

Milk & Honey

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Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Perfect Work in Us

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Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” (Phil. 1:6)

A good work was done for us at the Cross by our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, according to the above text, a good work is being done in us by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The work done for us is finished work, as John 19:30 assures us; the work in us is not yet complete, it is being carried on.

The verb “perform” is basically the same word Jesus spoke on the Cross, “It is finished”; and, that word, means “to make perfect.” The work in us is being perfected. This work in us will reach completion in the day of Jesus Christ. This is the day when He shall come to take His loved Bride home, and we shall be seen as perfect at the judgment Seat of Christ. Paul again speaks of that day of Jesus Christ in Philippians 1:10 and 2:16.

God began a good work in us when He saved us by His grace, and He will never be satisfied till that work ends in absolute perfection. God is a perfectionist.

It has been said that an earthly father or mother is so easily pleased, but very difficult to satisfy. Here is a little girl in the home. She is just taking her first wobbling, halting steps, and her parents are watching and encouraging her, with grins on their faces that spread from ear to ear. How pleased they are to see her daring walk for the first time; but those same parents would be grieved beyond words if that child still wobbles five years later. They are pleased with those first stumbling steps, but they will not be satisfied till that little girl becomes a lovely, healthy, intelligent, physically, mentally and morally capable young woman. Even so, our Lord wants to see His saints develop in spiritual growth and usefulness, in moral and spiritual beauty.

God is a God never satisfied, short of perfection. His standards are far higher than ours. Do you remember asking your children, when they were small, whether they had washed their hands before coming to the table? “Oh, yes,” said they. “Let’s see,” said you. “Go back to the bathroom and wash those dirty wrists and arms. It looks to me as if you washed on the towel and wiped in the water!”

The child’s standard of cleanliness is not up to yours. But the doctor maintains a still higher one. He washes his hands before an operation, not once or twice, but several times; he uses soap and antiseptics; he must have absolute cleanliness. Yet his standard is still lower than God’s in the spiritual realm.

God starts His work in us as believers long before we were saved. He started at our natural birth. Paul says that he was separated for the Lord’s work from his mother’s womb (Gal. 1:15). God has a plan for our lives that is put into operation at our very birth, fitting us for a place later on in His kingdom. Then, He calls us by the gospel, saves us by His grace, and installs the mighty power of the Holy Spirit in us to carry on the work begun in the soul, till that day of perfection has been reached, till we are completely conformed to the image of His Son.

Our God employs various means to perfect the work in us. The most blessed way is by engaging our minds and hearts with Christ, as we read in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “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.”

And then there is the hard way, by discipline, which we so often need, and is so painful, too. He produces in us likeness to Christ through life’s experiences of failure and sin. Our blessed Lord never needed this, because He is and ever was perfect.

When it says in Hebrews 2:10 that our Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings; and in Hebrews 5:9 that, being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation, those passages do not teach that Christ as a “person” was made perfect, but as the Author and Captain of our salvation. Unless He had endured the sufferings of the Cross, He could not have been our Savior. His perfection as our Savior depended on His sufferings on the Cross when He bore our sins. In Himself, He was always perfect; we are not, but God is making us so. In dealing with us in discipline and chastisement, He is making us what He wants us to be, and this is often a painful process. 1 Peter 1:7 speaks of this as being tried by fire; and Hebrews 12:11 tell us it is not “joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

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It is something like this: A blacksmith wants to make a certain piece of steel to fit into a certain special spot. He heats it white hot in his forger, and then proceeds to pound it into shape. I frequently used to see this years ago, when I worked in a machine shop. The boss had a small tap hammer in his hand, and his assistant had a great big sledge hammer. The boss would tap lightly, perhaps, on certain section of the metal, and then the man with the sledge hammer would hit it there. If the boss tapped lightly, it meant that his helper was to strike there rather lightly; if he hit it hard, then the assistant would really let the iron have it. So, between the two of them, the metal would be hammered into the shape needed for the special service it was to be performed.

So it is in the Christian life. The one with the small hammer pictures God; the one with the big sledge hammer is the devil. Scriptures show that the discipline of the believer is often administered by the devil. Remember how the Lord said to Peter that Satan wanted to get at him to test him, and that the Lord permitted it? Yet, at the same time, Jesus prayed for Simon Peter that his faith might not fail.

A very striking sample of this divine discipline is seen in the case of Job. God permitted Satan to afflict Job, but only by His permission, and he could hit Job only as hard as God let him. God employs Satan to fit and fashion us for His glory, to carry on the process of our ultimate perfection. The whole process is directly under the control of our loving Father. The total result is that we are thus perfected into the very form in which He can use us for Himself, even as the steel shaped into its desired pattern.

If that iron could talk, it would tell us that fire burns and the pounding hurts, even as we do know that fiery trials are not pleasant – discipline is not joyous, but grievous. But oh, that blessed afterwards! Even here and now, we get real blessing out of our troubles.

A brother once told me once that he was riding on the train and, behind him, sat two old ladies who were, so he said, having an organ recital on the train and seemed to enjoy it immensely. They were talking about all the organs they had taken out in operations, and were getting a real kick out of their reminiscences.

Did you ever notice, when a group of folks get together chatting, that they talk far more about the troubles they have had in life than over their good times? I believe that, when we get to Glory, we will thank the Lord more for the trials of the way than for anything else.

God seeks our moral perfection, likeness to Christ. Physically, we get worse with years; spiritually we should get better. The spiritual development is a process; the physical transformation will take place in one tremendous, climactic moment when Jesus comes to take us Home, for

“when we see Him we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” We shall be changed physically in a moment, praise His Name!

Do not faint under the process. Do not resent it, If you do, God might throw you on the scrapheap as unfit for any real service. Hebrews 12 tells us not to despise this process, not to faint, but to endure. Our Lord Himself passed through the fire of trial — not to make Him perfect, as in our case, but rather to prove that He was.

We’ll be perfect in that day, but some may be a perfect “hut,” so to speak, while others will be a perfect “palace.” Don’t be satisfied with mediocrity; God isn’t! *

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yea, RATHER that is risen again.” (Rom. 8:34) Note well that adverb of divine preference. The Victim of the cross is now the Victor of the throne.

5. “Amen, and I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” (1:18) The “Amen” of solemn affirmation and confirmation is to be observed. His solemn words are to be pondered over and kept in mind. As we have seen, He lives for evermore, and as such He has “the keys of death and of hades.” “Neither death nor life” separates the believer from His love. (Rom. 8:38) All power is His, in heaven and in earth, whether over the grave, or in the region of departed spirits. He opens or shuts at His will, and soon He will exercise His authority in resurrection for all His own.

In view of that which he had seen of the personal, the official and the moral glories of the Son of Man, the Apostle was to write the book of “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” And so it should be with all His servants. With reverence and godly fear they should present the things which they have spiritually discerned, concerning the Son of Man and Son of God. He is the Center of the Gospel story, the Center of the thoughts and purposes of God.

Soon He will come forth “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev. 17:14), subjecting all to Himself. Meanwhile we are called to His “kingdom and patience” (Rev. 1:9) and await His kingdom and glory at His return to claim His inheritance. May we be loyal and true to Him in the interim, with life and lip, witnessing of His majesty and mercy, and proclaiming His salvation far and wide. *

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