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Beloved Friends and Fellow Laborers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

Greetings in the name of the One who loves us and who loosed us from our sins.

The Lord continues to overshadow our lives. A couple of weeks ago I was in Ohio and preaching at Calvary Chapel in Massillon, and at Grace Chapel in Akron enjoying blessed fellowship with the saints and with Pastors Greg Becker and Harry Knotts. These are dear brethren. But guess what? I was involved in a serious accident. Both cars were totaled. Pastor Greg and I had attended the GGF Pastors Luncheon in Ashland and were on our way home. We were peacefully sharing the things of the Lord, when, WHAM! We were struck from the rear. I think both of us thought, THIS IS IT, WE ARE ON OUR WAY INTO THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD! Amazingly, after the initial shock, Pastor Greg turned toward me and calmly asked: "Are you okay?" I opened my hands, shrugged my shoulders, glanced over my body, and exclaimed: "I think so!" How we survived such an impact was truly miraculous. When, I managed to get out of the door and looked at Pastor Greg's car I was dumbfounded. We both survived and were calmly checking our limbs to make sure they were all still intact. A later hospital examination confirmed our diagnosis. Although, we were told that such accidents could have later repercussions. As some may know, Pastor Greg, not in the best of health under normal circumstances, and this old 79 year old 'patriarch,' survived to be of further service to our beloved Lord and Master. One never knows, does one?

Trust you will profit from another chapter of my new book: *LIFE IN CHRIST*. Most of my books are available at Amazon. Com., or in the larger book stores. As soon as funds are available, this new book will be made available. Pray for this project. I'm averaging one new book a year. Shirley is now working on putting her soliloquies together in one book of some 365. Great idea! Her ministry is increasingly well received. She sends out a new one every week. It is free. Send us your email address. She still has a few copies of her 100 soliloquy books. They make excellent gifts.

Pray for us also. We need guidance on future itineraries: to PA., OH., DC., AL., and even England. Why not? We are not as young as we used to be, and travel expenses are increasingly becoming out of reach. But, as Shirley just wrote in her recent soliloquy, "God is the God of the impossible!" Dare we forget, we are in a supernatural business?

Yours because His,

Henry and Shirley Hudson.

DIRECTORS: Henry, Shirley, & Bruce Hudson. ADVISORY BOARD: Pastors: J. Hollis, H. Knotts, A. J. Krause, R. Robinson, A. Watkins, P. Wiering, Mr. R. Purdy, Dr. R. Stern, Mr. N. Gidney C.B.E.

“IN CHRIST”

CHAPTER FIVE SAINTHOOD AND SANCTIFICATION

(This essay is taken from a chapter of my
new book: “*Life in Christ.*”)

“ . . . to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 1:1

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”

1 Corinthians 1:1

I begin this chapter with a few questions: “If the process of becoming a saint is as complex as it is presumed to be in today's world, how on earth could so many believers in the first century be called saints?” “Moreover, why are there so few today?” “And, how did the religious process of beatification and canonization become so complicated?” As I sit here at my computer I expect any day to hear that Pope John Paul II has been granted sainthood. On the day of his death, back in 2004, the crowds in St. Peter's square in Rome were waving their banners: “SANTO SUBITO!” “SANTO SUBITO!” They wanted this unusual man to be promoted to sainthood right away. According to the recent new's broadcasts, if the Vatican can find one more miracle associated with his papacy he will have made it and will officially be hailed a saint. There can be little doubt that this will happen, and countless Roman Catholic people will begin praying to him as an intercessor. I am sure, many already are praying to him. In fact, once again as I write, the city of Rome is preparing for some two million visitors who will be present for the beatification of John Paul II, scheduled to take place in Vatican City on May 1, 2011. Beatification is the last step before saint-hood. There were over three million present for his funeral in April of 2005.

Should my reader desire insights into this Roman Catholic process of what goes into making saints I would recommend the novel by Morris West. It is entitled, *The Devil's Advocate*. West was an out-standing writer, and this particular work was nominated for the national book award.

The worldwide Roman Catholic excitement over the movement to canonize John Paul II is an enigma when compared with the plain straightforward words of the New Testament. I think, for example, of the words that introduce the apostle Paul's letter to the church at Corinth. In the contemporary attitude toward determining who qualifies to be considered a saint, this church would hardly qualify for being a saintly church. It was a church plagued with carnality and there were all manner of schisms and unholy problems. Yet, the apostle Paul addresses the members as saints. Moreover, he clearly implied that all who call upon the name of Jesus Christ were also saints. They were all sanctified in Christ Jesus. No

exceptions! The word “sanctified” is a translation of the Greek word *hagiadzmo* which is related to the noun *hagiasmos*, and the word *hagios* frequently translated “saints.” Incidentally, it should be noted that the words “to be” in the KJV of 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 are in italics, which means that they are not in the Greek text. These believers were actually called “saints.”

