

On Christian Perfection

*An Address to Imperfect Believers
Who Cordially Embrace the Doctrine
of Christian Perfection*

From a Tract by John Fletcher

John William Fletcher (September 12, 1729 – August 14, 1785), an English divine, was born at Nyon in Switzerland. Fletcher was a contemporary of John Wesley (the founder of Methodism), a key interpreter of Wesleyan theology in the 18th century, and one of Methodism's first great theologians. Of French Huguenot stock, his given name was actually Jean Guillaume de la Flechere. Fletcher was renowned in the Britain of his day for his piety and generosity; when asked if he had any needs, he responded, "...I want nothing but more grace."

YOUR regard for Scripture and reason, and your desire to answer the end of God's predestination by being conformed to the image of His Son, have happily kept, or reclaimed, you from Antinomianism.

You see the absolute necessity of personally fulfilling the law of Christ: your bosom glows with desire to "perfect holiness in the fear of God:" and, far from blushing to be called "perfectionists," you openly assert that a perfect faith, productive of perfect love to God and man, is the pearl of great price, for which you are determined to sell all, and which, next to Christ, you will seek early and late, as the one thing needful for your spiritual and eternal welfare.

Some directions, therefore, about the manner of seeking this pearl must be acceptable to you, if they are Scriptural and rational; and such, I humbly trust, are those which follow.

If you would attain an evangelically sinless perfection, let your full assent to the truth of that deep doctrine firmly stand upon the evangelical foundation of a precept and a promise.

A precept without a promise would not sufficiently animate you; nor would a promise without a precept properly bind you; but a Divine precept and a divine promise form an unshaken

foundation. Let, then your faith deliberately rest her right foot upon these precepts:

Deuteronomy 6

⁵ Hear, O Israel: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.

Leviticus 19

¹⁷ You shall not hate your neighbor in your heart: you shall in any wise rebuke your neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.

¹⁸ You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people; but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord:

¹⁹ You shall keep my statutes.

Deuteronomy 10

¹² And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,

¹³ To keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His statutes, which I command you this day for your good?

¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

1 Chronicles 28

⁹ Serve God with a perfect heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands the imaginations of the thoughts.

Should unbelief suggest that these are only Old Testament injunctions, trample upon the false suggestion, and rest the same foot of your faith upon the following New Testament precepts:

Matthew 5

¹⁷ Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets.

⁴⁴ I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you...that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven...

⁴⁶ For if you love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans the same?

⁴⁸ Be therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 19

¹⁷ If you will enter into life, keep the commandments.

Galatians 6

² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

John 15

¹² This is my commandment, That you love one another, as I have loved you.

Romans 13

⁸ He that loves another has fulfilled the law:

⁹ For this, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

¹⁰ Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

1 John 4

²¹ This commandment we have from Him, That he who loves God love his brother also.

James 2

⁸ If you fulfill the royal law, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well.

⁹ But if you have respect to persons, you commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

1 Corinthians 7

¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

1 Timothy 1

⁵ For the end of the commandment is charity; out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.

1 Corinthians 13

² Though I have all faith, etc. and have not charity, I am nothing.

James 2

¹⁰ For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

¹¹ For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, you are become a transgressor of the law.

¹² So speak you, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

When the right foot of your faith stands on these evangelical precepts and proclamations, lest she should stagger for want of a promise every way adequate to such weighty commandments, let her place her left foot upon the following promises, which are extracted from the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 30

⁶ The Lord your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live.

Isaiah 1

¹⁸ Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

That this promise chiefly refers to sanctification, is evident from the verses which immediately follow it:

¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, [or disobey,] you shall be devoured with the sword.

Again,

Jeremiah 24

⁷ I will give them a heart to know me that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

Jeremiah 31

³³ This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ezekiel 36

²⁵ Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you:

²⁶ A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will put away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them.

And let nobody suppose that the promises of the circumcision, the cleansing, the clean water, and the Spirit, which are mentioned in these Scriptures, and by which the hearts of believers are to be made new, and God's law is to be so written therein, that they shall "keep His judgments and do them;"—let none, I say, suppose that these glorious promises belong only to the Jews; for their full accomplishment peculiarly refers to the Christian dispensation.

