***Spiritual Perfection - PH73-01

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 3:12-14***

Please open your Bibles to Philippians 3:12-14. The apostle Paul is ready to die. He is ready to face an absolutely righteous God who demands the same kind of absolute righteousness of every person in order to have eternal life. Paul is ready to face that kind of a God with that kind of a requirement without any fear whatsoever. The reason for this is that Paul is done with his old legal righteousness from his religious practices under Judaism. That was a relative righteousness. That got him exactly nowhere. That is in the past. He's done with it. Had he faced God with that kind of religious righteousness, he would indeed have been doomed.

By faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, Paul has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and has been placed into the absolute righteousness of Jesus Christ by being brought into union with the Son of God. Paul's life is now a life of joy. He delights in the daily experiences that he has with the Lord Jesus Christ. He delights in the power of the victorious, resurrected Christ flowing through his life.

The thing that characterized Jesus Christ, particularly after He was raised from the dead, was that He was a person who had won over sin. He was the victor. He delights in the fact that he shares with the Lord Jesus Christ the suffering of the satanic attacks in the angelic warfare. Jesus Christ is no longer under attack, but His body, the church (you and I, as believers) are. Paul says, "I delight in entering into that." He delights in possessing the mental attitude, he said, of Jesus Christ in His sacrificial death for others. He had a mind that would put others in such a selfless way that He went even to the cross.

Paul says, "I find that same attitude in me, in myself, and I rejoice in it." Furthermore, after all is said and done, Paul says, "I'm looking forward to the best ahead yet. I'm anticipating the out from among the dead resurrection when only the 1st battalion is removed, and I'm going to be in "Baker" Company of the 1st battalion of the resurrection. I'll be part of the first resurrection – the second contingent after the Firstfruits, Jesus Christ." Paul says, "I'm looking forward to that."

So picking it up at verse 12, the apostle Paul then gives us a self-evaluation. He says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." First of all, Paul tells us what he is not, and he does it in a very emphatic way. The very first word in verse 12 is "not" which is the Greek word "ou." As you know, this is the strongest negative in the Greek language. There is another negative in the Greek language, "me" which is a conditional "no." It's a "no," but you might be able to change my mind. But "ou" is the strongest negative, and it is expressing downright negation. This is a little word form in the Greek that we call a particle.

Then he says, "Absolutely not as though." "As though" is the Greek word "hoti." It actually means "that." These two Greek words, "ou" and "hoti" are the two opening words of verse 12. They introduce a statement which is to guard against a misunderstanding of Paul's remarks in verse 10. I just reviewed for you what Paul said in verse 10: "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." Paul says, "I prefer all of that to what I once was as a celebrity under Judaism." Yet Paul sees that this statement in verse 10 might be misunderstood. So actually, these two Greek words together amount to this: When he says "ou hoti," He is saying, "I do not say that," or "I don't mean for you to understand that I am saying." This is introducing something that he wants to clarify that he did not mean by that statement.

What he did not want to be misunderstood is that he had attained something that indeed he had not. So he said, "I do not mean to say that I have already attained." The word "attained" is the Greek word "lambano" which basically means "to receive." Here, it means "to lay hold of" – to take something in a very definite way. The thing that he has taken hold of in verse 10 is not to be misunderstood, as if he had attained a certain level of perfection, as he's going to explain. This is in aorist tense. He doesn't want us to think that at some point in his Christian experience, he has attained this. It is active voice – that he himself has secured this. It is indicative – a statement of fact. "Already is the Greek word "ede" which means "by now," or "at this time." Paul is saying, "At the time that I am writing to you Philippians, I don't want you to misunderstand what I have said to you as seeming to suggest to you that, at this time, I have already achieved something."

