

# THROUGH NIGHT TO MORNING

by

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## SERMON TWO -

### GOING ON TO PERFECTION

**"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Hebrews 6:1-2).**

THE house in its building leaves the foundation without forsaking it. The book in its writing leaves the alphabet without forsaking it. The anthem in its making leaves the scale without forsaking it. The foundation remains an essential part of the house, the alphabet an essential part of the book, and the scale an essential part of the anthem. So the Christian, in "**[going] on unto perfection,**" leaves some of the first principles without forsaking them. Though in a sense he has risen above and passed beyond them, he carries them with him as an essential part of his life and character.

Some of these fundamental principles, which we are to leave without forsaking, are given in the text, and it is our purpose to consider them.

### FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

A foundational experience is in the words, "**repentance from dead works.**"

It is not repentance from sin. Sin is not a dead work, but rather a work that kills. It is the assassin which by slow poison or dagger thrust murders the soul. A dead work is a work upon the merit of which one depends for salvation apart from JESUS CHRIST. It is dead because it is separated from the source of all spiritual life. The man who depends upon his character as the ground of justification before GOD, while he declares that he has no need of an atoning Saviour, is relying upon a dead work - dead because it is a character without the life of GOD in it.

The man who depends upon salvation through baptism or any other external ordinance, is trusting to a dead work. The "**fruit of the Spirit**" grows upon the tree of grace. Dead works are like wax fruits manufactured and hung upon a tree. They look like fruit, but are not, because they lack the life of the tree. They are mere imitations of life.

Max Miller declares that the difference between Christianity and all other religions is in the fact that Christianity saves by grace, and all other religions seek to save by works.

- Salvation by grace humbles the soul, while salvation by works glorifies self.
- In salvation by works "**Christ, and Him crucified**" is displaced by man and him glorified.
- Salvation by grace produces live, luscious fruit; salvation by works produces only dead, tasteless imitations of fruit. Even the fruits of the Spirit become dead works, if depended upon for salvation.

"**Love, joy, [and] peace**," as fruits upon the tree of life, are alive and good, but "**love, joy, [and] peace**," depended upon as our ground of justification before GOD, are dead works.

Church membership as the expression of CHRIST's life within us is living fruit, but Church membership as a basis for salvation is a dead work.

### FOUNDATIONAL ATTITUDE

A foundational attitude of soul is in the words, "**faith toward God**." It is the opposite of "faith toward works." There can be no growth without this soul attitude toward GOD. As well try to make a plant grow that never turns its leaves towards the sun. As well seek the development of animal life without the light.

It is more than faith towards truth. One may believe that the Bible is the Word of GOD without trusting GOD for salvation.

One may even believe in the Deity of CHRIST without trusting CHRIST as Saviour.

One may believe in salvation by grace without appropriating grace for his own salvation.

It is said that Michael Angelo looked up at the domes of buildings so much that he acquired the upward look wherever he went. GOD give us the habit of the upward look toward Himself, and then upward growth toward perfection will be more rapid.

### FOUNDATIONAL DISPOSITION

A foundational disposition is in the words, "**the doctrine of baptisms**."

There may be reference to the ceremonial washings of the Jews or to Christian baptism, perhaps to both, but the underlying meaning is the same in each case. The Jews practised ceremonial washings because they believed that GOD commanded them. The Christians practised baptism because CHRIST commanded it. The disposition of the soul was the same in both cases, though the disposition of the Christian marked a higher type of spirituality than the disposition of the Jew. In both cases, however, that disposition could be defined as the spirit of obedience.

It was a desire to please One Whose authority they acknowledged.

This disposition is essential to Christian growth. Indeed, it is essential to Christianity itself. No one who lacks it is a Christian. CHRIST was obedient unto death, and, if we have not the Spirit of CHRIST, we are none of His.

This disposition, for the lack of knowledge, may show itself in mistaken ways. It may fail to do the exact thing that CHRIST commanded, and yet may not be excused for ignorance when knowledge is in reach; but the disposition to obedience in the soul is more important than the outward act. A mother told her children to go into the garden and gather some flowers. The happy laughter which came from the garden was proof that the disposition to obey imposed no burden. Two of the children came into the house with their hands full of roses, but one little half-witted boy, who heard his mother's request, came in with his hands full of weeds and sticks which he had gathered. There were no flowers among them, and yet the mother forgot the bright children with the flowers, while she took the half-witted boy into her lap and kissed him and praised him for what he had done.

