

**THE
SAINTS
PERFECT
IN THIS LIFE
OR NEVER.**

Collected and Gathered from Scripture
in the Letter thereof, and the Spiritual
Sense of the Same.

Nicholas Cowling

**An Officer in the Army,
and a well-wisher to the Truth.**

*"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not
war after the flesh." II Cor. 10:3.*

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TO THE READER.

Courteous Reader;

It is the corruption of nature to keep others in misery with themselves; hence it is, that when a prisoner endeavoureth to escape, his fellow-prisoners do alarm the Keeper. It is just so in spirituals; when any are going forth from Egypt, or Babylon, or endeavour to bring forth others with themselves, then presently they cry, "wilt thou kill me as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday?" Or with the devout Jews, "here is he that hath destroyed our orthodox divinity," that hath stood by the secular power above eighty years. But if thy faith be no otherwise fixed than by tradition received from the fathers, do not bestow thy cost to buy, or thy pains to read, this discourse; but, "let him that is filthy be filthy still." But unto you that fear his name, Jehovah, on whom the sun of righteousness doth arise, with healing under his wings; and have received eye-salve and raiment, and have the white stone, which no man knoweth but he that hath it, read on; and if thou dost not meet with such rhetorical expressions and artificially logical conclusions therein as schools afford, supply it with thy charity, and know, that my education was not there; neither is it my employment to feed souls, but bodies. {At this time, Cowling was commissary general for victuals to William Waller's army.} Though silver and gold I have none, yet such as I have give I thee; that though thou wast once polluted in thy blood, now being washed, and thy navel knit, and art beautified with ornaments, refuse not to be the bride of such a bridegroom; and do not say, I am unworthy. If thou meetest with anything herein that doth confirm thy

understanding or enlighten the same, give him the praise that gave it me; but if thou seest more than here expressed, hide not thy talent, the day that hath dawned doth require thee to help draw the curtains that have darkened the corners of the earth. And so I rest thine, if thine own,

Farewell, N.C.

THE SAINTS PERFECT IN THIS LIFE, OR NEVER.

The great design of antichrist in the matters of worship, is not so much in diminishing of them, as by adding to them, to make them more glorious and beautiful to the eye, than described, and therefore is very punctilious for decency and order. But in the matters of God, communicated to the saints, there he doth diminish and subtract, putting that afar off which is nigh at hand, changing the present time into the future, making by subtle distinctions that which is here real and in truth fully complete, to be but in part and degrees attainable in this life, but must be completed after death.

Therefore, thus I propound, that a saint in this life, without any addition hereafter, is perfectly just, perfectly holy, completely glorious in this life, and is not capable of any addition after death in the least degree, but only of manifestation; and this I prove from a fourfold consideration.

First, from that conformity that is between the Father and a saint, laid down in a gospel precept, "be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Therefore the exception standeth good, "if your righteousness exceed not the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." The

righteousness of the pharisees here meant, is not that gross hypocrisy which we would fasten upon them, but that sincere piety which Paul witnesseth of himself, which was, as concerning the law, unproveable; and therefore is not only imputative perfection, but active and real, "for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Neither do we stir in holy obedience when created, until the Lord breathe into our nostrils the breath of life; and so he is not only a living soul, but a quickened spirit. Did God make the first man, Adam, a righteous living soul, and shall not the last man, Adam, be as fully a perfect quickening spirit? And is the tabernacle of God with men, and will he dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God? And is this city so glorious where God dwelleth, that there is no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, "for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof; and into this in no wise shall ever enter anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie?" And are we dead as concerning the first man? And is our life hid with Christ in God? And must we therefore mortify our members which are upon the earth? And are we made partakers of the divine nature, that we should escape the corruption that is in the world through lust? Are we passed from Mount Sinai, which was covered with blackness, and darkness, and a terrible voice? Nay, are we not come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and to the spirits of just men made perfect? "Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this

present world?" Have we not received that unction which abideth, by means whereof we sin not? And doth not everyone that hath this hope purge himself, even as he is pure? And, "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." And, "he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." Shall God create, and leave his work imperfect? And shall the second Adam be weaker to make perfect, than the first was to destroy? And is the tabernacle of God so defiled that he must dwell in an unclean thing? Or rather, "are ye not circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism," for the remission of sins, our nature being cleansed by his resurrection? And is that spirit of burning, which like an oven that doth consume our dross, hay and stubble, so dark, that it must want the help of perishing lights to discern between truth and falsehood? And is it not able of itself to say in our souls, "this is the way, walk in it?" Is there any in heaven or in earth found worthy to open the little book, sealed with seven seals, which caused John to weep, but the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Lamb? Are there any members in another world to be mortified by that life that we have hid with Christ in God? Or is there any corruption in a stint after death, that he shall need to be made partaker of the divine nature whereby he may then avoid it? Judge, did Christ preach to men alive or dead, when he said, "be ye perfect?" Did the apostles write to living men, or dead saints departed? If to living men, then surely the position holdeth true, as shall further appear.

