

XXI. - Description of the Perfect Man, or Gnostic.

Here I find perfection apprehended variously in relation to Him who excels in every virtue. Accordingly, one is perfected as pious, and as patient, and as continent, and as a worker, and as a martyr, and as a Gnostic. But I know no one of men perfect in all things at once, while still human, though according to the mere letter of the law, except Him alone who for us clothed Himself with humanity. Who then is perfect? He who professes abstinence from what is bad. Well, this is the way to the Gospel and too well-doing. But gnostic perfection in the case of the legal man is the acceptance of the Gospel, that he that is after the law may be perfect. For so he, who was after the law, Moses, foretold that it was necessary to hear in order that we might, according to the apostle, receive Christ, the fullness of the law. (Deu_18:15; Rom_10:4) But now in the Gospel the Gnostic attains proficiency not only by making use of the law as a step, but by understanding and comprehending it, as the Lord who gave the Covenants delivered it to the apostles. And if he conduct himself rightly (as assuredly it is impossible to attain knowledge (gnosis) by bad conduct); and if, further, having made an eminently right confession, he become a martyr out of love, obtaining considerable renown as among men; not even thus will he be called perfect in the flesh beforehand; since it is the close of life which claims this appellation, when the gnostic martyr has first shown the perfect work, and rightly exhibited it, and having thankfully shed his blood, has yielded up the ghost: blessed then will he be, and truly proclaimed perfect, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us," as the apostle says. Only let us preserve free-will and love: "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." (2Co_4:8, 2Co_4:9) For those who strive after perfection, according to the same apostle, must "give no offence in anything, but in everything approve themselves not to men, but to God." And, as a consequence, also they ought to yield to men; for it is reasonable, on account of abusive calumnies. Here is the specification: "in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watching's, in fasting's, in pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God," (2Co_6:3-7) that we may be the temples of God, purified "from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit." "And I," He says, "will receive you; and I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to Me for sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2Co_7:1; 2Co_6:16, 2Co_6:17, 2Co_6:18) "Let us then," he says, "perfect holiness in the fear of God." For though fear beget pain, "I rejoice," he says, "not that ye were made sorry, but that ye showed susceptibility to repentance. For ye sorrowed after a godly sort, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For this same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what earnestness it wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what compunction; yea, what fear; yea, what desire; yea, what zeal; yea, revenge! In all things ye have showed yourselves clear in the matter." (2Co_7:1-11) Such are the preparatory exercises of gnostic discipline. And since the omnipotent God Himself "gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;" (Eph_4:11, Eph_4:12, Eph_4:13) we are then to strive to reach manhood as befits the Gnostic, and to be as perfect as we can while still abiding in the flesh, making it our study with perfect concord here to concur with the will of God, to the restoration of what is the truly perfect nobleness and relationship, to the fullness of Christ, that which perfectly depends on our perfection. And now we perceive where, and how, and when the divine apostle mentions the perfect man, and how he shows the differences of the perfect. And again, on the other hand: "The manifestation of

the Spirit is given for our profit. For to one is given the word of wisdom by the Spirit; to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith through the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing through the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another diversities of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: and all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, distributing to each one according as He wills." (1Co_12:7-11) **Such being the case, the prophets are perfect in prophecy, the righteous in righteousness, and the martyrs in confession, and others in preaching, not that they are not sharers in the common virtues, but are proficient in those to which they are appointed.** For what man in his senses would say that a prophet was not righteous? For what? Did not righteous men like Abraham prophesy?

"For to one God has given warlike deeds,
To another the accomplishment of the dance,
To another the lyre and song,"
Says Homer.

"But each has his own proper gift of God" (1Co_7:7) - one in one way, another in another. **But the apostles were perfected in all. You will find, then, if you choose, in their acts and writings, knowledge, life, preaching, righteousness, purity, prophecy.** We must know, then, that if Paul is young in respect to time - having flourished immediately after the Lord's ascension - **yet his writings depend on the Old Testament, breathing and speaking of them. For faith in Christ and the knowledge of the Gospel are the explanation and fulfilment of the law;** and therefore it was said to the Hebrews, **"If ye believe not, neither shall you understand;" (Isa_7:9) that is, unless you believe what is prophesied in the law, and oracularly delivered by the law, you will not understand the Old Testament, which He by His coming expounded.**

~Clement- Stromata Book IV Vol. 2