

Perfect---Perfection
Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 3:12,15; Colossians 1:28; 4:12

The words "perfect," and "perfection," when connected with the believer, are words which put fear into our hearts because we know we are not perfect. It scares us because we attach to it the meaning of sinlessness, i.e. sinless perfection, which is not a Biblical doctrine. Another false doctrine which is taught is that the old nature is eradicated at conversion. We learn our old nature is put to death in our union with Christ, but we also know it is still within us warring against our desire to be experientially holy in our walk. Believers are declared righteous in God's sight though the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ and that is our position, but our experience often does not match our position.

The experiential aspect of perfection is the constant striving to be what we know God wants us to be, i.e. Christian perfection, and has already declared us to be in Christ. Without this desire to strive for experiential perfection we ought to question our standing before God. Every true believer has the revelation of the sinfulness, the evil, and the wickedness of his own heart from God. Unless God shows us our hearts, we do not know them, or the depths of their wickedness. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, . . ." (Jeremiah 17:9,10). This revelation comes to each believer in greater and lesser degrees (some are greatly humbled, others less), but this knowledge is in all awakened sinners as the Holy Spirit reveals the glories and perfections of our Saviour to us. Every advance in grace is accompanied by a new view of indwelling evil, and a loathing of self.

We have a tendency to downplay the meaning of perfection. We have the tendency to lower the standard of perfection as well. There could be several reasons why we would like to lower the standard. (1) We would rather live in the flesh. (2) We are spiritually lazy. (3) We are content in our present state. But we should remember that God does not lower His standard, but meets our great need with the promise of His grace (2 Corinthians 12:9,10). Whenever we begin to grow weary or weak in our resolve to follow after Christian perfection, we need only to view the cross of Christ, and consider His sufferings for us.

The word "perfect" has several meanings in Scripture, "to be upright, whole, undefiled, complete, mature, or consummate." If we define the opposite, i.e. imperfect, we have something defiled, incomplete, immature, unfinished, etc. A four legged chair which has only three legs is incomplete. This same chair with four legs, but with a scratch across the seat is imperfect. A physical adult with only a child's understanding is immature, or imperfect as to adulthood in understanding. Other meanings are seen in the animal sacrifices, "without blemish" (Leviticus 22:19), "without spot" (Numbers 19:2), and in those who walk in the way of the LORD "undefiled" (Psalm 119:1).

**Perfection in Scripture is based on our personal knowledge of the truth,
and our personal experience according to the truth.**

A. First mention (Genesis 6:9; 17:1).

a. Noah. This tells us the corrupted earth is about to be destroyed by God because ". . . every imagination of the thoughts of his (man's) heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). The condition of man in that day (and our day) is described for us by Paul in Romans 1:18-32. It was amidst all of this that we find recorded, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (6:8,9). Now Noah certainly was not morally perfect for he also was born inheriting Adam's sin nature. What "perfect" means concerning Noah is that there was no blemish as to his pedigree. In the

wicked and sinful conduct of all the world around him, Noah had kept himself and his family pure and undefiled in his physical lineage. He was also upright and pure in his spiritual conduct before his contemporaries (both before and after the flood). "And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him" (Genesis 7:5).

b. Abram. "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him. I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Genesis 17:1). Here the word "perfect" means to be without guile, i.e. without disguise, deceit, hypocrisy, or to be honest. Before his call by God Abram lived in the heathen country of Chaldea which was an idolatrous nation. He was amidst all kinds of evil practices and idolatrous beliefs. Now Abram had acted in the flesh for Ishmael, for the flesh neither likes to believe or wait, but God tells Abram to leave all to Him, to trust Him, and He would give him a son of promise in Isaac. He was not to walk any more in deception and hypocrisy. The Lord said of Nathanael, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" (John 1:47). Paul told the saints in Thessalonica, "For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile" (1 Thess.2:3). Peter states, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" (1 Peter 2:1). He also states, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:21,22).

B. The Law of the LORD (Psalm 19:7: 119:1).

These verses give us another idea of perfection, i.e. that of completion. "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: . . ." This tells us that the Word of God is the only necessary need in the conversion of a man. It is complete within itself and needs nothing else to accompany it, i.e. man's works. The Word of God is quick and powerful in the hands of the Holy Spirit bringing the dead sinner to life and enabling him to believe. We learn that the believer who walks in the law of the LORD can be undefiled and in so doing is blessed.