Secondly, by that union and oneness that is between God and the saints, "that they all may be

one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us," that the world may believe that God dwelleth in flesh, and the glory which the Son had with the Father, he gives them, "that they may be one, as we are one." How so? "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me" into their flesh, and that they may know the cause of this was, thy loving of them; and that this mystery of thy love, which hath been hid from ages, is now made manifest, to wit, Christ in every saint, the hope of glory; and that when Christ, who is our life, doth appear in any saint, then shall he appear glorious in this world. What great glory did appear in the Lord Jesus for thirty years together, till baptized, but only at his birth, and once at twelve years of age, yet in all the intervals of time was Christ in him the God of glory. "Wherefore thou art no more a servant but a son, and if a son then an heir of God" through the same Christ that was in Jesus, "for as many of you as have been baptized" into his death for the remission of sins, "have put on Christ." Is it the will of the Lord Jesus Christ that all those whom the Father hath given him may be where he is; and that he doth not at any time so withdraw, but that he doth speedily come again and receive us unto himself, that where he is there ye may be also? Can it be imagined, that where the pure God dwelleth, and is made one with the creature, there can be any defect or impureness remain? Shall the head be clean, and the body polluted, if one limb be leprous, the whole body is polluted.

Thirdly, from that care the Lord Jesus hath over the saints, in that he ascended up on high to give gifts unto men, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the

body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we "henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Had the papist priests of old, and the protestant ministers of new, spoken the truth in love, and not belied the gospel, the one had never got so many rich manors assigned to purgatory, framed near hell, nor the other to have sat so high in the souls of zealous ignorant covenanters, as they do, teaching the people that God is as changeable as man, your friend today and your enemy tomorrow. Should they with the angels sing, "glory unto God on high, on earth peace, good will towards men;" should they tell you, "that God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," not himself to the world; should they tell us that, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God," and by Christ are made the righteousness of God; they could not by such doctrine deceive, to wit, that our holy duties though never so constant brought with us to God, avail ought; neither our sins though never so many, Christ being ours, shall separate. But until the accuser of the Father is cast out, we shall still remain in that troublesome sea, where we shall need ships with sails, and gallies with oars, to get us those cordials that shall allay those scorching darts of hell and horror, which in those vessels of trade can never be found, but only in the Ark of presence, "Christ the head, from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the

measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the building of itself in love. So that henceforth ye cannot walk as other Gentiles do, in the vanity of your minds," because the oil that is poured on your head is run down into the skirts of your clothing. Now then, seeing there are no apostles to preach in heaven after death, no priests to go into purgatory to fetch part of Christ's body thence, which you say is imperfect, and shall be hereafter made perfect, but by what means of expiation I could never learn; be silent before the Lord and come out from amongst them, and conclude with the truth, that God who hath in this world begun this good work in you, will perfect the same in the same world.

Fourthly, from the design of God concerning the old Adam who is destined to death, and only to live in the new Adam. But before I proceed, I must answer an objection.

Doth not John say, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," and, "if we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar," and Paul saith, "I see a law in my members, rebelling against the law of my mind, and leading me captive unto the law of sin. Who shall deliver me from this body of death," &c. Answer: The apostle John doth in this convince those that hold there is no sin, because all actions are from God, and all that God doth is good, which is an undoubted truth; not heeding that in actions there is either a rectitude, or an aberration. As thus, eating is no sin as it is an act, but eating that which was forbidden made the act sinful; again, two men come into a shop, and both cheapen wares, the one buys, pays for what he takes, the other steals and carries away, the one sins, the other doth not, yet both came in by the power of God, and both went forth by the same power, "for in him we live, and move, and have our

