

Perfection

#0564

Study given by W. D. Frazee—June 22, 1968

I have a very interesting and important subject to study with you this morning. It is the subject of perfection. We hear quite a bit about it these days, and that is good.

In thinking of this I have been reminded of an old story about two knights in the Middle Ages who fell into a battle over whether a certain shield they were looking at was silver or gold. They battled furiously for some time. Taking a few moments to catch their breath, one of them observed the shield was silver on one side and gold on the other. They were both right.

As we study perfection we shall see that the Scripture presents two great facts concerning it. One is that God requires perfection. He always has required perfection. He always will. A perfect God couldn't require anything else. Not only that, it is the purpose of the plan of salvation to produce a perfected people who demonstrate in this world the fullness of divine perfection. God requires perfection, and He will produce it in His people. That is the first great fact.

The second great fact is that never in this world will we see ourselves as perfect. Never in this world will we, looking at ourselves say, Well, I guess I have arrived. I guess I am perfect. I guess I am sinless. Much less will we say, I know I have arrived. I know I am perfect. I know I am sinless.

Someone may ask how both of these could be true? If one is true the other is not. No. They are both true. This we shall see from the Scripture. Let's turn to Leviticus 16 where we will find in type both these facts.

The 16th chapter of Leviticus is devoted to the great Day of Atonement. Throughout the year the sacrifices had been slain in the court, and blood had been carried into the holy place, representing the transfer of sin from the repentant sinner to the sanctuary, and representing the covering of that sin, its forgiveness and pardon.

On the Day of Atonement, taking an offering and slaying it, the high priest presented its blood on the mercy seat in full and final atonement.

“And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord” Leviticus 16:29-30.

The work of the Day of Atonement was to produce a clean people. Clean from what? Clean from sin. How much sin? All sin. I like that word all.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” 1 John 1:9.

“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” 1 John 1:7.

On the Day of Atonement we have clearly presented to us that the people were to experience a cleansing. Notice, however, that it was the priest that made the atonement. The people did not make it. The priest went into the sanctuary. The priest made the atonement.

The atonement is, of course, the bringing together of God and man; the reconciliation of man to God so there is no longer anything in between. As the song says, “Nothing between my soul and my Savior.” If there is anything between, then we are not at one. The atonement has not been completed. If the atonement is completed, then God and I are one. The work of the priest is to accomplish this. I repeat, the work of the Day of Atonement is to present a people who are at one with God; present a people who are cleansed, that they may be clean from all their sins. That is clear.

What was done in type in the ancient service is to be done in reality in the heavenly sanctuary. Down here today we must expect that Jesus in finishing His work in the heavenly sanctuary, and will present a people who are at one with Him. This is borne out by many other Scriptures.

Notice the other side of this:

“This shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls” Leviticus 16:29.

I would think that would be a happy day, a joyous day, and a day of exhilaration. If it is the day when the priest makes the atonement to cleanse us that we may be clean from all our sins before the Lord, what place does the affliction of the soul have in this experience?

This is what we need to study. These are not two unrelated facts. They are two sides of the same coin. They are the gold side and the silver side of the shield that the knights were fighting about. It is the same shield. It is only as we afflict our souls that the atonement can be accomplished for us by the priest. And it is by looking at the price of the atonement that we afflict our souls.

What does it mean to afflict the soul? It means to sorrow over sin. It means to repent of our transgressions. It means to be sorry over our weakness and degeneracy. It means to weep over our transgressions of the law of God, and over the sinful disposition that caused it. This is our part on the Day of Atonement.

It is the priest's part to make the atonement for us. It is our part, as we gather in the court and around the sanctuary to enter into sorrow of soul over our sins. There are those who are willing to do this for a brief moment. They think that ought to be enough. But keep in mind that these people who gathered on the Day of Atonement to afflict their souls were the same people that through the year had brought the sin offering to cover those transgressions.

This indicates that sorrow for sin does not stop when we confess sin. Sorrow does not stop, it must not stop, and it cannot stop. Don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that God wants us to go around hanging our heads with a feeling of guilt and condemnation. I mean that the feeling of sorrow over sin must deepen instead of wearing away.

