



THE GOAL IS VICTORY

Quest Lesson A-12

The Problem: When a person becomes a Christian he often expects that there will be no more struggle, that life will be free from conflicts, and that the desire for sin will no longer be a source of harassment. As we have seen in previous lessons, such is not the case. In fact, the struggle often becomes more intense because "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would" (Galatians 5:17 RSV). Before the born-again experience, we gave in to our natural inclinations and went Satan's way without putting up a struggle. Now we turn to the Lord and, by the Spirit, He gives us the victory. But the struggle is intense because Satan is determined to overthrow our faith and to lure us into sin.

Even when we have victory most of the time, we find ourselves sinning every once in a while. The old habits keep coming back, and we tend to fall into the kinds of thought and behavior we hate. We may enjoy the blessings of present holiness and growth in holiness, and yet fall into sin incidentally because we have momentarily broken our relationship with Jesus. These incidental sins are a source of great discomfort and disappointment to the growing Christian. Such sins are not "incidental" in the sense of "unimportant." All sin is lawlessness, and all sin is of the devil (1 John 3:4-8), When we fall in this way, which is so contrary to our life of habitual union with Christ, we turn again to the Lord for forgiveness and renew our relationship with Him, But we are disappointed with ourselves, and crave for victory over those occasional failures that destroy our peace of mind and our upward climb toward heaven.

Is there any hope at all that the occasional sins of the otherwise consistent Christian can be overcome? Is there any such thing as total victory? Does the Lord envision His people as living without acts of sin before His second advent, or has He postponed such victory for us till He provides a miraculous change of character at the time of the advent. The question is the old one that has faced the universe ever since Satan's rebellion in heaven. Can the law of God be obeyed perfectly? Satan, of course, says no. He has a vested interest in convincing people that God's law is unrealistic and unjust. But what does the Lord say? Is He interested in demonstrating that His law can be kept, even by fallen humans like us? Or does He accept our weakness as too serious a hurdle to be surmounted, and settle for a miraculous change at the second advent?

We turn again to the Scriptures for the answer.

Objectives

First, we will consider the divine standard in Old Testament times.

Second, we will look at the divine standard in New Testament times.

Third, we will note that power has always been offered to reach that standard.

Fourth, we will ask; "When does human probation close? Is it at the second coming of Jesus or before then?"

Fifth, when does the Lord expect His believing people to have victory over sin?

Sixth, what does the Bible mean by "perfection?"

I. The Divine Standard in Old Testament Times

What has been God's standard for His people ever since the fall of our first parents? Does He argue that man's fallen humanity makes it impossible for him to obey the law fully, so that his once-in-a-while failures must be overlooked? Or does He expect perfect obedience to His law?

The Word

1. Despite Abraham's occasional failures, what standard did God uphold to Him? Genesis 17:1.
2. To what extent, by God's grace, was Abraham able to arrive at the divine standard? Genesis 26:4-5.
3. What instruction did God give through Moses regarding the lifestyle of ancient Israelites? Deuteronomy 18:13.
4. What is involved in having a perfect heart toward God? 1 Kings 8:61; Psalm 119:1.

Explanation: The Hebrew word translated "perfect" in Genesis 7:1 is tamim, which means "complete, incontestable, blameless whole, perfect, innocent, upright, honest." It is the word used often to refer to the animal sacrifices which were to be "without blemish" (Exodus 12:5; 29:13 Leviticus 1:3, 10; 22:21). It also is used to refer to God as "perfect" (Deuteronomy 32:4; 2 Samuel 22:31; Job 36:4). The same word is used in Ezekiel's description of Lucifer before sin was found in his heart (Ezekiel 28:15). The "undefiled" (tamim), spoken of in Psalm 119:1, "who walk in the law of the Lord," are "the perfect." God was asking Abraham to turn away from all sin, to be right with Him in heart, and to obey His law perfectly.

1 Kings defines what it means to have a perfect heart with God. Such a relationship with the Lord results in a life which conforms to His statutes and His commandments. The word "perfect" in this verse translates the Hebrew word shalem, meaning "complete, full, perfect, finished, whole." It is the word that described the kind of weights and measures the Lord wanted His people to use. "But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have" (Deuteronomy 25:15) the same word was used to describe the spiritual life of King Asa. His "heart was perfect with the Lord all his days"

(1 Kings 15:14). It also was used to refer to Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:3). Solomon was instructed to have a "perfect heart" (1 Chronicles 28:9; 29:19). Amaziah did right in God's sight, "but not with a perfect heart" (2 Chronicles 25:

The Old Testament message is decidedly in favor of a union with God which eliminates sin from the life. God expected His people to keep His law because of their covenant relationship with Him. They were instructed: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart" (Deuteronomy 6:5-6). The words to be written on their hearts were the ten commandments recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 5.

