

## SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

The young woman spoke with conviction as she said, "It is impossible to keep the law of God." The tone of her voice told that the matter was settled for her.

In one sense she was right. It is impossible to obey God - of ourselves. It is equally impossible to love God above all else, to love our neighbour as ourselves, to generate the spirit of repentance, to atone for our sins, or to change our own hearts. Christianity is full of impossibilities that drive our helpless souls to the lord. Jesus said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible." Mark 10:27.

Setting a moderate standard for ourselves, one that we feel we can comfortably reach, is not what we need. For, were man to become a law to himself, he would soon reduce religion to a way of sin rather than of righteousness. Instead of accommodating Christianity to the human level, Jesus sought to bring man's ideals to the very pinnacle of holy living. Lest we seek a lesser goal, he admonishes us, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matthew 5:48.

Speaking of impossibilities, what could be more impossible than perfection? Yes there it is, clearly commanded by Jesus himself. But such a goal, if it did not end in utter futility, could open a new door to man's glorious restoration. Reason tells us that God could not require anything less than perfection without giving approval to sin in some degree. That would never do, nor could it ever be. With God, compromise is out of the question. Paul reminds us, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Romans 13:14.

Jesus did not try to make men understand Christianity in its complexity, but to accept the gospel in its simplicity. When he spoke of perfection, he made no attempt to define it, except to say that the character of God is an example. Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children.

But there is still the question; How can anyone be perfect as God is perfect? Perfection is never something we gain by doing. It does not take a lifetime to learn that. On God's part, our perfection is an accomplishment. But for us, it is a relationship. In our own right and as sinful men and women, we can never become as good as God. We can never duplicate His character. But it is His purpose that we shall reflect his image more and more. The Scripture says, "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.

The apostle tells us, "For He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Corinthians 5:21. The only true Source or Example of righteousness is divine. Jesus said, "There is none good but One, that is, God." Matthew 19:17.

One of the clearest illustrations of this truth is found in the experience of Joshua the high priest. He is described as standing before the Angel of the Lord. In the account, the shabby clothing which he wore represented his own faulty human character. "Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the Angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." Zechariah 3:3,4.

Joshua gladly accepted the robe of perfection in place of his own poor righteousness. Through the surrender of his heart and the acceptance of the promise by faith, he was brought into union with the Divine that every spiritual grace might be his. So it may be with the humblest believer. "If we abide in Christ, if the love of God dwells in us, our feelings, our thoughts, our purposes, our actions, will be in harmony with the will of God as expressed in the precepts of His holy law. Jesus speaks of the experience of holy living in familiar terms. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman." "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." John 15:1,4,5.

Everything depends upon a right relationship to Christ on our part. So long as this holds true, the tender branch of our lives continues to grow, to become more and more like the Vine, until it reaches maturity. But even then, the same dependence upon Christ must remain.

In this Divine-human bond, the weakness of man is made triumphant over sin through the power of the Infinite. But God does something even more. He applies the merits of Christ's sinless life to each trusting soul. In the eyes of God, man thus becomes one with Jesus in character. Only in this vicarious sense could any be considered perfect. And for our encouragement, the Bible gives more than one example of such perfection. "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." Genesis 6:9. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." Job 1:1. From a human standpoint, both these men had faults and limitations, but clothed in God's righteousness, they were blameless.

One day the trial of our faith will be over, and we "shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." 1 Peter 5:4. Then the Lord will tell the wisdom of His providence and the wonder of His grace as revealed in us. Then we shall understand the deep things of God. But in that day, when eternity unfolds "the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16), none will have reason to boast of himself. The honour will go to Another. For as was true of God's people of old, so will it ever be. "In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our righteousness." Jeremiah 13:6.

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