**Sinless Perfection**

Paul does not want his desires which he expressed in verse 10, which is basically to know Christ in his daily experience, to be misunderstood as having realized it. Paul says, "I'm glad that I'm through with the old life of Judaism and my celebrityship, and I rejoice in the fact that I know Christ in my daily experience." He says, "But I want to make it clear that I don't mean to suggest that I know Him in my experience in an absolutely perfect way." What Paul is trying to edge people off from is assuming that he was talking about sinless perfection.

Here is a passage of Scripture which, had it been studied more carefully, would have preserved vast denominations from falling into the trap of the delusion that they could achieve some kind of sinless perfection. It would have prevented them even from the way they tried to hedge that idea when they say, "Well, when I say sinless perfection, I mean that I don't deliberately sin anymore. If I do sin, it's because of a mistake. It's inadvertent. I don't deliberately do this wrong." This passage is designed by Paul to try to prevent even that misconception.

Paul has not completely, in other words, experienced Christ's resurrection power over evil. Paul has not finished experiencing the sufferings of the angelic conflict in Christ's place. Paul has not achieved completely the mental attitude love which led Christ to the self-sacrifice on the cross. "Not as though (I absolutely want it made known that) I have already at this time laid hold of." Then he says, "Either," which is the Greek word "e," which means "or." It contrasts what he's going to say here with "attained:" "Were perfect." He says, "I don't want you to think that I've already arrived at some point of achievement of knowing Christ, or I don't want you to think either that I have already." And again he uses "ede." "At the point that I am writing, that I have already reached a state of perfection," or "That I were already perfect." The word perfect is "teleioo."

This is an important Greek word which is misunderstood and which is the origin of the concept of sinless perfection. People who think they come to the place where they do not sin anymore base it on this word right here. They will point to the Word of God and say, "You see, the Bible says, 'Get perfect, man. Get yourself to the place where you're doing right, and you never do wrong.' The Bible says, 'You can come to the place where you can become perfect.'"

Well, the apostle Paul is trying to correct that misconception right off the bat. He says about himself that he doesn't want anybody to think that what he has said in verse 10, about the joy of knowing Christ in his experience, is to suggest that he has arrived at some point of perfection. Actually, this word "teleioo" means "to bring something to an end" or "to complete the thing." For example, if you sit down and start building a model airplane, when you finish the thing, you have experienced "teleioo." You have perfected it. Or you sit down to paint a picture. When you have completed the picture, you have perfected it. That means you have brought it to its conclusion. That's what this word means. This word connotes reaching a goal or achieving a purpose.

This is used in Luke 13:32 in terms of the Lord Jesus Christ finishing an occasion of witnessing relative to Herod. He was performing certain things as a witness, and Jesus Christ said, "I'm going to almost perfect this." That is, "I will bring my witness to a conclusion." It is used in Hebrews 2:10 of Jesus Christ being fully qualified for His mission as Savior. He experienced things that human beings experienced (temptations and so on), in order that he might be fully qualified. "Perfected" is what the Greek says. "He might be perfected," in that He is brought to the point designed by these testings and by experiences to qualify Him for being a Savior – not to make Him sinlessly perfect. He already was that. This is used in James 2:22 of faith, and it is said that, "Our faith is brought to perfection (or to its designed end) by our performing divine good works." So as we perform divine good works, our faith is brought to its logical purpose, or its logical conclusion – its end.

This word, then, is never used to mean sinless perfection in your life here on earth. Paul is referring instead to a quality of spiritual maturity in himself as a Christian. Paul is saying, "I have not arrived at spiritual perfection. I have not arrived at spiritual maturity completely."

**The Stages of Spiritual Perfection**

Let's look for a moment at the stages of spiritual perfection. Spiritual perfection exists in three stages.

1. **Positional Perfection**

First, there is positional perfection. This refers to a Christian's position in Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This perfection is spoken of in Hebrews 10:14. This is the same thing as positional sanctification. That is, you are completely set apart to a purpose that God has for you. Positional sanctification is just as perfect as Christ is. You achieve positional perfection by being placed in Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Positional perfection does not mean that the Christian acts perfect at all times. The Christian will act very imperfectly at times. But positional perfection means that when God looks upon you, He sees you in Christ. You are as perfect as His Son. Therefore, you are qualified to enter God's heaven. That is positional perfection.

