

# **GOD'S CALL**

## **Major themes in the Scriptures**

### **Quality of being (19)**

#### **Progressive quality of being**

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “Quality of being”, the nineteenth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

Developing quality of being that is of true and lasting value takes time and very careful and diligent nurturing. It is progressive, both in dealing with the negative as well as in developing the quality of the positive.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

As we know that quality of being is primary in God's purposes, is most important for us, and is at the heart of what brings meaning to our lives, all serious Christians would want to know how we can properly and effectively develop true quality in our being, so that our whole life will be lived in meaning and purpose and fruitfulness, and we can fulfil God's purpose and God's call for our lives.

Christians go through different phases and at times, we can be very enthusiastic, very confident and full of joy; at other times, we may find ourselves struggling, failing and getting discouraged. We go through different experiences and at times, it seems as if the problems have been solved and we should be able to go on well but in many instances, we discover that again and again, problems continue to come and we continue to fail.

Even after we have chosen deliberately, decisively to follow the Lord Jesus, even after we have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and seen God at work, we may still find ourselves failing again. We may wonder why it is this way, why it needs to be this way and we may become discouraged.

In life situations, we can see many things going on around us that can help us to appreciate that there is a spiritual parallel compared with the things that we see at the natural plane.

Consider two brothers who one day went to a badminton match and after having seen the display of skill, they were very eager, very enthusiastic. Both of them wanted to become badminton champions. So they made effort. The first brother spent many hours buying books on badminton, read up, talked to people who were good in that particular game, and began training. He sought someone who was capable to teach him and he worked very hard.

At first, he seemed to be doing well. He enjoyed the game and he was making progress. However, after some time, he realized that he could not go beyond a certain stage. The simple things he could do, but once he came to playing more skilfully against those who were able, he was constantly losing and making many mistakes.

He could not understand why. He said, "I have read all the books. I understand how to do it, I know clearly what needs to be done, and I work very hard; but why is it I keep on doing the wrong thing? It is not possible to succeed!"

He was a very good soccer player. He could run very fast. But when it came to playing badminton, he just did not know how to run correctly, and how to hit with the racket, and it was a very difficult process for him. He saw good badminton players: They did not seem to have to run very fast. They just moved quickly to the right place and they were able to hit the shots well, but he just could not. At times he would learn a skill and after a while, he would go back to his old ways. As a result, he told his brother, "I quit. I am not going to play badminton any more. It is no use and I will never succeed."

His brother was a very good tennis player and he also wanted to be a badminton champion.

He started learning, practising. Similarly, he also made some progress, but he also continued to fail. He often thought that the net was lower than it was. He was used to playing tennis and in trying to playing badminton he had to adjust to the height of the net. And again and again, he made mistakes. It was difficult for him to place a good drop shot because he thought that the net was so low.

However, he understood that the process of change from tennis to badminton is a difficult process, and he can succeed if he is prepared to learn, work at it and gradually increase in the quality of his play. So, he asked someone who was capable to monitor him, to show him where he made mistakes, what went wrong, how they could be corrected.

He also found, from time to time he would go back to his old ways, but he was determined to change.

As a result, with the passing of time, learning from different players, playing with different ones, he began to increase in his skill to such an extent that he became unbeatable. He could win in any game quite easily. He had learnt so much and he was now a top player.

But as he went on, he realized that there was so much more to the game than he thought. Although he was a very good player and others could not beat him, he realized that all the skills that he read in the books were not all that there was.

There was more to it and he began to develop his own skills. He began to learn how to develop new kinds of smashes, new kinds of drop shots that people would not anticipate because they were so different from others, but they were very accurate and very effective.

So although he was a very good player, he continued to develop and to make progress even beyond what others had already attained. And this path can continue. He would continue to develop many different kinds of strokes and skills that others may not have discovered.

Well, in the spiritual life, there is a parallel.

We may have become Christians, we may have learnt to trust God, but do we understand that the change from being one who walked in his own way to one who truly learnt to follow God and abide in Him is a very, very great change and it is not something that we can attain very readily?