Consider the experience of the apostle Peter. Jesus warned him concerning certain weaknesses in his life, and urged him to watch and pray lest he enter into temptation. Peter, assured of his own steadfastness, went right into temptation and fell. Then he experienced a real repentance. Moved by that sorrowing, loving look of Jesus, and a sense of his own utter failure, he ran out from that courtyard where he denied his Lord into the darkness, and went to Gethsemane. In the place where Jesus wept, Peter fell on his face and cried his heart away. He had a real conversion.

We are told by inspiration that although Jesus freely forgave Peter, Peter never forgave himself. This is interesting. It doesn't mean that Peter was so dejected he would never after that do anything for God. On the contrary, we see him with holy boldness witnessing before the Sanhedrin. But the sense of Peter's failure kept him humble. It kept him where he ought to be, with a sense of the fact that within himself he had no righteousness, no strength. It kept him with a sense that he was a poor, weak man.

But mark you, Peter never denied his Lord after that. He never cursed and swore after that. Not once. In his life he demonstrated that Jesus was living in him the righteousness of the law.

Not once did Peter make boastful claims. Oh, no. Peter never forgave himself. He was afflicting his soul. It was that sorrow for sin that Jesus used to keep him from going back to it. If we are sorry enough about a thing, we won't do it again, will we?

There is many a man who falls under the temptation to indulge in alcoholic liquors. After he has gotten drunk and made a fool of himself he feels cheap, and vows to God and man that he will never touch it again. Sometimes those around him feel sorry for him. They try to comfort him. But unless he receives unusual help from the Spirit of God, you know what happens to those human resolutions. They last until the next great temptation. Then he takes the bottle again. Why? Because the sorrow did not go deep enough.

If sin causes us sufficient pain, we won't touch it. But merely waking up the morning after feeling bad over getting drunk is never in itself enough sorrow to keep

a man from going back to it. That is true of all sins. There is not in sin itself that which hurts us enough to lead us to quit it.

But when we see what sin did to Jesus, when we behold the Lamb of God led away to Calvary bearing our sins, and there suffering the just for the unjust, when we begin to get some idea of the fearful cost of transgression as it breaks the heart of the Son of God, we cry out, Oh Lord, is this the nature of sin? If it is, I don't want anything more to do with it.

And mark you, no matter how deep our repentance is when we give up sin, we must have a further work of repentance ever deepening day by day, and this must continue as long as time shall last.

On the Day of Atonement, the last day of the sanctuary year, there came a great climax of repentance as the people afflicted their souls. They were not going around on that day saying, Look at how holy I am. They were not coming there with a report card with a lot of good marks and saying, We are all right, or at least we are pretty close to it. On that day they wore sackcloth and ashes in token of humiliation. On that day they fasted in sorrow for sin. On that day they reached the bottom, as it were, in deep sorrow for transgression. And that was going on in the court and out in the camp while the priest was in the most holy place making the atonement.

Where is our High Priest? He is in the Most Holy Place. What is He doing? He is making the atonement. Where are we? We are in the court. What are we doing? I trust we are doing just what we are supposed to be doing, afflicting our souls.

That means we don't look good to ourselves. We look bad to ourselves. How can that be if we must be perfect when Jesus comes. I think we shall have to leave that part of the work to the One who's work it is to perfect it. Jesus says He is going to get it done. He says that one of the vital means in accomplishing that perfection is that you and I shall afflict our souls and see how weak and unworthy we are.

I was about to say we had better get used to it. We had better not think we are off the track. Feeling weak, unworthy, and unrighteous in ourselves is the straight road through to glory, friends. This is the path that the saints of God have trod these six thousand years. This is the path the remnant tread. But with that sense of our weakness must go the realization of His strength. With that sense of our sinfulness must go the realization of His righteousness. With that sense of our failure must go the realization of His victory, and claiming it as our own.

“For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.
And ye are complete in Him” Colossians 2:10.

You are complete. That is another word for perfect. You are complete in Him. Now I want to read you a wonderful comment on this from an article by the Lord's messenger. Listen carefully as I read these wonderful words:

“Jesus is the pledge of our acceptance with God. We stand in favor with God, not because of any merit in ourselves, but

because of our faith in the Lord our righteousness. Jesus stands in the Holy of Holies now to appear in the presence of God for us. There He ceases not to present His people moment by moment complete in Himself. But because we are thus represented before the Father, we are not to imagine that we are to presume upon His mercy and become careless and indifferent and self-indulgent. Christ is not the minister of sin. We are complete in Him, accepted in the beloved, only as we abide in Him by faith. Perfection through our own good works we can never attain. The soul who sees Jesus by faith repudiates his own righteousness. He sees himself as incomplete" *Signs of the Times* of July 4, 1892.

