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"Perfect" . . . A Word Study, pt 1

Duncan Dunsire, Winnipeg

Mat 5:48 (KJV) —*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Introduction & Explanation

This is a study of the word 'perfect' as we find it in the epistle to the Hebrews. Its use in that epistle is important since it touches on some vital topics regarding Christ, Israel, Christians, as well as other important truths. In our language, we will learn that this word has many different meanings and connotations. In Hebrews, 'perfect' is the word used to translate at least five original Greek words. So it is important for the study of this epistle that we understand what the word means in its context.

This article may be more than some readers desire. However, we hope that others will appreciate the essential importance of seeking to understand the truth of God's Word as it has been inspired and preserved for us by the Holy Spirit.

The English word 'perfect' is found in 66 verses in the KJV of the Old Testament and in 57 verses in the KJV of the New Testament. English dictionaries have many different meanings for the word 'perfect'; it can be found as an adjective, a verb, and even as a noun. Its meanings can range from 'flawless' to 'completeness' or simply 'satisfactory'. As an adjective, for example, we have the expression, 'perfect tense'. The meaning of the word is then understood by the context of the text or spoken words.

This article will mention the idea of context. 'context' is defined as, "The parts of a written or spoken statement that precede or follow a specified word or passage and can influence its meaning or effect" plus "the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc."

As an example of how language is used and how it must be explained in its context, you may recall John Ch. 11, when the Lord Jesus told the disciples in v.11, "*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep*". The disciples replied in v.12 "*Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well*". John clarifies the Lord's words in v.13 "*Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.*"

In brief, when the Lord told them that Lazarus was sleeping, they misunderstood and thought he meant natural sleep, John tells us that Jesus spoke about Lazarus being dead, and told them plainly "*Lazarus is dead*". The context of that passage clarifies what the Lord Jesus meant.

Therefore I would encourage readers to follow on through this article, and it may be that further understanding of some of these thoughts in the Hebrew Epistle will be impressed on your heart.

This study may appear rather theological or technical, but sometimes the only real way to fully understand a passage in scripture is to try to determine the usage as well as the meaning of the original Greek language written by the author under the control of the Spirit of God.

The word 'perfect' in the Epistle to the Hebrews is used in 16 verses using different forms, mostly originating from the root word '*telos*', which itself appears in five verses in the Epistle.

W. Wiersbe wrote "We do not study the Bible just to get to know the Bible. We study the Bible that we might get to know God better. Too many earnest Bible students are content with outlines and expla-

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is a monthly publication that is freely available on the Internet and is intended to be a help to believers who appreciate the timeless truths of God's Word and who recognize the unchanging principles of God's will for His people. It is primarily intended to strengthen those who enjoy fellowship in local assemblies of believers who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

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nations and do not really get to know God. It is good to know the Word of God, but this should help us better know the God of the Word."

With these words in our minds, let us seek to learn what the Spirit of God intends for us to understand by the use of the word 'perfect' as it is translated in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

We note one interesting verse related to this word in Mat. 5:48 (KJV) — "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*" It has been suggested that being 'perfect' in this passage refers to "uprightness and sincerity of character with the thought of maturity in godliness or attaining the goal of conformity to the character of God. While sinless perfection is impossible, godliness, in its biblical concept, is attainable for the children of the Father." 'Perfect', in this instance, evidently means to attain to a goal that is intended for the believer in Christ.

A similar exhortation is found from Paul in Ephesians 5:1: "*Be ye therefore followers (imitators) of God as dear children*" The standard for the heirs of the kingdom, then, is God's own moral perfection.

Peter writes in Ch 1 of his first epistle "*be ye holy for I am holy*". God is separate, different from His creation, both in His essential nature and in the perfection of His attributes, therefore, this character is the desire of His heart for His children.

The Lord Jesus in Jn. 17, speaking to His Father about the disciples, in v.11 says that the disciples "*are in this world*", but in v.14, He notes that "*they are not of the world*". Then in v.19, he prays that they might be "*sanctified through the truth*"

Sanctification is not so much simply being separated from, but rather being separated unto.

