God's Purpose for Man: Perfection in Love

Let us think about love. It is a word we hear often, a word we read and sing about. Yet the question remains: why must we have love?

We do not find the answer in what we feel, but in what the Word of God says. The apostle John shows us where love comes from and why we cannot live without it. Let us turn to 1 John, chapter 4.

In verses 7 and 8, the apostle John writes: “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”

God is love, and we must come to be like the Father. In this same epistle, in 1 John 3:2, we read: “and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” Love, then, is our goal. The commandments and the keeping of God's Word have this purpose: that we should come to love.

Love Must Be Made Perfect

Let us return to 1 John 4. In verses 17 and 18, the apostle goes further: “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”

It is not enough simply to love, nor simply to have love. Our love must be made perfect. It seems too much for us, but this is God's plan for man.

This is what God intended from the very beginning, from the foundation of the world: that man should come to perfection. It is perfection in longsuffering, in goodness, in gentleness, in love. Through this love we have boldness in the day of judgment, because we shall be like Him.

A Commandment, Not a Piece of Advice

Let us follow, step by step, God's plan for us. We shall see what purpose God had for us before we were created, even before the earth was created, and what He wanted man to be.

In Matthew 5:48, the Lord Jesus says: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” These words may seem to be merely an encouragement or a piece of advice, but they are a commandment. The Lord is not asking for some ordinary kind of perfection, at the piano or in music. He calls us to be perfect even as our heavenly Father is perfect.

That is why it is good to see what Scripture says about the Father, about the Son and about this high calling to perfect love. If we want to know where we must arrive, we must know the character and the attributes of God.

His Ways and His Law Are Perfect

In Psalm 18:30 we read: “As for God, his way is perfect.” Elsewhere, Scripture tells us that our own ways are as far from His ways as the heavens are from the earth. In other words, there is a great difference between the path on which God walks and the one on which we walk. He walks in light, while we walk in thick darkness. In heaven there is light, while on the earth where we live there is darkness – in the spiritual sense, of course.

Why are God's ways perfect? Because He is perfect and cannot have anything but perfect ways.

Psalm 19:7 says that the law of the Lord is also perfect, that is, flawless. It is only natural that it should be so, because God is perfect. The One who is perfect could give nothing but a perfect law. We can sum up the Kingdom of God in these two things: the law of His Kingdom is perfect, and its ways and ordinances are perfect as well.

The Lord Jesus Was Made Perfect

In Matthew 5 we saw that the Father is perfect. Let us now see what Scripture says about the Lord Jesus. In Hebrews 2:9-10 we read: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

“It became him”, says the Word of God. It was fitting that God should make the Lord Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, perfect through sufferings.

In the same epistle, in Hebrews 5:7-9, we read further: “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

Of the Father we have read that He is perfect, and of the Lord Jesus we read that He was made perfect. Also in Hebrews, in chapter 12, verse 2, we are told: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

What do we learn from this? In Genesis, God says that He makes man in His image and after His likeness. What plan, then, did God have for man? If God is perfect and His Son is perfect, how was man meant to be made?

We find the answer in Deuteronomy 32:4, where Moses speaks of all God's work: “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” How much of God's work is perfect? All of it. And we are not left out, for we too are His work. The perfection to which God calls us is His work in us.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 7, we see the glorious plan God had for man: to raise him to a high stature, to the stature of the Lord Jesus. If the Lord Jesus is perfect, God wants to bring us to perfection as well. In verses 11 and 12 we read: “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.”

The question asked here is clear: if perfection could have been obtained through the Levitical priesthood or through the Law of Moses, what need was there for the Lord Jesus to come? There would have been no need. Man's great need, then, was perfection. If it could have been attained in any other way, the Lord Jesus would not have had to come.

In verses 18 and 19 we see that the Law God gave on Mount Sinai made nothing perfect: “For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.” The Law could make nothing perfect, but a better hope has been brought in for us. What was not possible under the old covenant is possible under the new covenant.

The writer goes on to show that the Lord Jesus was made the surety of a better covenant. Then, in verse 25, he writes: “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” The Lord Jesus ever lives, that is, He is alive, and He intercedes for us with one purpose: to save us to the uttermost, completely. This is God's purpose: to bring us to the stature for which we were ordained from eternity.