1. **Relative Perfection**

But there is a second kind of perfection which is called relative perfection. This refers to a Christian's level of spiritual maturity here on earth. We have this in 2 Corinthians 7:1, Galatians 3:3, and Ephesians 4:12. Ephesians 4:12 tells us that it is the business of the local pastor-teacher to bring Christians to relative perfection. That is experiential sanctification – godly living in daily experience. Well, you can see immediately that relative perfection differs from Christian to Christian. Not all Christians are at the same level of spiritual maturity.

If we could have a divine viewpoint analysis of every believer, we could make a chart of your level of spiritual development from babyhood through adolescence, through adulthood, up to the upper level of super grace Christians. We would find that the congregation probably fell all along the line at various stages. You would find that perhaps some people who have been Christians for a long time, and who have been around here for a long time, might come out considerably lower than you would think they should come out.

This is relative perfection, and it is a varying status for believers. For this reason, relative perfection is progressive. You can, and you should, improve your perfection. You can, and you should, improve your experiential sanctification. You can, and you should, improve your daily life in reference to sin. The old sin nature can never be made permanently inoperative in this life, so perfection is always relative. It is never complete. That's what 1 John 1:8-10 tells us.

1. **Ultimate Perfection**

Then there is a third status of perfection – ultimate perfection. We have this described in 1 John 3:2 and Romans 8:29. This refers to ultimate sanctification. That means permanent separation of the believer from the presence and the practice of sin. This is what happens when you get to heaven. When you come into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, you achieve ultimate perfection. This ultimate perfection includes a resurrected body, which is absolutely perfect, and it includes the absence of the old sin nature from the soul. Thus you can never sin again. So you have the best combination in the world – an absolutely perfect physical body, and a soul completely free of the old sin nature. Therefore, you as a person are totally and absolutely ultimately perfect – completely free from sin.

Now, what Paul is talking about is the third one – ultimate perfection. Paul says, "I delight in the fact that I have come to know Jesus Christ in my experience. I have come to the place where I think like Him, and where I have the feelings that Christ has toward people and toward circumstances and situations. I have the choices that Christ has. My will is just the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. When I tell you that I have come to know Him this way in my experience, I don't want you to misunderstand (or to suggest), in any way, that I have reached ultimate perfection; that I never do what is wrong; and, that I am never in the status of sin."

So going back to our word that we began with, we're made perfect ("teleioo"). You will notice that it's in the perfect tense. Perfect tense in the Greek means that something is done in the past, and then it continues on forever. It continues into the present, and it goes on. Paul says, "There wasn't a time in the past that I achieved the status of ultimate sinless perfection – period. Therefore, I'm not that now either." He's very careful to use the perfect tense to say, "It never happened in the past." So that's not what I am now. Furthermore, it's passive. Ultimate perfection is something that God would have to give you. Therefore, it is not something that you can actively produce. Paul says, "This is not a thing that I've received." It's indicative – a statement of fact.

Now the rest of verse 12 tells us what Paul's goal is. He says, "Not as though (absolutely not) I have already arrived at (or had) ultimate perfection, but I follow after." The word "but" is "de," and it introduces now what is true about the apostle Paul. He says, "I will tell you, though, what I am doing." He says, "I follow after." The word is "dioko." It is present active indicative. "Dioko" means "to pursue" or "to press after." This is the word which was used in the Greek language to picture very adequately a runner in a foot race at a Greek game – an Olympic type of event. Here you have the runner in a foot race who is straining forward. He's pushing down the course, and he's running down the track with every muscle straining. His hands are stretched out before him, and his eyes are glued on the goal. That's what "dioko" was used to describe – that kind of an image of a person running, rushing, pushing, and pressing for all he had, to be a winner at the goal line.

