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HOLINESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE PRESENT LIFE --No. 10

Fulness There is in Christ

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Lecture X

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Text.--Col. 2:9, 10: "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power."

The connection in which this text stands, shows that the Apostle is laboring to establish the distinction between an outside legal religion, and religion by faith in Christ. For this purpose, he warns them in verse eight to "beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." And in the twentieth verse, by an earnest and solemn appeal, he strives to tear them away from "subjection to ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men." Indeed the main design of the whole epistle was to shut up the Colossians to the religion of faith, and cut them off from that of legality.

In the present discussion it is my design to show--

I. What is not intended by the declaration that Christians are complete in Christ.

II. What is intended.

III. To point out some things which are demanded by our nature, circumstances, and character, in order to complete well-being.

IV. The conditions on which this completeness may be realized in our own experience.

I. What is not intended by the declaration that Christians are complete in Christ.

- 1. When it is said we are complete in Him it is not intended that we are complete in the sense of an imputed righteousness. The other evening, you will recollect, I labored to show that the doctrine of imputation is at once an absurd and pernicious dogma. It is not necessary here to dwell on that point again. It is enough to say that God could no more perform works of

supererogation than any other moral being, and that therefore there could be no righteousness to impute. Moreover, a transfer of moral character is naturally impossible.

- 2. It is not intended that all Christians have, as a matter of fact, so received Christ, as to realize this completeness in their own character and experience; nor is it asserted in the text that any body ever did or ever will.

II. What is intended.

It is intended that in Him all the demands of our being are met--that a full provision is made, and set forth by God to meet all our wants, and make us all that God desires we should be.

III. Some things which are demanded by our nature, circumstances, and character, in order to complete well being.

The question is, what do men really need--what must belong to a Savior in order to his being a Savior to us such as we need?

- 1. Our nature and circumstances expose us to innumerable trials and temptations. I have dwelt, in these lectures, to a great extent on the trials arising from our peculiar nature in the circumstances in which we are placed. None are exempt from them. Even in the garden of Eden, man's nature and circumstances occasioned trial. Nor is this, on the whole, to be regretted. Such trials are to our advantage if we use the help afforded us in meeting them. They "work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But as a matter of fact, the circumstances are such, and men have so abused their nature, that the trials which they endure are extremely great, and the help which they need must be both adapted and adequate to meet all their wants in this respect.
- 2. Our frailties and infirmities are great, in consequence of our long abuse of ourselves. All the appetites and passions are greatly aggravated in their demands; the nervous system rasped up to the highest pitch; the habits inveterate; each successive generation placed under some additional besetments: until like the reed, man is liable to be swayed by every breeze, or carried adrift on the ocean of life, like a vessel torn from its moorings, and driven by a tempest. Hence, we need strength for our frailty, and grace sufficient for our infirmity.
- 3. Our ignorance is very great, and since men are influenced by motives, they can be influenced towards God and holiness, only in proportion as they are enlightened. The motives to sin are bold and obtrusive and seen by the ignorant, but the reverse is true of motives to holiness. Hence men must have a Savior able to enlighten and charm them away from the influence of things seen and temporal, and bring them under the influence of things unseen and eternal. The longer I live, the more I am astonished at the ignorance of men in reference of religious truths. Even Christians scarcely know their A, B, C. Very few of them are able to give any good reason for the doctrines of their faith. Hence, the great mass of them readily receive dogmas published by the press, and promulgated from the pulpit, which, to thinking minds, are palpably at war with human reason. Take, for example, the doctrine of imputed righteousness. Is it not astonishing that it was not at once seen that there can be no work of supererogation and of

course no righteousness to be imputed? What more could God do than benevolence demanded of Him? The Atonement and all his other works are virtuous, only because they are carrying out the law of benevolence. Jesus Christ was bound to be benevolent as much as any other being, and of course his righteousness could no more be imputed, than that of any other holy moral agent--no more than Gabriel's. Now, how does it happen, how can it be that men should believe such an absurd dogma as this, unless from sheer ignorance? Why the whole gospel is another gospel if this doctrine be true. It was Christ's object to save men from their sins, and not to throw over their filthy, ulcerated backs, a robe of imputed righteousness. I call it ignorance to hold such a dogma, because an intelligent being understanding it, and the objections to it, can't believe it. And this is but a specimen of many other things equally gross which are sanctified in the creeds and common faith of the mass of the Church. It is full of superstition, errors, and ignorance on a thousand subjects. The reformation cast off many, but many were left, some of which time has outgrown, and others yet remain. Now, we only get right, by getting an insight into the gospel. It is truth coming in that thrusts error out, and we therefore need somebody to deliver us, to teach us the very A, B, C, of religion. We want some patient instructor [sic.] who will be willing to teach us over and over even the same things. "What's that?" "A." "What's that?" "B." Now go back to A again, and ask, "What's that?" "I don't know," says the pupil. "Well," says the kind hearted teacher, "That's A," and thus, again and again, till he remembers it. Thus Christians need to be instructed by some kind agent who will not tear their souls, and sternly frown them away, but who will sooth them all down into love, and then gently remove their errors, and ingraft the word of truth.