The word 'perfect' is a common word in our English language and as noted, can be found in 123 verses in our New Testament.

Quite often in the way we use language, the meaning can only be determined by the context. According to one English dictionary, 'perfect' as an adjective may mean "conforming absolutely to the description or definition of an ideal type" as in "a perfect sphere" or "a

perfect gentleman". It may also mean "excellent or complete beyond practical or theoretical improvement". As a verb (used with an object) it may mean "to bring to completion or finish; to bring to perfection; make flawless or faultless". The context in which it occurs will enable the reader to determine the meaning of the word.

Principles of Bible Study

In the translation of the scriptures, translators not only look at the meaning and grammar, but at the context of a Greek or Hebrew word, and they designate a suitable English word as they seek to convey as much as possible the original thought. One has only to address a concordance such as "Strong's" or a dictionary such as "Vine's" to see the application of many different English words for a single Greek word.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, there are four similar Greek words and one entirely unrelated Greek word that are translated 'perfect'. We will address each usage using both Strong's Concordance and Vine's Expository Dictionary for help to seek an understanding of these words, each of them in its context.

As we read the Scripture and seek to understand it, there are a few important principles to keep in mind. The following lists a few of them:

1. True Interpretation of the scriptures can only be under the guidance of the Spirit of God
2. The subject matter in the text being discussed
3. The applicable meaning of each word must be determined
4. The grammar of each word must be determined
5. The general usage by the writer of each word should be reviewed
6. More closely, the usage by the writer of each word to the intended readers
7. Who are the intended readers of the text
8. The context in which the word is used. (Context is defined as "the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning.")
9. The interpretation is not in conflict with other clearer scriptures on the subject matter.

Sad to say, total dependence on commentaries may only lead to confusion. Dr. Gaebelein is reported to have noted that there are over sixty different interpretations by commentators on the book of Revelation. I am not against the use of commentaries, but would encourage careful, wise, considerate use of them.

The following excerpt from an article on "*Understanding God's Word*" is interesting:

"Hermeneutics (from the Greek word *hermeneuo*, which means to explain or interpret) is the branch of theology that focuses on identifying and applying sound principles of biblical interpretation. While the Bible is generally plain in its meaning, proper interpretation requires careful study and is not always an easy task. Consider that the Bible was written over a period of roughly 2,000 years by 40 or more authors using three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek). The authors wrote in different genres and had different vocabularies, personalities, cultural backgrounds, and social standings. The Holy Spirit moved each of these men to produce His inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21), but He allowed their various writing styles and personalities to be expressed in its pages. It was written in a culture very different from our modern world and has been translated from its original languages. These are just some of the factors that must be taken into account as we interpret."

(to be continued)

"When God intends to fill a soul, He first makes it empty. When He intends to enrich a soul, He first makes it poor. When He intends to exalt a soul, He first makes it sensible to its own miseries, wants, and nothingness."

John Flavel (1630-1691).

Paul's Metaphors Accountancy: Profit or Loss

Alan Davidson

Paul was in business for Christ. He was trading for eternity in the currency of heaven. *"But what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ"*, Phil. 3:7.

Paul wrote about Abraham. *"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him (reckoned unto his account) for (as, held to be) righteousness."* Gal. 3:6. Righteousness was credited to Abraham in the Divine ledger. Moses calculated profit and loss; *"Esteeming (accounting) the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect (was looking) unto the recompense of the reward"* Heb. 11:26.

Today the financial world revolves around stock market prices. Nations suffer austerity because of currency levels, inflation and banking losses. Corruption leads to a change in bank notes. The value of investments, interest rates and valuations fluctuate daily.

Amid the incessant media focus on the "rich listers" and the continual bombardment of "get rich quick" strategies, the believer's attention could easily be diverted away from the inestimable wealth that is ours in our Lord Jesus Christ. *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through is poverty might be rich"*, 2 Cor. 8:9. *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace"*, Eph. 1:7. *"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"*, Eph. 2:7. *"...God, who is rich in mercy,...."* Eph. 2:4. *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"* Rom. 11:33. *"In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"*, Col. 2:3. *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"*, Col. 2:9. *"And ye are complete in him"*, Col. 2:10. *"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the un-*

searchable riches of Christ", Eph. 3:8. *"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man"*, Eph. 3:16.

