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Christian Perfection

DOES THE BIBLE TEACH
THAT IT IS POSSIBLE?

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By KEITH L. BROOKS

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THE BIBLE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

WO Christians are in danger—the one who maintains that he is sinlessly perfect—the other one who is content with imperfection. New Testament teaching on the subject of “perfection” deserves the most careful study. It will be found that while Christians have a perfect standard set before them, no one has a right to claim perfection, and no one has a license to be satisfied with imperfection.

The one bad habit that some men have is boasting that they haven't any. It is a great fault, according to Scripture teaching, to be conscious of none. To profess sinless perfection is to confess a deficiency of spiritual discernment, for from Bible times to the present, those who have known Christ best have felt most their own imperfections. To make such claims, brands one instantly as self-deceived, for “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves (not anyone else), and the truth is not in us” (I Jn. 1:8). It further puts one in the position of calling God a liar, for, “If we say that we have not sinned we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (I Jn. 1:10).

It is evident that many have failed to compare Scripture with Scripture in this matter. Their claims are in conflict with scores of plain passages and without realizing it, they have put themselves on a level with the sinless Christ, and above the level ever claimed by any character in the Bible.

The Bible exhorts the Christian to strive for perfection. It is of no avail to seek escape on the ground that this demand is found in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:48) which some have a habit of assigning only to the Jews—for the Epistles no less than seven times demand perfection and the word "perfect" is used about forty times in the New Testament. However, no Scripture intimates that any saint will **feel himself perfect** prior to the time when the work of perfection is consummated in the complete transformation into the image of Christ at His coming.

Use of the Word

There are several Greek words translated by the English word "perfect." The word in Mt. 5:48 means "complete" and is rendered "of full age" (mature) in Heb. 5:14. The word in 2 Cor. 13:11 means "thoroughly adjusted" and is translated "mending" (in speaking of the nets) in Mk. 1:17. The word in Rev. 3:2 means "filled full" and is rendered "complete" in Col. 2:10.

Careful study of every passage in which the word "perfect" is found will show the following:

1. Believers are perfect in Christ.
2. Believers are to strive to conform to the perfect standard before them.
3. Believers are being made perfect through the agencies of the Spirit and the Word.
4. Believers shall be perfect at Christ's coming.

Let us examine the Scriptures as touching these four points.

1. Perfect Position—in Christ when saved.

Col. 1:28—"That we may present every man perfect in Christ."

We have a perfect sacrifice (Heb. 10:12). By His one offering He is said to have "perfected forever them that are sanctified" (set apart in Him) (Heb. 10:14). Every true believer has a perfect standing in grace before God (Rom. 5:12), a position that cannot be lost (Rom. 8:39) This is not perfection on our part but is a perfection derived from Christ's perfect work on our behalf. Col. 2:10—"Ye are complete (perfect) in Him."

Eph. 1:6—"He hath made us accepted in the beloved.

2. Perfect Pattern before us.
2 Cor. 13:11—"Brethren, be perfect." God's character is defined as our standard, for we are to be perfect "even as the Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). Christ the perfect one is our example (1 Jn. 2:6; 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:21) and He not only furnishes His own a pattern, but power to imitate Him.

3. This Perfecting Work is a Present Process.

"We are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). Note five methods God is employing for the perfection of His children.

- (a) The Spirit—"Now the God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight (Heb. 13:20, 21).
'By the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).
- (b) The Study of His Word. "All Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, fully equipped unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

- (c) Submission to His will under trying circumstances. "Let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and complete, wanting nothing" (Jas. 1:4).

- (d) Sufferings. "The God of all grace . . . after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect" (1 Pet. 5:10).

- (e) The Searching Effect of the Preached Word. "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors, for the perfecting of the saints" (Eph. 4:11-13).

These processes are all at work on every true believer and are successful in proportion to the yieldedness of the individual under the tools of the divine Shaper.

We may say that we are being made perfect—but to say that we already have attained absolute perfection, is going farther than any Bible saint, outside of the Lord Jesus Himself, ever went. The saintly Henry Martyn said, "I have daily and hourly proofs of my corruptions; for when does my heart come up to what my half enlightened understanding approves?"—and so may all testify who know Christ and their own hearts.

4. Presented Perfect at Last.

"Now unto Him who is able to present you faultless before the throne of His glory" (Jude 14)

"When He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3:2). "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part (incomplete) shall be done away, for now we see in a glass darkly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:10).

It may be asked then—"What present incentive has the believer for hastening the work of perfection in this present life? Surely "the love of Christ constrains us" and gratitude to Him for the perfect standing He has given us demands it. Furthermore, not to seek to please Him, brings the child of God under the rebukes of God's chastening hand according to Heb. 12, while rewards are laid up for all who yield to Him in this life.

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