Relevance: Abraham, whose life is used in the New Testament as the great example of faith (Romans 4; Hebrews 11), was perfected spiritually by his heart relationship with God. The standard then is the standard now, as we shall see more clearly in the next section. Are you willing to walk before God as Abraham did?

II. The Divine Standard in New Testament Times

Did God change His standard of behavior for mankind after Jesus died on the Cross? Did He abolish His law at Calvary, so that now perfect obedience to it is no longer required as it was in Old Testament times? Let us turn to the New Testament for the answer.

The Word

5. What did Jesus present as the divine standard for His followers? Matthew 5:48.
6. Whose perfection are we to emulate? Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:28.
7. What kind of holiness do other New Testament passages enjoin upon us? 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 6:13 James 1:4; 1 Peter 1:15-17.
8. What kind of works are made possible by our relationship with Christ? Revelation 3:2, 4; (compare Colossians 4:12)

Explanation: The Greek word for "perfect" used in Matthew 5:48 is teleios. It means "having attained the end or purpose, complete, perfect, full-grown, mature, adult, fully developed." This word is used 19 times in the New Testament. It refers to the perfect will of God which we perform when our minds are transformed (Romans 12:2). Paul said that he did not regard himself as already perfect; he was pressing toward that mark (Philippians 3:12-14). Nevertheless in the same context he wrote: "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded..." (verse 15). He enjoyed present perfection in Christ, but was pressing on to the point at which he would never stumble and fall. That is the paradox; we have Christ's fullness now ("you have been made complete in him" Colossians 2:10), but we are growing by His grace more and more into His likeness.

James makes it clear that perfection is a gift from God (James 1:16-17). Thus the ability to obey the "perfect law of liberty" (verse 25), to speak only right words (James 3:2), and to have perfect love (1 John 4:18) are all gifts to us. Without Him we can do nothing good (John 18:5).

Relevance: The divine standard in the New Testament is likeness to Christ. Such likeness involves the same complete conformity to His law as was required in Old Testament times (Hebrews 8:10; Romans 8:4). When your faith is like Abraham's, your works will be like His too (Genesis 26:5; Romans 4). Then you will reflect the character of Jesus.

III. Power to Reach the Divine Standard

Never at any stage in history has God asked man to struggle towards total victory in his own strength. Always His biddings are enabling. Power is always given to climb towards the heights of spiritual achievement. Righteousness by works is Satan's way, never God's. By surrendering your heart to Christ and depending constantly upon Him, you will be the recipient of His perfecting grace.

The Word

9. How did Old Testament writers believe they were perfected spiritually? Psalm 18:31-33; Habakkuk 2:4.
10. How is the righteousness of God made available to us? Romans 3:20-26, 31; 1 John 5:4.
11. Who is the One who washes us spiritually clean from all our sins and makes us more and more pure? 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 3:18.
12. Whose righteousness and perfection becomes ours when we believe? 1 Corinthians 1:30; Philippians 3:9-10.

Explanation: Our perfection is always in Christ. Only in union with Him can we be overcomers. Righteousness is by faith-grace. Faith is our belief; grace is the gift of God's power. As we allow Christ to come into our lives by

the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-10), He gives us His righteousness, His law is written on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10), and thus "the righteousness of the law" is "fulfilled in us" (Romans 8:4).

Relevance: Have you invited Christ to come into your heart as the source of your perfection?

IV. When Does Human Probation Close?

The question is, when does it cease to be possible for people to respond to the love of Christ? Does there come a time when God says, "It is finished! No longer will it be possible for people to repent of their sins and accept Salvation. We have waited and plead long enough?"

The Word

13. How did John the Revelator depict the end of Christ's heavenly mediation for us? Revelation 8:2-5.
14. What proclamation is made by heaven a short time before the second coming of Jesus? Revelation 22:11-12.
15. What will happen in heaven and on earth marking the fact that God will no longer plead with sinners? Revelation 15:5-8.