Paul wrote *"What things were gain to me"*, Phil. 3:7. We may ask, "What things?" In the previous verses he lists the "Things" he formerly considered as of great merit and morality. He had been before conversion a practicing Jewish fundamentalist, fanatical in his beliefs, fastidious in his practices. He had purity of parentage, family nobility and ceremonial morality. His outward conduct religiously was irreproachable. Phil 3:4-6. He puts these "Things" into the profit and loss columns of his new spiritual ledger. His assets changed to liabilities, pluses became minuses and gains were really damages compared to what he now had in Christ. *"Those I counted loss for Christ"*, Phil. 3:7.

"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but (to be) loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I may win (gain) Christ", Phil. 3:8. This is his account after thirty years of faithful service. The former things he put in the loss column. He cast them away as refuse, unworthy to be counted. They were as excrement of animals, refuse of crops, droppings from the table or wipings of the hands. In the profit column his gain was Christ. The blank side of the balance sheet was filled as being conformed unto His death and the quickening power of the risen Christ in his life.

In 2 Timothy we read Paul's last recorded words. He has no home, no wealth, no possessions and little clothes. He is in prison at Rome; probably a dismal cold underground cell, with a hole in the roof for air, soon to be executed as a criminal. His service is over and he will soon be handing in the account. His is not defeated or disappointed. He has put his deposit in the bank of Glory, he has handled the currency of Heaven, his treasures are above. He says, *"I know (Him) whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep (guard the deposit) which I have committed unto Him against that day"* 2 Tim. 1:12. Paul is speaking of all that he has as a believer in salvation and service. The account has increased in value, the proceeds are in safe keeping and he is sure of a good interest rate.

Stewardship is like a deposit account, against the future day of reward. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, He will make manifest what may be obscure at present. "*Gold, silver, precious stones*", 1 Cor. 3:12, are valuable, costly, durable, non combustible, and cannot be manufactured. "*wood, hay, stubble*" are common, perishable, products of nature. The plus or minus columns differ in cost, character and combustibility. As a bad workman suffers loss of wages, or a poor accountant makes a loss in business so the true assessment will be made in the "*day of our Lord Jesus Christ*", 1 Cor. 1:8.

"*They that will (are determined to be, plan to be) rich, fall into temptation and a snare*", 1 Tim. 6:9. Gold is not gain or godliness. Godly men, such as Abraham and David were rich. Poor men can sin by desiring to be rich. Determination at any price to gain wealth can lead to corruption. The believer can be overwhelmed in pursuit of earthly gains in this present life with a destructive effect upon spiritual gain. "*Charge them that are rich in this world (the present age), that they be not high minded, nor trust (have hope) in uncertain riches*", 1 Tim. 6:17. They should not put confidence in precarious possessions even though obtained in an entirely proper way. To Timothy, Paul writes; "*I give thee charge in the sight of God...that thou keep this commandment*". Timothy was given the doctrines and teachings of this Epistle, to keep as a trustee, to preserve that truths of scripture as a priceless treasure, "*until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*", 1 Tim. 6:13-14.

At the end of his life Paul summarized the account. "*For I am now ready to be offered (priestly), the time of my departure (nautical, ship sailing away) is at hand. I have fought a good fight (wrestler), I have finished my course, (runner) I have kept the faith (military, as a guard)*" (2 Tim. 4:6-7). Paul has kept "the faith" objectively, the deposit, the truth he had kept safe, he has been loyal to his trust. "henceforth there is laid up (as a deposit) for me a crown of righteousness". Paul had no doubt about how his account would look when the books were evaluated. Stored away for him at the Judgment Seat was a profitable, just reward for faithful stewardship. His earthly life was soon to end in the unjust court of Caesar.

What loss he had suffered in this life would prove to be eternal gain from the Righteous Judge, "at that day", 2 Tim. 4:6-8.