being." Because the law saith, "thou shalt not steal," the one sinned, the other did not; so John in this sense concludes him a liar that saith, he may as freely be a thief as a true man, but that he that is born of God sinneth, or he that received that unction doth commit sin, he utterly denieth; nay, he doth positively affirm that, "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him; nay, he cannot sin, because he is born of God," and that of the apostle in the seventh of the Romans, methinks he argues there as from the flesh, like a man that hath a gangrene, loathe to lose a member and as loathe to die; yet when he comes into the spirit, he can say, "it is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me;" nay, he doth further add, that if it be not my walks there is no guilt upon me, and therefore no condemnation due unto me, "for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Now the apostle tells us that the flesh is weak and could not but sin, therefore Christ in flesh fulfilled the law, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" yea, and, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

But to proceed, that the old Adam is for transgression doomed unto death is clear, insomuch that the Lord Jesus, the second Adam, being in that habit of flesh must die, though free from sin, that he might bring forth the glorious manifestation of himself in the saints by the Spirit, which doth clearly appear to be more manifested in the Apostles than in his own flesh. When did the shadow of Christ cure any? How few was the number of converts at his death? More converted at one sermon by Peter in the spirit, than by Christ in the flesh all his life long. Yea, what an unstable faith had the disciples when

fixed on Christ only in the flesh; though he often told them beforehand that he should be killed, and rise again the third day, yet not one of them did engage for it, but the most they did was but to perform funeral rites unto his dead body, and therefore saith Mary, "if thou hast taken away my Lord, shew me where thou hast laid him," and I will fetch dead Jesus thence; nay, when she had seen him, and told the disciples, it seemed to them a feigned thing. And when Peter and John found him not, but had the testimony of angels that he was risen, yet it did but more astonish them; and upon all those testimonies the two disciples brought it to this account, "we trusted it had been he which should have redeemed Israel," but our rulers have killed him, and all our hope is gone. How was Peter foiled by a silly damsel, when his faith was only in the flesh of Christ; but when in the Spirit, then, whether to obey God or man be meet, judge ye; not to a silly damsel where there is no great danger, but to the face of the magistrate, therefore if ye walk after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye walk in the Spirit ye shall live, and "henceforth know we Christ after the flesh no more."

Now that there may be no mistakes, there is in every saint flesh and spirit, which was not so in old Adam, for "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." There is not found in that first man either flesh or spirit; but, "the last man Adam was made a quickening Spirit;" therefore when flesh is opposed unto spirit, I do not understand that creature which was formed of the dust, that for walking in that ye shall die; but I understand by flesh, that depravity of will, that perverseness of affection, that blindness in understanding, which hath seized upon the reason, by which it is acted unto unrighteous conversation,

and so hath necessarily purchased destruction. Not that the creature barely considered as first formed, not walking in that flesh above premised, must necessarily die, or be destroyed, for Enoch walking with God, in this creature of flesh, blood and bone, pleased God, and died not, having this testimony, that he pleased God. Elias, though subject to the like infirmities of hunger, cold and sickness as we are, yet not walking in that dead sea of corruption as we do, died not. Nay, had not the Lord Jesus undertaken the full restoration of this poor creature, man, death could no more have killed him, than detain him when slain. "No man taketh my life from me; I lay it down, and I take it up again." So that from all that hath been said I gather thus much, that the man Jesus, whatsoever he did either for himself or suffer for others, was completely finished on the cross before he bowed down the head, and gave up the ghost; and that his burial, his resurrection, and ascension, was no part of making himself or others more perfect, more righteous, more holy, than he was upon the cross, but they were as so many clearer manifestations of that perfection which he lived in, and not the least addition in any ways which he had not in this life.

Now that something might be gathered hence from all that hath been said, for the benefit of the saints in general, I say thus much; that it is not sufficient for any to believe that Jesus Christ did fulfil the law, and satisfy the justice of God, and that thou hast only a name to live, but in regard of thy imperfection as touching good works, art dead; for to live only in the faith of the church of Sardis, will but cause Christ to come on thee as a thief in the night to destroy thee; but thou must have that faith of Jesus, which is the faith that he lived by in this life. You will say, Christ was perfectly God, and