16. How did Daniel depict the close of probation and the immediately following events? Daniel 12:1.

Explanation: The close of probation is the point of time just prior to the second advent of Jesus at which He will cease to intercede for sinners in the heavenly sanctuary. The offering of incense (Revelation 8:2-4) represents Christ's work of mediation (pleading for sinners as our High Priest). When John saw Him cast the censer into the earth (Revelation 8:5), he knew that there would come a time just before the end when Jesus' mediatorial ministry would cease. At that point of time the great proclamation of Revelation 22:11 will go forth, and no longer will it be possible for anyone else to be saved. The righteous are then 'in God's hands for eternity, and Satan cannot overcome them. The wicked are lost for eternity and can never find salvation. It is at the moment when the proclamation of Revelation 22:11 goes forth that Michael (Christ) stands up in the heavenly court (Daniel 12:1) and leaves the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. That is the opening of the sanctuary in heaven (Revelation 15:5), after which the seven last plagues are poured out upon the wicked on this earth.

Relevance: Are you preparing spiritually for the time when Jesus' heavenly mediation will cease?

V. When Does God Expect His People to Have Victory over Sin?

Of course, He wants us to have victory now, and has made available all of the necessary power for us to be overcomers. The Bible teaches that those who are willing to receive will have complete and final victory over sin before the close of probation.

The Word

17. What happens to God's people before the winds of strife are let loose at the close of probation? Revelation 7:1-3.
18. What does God's seal in the forehead mean? Revelation 14:1; compare Exodus 28:36-38; 39:30; Leviticus 8:9.
19. When God's faithful ones are sealed before the close of probation, what is their spiritual condition? Revelation 19:7-8.

Explanation: God's seal in the forehead is a symbol that the mind is fully controlled by the Holy Spirit. As the earthly High Priest wore a turban on the front of which was the golden plate bearing the words, "Holiness to the Lord," so the holiness of God is the possession of the sealed saints. They are now clothed for eternity with the righteousness of Christ. The Revised Standard Version correctly translates Revelation 19:8, "...it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure' for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints." When you are sealed Satan can no longer overcome you; your character

is set for eternity. You have made your choice to serve Christ, have retained the born-again experience (1 John 2:29) and are now doing only those works which are motivated by the indwelling Christ. For this reason you are "righteous, as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7).

Preparation for the final sealing work of the Holy Spirit (Revelation 7:1-3) is the work taking place in the hearts of believers right now. The Lord wants us to receive victory over all sin so that before He leaves the sanctuary at the close of probation, we will be sealed for eternity. Then, filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be kept from sinning during the trying time of trouble between probation's close and the second advent of Jesus. When there is no heavenly Mediator, after the close of probation, the sealed believers are not sinning. They have God's seal to keep them so that they do not need the High Priest in heaven to plead for their forgiveness.

Relevance: Are you preparing for the final seal of God to be received before the close of probation? Victory over all sin can be yours because Christ is offering it to you.

VI. What Does the Bible Mean by Perfection?

The Bible means by perfection a life filled with the Holy Spirit, a life which is free from sinful behavior. The perfection which Jesus gives us before the second advent. is not freedom from our human fallenness. We remain fallen human beings till Jesus comes. Everything we do is tinged with human imperfection. But not all imperfection is sin.

The Word

20. Did Jesus regard all imperfection as sin? John 15:22, 24.
21. What works are counted as sin? Romans 14:23 (last part).

Explanation: Imperfect works that do not result from faith in Christ are sin. All our works are imperfect, but when they are wrought in faith, and we have allowed Jesus to work through us, our works are acceptable to God (Galatians 2:20). Christian perfection is acceptability with God. If He accepts your works, because you are allowing Jesus to live within your heart, those works are perfect in the sight of heaven. Martin Luther expressed this Biblically when he said, "Works that result from the Word and are done in faith are perfect in the eyes of God, no matter what the world thinks about them..." Luther's Works (Saint Louis, 1961), Vol. 3, p. 318.

Relevance: As long as Jesus is living within, your works are perfect with God. It is only when we lose Him because we have failed to pray or study the Word, and have chosen to go our own way, that He is forced to withdraw from us and evil demons motivate us to sin. When you have Christ, the power of Satan and his demons is nil. Preparation for the final sealing work of the Holy Spirit is daily surrender to Jesus, so that with a renewed relationship each day you overcome sin. Soon Jesus will say, "This soul is living with me every day. He is having progressive victory in his life. He has made His choice. Now we can seal him for eternity so that Satan's temptations will no longer have any power over him."

Are you seeking Jesus daily for this victory? Final victory is not your achievement. It is Christ's gift! Yet you have the power to choose Him moment by moment. Will you join us in praying each day for the great final outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that we will all be sealed and made ready for the close of probation?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. God's standard for Old Testament believers was different from His standard for New Testament believers.
 - b. Before the Cross salvation was by faith just as it is today.
 - c. Probation closes before the second coming of Jesus.
 - d. You are not sealed before the close of probation.
2. Discuss: If we have salvation by faith now, why should the Lord want us to have victory over all sin?