Sacrifices Do Not Make the Conscience Perfect

This requirement of God can also be seen in Hebrews 9. There the author speaks of the first covenant, of the Holiest of all and of the tabernacle of meeting. In verses 9 and 10 it is written: “This tabernacle is a figure for the present time, in which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot make him who offers this worship perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. They are only earthly ordinances, given, like everything concerning meats, drinks and divers washings, until a time of reformation.”

Recently we have had several things to sort out in the family, and one of them kept me in the kitchen for a long time. At one point the thought came into my heart: “How am I wasting my time like this?” It seemed to me that I was wasting it, when I had better things to do. I thank God that He helped me to drive this thought away and to understand that, in fact, that was where His plan for me was.

It is not my sacrifices that matter. Nor does the time I give to the Kingdom of God matter, nor my service: that I go somewhere, that I do something, that I write or do not write. Such worship does not make me perfect as pertaining to the conscience. I must do, with patience, in peace and in rest, the things that nobody else can do. Even if they seem of little importance, they are, in fact, of great importance.

Some think that a man kept in prison for many years is useless, because he cannot bring souls to God. They imagine what great works that man would have done if he had been outside. But they do not consider how much God can work within him, because He is working to perfect his whole being.

Through what does God work? How did He work with the Lord Jesus? Did He make Him perfect through many years of ministry? The Lord Jesus ministered for only three years, and three years pass quickly. He was not made perfect through His ministry or through the healings He performed, but through suffering. Suffering helped Him to come to perfection in longsuffering and in love, because love overcame evil.

How is evil overcome? Scripture says in Romans 12:21: “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” The Lord Jesus overcame Satan with good. He did not resist at all, and that was precisely His work: not to resist. This brought Him to perfection, and Satan lost the battle. Had the Lord Jesus resisted, things would have been entirely different.

We also read about God’s work with man in Hebrews 13:20-21: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

In many places in Scripture we find that God works in us. What are His works in us like? Perfect. That is why the apostle prays that the God of peace would make the believers perfect in every good work.

The Word and the Spirit work in us

Is this perfection for all believers, or only for a certain group among them? It is for all. It is God’s work with man, through which He brings man to perfection, and several factors are at work in it. Let us take them one by one.

The first is the Word of God. Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” When must the man of God be perfect? After he dies? No, but now, so that he may be thoroughly furnished for every good work he has to do today. This is the purpose of the Word: to bring man to perfection, according to God’s plan.

The Holy Spirit also works for man's perfection. In the Gospel according to John it is written that the Holy Spirit was sent to earth to teach us all things, to bring things to our remembrance, to be with us always, with us and in us. Peter also shows how the Spirit works, right at the beginning of his epistle, in 1 Peter 1:1-2: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied."

The Spirit works and leads us to sanctification. In this same chapter, in verses 15 and 16, holiness is given to us as a commandment: "But as He who has called you is holy, so be holy yourselves in all your conduct. For it is written: 'Be holy, for I am holy.'" To come to sanctification, we need the Spirit, this Intercessor who is living and makes intercession for us, but who also does other things: He exhorts us and guides us. That is why we must walk after the things of the Spirit.

All God's work is perfect and has a single purpose: to bring us to His likeness, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Concerning the Spirit's work with man, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18: "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 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."

Here the Spirit of the Lord and the Word of God work together. We behold as in a mirror the beauty of the Lord, and the Spirit changes us into the same image as His. He sanctifies our life and works with us, so that we may come to sanctification and bear the image of God within us.

For the perfecting of the saints

Who else works with us, so that we may reach the stature for which our Heavenly Father created us? In Ephesians 4:6, Paul writes: "There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, who works through all and who is in all." God works through all, but, as the next verse says, "to every one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ." He works through all, with a single purpose.

Verses 11-15 show this purpose: "And He gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and their cunning craftiness in the means of deceit; but, being faithful to the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head, Christ."

God gave these ministries for the perfecting of the saints. Our part is to be faithful to the truth.

Let us dwell on it: "but, being faithful to the truth in love, may grow up in all things", with a single purpose: to come to Him who is the Head, Christ, to a perfect man. This is God's work with man through the church, and the Epistle to the Ephesians is an epistle written to the church.

