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A S E R M O N

ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

Mrs. John F. Seymour,

SEPTEMBER 9, 1860.

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DELIVERED IN THE

REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH, UTICA,

ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

MRS. JOHN F. SEYMOUR,

SEPTEMBER 9, 1860.

BY CHARLES E. KNOX.

"LIFE THAT SHALL FEAR NO DEATH,
GOD'S LIFE ABOVE,
OF LIGHT AND LOVE,
THAT SHALL BE THINE!
ALL WELL WITH THEE!"

PUBLISHED BY

REQUEST OF THE FRIENDS OF THE FAMILY.

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S E R M O N .

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“BRETHREN, I COUNT NOT MYSELF TO HAVE APPREHENDED ; BUT THIS ONE THING I DO, FORGETTING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEHIND AND REACHING FORTH UNTO THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEFORE, I PRESS TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE OF THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.”

IF we set aside the one great principle of the perfect Christian life, and attempt to describe Christian perfection by the enumeration of the individual parts, we find it to be no easy thing. The law of Christian love is so comprehensive and so perfect that no single act can arise in any possible exigency of life, but that it at once determines its quality and fixes its place ; but when we commence at the other side, and try to collect the virtues which make the Christian, it is not easy to know when our enumeration has become complete. We cannot at once say that there may not be some other virtue which *may* not be required by the existence of new and peculiar circumstances.

We may take our Bible in our hand, and read over the longest catalogue of gracious gifts that we find there, and we do not feel that it completes the whole number. We read, “the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;” and although

we feel that truth and honesty, patience and hope, and penitence itself, may be included, yet we know they are included by extending a principle and not by enumerating particulars. So also knowledge, even the study of the Scriptures, is not included, although it is evident that he who practices the virtues of the Apostle's catalogue, will be diligent in Scripture investigation.

Yet it is well for us at times to place before us, as well as we may, some systematic arrangement of the duties which together make up the perfect Christian. A view of the Christian character from this side, will perhaps exalt before us the high standard, and give us a new appreciation of the excellent law which comprehends all in its simple profundity. I suppose it was when Paul had *such* a model of Christian perfection before him, rather than the one single and controlling principle, that he confessed his own imperfection, that he considered that even he had not fully apprehended or seized hold upon all the wide departments and details of a perfect life. Let me then try to place before you some outline of such a model.

First of all must we include the most practical graces of common Christian life : penitence and faith, the great initiatory duties ; and with them confession.

Then follows closely that great secret of Christian vitality, prayer in its private and public forms : then, the duties which spring from right appreciation of man's inferiority, gratitude, dependence, meekness : then, public acts of recognition of God, worship, with its deep adoration and its holy wonder, and the duties connected with the sacraments.

Now we turn toward man : first, those plain and fundamental duties to all men—honesty and truth ; with them, the more spontaneous virtues—affection, benevolence, self-denial ; then, those high and attractive virtues, which really do so much and are so little appreciated, cheerfulness, hope, courtesy, gentleness ; then, the three great co-workers in all activity—diligence, earnestness, zeal.

And now follow also the virtues which preserve all the others—constancy, perseverance, patience, resistance, watchfulness.

And besides all these common graces for daily practice, the special duties which pertain to special offices must be included : for apostles, prophets, teachers, the peculiar and especial duties of teacher and prophet and apostle—the especial and peculiar manifestation of all other duties which belong to pastor and officer and teacher of the Bible, and to him to whom the minds of children are entrusted.

And so might we carry out the enumeration of special graces adapted to special hours in life : for the hour of open assault, for the hour of secret solicitation, for the hour of enticing prosperity, for the restive hour of adversity ; to chasten the high hour of exultation, to lift the low hour of depression ; for the hour of affliction, the hour of sickness, the dying hour.

Really, then, in this method, we can hardly stop short of the every act of every hour, every act of life. It is impossible to cease the enumeration until all are included, for there is no hour which has not its own peculiarities, and so no hour which does not need some peculiar adaptation of the Christian graces to its many-sided and singular form.

And now, having alluded to some of the common virtues which lie at the very basis of Christian character in Christian daily life—to the multiplied adaptations of each and all to the multiplied peculiarities of life—and asking you to remember the high sense of honor requisite in the soul to carry out even one of the least of them—let us advance a step further towards the perfect Christian's character.

The ignorant and the illiterate Christian may possess, and should possess these common graces ; but evidently, no small degree of true Christian knowledge is to be connected with our model.

