again—a little further on, our apostle, in the ninth chapter of the Hebrews, says, at the twenty-first verse, “He sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.” They were all sanctified vessels, you know, but they were not perfect vessels till they were sprinkled with the blood. “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these,” and so forth.

Now, beloved, the vessels of the sanctuary, as I have said, were sanctified the moment they were put there, but they were not perfect, God could not therefore accept any sacrifice that was touched with the golden tongs or that lay upon the brazen altar, so long as those golden tongs and the brazen altar were imperfect. What was done to make them perfect? Why, they were sprinkled with blood, but they had to be sprinkled with blood ever so many times—once, twice, thrice, multitudes of times, because continually they wanted making perfect.

Now you and I are this day, if we are consecrated persons, like the vessels of the sanctuary. Sometimes we are like the censer—God fills us with joy, and then the smoke of incense ascends from us, sometimes we are like the slaughter-knife that the priest used, we are enabled to deny our lusts, to deny ourselves, and put the knife to the neck of the victim, and sometimes we are like the altar, and upon us God is pleased to lay a sacrifice of labor, and there it smokes acceptably to heaven. We are made like sanctified things of His house. But, beloved, we, though we are sanctified, and He has chosen us to be the vessels of His spiritual temple, are not perfect till the blood is on us. Yet blessed be His name, that blood has once been put upon us, and we are perfected forever.

Is it not delightful to think that when God uses us in His service He could not use unhallowed instruments? The Lord God is so pure that He could not use anything but a perfect tool to work with. “Then surely He could never use me or use you.” Nay, but don’t you see, the blood is on us, and we are the sanctified instruments of His grace, and moreover, we are the perfect instruments of His grace through the blood of Jesus. Oh! I delight to think that although in preaching the Gospel I am in my own estimation and in yours rightly enough, imperfect, yet when God makes use of me in conversion, He does not make use of an imperfect man, no, He looks upon me in Christ as being perfect in Him, and then He says, “I can use this tool, I could not put My hand to an unholy thing, but I will look upon him as being perfected forever in Christ, and therefore I can use him.”

Oh! Christian, do try to digest this precious thought, it has indeed been precious to my soul since I first laid hold upon it. You cannot tell what God may do with you because if He uses you at all, He does not use you as a sinner—He uses you as a sanctified person, nay, more, as a perfect person. I will repeat it, I do not see how a holy God could use an unholy instrument, but He puts the blood on us, and then He makes us perfect—perfects us forever, and then He uses us. And so I see the work of God carried on by men whom we think are imperfect, but I never see God doing any of His deeds except with a perfect instrument, and if you ask me how He has done it, I tell you that all His consecrated ones, all whom He has sanctified to His use, He has first of all perfected forever through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

And now we will have one more thought, and then I shall have given you the full meaning of the text. In the seventh chapter, the nineteenth verse, there is a word that is a key to the meaning of my text, and that helped me all through it, and I will give you the key now. “For the law made nothing *perfect*, but the bringing in of a better hope *did*, by which we draw nigh unto God.” Then with this, compare the tenth chapter and first verse, “The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year, continually make the comers thereunto *perfect*.” There is the word “perfect,” and we have got it in the text, “for then,” says

he, if they had been perfect, “would they not have ceased to be offered?” Why offer any more, if you are a perfect man? “If the sacrifice made is perfect, the worshippers, once purged, should have had no more conscience of sin.”

Now mark. The Jewish sacrifice was never intended to make the Jews’ moral character any better, and it did not, it had no effect upon what we call his sanctification, all the sacrifice dealt with was his justification, and the perfection would be sought after, the perfection is not of sanctification, which the Arminian talks about, but the perfection of official standing, as he stood justified before God. Now that is the meaning of the word “perfect” here. It does not mean that the sacrifice made the man perfectly holy, and perfectly moral, and so forth, the sacrifice had no tendency to do that, it was quite another matter. It means that it did not perfectly make him justified in his own conscience and in the sight of God, because he had to come and offer again.

Now, here comes a man who is troubled in his conscience. He comes sighing up the temple and he must speak to the priest. He says to the priest, “I have committed such-and-such a sin.” “Ah!” says the priest, “you will never have any ease to your conscience unless you bring a sin-offering. He brings a sin-offering, and it is offered, and the man sees it burn and goes away. He has got faith—faith in the great sin offering that is to come—and his conscience is easy. A day or two after, the same feelings arise, and what does he do? He goes to the priest again. “Ah!” says the priest, “you must bring another offering, you must bring a trespass-offering.” He does that, and his conscience grows easier for a time, but the more his conscience gets quickened, the more he sees the unsatisfactory character of the offering he brings.