So he presses after (he pursues) something. There is something that's really important to Paul. He says, "I'm not perfect, but I'll tell you what I am doing. I'm running down the race track with everything in me." Present means, "I continually do it." It's active. Paul says, "It's my feet that are running. It is I, myself, who is engaged in this." It's indicative – a statement of fact. What is he doing?

He said, "I am pushing forward with everything in me, if that I may apprehend." The word "if" is the Greek word "ei." This is a third class if condition. You Greek students might be a little surprised at that because usually, as you know, a third class condition is signaled to us by this little word "ean." That's in the conditional part of the sentence (the protasis), and the conclusion part (the apodosis) has the subjunctive mood. Well, the Greek New Testament very often would not use "ean" in a third class condition. It would actually use "ei," which usually is used in the first class condition. This time it uses "ei," but we know its third class because in the conclusion part of the sentence, it does use the subjunctive.

This is what a third class condition tells you. Third class condition tells you maybe you will, and maybe you won't. You might, but you might not. So it is important to know that Paul says, "I am pursuing after, and maybe I'll secure what I'm after, and maybe I won't secure what I'm after. But I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do." This is one of the most important passages of Scripture (I think) that you will ever study. That is because it is going to give a clue (a key) here in a moment to something that will resolve more human problems, if people would do it, than almost anything else.

Paul says, "I know it will solve a lot of problems, and therefore I do it for myself." "If" is really "I may, or I may not." It is his hope, "That." "That" is the word "kai" (also). "If also I may apprehend." The word "apprehend" is the big word "katalambano." You will notice immediately that "lambano" is exactly the word that we had previously, when he used the word "lambano" about attaining. You notice that he has added something to the word. He has added the Greek preposition "kata," which basically means "down." Therefore, it adds a point of intensification of emphasis. He uses the word "kata" before "lambano" to give the idea of "coming down on." Thus, the word comes to mean "to lay hold of," or "to seize." That would be the best English word. It's something that you really go after, and when you get it, you grab it, and you grab it with the determination that you are going to have this for yourself no matter what. You seize it.

So the word is "katalambano." It is aorist active subjunctive. He is going to come down intensely to seize (to appropriate) this forcefully for himself. It expresses the reason he is pursuing. Previously, we had this word, "dioko." It means "I follow after," "I press after," or "I pursue." Now the Greek sentence ties it to this word "katalambano." It's telling why he's pursuing. Why are you straining? Why are you going down the track with every muscle straining in this way, Paul? And he says, "Because I am trying to take hold of something." It is aorist which means there is a point when I'm going to seize it. It is active – I'm going to do the seizing. But, it's subjunctive. It's the third class. Maybe I will, or maybe I won't.

Here's the reason he's doing it. "That for which." "That" is the word "epi," which means "upon." "Which" is the pronoun "hos." It means "because:" "I am pressing forward because." "I press forward if that I may seize that for which also ('kai') I am apprehended because I have been seized." Again we have "katalambano." It is aorist passive indicative this time. That is, at some point Paul was seized by the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the point of his salvation. It is passive. It is God who saved him. He didn't save himself. It is indicative – a statement of fact.

