

Up The Ladder of Perfection

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Adapted from commentary on perfection by J.L. Dagg

Ephesians 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

Ephesians 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Ephesians 4:13 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 measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

The process of the Lord in developing spiritual maturity in believers, which is continued during the entire present life, is completed when the subjects of it are perfectly fitted for the service and enjoyments of heaven. In this work of the Spirit, the resurrection of the body is included, and the fashioning of it like the glorious body of Christ. Having been predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son, the purposed work of grace is not completed until we appear in glory, with our bodies like the glorious body of the Redeemer. Saints on earth long for this perfect conformity, and they look forward to it as the completion of their wishes and hopes: (**Psalms 17:15**) "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." This was the object of Paul's earnest desire, the prize for which he put forth every effort. He refers to it in these words: (**Philippians 3:11-12, 14**) "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead: not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

- ❖ (Like a lot of road construction projects we see) The work of grace will not be completed until the second coming of Christ:
 - "He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (**Philippians 1:6**)
 - Then the last change will be made, which will fit us for the eternal service and enjoyment of God, in his high and holy place. (**1Cor. 15:51** Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed)
 - (**1 Jn. 3:2**) "Then we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.
 - (**1 Cor. 13:12**) "...now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also

- I am known.”
- **1Cor. 13:10** But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.
 - and until then every saint must say with Paul: (**Philippians 3:12**) "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect."
- ❖ Besides this final perfection, to which the saints are taught to aspire, there are stages in their progress to which the name "perfection" is, in a subordinate sense, applied in the Holy Scriptures.
- The disembodied saints, now in the presence of God, though they have not attained to the resurrection of the body, are nevertheless called "just men made perfect" (**Hebrews 12:23**). They are free from the body of death, free from sin, free from all the tribulations and sorrows of this world, and are present with the Lord, and in the enjoyment of his love.
 - All this, although they have not yet gone through that transformation in which their spirits join with their glorified bodies which they will receive when our Lord descends from heaven at His next coming.
- ❖ Even in the present life there are stages in the Christian's progress to which the term perfection is applied.
- In the fleshly development of humans, we see a message of the Lord about this stage-like development: first the developing fetus in the womb, then the newborn made fully ready to be exposed to the environment of earth, then the development of communication and motion skills in the toddler, then the development of social skills in the growing child, then the development of a body of knowledge and refining of the use of the body by youngsters, then the perfecting of those and other skills as they move into adulthood, and the refinement of those human capacities through life.
 - This is a kind of fleshly reflection of a similar spiritual movement toward higher spiritual things.
 - So, the newly born-again believer begins to grow in spiritual things, as they move toward spiritual adulthood. Then, when they have attained to an enlarged knowledge of divine truth, they are said to be perfect, or of full age, to distinguish them from those who have learned only the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. This maturing is referred to in **Heb. 5:14**: But strong meat belongeth to them that are of **full age**, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.
 - “full age” here is the Greek word for perfect (telios)
 - Next, we should note that people who show a consistent commitment to be upright, by a godly life, are called perfect.

- So Job (Job 1:1) was "perfect and upright, fearing God and eschewing evil."
- To Christians generally the term "perfect" appears to be applied, in the exhortation of Paul: "Let us, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." (**Philippians 3:15**) He here includes himself among the perfect; and yet, in the same chapter, he affirms that he was not already perfect. (**Philippians 3:12**)
- So, it is clear that the words are used in different senses in the two places. No perfection to which the people of God attain in the present life, includes perfect freedom from sin.
 - Job, though a perfect man, said (**Job 9:20**), "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me. If I say, I am perfect, it also shall prove me perverse."
 - Paul, though numbering himself among the perfect, said, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." "I am carnal, sold under sin." (**Romans 7**)
 - John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves:" (**1Jn. 1:8**) and
 - Solomon, "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." (**Eccl. 7:20**)
- With these confessions of children of God which are declarations of God's word, the experience of Christians in all ages has proven it; and they have found need for daily prayer, and Christ taught that very idea in **Luke 11:4**, "Forgive us our sins."
- In the precept, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect," (**Mat. 5:48**) we may take the term in its highest sense. As we are commanded to love God with all the heart--to be holy because he is holy; it is our duty to be perfectly free from sin; and to come up to this standard, should be our constant aim and effort.
- We cannot attain to a perfect knowledge of God in the present life; but we may follow on to know him. So we cannot attain to a perfect likeness in holiness, yet we may be "changed into the same image from glory to glory." (**2Cor 3:18**)
- Progress in the divine life is full of reward, and full of encouragement, even while we are fighting the good fight of faith, and before we obtain the victor's crown.
 - The promise of grace to help in every struggle,
 - of continued success in every conflict, and

- of final victory,
 - These are sufficient encouragements to cause us to put forth every effort.
 - We should ever press toward the mark, ever keep the high standard of perfection in view, and aim to reach it.
 - Paul said it this way: "Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (**2Cor. 7:1**)
 - Excusing self for sin in one's life must be avoided
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- ❖ **Col 3:5** Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

 - ❖ **Rom 8:13** For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.