

Faultless or Flawless?

“Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of an eternal covenant, restore you in every good thing, to the end that you may do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing before Him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20,21) (Author’s translation).

In the constant struggle to maintain a workable and satisfactory relationship to Christ, we are often confronted with the problem of perfection. Believers are rarely satisfied with their performance and assume that Christ is not satisfied with them. This, of course, affects their peace of mind as well as their confidence in prayer and the enjoyment of their relationship with Christ. It is difficult to maintain a satisfactory relationship with other persons if we are constantly feeling guilty in their presence. With Christ it is not so much a matter of sin, per se, it is of unworthiness and inadequacy. Unfortunately, the leadership of the Church has tended to foster these feelings rather than alleviate them. This is often for the sake of leverage in promoting their projects and programs. No one ever seems to do enough. Thus, the message from the pulpit, rather than bringing encouragement and enrichment, seems always to focus ultimately on the believer’s performance. The fellowship of believers ought to be a refuge from the battering winds of life in the world, but is often “a pep rally” to induce more vigorous efforts, or a “woodshed” experience of chastening for human failures.

But God has called us unto peace and rest in Him, for the “weary and heavy-laden.” Where then is the peace? Where the relief from burdens? If one can never feel that one has completely satisfied God’s requirement, one can never have the peace and rest that is promised. Unfortunately, no matter how much one may do in striving for, perfection, it never seems, in the minds of the leadership, to be enough. The truth of the matter is that most of the religious exercises imposed on believers in the name of “Christian perfection” is in the flesh. And the flesh is never satisfied, whether it be in the earthly realm or the spiritual. No matter what one may acquire in the way of possessions, the flesh always wants more. It’s the treadmill of “diminishing returns”—it takes more and more to satisfy. That is not only true of possessions, but also positions. One must constantly reach for higher goals. And it is also true in the religious realm. It is typical of the flesh to reach out for “excellence” or “perfection.” It is not so much a motivation by the Holy Spirit, as it is the fleshly pursuit of superiority. The common expression—“I must do my best for Jesus”—has the familiar ring of competition, either with oneself or with others. Paul found the Corinthians immersed with this competitive spirit and chided them for comparing themselves with one another and rating their performance. Paul said “I do not even judge myself.” He told them that it was not wise for them to make these comparisons, because it only ministered to pride. “It is after all,” he said “the work of the Holy Spirit in them that made the difference”—“What do you have that you have not received [as a gift]?” A wall motto of great insight goes like this—“Look at yourself and be miserable; look at others and be envious; look at the Lord and be happy” (Author unknown). The only sound and true motivation comes from the Holy Spirit within and is not the result of fleshly religious exercises. The religious flesh can be readily identified by the fact that one is never satisfied. All efforts to prove something to God as to one’s

earnestness or fervency or piety are futile, inasmuch as He already knows whether one is earnest or fervent or pious. We can never barter with God—so many pounds of piety for so many pounds of response from God.

Perhaps at the heart of the controversy is the perception of “perfection.” There are two words in the Greek that are translated (or rather mistranslated) by the same word—“perfection.” The truth of the matter is that there is no word in the Greek New Testament as applied to humans, which corresponds to our English concept of “perfect.” There are two words that are usually so translated—*teleo* and *katartidzo*.

Teleo has the meaning of completeness or consummation or fulfillment. It does not mean flawlessness. An object is fulfilled when it serves the purpose for which it was created. Thus, an automobile serves its purpose when it transports passengers. It may be battered and inefficient, but it is, nevertheless, fulfilled. The author had a friend who had a restored Model T Ford, which he parked in his backyard and used as a library. The car was flawless in its restoration, but was not fulfilled as to its purpose. Human beings—created in the image of God—are fulfilled when they receive His Spirit in them. No amount of good deeds or human achievements will ever suffice to bring that fulfillment apart from the Holy Spirit, conversely, there may be many flaws in the individual personality and performance, but as long as they possess the Spirit within, they are complete or consummated. A text in the New Testament that has caused a great deal of consternation is Matthew 5:48—“*Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*” The problem is resolved in the proper translation of the word *teleo*—fulfilled or consummated. Properly translated the text should read, “*Be ye therefore fulfilled as your Father in heaven is fulfilled.*” The glory of God is the ultimate fulfillment of all things and “*We are called unto His glory*” (I Peter 5:10) as well as being “*partakers of His Divine nature*” (II Peter 1:4) as Peter tells us. This fulfillment comes with the indwelling presence of Christ. Created to be like Him and to share His glory, the failure of the human race to maintain this position through the entrance of disobedience and sin, was overcome in the coming of Christ as Redeemer and Restorer of the lost glory.

The word *teleo* is used again in I Corinthians 2:6 (another difficult passage) where Paul says, “*We speak wisdom among them that are perfect . . .*” Was he suggesting that the Corinthians were flawless? Or was he speaking only to an elite group who had achieved flawlessness? The matter is resolved in the proper understanding of *teleo*. Paul was not speaking to the unfulfilled Greeks, who knew only the wisdom of this world, but to the fulfilled believers, who had become filled with the Spirit of the “Master of the universe.” The Corinthians were hardly perfect, but possessing the Spirit of Christ, they were fulfilled.

The other word, usually translated by “perfect,” is *katartidzo*. It means “mended,” “repaired,” “restored.” We first meet the word in Matthew (4:21) where Jesus is walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and encounters Peter and James and John “mending their nets.” The word, “mending,” is from the word *katartidzo*. This is the word used in the passage quoted above—“The God of peace . . . restore [mend, repair] you, so that you may do His will.” The prevailing idea here is restoration and not perfection. Apart from the Spirit of Christ, no human could successfully do the will of God. So, once again, we are not dealing with

flawlessness, but recovery. If, for example, one were to break an expensive antique vase, one could mend it so that it would be functional, but it could never again be perfect in the sense of flawlessness. The antique dealer would no longer be interested in it.

So the believers are repaired and restored and fulfilled, but not perfect. As long as we are on the earth we will have to face the human fallibilities and weaknesses of this earth. Paul faced it and found his strength, not in his flesh, but in his spirit—not in religious exercise, but in the presence of Christ within. God’s strength was made perfect [*teleo*—fulfilled] in His weakness.

It is in this vein that Jude can say that Christ is able “to present us faultless before Him.” We are faultless, but not flawless.

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