Let us look then for a few moments, at the kinds of *knowledge* required in the perfect Christian. First of all comes the knowledge of the Scriptures; and right here how vast is the department which opens upon our entrance. How much there is to be explored: how rich is the exploration: how many are the ways of reaching the pure gold. Here are unnumbered subjects with unnumbered suggestions. Here are subjects branching in a thousand ways into every department of thought and of life, which rise with the solid heart of gold to every topmost growth of science; which penetrate to the deepest rocks, amid which the roots of knowledge are entwined: here are subjects which yield the return which outweighs in value the gain of miner or pearl-diver or diamond-sifter. How many are the methods of Scripture itself in bringing these simple subjects to us: in history, by simple recital, by stirring narrative, by heroic story; in prophecy, by hope fulfilled, by promises secured, by high inducement, by mystery revealed, by the ultimate reward; in poem, by hymns of fervent devotion, by songs of high praise, by the impassioned utterance of the spiritual nature, by the ethereal flight of sanctified imagination—by the subdued tone of David, by the animation of Asaph, by the boldness of Isaiah, by the fiery vividness of Ezekiel, by the tenderness of Jeremiah, by the dramatic power of Job; in doctrine, through nature and providence leading us up to *God*,

through proclamation and appeal and conscience teaching us that *man* is a *sinner*, through the Son of God's love teaching us the way from captivity to deliverance, and opening the gate of the prison into a city of golden splendor; in the epistle, in its friendly advice, in its generous sympathy, in its convincing argument, in its care for little things, its pure kindness, its courtesy, with the vigor of Paul, the calm strength of James, the glow of John; and, at the close of the great volume, in the great Apocalyptic vision which sheds its flood of sunlight over the lost era of earth's history.

How many are the methods which we may take to investigate and explore these Scripture subjects. Sometimes by the order of time, when we read in the usual order of consecutive books and chapters; and again when we take the true succession of books and chapters; sometimes in the order of topics, when we follow consecutively the topics of the Bible; again, when we arrange them into departments of General and National History—Prophecy Fulfilled and Unfulfilled, Individual and National and Universal—Poetry, the Didactic, Descriptive, Lyric and Pastoral—Biography of Men and Women, of the Young and the Old, the Commendatory and Deprecative; again, when we study the topics in their adaptation to the various parts of life, or to the various estates of life, like prosperity or doubt or

sickness or death ; again, when we arrange all these great topics into a system, and especially when we make them all crystalize around the one great doctrine of Christ's Mediation.

And so we enter upon a new and delightful department of study, when we trace Scripture in its relations outside of itself. How many wide-reaching thoughts in the connection of Scripture with profane history, with the various sciences, with literature, with its power over national mind, with its providential progress and conquest in the succession of centuries, with its diffusive and redemptive influence upon the civilization of the world to-day.

Then we have again a different and most profitable department when we reverse the process, and from the existing records of men, collect the evidence to the truth of Scripture and found the broad and deep substructure upon which speculative Christianity is upreared. Those centres of credibility and authenticity and inspiration of Scripture, how wide a circle of investigation surrounds each of them : how little does he see of the great mass of argument which form the unconquerable bulwark of our religion, who has not made diligent study in these great circuits of thought.

And now having obtained some knowledge of Scripture and its relations, of its true spirit and its

demands, let the Christian study as accurately as he may, himself. Let him learn his own power, and his own weakness : let him learn where lies his energy, and also over what frail gate he must set his keenest watchman : let him determine over whom he can gain the most influence in his work for the Saviour, and the time and the circumstances in which they are best approached. Watching himself, let him know what objects of worldly life, or what conjunctures of times or objects, operate with most force to lead him upward or downward. Let him learn his relation to the church, and the position in which he can be most effective for her. Let him see how he can best assist his Christian fellow in his devotion to the same Master, by prayer, by Christian sympathy, by exciting a common enthusiasm.

And so knowing himself, let him prosecute his discovery in seeking the means of activity.

Here a word of kindness will do a lasting work : there an appropriate book will dissolve a doubt : *there*, only persistive persuasion will be effective. Here relief of a temporal necessity will open the avenue for spiritual influence : there you may perhaps discover secret dissatisfaction in the midst of abundance and prosperity, and point to Him who alone can fill the soul. Often the natural introduction of a religious conversation will secure the best

attention and fix the deepest impression ; while sometimes the more unusual, and the greater the effort to speak or to act, the firmer will the simple word hold its grasp upon the memory and the heart.