In act he had disobeyed, but in disposition he was obedient. It was the disposition that counted with the mother as she took the handful of weeds and sticks and arranged them for a place on the table beside the flowers. If, in ignorance, we bring only weeds and sticks, while others bring their flowers, He will not despise the disposition which prompts the act.

### FOUNDATIONAL FAITH

A foundational faith is in the words, "**resurrection of the dead.**" Both words in the Greek are without the article and indicate a "resurrection of dead things," whether souls, bodies, or institutions.

It is fundamental that a Christian believe in resurrection, which means the power of GOD to give life to the dead. Of course he believes in the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST. His Lord was crucified, dead and buried, and rose from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures. The very body that was laid away in weakness came forth in power. Of course the Christian believes in the resurrection of his own body. The plants that spring up from the soil, budding and blooming above the grave of his loved ones in the springtime, are to him symbolic of the fact that the dead who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of GOD and shall come forth.

There are dead souls all about us, and the soul dead to GOD can be made to pass from death unto life through "**the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.**"

In other words, the resurrection power of GOD is ready to co-operate with our faith in raising dead souls to life.

Faith in this resurrection power is essential to success in winning souls to CHRIST. There are no hard cases. GOD can raise to life one dead soul as easily as another. There may be degrees of life, but there are no degrees of death. Every corpse is equally dead. Lazarus was no more dead the fourth day than he was the moment after the breath left his body. Every bone in Ezekiel's vision was equally dead, and it was, therefore, as impossible to raise one as another. But when, in response to Ezekiel's prayer, the breath of GOD came upon them, they were all equally capable of resurrection. The miracle-working resurrection-power of GOD is the one thing needed in order to bring about the salvation of the wickedest man or woman in the world.

## FOUNDATIONAL EQUIPMENT

A foundational equipment is in the words, "**laying on of hands.**"

Beyond doubt this refers to the enduement of the HOLY SPIRIT. The Apostles laid their hands on people and they received the HOLY SPIRIT. What relation the laying on of hands had to the imparting of the HOLY SPIRIT we are not told. It may have been the method by which the miraculous gift of the Spirit was imparted to others, or it may have been in recognition of the fact that the HOLY SPIRIT was already given.

As to whether anyone to-day has the power to impart the HOLY SPIRIT to another we do not know. If it be true, then our difficulty is in finding the person or persons who have such power. There are those who claim the power by virtue of their official position, but their credentials are not satisfactory to some of us. However, we need not spend time in seeking to learn whether or not one may impart the HOLY SPIRIT to another after we have learned, on the authority of GOD's Word, that every Christian may receive the HOLY SPIRIT for himself.

The ceremony of imparting may, with reason, give way to the act of receiving. JESUS said, "**If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.**" Here the HOLY SPIRIT is offered for the asking. James wrote, "**Ye have not, because ye ask not.**"

It was while the Apostles were at prayer that the HOLY SPIRIT came upon them at Pentecost, not while they were laying hands on each other. As JESUS CHRIST is the gift of God for salvation, so the HOLY SPIRIT is the gift for power. For power in service it is foundational and fundamental that we pray for the gift of the HOLY SPIRIT and receive the gift by faith.

## FOUNDATIONAL EXPECTATION

A foundational expectation is in the words, "**eternal judgment.**"

"Judgment" may mean a decree for us or against us, though its usual meaning is a decree of condemnation. Judgment for the penitent believer is eternal, and judgment against the impenitent unbeliever is eternal.

Certainly there is no teaching that either decree will be revoked after death.

But what has my faith in eternal salvation for the righteous, and eternal condemnation for the wicked, to do with the perfection of Christian character? Much every way. The man who believes that the destinies of men are not settled in this life, but that they will have another chance after death, lacks incentive to earnestness in living or working for the salvation of others. If I can repent in the future, why not eat, drink and be merry here, if I feel so inclined? If my friends may be saved after death, why should I be earnestly concerned about them now?

The doctrine of future restoration is paralysis to Christian earnestness, while it is an opiate for the conscience of the man who wants to live in sin. It is index to a shallow surface view of sin

and holiness. It would comfort with a false hope some whose loved ones have lived and died in unbelief at the risk of damning thousands who ought to repent and turn to GOD to-day.

### FOUNDATIONAL NECESSITY

A foundational necessity is, by fair inference, at the bottom of all this. It is a two-fold necessity:

First, if we would "**go on unto perfection**" we must have these elemental and essential things.

- We must have an experience of salvation by grace;
- we must live with the attitude of faith toward GOD;
- we must have the disposition to obedience;
- we must be endued with the HOLY SPIRIT;
- we must exercise faith in the resurrection power of GOD;
- and we must be influenced by the expectation of eternal judgment for saints and against sinners.