While here in this context, compare 1 Corinthians 1:30, for here this sanctification is because believers are related to Christ Jesus. They are presented as being in Christ Jesus. Their position or relationship is not because of any thing they did, but it is because of what God did in identifying them with Jesus Christ. The verse declares that believers are in Christ who “*is made unto us, wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*” The next verse tells the reader: “*In order that (hina), as it has been written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*” The wisdom, the righteousness, the sanctification, and the redemption are all of God, and therefore no believer has any ground whatsoever for boasting. Like salvation itself, it does not come through works of righteousness (Tit. 3:5-7).

In all likelihood, the title of this chapter will provoke some degree of negative reaction among many contemporary Christians. First of all, the mere mention of the word “sanctification” could in itself produce such an effect, simply because there seems to be a general conspiracy of silence with regard to the biblical teaching about sanctification. Let me turn to 2 Corinthians 7:1. The wording here might open a Pandora’s box. Of course, the severity of the reaction will depend on the denominational and doctrinal traditions against which the two words, “perfecting” and “sanctification” are appreciated. They do appear together in this verse and tie in with the immediate context. Note Paul’s words:

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1).

“Holiness” and “sanctification” are two different words in English, but not in Greek. They mean essentially the same thing. As is common knowledge, English is a language that has borrowed heavily from two linguistic traditions: the Latin and the Germanic. Even today, French, Italian, and Spanish versions of the Scriptures, translate the word “holy” by the words *saint*, *santo*, and *sagrado*; whereas German, Swedish, and Yiddish would render it by the words, *heilig*, *helig*, and *heylik*. In the above passage, the French and Italian New Testaments render the original text with the words, *sanctification* and *sanctificazione*. This phenomenon was never a problem to me because between the way English is spoken in England and in America there are dozens of words, which, while they are different in form, nevertheless, mean the same thing. For example, consider the following list: candy and sweets, chips and crisps, cookies and biscuits, diaper and nappy, elevator and lift, gas and petrol, hood and bonnet, trunk and boot, mail and post, pants and trousers, truck and lorry, vest and waistcoat, and yard and garden. There were times during my first days in the U.S.A. when I thought I was learning a new language!

The context gives the rationale behind Paul’s exhortation. It rests on promises given to those who enter into a salvation relationship with God. Such people have obeyed from the heart the doctrine of the Gospel, that is, through their faith in Jesus Christ, God has given them the authority to become his children. Consequently, they are expected to live in a manner befitting their new position. Their conversion involved *metanoia* (Greek, “to change the mind.”), that is, it initially took place in their minds when they consciously turned “from” sin and turned “to” God. This conversion entailed a metamorphosis. On the practical side, this vertical relationship with God is expected to manifest itself in the horizontal realm of common

everyday experiences. It is a mistake to view sanctification only in a limited religious/church context. It belongs also in the market place and in the home.

By way of an aside, and in connection with these words of Paul, there is a curious historical sidelight that has a bearing on our subject. One of the common epithets hurled at certain so-called “heretical” Christians during the Middle Ages was the word *Cathar*. It is a word derived from the Greek adjective *katharos*, which conveys the meaning, “pure.” The institution-alized Church of that day labeled such Christians as Cathars because they tended to identify the membership of the true Church with a life-style that brought practical sanctification into every dimension of life.

In order to appreciate more fully the nature of what surely is an ironic paradox, there is a need to understand what has come to be called a “sacral” mentality. Sacralism is that perspective on society that views church and state as being tied together, rather than as being complete and separate entities. In other words, all people within a given geographical and political region are considered members of whatever ecclesiastical institution happens to be dominant. Such a conception brought forth, as might well be imagined, no small amount of social friction. A truly dyed-in-the-wool sacralist seems to have little toleration for a Gospel that calls for people to bring “*forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance.*”

From the time of Emperor Constantine, sacralism tended to dominate Christendom. There were always voices of protest but they did not seem to make any lasting impact till the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the wake of the Reformation, as more and more Christians turned to the authority of Holy Scripture for their doctrine, there developed a gradual movement away from sacralism. and Anabaptist/Separatism developed, and it began to grow in influence. By the eighteenth century, especially in the minds of the Founding Fathers of the United States, sacralism was no longer expedient. Evidence for this is unequivocal in the words of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. For those who desire to study further the subject of sacralism, I would recommend the book by Leonard Verduin, *The Anatomy of a Hybrid*.

