

Faultless . . . Not Flawless

by David Morsey

“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before glory with exceeding joy . . .” (Jude 24).

The central message of the entire Bible is redemption. God's creatures, fashioned in perfection, were corrupted by the intrusion of Satan. What made the creature vulnerable was one of the very things that made him like God in the first place—free will. The hosts of angelic beings today that surround God and that minister to His people on the earth are without free will. Unfortunately, the right to choose coupled with the corrupting effects of evil, still cause us often to make unsound choices. And whereas salvation covers the restoration of our spiritual relationship to God, it does not guarantee sound choices in the flesh.

The process of redemption restores to the individual the Divine presence lost in the fall. Unfortunately we retain the scars of the Satanic invasion in our flesh and thus must live out our lives on the earth in weakness and folly. The clay vessel which contains the glory of the presence of Christ is nevertheless flawed. *“For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.” (II Corinthians 4:6-7)* In the final consummation of all God's purposes, this flawed vessel will fall away and the new vessel, fully restored to God's original intention for it, will be able to function in the eternal realm of the Spirit with God.

Meanwhile, on the earth, we must struggle with the limitations of the flesh, even though we are restored in our spirits. As Hamlet once said in his famous soliloquy—“Ay, there's the rub.” In many ways our life on the earth is really a kind of death—a decadence of the human flesh by reason of the sentence of death pronounced in Eden. And we also, when we have accepted Christ into our spirits, have *de facto* pronounced the death sentence upon our flesh. Paul speaks of the death of our mortal bodies; but he reminds us that we are still in the dying process and therefore subject to the weaknesses that are intrinsic to it. It is like the terminally ill who are yet alive. And so our flesh is hopelessly flawed.

But the good news is that meanwhile we are regarded by God as faultless. That is, we are not held responsible for the alienation from God that is the state or condition of everyone born into this world. All who are redeemed are thus blameless or faultless as far as the spirit is concerned—it is no longer affected by the consequences of the fall.

Moreover, the Spirit has a decided affect upon the flesh—not to make it flawless, but to give a perspective that enables us to cope with it in the world. Paul recognized, that in his flesh *“there dwelt no good thing.”* Thus, he did not assume that he could improve the flesh and make it flawless. He had his struggles with it throughout his lifetime, as is indicated by very definite statements in various places in his epistles. He was victorious in his spirit, but in his flesh he suffered the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.”

There are many assurances that the Bible gives us as to our secure relationship to Christ and His energizing work within us. Perhaps the most complete statement is in Hebrews 13:20-21. *“The God of peace...make you perfect [mend, restore] in every good work [thing] to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ our*

Lord, to whom the glory will abound forever.” It is important to understand the finer nuances of the words and phrases used here. The passage is so familiar as a benediction, it may escape our notice. Remember that the English concept of “perfect” does not occur in the New Testament. The Greek word so translated is either *τελειος* (*teleios*) which means “consummated,” or *καταρτιζω* (*katartizo*), which means “mended” or “restored.” The broken vase may be mended so as to be serviceable again, but is no longer perfect. We are restored in our relationship to God, but are flawed as to the excellence of our original creation. The word “work” is not in the original text. We are restored by God so as to participate with Him in that which is good. Furthermore, possessing the Spirit of God within us, we want what He wants in the world. That is not to say that all our desires and interests are in keeping with God's; but rather that we are in harmony with His will and purpose for the world. Once we have His Spirit within us, He then begins the process of working in us that which is in accordance with His ultimate intention for His original creation. And of course this is not in our own strength, but through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the expression of all the glory and majesty and power of God forever.

That the power for our spiritual growth is from God is a constant theme both in the Old and New Testaments. A classic example is in Zechariah 4, in connection with the recovery of Israel—*“Not by might nor by power but by my spirit saith the Lord of Hosts.”* Jesus said, *“Without me you can do nothing.”* Paul repeatedly shows the inadequacy of the flesh, and the power of the Holy Spirit in bringing about spiritual growth. *“What the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and on behalf of sin, condemned sin in the flesh that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit”* (see author's Commentary on Romans).

When the Holy Spirit enters our spirits, a seed is planted which grows into a tree of the Spirit—a “Godtree” (we are not little Gods but are given His nature). This tree expands far beyond our fleshly frame and enables us to interact with God. That is why tiny specks in the universe like ourselves can be comfortable with the idea of interacting with God as though we were on an equal plane with Him. However, now in our flesh-selves, we are prisoners of a body debilitated in the fall, and we find ourselves like Paul, “unable to do the things that we would.” If Paul could not do it, neither can we. Goodness in the flesh is not the automatic effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit within our spirits. The Holy Spirit gives us a different perspective. Our attitude towards sin is God's attitude towards sin. He does not like it. We do not accept our human failures gladly or willingly. We are always brought low by them. We do care to be pleasing to God and we do care to perform properly, but we are weak in the flesh. What marks us as His children is that we possess His nature. Peter makes this very clear in his second epistle—*“We are partakers of the Divine nature”* (1:4). Our attitude toward life in the world is God's attitude toward life in the world, but the performance is greatly affected by the sin nature that dwells within us.

According to Paul in I Corinthians 13 we are really children—*“When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”* (I Corinthians 13:11-12). This is not an appeal to obtain spiritual maturity as an exercise in “Christian perfection,” but that all of us, as long as we are on the earth are like children. We will only reach the maturity Paul speaks of here when we are glorified. Meanwhile we are all denizens of the “cosmic sandbox.” We are like little children at play.

Thus also we are limited in our expressions of faith. That is why there are so many divisions in the Church. We are children in our efforts at worship. In a sense the visible Church on earth is the "Ecclesiastical Nursery School." We think we are so knowledgeable and so right about our particular doctrinal systems. In reality we are only children. If we would understand that and realize that "the fact of our salvation does not include the content of our salvation," we could relieve a lot of the tension and conflict that exists now in the Church. In spite of our limited understanding of the atonement, our salvation is only in the sacrifice of Christ. In the flawed expressions of hundreds and thousands of Christian communities, the salvation of us all lies not in the expressions of our faith, but in the grace which covers us all.

So we are faultless, but not flawless. Our failures and follies in the flesh are not acceptable to us, but they are inevitable. God holds us blameless for them, however, because we were caught in a process of evil for which we have not been basically responsible. One day we shall indeed be flawless, but now, until that time when we have cast off our earthly shells, we must consider ourselves to be merely faultless and trust the Holy Spirit to help us bring into conformity our weakened flesh, because "without Him we can do nothing."