

Perfection

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The drive for perfection is in us all; it comes from the image of God, who is perfect. But can we be perfect? The first words out after doing something wrong are often, "Well, I'm not perfect!" The drive for perfection in us, however, does not let us rest with failure, so we have all set our wills to strive repeatedly, to try to reach perfection.

A great deception hides behind the human willing toward perfection. This deception is simple and seemingly defensible because it rests on the assumption that what we do, measured against a standard, reveals our level of perfection—as if we take a test every day, with a score, that lets us and the world know how we have progressed toward or away from perfection. The good person hopefully lives a life that looks like a good sales chart, with a steadily climbing line.

Some even think that if growth toward perfection doesn't progress well enough in this life, that the individual makes return visits, reincarnated, until a passing grade opens the door to a happy forever in the next dimension. The sum of such thinking is a deception because it reduces to no more than, "I work to improve myself." The measure of perfection is the human self and what it does or does not do, making life a mere imitative act of some standard.

The Bible calls this deception, and Christians know better than to base going to heaven on such foolishness. The Bible describes salvation as God's gift through the atonement of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. One sin damns a person, and only a perfect savior, incarnated, could atone for our sins. So Christians know better than to approach Saint Peter at heaven's gates with a good report card of compensatory works and built up character through doing good. Non-Christians, however, still labor under the deception that God requires no atonement and that recycling

is the way to go until the aluminum self takes on the correct properties through vigorous self examination and improvement.

This deception sadly does not confine itself to non-Christians but can carry over into Christians trying to be like Christ. I remember my mother-in-law, Mimi Anderson, giving me things to read by Norman Grubb when I was in my 20's. Norman repeatedly made the point in his books and talks that self-improvement is the big lie: the self cannot improve. For years, this did not sink in, though I mentally absorbed the ability to recite and teach a lot of what Norman shared. I remember once in Duncanville, Texas hearing Norman speak at a small church, and what he said went by me. I did catch enough of his point to ask him later, "What do you think about hard work?" He answered without hesitation, "I do as little of it as possible." I went away purple with rage, and I leave you dear reader to discern why. He had read my spirit in the question as I had read his spirit in listening to his talk.

I had that quest for perfection that I mentioned earlier, which we all have. Until colliding with the Bible, my quest was eased by the fact that I didn't live by a strict, unchanging standard. I could always lower a standard or redefine it into manageable terms for myself. Immutability and impossible absolutes did not exist for me. I knew that I needed a savior, but I saw the rest of life as up to me, and I intended to live life as I pleased in carnal pleasure. However, this led to what I later looked back on and recognized as the first signs of depression, for after the season of pleasure life lived in the flesh is the withering branch. One morning I read the early chapters of I Corinthians and God revealed to me that life comes from the Spirit. I got that skewed, though, for I reasoned, "The Spirit wrote the Bible, the Spirit is perfect, so if I learn the Bible well enough, I can become perfect."

I could tell you my testimony of Bible memorizing, Christian books, seminars and practical efforts, but that is not my scope here, and you have your testimony of all the ways that as a Christian you tried to perfect yourself. So let me skip ahead to the failure part where the more we read the Bible, the more we realize that we are totally unlike what it says. So we try, and we

try again, and we live in a Romans 7 experience of loving God but hating ourselves, perhaps even putting perfection off to our future life in heaven, resigned to endless struggle and failure while here on earth in these mortal bodies, supposedly with two natures warring in us.

This does not sound very glorious. Now, let's come back to Norman's point from the Bible that self-improvement is the big lie; the self cannot improve. The Biblical basis for this assertion is simple: the Bible calls us temples, branches, and vessels. At first, these sound innocuous enough, but they have a sting to them easily missed by the person still locked in trying to become a better Christian. To break the deception that the Christian life is what we do, or what we do with God helping us to be like Him, God has to reveal to us His simple intent from the scriptures, that He created us for ONE purpose—to contain Him and express His life in us and as us in a union.

This is radically beyond the general "Jesus is in my heart" version of "Christ in you the hope of glory" of Colossians 1:27. I knew for years that Jesus was in my heart, but I still lived life as if I was the one living it, meaning that I lived by my efforts plus some supposed help from God, if I even wanted help, which I did not most of the time. Though I did not yet know the term "no independent self," I lived as if I were an independent self and still wanted to be one, even when I learned that God created us to be temples, branches, and vessels.

The reason that I still lived as if I were independent is that I did not see that these Bible illustrations of God's purpose for us mean that we are powerless. I started to write "completely powerless," but that is more of the deception. Powerless means zero power. Let's look at the first illustration, that of the temple. In the Old Testament, the people doubtlessly thought that the temple was beautifully ornate, as were the attire and implements of worship. But clearly, nothing was like the presence of the Shekinah glory, the living presence of the Lord, which came to abide above the ark and between the cherubim. Nothing else in this world or the next could duplicate that or be that.

God created us as temples (1 Cor. 6:19) to contain His glory. This is not a place for a full lesson in biblical anthropology, but let us say that God is one who knows, wills, and desires; so to make us in His image, He created us with those same capacities so that He could indwell us and express His life as our life. Wait a minute, "What about me?" we cry. That's a good question, but the Bible mystery is this: we find our lives by losing them. Not until I agreed with God that I had lost my life, did I find my life—the life I had always looked for, but looked for by my own thinking and doing as if I were an independent self. If we back up from our 1 Cor. 6:19 verse, we find in 6:17 "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (NASB).

The point then is this: God created us to contain Him, yet He also wanted us to be persons in His image that live lives with the consciousness of being real selves who know, will, and desire. But we must not think that we are He or that we can be like Him; that would only say that we can be God too. This is what blasphemy really is, thinking that we can be like God. Lucifer grasped that lie and turned into Satan, and he, as the devil, has been spinning that lie ever since in us wherever he can.