If we are where we ought to be we see ourselves as incomplete. Is that the way you look to yourself? Well you are. You were yesterday. You are today. You will be tomorrow.

"The soul who sees Jesus by faith repudiates his own righteousness. He sees himself as incomplete, his strongest faith but feebleness, his most costly sacrifice as meager, and he sinks in humility at the foot of the cross. But a voice speaks to him from the oracles of God's word. In amazement he hears the message, 'Ye are complete in Him'" *Ibid.*

Who hears that? Ah, the man that sinks in humiliation at the foot of the cross, recognizing that his righteousness is not enough, his repentance is not deep enough, his faith is not strong enough. Bowing at the foot of the cross, afflicting his soul, he hears the Word of God declare, "Ye are complete in Him."

My dear friends, why do we have a priest in the sanctuary? Because we need Him. He is appearing for us in the presence of God.

"Now all is at rest in his soul. No longer must he strive in order to find some worthiness in himself, some meritorious deed by which to gain the favor of God" *Ibid.*

We are not to look around all through our lives to see if we can find something good to encourage us. Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling. And that is not simply the way we begin the Christian life. That is the way we keep on. As long as we are in this world we need to be hanging our helpless soul on Jesus. I repeat, let's get used to it. What do you say?

"Beholding the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, he finds the peace of Christ, for pardon is written against his name, and he accepts the word of God, 'Ye are complete in Him'" *Ibid.*

I don't look complete. I can't see that I am. Does Jesus say pat myself up a bit and maybe I will pass? Oh, no. We are complete in Him. That is the way we carry on. Jesus is not only the author but the finisher of our faith.

Lest someone should misunderstand, does that mean that as long as we are in this world we are going to keep right on breaking the law over and over and over again? No, my friends. We need to distinguish our thinking between sin and sins. Each sin we commit is a transgression of God's law, but the thing that is back of the act we do is our sinful nature. If we confess our sins, what does God do with them? He forgives them.

Remember Peter's experience. Although he had confessed his sins and knew that God forgave them, Peter knew that deep in his heart the same weakness was still there. Therefore he couldn't go confidently down the street saying, Oh well, I don't need to worry now. I know I will never curse and swear again. I am finished with that. Was he finished with it? Yes. He was as far as his choice was concerned. But he knew that his only hope of keeping the way he wanted to be was to keep looking away from himself to Jesus. Do you see what I mean?

In what we are studying this morning I do not mean to suggest that we can just go on breaking the law and feeling Jesus will forgive us, and break the law and feel He will forgive us, and keep that up until we see the cloud coming. Oh, no. I don't mean that at all. "On that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord." But don't forget, while He is doing it, you and I are to afflict our souls. We are to be sorry and ever sorrier.

The two things go together. They are not separate. Day by day we shall experience a deeper sorrow for sin, a greater dissatisfaction with ourselves. That expresses the thought that I want to get before us. If we linger on that all the while, it will utterly discourage us. Therefore our hope is in looking to our great High Priest in the sanctuary. That is why this text says we are complete in Him.

"How hard it is for humanity long accustomed to cherished doubt to grasp this great truth, but what peace it brings to the soul; what vital life. In looking to ourselves for righteousness by which to find acceptance with God, we look to the wrong place, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are to look to Jesus, 'For we all with open face, beholding in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory.' You are to find your completeness by beholding the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" *Ibid*.

In order that we may catch the impact of this great truth in all its fullness, I want to take you forward past the sanctuary service to the time of trouble. In your imagination I want you to join with me in that group that will welcome the Savior when He comes. There we see that little cloud in the distance. At first it is dark, but as it draws nearer the earth, it is all glorious. We finally discern Jesus.

Do you know what we are going to say? In the first vision the Lord gave His messenger back in December, 1844 we have the picture. She says there was a period of awful silence. All faces gathered paleness (*Early Writings*, pages 15 and 16). The saints said, Who shall be able to stand? Is my robe spotless?

Someone might say, "Why do you talk that way? Weren't your sins all blotted out in the Most Holy place?" Yes. Hasn't God helped you to stand through the time of trouble without a mediator? Yes. Haven't you been delivered from the mobs, and haven't you been glorified so that you now have glorified bodies? Yes. And yet you stand here and say, Who shall be able to stand? and with trembling cry, Is my robe spotless? Of course it is spotless. Why do you say that?