Character, time, modes of approach, peculiarities of habit, disposition, mood, subjects of thought, amiability, attraction or aversion to religion—let them all be studied, and through friendship, through the common interchange of life, by private endeavor and by public exertion, let no method of activity be undiscovered through which the soul of a man can be reached and saved.

And now let the Christian lift his eyes and take a broader range of the *Work to be done*. Let him take in the whole wide world. He will see the myriads of earth's population intent on other subjects than the great salvation : he will find that the fraction which expresses the proportion of Christians in the world has a denominator sadly large, no more than *one-eightieth* of the world's inhabitants making even a profession of evangelical religion : he will see that whole races know nothing of piety, nor have even a conception of Christianity : he will see that continents, that stretch from sea to sea, are hardly invaded, even across the boundary line, by his Prince's Army : that multitudes of islands are isolated from all true knowledge of true happiness : that not only ignorance casts its black shade over

the heathen nations, but that prejudice has a chain, and pride has a chain, and superstition has a fetter, and the heart that clings to sinful gratifications has many a band, until in the gloom of ignorance the millions are captive also. He will see more: that not only *heathen* men are lost to Christian love and Christian virtue, but that multitudes of men who wear the name of Christian are the followers of a false Christ and not of a true; he will see, if he only look with an earnest vision, that the majority of men in Christian lands really know nothing of the peace and power of true religion; and that even the *one-eightieth* of the world, this small fraction of people who are gathered in the house of God, before the altars where they have recited their creed, that this small fraction must be reduced by subtracting the number of the hollow and the superficial. O it is blessed for us that we are not allowed to judge the motives of these around us; and that we may ask God alone to apply the test of fidelity.

And as he looks at this great world of sinners, diseased, blind, captive, with night upon the sky above them, and the storm gathering its thunder and its tempest, he *cannot* be quiet; he cannot look on. Where there is one near him, where there are numbers to whom he may speak, he *will* say there is health and sight and freedom and the glorious sunlight for every one who may only choose.

I believe that Paul placed before him the model of a perfect Christian, something like this which I have attempted to indicate ; and I believe that every one who is earnestly a Christian will place before him some such model as this, and with Paul will say that for himself he has little apprehended—he has little *taken hold of* the perfect Christian life with his soul. In addition to all these things, he will connect with them, as Paul did, that Future Life ; and then he will see and feel that the Christian life, however symmetrical it may become in its completion of parts here, cannot be fully perfect till the actual possession of life in Heaven itself.

Then the obedience will indeed be perfect : then there will be no law of the members to war with the law of the mind : then there will be satisfaction for the immortal soul. He will ever hold such a vision before him, like a crown of light hung in his evening sky, to be laid upon his own brow, when, through the perfection of graces and of knowledge, of activity in the great work of the world, he shall have reached the goal of the race.

But while with Paul he will confess his imperfection, in the same instant, he will declare his resolution. Whatever may be his imperfection, he will not stop to think of it ; whatever may be his deficiency in the circle of Christian graces, he will

not sit down to lament and to be idle; however great be the ignorance, he will not allow it to impede at least the desire and the purpose of acquisition; however weak may have been the good impression of his character upon others, it shall not hinder the growth of firmness and energy; and as long as the great world lies in wickedness, the Spirit of the living God shall make his own weak arm powerful to rescue others.

Forgetting the things which are behind, he will reach forth unto those which are before.

He has made some attempt to grasp the circle of graces, and of knowledge, and of means of activity, and of the work to be done; he will not for a moment stop to enumerate the graces and the knowledge and the work in which he has been *deficient*. The very deficiency shall not be an obstacle in the advancement, while there remains so much to be attained.

We often think, and think solemnly, that we ought constantly to remember our numerous failures, and ever to confess them with lamentation before God; and so we ought. But it is surely no part of *penitence* to sit, with mournful face, discouraged and inactive. We cannot sufficiently lament our sins; but our sin is only gathering a new fold around its volume, if we make it the occasion of

indolence. God has put us in the olympic race. What right have you or I to stand with our back to the goal? and to gaze stupidly at the little distance which ought to be behind us? What right have we to *stand still* to think of the slow speed we have made in our course? This is all a mistaken fancy and a morbid sense. This is not health: this is not penitence. This is disease and faithless despondency. This is reaching back unto the things behind and forgetting the things before.