There certainly was no sacralism in Paul’s mind when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians. It was only the church (Greek, *ekklesiā*, an “assembly of called-out people”) that was viewed as being sanctified (1 Corinthians 1:1, 2, 30; 6:11). It was not the entire population of a city. Hence, it was only the members of the church who could perfect sanctification, for it was only such who had been sanctified. Furthermore, Paul’s words, viewed in their greater context, make it clear that the perfecting of sanctification leads to a deeper experience of fellowship with God. There was no esoteric secret to the process. It would depend directly on positive proactive faith interacting with the Word of God. Such fellowship with God is impossible for a Christian who persists in compromising with sinful practices. I think of Psalm 66:18, “*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*” The Hebrew idiom here, suggests that if I come to terms with sin, the Lord will not hear me.

Coming to terms with sin speaks of compromise with sin. The essence of sin is disobedience. Any act or thought contrary to the will of God is sin. Hence, compromise with sin can hardly perfect holiness in the fear of God. Paul’s words leave no room for any doctrine that teaches that this perfecting of sanctification is an experience that takes place in an instant of time. Rather, it is something that is part and parcel of normal spiritual growth and development.

WHAT ABOUT “SINLESS” PERFECTION?

Probably most of my readers will have heard of the doctrine of sanctification that postulates the theory of living a “sinless” life. If I am to cover sanctification, then I must say something about this theory. I have in my library a devotional classic by Archbishop Fenelon (1651-1715), which is entitled, *Christian Perfection*. It is an interesting work, but it does not teach “sinless” perfection. What it does, in a somewhat mystical way, is offer spiritual guidance as to how a Christian might live his life on a higher spiritual plain. The central thesis focuses on nothing short of submitting to God’s will in every facet of life. The main thesis reflected the thought of a contemporary movement that came to be known as Quietism. For such teachings Fenelon was criticized and finally banished from the court of Louis XIV. The wonder is that he could have lasted in that court as long as he did. Some Christians find the book to be helpful. Personally, I have my reservations about the book, but it does spark some sympathy in my heart.

There are, however, some Christians who have developed a doctrine of perfectionism that does indeed embrace sinlessness. They contend, something like Fenelon did, that an all-surrendering-submission to the will of God is the *sine qua non* that opens the door to this blessed state. They do claim that it is a work of the Holy Spirit that takes place in an instant of time and that it results in a quality of life that produces nothing less than “sinless” perfection. For those not familiar with this viewpoint, there will probably be a recoiling in amazement that any flesh and blood Christian would ever adopt such a doctrine. It is not new, and, as might be imagined, it has been the cause of no small controversy and a great deal of confusion.

One of the first times I ran into the doctrine of experiential sinlessness was during a church visitation program. I was trying to call on every home within a mile radius of the church where I was the pastor. It was a very warm afternoon and I remember the scene well. I was walking along the pavement, and had stopped at the pathway that led up to the next house I intended to visit. It was one of those walkways that was in the middle of the property and that led directly to the front door situated in the middle of the house. I was about to approach the house when I noticed that on the right side, sitting in a deck chair in the middle of the lawn, was a middle-aged lady, and on the left side, also in the middle of that lawn, was a middle-aged man, who was contentedly puffing away at his pipe. They were separated by a distance of about forty feet. For a moment I hesitated, and then I decided to approach the lady. I walked toward her and putting on my best smile, I announced who I was and what I was doing. She responded immediately by telling me that she was a member of such and such a church, and that she never missed any of its services. But then, in no uncertain terms, she let me know that she was a very good Christian, and that she had not sinned for fourteen years. Before I could reply, I heard a gruff voice from the other lawn exclaim, “Ha! Ha!” As further dialogue disclosed, the dear lady was sincere, and really believed that she had lived sinlessly for the last fourteen years. Can it be imagined what it would be like to live with a woman of such a persuasion? “*Lord, help the husband!*” Little wonder he was prompted to make such a cynical response.

The incident reminded me of a story that I had heard of the preacher who often encouraged vocal interaction while he was actually preaching. On this one occasion, he was preaching up a storm about how ridiculous it was for any person to claim to be perfect. He was carried away and felt bold enough to challenge his congregation, “No one is perfect! If anyone here thinks that he is perfect, let him stand up right away here and now before every-one.” For a

few seconds no one responded. Then, a fine looking gentleman rose to his feet. At first, the preacher was taken aback, but after a moment, he tried to press home his point, "You mean to tell me that you consider yourself to be perfect?" Without hesitation the man replied, "Of course not, but I thought that I should stand up in behalf of my wife's first husband!"

The only human being that has lived a sinless life is the Lord Jesus Christ. Holy Scripture declares that he knew no sin, did no sin, and had no sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). As for the rest of us, the same Scriptures exclaim, not only that "*all have sinned,*" but that "*there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not,*" and also that, "*if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" (Ecc. 7:20; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8).

