
“PERFECTING HOLINESS.”

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”—2 Cor. 7:1.

HOLINESS is moral purity; and it is written that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14); and again, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8.) Purity of heart signifies purity of the will or intention, the main-spring of life. To be perfectly holy or pure in every sense of the word would signify absolute perfection, which no man can now claim; but those who by faith are clothed with the righteousness of Christ are now *reckoned* “holy and acceptable unto God” (Rom. 12:1), the righteousness of Christ being imputed to them by faith. These, whose hearts are fully consecrated and loyal to the Lord, are “the pure in heart”, whose privilege it is to see God.

While *the heart* of every accepted child of God must be pure from the very beginning of his Christian life (otherwise he is not accepted or owned as a child), yet, as the Apostle suggests above, there must be from that time onward a gradual work of *perfecting holiness* in the fear (filial fear) of God. That is (being graciously *reckoned* of God as holy through Christ, from the hour of our entire consecration to his will, because our will and effort are to be so), we are to go on striving daily against our natural imperfections, and endeavouring as nearly as possible to make the *reckoned* holiness more and more *actual*. Thus we should continue to *grow* in grace and in the actual likeness of the Lord.

Some Christians make the very serious mistake of supposing that they, as merely passive subjects, may receive instantaneously the blessing of holiness as a mark of God's special favour. But such a conception is very far from the Apostle's idea, as expressed above. He represents the attainment of holiness as a

life work, and the individual Christian as the active, and not as the passive, agent in accomplishing it. From the standpoint of a reckoned holiness he is to go on, day after day, and year after year, in the work of actual cleansing of himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit—of person and of mind—“perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.”

In the exceeding great and precious promises we have abundant incentives to strive daily to perfect holiness; but these must be held before the mind that they be not crowded into the background by the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of its pursuits. The pure in heart—whose will is only to serve and please him—do see God by faith and with the eyes of their understanding. They see him in his Word and his plan, as he graciously opens it up to their minds as meat in due season; they see him in his mighty works—of creation, and of redemption and salvation; they see him in nature, whose open book is ever eloquent in his praise to those who have eyes to read; by faith they see him in the secret closet communions when there is no eye to see and no ear to hear but God's, where the heart may freely unburden itself of its load and lay down its cares and feel that unutterable sense of divine sympathy and love which only those can understand who have taken the Lord as their personal friend and counsellor. They see him, too, in his providences; for, having entered into their closets and shut to the door and prayed to their Father in secret, the open reward of his sure and safe leading always follows, according to his promise.

How blessed it is thus to see God—to realise his presence and power and his abiding favour in all the vicissitudes of life; to watch him and see how, as the

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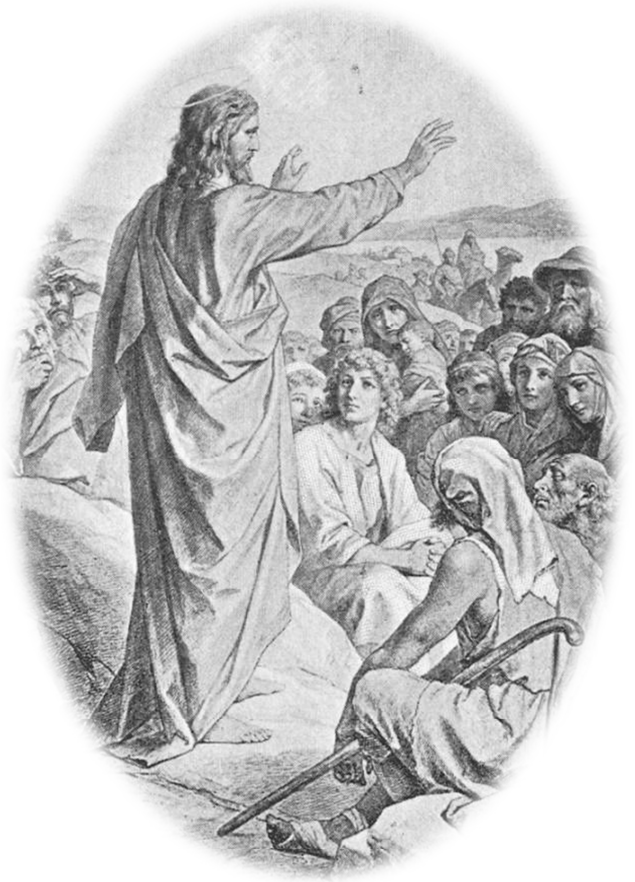
days and years go by, he makes all things work together for good to them that love him, and to see also, from the grand standpoint of observation he gives us, how glorious a destiny he has carved out for us and for all the willing and obedient subjects of his authority.

If we cultivate acquaintance with God and with our Lord Jesus, communing with them through the divine word and prayer, almost unconsciously to ourselves the work of perfecting holiness progresses. To be thus in communion with them is to receive more and more of their mind and disposition. And having the mind of God thus in us, as the controlling principle of our actions, to what purifications of the flesh it will also lead!

It begins at once to clean up the whole man. Old unclean, as well as sinful, habits are put away; unseemly conversation is not permitted to pass the door of the lips, or if, by force of old habit, slips of this kind occur, they are promptly repented of and rectified; and unholy thoughts are not entertained. The same spirit of holiness prompts also to the cleansing and purifying of the body, the clothing, the home, and all with which we have to do; for the outward man must be in conformity with the pure heart within, and with the heavenly guests that make their abode with us.—John 14:23.

It is quite possible, however, that the more we succeed in purifying ourselves of the old carnal nature, the more we may realise the imperfections that still remain; for the purifying process is also an educating one: we learn to appreciate and admire purity, holiness, the more thoroughly we assimilate it, until “the beauty of holiness” becomes the most desirable of all possessions, that which is lacking of its glory is our deepest concern and the great work of perfecting holiness becomes the chief business of life. Let the good work go on, dearly beloved, and, in the end, the Lord himself shall be your exceeding great reward.

—ZION'S WATCH TOWER, December, 1894.—



The Sermon on the Mount. H. Hofmann. 1824-