

The Matter of Perfection

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. -Matt. 5:48

Some suppose Romans chapter seven to be a description of the Christian life, as opposed to a description of an unconverted state. But we know Paul is not referring to his own converted state because he already said that Christians have been made "free from sin" (Rom. 6:18, 22). The man in Romans seven was not "free from sin" and, therefore, he was not a Christian.

Paul also said that, "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). Yet the man in Romans chapter seven was under condemnation and therefore needed to be saved by Jesus (Rom. 7:24-25).

And Paul said that, "to be carnally minded is death" (Rom. 8:6). But the man in Romans chapter seven said, "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14). Therefore, the man in Romans chapter seven did not have eternal life.

And finally, Paul said that as a converted man he lived with a good and pure conscience that was void of offense (Acts 23:1; Acts 24:16; 2 Tim. 1:3). The man described in Romans chapter seven is deeply disturbed by his conscience (Rom. 7:16). Therefore, the description given in Romans chapter seven was not of the converted life of the Apostle Paul. It is a narration describing what happens when an unconverted sinner's mind encounters the law of God and is convicted by it.

Paul did say, "...not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Php. 3:12). When Paul said he had not yet attained perfection, he was talking about being free from physical corruption and attaining physical perfection. This is obvious since He said in the verse right

before, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Php. 3:11). The context of verse eleven gives clarity to the meaning of verse twelve. Paul was saying that he had not yet attained physical perfection because he had not yet attained a glorified body.

Paul was not saying that he was sinful and had not yet been made free from sin, since Paul already said that Christians have been made "free from sin" (Rom. 6:18, 22), and that he had a "conscience void of offense" (Acts 24:16; see also Acts 23:1; 2 Tim. 1:3). Paul was certainly not saying that moral perfection is unattainable in this life, as many misunderstand him to be saying, since only two verses down he said, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded" (Php. 3:15).

Clearly, Paul was writing about two different types of perfection. One type of perfection Paul said he had attained and one type of perfection which he said he had not yet attained. Paul was making a clear distinction between physical perfection and moral perfection and stated that the former is only attainable in the next life while the latter is attainable in this life. Moral perfection is attainable in this life while we are still in our flesh, since our flesh is not sinful in and of itself, and our flesh does not necessitate our choices, but we are free to live after it or to choose not to (Matt. 16:24; Rom. 8:13; 1 Cor. 9:27).