With the authority of Holy Scripture being so explicit, what then prolongs the controversy? I think that the answer lies mainly in certain misunderstandings connected with the words "perfect" and "perfection." Before attempting any definition, the first thing that should be done is to get hold of a concordance and look up the references to these two words. How, for example, would we explain the descriptions of Noah and Job (Gen. 6:9; Job 1:1)? And what would we say to the charge that God gave to Abraham (Gen. 17:1)? Were these Old Testament men actually perfect? Could God really expect Abraham to be perfect? Can such passages be used to teach "sinlessness?" Are they not clear? Are not those who belong to God supposed to be "perfect?" Are they not supposed to sin less? How easy it is to play with words!

WESLEY AND METHODISM

Much of the contemporary controversy connected with sinless perfectionism hails back to the early years of Methodism. From my reading and research I cannot help but have a warm spot in my heart for the early Methodists who stood unapologetically for evangelism and the doctrine of personal holiness. Alas, much of modern-day Methodism has jettisoned such emphases, and I get the impression that if any emphasis remains, it is one that confuses the Kingdom of God with some kind of mishmash served up as Christian Socialism.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, did not use the phrase "sinless perfection," but he did, in the tradition of Fenelon, focus some attention on the expression "Christian perfection." In fact, he composed a lengthy tract entitled, *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. While I found the tract a little difficult to follow, my heart went out to him, because I could detect a hunger for a deeper appreciation of the spiritual realities of the Christian life. However, his doctrines in this regard, aroused no small opposition from some of his contemporaries. In one of his sermons (Sermon 40), he told why, in spite of opposition, he intended to continue to teach his view of perfectionism. Let me quote the pertinent part: "*Some have advised (us) wholly to lay aside the use of those expressions ('perfect' and 'perfection')* because they have given so great offenses. *But are they not found in the Oracles of God? If so, by what authority can any messenger of God lay them aside, even though all men should be offended?*"

As needs to be noted, he did not use the term "sinless" perfection. And can any Christian really fault Wesley for what he had to say? Was he not correct? Does not the Bible use the expressions "perfect" and "perfection?" Besides the passages already mentioned, the reader might want to check also, Matthew 5:48; 1 Corinthians 2:6, and Colossians 1:28; 4:12. Anyone taking the time to look up these few references will readily understand why Wesley

would ask: *“by what authority can any messenger of God lay them aside, even though all men should be offended?”*

Why then, after making such a strong statement, did he vacillate and pen the following words to his brother Charles? *“Shall we go on in asserting perfection against all the world? Or shall we quietly let it drop? We really must do one or the other; and, I apprehend, the sooner the better”* (Letters 5:88).

Before rushing to join his critics, I think that we might remind ourselves that perception, even in matters of definitions of words, can be quite different depending on the propensities of individual preunderstandings. For example, I recall how gullible people were in the democracies of the West when they heard communists talk about peace. The same word was being used by both sides and yet there was a world of difference in how the word was understood. So, before anyone begins to criticize Wesley for thinking that maybe the word “perfection” should be dropped, it might be well to remember that words can mean different things to different people. I call to mind once again, the words that were once common in my vocabulary: flat, plaster, sweets, crisps, nappy, lift, chips, petrol, bonnet, jelly, post, cellotape, tube, lorry, vest, and on and on the list could go. Incidentally, how often does anyone today use the words “gay” or “queer” in what at one time would have been their strict definitional dictionary sense?

Wesley had problems with the word *“perfection,”* in trying to employ it in relation to his doctrine of sanctification. And in his defense, I must say that I cannot help but sympathize with his attempts. In a couple of his sermons (Numbers 40 and 76) he tried to explain exactly what he meant, but it is apparent to the more discerning reader, that he was sailing in troubled waters. After a series of carefully worded disclaimers, pointing out that perfection did not imply exemption from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations, he went on to say that it is simply another term for holiness. With this qualification he could write, *“Thus, every one that is holy is, in the Scriptural sense, perfect.”* However, at the same time, he contended that there was no absolute perfection on earth. But, even in the face of this categorical disclaimer I cannot but wonder how he would have applied it to the Christians at Corinth? They were “saints,” which literally meant that they were “holy ones,” but as a study of circumstances at Corinth will show, many of the Christians there were “carnal,” which is contrasted with being perfect (1 Cor. 2: 6; 3:1-3). However, Paul did acknowledge that in some sense they were holy, but apparently, such did not qualify them to be called perfect. (1 Cor.1:1; 6:11; 2 Cor.13:9, 11).

The water gets rougher and the fog becomes a little thicker as Wesley tried to make his doctrine fit the facts of experience. He apparently was obliged to push his doctrine to the extent that he spoke of the possibility of *“the destruction of all inward sin”* and of being *“so far perfect as not to commit sin.”* However, again to his credit, he was candid enough to admit that while many Christians had arrived at the full realization of Christian perfection, there were few of them, *“hardly one in ten; nay one in thirty”* who could retain it for even one year.

