

Perfecting of the Saints

This chapter taken from the book *When Faith Came* by Franklin Whittenburg © 1998-2006

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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 KJV).

I believe that the doctrine of perfection is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in the Bible. To understand what the Bible is talking about when it refers to perfection; you must understand how the term is used. The word “perfection” used in the Bible refers to the believer becoming “mature” or coming to a “full age”, complete. But man in his natural understanding, looks at God and says, “I will never be like God so I can never be perfect”. Perfection to man is attaining a God like state. With this attitude, man has an excuse to except all sorts of garbage and behavior in his life because after all, “Nobody is perfect”. But man has missed a very important point here.

Let me explain it with an analogy that a friend of mine thought of after I explained to him the perfection doctrine. Man was created for fellowship with God. Man was not created to be God. That is like an apple looking at an orange and saying an orange is perfect. I will never be an orange, so I can never be perfect. But an apple was not created to be an orange. The perfect apple is to become all that it was created to be! The same way the perfect Christian is simply to become all that they were called and created to be.

How did man ever come to the point that he thinks that he should be like God? To find that out we must go all the way back to the Garden of Eden when man ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This idea that man could be like God actually came from GOD!

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken (Genesis 3:22,23 KJV).

Common sense would dictate though that if God actually wanted man to become a god like Him then God would have encouraged Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and not forbid it! The Bible plainly states that we are to grow up to be a perfect MAN in Christ, not to become a perfect god or a “little god”.

And he 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 come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: (Ephesians 4:11-13 KJV).

Once again, for the Christian to become biblically “perfect”, means for him to become all that God called and created him to be.

But how do we attain the perfection spoken of in the Bible? Very simply, our “perfection” is the ministry of the Holy Spirit and cannot be achieved by us as Paul explained to the Galatians 3:3, **but it can be achieved in us** like it is written in the book of Hebrews 13:20,21 KJV.

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh (Galatians 3:3 KJV)?

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13:20,21 KJV).

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. (1 Peter 5:10 KJV)

What did the apostles think of us becoming perfect?

For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this we wish, even your perfection (2 Corinthians 13:9 KJV).

Finally, brethren, farewell, Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you (2 Corinthians 13:11 KJV).

(Most important) What does Jesus think of us becoming perfect? It is not only His will, but also His prayer!

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:20-23 KJV).

Point to Ponder: What I am going to share in the rest of this chapter is just a theory I have for anyone that might want to study this farther. I am not declaring this theory as “sound doctrine” until I do more research on this, so study this with discernment.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Corinthians 13:9-12 KJV).

I would like to share here a study and explain the reason that I think Paul finally attained “perfection” after he said he still hadn’t attained it in the book of Philippians. As Paul states in Philippians 3:11, perfection to him was attained at the resurrection of the dead. Please read the chapter “Understanding Eternal Life”.

If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 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. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you (Philippians 3: 11-15 KJV).

So at what time is the Christian resurrected from the dead? We know by reading Galatians 2:20 the point when we died.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20 KJV).

As the Bible teaches in many others verses that the Christian is going through a resurrection process now, to walk in the Spirit and a new and living way. The Bible says that if we are “in Christ”, then we are in the resurrection, because Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” in John 11:25,26 KJV.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-3 KJV).

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; (Colossians 2:10-13 KJV).

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (Romans 6:5,6 KJV)

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death (1 John 3:14 KJV).

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life (John 5:24 KJV).

If the word “perfection” as we have seen in this study means “mature” or “of full age”, and means becoming what God called and created us to be, then like Paul claims we attain that when God finishes resurrecting us. Does God ever do this?

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20,21 KJV).

The Bible says that we are to become perfect through patience. From my experience, learning patience just takes time.

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (James 1:4 KJV).

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you (1 Peter 5:10 KJV).

In the verse in Philippians 3:14 KJV, Paul declares that he is pressing toward the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus”. Did Paul ever attain his “calling”? To answer this you have to know what Paul’s “calling” was? You do not have to look any farther than the book of Romans or 1 Corinthians!

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Romans 1:1 KJV).

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, (1 Corinthians 1:1 KJV).

By these two verses, you can see that Paul's "calling" is to be an apostle. Did Paul ever achieve his "calling"? Yes, he plainly declares that he has attained apostleship when he revisits Corinth the second time in the second epistle to the Corinthians. Coincidentally at the end of 1 Corinthians in chapter 15 is where Paul explains the resurrection of the dead.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia: Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:1,2 KJV).

I believe that Paul left a little trail that showed his growth process and ours, from the point of being called to the point of maturity (perfection). Please read the chapter "The Christian Experience: From Seed to Saint".

This trail starts at Philippians 1:1 where Paul calls himself a "servant" of Jesus Christ.

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: (Philippians 1:1 KJV).

What stage of growth is the "servant" representative of? The Bible says that a "servant" is no different than a child in Galatians 4:1,2 KJV.

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father (Galatians 4:1,2 KJV).

The Bible claims the purpose of the five-fold ministry spoken of in the book of Ephesians is to take the Christian from being a child in Christ to becoming a perfect man in Christ.

And he 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 come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: (Ephesians 4:11-15 KJV).

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Corinthians 13:9-12 KJV).

Did any of the apostles including Paul ever come to the point that they knew all that they were suppose to know or did Paul always just know part of what he was suppose to know? Paul says that through his teaching the church should know the “manifold wisdom of God”!

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (Ephesians 3:7-11 KJV).

What about Luke?

It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed (Luke 1:3,4).

So at the beginning of Romans, Paul is declaring himself a “servant” or child called to be an apostle, which we know he finally became and that was his perfect calling in Christ.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Romans 1:1 KJV).

When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain. And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ (Romans 15:28,29 KJV).

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