

The Perfect Church?

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

We all have heard people say, "There is no perfect church." In fact, there is no church that is *not* perfect. The problem is that people make their assessment by looking at men instead of beginning with God.

Of course, none of us is perfect with regard to our behavior. We understand this. Certainly, we all fail, and we all use rebound. Sometimes we hurt each other. But in our daily lives, by yielding to the Word and the Spirit, we are working out growth, which leads to maturity. We are working out what God works within us.

"There is no perfect church!?" The problem with people who make such a statement is that they don't agree with God on the position of the Church.

Consider this: God had chosen each of us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love (Ephesians 1:4). This booklet will show that

God's perspective, from eternity past, sees the Church and its members only in eternal life. Indeed, from the Father's viewpoint, the Church *is* perfect.

Chapter One

THE FATHER'S VIEWPOINT

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and without blame* before him in love:

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:3-7).

"Let us therefore, as many as be *perfect*, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (Philippians 3:15).

“And *ye are complete* in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:10).

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

“ For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3).

Some who have been Finished Work believers for years completely ignore the principle of the perfect Church when a crisis comes up. Philippians 3:15 means that if I am in a church and I am going through a trial, I adjust to the Father’s view on the church. If I understand Ephesians, I am accepted in the beloved. I am complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:10).

God calls each of us to a local assembly (Hebrews 10:25). The Father sees that assembly—provided it preaches and teaches the whole counsel of God—from His viewpoint of eternity past and eternity future. Yet, members of the Body of Christ often will not agree with the Father about the church when trials and problems come.

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

“And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

The next verse says that from now on, we are to know no one after the flesh, not even Jesus Christ, who was crucified in weakness.

Perfectly Hid in Christ

There is not a reason in the world for any of us to forsake being part of a perfect Church. Even if we fail, we are to be thus minded: Name the sin and go back to being perfect in our position once again, understanding that we are accepted, hid, and protected by the Finished Work.

The Lamb was slain for us in eternity past; thus when we believed, we became perfectly hid with Christ in God.

Yes, we sin (1 John 1:8). Yes, we must rebound (1 John 1:9). But go back to the premise—that the Church is perfect in the Father’s eyes. That is the only reason He can even fellowship with us.

The Properly Prepared Table

“Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (Psalm 78:19).

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5).

The table is a place we gather around for a meal. Food is arranged on the table. Family members gather around the table to eat, and what is placed on the table is very important. Even the most modest meals can provide proper nourishment to keep a body healthy and able to function in normal activity.

If a person is expected to work very hard, in more stressful situations, he will probably eat a more hearty meal. Furthermore, he will be thankful to the one who provided the food as well as the one who prepared it. One meal a day, however, is not enough.

When David was out on that lonely Judean hillside, he had a “table” of doctrine. He rested in green pastures—a field of mercy, the place of provision through grace; he had doctrine in his soul. David was advanced in his belief system,

and he understood that he had a table prepared by God in the wilderness.

Demonic Snares

“Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils” (1 Corinthians 10:21).

The devil has set up a table where he serves doctrines of demons, according to 1 Timothy 4. These doctrines promote religion and the efforts of the flesh. “Don’t marry. Abstain from meat” (see 1 Timothy 4:1-3). These are rules from a table of false doctrine.

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

“And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:13-14).

The table of demons becomes “a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto *them*”—speaking of those who refuse to eat from the Lord’s table of grace (see Romans 11:9; Psalm 69:22). In Malachi 1:12, God says that Israel “polluted my table.” God’s table was profaned with familiarity and the doctrines of

demons.* He declared that they “polluted my bread upon mine altar” (Malachi 1:7).

One attitude that reveals familiarity is a lack of appreciation and thankfulness. When circumstances overwhelm us, we need to learn how to draw near to the Lord. To the weary and heavy laden, He simply says, “Come” (Matthew 11:28-30). Then, we learn how to draw near to the Body of Christ, where our hearts are comforted, being knit together in love (Colossians 2:2).