How easy it is to be judgmental and to engage in criticism? Enough is enough! It is no faint praise when I say that I admire John Wesley’s life and ministry, and that I would that there were a lot more like him in the ecclesiastical circles of the twentieth first century. Besides, I think it is time to face up to his challenge. The words “perfect” and “perfection” are biblical words, and they are, as has been noted, applied to men both in the Old and New

Testaments, so “*by what authority can any messenger of God lay them aside...?*”

PERFECTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is not easy to know where to begin in discussing the biblical meaning of the word “perfect.” I pick up my *English Hebrew Lexicon* and I read that the Hebrew word in Genesis 6:9 and Job 1:1 means, “*complete, uninjured, sound, whole, perfect, and without blemish.*” But in what sense did Noah, Job or Abraham possess any one of these qualities? Surely, not in any absolute sense with regard to their practical righteousness. As was quoted earlier, “*there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not*” (Ecc. 7:20). Yet, in some way these Old Testament worthies could be called perfect. I suppose it would be easy to rationalize and claim that these particular men were in a class all by themselves. They were outstanding in their faith, and therefore not to be rated with any of us who are among the rank and file of work-a-day Christian believers. Who can dispute that they were exceptional, but Paul did, as was stated in the previous study, admonish the early Christians to walk in the steps of Abraham, so if God expected him to be perfect, it can be logically argued that he expects nothing less of New Testament Christians (Rom. 4:12). And apparently, God expected some degree of perfection out of the rulers of Israel and Judah (e. g. 1 Kings 11:4; 15:3, *et al.*).

The historical and literary contexts of each one of these passages imply that at the very least, perfection was connected with the maintaining of a right relationship with God. And this, as has been noted in previous studies, would only be possible by faith-obedience to God’s revealed will, (1 Kings 8:61). By no stretch of the imagination did it mean a state of absolute sinless perfection in which all sin was totally eradicated. If it did, then I cannot help but wonder how such passages as 1 Kings 15:3 and Psalm 51:1-19 would be explained and reconciled? Being perfect, or possessing a perfect heart before God, should never be understood apart from immediate contextual considerations. The contrast in 1 Kings 15:3 is between Abijam and David. The context lets its reader know that Abijam had actively sanctioned idolatry, so his heart was not perfect before the Lord. A perfect heart is one characterized by sincerity of purpose. Only those who walk before the Lord in truth with all their heart, “*to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments and his testimonies, AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE LAW OF MOSES...*” can be said to have a perfect heart. (1 Kings 2:3, 4; 15:11-14, contrast with 16:30-33).

PERFECTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Reading these foregoing words, some readers might be prompted to remind me that Christians no longer are under the LAW but are under GRACE. I have already touched on this question and will do so again I am sure, for I suspect that it is one that is frequently misused, even as it was in apostolic times (Rom. 6:15). But without further comment, let me move to the pages of the New Testament, and for reasons that might forestall certain additional objections, let me begin with a passage found in Paul’s epistle to the Christians at Philippi. The words are simple and quite straightforward. I suppose that someone, with a special axe to grind, could interpret them as belonging to a very small exclusive group within the church, but such an interpretation would fly into the face of the overall tenor of the epistle. One of the pleasant peculiarities of this epistle is the all-inclusive manner in which Paul wrote “*to all the saints*” (Phil 1:1).

The words I have in mind are as follows: *“Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded....”* (Phil. 3:15). The context should again be read and studied carefully. I recommend that comparisons be made among different translations. I say this because in verse 12, the King James Version does not give the perfect tense its full force. The verse could be made to read, *“Not because (ouk (ou) hoti, cf. 4:17) I have already been made perfect [perfect tense, i.e. having received the righteousness of God by faith, cf. 3:9], but [beyond this] I pursue after if also I may apprehend that for which I was apprehended [aorist tense, at a point in time, i.e., his conversion] by Christ Jesus.”*

Paul was telling his readers that by faith he had gained Christ, and had thus received the righteousness of God. In other words, he had been made perfect in his position before God, not through anything that he himself had done, but through that which God had done for him in the person of Jesus Christ. This standing, or this position, came as a result of his faith, and in consequence, he realized that it ought to impact on his subsequent life. Therefore, with singleness of mind, he gave himself to the task of apprehending the purpose for which Christ Jesus had converted and commissioned him.

The point I would want to emphasize here is that Paul clearly spoke of being made perfect, and he also viewed the Philippian Christians as having been made perfect. He also wanted them to have his mind-set, that is, he desired that they would follow his example and would pursue the purpose for which they had been saved. The context reveals that Paul had consciously turned away from his religious pedigree (one that was worthy of admiration), and whatever other accomplishments he had accumulated to his personal account. He did this in order to gain Christ, for he had learned that in gaining Christ, he gained the righteousness of God. It was all by faith, and it happened in a moment of time. Such, in essence, is the doctrine of justification. God himself, by virtue of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, can now impute to the believing sinner's account divine righteousness. The justified sinner now has peace with God and is no longer under condemnation (Rom. 3:2-28; 4:1-3, 20-25; 5:1, 9; 8:1).