It is no staged play. It is no actor's recitation. It is a sense of the weakness and inadequacy and incompleteness of humanity. And if the remnant who have been sealed and who have witnessed for God through Jacob's trouble, and have been delivered and glorified talk that way, then something similar in the way of humiliation would be appropriate for you and me today. Therefore all claims to be sinless and holy reveal a woeful lack of perception. Ye are complete in Him.

Back now to the scene when the cloud draws near, and there is Jesus. He lets us stand there trembling. I don't know just how long. It says for a period. Even if it is only moments I am sure it will seem like ages. We need it or He wouldn't let us have it. We need that final sense of weakness, humiliation, sorrow of soul over our own human inadequacy. But what He is going to say? My grace is sufficient.

Then the faces of the righteous light up, and in a moment we will be given the final touch of immortality and caught up in the cloud to meet Him, and never again will we have those feelings of inadequacy.

Oh, I long for that glorious hour, don't you? But until then, let us settle down to the fact that repentance and humiliation of soul is part of the program. Let us never get the idea that it is all the program. The deeper the repentance the higher our trust must reach. We must be united in Him. The deeper our sense of humiliation, and the further we look at ourselves and see ourselves beneath the standard, the higher our trust must reach to lay hold of the fact that we are accepted in the beloved and that we are accounted complete in Him.

Never go to a season of prayer without coming forth from your closet knowing that you are accepted in the beloved.

The trouble with the Pharisee that prayed in the temple was that he was reciting his own good deeds. And however accurate his account was of outward performances, he had no idea at all of the weakness and sinfulness of his own heart. But the publican coming up to the temple sensed his great need, and he cried out, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus said he went down to his house justified. He went back home accepted. He went back home counted righteous.

Oh, I trust that every one of you, as you go from this sanctuary today, will go like the Publican—justified, accepted, knowing that you are righteous. But if you go like him, you must first come like him. If you come like the Pharisee to recite your

good deeds, you will go like the Pharisee with nothing but human worth, human righteousness, and that will never meet the judgment. But if you come like the Publican recognizing your weakness, your unworthiness, and afflicting your soul, then on that day shall the Priest make an atonement with His precious blood to cleanse you that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.

“Nothing can for sin atone,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
Nothing good that I have done,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

The more good we do, the less good we will see in ourselves. That is a paradox, but it is the truth, and never forget it. The nearer we get to Jesus, the less we will see in ourselves.

Rest weary soul; the penalty is born, the ransom paid,
For all thy sins full satisfaction made.
Strive not to do thyself what Christ has done,
Claim the free gift and make the joy thine own.
No more by pangs of guilt and fear distressed;
Rest, sweetly rest.

Even in our earnest endeavors to be like Jesus, and we should make earnest endeavors, there is danger that we get our minds too much on forming habits and doing things, and hoping thereby to climb up. We need to simply rest in the love of Jesus.

I am sure there are many things that I must yet learn both in fact and in habit. But my hope is not in my ability to get through the list. My hope is in a Lamb who died for me, and a Priest who lives for me. I know that He has begun a work in my heart, and I am confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in me will perform it and will finish it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

“As we have clearer views of Christ’s spotless and infinite purity we shall feel as did Daniel when he beheld the glory of the Lord and said, ‘My comeliness was turned into corruption.’ We cannot say I am sinless until this vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body” *Signs of the Times*, March 3, 1888.

Will the remnant then ever say, “We are sinless?” No, but God will say it about us.

“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus”
Revelation 14:12.

I would rather have God testifying about that than my testifying about it. And it isn’t that I know down inside I am good but I mustn’t say anything about it because that would be proud. Oh, no. Nothing like that. I actually see myself as weak,

inadequate, incomplete. But when I listen to what Jesus said, when I see Him dying for me and see Him pleading for me, I have to accept what He says instead of what I see. I have to accept His statement that I am accepted instead of my feeling that I am not good enough. That is faith. That is righteousness by faith.

I also accept by faith what seems impossible, that He is going to make me like that. If I should look back over the years that have passed and see what I have accomplished, or what has been accomplished in me by His grace, and project that on into the future, I would say a hundred years wouldn't be long enough to get me ready.

What makes me think I am going to be ready? He said so. But I will never get any courage looking at myself and charting my progress.

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” Hebrews 13:20-21.

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