At last he says, “I am so uneasy, oh! that I could have a sacrifice every hour! For do you know,” says he, “while I can put my hand on the head of the victim, I feel so happy, when I come to see it slaughtered, and the blood flowing, I feel so easy, but I do not feel perfect. I will even go up to the temple,” he says, “that there I may live.” He sees a lamb slaughtered in the morning, and tears of joy are in his eye. “Oh!” he says, “I have seen that lamb, and when I saw the blood of that lamb flowing, I felt so rejoiced.” Noon comes. “Ah!” says he, “my sins arise again, I have got a conscience, and where can I get relief for it?” And off he went to the temple, and there was another lamb in the evening, because God well knew that the sacrifices were themselves imperfect, only a shadow of the great substance, and that His people would need to have the service renewed, not only every year, but every day, nay, every morning and every evening.

But now, beloved, behold the glory of Christ Jesus as revealed to us in our text. “Those sacrifices could not make the comers thereunto perfect.” They could not feel in their own conscience that they were perfectly justified, and they wanted fresh offerings, but here today I see the slaughtered Lamb on Calvary, and it was but yesterday I rejoiced in Him, and I can rejoice in Him again today. Years ago I sought Him and I found Him. I do not want another Lamb, I do not want another sacrifice. I can still see that blood flowing, and I can feel continually that I have no more conscience of sin. The sins are gone, I have no more remembrance of them, I am purged from them, and as I see the perpetual flowing blood of Calvary, and the ever rising merits of His glorious passion, I am compelled to rejoice in this fact, that He has perfected forever me—made me completely perfect through His sacrifice.

And now, Christian, try and lay hold upon this meaning of the text. Christ has made your conscience at ease forever, and if it disturbs you, recollect it has no cause to do so, if you are a believer in Christ, for has not He given you that which will put away all conscience of sin? Oh! rejoice! It has purged you so entirely that you may sit down and rest. You may sing with the poet—

*“Turn, then, my soul, unto thy rest;
The merits of thy great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty.
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.”*

Look at the text. Once again I am going to say the same things, lest I should not be quite understood. Dear brethren, we could not have access to God, unless on the footing of perfection, for God cannot walk and talk with imperfect creatures. But we are perfect, not in character, mark, for we are still sinners, but we are perfected through the blood of Jesus Christ, so that God can allow us to have access to Him as perfected creatures. We may come boldly because being sprinkled with the blood, God does not look on us as unholy and unclean, otherwise He could not allow us to come to His mercy seat, but He looks upon us as being perfected forever through the one sacrifice of Christ.

That is one thing. The other was this. We are the vessels of God's temple, He has chosen us to be like the golden pots of His sanctuary, but God could not accept a worship which was offered to Him in unholy vessels. Those vessels, therefore, were made perfect by being sprinkled with blood. God could not accept the praise which comes from your unholy heart, He could not accept the song which springs from your uncircumcised lips, nor the faith which arises from your doubting soul, unless He had taken the great precaution to sprinkle you with the blood of Christ, and now, whatever He uses you for, He uses you as a perfect instrument, regarding you as being perfect in Christ Jesus. That, again, is the meaning of the text, and the same meaning, only a different phase of it.

And, the last meaning is that the sacrifices of the Jews did not give believing Jews peace of conscience for any length of time, they had to come again, and again, and again, because they felt that those sacrifices did not present to them a perfect justification before God. But behold, beloved, you and I are complete in Jesus. We have no need of any other sacrifice. All others we disclaim. He has perfected us forever. We may see our conscience at ease because we are truly, really, and everlastingly accepted in Him. "He has perfected forever them that are sanctified."

Now, what have I to do, but to turn to you and ask this one question, and I have done. Are you a sanctified person? I have known a man say sometimes to a believer, "Well, you look so sanctified: ah! you are one of those sanctified fellows." Well, if they said so to me, I would say, "I wish you would prove it." What can be a more holy thing than to be a sanctified man? and what a more happy thing! Let me ask you, then, are you sanctified? Says one, "I feel so sinful." That I do not ask you, I ask you whether you are set apart to God's service. Can you say—

*"Dear Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do"?*

Take me just as I am, and make use of me, I desire to be wholly Yours? Do you feel that for you to live is Christ, that there is not any object you are living for but Christ—that Christ is the great aim of your ambition, the great object of all your labors, that you are like Samson, a Nazarite, consecrated to God? Oh! then, remember that you are perfected in Christ.

But, my hearer, if you are not sanctified to God in this sense, if you live to yourself, to pleasure, and to the world, you are not perfected in Christ, and what is to become of you? God will give you no access to Him, God will not use you in His service, you have no rest in your conscience, and in the day when God shall come to separate the precious from the vile, He will say, "Those are my precious ones, who have the blood on them, but these have rejected Christ, they have lived to themselves, they were dead while they lived, and they are damned now they are dead." Take heed of that! May God give you grace to be sanctified to God, and then shall you be forever perfected through Christ.

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