My years in the ministry have taught me many things, one of which is that I should not assume that all professing Christians understand the doctrine of justification by faith. I have met far too many good religious people who somehow or other think that Jesus Christ paid maybe 80 percent of the price of redemption and that they need to pay the other 20 percent. May God help us to dispel this erroneous confusion. As far as the Bible is concerned, such thinking is false, and has frequently led to all manner of heresy. But I don't want to digress. The point I am trying to make is a very simple one. In that historical moment of Paul's conversion, God, on the basis of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, declared him to be one 100 percent righteous. In the light of this fact, Paul, as far as his position before God was concerned, was perfect. The Greek word for *“perfect”* derives from the root *telos*, which conveys the idea of aiming at an objective, or striving toward a goal; that, when reached, completed, or accomplished, results in perfection. Hence, Paul, being identified with Christ, can be said to have arrived at, reached, completed, or accomplished a position of perfection. Not only were his sins forgiven, but he had imputed to his account the very righteousness of God. Also, this position, or standing before God, made possible the potential for personal experiential fellowship with God. Thus, the “positional perfection” made the “perfecting of holiness” possible. It opened the door to the realization of a quality of life that honors and glorifies God.

It might be worth the trouble to turn to a supporting passage. If there remain any lingering doubts about this matter of believers being considered perfect, then the following words from Hebrews 10:14 should remove them, *“For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.”* This sanctification, or this setting apart for a holy purpose, as the context elaborates, is by faith, and it includes the remission of sins (cf. Acts 26:18). There can be no fellowship with God apart from the settlement of the sin question, and this depends on the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22). The passage makes it clear that the perfection it is speaking about is a perfection that comes by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ. His death, and his death alone, is the basis for the remission of sins. Thus, the objective of entering into a personal relationship with God can be reached, and accomplished by the death of Christ on the cross. If we study the broader context of this passage we can discover that many of Paul’s contemporaries were on the wrong road, and thus were heading in the wrong direction, and thus there was no way they could reach the desired destination.

In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul wrote that his own nation was ignorant of God’s righteousness, and that they were going about to establish their own righteousness, which of course was anything but perfect. And in this context, he also added, *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth”* (Rom. 10:4). I don’t think the truth could be stated any clearer. Those who turn to Jesus Christ, who acknowledge that they are sinners, and believe that he died on the cross for their sins, are the ones that God justifies. They are declared righteous by God, and thus have a positional relationship with him. There is no longer any alienation. They have been reconciled by the blood of Christ’s cross, and thus they have peace with God (Rom. 5:1-11). The purpose of his sacrifice was to bring salvation, and those who come to God by the way of the cross have obtained the positional perfection that God has made possible.

However, positional and practical perfection are not one and the same thing. One differentiation is that the former refers to a Christian’s relationship with God and the latter washes over into his relationships with his fellow men. It is similar to the distinction mentioned earlier between those truths that are vertical and those that are horizontal. A child possesses a positional relationship with his father, but such, in itself, does not guarantee a condition of harmonious experiential fellowship with his father. The former must exist in order to make the latter possible, but unless the positional relationship impacts positively on the various aspects of practical life the harmony cannot be experienced. If it does so impact, then, an ideal situation becomes possible, and thus the perfection, that is, the practical experiential fellowship desired can now be realized. This conception should not be difficult to imagine because I have often heard the casual comment that a certain father and son have a perfect relationship, meaning of course, that they relate to each other in their social and family lives, in ways that are ideally expected of fathers and sons. If the word 'perfection' can be understood in the sense of a desired end or goal, instead of some concept of sinlessness, then the usage will become much easier to comprehend.

PRACTICAL PERFECTION

But what exactly is intended by practical perfection in the process of spiritual growth and development? The best way I know of answering the question is to keep uppermost in mind the root meaning of the Greek word *telos*. As was stated a moment ago, it contains the notion of a movement toward and arrival at an acknowledged goal. For example, I write with

a goal in mind. I want to promote understanding with reference to a doctrine that is frequently distorted. If the manner in which I proceed helps to correct the distortion and to make clear both the theoretical and practical meaning of the doctrine, then, it would be possible to say that “perfect” understanding has been achieved. In other words, the content and method of my approach has caused my reader to understand perfectly my attempt at explanation. This would not mean that he had, all of a sudden, come to a flawless understanding of all ramifications of the doctrine, but it would mean that he had arrived at a point where discussion now makes “perfect” sense, and that further knowledge and development were, not only possible, but were anticipated.