therefore needed no faith. So he was as perfectly man, and therefore needed a faith to believe that the godhead dwelt in him bodily, as is evident, when surprised with hunger, and thereby saw that God could satisfy his hunger without the ordinance of bread. In many other things it is clear, that Jesus in this life did live by faith in the godhead, and therefore the apostle saith, "that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ," not the faith in Christ; "the righteousness which is of God by faith; that thereby I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead;" for there shall no more of a saint rise to immortality after death, than is perfectly righteous in this life. Let therefore the sufferings in you "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in your flesh, for his body's sake, which is the church. And as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." Nevertheless, you that are yet overclouded with imperfections, and do in the flesh commit sin, "walk by the same rule," mind to be perfect; and walk not as those that are enemies to the cross of Christ. Art thou a professor of long standing, and art thou still as pettish in thy family as ever, so that thy door is marked ill for servants? Art thou as proud as any, as covetous as ever, as cruel in discipline amongst brethren as heathens? Remember their plea, have we not preached in thy name, eaten in thy presence, cast out devils? Have not we, by our preaching, cast out the devil of drunkenness from that man on thy right hand; and I see another that had the devil of uncleanness

converted by me; yet, depart from me, I know thee not thou imperfect man. You will say, "who then can be saved?" "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." "Thy strength is to sit still," and except thou art born again, thou canst not enter into the kingdom of God. You know a child cannot beget itself, nor move, nor be born, but by the strength of that life that it receiveth in the womb, where there is nothing but darkness, and yet from thence cometh a perfect creature; and that life by which thou must live unto eternity, is as much hid from the old Adam before the new birth, as is the life of an infant in the womb. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, and they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." But you that have a Christ only without you, and no spirit of burning within you, so that there is no light shining forth to the world that Christ is in you the hope of glory; though thou canst speak as smooth as Jacob, whoever feels thee shall find thee as rough as Esau. In thy judgment over others, as either servant or soldier, as heathenish and cruel as any Greek or Roman, not heeding thy head, the Lord Jesus, in meekness, in love, in forbearing, in forgiving one another; not rendering evil for evil, forgetting that God sendeth his rain on the just and unjust. I refer thee to consider, what good thy outside faith and imperfect works, with them of Sardis, will do thee, which only procureth to thee nothing but Christ's coming as a thief to destroy thee. But you that have begun to deny yourselves, not only in your lusts, but in your holy duties, and do clearly see the nothingness that is in those vessels of trade, that never brought you further than

the dead sea of fear and trembling, and have espied that there remaineth a rest for the people of God; say not in your hearts, there dwelleth the sons of Anak, I mean your corruptions, and the city thereof, the moral law, walled up to heaven; I say with Joshua, the Lord being yours, and he having given you his Spirit, will by that Spirit kill all your corruptions, and bring you into the possession of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And you that are yet but infants, shall grow up into that stature and fulness of Christ, until the perfect day dawn in your hearts from on high, which hath already visited you; and this in part we see made good unto some, who of fierce and cruel are become mild and loving, and ready unto every good work; and then when the Lord shall search for iniquity in Jacob, and transgression in Israel, he shall find none.

It may be here demanded what this perfection is; to which I answer, that which the eye of reason never saw, nor the ear of a carnal man ever heard, nor can enter into the heart of a mere natural man to conceive, cannot be fully deciphered; there need no arguments from philosophy to prove that honey is sweet, but tasting, and without it no man can know it. That which I drive at in all that hath been said is, that the saints might live like themselves; such as are in a calling that is never attended with honour, never trouble themselves to attain unto dominion, but such as are in a capacity to get it, usually engage for it; and seeing that the man Jesus being in Christ, was in this life completely perfect, and shall not the same Christ in the members be as completely perfect in this life, judge ye. "Let therefore as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even the same unto you." And seeing there is a white stone, and a name written in it which no man

knoweth but he that hath it, I forbear to trouble any to steer by my compass, lest he mistake the points. But seeing in Christ there is a way, in which you cannot stray, a truth by which you cannot err, a life by which you cannot die, walk, stand in, and live by that; and seeing there is a rest for the people of God, which whosoever is entered into ceaseth from his works, as God did from his. They do not only cease from their works of sin, but from their works of piety, upon that account they have formerly lived in them, which was only to please God, that they might be happy and better than others; but now they act from life, and they trade in holiness, not to be citizens of the living God, but because they are so. They do not forbear to sin because they will not displease God thereby, but because they are bought with a price, and therefore they must glorify God in their bodies and spirits, for they are God's. And surely themselves nor God should have glory, if the saints should live continually in sin and under the power of corruption; and for any other perfection or glory attainable in this life or hereafter, as yet I know none.

FINIS