- 4. We have a subtle adversary of great power and malignity. It has become unpopular to say much about the devil, people have become so incredulous respecting his existence. This state of things is doubtless the result of his infernal agency, since, if men doubt his existence, they will the more readily become his prey. But the Bible holds other language. It requires men to pass the time of their sojourning here with fear--"to be sober and vigilant; because our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." It represents him as possessing great subtlety, and being ready to take ten thousand advantages, even turning himself into an angel of light, to delude and destroy souls. And what man is able to resist him?--to detect all the villainies and sophistries of a mind as old and malevolent as his? I have often felt that the devil would just as certainly have my soul, in spite of all my endeavors against him, if Christ did not save me, as I existed. As well expect to escape a devouring lion, whose strong power had already encompassed you about. Who has not found that sometimes the devil has made a lie appear so much like truth, that we would be ready to take an oath it was truth. No doubt ten thousand times, persons have thought the Lord was leading them, when in fact, it was the devil who had involved them in a web of lies and sophistries, and was hurrying them on to the precipice of ruin. Now, a man who does not know these things, will never make much effort to get away from him. From him? From thousands of them, all leagued to destroy. Who can protect us? Our Christian journey lies all the way through an enemy's country, and throngs of devils are prowling about on all sides, and if the Lord does not deliver us the devil will have the whole of us.
- 5. Our education, habits, and prejudices all give him a decided advantage over us. He has been weaving his web of villainies and lies for thousands of years, and with all his profound

experience, great mental capacity, and legions of compeers, he is able to weave his devilish plots into everything. You cannot have a benevolent society, but he must have a hand in it--even if you are getting up a Bible Society, his counsel and agency must have a place. He has a corner at every Missionary meeting and carefully watches its workings. Any one who will look narrowly into those which are professedly the most benevolent projects of the day can scarcely fail to see that the devil has a hand in them, and is exercising his infernal craft to pervert them to evil.

If I had time to take up the habits, opinions, &c., of society generally, I could show snares and pitfalls, and ambushes arranged with wonderful subtlety and adaptation, and awfully effective for the ruin of mankind. These are not less manifest in family and even individual relations, and at all peculiar crises of life, taking advantage of habits and education and susceptibilities to work out the endless overthrow of men.

Again, I ask how can we escape him? Who can deliver us? We need a wiser and a mightier than he to defeat him and to effect our escape.

- 6. We need a propitiation for our sins who will render it consistent for God to pardon us. What is the reason that the governor of this state felt a difficulty in pardoning Colt? Because it feared the influence it would have to loosen the bands of society. It was not an unwillingness to gratify him, nor a desire to gratify any malevolent feelings, but lest it should thereby strengthen the bands of wickedness. So in the government of God. Pardon must not be extended to sinners unless on such grounds as will not impair, but uphold the influence of the government. Something must be done to propitiate as the gospel calls it--there must be an atonement, or sin could not be forgiven without the greatest danger to the public interests, and God could not be just in exercising pardon. There must then be a Savior who could make an atonement and thus meet this necessity.
- 7. We need an influence that can break our hearts and bring us to repentance--not only to atone for, but to reclaim us. That is a very slim gospel, which merely pardons men, and then leaves them to achieve their own victories over the world, the flesh, and the devil. It would never save any man. We need a gospel which will come to us where we are, break up the deep foundations of our selfishness, and transform us to love.
- 8. Not only do we need thus to be initiated into the spirit of the gospel, but kept all along the way to glory. We need a Savior who will watch over us till He gets us within the sacred enclosure. Should He forsake us, even at Heaven's golden gate, we should turn away and go back to hell. We must be placed safely within to be secure.
- 9. But, in order thus to keep us, He must possess such surpassing loveliness, and radiate such charms, as to draw away the soul from all other fascinations and lovers. He must be able, as it were, to make us sick of love, so that we would follow Him through any trials, and all seductive influences, unattracted by any of them, from our steadfast devotion to his love. We need somebody to draw us. If God should flash his livid lightnings, and hurl his blazing thunderbolts upon us; if He should roll up into our faces the lurid fires of perdition, it might amaze and horrify us, but it would do no good--it would not draw us to Him--it would not call out our love.

