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"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

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**PASTORAL LETTER**

OF THE PRESBYTERY OF LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA,

ADDRESSED TO THE CHURCHES UNDER THEIR CARE.

OCTOBER 20, 1827.

DEAR BRETHREN—Being appointed to watch for your spiritual interests, we think it our duty at this time to address you in a pastoral letter of more than usual length. The churches in our presbytery are mostly in a languishing state. While other regions are visited with frequent revivals, and stirred up to a diligent practice and a vigorous promotion of the gospel, we have fallen into a general coldness, and have experienced a long suspension of divine influences. In some places, death, emigration, and apostacy have diminished the number of church members more than the means of grace have increased it. In short, some of our wisest and most experienced men think they see amongst us the symptoms of a long and fatal decline. Still, however, we rest on one ground of hope and consolation. Our churches, we believe, contain many sincere children of God, who have an interest at the throne of grace, and daily supplicate the Father of Mercies for a blessing on our public ordinances, and for an effusion of the spirit upon our churches.—Therefore, we trust that we shall not be finally deserted; though we may suffer a severe chastisement for our abuse of past favors and present privileges.

Judging from the history of former ages, we apprehend that the two most alarming symptoms in a church are: 1. The omission or negligent performance of duty; and 2. A departure from sound doctrine according to the scriptures.

1. The omission or negligent performance of duty weakens the pious feelings of the heart—wounds, and then hardens the conscience—opens the door for temptation and delusion—offends God, and grieves his Holy Spirit—and, when it becomes general in a

Religion often receives a sanction in young minds from parental authority and example, which cannot be obtained from any other source.

Finally, brethren, we must observe that the spirit of slumber which pervades our churches seems to have fallen upon us at a most unreasonable juncture. The Christian world is at present greatly moved. In innumerable places, Christians are active, both in maintaining the cause of religion at home, and extending its influences abroad. The time seems to be approaching, if it have not already arrived, when the Head of the church will collect his true followers into an efficient body; and employ them effectually in multiplying the victories of the cross. It is also true that in the present day, the cause of irreligion and vice is advancing. If the good seed of the word is sown extensively, we know that wherever the church is asleep, the enemy also sows his tares. It would seem that the kingdoms of light and darkness are both collecting their forces for some mighty conflict. And in this war, there can be no neutrality. "He that is not with me, is against me." is the maxim of our blessed Saviour. Perhaps few churches in Christendom are more loudly called upon by the voice of Providence than our own. Not only are our spiritual concerns languishing at home; but we are surrounded by a large region of desolation, where "the people perish for lack of knowledge." The interests of our own families unite with those of more distant friends in calling upon us to awake out of sleep, and act our part as the friends of Zion. May the spirit of the living God enforce the admonition; and excite us to act as a people feeling that "we are not our own, but are bought with a price," even with the blood of the everlasting covenant.

"And now, brethren, we commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified."

SAMUEL HOUSTON, MODERATOR.

FRANCIS M'FARLAND, STATED CLERK.

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For the Calvinistic Magazine.

### CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

I have listened, with some attention and anxiety, to the abettors and defenders of what they call, *Christian Perfection*. They sometimes, if not generally, treat it in a controversial manner; casting unjust aspersions on others whom they choose to call, opponents. They use a great deal of declamation, and cite nearly all the passages, with great zeal and triumph, where the word *perfect*, *perfection*

&c. is used; without shewing the connection, or settling the real meaning of any one of them. They also attempt to treat the subject *analogically*; and talk flippantly about perfect buds, perfect flowers, perfect trees, &c. &c. They have also their perfect child, perfect man, perfect angel, &c. &c. I confess I have often been perplexed, dissatisfied, unedified, and concluded that I either could not understand them, or that they did not understand themselves. A general indefinite, declamatory exhibition, without point, has appeared to me, and, as far as I can learn, to many others, the real aspect of an hour's effort.