We see from our two verses so far that God created us to be creatures that He indwells. More than indwelling, though, He means that we join to Him in an inseparable, fixed union whereby we no longer live, but He lives in us and as us. In this union we find our lives by seeing our total powerlessness to be like Him. We can no more be He or like Him than the tabernacle or the temple could in the Old Testament. God, however, wants more than an inanimate building to live in; He wants those in His image to contain and express His glory so that we know fellowship with Him as those united to Him as one Spirit.

Lucifer is the one who thought that he could become the glory, that he could be a good Christian as it were. He sows the same lie into each new baby born into the line of the first Adam, and we propagate and develop that lie without even knowing the satanic origin and energy behind that lie; for we are really born

little temples of Satan until we become Christians, whereby the body death of Christ, which Paul explains in Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20, we die to sin and come alive to righteousness. Here again, I'm getting ahead, but let me say that salvation is Christ's death for our sins, but it is equally Christ becoming our old man (Satan-I union) on the Cross so that we rise in the resurrection as new creations (Christ-I union). You see, we have always been containers of an indwelling spirit, either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness as Romans 6 and Ephesians 2 tell us.

Let's look at our second Bible analogy. God created us to be branches of His tree (John 15:4-5). In my still separated thinking, I always misread what Jesus meant by abiding. I saw a branch on the ground that had to struggle and work to get up off the ground, attach itself to the tree, and strain to remain attached to the tree. No wonder the Christian life seemed laborious and not fun. In my best moments I pictured that I might touch the tree and get some of that good sap. Really, however, that was too dangerous to think, for it meant that I might think that I had arrived; and life in the separated lane is more about trying to get to a place that we never get to and really never think that we can get to anyway. Some glory that is. We think, when we're living from that lie, that we hate it; but we don't hate it enough yet, or else we would let the lie go.

The truth about branches is this: they sit insanelly at rest to the torment of those still loving the doing-doing life of always trying to get to the permanently impossible destination. Branches start out abiding. How about that? They don't even fall off in the night and have to get back onto the tree. This is all dismal news for the hard working Christian trying to be like Christ. My goodness, if the hard working Christian ever got there, would he or she do? I'll tell you what that person would do—REST!—as in Hebrews 4. Oh no, but that's too easy and out of line with the glory of toil.

Abiding means, "You're here; just stay here." The stress of abiding does not come, in biblical terms, from trying to get attached, but from the enemy's efforts to pull us away if we ever once see that we are the branches. Trees experience threat of

disease, storms, lumberjacks, and reckless drivers. The branches don't have a chance without the Tree Keeper, who is the Tree. Okay, we do have mortal bodies, so disease will take them away for now. Trials and tribulations, and God's call to suffering—these all provide stress on the branches. Plenty of lumberjacks and reckless drivers, energized by the devil, also try to pull us away or chop us down. They can't, however. As spirit people, God keeps our hearts united to Him even when our bodies and souls experience attack. That's why I say that living the Christian life is easy; it's excruciating at times, but walking in the Spirit is easy. If a person ever gets these two things in harmony, then he or she moves on in faith without bothering too much over the negatives. Glory occupies our thinking.

What do we do then if we don't work but rest? One of my favorite verses is one that Paul quotes in Galatians from Genesis 15:6 "Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gal. 3:6 NASB). Now we're onto faith and not work that we do. Faith might seem like work, but the Bible calls it only a labor, meaning the travail we feel as we let go and receive. God created us as receivers, not as initiators of doing. God means us to know and enjoy His life in and as us so much that we can't help but do, while knowing that it is "God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13 NASB).

Let's look at our third and last biblical analogy (there are others, such as slave, body, and wife—but I will leave them for another time). God created us as vessels to contain Him as treasure. Earlier I mentioned the tabernacle and temple attire and implements, which God intended to be beautiful and functional but not such that one would say, "Look, that thing is the Shekinah." No, everything about the tabernacle and the temple, from the materials, to the building, to the implements, only aimed toward the presence of the living God.

With us, we are vessels, much like the tabernacle or temple, except that we are created as living clay pots. Our humanity looks and feels quite common compared to angelic and heavenly

mysteries. As humans, we have bodies and souls, and we are spirits. Paul describes us as having “this treasure in earthen vessels” in 2 Cor. 4:7 to make the point that even though we are painfully vulnerable to the brutality of fallen nature and to the evil devices of those still enslaved by the devil—nonetheless, the treasure of who God is in us is the point and not what we experience while living in a world now alien to who we are as new creatures. We would like to be super heroes with eternal powers of body and soul so that we could repel the effects of death. Rather, God means for us to experience these brutalities and praise Him as triumphant anyway since He works life out of our negatives (2 Cor. 4:12). Before experiencing the physical resurrection that will reveal our new bodies some day, we learn by faith to live in the constant resurrection that comes in our spirits through “life-by-quickening” now.

This article started out with the quest for perfection, and the one who sees that perfection as not what we do, might now ask for a final clarifying point on what perfection is. Perfection is a person: God Himself is perfection. Therefore, unless we can become God (an enlightened audience laughs at this idea), we scrap the notion that we can work and improve ourselves. Instead, we now simply receive by faith who He is in us. In this way we find ourselves. The hunt for the self now ends. When it’s no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me, *then* I live. This is high mystery but practical. Forget about all that hard work and especially that reincarnation lie, which is just a recycled nightmare of getting to keep on with all that false self-effort again and again. With Christ’s atonement, God will do nothing more, and we do nothing but receive and enjoy. No wonder we praise Him!

Perfection is God Himself. We live perfect lives by enjoying our union with Mr. Perfect.