
Preface

Perfection, in any sense of the word, and in no matter what context, whether Christian or secular, is a difficult concept to relate to, and therefore a difficult subject to broach. Nothing in our world is perfect. To speak of perfection suggests the unattainable, that which belongs only to God. In the everyday setting, the word has a demanding ring to it and evokes a groan of inability.

In the Christian setting, responses to the idea of 'perfection' are even more complex. Understandably, many are wary of eccentric or elite doctrines, and suspicious that someone thinks he is more holy, or perhaps already perfect.

Generally we have accepted that imperfection is the norm of human life, and that it will be so until we die. We cope with our failure by accepting that 'nobody's perfect', and that it would be presumptuous to try to be. Concern for our world and with a peaceful and prosperous life has become the priority for many of us, with thoughts of moral perfection seeming a little selfish and indulgent.

In all then, the subject of this volume is not a comfortable one, since we are only familiar with imperfection, and find perfectionism in any form to be distasteful and alienating. Nevertheless, this volume sets out to approach this important biblical subject.

The eternal purpose of God

The reservations we have just mentioned are predictable responses from our perspective, whereas we need to consider the subject from God's perspec-

tive. This book will put forward the scriptural proposition that **the gospel of Jesus Christ embraces the message of perfection**. The eternal purpose of God was to reproduce His life, and the perfection of His divine nature in those who are 'in Christ'. The heavenly Father covenanted in Christ to give us birth as His children, from which birth we may grow up to the full stature of Christ. We may '*go on unto perfection*'. (*Heb 6:1-2*).

To receive the gospel is to automatically embrace the hope of perfection. For we are born of a divine seed which will bring forth fruit unto perfection provided the good soil in the heart of each believer permits this growth. The **provision** for such a perfection lies first of all in the Father's will to give us birth from the seed of His life. In addition, He made provision for a cleansing **process** through the work of the cross. Christ made provision for our full salvation, for our full perfection.

These two subjects of provision and process are central to this volume:

- the provision of perfect life, divine life from the seed of the word of God;
- the process for the cleansing and removal of sin.

This places the subject of perfection and our response to it in a very different light. It is not that we are being presumptuous if we believe for perfection. Rather, if God has made a full provision for this, as we shall endeavour to show, what should our response be? Would we want to fall short of inheriting what the blood of Christ has made available?

Knowledge of good and evil

In addressing the subject of perfection, it will be necessary to examine the forgiveness, cleansing and removal of sin. 'Sin' as the universal condition that came upon the human race through Adam's disobedience, began with the eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is vital to understand that beyond the matter of disobedience alone, the 'eating' or acquisition of this knowledge of good and evil has become a major feature in the disposition of fallen mankind. This knowledge brought about a consciousness of, and then a lifelong preoccupation with good and evil. Moral contemplations have substituted for relationship with the Father, and have blinded mankind to the divine purpose. The scriptures set forth the self-righteous Pharisee as the epitome of the man obsessed with legalistic strivings about good and evil, who becomes opposed to the purpose of God.

The point of this, is that whether an individual is 'good' or 'evil', religious or secular, 'born again' or unrepentant, he is nevertheless in a fallen and lost condition if he is preoccupied with this knowledge of good and evil. This is a most essential perspective as it explains why, having inherited 'original sin', we nevertheless find much 'goodness' in ourselves and in mankind generally. It is the tree of the 'knowledge of good and evil' that describes our fallen state, not a tree of 'wickedness'.

All our works, whether good or bad, which are **self**-motivated responses to the righteous standard of God are '*dead works*'. (*Heb 6:1-2; 9:14*). From these

the conscience is to be cleansed. 'Repentance from dead works' is the very first of the first principles involved in going on unto perfection.

The sinful condition and lost position for mankind, was that he would, with the knowledge of good and evil, operate as another centre apart from God. He would be master of his own destiny by developing the various facets of law to organise, control and guarantee his survival. Persistent ethical reflection upon personal, social, political and spiritual issues would now replace relationship with the Father.

Attached to this condition, is the fact that Satan deceived man into believing that the eating of the tree was a way to be 'like God'. When God said, 'let us make man in Our image and after Our **likeness**', He **did** intend for us to be 'like God', but not in the way that Satan proposed. Man was to abide in faith and patience in relation to God's covenant purpose, which would in time bring forth the offer of divine birth and sonship through Christ.

Mankind, 'made in the image and likeness' was nevertheless fallible and able to be tempted. Clearly, he was not yet complete. The creation of man was a beginning point. Indeed God did make him in the image and likeness, but the full conclusion of the purpose of God was to require a process by which man could be **made perfect** and entire in his possession of the divine nature.

Creation and incarnation

Just as children born in a family inherit the father's likeness through the human procreative process, the heavenly Father intended that we should inherit His likeness through divine birth, through an implanted word that would enable the formation of the divine nature.

At a time that had been appointed and fixed in God's immutable purpose, '*in the fullness of time*' (*Gal 4:4*), the Word became flesh as the incarnate Son of God. The supreme outcome of His incarnation, of His life and death, was that the body of Christ would come to include us as co-members.