Let us see to it that we have this foundation before we try to build; this alphabet before we try to write a literature of Christian life; this musical scale before we seek to compose the songs of life.

A second necessity is, that, having the foundation, the alphabet, the scale, we should begin at once and persevere in erecting the building, writing the literature, composing the songs.

More than twenty-five years ago the foundation of a great Cathedral was laid in Brooklyn, and the foundation, covered with grass, was still there without a building, when I saw it last, suggestive of failure to every passer-by.

- Some children have learned their alphabet and then refused to study, their ignorance and illiteracy a reproach to them and their parents.
- Some have learned the musical scale and then ceased their efforts, willing to remain ignorant of music.

Is our experience like a foundation without a superstructure? like a book all alphabet and no literature? like a musical composition all scale and no harmonies? Hear the command, "**Let us go on unto perfection.**" Run toward the goal. If you cannot run, walk. If you cannot walk, creep or crawl - but "**go on.**" Begin with what you are and have. Do not wait for more before you begin to seek the best.

An artist spent years looking for a piece of wood out of which to carve an image, and, after searching the country for it, he found just what he needed, hard, smooth and finegrained, lying neglected in his own home yard.

A farmer's son in America went to College and studied mining engineering. He was offered a position at a salary of 25 dollars a week, but he refused, saying that he intended gaining a fortune by discovering a rich mine. He went west and worked for years in search of his rich mine, with an income of less than 25 dollars a week, and returned home discouraged, to find that his younger brother, sitting one day on a stone in the shade of a tree, noticed that in the stone there

were some little white particles unlike the rest of it. He had the stone tested and found that it was an index to a great silver mine on the old farm, which enriched the family.

Let us begin where we are, with the commonplaces of life, and seek to make out of them the best we can.

Do not make the mistake of gazing at the stars a million miles away and falling into the ditch at your feet. Do not forget the stars, but look out for the ditch. In its gravelly bottom may be a fortune for you. The stars will keep. We may reach them best by way of the ditch. I would not "hitch my wagon to a star," for stars were not made to guide or hold wagons, but I would try to make my old wagon the star wagon of the neighbourhood. Use commonplace things for GOD. Invest your own common everyday life for His glory, and see if He does not pay interest in your transfigured character.

As Christians should begin at once with what they have, and "**go on unto perfection**," so every sinner should begin at once with what he has and become a Christian. He can make a beginning with his sins. If he is honest, he will not have to go far to find them. Make an inventory of them before GOD and ask Him to forgive for the sake of CHRIST. You may not know much about CHRIST. Perhaps you have been taught to believe that He is not divine. I will not stop to argue with you, though I think the argument strong enough to convince an unbiased mind.

Begin on the sure foundation that you are a sinner and need salvation. Then confess your sins to GOD and accept the CHRIST you know as the Sin-bearer. He will do the rest. I promise you that if you will make an honest confession of your sin and accept the CHRIST you know as Saviour, you will then have revealed to you the full-orbed CHRIST as He is.

A Pastor in New York urged an intellectual but dissipated man in his parish to become a Christian.

The man replied, "I cannot believe in the inspiration of the Bible, in the deity of CHRIST, or in prayer."

"Do you believe in your own sins?" asked the Pastor.

"Oh, yes," replied the honest soul, "there is no doubt about my being a sinner, and sometimes I am in hell."

"Are you willing to bring your sins to CHRIST for forgiveness and let Him, whatever you think of Him, take your guilt?"

"But," he said, "I can't believe in the inspiration of the Bible, in the deity of CHRIST, or in prayer."

"Just now," persisted the Pastor, "I am not asking you to believe these things. You know you are a sinner, and in sin there is a taste of hell. Now I offer you JESUS CHRIST as your Saviour from sin. Will you accept Him as such, and leave all questions that puzzle you for future solution?"

The man went to his home and that night he accepted the CHRIST he knew as his Saviour, and came to the meeting the next night to tell the people the joy of forgiveness that was in his soul. After several days of joyful testimony which led others to CHRIST, the Pastor gently said, "What do you think now of the deity of CHRIST? "

"Such a Saviour," he replied, with great emotion, "must be divine; if He were not divine He could not have done what He has done for me."

And there was no difficulty then about believing in the inspiration of the Bible and in prayer. Like the blind man, he knew little of CHRIST, but one thing he did know, that, whereas he was blind, now he could see. Come, with your guilt of sin to the CHRIST you know, and receive Him as your Saviour. It will not be long before He will reveal Himself to you in His fulness.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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