

Perfection Now, but Not Here

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Aug 11, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Welcome to this special edition of Then and Now. Because I am out of the office this weekend, traveling to Ohio to visit our grandkids, I did not have the time to produce the usual historical podcast, so I am doing a topical study on **the Perfect**.
- B. This topic relates directly to the study we did two weeks ago on the Resurrection issue.
- C. We are in for a special treat. We are departing from our normal arrangement, to play a portion of one of Arthur Melanson's daily radio programs entitled, *Perfection: The Biblical Definition*. He hosted a daily radio program in the Philadelphia area for over 30 years, with the last 20 or more years of that as a Full Preterist. You cannot imagine the amount of criticism Arthur had to endure while teaching preterism to his huge listening audience there in the Philly area.
- D. Brother Melanson grew up in New England, so we will get to enjoy his very charming way of pronouncing words, kind of like John F. Kennedy. People up here in the Northeast part of the USA just love to hear my Texas accent, and I just love to hear their New England accent.
- E. We play excerpts from one of Arthur Melanson's radio programs where he explains the meaning of Heb. 11:30-40, regarding the "better resurrection" at the first century Parousia, which **perfected both the living and dead saints**. In the second half of the session, I explain how this idea of perfection is dealt with in 1 Cor. 13:8-13, to show how the Collective Body View of these two texts is fatally flawed. This lesson directly relates to the session two weeks ago on *Refuting Resurrection Errors*, and takes it further.
- F. Brother Melanson will be explaining Heb. 11:30-40 to us. This text is not very well-known as a resurrection text, but by the time we are through listening to his lesson, we will see very clearly that it is indeed a very powerful resurrection text. You might want to open your Bible to Hebrews chapter 11 and read along with him as he explains the text. After his lesson, I will close our session with a few comments about the arrival of the Perfect in AD 70, and what that implies about the resurrection and our life in the kingdom today.
- G. So, without any further introduction, let's listen to his explanation of Heb. 11:30-40

[Play the audio of Arthur Melanson's Lesson here]

My Comments:

Here is the text about the Perfect:

1Cor. 13:8 ¶ Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.

1Cor. 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

1Cor. 13:10 but when **the perfect** [neut sing nom] comes, **the partial** [neut sing gen] will be done away.

1Cor. 13:11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with **childish** things.

1Cor. 13:12 For **now** we see in a mirror **dimly**, but **then face to face**; now I know in **part**, but then I will **know fully** just as I also have been fully known.

1Cor. 13:13 But **now** faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

We need to ask: Perfection Now, but Where Is It? Down here or up there?

It is not a question of whether Perfection has arrived. All preterists agree that the Perfect, whatever it is, indeed arrived in AD 70. But that only begs the question. What was it, and where did it arrive? How did they experience that Perfection?

Notice how Apostle Paul describes the effect of the Perfect after it arrives:

- gifts of prophecy will be done away with
- tongues will cease
- partial knowledge will be replaced by full knowledge
- seeing dimly will be replaced by seeing face to face
- knowing in part now is replaced by knowing fully as we have been fully known
- the partial will be done away.

Now ask yourself:

- Who was Paul saying these things to? Living or dead saints? (Living saints)
- How did the living saints experience these things at AD 70? (cognitively or not)
- Where did those living saints experience these things? (on earth or in heaven)
- If perfection came to earth in AD 70, where is it now?

As you ponder those questions, I want to read a few statements from Dr. Charles Hill, one of the futurist critics who wrote one of the chapters in Mathison's book. Notice what he has to say about Max King's interpretation of The Perfect in 1 Cor. 13:10-12. Keep in mind that Max King teaches the Collective Body View of the resurrection in First Corinthians, and that is the view which Dr. Hill is critiquing here:

[Dr. Charles Hill, *Mathison*, p. 103] "According to King's [Collective Body View] interpretation of 1 Cor. 13:12, [the living and remaining saints after AD 70] should have **fully understood** [Paul's eschatology and resurrection view], for by then **the perfect** of v. 10 had come!" [bracketed words added for clarity, boldface added]