But there are passages of Scripture that may give us that idea, that may seem to tell us that once you become a Christian, once you become in Christ, once you are baptized into the body of Christ, you can overcome, you can be effective, you can be a new person altogether.

**2 Corinthians 5: 14-17**

- 14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;
- 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.
- 16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer.
- 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

The apostle Paul tells us, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died". So if all of us who have responded to the Lord have already died in Christ, then should not it be that all our past habits, past ways and wrong kinds of attitudes would also have died? And he said: "...and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." So this is how we can now be living this way: No longer living for ourselves, no longer going our own ways, but living for Him who died and rose again on OUR behalf.

And **verse 17** is a verse which many have quoted with an impression that the change in our lives will be so dramatic that we will have that kind of freedom and power and we will be able to conquer in our new way of life.

**Verse 17** says:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

“...a new creature” means that you are no longer what you were.

So if in the past you were self-centred, now you will be Christ-centred. In the past you were selfish, now you are self-giving. You are a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

In the King James Version, **verse 17** is translated as:

(KJV) Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

“...all things are become new” – so this gives us the impression that everything will be transformed. It will be new. We will be new. All the things in our lives which were not good will no longer be there. And the word “all” is present in the Greek. So to translate it as “all things are become new” is not wrong; in fact, it is in accordance with what is written.

In the Amplified Bible, **verse 17** is translated as:

(AMP) Therefore if any person is [*ingrafted*] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [*previous moral and spiritual condition*] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!

So again, this translation gives us the impression that the person who has become a Christian is totally transformed. He is a new creature, he is a new person: a totally new creature.

The word translated as “creature” can be translated either as “creature” or “creation”. And that is why in the Amplified Bible, it says: “he is a new creation” or within brackets, “a new creature altogether”.

So whether you translate it as “creation” or “creature”, the meaning that comes through to us would seem to be that once you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, once you have repented of your sins, then you have become a new creation, a new creature, the old things are gone and all things are become new.

But then when we read the Scriptures as a whole and as we observe life, as we go through life ourselves, we find that that is not the case. It is not like that. So what is the problem?

As far as I can see in this passage, the apostle Paul is primarily telling us that when we respond to the Lord, we genuinely repent of our sins, yes, we become a new creation, a new creature in the sense that something has taken place that was not there before: We are born again; the Holy Spirit has worked in our hearts; we now have life from God.

It is a new creation. Yes, there is something that we never had before. And now we have a new status: We are now children of God; we are now members of the family of God; we are now members of the body of Christ. It is a new creation: We are a new creature with new potential; we have access into the presence of God in a manner that we did not have before. So, we are a new creation, we are a new creature.

So now there is this potential that we did not have before. When our sins were not forgiven, when we went our own way, we could not come into the presence of God freely. God would not permit that. But when we have repented and our sins are forgiven through the Lord Jesus, then it is possible for us to come before God and God will welcome us if we come in a humble and contrite spirit.

So the potential is there for us to develop, to be fully like the Lord Jesus. We become a new creation according to the image of Him who created us. We are to be transformed to become like Him.

The reason is: We develop our character through our moral choice. So, all the years of our lives when we have made wrong choices, selfish choices, all these choices will have an effect on our character, and that character does not go away just because we say, "Now, I do not want it." It does not go away that way.

The character is formed by a continuous choice on our part. Again and again we have chosen to go a certain path and that will result in a formation of our character. It has been developed over many years – a life of self-centredness, selfish way of thinking, following the ways of world. All these are not going to go away very easily.

The Lord tells us we must be transformed. We need to become new not just in our status, not just in the sense that we can have access into the presence of God, but in the quality of our being.

And so we see the apostle Paul writing in **Galatians 4: 19**. He says:

**Galatians 4: 19**

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you--

"I am again in labor" – He laboured for them. He suffered so much to preach the gospel to them to help them to repent, to find forgiveness, to become new creatures, new creation in Christ. But he knew that that was not the end of it. That was just the beginning. He had to labour again and again and again in the process of helping them, so that they would be transformed, that Christ would be formed in them; and that is a very difficult process.