When Elijah passed by Elisha, he cast his mantle upon him, and forth with, Elisha left the oxen and all, and went after Elijah. I have often thought it seemed to charm him. So Christ, as He passes by a soul, seems, shall I say, so to bewitch it, that it would seem as if He could lead it even through hell. I do not know but He could. If circumstances demand the sacrifice, it would kiss his cross, and say, drive your nails and crucify me. I willingly endure it for Christ's sake, "who loved me and gave Himself for me." Oh, we do not want a legal Savior, but one "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," in whom we are complete, whose beauties can ravish and enchain our hearts. What is a Unitarian Savior good for? Pooh! Not such do we need, but one who can so captivate us, that if a thousand racks and gibbets stood in the way, they would not deter us from following Him whithersoever He goeth.

- 10. In short, we need a Savior able and willing to save us, and not only in eternity, but here in this world. We need Him daily, and unless we have such a one, we must constantly wallow in the gutters of iniquity, and its consequent misery. We need our every want met, and our souls made complete in all the will of God--to be filled with his fulness.

IV. The conditions on which this completeness may be received and realized by us, in our own experience.

- 1. One condition is a realization of our necessities. The Lord Jesus Christ said to one of the churches of Asia--"Because thou sayest--I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." Now observe, one grand defect in the way of people, is that they are so full in themselves, and so increased in goods in their own estimation, as to fail wholly to discover that they are in need of Christ in all things--that their necessities are as vast as the wants of their whole being. This they must realize.
- 2. Another condition is, that we must realize, that in Him we have all we need. Now people often admit this in words, but not in fact. They often think there is something so peculiar in their case, in their habits, education, relations, or trials, that Christ cannot save them. They seem to think Christ can save everybody else but them. But they must understand that they are complete in Him whatever are their relations, trials, habits and circumstances. This they must realize.
- 3. Another condition, is the renunciation of self-dependence in all respects. A man must not depend on his learning, his own philosophical insight, or anything else, or He will never depend on Christ. He must become a fool that he may be wise. Just as far as he thinks he can get along without Christ, he will get along without Him, but it will be away from God. When an individual has so much of self-dependence, he really has no faith in the existence of God, nor in his attributes. Self-dependence is allied to infidelity. "Every good, and every perfect gift, cometh down from the Father of light." Should God withhold from us that which we are dependent on Him for, nothing but certain destruction would ensue. This dependence runs through all moral as well as natural life, and it must be felt and acknowledged.

- 4. You must despair of finding help anywhere else. While a man runs to any and everybody, and puts more confidence in men than in God, he may go to the best man on earth, to an apostle, or an angel, and it will avail him nothing. He might as well go to a child, as far as any efficient help is concerned. I have told sinners sometimes, I won't pray for you, nor have anything to do with you, if you are going to depend on me, and put me in the place of the Savior. Away with you to Christ if you want help. Some of the last years that I labored as an evangelist, the church depended on me so much, that it cost me more effort to get them to look to God, than to perform the requisite labor to convert sinners, and it is so now. I was afraid to come here on this account, and feel now, brethren, that you have depended on me, more than you have any right to. It is a species of trusting in an arm of flesh which God abhors. Many will flee to books, to anything, and sometimes even to the Bible, and put it in the place of God, and cleave to such vain help, until God compels them to look to Himself alone.
- 5. You must cease to rest in means of any kind. I do not mean that we must cease to use means as means, but they are not to be put in the place of God, or substituted for a Savior. I wish I could impress it on you, how much professors of religion and all men, trust to means more than God, and put them in the place of Christ. You must cease from this entirely, if you wish for completeness in Him.
- 6. You must give up your cowardly unbelief, and dare to trust Christ wholly. Do you know that unbelief is a form of cowardice? I try sometimes to make people see that they dare not trust Him, and to show them that they must have more courage, or they never can be complete in Christ. Venture on Him, if you would be filled with his love.
- 7. You must give up your love of reputation with men. When you really come to Christ indeed, you will see what Christ meant, when He said--"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household." "They will cast out your names as evil." You must bear all this--be content to hear them misrepresent you--impute evil motives--look contemptuously--slight your company--stare at you, to see if the dilation of the pupil of your eye does not indicate insanity--just as certainly as you give yourselves up to be led by Him in all things. Care not for them. They need your pity more than your frown. They, poor souls, know not what they do.
- 8. You must forsake all that you have. You must spare no lust, have no sinister end, but give up all, be crucified unto the world. I know this is a great step to take, but you must do it or die. You must thus reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, in order to reckon yourself alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- 9. You must confide in Him for all you want--believe that you are complete in Him, not partly so. No matter what new want you discover, or what new circumstances you come into, believe that in Christ, there is grace sufficient for every emergency, however great, otherwise He is not a full Savior to you.