A full cup is the most powerful weapon wherewith to meet a tempting Devil. If we are so abiding in Christ that we can truly say, "My cup runneth over," there is in certain sense, no room for Satan to come in.

An Assembly Should Be . . . But Corinth Wasn't, pt 1

Joel Portman

1 Cor. 1:9-10, 13; 3:1-3; 5:6-8;
10:20-21; 14:26

Many of us have a book on 1st and 2nd Corinthians by J. R. Caldwell in our libraries that bears the title, "The Charter of the Church". This is an appropriate title for a book that gives a majority of the teaching regarding the practices of a New Testament local assembly, though we often quote Matt. 18:20 with reference to the same. 1 Corinthians, along with 1 Timothy, contains apostolic instruction given to us to give guidance in local assembly matters, both practical and spiritual in content and application. That being said, it is interesting that the apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, did so against the background of the major problems that existed in that assembly. Sometimes believers wonder how it could be called an assembly when the problems and deviations from truth are considered. However, in that day, what else could bear witness to Christ in that vile city apart from that assembly, even with all its deviations from the truth. Also, God undoubtedly recognized the presence of faithful and exercised saints that were a part of it who desired its restoration. And we know that the believers there did respond to the correction

that Paul gave them by means of this epistle. So that we are presented with the truth of what an assembly should be against the background of its failure. In the same way, we read the letter that our exalted Lord sent by John to the seven churches of Asia, which in many cases was intended to correct grievous errors that He saw in them, and yet He (the only one capable), still recognized and treated them as assemblies. So let us consider what an assembly should be, even though it is clear that the assembly in Corinth was not that.

1. A Unified Company (ch. 1)

We take note that an assembly will only be as unified as we personally seek to make it. It is easy to blame others if there is a lack of unity in an assembly, but we should ask if we are personally contributing to or detracting from that unity. Of course, unity with others must depend on conformity to the Holy Scriptures. It is a unity that is established and maintained by the Holy Spirit on a solid basis, which is the person of Christ and the Word of God. Paul deals with the most important problem first, even though they had not mentioned it to Paul. Rather, the saints in Corinth seem to be ignoring this problem, but it came first and was very grieving to the apostle. God's assembly is intended to express unity, even with diverse members in it. We can hardly read the New Testament without realizing that truth. Every picture of a local assembly that is given suggests unity, i.e, a body, a building, a temple, a chaste virgin, a little flock, etc. We ask if the unity of an assembly means that much to us, or are we willing to tolerate conditions that are adverse to it?

Paul shows that assembly division has three results:

1. (1:13) It dishonors Christ and the gospel. Notice especially: for division to be right, Christ must be divided, another must be crucified for them instead, and another name is given the place that Christ ought to have.
2. It harms and hinders the assembly (ch. 3). We notice the carnal condition of the believers in Corinth, which was the cause as well as the result of their disunity.
3. It ruins and denies one aspect of the Lord's Supper (ch. 11) They were professing some-

thing in the Lord's Supper that didn't actually exist, and judgment was the result.

It is vitally important for us to seek to maintain the unity of the assembly where we are if at all possible. We note Eph. 4:1-2, that Paul gives qualities and attitudes that, if maintained, will promote the unity of the assembly where we are.

God will hold anyone responsible who introduces anything that harms unity and fellowship of the believers. SELF lies at the core of many, or most, assembly disunity, and SATAN is seeking to do anything possible to ruin assembly unity.

Paul's mention of the fellowship of His Son in v.9, enforces the expression of unity among saints. May we seek to enjoy that fellowship as long as the assembly exists.

2. A Spiritual Company (ch. 3)

Ideal assemblies of the New Testament were marked by two basic features: Simplicity and Spirituality. It seems to be a tendency of man to complicate matters, whether in social and political spheres or in that which is spiritual. Introduction of orders, rules, hierarchies, or organizations and committees, all of these are contrary to the pattern that we observe in early days. Assembly meetings were extremely simple, but at the same time, ideally, they were extremely spiritual. Again in an application to ourselves personally, are we contributing to the spiritual state of an assembly, or is our attitude, condition and conduct detracting from it? It is clear that God intends every believer to be spiritual, and that is to be under the control of, guided by, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is said by more than one godly brother, that a believer can be as spiritual as they desire to be, but one cannot be spiritual when the flesh is controlling and we are catering to its desires. The sad reality is that many believers live much of their lives in a carnal condition.