Attributing the defect, however, to my own ignorance, and desiring to be corrected, and come to some point on the subject, I set myself down to peruse Mr. Wesley's '*Plain account of Christian Perfection.*' But alas! to my great disappointment, I found 'confusion worse confounded.' He defines *Christian Perfection* to be, "the loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. This implies, (says he) that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul: and that all the thoughts, words and actions, are governed by pure love." Well, thought I, if this be a proper definition of Christian Perfection, I wonder what *more* than this, does the moral law require. I wondered if Adam before his fall could do *more* than this—if Saints and Angels in heaven—yea, if the 'man Christ Jesus' himself, while on earth, could do more than what is implied in this definition. This must surely be an *absolute or sinless perfection*; and this is what the same author must mean when he further asserts, that "it is only of grown Christians it can be affirmed, they are in such a sense perfect, as to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers." It is further "implied in being a *perfect Christian*,—that all inward sin is undoubtedly, taken away." Yet, he admits that such a character, a perfect christian, freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers, is nevertheless not freed from "infirmities, ignorance, and mistake." But maintains, that "where every word and action springs from love, a mistake is not properly a *sin*. However, it cannot, (he says) bear the rigor of God's justice, but needs the atoning blood." And again; "Every one may mistake as long as he lives: a mistake in *opinion* may occasion a mistake in *practice*: every such mistake is a transgression of the perfect law: therefore, every such mistake, were it not for the blood of atonement, would expose to eternal damnation. It follows, that the most perfect have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions." Here, this *perfect Christian*, freed from *all inward sin*—all evil thoughts, &c. is not however freed from "mistake;" but this "mistake is not properly a *sin*;"

notwithstanding it is acknowledged to be "*a transgression of the perfect law,*" and "would expose to eternal damnation, were it not for the blood of atonement." Here, if I mistake not, is the *prototype* of all the jargon, and confusion of modern preachers on this subject. If any man can harmonize these inconsistencies and contradictions he has, I confess, more theological acumen than the writer. He can try it if he choose; but we turn to a more sure word of prophecy.

The simple question now before us is this: Do any saints ever attain *perfection* in this life? By perfection I mean *perfect holiness*; by perfect holiness I mean, a perfect conformity of the *heart and conduct* to the revealed law of God. This implies the keeping "*all the commandments of God at all times, without the least breach of them, in disposition, inclination, thought, affection, word, or conversation.*" Perfect holiness consists in having the heart wholly possess by the love of God, without the mixture of any inferior or baser passion. It implies that the subject of it be free from 'each evil working of the heart, each depraved cogitation of the mind, each embryo purpose of wickedness, each malignant feeling, each rising of impatience, each fretful act of repining against the course of God's providence, each want of cheerful acquiescence in his purposes, each defect even of love to him as our maker and benefactor.' This you may call *Christian Perfection*. But to free the subject from all ambiguity, I prefer to call it *perfect Holiness*. Now that any mere man, since the fall, did ever attain to this perfection in this life, I do not believe. Adam, *before* the fall, was able to keep *perfectly* all God's commandments; but no mere man *since* the fall was ever able to do it. The Lord Jesus Christ was both *able*, and also *did* perfectly keep the commandments of God; but he was more than mere man, being both God and man in one person. The saints hereafter in heaven, being made perfect themselves, shall be enabled perfectly to obey God in all that he shall require of them. But that saints on earth, do *not* attain to this perfection, we firmly believe, for the following reasons:

1. Because the best of saints, in this life, are but *partially* renewed; that is, are not entirely freed from "the old man," the remains of flesh and corruption, which rebel and war against the spirit, and "*the new man*" within. Gal. v. 17. They are not freed from every thing mentioned in the above definition of perfect holiness; which we presume, will not be controverted.

2. Because the scripture testimony is express and pointed in support of our position. "For there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and *sinneth not.*" Eccl. vii. 20. "For there is *no man that sinneth not.*" 1. Kings viii. 46. "If we say that we have *no sin*, we de-

ceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." I. John i. 8. "If I say, I am *perfect*, it shall *prove me perverse*." Job ix. 20. "I have seen an *end* of all *perfection*." Ps. cxix. 96.