The “perfect” church is filled with imperfect people who give thanks to the Lord often (Colossians 3:15) and communicate their appreciation to the pastor (Galatians 6:6). They may go through hard times, but they count it all joy (James 1:2). They may fall seven times in a day, but they help each other to get up and go on (Proverbs 24:16, Ecclesiastes 4:10). They have been taught that the work was finished for them two thousand years ago on the Cross, and they are very thankful.

** To read more about the sin of familiarity, read Living an Inspired Life from the Breath of God, by Pastor Carl H. Stevens, Grace Publications, 1997, and Love Comes through Honor, by Pastor Paul M. Stevens, Grace Publications, 1998.*

Chapter Two

FEAST AT THE RIGHT ALTAR

“My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee.

“Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.

“Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart” (Proverbs 7:1-3).

“They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge” (Ezekiel 44:16).

Who would want to sit down to eat and just have a teeny sandwich every day, when God provides a table full of godly food and godly doctrine?

God has organized a table of bread from heaven that provides food for the soul. There, we eat His flesh and drink His blood by eating His Word and entering into the cleansing power of the Blood, which is ever cleansing us (1 John

1:7). When we hear doctrine preached by a man of God, we are eating from a table that has been furnished for us by God and the pastor-teacher.

Ezekiel 44:16 says that when we come to God's table, we worship God by receiving the doctrine from the table. Then, as we receive the doctrine from the table, we minister to the Lord with it.

Receive Truth Daily

Proverbs 7:3 tells us to receive God's doctrines and "bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart." The more we hear doctrine, the more our soul is developing into a table; and on that table is every kind of godly nourishment. Think of it as the table on Thanksgiving Day! Spiritually, it is possible for every believer to eat from that kind of table every day.

"Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise ye princes, and anoint the shield" (Isaiah 21:5). When the pressure is on, God's people have a table prepared for them as they go forward with God in the battles.

Song of Solomon 1:12 says, "While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof." This refers to our fellowship

with the sweet scents, the aroma of God: grace, love, and the Finished Work.

Changed at the Pure Table

“And they burn unto the LORD every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the LORD our God; but you have forsaken him” (2 Chronicles 13:11).

The table must be pure because that is where God changes us. In Genesis 35:2, “Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away [your] strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments.”

The Hebrew word for “change” here is *chalah*, meaning to enter into something new, or to come into newness. The grammar indicates that it is an action made in response to an order or command.

Second Samuel 12 tells how God confronted King David through Nathan the prophet. David was responsible for killing Uriah after making Bathsheba (Uriah’s wife) pregnant through an act of adultery. King David repented and the

prophet told him that his life would be spared but that the child would die. The child was born, and for six days the king fasted and sought God; then, on the seventh day, the child died. His servants were afraid to tell him; yet, when David heard the news, instead of grieving any further, he got up. He washed, anointed himself, changed his apparel, and went to the house of God to worship. After that, David went home and ate a meal (1 Samuel 12:1-20).

There was a change. And what happens at God's table? He changes us with His Word and by His Spirit.

"The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycomores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars" (Isaiah 9:10).

Building and changing. That is what happens when we keep coming to the table. This is what God can do when we see that His Church *is* perfect.

Glory to Glory, Day by Day

"There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease" (Job 14:7). The tree will sprout again; there will be a change.

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Every day that we walk in the Holy Spirit, God changes us into someone who is more like Christ. When we woke up this morning, it was to be changed today from yesterday. Yesterday was good, but we are alive today to be changed.

The Christian has so much to look forward to. Daily we can look in the mirror of God’s Word and let the Holy Spirit change us.

The word for “changed” in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is the Greek word *metamorphoo*. It means that we receive the action of a dogmatic assertion of a divine reality. This indicates that the change is ongoing, as we keep receiving from the table that He establishes in our lives through His Church.

Chapter Three

GOD HEARS THE HUMBLE

Our lives are always changing, and most of those changes are according to God's will. There are, however, some things that should never *change*. Proverbs 24:21 says, "meddle not with them that are given to change." That word in the Hebrew is *shanah*, and it implies a diversion from the old pathways spoken of in Jeremiah 6:16: the proven ways of God's redemption.