Many of us may not realize it initially. When we first respond to the Lord, we are very enthusiastic, very eager. When we find forgiveness of sins, we are very grateful. We know that the burden has been lifted and so we come to God with joy, with gratitude, in a spirit of worship, we love Him and we tell Him we are prepared to live for Him; and we mean it, we are sincere.

But with time, we realize that it does not last. We thought that we had now given our lives fully to Him, but as we go through the day to day situations of life, we find that the things of the world still attract us very readily. The many things that we liked in the past, they do not just go away just because now we say we love the Lord.

And so we find that even though we may have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit that has lifted us above all this for a period of time, yet we realize that Christ is not yet deeply formed in us. And so, it is very easy for us to go back to our old ways. The gratitude that we had towards Christ can easily dim. We can forget what He has done for us. The meaningfulness of the cross, how much He has suffered for us, now has become terms and words. The freshness, the reality, the depth of it is no longer there.

At one time, we thought that we no longer loved the world nor the things in the world, but they seem to be creeping back and begin to have a hold on us. Initially, we thought that we were so very weak; we could not do anything without God. And so we prayed and we prayed, we trusted Him, we looked to Him, we cried out to Him and He helped us.

But with time, we develop confidence: "I can do it. I know what to do. I can recall which verse to apply in which situation. I know how to help people in their different problems."

And so, our confidence develops; and as our confidence develops, our dependence on God diminishes. We are not so conscious that we now have moved away from a close walk with God and increasingly we have developed self-confidence – the flesh.

So the path of transformation is a difficult path. We can give up in one way or another to varying degrees like the first brother. He found it too difficult; he did not want to carry on that way. Perhaps he would play another game that is easier to learn, but he would not carry on because he found that it was very difficult.

The apostle Paul was very burdened for the people that he helped. We all know that the apostle Paul was spiritual, he lived for God sincerely, effectively, and he preached with power and effectiveness, and people responded to the Lord genuinely. And yet, we see that the outcome was such that many of the people that he helped continued to struggle in the flesh and he was very burdened for them. For example,

**Galatians 3: 1-3:**

**Galatians 3: 1-3**

- 1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?
- 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?
- 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

The Galatians understood at the beginning the need for faith, to trust God, to look to Him, to depend on Him; that God brings to us forgiveness, brings to us life and meaning and we must go on in Him. They understood that. They began by the Spirit, by faith.

But then with time, they were seeking to be perfected by the flesh.

They were beginning to do things that they thought were good, they were beginning to exercise themselves on the basis of their natural abilities to fulfil the works of the Law according to what people said and taught, instead of coming to God and depending on Him and growing in Him.

They went back to the way of the flesh: They began in the flesh, then they repented and they entered into a new realm, and they began in the Spirit; but now they were seeking to be perfected by the flesh and that is in fact going backwards, falling back to the old ways.

So this kind of situation can happen quite readily. That is why if we want to develop quality of being, we need to understand that it is not an easy path but it is possible.

And not only possible, but God has made every provision to help us to become like that. God created us with the intention to help us to be like Him. He created us in His image because He wants us to have deep fellowship with Him, to be like Him. Christ came into this world to save us not just by forgiving us our sins, but to give us His life, so that we can be like Him, we can be transformed to be like Him.

God wants to bring this about, but God cannot do it on His own. God cannot make you like Christ just because He says, "I want you to be like Christ." That is not possible.

The reason is: We are moral beings and as moral beings, our moral character has to be our own choice. God cannot make you a good moral being unless you truly and deeply want to be such, and you are prepared for the cost of being such.

So if your desire to be really like Christ is not that deep, you cannot become like Him.

If the cost you are prepared for is not everything, then you cannot be. It is like that. It is not possible because the cost of becoming like Christ has to be everything. You have to give everything for that. Otherwise, it is not possible.