3. Because the scriptures record the sins of the most holy men that ever lived: instance the *dissimulation* of both Abraham, and Isaac, respecting their wives; (Gen. xx. 2: xxvi. 7.) Jacob's lie to his father; (Gen. xxvii. 24.) Moses's unadvised speech. Ps. cvi. 33. Instance also, Noah's drunkenness; Lot's incest; David's murder and adultery, the impatience of Job and Jeremiah, in cursing their birthday; Peter's denial of his master with cursing and swearing, and his *dissimulation* afterwards, before the Jews; the contention of Paul and Barnabas. From such instances as these, of persons who were filled with the Holy Ghost, and endued with such a great measure of grace, not excelled by any we read of in the scriptures, or any history, we may safely conclude, that if they were *not perfect, without sin*, (for surely their aberrations were not *mistakes* merely) then no saints, in this life, have ever attained to a state of sinless perfection, or perfect holiness.

What then, it may be enquired, is that perfection spoken of, concerning, and ascribed to the saints in the scripture? I answer, it is not to be understood of *absolute perfection* and freedom from all sin; for the reasons already given, which prove the contrary. But it is to be understood of *sincerity*, and *uprightness* of intention, motive, and conduct. So the word *perfect*, is often rendered *sincere, upright*, in the marginal reading. And no more is to be understood than what is generally termed, by good writers, an *evangelical perfection*; or, at furthest, a *comparative* perfection: thus God testifieth of Job, *there is none like him in the earth, a perfect man*; that is: none so perfect as he is—none like him, *a perfect and upright man*. His perfection consisted in his uprightness and sincerity. And it was no more than this that Hezekiah plead before God when he said, "Remember I have walked before thee *in truth*, and with a *perfect heart*." For the scripture, as we have seen, notes the sin of both these men afterwards; so that it is clearly evident they were not absolutely perfect. The Apostle Paul asserts, in Phil. iii. 15, that himself and other Christians were *perfect*: yet he had before, in v. 12, 13, acknowledged that he was *not perfect*. In this there is no contradiction, if we refer to the distinction just made; understanding the perfection which he *had* attained, and of which he speaks, in v. 15, to be no more than *evangelical perfection*; and that which he had *not* attained, in v. 12 to be understood of *absolute* perfection; to which no saints do attain in this life, and to which if any do pretend, it is owing to their igno-

rance of themselves, of God and of the spirituality and extent of his law, by which is the knowledge of sin.

Curiosity, if nothing else, would prompt us to hear how one of our modern, loose declaimers on perfection, would preach from this text; "*If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor.*" Matt. xix. 21. This item, in their perfection creed, I have never heard them touch; no, not even quote, much less adopt themselves, or inculcate upon others. A pretty tough requisition, perhaps, for some of our modern perfectionists who through *ignorance, infirmity, or mistake*, can quote more scripture, than they can understand.

CLELAND.

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### SPECIMEN OF WELCH PREACHING.

At a meeting of ministers at Bristol, the Rev. Mr.—invited several of his brethren to sup with him. Among them was the minister officiating at the Welch meeting house in that city—he was an entire stranger to all the company, and silently attentive to the general conversation of his brethren. The subject on which they were discoursing was the different strains of public preaching.

When several had given their opinion, and had mentioned some individuals as good preachers, and such as were models as to style of composition, &c. Mr.—turned to the Welch stranger and solicited his opinion. He said he felt it a *privilege* to be *silent* when such men were *discoursing*, but that he felt it a *duty* to comply with their request.—“But,” said he, “if I must give my opinion, I should say that ye have no good preachers in England. A welchman would set fire to the world while you were lighting your match.” The whole company requested the good man to give them some specimen of the style and manner of preaching in Wales. “Specimen,” said he, “I cannot give you; if John Elias were here, he would give you a specimen *indeed*. I cannot do justice to the Welch language: Your poor meagre language would spoil it? It is not capable of expressing those ideas which a Welchman can conceive?—I cannot give you a specimen in English without spoiling it.”—The interest of the company was increased, and nothing would do but something of a specimen. “Well,” said the Welchman, “if you must have a piece, I must try; but I don’t know what to give you—I recollect a piece of Christmas Evans. He was preaching on the depravity of man by sin—of his recovery by the death of Christ, and he said: “Brethren, if I were to represent to you in a figure, the condition of man as a sinner, and the means of recovery by the cross of