

4. How Good is Perfect?

“What do ye imagine against the Lord? He will make an utter end; affliction shall not rise up the second time.” Nahum 1:9. These words of Scripture constitute one of the most amazing promises found in all of the Bible.

God’s Word also declares, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” John 8:36. This amazing promise, that man will never fail again, *will* be carried out in this freedom which He gives to us. Here we have pictured to us a time that is coming in the near future when, not even in thought, will sin raise its ugly head again.

Our first response to this thought is apt to be that with all evil removed there will be no inclination to sin, so obedience will be natural. However, this was the condition in heaven when sin started. And let me further remind you that in times of ease and prosperity man strays farthest from the Lord. Isn’t this one of the major problems of the church today? “Rich and increased with goods,” but destitute of love.

How is God able to make such a sweeping promise? In Malachi 4:1 God says that the cleansing fire that purifies the earth will, in the process, also remove sin—both root and branch. In John 15:5 Jesus says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches . . .” Here Jesus was speaking to His disciples after one had separated himself from the twelve. Would it not be just as true to say that Satan is also the root from which the branches of the world are growing? These are to be consumed in the cleansing fire.

But we must look much deeper to see what is involved in God’s promise of Nahum 1:9, which declares an enemy, shall not arise a second time. The first enemy arose by looking to himself!

There has always been the possibility within the freedom of God’s creation for the root of sin to spring up. How can God promise that not one of His redeemed, or someone from an unfallen world, or even an angel from heaven will ever, even in

thought, rebel against Him? Marvel of marvels, this will be the impact of the plan of salvation throughout God's creation! God, who knows the future, assures us that this will be so.

God's work is already finished for those who dwell in the heavens. Inhabited worlds and angels have been able to rejoice that they have been liberated from the presence of evil angels and from Satan. Revelation 12:12. However, this quarantined earth and its inhabitants are fully aware of the presence of Satan and his workers.

Even so, to some of us sin has not yet become exceedingly sinful. Its deadly nature has not come through to us as malignant (deadly). Somehow we think that we can drop its bewitching influence upon us just before we are permitted to enter heaven.

"Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden . . . Our only hope is perfect trust in the blood of Him who can save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him."¹ To the *uttermost* means saving *from* self not *in* self. The malignant nature of sin is revealed as we trust in self rather than in God's Word!

Could this be the reason why there is in our world today an unprecedented call from every class of society for self-expression? Nations are demanding independence. Cities, towns and villages are all declaring their own authority. Families are being broken almost as fast as they are formed. Children are "doing their own thing" as a direct result of the self-expression atmosphere that permeates the world.

Satan is doing his work well. Thus, self-assertiveness and self-worth are declared to be the answer to personal, as well as public, problems. Think what this spirit started in heaven so long ago. "We cannot retain self and yet enter the kingdom of God. If we ever attain unto holiness, it will be through the renunciation of self and the reception of the mind of Christ."²

Selfish thoughts not only unfit us for heaven, but "When self is woven into our labors, then the truth we bear to others does not sanctify, refine, and ennoble our own hearts; it will not testify that we are fit vessels for the Master's use."³

How are we to be free from self? Hebrews 12:6 tells us, “. . . He chasteneth . . . every son whom He receiveth.” This is to remove every root of bitterness (self) that could spring up to trouble us.

“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh . . .” Hebrews 12:25. How easy to hide self behind a screen of not understanding when He speaks. God does not promise that we shall understand everything before we follow His calling. Hebrews 11 reveals a large number of faithful who did not understand God’s purposes, yet they all obeyed. Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham are just a few. Some might call this blind faith. But I would remind you that God’s children “. . . walk by faith, not by sight.” 2 Corinthians 5:7.

How good is perfect? Perfection is not a state of goodness to be attained, but rather a state of trusting God implicitly without doubting or questioning. It was this characteristic that marked Job’s life and enabled God to say that Job was “. . . a perfect and upright man. . .” Job 1:8.

This commendation from the Lord came in spite of the fact that Job testifies in chapter 42:6, “. . . I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Noah was declared to be “. . . just. . . and perfect . . .” Genesis 6:9. Yes, like Lot, Moses, Abraham, David and Solomon, the Bible record of their lives reveals personal imperfection.

How good, then, is perfect? That depends.

“As the leaven, when mingled with the meal, works from within outward, so it is by the renewing of the heart that the grace of God works to transform the life. No mere external change is sufficient to bring us into harmony with God. There are many who try to reform by correcting this or that bad habit, and they hope in this way to become Christians, but they are beginning in the wrong place. Our first work is with the heart.”⁴

“The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from a love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.”⁵

God has a plan whereby we may be found perfect—not by human effort “lest any man should boast.” This perfection is a marvelous gift from Jesus Christ that is given to all who believe.

“The law requires righteousness,—a righteous life, a perfect character; and this man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God’s holy law. But Christ, coming to earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them.”⁶

How good is perfect? Perfection is a divine accomplishment revealed in the life of Jesus our Lord during His earthly life on this planet. His life reveals perfect trust, total dependence upon His Father for daily living and accomplishing the will of God.

Now He has finished His work—completed everything in our behalf—knowing that we could never in our strength do what God’s law requires. What is our part? Exercise the will! Choose to trust Him! Even if we know that we cannot do what we choose to do, by choosing we open the door for Christ to do in us what we are unable to do for ourselves. So, in truth, the child of God chooses to trust in all things. Then his

work is to let Christ do the trusting through him and refuse to allow circumstances or situations to create doubts in the method Christ is using to do His work.

If we refuse to doubt *His methods of working* in us and simply believe He knows what He is doing, then we will have learned Christ's secret of victory—even in the face of apparent defeat.

Let me close this chapter by quoting my favorite and most helpful paragraph from the pen of one who lived what she wrote:

“The Father’s presence encircled Christ, and nothing befell Him but that which infinite love permitted for the blessing of the world. Here was His source of comfort, and it is for us. He who is imbued with the Spirit of Christ abides in Christ. The blow that is aimed at him falls upon the Saviour, who surrounds him with His presence. Whatever comes to him comes from Christ. He has no need to resist evil, for Christ is his defense. Nothing can touch him except by our Lord’s permission, and ‘all things’ that are permitted ‘work together for good to them that love God.’ Romans 8:28.”⁷

How good is perfect? All the goodness we will ever have is simply a perfect trust in Jesus. “Through the merits of Christ, through His righteousness, which by faith is imputed unto us, we are to attain to the perfection of Christian character.”⁸

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- 1 The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1132, The Signs of the Times, Dec. 30, 1889.
 - 2 Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 143.
 - 3 Selected Messages, book 1, p. 405.
 - 4 Christ's Object Lessons, p. 97.
 - 5 Christ's Object Lessons, pp. 97, 98.
 - 6 The Desire of Ages, p. 762.
 - 7 Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 71.
 - 8 Testimonies, vol 5, p. 744.