**God Seizes Us**

Also, he says, "As I have been seized when the Lord saved me." I have been seized by whom? "Of" is the Greek word "hupo" which means "by." "Then the person is," he says, "Christ Jesus." "When I have been seized by Christ Jesus." The term "Christ Jesus" is in that order. When "Christ" comes first, it stresses the exaltation of the Son of God, who was willing to empty Himself. This testifies to the fact that this One, who was God before He ever took on human form, in His pre-existence, was willing to set that aside, to come and to die for the sins of the world. So it speaks of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in condescending to save us. Paul is speaking about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in being willing to pursue him and to seize him for eternal life. So he uses the combination "Christ Jesus," which stresses the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a very important thing for all of us to remember. We came to salvation because God seized us. We sing the song, "I found Him. Oh, I found Him," but the Bible tells us that we weren't looking for Him when we found Him. It is because God, in His grace, reached out and seized us. It's like someone said to me this week, "I think about the grace of God, and I marvel. The question keeps coming back to my mind. 'Why me? Why does God choose to enlighten me?'" Well, this includes even the enlightenment that you have in spiritual things through the instruction of the Word. You could be sitting someplace where some preacher was wowing you with interesting stories and tickling your fancies. He may do other things to give you a good shot in the arm, and rob you of spiritual enlightenment. You could be there just as well. Why should you be sitting where you are, in one of the few places where instruction is really being given in the Word of God, and where substantial food is being served up in a banquet-style offering for the people of God? I don't know. God says, "I'll invite you in."

There are some people that you wouldn't invite to go out to a meal. There are some people you would never think about taking to a banquet event. Yet, God says, "You're one of the people I want to come to My banquet. So I've seized you and brought you in." That's the grace of Christ Jesus.

So the apostle Paul says, "I don't want you to misunderstand what I'm saying. God has a purpose for each believer. God saves a sinner with a plan in mind for that sinner." The first step to functioning according to God's plan is to build spiritual maturity into your soul. You use God's system of grace for doing that through the teaching ministry of the local church. God's ultimate purpose is to bring the believer to ultimate perfection, where your body is resurrected, and your soul is free of sin. Paul says, "I haven't come to that yet." The pursuit of the spiritual maturity structure in your soul is done in the midst of a great angelic warfare that opposes that every step of the way. But failure to pursue the plan for which God seized you is to miss the best in life. A person who is not pursuing the plan of God for which God seized you in the first place is a person who is operating under reversionism; emotional domination of the soul; and, spiritual callouses. What they don't understand is what Paul understood so well.

Paul said, "There was a time when I was such a star. I was so perfect. I was absolutely legally righteous. Everybody looked up to me. But God looked down upon me in condemnation. Now," he says, "I know Jesus Christ in my daily experience. I don't go around being a fool in the things I think; the choices I make; or, the feelings I have. I'm not a bleeding heart idiot. I don't go around being caught up in the concepts of the world. I'm not out to do the things that the world thinks that its human viewpoint idealism is leading it to do – that these things are desirable goals." Paul says, "It's great to know Christ, and to have him functioning in my experience." Paul says, "God bless the home that has parents who have God's viewpoint, and understand that God has seized them for something, and that that's what they're pursuing. So they're not making fools of themselves and of their kids; cheapening them; degrading them; and entering them into all kinds of contemptuous things."

Paul says, "I know what it is to have Christ in my experience. But," he says, "I don't want you to misunderstand me. I haven't reached ultimate perfection. But I do want you to know that I'm like an athlete at a racetrack, and I'm straining every muscle because God reached down and He took me for a purpose. That purpose is right there. That's the goal line. My eye is set on that purpose, and that's where I'm going. I know I'm doing it surrounded by the demonic world, who is trying to put a foot out and trip me, and who is, in one way or another, trying to stop me from doing it."

So we may translate verse 12 in this way. Paul says, "Absolutely not do I mean that I, at this time, have laid hold of, or, at this time, have been brought to ultimate spiritual perfection, but I pursue after if also I might seize that, because also I was seized by Christ Jesus." "Because also I was seized by Christ Jesus" is his way of saying, "I am going after this thing that is before me." He's going to tell us what that is in a minute. He says, "This is why Jesus Christ took hold of me. The Lord, and His grace, reached down and took a poor celebrity slob and converted him into a prince of God. Now, when He did that for me, then I don't have any interest in life except to pursue what He has designed for my life. I'm not going to play the fool again." That is what Paul is saying.