[Dr. Charles Hill, *Mathison*, p. 108] "In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul [asserts] that the ignorance that he then experienced would be remedied when **the perfect** would come. His **dim vision** would then cease; he would then "**understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.**" Where then is the perfection of knowledge that Paul so earnestly expected? How paradoxical it is that the very generation which attained consummate fullness of knowledge when the perfect came, saw that knowledge evaporate virtually overnight! How utterly unimaginable it is that those who became like him when he appeared, for they saw him as he is (1 John 3.2), not only did not recall the experience for us, but apparently were no different for it! Or rather, the only observable change is that their spiritual understanding was plunged suddenly into the abyss, from which it has yet to be recovered!" [bracketed words added for clarity, boldface added]

[Dr. Charles Hill, *Mathison*, p. 109] "The irony is astounding. The dreaded and nearly fatal "Hellenization" of the gospel [which Max King asserts was the reason for the confusion and ignorance of the saints after AD 70] is supposed to have struck the church, according to [Max King's Collective Body View], concurrently with the church's attainment of its ultimate state of perfection. It does not seem to me that one can have it both ways. If one wants to argue for a radical nosedive of the church as soon as the apostles left the scene somewhere around A.D. 70, then I do not see how one can argue that it was precisely then that the church also attained the consummation of its hope, its full measure of knowledge and sanctification, and its final state of conformity to the image of Christ." [bracketed words added for clarity]

[Dr. Charles Hill, *Mathison*, p. 119] "...the hyper-preterist [has] the troubling paradox that the generation which experienced **God's final perfecting** of his saints is the very generation which let the faith slip through its hands." [bracketed words added for clarity, boldface added]

Now, I don't know if you see the problem that Dr. Charles Hill is pointing out here, but it is just not consistent for the Collective Body View to claim that the Perfect arrived in AD 70, but then not produce the evidence to prove that it actually arrived, because the saints that we find after AD 70 show no evidence of having perfect knowledge. They were more confused than the saints before AD 70! And they show no knowledge of the Parousia occurring in AD 70. In fact, all the Christian writers after AD 70, every one of them are still looking forward to a future Second Coming. How in the world could they get so confused and be so ignorant, if in fact, the Perfect arrived in AD 70? Their partial knowledge should have been replaced by the fullness of knowledge, like Apostle Paul had claimed that it would. There is a problem here, which the Collective Body View advocates are simply not dealing with clearly, consistently, or convincingly.

Now, we need to look at those questions again:

- **Who** was Paul saying these things to, in regard to the arrival of the Perfect? Living or dead saints? Obviously it was to the living saints there in Corinth in AD 57 when he wrote his first epistle to them. He was telling those living saints what they could expect to see, hear, and experience at the Parousia when the Perfect arrived.