Besides, if sprinklings of the Spirit were sufficient, under the Jewish dispensation, to raise the plant of Jewish perfection in Jewish believers, how much more will the revelation of the horn of our salvation, and the outpourings of the Spirit, raise the plant of Christian perfection in faithful Christian believers! And that this revelation of Christ in the Spirit, as well as in the flesh, these effusions of the water of life, these baptisms of fire, which burn up the chaff of sin, thoroughly purge God's spiritual floor, save us from all our uncleanness, and deliver us from all our enemies; that these blessings, I say, are peculiarly promised to Christians, is demonstrable by the following cloud of New Testament declarations and promises:

Luke 1

⁶⁸ Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He has visited and redeemed His people,

⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David;

⁷⁰ As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

⁷⁴ That He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear [that is, with perfect love],

⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life.

Matthew 5

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit...

⁶ ...which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

John 4

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said unto her, If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give me to drink; you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water.

¹⁴ But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

John 7

³⁷ Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink.

³⁸ He that believes on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water, [to cleanse his soul, and to keep it clean].

³⁹ But this He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, [in such a manner as to raise the plant of Christian perfection,] because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Mr. Wesley, in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, has published some excellent queries, and proposed them to those who deny perfection to be attainable in this life. They are close to the point, and, therefore, the first two attack the imperfectionists

from the very ground on which I want you to stand. They run thus:

1. Has there not been a larger measure of the Holy Spirit given after Christ was glorified?¹
2. Was that glory which followed the sufferings of Christ² an external glory or an internal, viz., the glory of holiness?

Always rest the doctrine of Christian perfection on this Scriptural foundation, and it will stand as firm as revelation itself.

It is allowed, on all sides, that the dispensation of John the Baptist exceeded that of the other prophets, because it immediately introduced the gospel of Christ, and because John was not only appointed to...

Mark 1

⁴ ...preach the baptism of repentance,

–but also clearly to point out the very person of Christ, and to...

Luke 1

⁷⁷ ...give knowledge of salvation to God's people by the remission of sins.

Nevertheless, John only promised the blessing of the Spirit, which Christ bestowed when He had received gifts for men:

Matthew 3

¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that comes after me is mightier than I; He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

Such is the importance of His promise, that it is particularly recorded, not only by the other three evangelists,³ but also by our Lord himself, who said, just before His ascension,

¹ *John* 7:39.

² *1 Peter* 1:11.

³ See *Mark* 1:8, *Luke* 3:16, and *John* 1:26.

Acts 1

⁵ John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

So capital is this promise of the Spirit's stronger influences to raise the rare plant of Christian perfection, that when our Lord speaks of this promise, He emphatically calls it...

⁴ ...the promise of the Father,

—because it shines among the other promises of the Father,

⁴ ...which you have heard of me.

And again,

Acts 2

¹⁷ And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

³³ Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He has shed forth this, which you now see and hear.

³⁸ Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

³⁹ For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

This promise, when it is received in its fullness, is undoubtedly the greatest of all the...

2 Peter 1

⁴ ...exceedingly great and precious promises which are given to us, that by them you might be partakers of the Divine nature [that is, of pure love and unmixed holiness].

Have, therefore, a peculiar eye to it, and to these deep words of our Lord:

John 14

¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever,

¹⁷ Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world knows not, etc.; but you know Him, for He dwells with you, and shall be in you.

²⁰ At that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

²¹ He that has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me: and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

²³ Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

“Which, [says Mr. Wesley, in his note on the place,] implies such a large manifestation of the Divine presence and love, that the former in justification is as nothing in comparison of it.”

Agreeably to this, the same judicious divine expresses himself thus in another of his publications:

*“These virtues”
[meekness, humility, and true resignation to God]
“are the only wedding-garment;
they are the lamps and vessels
well furnished with oil.”*

“There is nothing that will do instead of them; they must have their full and perfect work in you, or the soul can never be delivered from its fallen, wrathful state. There is no possibility of salvation but in this.

“And when the Lamb of God has brought forth His own meekness, etc., in our souls, then are our lamps trimmed, and our virgin hearts made ready for the marriage-feast.

“This marriage-feast signifies the entrance into the highest state of union that can be between God and the soul in this life. This birthday of the Spirit of love in our souls, whenever we attain, will feast our souls with such peace and joy in God, as will

blot out the remembrance of everything that we called peace or joy before.”