There are many Christians that never learn that lesson. So they spend their whole lives playing the fool again and again, because they never learn to have a sense of values and a sense of priorities. Why not? Because they've got human viewpoint mentalities. So you listen to the world. You listen to your old sin nature. You listen to the propaganda on television. You listen to the news media. You have no basis of evaluating what you hear. So you make all the wrong choices.

Let's move on to verse 13. Here's the significance of all this. Paul says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. The word "brethren" is "adelfos," the standard word in the Greek New Testament for "brother." But it does indicate to us that Paul is talking to Christians; that is, the Christians at Philippi. He wants to put an emphasis upon the fact that he is talking about something relative to himself. So he adds in the Greek Bible the word "I" ("ego"). You don't have to add the word "I" in the Greek Bible to indicate "I." You can see that from the verb. But if you really want to emphasize that you are talking about yourself, then you throw in the added word.

So we would translate something like this: "Brethren, as for myself." Now, mind you, I want you to remember the circumstance. Paul is in the city of Rome. He is sitting there in imprisonment. At this point, he has been in prison for four years – two back in Caesarea, and two in Rome. Do you remember how he got there? It was because he went to Jerusalem. He wanted to be there for the feast day, and he was warned all along the line not to go. But something had happened in the thinking of the great apostle Paul. Here was a man who was not only a mature Christian, but he was a super grace maturity Christian. This man had a spiritual maturity structure in his soul that was something to behold. It was way up there, fully developed. It was super grace level. The container was built; the grace of God was pouring in; and, he was overflowing. God was giving him more grace, more grace, and more grace.

**Paul's Reversionism**

But something happened. Something happened that caused the apostle Paul to fall for a sucker deal that the preachers of Jerusalem offered to him and suggested to him. They said, "Paul, you know that your reputation has gone everywhere as the preacher to the gentiles. These unbelieving, no-good Jews in the city of Jerusalem just grind their teeth at the sound of your name. They hate your guts. You could help your testimony, Paul. You could win rapport with these resisters if you would come and perform a Jewish vow. You could just pretend you're still under Judaism, and go through a religious Jewish ceremony. What's the harm? And all these Jews would say, 'Oh, well, he's not against us. He's not against our Jewish customs and heritage, after all, is he?'" And something happened in the thinking of the apostle Paul, and he didn't instead tell those preachers where they could head in. That's why it's dangerous to associate with other preachers. They're so disoriented that you pick up a lot of bad habits.

Instead of dismissing them, he listened to them; he took this vow; and, he proceeded to take this act of Judaism upon himself – he, the great apostle of grace. Well, you know what happened? It caused a riot. He was taken into custody. He was almost killed. Paul knows something about failure in the spiritual life. Paul had experience reversionism. He had fallen back down the road from spiritual super grace maturity and had suffered now, under the discipline of God, for four long years. He only had five more years to live. At the time, he shot four of those years in prison, restricted from being able to move around the Roman world (the Roman Empire), and to be able to do the Lord's work. That was a blow. So I want you to keep that in mind – that this man knows what he is talking about when he talks about failures as a believer.

So Paul says, "Brethren, I do not count." The word "count" is "logizomai." It is present middle indicative. "Logizomai" means "to conclude" or "to regard." It always implies that you thought something through, and now you've come to a conclusion. So Paul says, "I've thought this thing through, and I do not arrive at this conclusion." It has the negative with this. The negative is "oupo." "Oupo" means "not" or "not yet." Paul says, "I have not yet concluded something." That is in the present tense – his constant attitude. It is middle. This is his view about himself. It is indicative – a statement of fact.

Then he adds the word "myself." In the Greek, it is "emautou" – about himself personally. We would translate: "Then here, brethren, as for myself, I do not regard myself to have apprehended." We're back to "katalambano" again – "to seize." "I do not consider that I myself have seized at this point." It is perfect active infinitive. The word refers to all that is in God's plan for the apostle Paul. It is perfect. At no time in the past do I view myself as having seized what God has for me. It is active – my own doing it. Infinitive indicates that purpose has been realized.