Yes, you may develop a little bit of something like Him, but you cannot grow into His likeness such that His life and power will be clearly manifested through you, that Christ is formed in you. The Lord Jesus saw that many people were enthusiastic; they may profess faith in Him, they may say they would be His disciples, but again and again, He would tell them what is the cost of discipleship, what does it mean: "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Do you really want to follow Me? Do you understand what that means?"

Many people want to follow Christ selectively. They would like to follow Christ where it pertains to His power, His glory, His ability to perform miracles. They want to follow Him in those aspects. But do they want to follow Him when He went hungry, when He was thirsty, when He was rebuked by other people, when He was maligned, when He died on the cross for the sins of men?

Do we want to identify with Him, that our hearts be with Him as He went through those situations? Do we want to develop that kind of spirit? If we do not, then how can He be formed in us? It would be a contradiction. They cannot go together.

So the kind of person we develop has to be what we really want to be, and by the power of God, we become so. So it is man and God working together fully.

So the Lord Jesus told the parable of the sower to help us understand the different kinds of choice that we make, the different qualities of heart within us, the different responses that people show.

**Luke 8: 11-15**

- 11 "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.
- 12 "Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.
- 13 "Those on the rocky *soil are* those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have *no firm* root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.
- 14 "The *seed* which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to maturity.
- 15 "But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

The Lord Jesus tells us the different kinds of soil represent the different kinds of heart: the way we respond.

The seed is the word of God. It is the same seed but the effect, the outcome is different in different soil.

"Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved."  
Those beside the road, they represent a context, a soil that is not suitable for the word of God to grow in. They are preoccupied with the things of the world; the heart is not open to God. When the word of God comes to them, they are not receptive. The road is very hard, it is not like the soil that is good, that receives the seed and it can then grow.

So, a hardened heart cannot properly receive the word of God. And a hardened heart can come about in many different ways. It can be because we are attracted by the things of the world, we are preoccupied with that. It can be because we are self-confident, we think we know where we are going – we do not need God.

Or it can be that we know that there are many things wrong in our lives, we do not want to think about them, we do not want to change, so our hearts are hardened. We will not receive the word of God to change our lives.

And so, the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. So when the heart is hardened, the devil has a very easy job. He can very readily take away the word that is sown. It may seem as if you never heard it. It did not come through to you at all.

"Those on the rocky *soil* are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have *no firm* root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away." Here again, it shows to us the kind of response. We can be enthusiastic, we can be eager, but it is not deep. There is no real root. We can profess faith in the Lord; we can even be prepared to do many things for Him for a period of time: great enthusiasm, but no deep root, and in time of temptation, fall away.

This again happens to many people who have not properly counted the cost: "What does it mean to be a disciple? What do I want in life?" And so because they look at it in a superficial way - "It is a good idea to be a Christian; I want to go to heaven; I can enjoy the fellowship, the company of these good people" - and so, they are very enthusiastic, they join and they do many things together. But when trials and difficulties come, when temptation comes, they fall away: "It is not worth it. Why should I carry on this way? There are so many other things that I can do if I do not continue to be a disciple."

"The *seed* which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to maturity." There are others who have a genuine faith, who believe, who really want to follow the Lord.

They desire, there is a strong desire in their heart to be like the Lord, to walk in His ways, to build His kingdom. But their heart is not fully given to the Lord, their heart is not completely His and so, they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of *this* life. They are affected by the things of the world. Even though they love the Lord, their love for the Lord is not pure, it is not total; it is not complete. Just as Solomon continued to love many other things in the world in addition to His loving God, that kind of state will lead to degeneration as we go on in it. Then the thorns will choke the plant; it does not bring forth fruit to maturity, and if it goes to a very severe state, then the plant may also die.

So this tells us that the path of development of quality of being is not an easy path and it is up to us whether we want to or not.

So, some may think that it is not possible.

But in case we think that way, the Lord Jesus tells us the last type of soil: the good soil.

He tells us it is possible: "...the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance."

