1 Peter - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Holiness and the Second Coming of Christ, Holiness and the Second Coming of Christ: No. 6

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If we examined every scripture in the New Testament that speaks of the corning of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we should find it connected, with practical holiness. If we look at 1 Pet. 1, those begotten by God the Father unto a living hope, and kept by the power of God, may, whilst here, be in much heaviness through manifold temptations. But it is a that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ; whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." Now, is not the blessed Person and appearing of our Jesus the one commanding object here set before the tried saints? It is most painful to see how His blessed Person and appearing are set aside by many who talk of holiness and perfection, and work themselves up to such a state of supposed holiness by faith, so that they say they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, but it is in themselves.

Is it not astonishing that the human mind can be so deceived as to suppose it is rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory in the attainments of supposed holiness? Rejoicing thus in self is self-righteousness, or self-holiness. It is just putting self in the place of Christ and the glory of His appearing. No, no, it is not in our own holiness we thus rejoice—it is in that blessed coming One, " whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Do not say we misrepresent; we have heard one of the greatest teachers of modern holiness so misapply this scripture. Nothing could be more false or dangerous to our naturally self-righteous pride. Another scripture was similarly misapplied to our attainments in holiness, until " we are changed from glory to glory"—our sanctification becoming so complete from glory to glory. But all is self; our perfection; all root of sin gone. Now it is this careless manner of partial quotation of scripture that is the method of teaching false doctrine, and cannot be too strongly condemned. Let us turn to the scripture. " But we all, with open face, beholding.... the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.) Now, is this transformation effected by beholding our own perfection, or holiness, or attainments; or by the transforming power of the Spirit, in beholding the glory of the Lord? Let us beware of all teaching that thus puts self in the place of Christ. The consequences must be disastrous to all true practical holiness.

But to return to 1 Pet. 1 What effect, as to practical holiness, is expected from the fact of our being begotten by God our Father; and being found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ; and our joying in Him, not ourselves, with joy unspeakable and full of glory? " Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Ver. 13.) Nay, it is on this very ground, as obedient children, the exhortation to holiness is based. “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

Oh, how sadly this is often quoted, to prove righteous perfection in self, entirely ignoring its connection! The all-transforming, glorious object, the Person and offering, the coming of the Lord, and our unspeakable joy in Him, is all set aside, and self put in its place.

Is not this a most serious mistake? How is it with you? Are you seeking unspeakable joy in your own holiness; or have you found it in Christ? Have you learned that looking for this grace, at the coming of the Lord, is the great truth to gird up your loins; and that you may be like one waiting for your Lord? How often our Lord Jesus impresses the truth of His coming upon us! Let us listen to Him, though all men set it aside.

You will find the same connection between giving all diligence, and the coming of the Lord Jesus, in 2 Pet. 1 You only need to read it in the presence of the Lord, in dependence on the Holy Ghost. Mark, also, the solemn warning: 46 Knowing this, first, that there shall come in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?” (Chap. iii. 3.) Can it, then, be true holiness, where the Lord's coming is treated with indifference? There is not only the blessed side of this truth for the saints of God; but read the awful warnings of this chapter (2 Pet. 3): " Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

We will now turn to that striking scripture on this subject, 1 John 3:1-3. First, we contemplate the love of the Father. " Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Wondrous free gift of God to us! What love, to be brought into this relationship to the Father—the children of God! " Beloved, now are we the children of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be [or, has not yet been manifested], but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." How inseparable is true holiness and the full manifestation of what we shall be at the coming of the Lord I He is the all-absorbing, supreme Object of hope. We shall be like Him. This does not yet appear, is not yet manifest. Can any man say he is now like Christ? Can he say he is pure, sinless, holy, as a man down here, as Christ is, above all heavens? That he is accounted so, reckoned so, is blessedly true. Such is the glory of His grace, wherein He has taken us into favor in the Beloved. But have we not continual conflict with an evil nature, tendencies, or whatever we may call the flesh? This never was, and never can be, so with Christ, the Holy One of God. But the word is plain: “Every man that hath this hope in him [in Christ] purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Let us not deceive ourselves. If a man has attained to perfection in the flesh, and is as pure as Christ is pure—for that only is perfection—then, if he is thus pure, plainly he cannot purify himself. Can the glorified and risen Christ purify Himself?

Leaving, then, all these false thoughts of perfection, let us look at the true thought in this precious scripture. We know, then, that a glorious day of manifestation is near. Christ shall be manifested in all his purity and glory. And we, poor redeemed sinners, now the children of God, shall then be like Him—we shall see Him as He is. What, then, is the effect of this absorbing hope in Him? What is the effect, we ask, on every man that hath this absorbing, transforming hope in Christ? " Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Christ is the standard, the rule of his life, his perfect copy; and he seeks to imitate Christ. Thus, with open face, he beholds the glory of the Lord, and is changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Yes, we are now the children of God. It is not yet manifested what we shall be. We know that when that manifestation shall take place, " we shall be like him," and we shall see Him as He is. Ob, blessed certainty!—to see Him as He is, to be like Him. What can we desire more? As to that eternal future, there is not one thing more to desire. To awake in His likeness is eternal satisfaction. There is one thing, however, every man desires now that has this hope in Christ—it is to " purify himself, even as he is pure," to be more and more, and still ever more, like Christ here below. And this is not that we may become the children of God, but because we are now His children. For " Whosoever is born of God doth not practice sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." " Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.” Being born of God, and having full redemption through the blood of Christ, u Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

The sons of Aaron were first redeemed from Egypt, before their consecration, and even then the blood was put upon the right ear, thumb, and toe. Even so with us—we have redemption through His blood. Then are we sanctified, dedicated by that same one offering, that same precious blood. Then the seal of the Spirit, as the witness of the eternal efficacy of that blood. Thus the oil and the blood are upon our ear, thumb, and toe, or ear, hand, and foot—our thoughts, actions, and walk all consecrated to God, by virtue of that blood, in the power of the Holy Ghost. Thus are we waiting for the coming of the Lord, the day of the redemption of our bodies.

Beloved reader, we call your attention to a few of the closing words of Revelation: " For the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I comb quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

" He which testifieth these things saith, surely I come quickly." The next moment this repeated promise may be fulfilled. The Spirit is awakening the church to the holy desire. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth, say, Come.” And grace still flows out in all its fullness. " And let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." Can you in spirit look up to heaven, and thus speak your heart's desire to the Lord Jesus, in that one word, " Come?" There is one Spirit, and He imparts this one desire in the hearts of all that compose the bride. The Bridegroom says, " I go to prepare a place for you." Now He says, " Surely I come quickly.'' "Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus." C. S.

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