You could see why he is saying this, and why he wants to make a point of this. While he writes this very letter, he's sitting in a prison cell. The very fact that he's sitting in prison reminds him that he has not reached ultimate perfection. It was a breakdown in his own spiritual judgment that brought him into this imprisonment. He wanted to gain rapport with those Jews. Wasn't that pathetic? Here was the great apostle Paul, who had the finest message to communicate if ever a man had. Instead of standing up and communicating, and realizing that he didn't need to accommodate himself to those in error to win a hearing, he proceeded to try to secure their favor.

Now, this is professional preacher technique. This is getting up and talking to a congregation in such a way that you leave loopholes in what you say. So even though you say God says this, you have the feeling, "It's OK if I don't do it." I once had a lady tell me the thing she didn't like about my preaching was because I made it sound like that's the way it had to be. That's what she said. She said, "You just make it sound like that's the way it has to be." So she went to another church where they didn't make her feel that that's the way it had to be. She didn't realize that I didn't write the book. I just read it, and I just tell you what's in it, and they blame me for it. If you don't like the way it is, you blame the person who wrote the book – God the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul had no business trying to accommodate himself to these Jews to win a hearing to communicate. God holds people responsible for His truth. When a communicator has delivered the truth to you, you're on the hook. Jesus Christ once said to a group of unbelieving Pharisees, "If you had not known the truth, it would not have been held against you. But now that you know the truth, you're guilty. Now that you have heard the truth, God's going to hold you for what you know." I've said many times that if you want to be negative toward the Word of God, do yourself a favor and stay home. Don't come and learn the truth, so that the pressures and the disciplines of God's will come against you for disregarding the truth.

Now, it was the law and order of the Roman Empire that saved Paul from death. When the mob was out to tear him limb-from-limb, it was the Roman authorities who came in and preserved him and ultimately safely transported him to Rome. But this experience taught Paul that a super grace status Christian is not immune to spiritual reversionism. Actually the greatest hazard that a Christian faces, who has developed any spiritual maturity in his soul, is that he lets it deteriorate. Never forget that spiritual maturity has to be maintained. It is not like your children growing up – that when they grow a foot-and-a-half, they're never going to shrink shorter again. Spiritual maturity does not go in one way only. Therefore, you never can come to the place where you do not continually and regularly take Bible doctrine understanding into your mind. You cannot coast along upon a level of maturity, whatever it is. You have to continually move forward in development in the study of the Word of God.

This is a great occupational hazard for preachers as well as for people in the pews. There are many preachers who experience the hand of God upon them in ministry. God is using them. God is using the Word of God through them. Pretty soon, they begin viewing themselves as spiritual giants. They're just worms. They were worms before God used them, and they're worms after God uses them. God is in the earthworm-using business, and they forget that. Especially when you get a bunch of these worms together in a preacher conference, you've got the sight of one worm complimenting another worm. Now, God has to sit there and smile and laugh.

But the sad part about that is that these creatures fall into pride. If you listen to them, you'll hear in a very subtle way how they describe to you their travels back and forth; crisscrossing the country; their great exploits; and, the experiences they have had. In fact, that's basically their preaching. Their preaching is, "I remember this. Then I've had this experience, and then it's this experience. You can hardly get three, four, or five sentences of exegesis out before they're giving you another illustration. They suddenly refer to their fame and how popular their appeal is.

You will notice that they have certain preferences of temperament. Pretty soon, you discover that they are telling you how to raise your children; how to treat your wife; and, how to handle your husband. But they're not talking out of biblical exegesis. They're talking about their temperament. They tell you what to do with your children. If they happen to be buffs on fishing, then they describe to you the glories of how they took their children out, and they sat along the bank as they grew up. They were six, and they were seven, and then they were ten, and they caught bigger and bigger fish, and that was it. So you go out of that meeting saying, "Oh, well, the way to raise your kids is to sit on the bank and fish with them. That will make them fine people."