There was much evidence of carnality in Corinth. Their divisions and cliques were one evidence of it, but also their behavior, their self-conceit and self-confidence, and the permissive spirit that allowed open immorality among them. Their continuation at the idol's temple or at feasts associated with idolatrous practices and their scandalous behavior at the

Lord's Supper (ch. 11) also displayed a carnal spirit. Paul said that they were "*carnal and walk as men,*" (3:1, 3, 4). Paul's exercise toward them was limited by their carnality (3:1).

This condition among believers mars the power and testimony of a local assembly and should be addressed by each one of us, first of all as seen in ourselves. It is possible to slide into a condition that produces a failure to recognize how far one actually is from the Lord and how out of touch one is, and this is a condition that is addressed and corrected by the Lord in Laodicea. They were blind to their own condition. We are in a sad state if we fail to judge ourselves and seek restoration and renewed spiritual exercise.

3. A Holy Company (Ch. 5)

Again, Paul reinforces a principle that should be the exercise of every believer, and that is to maintain and display a holy condition of life that will be reflected in the assembly. Sadly, Corinth was failing to recognize the necessity for this important truth. So that we see that an assembly will only be as holy as its members are in their heart, mind, and life. We need to face the truth that we can be as holy as we are exercised to be. Holiness is a word related to 'sanctification', which is defined as separation from all that is contrary to the holy character of God, who Himself is holy. Regardless of the reference used, all define holiness, holy, or saint as a state of being separated in principle and conduct. God is the ultimate defining standard of holiness, and as seen in believers, it is a state and life that conforms to that standard, being separated from all that is contrary to it. One reference (G. B. Stevens, quoted in Vine's Expository Dictionary) tells us that the word *hagios* means more than sacred, more than honorable, more than pure and free from defilement. It is "more comprehensive. . . .It is characteristically godlikeness." This is a high standard to which we have been called, which is a state positionally that is to be reflected practically in the lives of every believer who is a "saint".

It is obvious that the believers in Corinth were not living holy lives even though they were saints (1 Cor. 1:2) by calling. We learn from Israel's history that God can only dwell in

the midst of a holy people, though we also observe that He tolerated the presence of sin in them up to the point of their idolatry in the holy temple in Ezek. 8, and He judged them for it. We learn from the New Testament that unjudged sin, covered, ignored and unconfessed will ruin an assembly as well as the life of the individuals involved. Here, in Corinth, it seems that they were showing pride over their ability to tolerate open sin in their midst (5:2, they were "puffed up") and had not mourned over the sin among them. Paul continues to address this sin of their impurity and unholiness in ch. 6 and even into ch.7, where he teaches the sanctity of the marital relationship. Reading the two epistles to this assembly makes one think that the basic source of the problem was their continuing to associate with practices identified with the idol's temple. In 15:33, Paul touches on the corruption that results from wrong associations. Then in 2 Cor. 6:14-18, he again emphasizes the need for complete separation from all the contaminating influences of the vile world.

1 Cor. 5 teaches the absolute requirement for assembly discipline in any case involving the sins that are defined in v. 11. Sin that is unjudged in a believer has three results that also affect the assembly testimony and environment. It dishonors the Lord, by casting disrepute on His Name and Person. It defiles the assembly since it associates the assembly and other believers with that practice. And it ultimately destroys the person if unconfessed and dealt with. It will ruin his life and testimony completely.

Holiness and separation to the Lord is not a condition that brings sadness and a mournful attitude into one's life. For a child of God, it is the only condition that truly results in joy and peace within. May we seek to maintain and display such a condition as individual believers enjoying fellowship with a Holy God.

(continued)

Striving against sin is most painful at present, but indulgence in sin proves most bitter in the end. We cannot trifle with any sin without paying bitterly for it.