Going back to an analogy I have used in my preaching and teaching, I might speak of a six-month-old baby as being a perfect little child. My comment could mean a number of things, but generally it would signify little more than the fact that the baby had progressed normally, and that he looked and acted like a six-month-old baby. Of course, if the baby were my grandchild, it might mean a great deal more, but even then it would never be understood to mean absolute flawlessness so that all future development could no longer be envisioned. If two or three years later this same baby still acted like a six-month-old baby then he could hardly be called a perfect child. In the case I have described, I have used the word perfect in a relative manner dependent upon certain pre-understandings. I was simply acknowledging normal growth and development that had not been marred by any serious physical or mental aberrations.

Other illustrations come to mind. I have a friend who is a carpenter by trade. Personally, I think that he is a craftsman in the true sense of the word. He comes to my house, he takes measurements, and when he brings back the shelves, windows, or whatever it might be, lo and behold they fit exactly, or “perfectly.” There always seems to be a quality of “perfection” to whatever he makes. Recently, there was a guest in my home who happened to be a professional golfer. Talk about “perfection,” just about every shot with club or iron was perfect. I must have uttered the word two dozen times in one game. Once in a while I myself hit a perfect shot, that is, I used the right club and was able to do what I was supposed to do with the ball. The objective or the purpose in hitting the ball was realized.

Undoubtedly, there are a number of differences between a \$24,000.00 Rolex wrist watch and the \$24.00 watches that I see on sale in department stores. But, regardless of what these differences might be, both the expensive and the cheap watch are constructed to keep time. The Rolex watch, in spite of its inherent value, if it failed to keep accurate time, would be imperfect. Using the word “perfection” in this context depends on preunderstandings about the essential purpose of a watch; not on mere outward appearance. Something similar might be said about a common sewing needle, or an ordinary hammer and nail. In and of themselves, they hardly qualify as being objects of perfection. But when the practical end of their design is in evidence, then the idea of perfection is suggested. These objects were designed for a particular *telos* (Greek, “end”), and it is only when they are used in achieving their *telos* that their “*perfection*” can be fully demonstrated.

I have labored the point enough. I need to bring these illustrations back to the subject of “perfecting sanctification.” The practical side of the Christian life is tied up with the purposes of God in the plan of salvation. If salvation were nothing, but a fire-escape from Hell, then why didn’t God take us to Heaven the moment he saved us? Obviously, such an idea falls a great distance short of the biblical teaching concerning salvation. A person does become a child of

God the moment he believes the Gospel. He then is expected to live a life of obedience before his heavenly father (1 Pet. 1:14-16). It is such obedience that perfects sanctification. The new positional relationship sanctifies him, but unless he begins to realize the practical purpose of his sanctification in his every day life, he can never apprehend the “perfection” or, the growth and development that God expects of him.

As I have said repeatedly, the faith response to the Gospel is only the beginning. It opens the door, so to speak, to an experiential knowledge of God. The believer steps through the open door to a treasure house of exceedingly great and precious promises and to the degree that he interacts positively to these promises he can become effective in perfecting sanctification (2 Peter 1:3-8). It is only by his faith obedience to the Word of God that he can accomplish, arrive at, complete or “perfect” the purposes for which God saved him.

By way of further analogy; picking up on how the idea of perfecting sanctification is related to the overall purpose of salvation, let me return to the common sewing needle once again. Disobedience, or the failure of faith, can be likened to the blunting of the point of a sewing needle. Some sewing might still be possible, but the effective purpose has become greatly impeded. Yes, the needle is nothing but a needle, but its practical service-ability has become something less than perfect. Likewise, a child of God always remains a child of God, but disobedience renders his practical sanctification less than perfect. His quality of life falls short of that which should accompany salvation.

Practical perfection then, in the light of what has been said so far, must never be used in an absolute sense to mean flawlessness, or sinlessness. The passages in both Old and New Testaments that use the word perfect in describing the lives of flesh and blood men were not depicting them as being sinless, but were simply passing judgment on a level of spiritual development in accordance with standards established by God himself. They were “perfect” people only in the sense that they fulfilled the responsibilities to which God had called them. They possessed a “perfect heart” because, and only because, they were walking in the truth. The effective force of their faith had brought their growth and development to a level with which God himself was well pleased.

In this connection, let me return once more to Paul’s first epistle to the believers at Corinth. Again, I have two verses that I would like to place side by side. *“However, we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nothing”* (1 Cor. 2:6). *“Brethren, be not children in understanding: however, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men”* (1 Cor. 14:20).

First, let me call attention to the word “perfect” in the first reference and to the word “men” in the second verse. Both words, while being different in English, are translations of the same Greek word *teleios*. As might readily be concluded, this word hails from the root word *telos*. If we were to take the time and trouble to look carefully at the context we would discover that the matter on hand had caused Paul to make a clear contrast between maturity and immaturity. The ones who are viewed as “*perfect*” are the ones who had arrived at a level of spiritual understanding that was able to assimilate divinely revealed truth. When I say, assimilate, I mean that the divine revelation had entered the mind to the degree that it controlled both thought and behavior, and when this happens a believer can be described as being “mature” or “perfect.” The “immature” or “imper-fect” believer would then be the one who fails to assimilate the Word that comes from God.