Another guy likes to make money, so he tells how he took his little boy down to the bank; sat him behind the desk; showed him how they make money; how to make it straight; how to make it crooked; and, how to move ahead in the world. And he thinks that this is the way to advance his children. So he says, "That's how you do it. You teach your kids to make money. That's how you raise your children." Well, this is temperament. This is taste. This has nothing to do with the Word of God. But when you think you're a spiritual star, then you begin to lose track of what is your personal temperament and taste, and what is actually the principles of the Word of God.

I've heard these characters reassure their listeners how their family is not impressed with their fame. Now, the only reason a guy wants to tell you that his kids are not impressed with his fame; how far he speaks; how many people are influenced by him; and, so on, is because he wants to remind you about his fame. So don't be suckered for that. When you hear somebody telling you about his fame, just remember that he is doing exactly what the apostle Paul says, "That's not for me. I don't view myself in that foolish light as having arrived at anything." Paul learned the hard way that if you think you've arrived, then you are going to fall and fall hard. Paul learned the hard way that you have to maintain your spiritual maturity structure, or you're not going to continue anywhere with the Lord. Paul is giving you here an unemotional, honest evaluation of himself. He declares that he has not arrived spiritually, and he's not doing it out of a fake humility.

Here's the problem. When you get to be a super grace Christian, one of the great things that happens is you have a great capacity for life. For the first time in your life, you're able to enjoy things. You may have had a lot of money before that, but you didn't know how to enjoy it. When you get to the super grace level through the intake of doctrine, you know how to enjoy your money. You know how to enjoy your wife, your husband, your children, and your family. Every possession you have comes into a perspective.

Now, all of a sudden, you find yourself enjoying life. I have seen so many people who were spiritual nobody nothings who were in the church service every day. Every time there was a Bible class, man, they were there, and their kids were there. They were out to prayer meeting and the whole bit. I saw them making progress. Suddenly, they found they had a capacity for living, and they could enjoy things. What did they do? They started substituting that capacity for enjoying things for the times of the study of the Word of God and for the times of prayer.

Pretty soon, I began to see them only occasionally: in church; in and out. Pretty soon, they were dropping out of prayer meeting all together. Where are they? Well, they're enjoying the fact that God's Word has given them a capacity to enter into living. Before that, they were insensitive duds. Now they've got a sense of appreciation. I'm warning you that when God gives you a capacity for living, the first thing the devil is going to tell you to do is to start enjoying that capacity. He's going to tell you, "You've got enough spiritual maturity. Now enjoy your money. Travel around. Get out there and commune with nature on Sunday morning. Never mind that Sunday evening church attendance stuff. There are a lot of good television programs that broaden your outlook."

Pretty soon, you find that your capacity for living is substituted for the Word of God. These people were once teachable. Now they have become unteachable. They once effectively served the Lord. Now they become a drag on the ministry. They once were functioning on divine viewpoint. Now they can't even recognize human viewpoint when it comes along. The very capacity that doctrine gave them to enjoy life is allowed to cause them to become negative toward the Word of God. These Christians did learn a lot of divine viewpoint, but they didn't learn as Paul learned that you have to maintain it. Otherwise you lose it.

So do you know what happens? The pastor-teacher is put in the unpleasant position of trying to force-feed. That's what preachers finally have to do with these poor Christians who've reached the super grace level, and they lean back on their laurels and think, "Man, I have it made. I really enjoy life." So they're enjoying life more than the Word of God. The dummies aren't realizing that they're going to stop enjoying life. Ultimately, reversionism sets in with all its devastating effects. So what are we going to do about this? The key is one of the greatest principles in the Word of God, and that is coming up next. We'll look at that next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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