Character of Divine Love, pt 1

Robert Surgenor

The "Love of Christ" is an expression that you will only find three times in your Bible. However, in the New Testament, love is found 236 times, being translated from three Greek words - "Agapae," 106 times; "gapo," 109 times; and "Phileo," 21 times. Does the four-word statement, "the love of Christ," mean Christ's love to me, or does it mean my love to Christ?

(1) Our first text states "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*" (Rom. 8:35).

(2) The second text says "*For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:*" (2 Cor. 5:14).

(3) The third text reads; "*And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*" (Eph. 3:19).

(1) Love, the basis of all the good things God is working for us in Romans.

(2) Love, the prompting factor for Paul to live a new life in 2 Corinthians.

(3) Love, filling the saints with the fulness of God in Ephesians.

John wrote; "*We love Him, because He first loved us*" (1 Jn. 4:19). The threefold expression, "the love of Christ," never refers to "We love Him," but always to, "He first loved us." Our love to Him was prompted because of His love to us, but His love to us was not prompted from any worthiness in ourselves. He loved us, not because of what we were, but in spite of what we were. He loved us just because He loved us.

The Love of Christ - Romans 8

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8:35)

When considering the context from verse 28 to 39, one becomes aware that Paul is dealing with the eternal purposes of God relative to the call and securing of His elect people.

The "All Things" of Romans 8

Verse 28 tells us; "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*"

Many expositors take this up and tell us that this means that any tragedy that may befall us in life is working for our good. In other words, they say that if I am involved in an accident and my legs are cut off, that is working for my good. Or, if my house burns to the ground, or someone murders my wife or children that is God working for my good. They say that the word "good" also "means happy or pleasant," so that seeing my wife murdered is pleasant and makes me happy? Really? It is wonderful what so called "truths" people can extract from a single verse. However, any verse taken out of context becomes a pretext.

Consider the words, "*all things.*" Ask yourself, what are the "all things?" To be scripturally sensible, the "all things" are simply all of the things that are mentioned in the following verses of this portion. Notice also that our verse states that what follows are according to His purpose. Thayer's Lexicon tells us that the words "His purpose" conveys the thought of "the setting forth of a thing, placing of it in view." So our verse could easily read "that all things work together for good according to the setting forth of the things placed in view." The things God places in view are those developed in the following verses. They are essentially working together for our good, as we shall see.

The first thing we see working for us is, God knowing us.

God's Foreknowledge

"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (verse 29).

Ephesians 1:4 reveals that God's foreknowledge of us was before the foundation of the world. It is amazing that tens of billions of years ago, we were known by God. He was forming a love relationship. I am deeply humbled at the thought. One cannot position people or impart blessings to them if they are not known. That is why the first working of God for our good is, God knowing us.

God's Predestination

The next of the "all things" is God predestinating us. That word is "proorizo," and simply means "to determine beforehand." It is interesting to notice that this word always conveys the thought of securing a blessing. Notice - "we have been predestinated to be conformed the the image of His Son". In Ephesians 1:5, We are informed that God has "predestinated us unto the adoption of children," and in verse 11 we have been predestinated to obtain an inheritance. Thus three great things have been secured for us; We shall be like Him. We have been incorporated into His family as sons, and lastly, we have been given an inheritance.

At the end of our verse it is interesting to notice that Christ is brought into the picture. "That He might be the firstborn among many brethren." Why do we have the abrupt mention of our Lord? Perhaps the words "many brethren" unlocks the door. How could Christ be the firstborn if there were no brethren? The word "firstborn" connects us with the human race, and conveys the thought of eminence. Colossians 1:18 states "And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence." The truth of this verse could never become a reality apart from our Lord becoming a human being. Paul relates this truth to the Hebrew saints, writing; "Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."

Before His incarnation, the Trinity was all spirits and so were the angels. Only one Person in the spirit world became an actual human being, and that person was the Christ. "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). What a tremendous event! God became a man. As you can readily see, none of our blessings being considered in these verses could ever become a reality apart from this.

God's Effectual Call

Paul reveals more good things in verse 30. "Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also

justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified."