Earlier, I made reference to Colossians 1:28 and 4:12. Put these passages together with the two verses just quoted from First Corinthians (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20), and it should be quite clear that spiritual perfection, or the perfecting of sanctification, is nothing less than that continuous process of growth and development that receives its impetus from the dynamic interplay between faith and the revealed will of God. A young convert in Christ can be part of this process. He might not manifest the knowledge and maturity of an older convert, but he can nevertheless, relative to his faith-obedience, be found "*perfect and complete in all the will of God*" (Col. 4:12). In P.T. Forsyth's words, he experiences a "*harmony of relations with the will and grace of God.*" By the way, Forsyth's little book, entitled *Christian Perfection*, contains an excellent theological discussion of this aspect of the question. However, don't expect to find it in any local book stores. It was published about one hundred years ago.

A CONCLUDING WORD

Before bringing this study to its conclusion, I would call attention to one other Greek word that is more often than not translated by the English word "*perfect.*" The word is *katharizo*. Since it is usage that determines meaning, more than etymology, it would be worth the time and effort to peruse a few of the passages where the word and its cognates occur. To get started, a beginning could be made with the following references: 2 Corinthians 7:1 and 13: 9, 11.

As far as I am concerned, from the accumulated implications derived from these particular passages, I would contend that the "perfection" that is intended is something that results from the making of certain adjustments in one's life; which results in better interpersonal relationships, which in turn, leads to a maximization of potential for more productive practical Christian service.

Quite a mouthful, but the substance is in direct line with the essential thrust of what "perfecting sanctification" is all about. If my reader were to check a reliable critical Greek lexicon, he would find that the word *katartizo* carries overtones that bear the meaning of fitness, adjustment, restoration, and knitting together. It is as an end result of the actions suggested in the meaning of these words that perfection is realized. But let me emphasize once again, the perfection that is intended must not be construed to mean sinlessness. Greek cognates are also found in Galatians 6:1 and in Ephesians 4:12. In the former, *katartizo* is translated "*restore,*" and in the latter, *katartismos* is rendered "*perfecting.*" The con-texts in both passages bring out the same ideas as were just stated. When Christians are properly adjusted in their fellowship with God, and consequently with each other, they are able to minister more effectively, which, in turn, leads to their own greater growth and development. In such a condition, they can be described as being perfectly knit together. The meaning is always that of adjusting relationships according to God's will. And this can only be done by obedience to the revelation that is found recorded in the Holy Scriptures. Paul wrote to Timothy that, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, in order that the man of God may be perfect* (Greek, *artios*, meaning, "fitted, equipped, complete, adapted," etc.) *thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Through faith-obedience to Holy Scripture, a Christian can become perfect, that is, can be completely equip-ped for that quality of life that truly pleases God.

When a soldier is trained and dressed in battle gear, or an athlete is in appropriate togs reflecting confidence and prime physical fitness, or a skilled technician with his particular tools, or a bride in wedding dress, or a child dressed for the first day of school with books, pencils, and lunchbox in hand, what is the one word that is uttered to describe the impression that anyone of these examples has created? Is it not the word “perfect?” Likewise, any sincere Christian, by intelligent application of the truths of Scripture can stand perfect, that is, he can be made ready for an effective and productive life in his service for God.

By way of conclusion, let me say that the essential thrust in the idea of “perfecting sanctification” is not negative but positive. I would emphasize this statement because I think that it is always tragic when Christians allow the distortion of biblical doctrine to discount its efficacious value. Since when did abuse, or misuse, cancel correct use? The perfecting of sanctification should never be confused with what goes under the heading of “sinless” perfection. According to Holy Scripture “perfecting sanctification” is a doctrine that leads to sinning less, but certainly not to sinlessness. It is not something that takes place in the “*twinkling of an eye.*” Rather it is part and parcel of the normal process of spiritual growth and development. It begins with the “sanctified” relationship that belongs to everyone who believes the Gospel, and thus is found “in Christ.” It is this positional relationship with God that gives entitlement to the claim to be a child of God, and it is this position, with all that it entails, which should impact on daily behaviour patterns. The more that it does, the more the experience of sanctification can be said to be perfect. (e.g. 1 John 1:8-10; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; John 1:12; Col. 4:12; 1 Thess. 5:23).

In the final analysis, it all comes back to a simple brief formula, namely: *SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS DEPENDENT ON DISCIPLINE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF FAITH.* The mind digests the knowledge of Holy Scripture, and faith translates it into obedience. In such a manner, “perfecting sanctification” is then experienced because, in practical terms, the will of God is realized in the daily responsibilities of life.

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