- **How** did those living saints, who lived and remained until the Parousia, experience the Perfect when it arrived at AD 70? Did they experience it in the cognitive way that Apostle Paul had indicated that they would, and in the way that they were expecting to experience it? Notice that Paul had said that prophecy would be done away with and tongues would cease. Some of those saints there at Corinth had the gifts of prophecy and tongues, and Paul said those gifts would cease at the arrival of the Perfect. That is an experiential cessation of prophecy and tongues. They would know that the Perfect had arrived when their gift of prophecy ceased and their tongue-speaking ceased. Paul also said that partial knowledge would be replaced by full knowledge. So Paul gave them a lot of expectations about what they would experience when the Perfect arrived. Did they experience those things? Did they know that the Perfect arrived? It is apparent that the Perfect must have arrived, and that those saints must have experienced those things that Paul said they would, or else Paul has to be labeled as a false prophet for giving them false expectations which never materialized. But there is NO evidence at all that those saints experienced those things **ON EARTH**. So that brings up our third question:
- **Where** did those living saints experience these things, on earth, or in heaven? If perfection came to earth in AD 70, why don't we have a record of those living and remaining saints experiencing those things, and talking about it afterwards? Why don't they claim that the Perfect arrived? Why don't we find them around after AD 70 with that fullness of knowledge that Paul said they would get when the Perfect came? They obviously did not experience those things on earth after AD 70, because the all the Christians we find around after AD 70 were totally ignorant of the Parousia, and amazingly confused about a number of different doctrinal, moral, ethical, and spiritual issues. So unless we preterists want to throw in the towel and say that the Perfect did not arrive, it might be best instead to simply admit that those living saints had their bodies changed from mortal to immortal, from corruptible to incorruptible, from imperfect to Perfect (like Paul says two chapters later in 1 Cor 15), and then caught up to be with Christ in heaven forever afterwards. So we see that those who take an Individual Body approach to the resurrection, and especially those who take the literal rapture idea here, have a good biblical answer to this question. But those who take the Collective Body View simply do not have a reasonable explanation for how the Perfect arrived without those living saints after AD 70 getting the benefits of the Perfect, nor even being aware that those benefits had arrived. Those living saints **ON EARTH** after AD 70 did not have the fullness of knowledge. They evidently did not experience all those things that Paul promised they would experience when the Perfect arrived. That means that the saints who experienced the Perfect when it arrived, must have been taken off the earth in order to get the benefits of the Perfect. They were **CHANGED** and **CAUGHT UP** to heaven where they would experience those benefits. That explains why the saints on earth did not have that fullness of knowledge, nor even know that the Perfect had arrived. So, that raises our fourth question here.

- **Where** is that perfection NOW, if it came to earth in AD 70? Do we still have it available to us now after AD 70, while we are still on earth in this life of flesh? That is what the Collective Body advocates are claiming. They say that we have the Perfection now, and heaven now, and our immortal bodies now, while we are still in our physical mortal bodies on earth. Where is that perfection that came in AD 70? If it came to earth in AD 70, where is it? Why don't we see it being experienced by all the saints after AD 70? Why don't we have that fullness of knowledge and clarity of understanding that Paul promised we would? Or is it only available in heaven? Obviously, heaven is the only place where perfection is. It is not on earth. So, if Perfection arrived in AD 70, the living saints had to be taken to heaven to experience that Perfection. They didn't experience it here, because it did not come here to earth. They could only experience it in heaven.

One of the advocates of the Collective Body View recently (Dec 2012) wrote the following remarks on one of the preterist Yahoo discussion lists. Keep in mind that this is the same guy who claims that all those who take the Individual Body View of the resurrection are "futurists." Now, imagine that! Here's what he says about Perfection on earth:

"Upon faith in Christ [after] AD 70 a believer has inherited eternal life and **"will never die" nor will they ever go outside the city** because they **actually have become a part of it** (John 11:25-26; Rev. 3:12). They have become **fully regenerated/raised** and thus how much more will God's seed forever remain in them - **thus they "cannot" nor "will" they "sin"** (1 John 3:9)." [Mike Sullivan on the PretCosmos YahooGroup, Dec 11, 2012]

[FROM ED] Now, I do not know if that bothers you, or not, but that statement sends a real cold chill up my spine, because it is nothing short of claiming *perfection on earth*, i.e, *sinless perfection*, so that they "cannot nor will they sin" because they have been fully regenerated and raised, while they are still in this physical life on earth. Can you imagine that? I can't believe that he admitted that he believes this.

Do you see the implications of what this Collective Body advocate is saying? He is teaching that we are **fully regenerated** and **fully resurrected** now, so that **we cannot, nor ever will sin**. That is the idea of the *impossibility of apostasy*, and the *perfection of saints on earth*. It leads right straight to the doctrines of "heaven now," "immortal body now," and "perfection now." That is an extremely dangerous deception that leads to all kinds of moral, ethical, and spiritual errors, so it is no surprise that many of those who have taken the Collective Body View have departed into Universalism, radical Annihilationism, and all kinds of other hyper-cessationist errors. It is the same idea that John Humphrey Noyes was following when he built his *Oneida* utopian commune a century and a half ago. It didn't last very long before people woke up to the reality of their sinfulness, their imperfection, and their mortality. They thought they were in heaven now, but soon realized that they were not.