So this tells us that it is possible. Although it is difficult, it is possible. The fact that we have failed does not mean that it is not possible. The fact that we have failed again and again and again does not mean that it is not possible.

It just means that we must find out: Why did we fail? Every moral failure can be corrected. Every moral failure is the result of a wrong choice. Therefore, every moral failure can be corrected if we are prepared to change our choice.

The problem is many people are not willing to change their choice because it would take away a lot of the enjoyment of this world, a lot of the things that they liked and preferred, and so they would rather not change.

The *seed* in the good soil, they have heard the word in an honest and good heart. It means they are prepared to face the issues properly and fully; they want to look at their lives honestly: "If my life is not right, not good, I will change. If my life is in the right direction, I will build upon it." Honest: prepared to face. Good heart: the direction – "I want to be what I ought to be, I want to be what God wants me to be." And it is not just a desire. There is a decisive choice, a commitment, a holding fast – holding fast to what we believe, holding fast to what is good, and we bear fruit with perseverance. We are to go on and on and on.

But God is prepared to help us if we are prepared to do that. The Lord Jesus had to persevere. We know how difficult it was for Him to go through the cross, that He could pray, "...if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me..." But He was very clear: "...yet not My will, but Yours be done." He was committed: He persevered until the end to fulfil His mission.

If we want to develop quality in our being, we have to persevere, we must hold fast what we have come to understand, what we have appreciated and the outcome will be good. We will be the good soil and we will bear fruit. It will be a meaningful life.

The second brother shows to us how it is possible to learn. Of course in the physical realm, it may not always happen that way. No matter how determined you are, you may never become a good badminton player. You can work very hard, you can read, you can do everything you are capable of and yet never end up a good badminton player – maybe just beat your younger brother, that is all.



But in the spiritual realm, in the moral realm all of us can develop that quality because God is the One who will enable us, and God is the One who will give us His life. Therefore, it is possible for us to grow, to develop and to become what we ought to be.

So progress in the Christian life, progress in the development of the quality of our being can be seen in two different important ways.

We can make progress in the first way by dealing with negative and wrong desires and the character that is not good, so that we do not remain self-centred and self-seeking. So the first way of making progress is to deal with all that is negative in our hearts. The wrong desires, wrong attitudes, the character that has been developed that we recognize is not good, we have to deal with this, we have to put that to death, we have to deny ourselves.

In the second way, it is also progress, it is also denying ourselves, but it is making progress in the path of righteousness and moral goodness, so that even in areas and situations where our attitude is already positive, we develop greater depth and meaning and substance in our being. And this is an area that we can continue to develop.

No matter how positive you are, no matter how good a character you have developed, you can continue to grow and develop further and further. We are finite beings created by God but we have a potential to continue to develop because we are created in the image of God and God is prepared to give us His life; and God's life is infinite.

So if we partake of the life of God, we will grow in Him. The potential in our lives will grow and we can be transformed into His likeness from glory to glory; we can become like the Lord Jesus more and more. The development will increase in its meaning.

We have previously considered that there are two realms of learning to deny ourselves. In the first realm, we deal with negative self-life. In the second realm, we nurture ever growing quality of self-giving in being and living.

Let us consider an example of developing increasing quality of moral being: the apostle Paul dealing with the negative qualities and nurturing the positive qualities in his moral and spiritual being.

**Philippians 3: 7-17**

- 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
- 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,
- 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,
- 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;
- 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.
- 12 Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.
- 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,
- 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
- 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;
- 16 however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.
- 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Here, we see the apostle Paul learning in both aspects. He learnt to deal with the negative and he learnt to develop and nurture the positive. He came to realize that he had confidence in the flesh. There was much that he could do before he gave his life to the Lord Jesus. He was respected, he was able. He thought that he was blameless in keeping the Law. He was a Pharisee, a religious leader and respected in his community. But he said, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

Whatever things he thought were very good and useful to him, he regarded them as of no value because he wanted to gain Christ. He says, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ". So, his attitude, his commitment: he was prepared to give up everything in order to gain Christ and he regarded that all those things that seemed to be so valuable to him were actually rubbish.