He called us. In Matthew 22:14 we read; "For many are **called**, but few are chosen." That is a general call. When the gospel is proclaimed to an audience, they are being called, but not all are being saved. However, there is in the Scriptures a call that is what we term an effective call. In other words, the preaching of the gospel penetrates their hearts in convicting power by the Holy Spirit, so that they cannot resist. The result is, they trust Christ and are immediately saved. We see this truth impressed upon the Corinthian saints. "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called** to be saints." "God is faithful, by whom ye were **called** unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." "But unto them which are **called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." "For ye see your **calling**, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are **called**" (1 Cor. 1:2, 9, 24, 26).

Paul relates this to himself. "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and **called** me by His grace" (Gal.1:15).

Writing to the Galatians he pens "For, brethren, ye have been **called** unto liberty" (Gal. 5:13).

The Ephesian saints were also reminded of this precious truth. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are **called**" (Eph. 4:1).

Peter also reminds his readers "But as He which hath **called** you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:15). This effective call is another in the list of "all things" working for our good.

God Justifying

Paul moves on and mentions, "them He justified." This is the immediate result of responding to the powerful Spirit-directed call. To be justified means to be exonerated of all the charges laid against us. When a person is incarcerated for a crime, then later pardoned by the governor, he walks out of prison a free

man. However, the stigma of his crime remains, even though he is free. Justification is vastly different. Justification means to be cleared of all guilt as never having been guilty in the first place. Often, we read of someone being accused of a crime he never committed. This results in his imprisonment. Later, evidence is uncovered that he is innocent of all the charges that were laid against him. Consequently, he walks out of prison, not pardoned, but rather justified. There is no criminal stigma on him, for he never committed a crime. Those who have been called, upon trusting Christ are looked upon by God as if they had never sinned. Amazing! Perhaps that is why you will not find the word pardon in the New Testament. Romans 5:1 states; *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

The effectual call always produces justification, for when God's call comes in convicting power, that person will trust Christ as Savior. There is no doubt about it. When preaching the word of God to sinners, it is fruitless to employ human tactics in an effort to convert them. All the preacher is responsible to do is what Ezekiel and Jonah were told. *"Thou shalt speak my words unto them"* (Eze.2:7). *"Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee"* (Jonah 3:2). Paul declared to the Corinthians *"My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"* (1 Cor. 2:4).

I remember the late William Warke saying "These preachers that stay up half the night reasoning and talking to sinners in an effort to get them to profess, seemingly don't believe in election." Blunt, but true.

God Glorifying

The next expression from Paul's pen is rather alarming *"and whom He justified, them He also glorified."* This is another of the "all things" working together for our good. "Glorified!" What does that mean? It means that when the Lord comes to take us home at the Rapture, we will be immediately glorified. God *"shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body"* (Phil.3:21). However, what is most interesting is that the word "glorified" is

in the past tense, even though it has not yet taken place. We are talking about the near future, not the past, when we speak of being glorified, yet the Scripture presents this truth as if it has already taken place. Why? Well, this is the Spirit's way of informing us that in God's eternal workings, the glorification is set and sure as if it had already taken place. It is divinely guaranteed. It can never, never, be annulled. I may fail. I may come short of God's desires for my walk, yet His workings for my good can never change nor fail.

Who Can Be Against Us?

After announcing these immutable good things, Paul raises a challenging question. *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (vs. 31). Paul told the Thessalonian assembly *"We would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us."* (1 Thes. 2:18). Satan is against us. All the powers of darkness are against us. *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"* (Eph. 6:12). Paul's question is worded to convey the thought that nothing can be against us. How can this be? The solution is simple. What Paul is addressing here is the fact that nothing can hinder the "all things" working together for our good, relative to the divine plan and program of God. "Against us," has nothing to do with my life for God and my efforts to serve Him. No! What we are considering is the fact that no power can effectively work against God's divine plan for us. The powers of darkness may hinder my labors for God, but they can never destroy my justification, or my glorification. That I believe is the meaning of this vital passage.

(To be continued)

No man can estimate the greatness of the love of Christ, or the merit of His precious blood; except He can fathom the depth of His own sin, and see clearly the extent of his own ingratitude.