REMARKS.

1. See why Christians are so imperfect. It is because they don't realize their wants, and do not take

Him as a complete Savior.

2. They are always like to be, while they know so little of Jesus. I was conversing with one of the principal men in the state, on sanctification. He agreed with me in theory as to its attainability, and then said, that as a matter of fact, no body would realize it in this world. I replied, if you knew what you ought to know about Jesus Christ, you would as soon cut off your right hand as say that. It is a want of a knowledge of Jesus, which leaves men in sin, and makes them weak against it. I have often thought of the sons of Sceva the Jew, who attempted to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, "whom Paul preached," and when they had bidden an evil spirit come out, he replied, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded." They did not know Christ, and consequently experienced only defeat. Suppose they had told their experience afterwards, to prove that no body ever did or could cast out devils! Ah! It is one thing to hear and read about Christ, and quite another to trust Him, know Him, and become complete in Him.

3. While they place so much reliance on human, and so little on divine teaching, they are like to remain imperfect. Let them stand in that relation in which God has placed them, and both profit the soul; but when men hear the minister or one another and depend on what he says more than on what God says by his word and Spirit, it is fatal to a growth in divine things. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

4. While men rest in the letter and overlook the spirit of the gospel, they will of course remain imperfect.

5. The same will be true as long as they put their works in the place of Christ, or their watchings, their resolutions, and legal efforts.

6. Also, while their guides and leaders are blind, and while the shepherds frighten away the sheep from their pastures.

7. Many professors don't know Christ, because, as it were, they have only been converted and baptized unto Moses. Others have received John's baptism unto repentance; and others still know Christ as an atoning Savior. They began in the Spirit, and are now trying to become perfect by the flesh.

8. Wherever there is an imperfection in Christian character, there must be ignorance or unbelief, for the text is a promise that covers the whole field of our necessities. It is remarkable how the Bible abounds with promises both general and specific. Some cover our whole necessity--others point to specific wants. The specific promises seem to be given in accommodation to our ignorance and infirmities, lest our general confidence should not suffice in hours of trial; and yet to some minds, a general declaration implying a promise like that in the text affords greater strength than any specific promise.

9. How few realize that if they are not complete in Him it is because of unbelief. The truth is, it is because they have never known the exercise and power of faith.

10. Doubts respecting the doctrine of entire sanctification, are unbelief, for it is impossible that any one should doubt this who has implicit faith in what Christ says. If grace sufficient is promised, the doubts are unbelief.

11. Many deceive themselves by saying--"I believe the promise but I don't believe I shall fulfill the condition." The truth is, believing the promise is fulfilling the condition. How many nullify the promises in this way. They say they believe that the promise would be fulfilled if they complied with the condition, but this they know they do not do, and have no confidence that they shall. And instead of blaming themselves for it, they really turn it into a virtue, by calling it self-distrust. Its real name is unbelief.

12. If Christ is the depositary of all we need, we see why we are commanded to "come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." But true faith is almost universally regarded as presumption, and such boldness as Jacob, Moses, and others exercised exclaimed against as profane. How shocking this is, when, as a matter of fact, it is presumption not to come boldly. It is disobedience to a divine requisition.

13. There is no real difficulty in the fact that the promises are conditioned on faith. For faith in promise depends upon confidence in the general character of the promisor, and not to give full credit to the promise is to impeach the character of him who made it. Suppose a man of great wealth and veracity should make a promise with this condition, as indeed every promise necessarily implies it. Would there be any difficulty in the condition? Not the least. So long as we had confidence in his character, we should regard it as absurd to make a difficulty of the condition of faith. But if the man was known, or supposed to be unable or unwilling, or that his general character was bad, then truly the condition would be a stumbling block. Nay, to believe implicitly would be absurd and impossible.

14. It is impossible that unbelief should fail to make the soul wretched, or that faith should not bring it deep repose.

15. What a foundation have we for universal repose in Christ. He is a Savior who exactly and perfectly meets our case and necessities as they are. In Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Oh, how important that we should know Him--that our acquaintance with Him should be full. We need a more thorough acquaintance with Christ than with any body else. There is such a thing as knowing more of Jesus, as having a more intimate acquaintance with Him than that which exists between a husband and his wife, or the dearest friends. Whoever is ignorant of that, is ignorant of the very marrow and fatness of the gospel. A personal acquaintance with Christ strengthens our confidence more and more in Him. Yes, and such an acquaintance removes our filth and makes us clean. James Brainard Taylor exclaimed--"I am clean." Brethren are you clean? Are you complete in Christ? Let us go to Him and receive of his fulness, until we are "filled with all the fulness of God."

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.