When you want to pursue Christ and you want to know Him, you want to live for Him, you will realize that all these things are rubbish, they are of no real value. What is of true value is found in Christ: The life of God, the character of God, moral and spiritual goodness in God can be part of us when we learn to give ourselves to Him.

And so he says, "I do not want to just depend on myself to seek my own righteousness, but I want to be found in Him; the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith": that through faith in Christ, he may develop that quality of his being.

Then notice, Paul now emphasizes the positive. Why did he deal with the negative? It is in order to develop the positive, to make progress in this direction of the positive: "...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death".

"...that I may know Him..." – the "Him" referred to is the Lord Jesus Christ and knowing the Lord Jesus Christ in this context means knowing that which is good and perfect. The apostle Paul was not pursuing the world anymore. He was not seeking for anything outside of what is truly good: "that I may know Him". And he wants to know the Lord Jesus increasingly, continuing to develop in that direction.

And in order to know Him deeply, he must increasingly experience the power of His resurrection which comes to us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to experience the life of Christ, the power of His resurrection. We have risen from the dead, we live like Him.

And notice the next phrase: and the fellowship of His sufferings.

Here, the apostle Paul did not emphasize: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the glories that Christ has and the fullness of joy that I could know in Him”, although it is true. But here, the apostle Paul emphasized: “the fellowship of His sufferings”. This is to tell us that if we really want to develop to be like Christ, if we want to know true joy and meaning in life, we must learn the path of suffering together with Christ.

If the Lord Jesus could go through life without the cross without diminishing, taking away, anything good in His mission, He would rather not go through the cross. But He knew that it was not possible. The cross was necessary for Him to fulfil His mission, in order for Him to help us so that we can become like Him. If we want to become like Him, then this attitude in Christ, where He left the glories of heaven to come into this world to die for us, this attitude must be our attitude as well.

So “the fellowship of His sufferings” speaks of what we are prepared to go through, however difficult and unpleasant, in fellowship with the Lord, in whatever He desires us to go through. We know that His sufferings never came about because of His own sins because He never sinned. So His sufferings were associated with His righteousness. He suffered for righteousness’ sake, He suffered for our sins; He suffered because of love, because of compassion.

If we are to develop well, then we must learn this aspect. If we do not understand what it means to suffer with the Lord Jesus, if we do not understand what it means to suffer for the well-being of other people, then we have missed out on a very major aspect of development of our lives.

God is very pained in His heart when He sees the world living in darkness. The Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem when He saw their hearts were hardened. If we are to learn to grow to be like Him, then we too must learn to go through the sufferings that He went through: the same spirit and attitude; "...being conformed to His death" – to go through the whole process, so that we go right through to the end of whatever God wants of us. We do not hold back. We are prepared to go through any aspect of life that God wants us to go through as part of His purpose for us.

"...in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead": Here, I see that the apostle Paul is not just merely referring to the fact that after he dies, one day, he will rise from the dead. He is not just referring to what will happen to all Christians, who when they die, one day they will know the resurrection. Here, he was referring to the spiritual realm, the spiritual life where he was living by the power of His resurrection all the time, that is to say, a life that is full of freedom, life and power in increasing measure, in accordance with the will of God and the ways of God. He wanted to grow and grow and develop, so that His life would always be lived in that plane.

But he says, "Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." He says, "I have not yet attained to that." And what is that?

He is saying: "God wants me to develop that kind of quality that is so wonderful and so beautiful. I have not yet reached that. I have not yet become perfect in that sense, but I press on. I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

That goal in Christ is limitless because the beauty in Christ, the riches in Christ, the perfection in Christ is limitless. We must continue to develop and to nurture. No matter how much we have grown, there is more to grow and to develop.

But then **verse 15**, he says, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude". Paul says, "I am not yet perfect" and yet, he is calling upon those who are perfect to follow him. That may seem rather strange. Some may say, well, the word "perfect" can be translated as "mature". "Those who are mature, follow me." But as far as I can appreciate, many translations translate it as "perfect" rather than "mature", although this word can be translated as "mature". So what is he trying to say?

"Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you." Here, as I see, the word "perfect" is a reference to what ought to be. What ought to be, what is really good, what is really meaningful in the eyes of God: "perfect" in the sense that we have responded in a manner that is fully pleasing to God. Of course, not in the absolute sense as God Himself is absolutely perfect, but to the degree that we can say God would be very pleased with us – that kind of response.

In this world, we also know what is a perfect score. In a diving competition, many people may get eight, nine, but some may once in a while get ten – perfect score. But that does not mean that it is absolute.

It is just that as far as the judges are concerned, it is a very, very good dive. So too in many other things in life, people are prepared to give you a perfect score if you have attained to that kind of quality that they can say, "This is what it ought to be."

In our lives, God looks at us that way. In the context of our finiteness, in the context of the world that we are living in, in the context of how He has created us, are we what we ought to be? If we are what we ought to be in the sense that God is really pleased with us, it can be classified as perfect in a certain sense. But in different places in the Scriptures, the word "perfect" can be used in different aspects with different emphases and degree of quality.

So the apostle Paul says, "Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect". As far as his attitude was concerned – his commitment – you can say he was perfect. He had given himself fully to the Lord. But he also knew that there will be growth in quality even as he continues to work at it because God's calling, in terms of the path of perfection, is limitless. So the apostle Paul can continue to grow and to develop.

And so, that is why he says, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you: Have the perfect attitude; have the right attitude; if it is otherwise, God will show that to you. Keep living by it."

"Brethren, join in following my example". So, the apostle Paul could say that, it is because he had the right attitude. He had given himself to the Lord, but he knew that there was a lot more to grow, to develop, but this is the right path; we must move in that way.

I want to conclude but because of time, I will not elaborate very much on something very important.

But it is a very, very big subject and I will not go into detail at this point of time. But I want to introduce it here because it is appropriate.

When we are talking about progressive quality of being, the principle of being perfected, what does that mean?

The Lord Jesus shows us how, as the perfect Man, he went through various situations in life that contributed towards his manifesting the highest quality of moral and spiritual qualities. We all know the Lord Jesus was perfect: He never sinned; He lived His life in full obedience to God at all times; His heart was pure.

But the Scriptures tell us He was made perfect. What does that mean?

**Hebrews 5: 7-10**

- 7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.
- 8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.
- 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,
- 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

This is not an easy passage but it is a very, very meaningful passage. It helps us to understand who the Lord Jesus is, what He went through and the spiritual principles that are relevant to us. We are told: In the days of His flesh, that is when He lived on earth as a Man together with us, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. We are not told what this was referring to but the principle is there: He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to God.

As the perfect Man, He went through great difficulties and He prayed earnestly.



We are told in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was in great agony when He prayed and His prayers were basically focussed on the mission of the cross. Here the Lord Jesus was not praying and crying because of His own selfish desires, because of His suffering caused by His own failures and neglect. There was nothing of that. He lived His life fully for God. But there was loud crying and tears in association with His mission to be the Saviour of world. To fulfil that mission, He went through great difficulties and He prayed to God, He cried to Him.

He prayed to the One able to save Him from death. This does not mean that the Lord Jesus was praying to God to save Him from the death of the cross. It is quite clear from the Scriptures that the Lord Jesus chose the path of the cross willingly. He was not asking to be delivered from it, but it tells us He was praying to this Person, this One, the God who is able to save Him from death: that means the almighty God, the God who is able to do all things, is able to save Him from death, if that were the best thing.

“...and He was heard because of His piety” tells us that God answered His prayers. God granted to Him His request; God helped Him, worked in His life because of His piety, because His attitude was right, because His commitment was there, because He was prepared to live for God.

Then it tells us: “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”

The Lord Jesus as the perfect Man learned obedience. Was He not always obedient? Yes, He was always obedient in the sense of His attitude towards God the Father. He was always responsive, and submitted. But here we are told: “He learned obedience”. This is a different realm, it is a different context.