In the beginning, the marvel of **creation** was followed by the principle of **procreation** as the miracle reproduction of God's family began to unfold. In the new creation with Christ as firstborn, the incarnation of the Son of God made it possible for a further extension of this miracle – the incarnation of His life in many sons and daughters. If we are to catch the real heart of God's purpose for us, we need to see that as 'incarnation' described the Word becoming flesh, so it also describes the process of God coming in **our flesh** through divine birth and formation.

God was revealed 'incarnate', in flesh, in Christ. '*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth.*' (*John 1:14*). Christ took on our flesh and blood, firstly to deal with sin in the flesh, and then also to make a way for us to become '*members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.*' (*Eph 5:30*). In Him, '*the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily*' (*Col 2:9*), and we have been joined to Him in His body. **We are 'joint-heirs' with Christ of the revelation of God in the flesh.** (*Rom 8:17*).

While Christ was born of a divine seed in Mary's womb, our birth from the seed of the Word engrafted in the heart (James 1:21) is a miracle that proceeds from Christ's incarnation. Indeed precious promises have been given to us regarding our being '*partakers of the divine nature.*' (II Peter 1:4).

Within the body of Christ, the life we live is His life. This is the marvel and mystery of '*Christ in us, the hope of glory.*' (Col 1:27). We are more than channels of His life, and this work of incarnation exceeds the pantheistic view that we are reflections of God along with other glories of creation. There is no suggestion here of the philosophy of eastern mysticism, as if Christ is within us as a reincarnation.

Over against the will of the Father to give us His likeness through incarnation, the original lie advanced to mankind was also an offer of godhood, to be 'like God', but by another means. With this in mind, we note that there is a deception regarding godhood that may easily be confused with the legitimate scriptural aspiration to the '*high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*' (Phil 3:14).

Care is needed so that we don't confuse these two, and either suppose that our activity in the flesh is the architecture of God, or on the other hand demean the 'high calling' through reaction and fear of deception.

Certainly the crucial issue for the church in the last days will be the conflict between the self-determined system of mankind under Satan's power, and the body of Christ going on to perfection through the provision of the cross.

Overview

1 **The Hope of Perfection** compares the gospel offer of divine birth with the knowledge of good and evil. The eating of the tree has led mankind to be preoccupied with religious law-keeping aspirations as epitomised by the Pharisees. There is a modern equivalent to the Pharisee – he is the man who is seeking righteousness by legalistic means, but is opposed to Christ.

2 **The Cross of Christ** shows that the death of Christ was not just to pay the penalty for sin or to appease the righteous judgment of God. Through His suffering He was 'made perfect' and opened a way – the new and living way into the holiest. The call of the gospel is to take up His cross, to lay down our lives and travel with Him upon the new and living way, being perfected by the blood and water which flowed from the side of Christ. The reason that He vicariously '*became sin ... for our sake*', was that we might become the righteousness of God. (II Cor 5:21). The cross opened the way for us to be 'in Christ', and thus opened the process whereby we may become the righteousness, or the perfection of God.

3 **The Blood of the Everlasting Covenant** compares the blood of Christ with the former Old Testament offerings, and explains 'how much more' the blood of Christ can now cleanse. His blood, if its effectiveness is applied through faith and by the Holy Spirit can cleanse not just the outward, but the heart, the conscience of man. His blood can cleanse to the degree of Christ's perfection.

4 The Nature of Perfection establishes that the quality of our perfection is to be as Christ's, for our identity in Him and our relationship to Him are clearly defined by the symbolic aspects of 'sons of God', the 'body of Christ' and the 'bride of Christ'.

5 The Day of Atonement, 6 The Time of the End and 7 The True Temple deal with the eschatology of perfection. Our subject leads inevitably to the study of the end-time events that include the perfection of the church and the marriage of the perfect bride to Christ etc. The subject of perfection provides the key to eschatology, since the book of Revelation describes the restoration of the church, the functioning of the true temple to conclude the church's perfection, and the judgments which then proceed through to the second coming of Christ. The themes, chronology and keys to the interpretation of the book of Revelation are the major focus of these chapters.

8 The First Principles and 9 The Body of Christ conclude the study by examining the foundations and context upon and through which the hope of perfection can be realised. Without the personal foundations for life in Christ and the corporate context of the functioning body of Christ, the magnificent message of the provision and process of perfection can have no genuine outworking.

Conclusion

Certainly John's warning must at all times and in all humility be heeded – *'If we say we have no sin, we lie, and the truth is not in us.'* (1 John 1:8). On the other hand, to overlook God's will for the perfection of His people is to miss the central theme of the scriptures – since the Old Testament has been set forth to teach us our incapacity, and the New in deliberate contrast reveals 'how much more' the blood of Christ is able to accomplish. To humbly press on then, enduring to the end, appropriating the benefits of the atonement through the blood and water, is the only reasonable Christian response.

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