Let us reverse the process. Let us forget our sins, and leave them in the distance: let us reach forth unto the graces of Christian perfection. Let us forget ignorance, and with new application reach forth unto the comprehension of God's word, in its beauty, in its richness, in its power. Let us be determined to know our own energies, and to know the adaptation even of ourselves to some part of Christ's work. Let us resolve that we will study the character of men around us, and times and seasons, with a higher than human and worldly ambition: let us seek to know them that we may take them by the hand and lead them to Jesus. Let us not *think* of the *little* that *has been* done, but of the *greatness* of the work *to be* done. And high over all, as we run our race, let us ever see the crown of light in the evening sky, waiting for us, when *we* too shall have finished our course.

O that we might ever press forward till we come to that time. O that we might reach forth unto things before, marking our progress only by the distinctness of the goal. O that every Christian here to-day, and this church of God, would make this high model of Christian perfection the high aim of its ambition. Then would there be most evident progress in graces and knowledge and work for God, when every heart should utter as its lofty purpose: "This one thing I do."

My Christian friends, I cannot close these remarks without reminding you that the stroke of affliction has again descended upon this church and people. One form which has now so long been absent from this loved sanctuary, has stepped softly behind the veil, and will no more be seen among us. She whose voice of kindness and whose deeds of Christian love will ever live in our memory, will no more incite us, by her personal presence, to benevolent effort among the poor and the sinful. Upon earth at least, there is now no longer one, whose fervent prayers, in health and in sickness, will ascend for God's presence to dwell with pastor and people. But there *is* still upon all our hearts the imprint of her character. We cannot erase it. We would not if we could. And if there is one thing more than another which speaks to us from her whole

life, and which even now in death reaffirms the record of life, is it not the very utterance of the apostle? is it not in these words of modest boldness: "I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

With what confession of imperfection was there ever connected in her the *resolution* to *attain* the perfect life. In the Christian graces of her life, in her pursuit of knowledge, especially in that highest department of knowledge, the investigation of Scripture and in the instruction of others in the knowledge of God revealed to men, in her practical use of the means of activity, in seeking to point others, who were blind and diseased, to the Physician of souls, and in her sensibility to the condition of a world in sin, there comes to us, even to-day, a new and solemn emphasis of these words of Scripture.

If I am not mistaken, while she who has gone was among you, she was one in whom hope and cheerfulness made religion beautiful and gave power to influence. Yet, ever in her thought and in her speech, was there the constant serious impression of the indispensable value of the Holy Spirit. It was His presence which energized all her effort and crowned all her religious ambition. I can never forget, (and

I may even again allude to it here,) that bright morning when I last saw her, and when she gave me her parting message to this church of her prayers and of her love. I bring to you to-day that smile of Christian hope which made even her bed of death attractive, and those solemn simple words of her earnest voice, which she charged me to speak to you. "Tell them," she said, "that they need, each one of them, to pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit. Tell them from *you*, not from *me*—I am not worthy." I charge you that you heed these simple, earnest words. I charge you that you make the influence of this her peaceful death, more extensive and more lasting than the influence even of her prolonged life could have been. I charge you that you appreciate and rely more fully on the silent power of that Divine Spirit, and that you allow no other possible method or hope of spiritual prosperity to supersede or take the place of that Divine presence. And I solemnly charge you who have grieved that Divine Spirit, that you cease to repel His influence.

For her we have the assurance that now at length she has seized hold upon that perfection which is endless : she has apprehended that for which she was also apprehended of Christ Jesus.

O that for us also, when we shall have run our race, forgetting things behind and reaching forth unto

the things before, when we shall have finished our course, we may leave on earth a character which shall never cease to reproduce its pure influence here, and may attain in the life beyond unto that crown of light!

Let us look at her example left for us, and say :

“Needs there the praise of the love-written record,
 The name and the epitaph graved on the stone?
 The things we have lived for—let them be our story,
 We ourselves but remembered by what *we* have done.”

Let us look at her home above, and *feel* :

“These are the crowns that we shall wear,
 When all thy saints are crowned ;
 These are the palms that we shall bear,
 On yonder holy ground.

“That is the city of the saints,
 Where we so soon shall stand ;
 When we shall strike these desert-tents,
 And quit this desert-sand.

“Then welcome toil and care and pain!
 And welcome sorrow too!
 All toil is rest, all grief is gain,
 With such a prize in view.

“Come, crown and throne! come, robe and palm!
 Burst forth, glad stream of peace!
 Come, holy city of the Lamb!
 Rise, Sun of Righteousness!”