It is in the context of His incarnation, in the context of His experiencing what it meant to be a Man: going through the difficulties of life, going through the situations that he would never have experienced as God, if he had not become Man. So in the days of His flesh... He learned obedience. He went through situations which otherwise He would not have, and in His spirit He learned to go through this with full submission in the midst of suffering.

If we want to be like Christ, let us not run away from sufferings, but let us not suffer unnecessarily. Let us not suffer because of our own foolishness, because of our selfishness, because of our disobedience to God, but if we love God and walk in His ways and we suffer for it, then let us rejoice. There is a meaning in it; there is a purpose in it: God wants us to develop in our lives – “learned obedience from the things which He suffered”.

And **verse 7** tells us: “And having been made perfect...” – so it tells us that this process of His suffering, His going through the situations in this world led to His being made perfect. Was He not already perfect? Yes, He was perfect and yet, He was being perfected.

So this tells us that: perfection – there are different meanings, different aspects, different levels, different qualities that are present. The Lord Jesus was perfect in the sense of His attitude, His moral qualities, His compassion, His love, His preparedness to go all the way – all that was there; He was perfect.

But He was now perfected as the Saviour of the world: He had now gone through all the suffering necessary to equip Him to become the source of eternal salvation... to all those who obey Him. So to become the source of eternal salvation, He had to be perfected.

He went through all this so that He developed within Himself what it meant to be the Saviour of the world. He had to go through the cross, He had to suffer in that way, and this perfected Him so that He became He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

So this tells us that as a result of all that He went through, it was now appropriate for God to designate Him as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, the highest order of priesthood possible.

How could He be a high priest? Because He identified with us fully, He understood what we are going through. He went through life on earth as a Man; He suffered to the uttermost. He knew what it was. He can present our needs before God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

So no matter how we develop, however far we may go in our development of our lives, there is always more to develop.

We need to work at both. Anything that is negative in our lives, we must be very resolute, decisive to deal with it totally. We must not allow anything to remain.

That is the first thing. If we are not prepared to do that, then we will never be able to develop to be like Christ because Christ is holy and perfect.

So if we want to be like Him, then the minimum is we must reject everything that is negative: Do not give in to the self-life in any form; do not seek your own selfish desires in any way - that must be fully dealt with.

We must be prepared to give ourselves such that our heart is completely His: our heart belongs to God, we now no longer want to live for ourselves, but we live for Him. This becomes our whole way of life. We must be committed in this way.

Then, as we do that, we must develop the positive and it is not easy. We have to learn how to pray, we have to learn how to give, we have to learn how to care, we have to learn how to suffer, we have to learn to develop ourselves and this is a process that can go on for eternity. We can keep on developing and growing and growing and growing. It is limitless.

It is a very wonderful path, but it is a very difficult path.

An honest and good heart, hold fast what we have come to know to be the right path, bear fruit with perseverance: that is what God is calling us towards.

But it is a sad thing that not many people are prepared to do that – that is the reality; we have to recognize it.

But let us see that it is possible to develop and God wants us to develop, and He will enable us if we are prepared for the cost of it, if we are prepared to walk with Him, follow Him all the way.

So basically, we have sought to appreciate that developing quality of being is progressive.

We need to deal with the negative progressively to the utmost that we can; we need to nurture the positive progressively, to the very utmost that we know how.

So even though that badminton player had become very good and nobody could beat him, he could still develop higher and higher and higher quality in his skill – in the spiritual realm, even much more so.

The more we develop, the more we realize there is more to develop because God is infinite and there is so much more that we can learn and grow and develop in Him. So let us do what we should and go all the way.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must come to God and seek His guidance and enabling to deal with our self-life deeply and for long term, and faithfully nurture the positive qualities of moral character in ever increasing measure.

Let us now come before the Lord and ask Him to help us, so that we may understand more clearly what this path means and how we can effectively respond to Him, and He can help us to develop in the path of His calling and in the way that we should live.