

THE



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NEXT MEETING AT FULTONDALE OCTOBER 25-31

Brother Frank Chumley will be preaching in that meeting. Make your plans now to attend each night. We will have more to say about it later.

How To Reform Society

By Ed Harrell

Late in the 19th century churches were under pressure to join national campaigns to pass legislation on such moral issues as prohibition and Sunday closing laws. F. D. Srygley took this swipe:

"Some church papers and preachers are whooping up the people to send petitions to the legislature to stop the railroads from running freight trains on Sunday, and the DAILY AMERICAN suggests that it would also be a good thing for the publicans and sinners to send petitions to the churches to stop church members from doing so much badness every day in the week and Sunday too. If this plan works out right we may reasonably hope for considerable improvement in the morality of railroads and churches both...but I am not overly sanguine of the success of the scheme. Petitions may do very well for common sinners like railroads, but in severe cases of meanness I am in favor of something more potent. Nothing short of amazing grace and a living faith will improve the morality of churches. That's my idea."

That's my idea too. Christianity has to do with the reform of society only as that is related to the purification of individual lives by the power of "amazing grace and a living faith."

I see two reasons why Christians should not get caught up in the popular social reforms - even those that seem to rest on moral principles. First, a Christian's responsibility is not the cleansing of the world but of individual men and women in the world. Jesus's mission was to seek and to save the lost. (Lk. 19:10.) How can I justify time and effort spent in worldly crusades with worldly men which at best will make the world a slightly more comfortable place to live? Social reforms will save not one soul. And the danger exists that some may actually think they are performing their Christian duty by

joining hand with false religionists to force sinners to behave themselves against their will. We need to keep in view our spiritual mission as Christians.

Second, all such moral crusades set out to accomplish the impossible. We will never escape sin in this world. (1 Cor. 5:10.) History has seen many moral reforms, and the world remains wicked and confused. Some societies are preferable to others, but in any of them we must live in the midst of sin. Our mission is not to purify the world; it to escape it. Preach the gospel to your neighbor. That will make him a better person to live with. That is about all you can do.

[Editor's Note: For some time now I have been concerned that a lot of the preaching and writing among us (even among conservatives) is taking on too much of a tone of reforming this world and too little of getting people ready for the next world. Too much about "saving America" and too little "saving sinners", too much trying to force better moral conditions in society and too little teaching on moral looseness within the church. Not enough emphasis upon the fact that Christians must live godly regardless of what their neighbors do. We think brother Harrel's article is a breath of fresh air. It hits the nail squarely on the head.- EOB]

When That which is Perfect is Come

By Jimmy Tuten, Jr.

"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" - 1 Cor. 13:9-10.

It will be the purpose of this writing to discuss the meaning of the expression: "when that which is perfect is come."

THE PROBLEM STATED

There are basically two positions on this verse of Scripture. One position asserts that the expression refers to Christ, i.e., to the perfect state in heaven following the second coming of Jesus. Barnes says, "the sense here is, that in heaven - a state of absolute perfection - that which is "in part" or which is imperfect, shall be lost in superior brightness" (BARNES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT, Vol.5, p. 254). Lenski says that the imperfection referred to still exists and that it will be removed only at the Parousia (a term denoting the second coming of Christ) of Jesus. He says, "an entirely new way of apprehending, of seeing, and of knowing shall take its place" (INTERPRETATION OF I AND II CORINTHIANS, p.566). It is thought that verse twelve of 1 Corinthians thirteen is the sustaining factor involved in this position.

The other position (one that harmonizes with the rest of the New Testament) is that the expression refers to the complete, perfect will of God made known to man through the process of Divine revelation. The position is clearly stated in the following quotation: "these gifts were to continue in the church to guide and instruct it until the completed will of God was made known." (Lipscomb, A COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES, p. 200).

Certainly men and women could only reach the stature of the fulness of Christ after full knowledge of God's plan for man was revealed (Eph. 4:11-15).

THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE

1 Cor. 12-14 is a section of Scripture dealing with "spiritual gifts." It is introduced with the expression, "now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (verse one). The whole of this chapter is devoted to the ENUMERATION of these gifts, three of which are mentioned in verses eight through ten of chapter thirteen. In addition to showing the more perfect way of love, chapter thirteen shows the DURATION of the spiritual gifts. They were to be operative until that which is "perfect" is come. Chapter fourteen concerns itself with a discussion of the REGULATION of these gifts. Observe therefore that the context clearly reveals that the spiritual gifts were given "in part" and reveals that it was these items that were to be done away with (1 Cor. 13:9-10). When Paul says, "we know in part, and we prophesy in part," he has reference to the revelation of God's will that was then being made known through "prophecies," "tongues," and "knowledge" (1 Cor. 13:8). This is more evident by the statement: "Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I speak to you either by REVELATION, or by KNOWLEDGE, or by PROPHECY, or by DOCTRINE?" (1 Cor 14:6, caps mine, JTT). The spiritual gifts, miraculous in their nature, was God's way of communicating His will to the early church. The early church did not have the will of God in written form as we have it, so God gave the church PROVISIONAL gifts until the written law was provided. Then the provisional, spiritual gifts were suspended by the perfectly revealed will (Jas. 1:25; 2 Pet. 1:3). This becomes evident when one observes the contrasts of 1 Cor. 13:

- (1) Contrast between spiritual gifts and love.
- (2) Between that which fails and that which shall not cease.
- (3) Between the part and the whole, the incomplete and the complete.
- (4) Childhood state and the state of maturity.
- (5) Knowledge in part and full knowledge.
- (6) Between seeing things darkly and seeing them face to face.

As has been shown, the purpose of spiritual gifts was to complete Divine revelation. The gifts guided the ship of Zion during the revelation period when God's will was being placed in written form. When the church reached the "stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), the temporary gifts were done away.

That which is perfect could not possibly refer to Christ. We know for fact that the spiritual gifts have ceased! Since the spiritual gifts have ceased we know that the perfect has come. But the second coming of Christ has not taken place! So, that which is perfect could not refer to Christ's coming. Then again, the context speaks of knowing fully (1 Cor. 13:12, 9-10). If this refers to knowing with the perfect knowledge that Christ has, then we would be elevated to the position that Christ occupies. This amounts to omniscience which Deity alone possesses. The Bible does not promise the Christian that he will have the full knowledge that Christ has and to the extent that God possesses it. Furthermore, Paul did not say "when He who is perfect is come," but rather, "when that which is perfect."

The word translated "perfect" is the Greek word teleious. It is defined as "having reached its end, finished, complete, perfect" (Vine, EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT WORDS, Vol. III, p. 173-174). When used of PERSONS it has reference to attaining the full limits of stature (Heb. 5:14). When used of THINGS it has reference to completion. That the "perfect" in our text has reference to God's complete revelation and not to Christ is seen in Vine's comment: "referring to the complete revelation of God's will and ways" (Vol. III, P. 174). It should be kept in mind that Jesus promised the Apostles that He would guide them into all truth, then they would have been thus guided during their lifetime. This means that the faith once and for all delivered would have been given by the time the last apostle died (Jude 3). Gifts, such as "words of wisdom," "knowledge," and "prophecy," were all necessary vehicles for conveying this truth, but now that truth has been revealed, these are no longer necessary. It is a fact that instruction received directly from God by inspiration has ceased (Gal. 1:11-12). What could spiritual gifts do now, that the Word, fully revealed, confirmed and written cannot do? Nothing! Spiritual gifts or endowments were necessary to reveal, to confirm, and to complete revelation. They are not necessary to it perpetuation. So it is then, that in the absence of the complete revelation of the written word, the church needed guidance and direction. This God provided through spiritual gifts, but now that His completed revelation has been written and recorded within pages of the New Testament, the church can stand on its own. The fact that God's full will is revealed and His provisions for saving man is completed; the fact that spiritual gifts served this end, is set forth in Eph. 4:11-15; please read it carefully!

CONCLUSION

The church existed before any of the New Testament was written. The Holy Spirit guided its establishment, filled it with His presence, and wrote letters of instruction to it. The New Testament constitutes God's will revealed through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:1-13). Until that Will was revealed and written, the church went through a miraculous age when spiritual gifts served to edify and build it up (Eph. 4:1-16; 1 Cor. 14:4-5, 12-19, 26-33). In this way early Christians would abound "in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:13). The spiritual gifts were like tug-boats, guiding the church through perilous waters. They were necessary to bringing about the completion of the church and to guiding it until revelation was placed in written form. God gave gifts unto men for the perfecting of the saints and the edifying of the body of Christ.

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