

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: LET US GO ON UNTO PERFECTION

Scripture: Philippians 3:7-14.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the just. 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. 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, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore not leaving the principles of the doctrine
of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.

There are no perfect men. You are not perfect; I am not perfect. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. No man has yet arrived at the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. No man has ever kept the law of God wholly and completely, nor would any man be perfect even if he had kept the whole law, for he would still be under the debt of original sin. But all of us could be more nearly like Christ; all of us could be more perfect than we are.

"More perfect?" There has been many an argument over the question of whether perfection is relative or absolute. Some say that it is absolute; that a thing or a person is either perfect or not perfect, and cannot be partly so. Others take the position that a man may be perfect today, and more -- or less -- perfect tomorrow. It all depends on the definition of the word "perfect." "Perfect" may sometimes be used in the absolute sense, but much more often it is used in the relative sense. To be perfect is to have all the properties or qualities belonging to the natural, completely developed, or whole state -- to be whole, complete, or sound; to be lacking in no essential detail. It comes from a Latin word which means to carry to the end, to perform, to finish, to bring to completion or maturity.

If we follow this definition, perfection is relative, not absolute. Taking into account the full growing cycle of corn, and the date, one might look at an ear of corn on July first and pronounce it perfect. But if you were to go out to pick your corn on October first, and find that same "perfect" ear of corn in the same stage of development you found it in July, you would call it imperfect, because it has not arrived at completion, was not fully developed, was not matured, as it ought to be.

Perfection is relative rather than absolute in another way. Perfection is related to nature, talents, capacities, and potentials. A small ear of popcorn is not imperfect because it is not so large as a good ear of hybrid field corn. A race horse is not imperfect because he isn't as heavy and can't pull as much as a good draft horse. All men are not alike. They have different natures, capacities, and talents. Each man achieves perfection when he develops all the properties or qualities belonging to his natural, completely developed, or whole state. Perfection is not uniformity. If every one of us were exactly like Christ in every respect, we should all be exactly like each other, and that would be tragic. In moral character we must be

like him. But it is not necessary that each one of us exactly duplicate Jesus' ability at teaching, preaching, or storytelling in order to be perfect. Perhaps our perfection should lie in the field of music, art, sculpture, chemistry, medicine, engineering, law, or what not.

Perfection is maturity. To be perfect is to be grown up to the full extent of one's nature, talents, capacities, and potentialities; to be complete, thoroughly fitted or adjusted, fully grown, mature. The words "perfect," and "perfection" are nearly always used in this relative sense in the New Testament. Perhaps one of the mistakes that Christian people make is in trying to be exactly like Jesus, and giving up part way through the growing process when the task appears impossible. Rather, each one of us should use Jesus not as an exact pattern to which all must conform in every detail, but as an example to be followed in developing one's own nature, one's own talents, capacities, endowments, and aptitudes to the perfection of maximum growth, development, and maturity.

How do we achieve perfection? If perfection is maturity, we do not achieve it in one conversion experience, or by some instantaneous and miraculous spiritual transformation. This is not to say that such experiences do not come, or that they are not desirable. A miraculous transformation or a conversion experience can change our nature and our desires, can reverse the direction of our lives and point us in the right direction. But such an experience still leaves us in the spiritual kindergarten; it cannot instantaneously make us mature, fully developed, complete, or perfectly adjusted. Perfection is maturity. The conversion experience is fine, but after having received it, we must GO ON unto perfection.

How do we achieve the perfection of maturity? Not by staying forever in the kindergarten, dealing forever with first principles. If a man had to be converted every day, if he had to go back to the beginning and rebuild his faith every day; if he had to go back and repent of all his past life all over again every day, he never could arrive at the perfection of maturity. So, in one sense, perfection is achieved by leaving the first steps behind, and going on unto perfection -- moving on to something more complete, better, bigger, finer, higher, and more

in keeping with one's real God-given nature.

On the other hand, it is also true that we can never safely ignore, discard, or leave behind the first principles of the gospel by which we took those first steps, any more than we can finish high school by forgetting all the principles of reading, writing, and arithmetic which we learned in the first grade. We may not consciously use very much first grade arithmetic when solving a problem in high school trigonometry, but the first grade principles must still be followed. Probably none of us remembers the exact moment when we learned to read and recognize the word "cat" but a Doctor of Philosophy must still know and recognize the word in his reading.

Perfection is achieved by remembering and obeying basic principles and laws, not by leaving them. Faith, one of the first principles of the gospel, is a continuing principle. There is daily need for it if we are to make any growth towards the perfection of maturity. We do not achieve maturity by abandoning our faith as we go on to something better; but as faith in one field matures into knowledge, our faith is extended, or projected into another field.

Likewise, repentance is a continuing principle. We may make one major decision of repentance, and set our faces in the right direction by that one conclusive act; but this is not final. We need to continue the process of repentance daily. True repentance is continuing adjustment to an increasing revelation of God.

"Therefore, not leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." If you will have faith in Jesus, repent and reverse the direction of your life, and obey the principles of his gospel, he will give you a new life, a new birth. But a rebirth still leaves you an infant, not a mature Christian. Paul had received a marvelous conversion experience long before he wrote to the Philippians, yet he still could say to them; in the words of J. B. Phillip's modern translation: "My brothers, I do not consider myself to have 'arrived' spiritually, nor do I consider myself already perfect. But I keep going on, grasping ever more firmly that purpose for which Christ grasped me."