We make God a liar

If someone dares to say that perfection cannot be attained, what is he actually disputing? He is disputing God Himself. On the one hand he makes Him powerless, and on the other he does not believe in the plan God made before the foundation of the world. Everything that is written, the whole plan that unfolds in the Word of God, has a single purpose: to bring man to this goal. If we do not believe, we dispute God's work and make Him a liar, as if He could not accomplish it.

Then we would have to rely on an unwritten formula, unknown to us, a mysterious formula by which God would transform us and bring us to perfection. Many do not even believe that there will ever be perfection. And those who do believe it say that God will accomplish it in an intermediate time, between departing from the earth and arriving in the Kingdom of God. But what about those who will be living at the end and will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye? What time will they have left? Scripture says that first the dead will rise, and then those who remain will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

This is what I am working on

We find the same work of perfecting in the Epistle to the Colossians, which was also written to the church. In Colossians 1:24-25, the apostle Paul writes to the believers in Colossae: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and in my flesh I fill up that which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ, for His body's sake, which is the Church. Of it I was made a minister, according to the stewardship which God gave me for you, to fulfil the Word of God." Then, in verses 28 and 29, he shows what this ministry was aiming at: "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. This is what I labour for, striving according to the working of His power, which works mightily in me."

This is what the apostle Paul was labouring for, the same Paul we praise and of whom we say that no one can be like him. He strove according to the working of God's power, which worked mightily in him, with one single aim: to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Paul, God, the Lord Jesus and, we can say, the Holy Spirit all took part in this work. As we saw in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Lord Jesus is the Mediator, and He lives to intercede for us, in order to make us perfect.

That is why our plan must be the same as Paul's. If we want to bring someone to Christ, so that they may have a share in salvation, we must work according to God's plan. If God wants to make people in His image and likeness, we too must work towards the same thing.

Let patience have its perfect work

We have seen that the church also takes part in this work. Now it remains for us to look at our own personal part. In Hebrews 6:1-2 we find an exhortation: "Therefore, leaving the first principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of the laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgement." The Word calls us to leave the first principles and to go on to perfection. It is like school: we leave the first year behind and move on

towards the end of our schooling, towards finishing our education.

James writes the same thing in chapter 1, verses 2-4: “My brethren, count it all joy when you go through various trials, knowing that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” In these verses we see the Lord Jesus once again, but also the thief who was crucified with Him. Patience had to have its perfect work in the thief, so that he might be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Many people have been martyred, and in them patience had its perfect work.

Whose part is this: God’s or man’s? We are called to count it all joy when we go through various trials. Trials and troubles are not pleasant, but this is our calling. Here God’s part and man’s part go together. Man does not work alone, but together with God; yet there must also be our own personal part, not only God’s part.

The apostle Peter speaks of perfection in the same way, in 1 Peter 5:10: “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.” We are told: after we have suffered a little while. But how must we suffer? With patience, so that patience may have its perfect work and we may be perfect. How long is “a little while”? One year, two, three, ten, until we depart from this earth. The Word tells us that whoever endures to the end will be saved.

Love consists in keeping the commandments

We also find man’s part in 1 John, chapter 2. Let us bear in mind that these are not metaphorical promises, but things that must happen in each one of us. In verses 3-6, John writes: “And by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has been perfected; by this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as Jesus walked.”

Verse 5 calls for clarification: “But whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has been perfected.” This is not a metaphor. The aim of the commandment is love, and if we keep His Word, the love of God is perfected in us. Perfect love is, we might say, the supreme goal. It casts out fear, because fear has torment.

John returns to this in 1 John 5:2-3: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” He writes the same thing in 2 John 5-6: “And now I beseech you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another! And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment in which you must walk, as you have heard from the beginning.” Love is our part now, and it consists in living according to the commandments of the Lord Jesus.

In closing, let us turn to Philippians 1:6: “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:” God can bring to

completion what He begins, on condition that man does his part and remains in obedience to God to the very end. Then God completes His work, and it will be a perfect, flawless work.

“Whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has been perfected.” This is an extraordinary promise. We have not yet reached it, but if we are determined to keep His Word, the love of God will be perfected in us. May the Lord help us to remain in obedience!

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