

The Book of Hebrews

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The 144,000.



As we thus walk along the way of sanctification, meeting one problem after another as it comes to us, we are progressing in sanctification and nearing the goal of holiness. From the moment we start, God is imputing righteousness to us. We are indeed not perfected, but we are headed in the right direction, and should we die before we reach the goal, God will adjudge our motives and give us credit for what we would have done had we had the opportunity.

The fruit of a tree is not perfected in a day. It takes weeks and months from the time when the bud first appears before a tree produces a ripe apple. Yet each stage reveals perfection. The bud is perfect, so is the first incomplete fruit, and so is the perfected fruit. So it is also with a human being. The little babe may be perfect, so is the child, so the developing youth, so the grown man. Perfect, but not complete. The Bible uses the word "perfect" to denote two things—the incomplete though perfect stage, and the completed perfection. Note Paul's statement in Philippians 3:12: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." Paul did not claim to have been "made perfect" (A.R.V.); but in verse 15 he states, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded."

In verse 12 he states that he is not perfect; in verse 15 he says he is. Young translates verse 12: "Or have been already perfected"; and verse 15

"As many, therefore, as are perfect." Robertson, in *Word Pictures*, says that "perfect" in verse 12 is the "perfect passive indicative (state of completion) of teleioi Paul pointedly denies that he has reached a spiritual impasse of non-development.

Certainly he knew nothing of so-called sudden absolute perfection by any single experience. Paul has made great progress in Christ likeness, but the goal is still before him, not behind him." On "perfect" in verse 15 he says, "Here the term teleioi means relative perfection, not the absolute perfection so pointedly denied in verse 12."—Volume 4, pp 454, 455.

This explains Paul's statement. He does not claim absolute perfection, which is equivalent to holiness, but he does claim relative perfection. This is emphasized in verse 16: "Whereto we have already attained," or better, "To the place where we have come." Paul did not claim that all had proceeded equally far on the Christian highway, but "whereto we have come," wherever that place may be, we are to be relatively perfect.

Will any ever attain to the perfection to which Paul said he had not attained? We should be disappointed if Paul had claimed absolute perfection; for no man who attains to this will ever claim it, or perhaps know it. God knows, but man himself will make no such claim.

But will any ever reach that stage? We believe so. Read the description of the 144,000 in Revelation 14:4, 5: "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God."

Note that these are "without fault before the throne of God." They will be among those of whom it is said, "He that is holy, let him be holy still."-Rev. 22:11. This, as will be noted from verse 12, refers to those who are living before the Lord comes and who have attained to holiness. Had they not so attained, it could not truly be said, "Let him be holy still."

Anyone who claims to have attained to a state of holiness may confidently be said to be destitute of it. The nearer a sinful man comes to God, the more aware he is of his own shortcomings. Only when a man loses sight of God does he claim holiness.

This is not written to discourage anyone from attaining perfection, but from making claims to having reached it. There is, indeed, a definite call for men to give themselves wholly to the power of God for the attainment of holiness. Before the end comes God will have a people behind in no good thing. They will reflect the image of God fully.

When Paul, in Hebrews 10:19, 20, speaks of entering into the holy places by (margin, "in") the blood of Jesus, he has particular reference to the 144,000, those who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."-Rev. 14:4. Only the high priest was permitted to enter the most holy place. Ordinary priests could not do so. When the 144,000, therefore, are said to follow the Lamb wherever He goes, and when we know that He as high priest goes into the most holy, then we know that the 144,000 are high priests, if they are to go with Him into the holiest of all. As God's people are kings and priests, so this special company are kings and high priests, following Him wherever He leads.