One of the methods Jesus gave us to test the character of a person or an idea, is to inspect its fruit. That is, to follow the logical implications of a teaching to see where it ultimately leads us. It is sometimes hard to see the fallacy of an idea or a doctrine until it is applied to our lives in a practical way. Then the implications begin to show up. Jesus said we can know the character of a tree by the kind of fruit it produces. If the practical applications, implications, results, and outcome of a doctrine are bad, then the doctrine is definitely bad also. And that is what we are seeing here. When we see the bad fruit that the Collective Body has produced and is producing out there, it ought to make us pause and take a closer look. There is definitely something wrong with a doctrine like the Collective Body View which produces such defective fruit in our lives.

In the seminary, one of my professors noted that:

Every preacher looks for the perfect church
Every church looks for the perfect preacher
But, never the twain shall meet!

Every boy looks for the perfect girl
Every girl looks for the perfect boy
But, never the twain shall meet!

At least not on earth, while we are in this life of flesh.
There is nothing perfect here on earth.
Perfection is only in heaven.

And if we are in heaven now, we should also have perfection now, and that is exactly what these Collective Body advocates are claiming. Do you see what they are saying?

That is the point that even most preterists have missed, especially those who take the Collective Body View of the resurrection. They just do not seem to understand that perfection is only found in heaven, not on earth. They think we are in "heaven now" and have our "immortal bodies now" and have "perfection now." But perfection is only in heaven. Do you catch the power of that?

Do you see how that totally unravels the "heaven now" and "immortal body now" and "perfection now" ideas of the Collective Body View? What we are doing here, is inspecting the fruit of the Collective Body tree. The fruit is bad. The fruit is obviously wrong. What does that tell us about the tree that the fruit is coming from? The Collective Body View must be wrong, because the fruit that is coming from it is wrong.

Up until AD 70, heavenly perfection was not available to saints after they died. But the resurrection brought perfection and made it available for the saints. However, it was not brought into the SEEN realm and given to the living saints on earth. Those living saints had to go to heaven to get that perfection. Their mortal bodies were CHANGED into immortal bodies, and then they were caught up to be with Christ in heaven where the Perfection was.

All you need to do to determine whether you personally are "perfect now" while in this life on earth, is simply ask your spouse. He or she will definitely confirm the fact that you are not "perfect now".

If you are not sure whether you have your immortal body now and are in heaven now, ask yourself if your physical body is indestructible and undying? Do you ever get sick, suffer pain, and have bad hair days? Immortal bodies in heaven do not have any of those problems, but our physical bodies on earth surely do.

I think it is pretty safe to say that we are NOT "perfect now" while we are in this life on earth, nor are we in "heaven now," nor do we have our "immortal bodies now." Those fellow preterists who believe such nonsense are simply following a defective interpretative method which forces them to hyper-spiritualize the nature of fulfillment in order to avoid dealing with the historical reality that we are not experiencing heaven now, immortal bodies now, nor perfection now. It is merely an avoidance routine, or denial mode.

It is like the Russian peasant after the Bolshevik revolution who went in to see the eye doctor to have his eyes examined. Of course, before the revolt, the Bolsheviks had promised paradise to the peasants if they would help them get into power. So, here this poor peasant is, after the revolution, still suffering in poverty. He goes to the eye doctor. The doctor says, "Your eyes are fine. Why did you want me to examine them?" The peasant said, "I just wanted you to check out my eyes, because for some reason *my eyes are not seeing what my ears are hearing!*"

That is the same problem that our futurist critics like Dr. Charles Hill have! They just don't see the "perfection now," or the "heaven now," or the "immortal bodies now" that the followers of Max King's Collective Body View are claiming that we have.

Do you catch the power of that?

Well, that will wrap it up for this session. If this has raised any questions or comments for you, do not hesitate to email me. I would love to hear from you, pro or con. Thanks so much for listening.

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