"For I am the LORD, I change not" (Malachi 3:6).

As we consider this subject of change, we must remember that verse. God does not change. His attributes—His nature of love, His mercy, and His grace—never change. Look at His declaration in Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." The next verse tells us that it is a good thing to be "established"—but more specifically, to be established with grace. Do not remove the old landmarks!

(Proverbs 22:28).

We may think God is changing, because of our limited perspective, but He never changes. We are always the objects of His heart, even when we are out of fellowship with Him because of sin. Therefore, He uses that table, the Holy Spirit, and the plan of God to break us. And as God breaks us, He begins to tell us what happens when the humble are broken.

The word “humble” in the Septuagint is *per-natos*, and it refers to someone who doesn’t get offended, who yields his body and mind to Christ, who becomes inwardly broken by hearing the Word of God inside. A humble person is filled constantly with the Spirit. He doesn’t think too highly or too lowly of himself.

The Protection of Humility

One of the greatest protections for any Christian is to experience the doctrine of humility. In a marriage, in friendship, in family, in business, and on the mission field, the doctrine of humility must take precedence over personal preference.

“LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear:

“To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress” (Psalm 10:17-18).

First of all, God always listens to the humble. Secondly, He prepares their hearts for His plan through the table, through change. Someone who has not been hearing the Word of God is not humble. When you are humble, God causes you to hear. He prepares your heart. He gives you your desire.

“For he shall stand at the right hand of the [humble], to save him from those that condemn his soul” (Psalm 109:31).

“For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him” (Psalm 12:5).

Think about this. If you fail but you remain humble, the Lord will protect you while others are condemning your soul. The Lord guards the humble person who faces oppression. He constantly delivers the soul of the humble (Psalm 72:13). When a humble person is wounded, God delivers him (Psalm 109:21, 22). The Lord delivers the humble from evildoers (Jeremiah 20:13).

God has always come along to protect the humble. Think of some wicked people He pro-

tected:

The Lord protected King Ahab—as in the wicked Ahab and Jezebel. “...because he humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days...” (see 1 Kings 21:29). Ahab became humble and God reversed the direction of his life.

Then there was Manasseh, a king who began reigning at age twelve. After his father had effectively destroyed idolatry in Jerusalem, Manasseh raised up idol worship and abominations involving heathen gods (2 Kings 21). But when the Assyrians bound him and carried him into captivity, Manasseh became humble before God:

“And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,

“And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God” (2 Chronicles 33:12-13).

Humility Takes Away Judgment

Acts 8:26-39 tells how the perfect Church operates through imperfect people. Here, the Lord directed Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch

who became saved and baptized—just from hearing the Scripture. “The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

“In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth” (Acts 8:32-33).

That is such a beautiful passage. Through the humility of Jesus Christ, who was broken for our transgressions, our judgment was taken away. Think of that for a moment. *Judgment was taken away by humility.*

And now, because of Calvary, we are members in particular of Christ’s perfect Church, though we are imperfect people. He still desires to change us more and more into His image, to be more like Him each day. But, How will He perform it? He changes us on the table of doctrine in our hearts.

Then, when He humbles us, He gives us our desire, takes away oppression, and He causes us to hear. On your worst day, if you are humble, you will hear—because the Word of God says it is so (Psalm 34:2).

How does God do it? He uses a perfect Church full of imperfect people. This is His design.

CONCLUSION

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I will dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15).

Revival comes through humility and meekness. Every individual can have his heart revived, his soul refreshed, and his entire life changed through the doctrine of humility exercised in Christ’s perfect Church.

When we are not being changed, God will reveal to us what our hearts are like. He will use various trials and circumstances to bring it out, and whatever comes out of us under pressure is who we are. God allowed Israel to go around and around in the wilderness to show them what was inside of them (Deuteronomy 8:2). For forty years they walked in large circles; but the Lord’s purpose was to bring humility into their

lives so that ultimately they could know God and be conformed to His likeness.

We will always be in a process of being changed into God's image until that day when every member of the Body of Christ will experience the greatest change of all.

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

Oh what a day that will be! At last we will see the perfect Church with perfected people.