C. The Gospels (Matthew 5:48).

The Lord is giving the polity for a coming kingdom by setting forth exhortations for obedience. Knowledge is essential for a Biblical walk. We know that holiness is being Scriptural. We become holy in our walk by putting into practice the words of the printed page. Here the Lord exhorts them to be perfect even as their Father in heaven is perfect. What does He mean? I believe the Lord is giving them knowledge in order that they might walk in obedience. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love neighbor, and hate thine enemy" (Matthew 5:43, in reference to Leviticus 19:18, and Deut. 23:3-6). Then the Lord says to them, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: . . ." (Matthew 5:44,45).

By their obedience to this exhortation they would be perfect even as their Father in heaven was perfect, i.e. the Father loved His enemies. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. . . For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8,10). By Divine revelation our knowledge is being completed or furnished, and our walk will be based upon the knowledge we possess. Thus we are growing into the perfection of knowledge, and our experience is being perfected by obedience to the knowledge we possess.

D. James and John.

Both give exhortations concerning Christian perfection. "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body," i.e. to control the tongue is to control the whole body, or be fully mature (James 3:2). "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love," i.e. is not mature and has not come to understand the love of God fully (1 John 4:17,18).

E. Paul's epistles.

There are many references to the word "perfect" in the Scriptures, but because of time we cannot look them up now. However if you will take time to do so, you will find it a very profitable study. In the revelation given to Paul we find the progression of (1) knowledge, and (2) obedience. Paul's revelation changed many things. For instance we read, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38,39). When there was a dispute between the apostles and Paul concerning what the newly converted Gentiles should do the answer was to obey four laws (Acts 15:28,29).

When Paul wrote the Galatian letter he said, "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:2,3). As for the Corinthians we read, "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish (pray), even your perfection" (2 Corinthians 13:8,9). To the church in Thessalonica he wrote, "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more" (1 Thess. 3:9,10). Paul would have them come to the maturity and completeness of brotherly love in experience.

"Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophecy 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: 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 13:8-12). This passage is usually made to refer to Paul obtaining further revelation, and when he would come to the revelation of the Body of Christ then the kingdom knowledge would pass away, but that is reading into the passage something it doesn't say. It is my opinion that Paul was referring to the fact that he only had imperfect knowledge of the Kingdom of heaven and the Pentecostal powers of that age, and when Christ returned and the Millennium began they would see all of it perfectly, i.e. it's completion. What did Paul know at this time? We must know the scope of the epistle and put the revelation in it's proper dispensation.

When we study Paul's epistles we find the foundation of perfection and what it is to us as members of the Body of Christ. We also get a clear idea of it's meaning because we receive the full revelation of God (Colossians 1:25). Every believer is declared righteous in the sight of God through the finished work of Christ. This is our justification and position by grace. This is God's work alone. This begins our Christian life and our knowledge of God. This begins our understanding of the work which Christ accomplished on our behalf. This begins our knowledge of what our Christian walk is to

be like. This begins our knowledge of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to each other as believers.

We can only walk uprightly, or in a perfect manner, as we have the knowledge to do so. **Imperfect knowledge of the truth rightly divided leads many to try to walk imperfectly.** (Much like the Galatians, 3:2,3). Once the full revelation of truth was known, perfection was in knowing and doing the complete will of God. Walking in the truth of the one new man with Christ the Head, as members of His body, of his flesh, and of his bones, and as members one of another. This was the burden of Epaphras for the Colossian saints. ". . . always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12). Perfection in revelation or knowledge had reached its end, i.e. complete knowledge, fully finished, maturity. Now Christian perfection could be fully practiced by obedience to the knowledge received.

The knowledge itself was perfect, complete, full. ". . . the fulness of him that filleth all in all. . . And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 1:23; 3:19). "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:10). Paul states that the gifts of men were for the perfecting of the saints, 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 stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). To the complete knowledge of the one new man in union with Christ it's Head.

After the revelation of the mystery of "Christ in you, the hope of glory," Paul states, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily" (Colossians 1:28,29). This perfection would be that completeness of knowledge which goes beyond the Kingdom of heaven revelation. It is the knowledge of that which is all of grace and which sees the believer quickened together, raised up together, and seated in heavenly places together with Christ, i.e. perfect knowledge.

Paul refers to "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). I believe this refers to his full and complete revelation of truth because it was far superior to what he gave up (3:4-6). Then he records, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect (have full knowledge), be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (3:15). But concerning his walk Paul states, "That I may know him, . . . Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect (fully mature in Christian experience): but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (3:10,12,14).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect (**both in knowledge and experience**), throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Doctrine tells us what is right. Reproof tells us what is not right. Correction tells us how to get right. Instruction keeps us going right.