

THE PERFECT HEART
1 KINGS CHAPTER 8 VERSES 59-61

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INTRODUCTION

When I was in college, I occasionally worked on the weekends and the summers fixing and painting cars. I learned the skill from an old baseball coach when I was about 16. You see, I was driving to school one morning and did not see the car in front of me slowing down in time to keep from hitting it in the rear. I did not do any damage to the car I hit, but I messed my car up a good bit. My dad had it towed to a local garage where they straightened the fender out enough to where I could drive.

I really did not like driving a wrecked car, but neither my parents nor I had the money to fix the car. It was a 1974 Fiat 128 and was probably not worth fixing. However, I decided to fix it some way. I saved money from mowing lawns and doing odd jobs to buy a junk car for \$125 to use for parts. From there I began to learn how to work on cars and the art of body work and painting.

I remember going over to my baseball coach's body shop one day to work on my car. They had just finished painting a car and my coach told me to go take a look. I walked in the paint booth and there was a 1966 Pontiac GTO. It was a sight to behold. It was candy apple red and in mint condition. The chrome was shiny. The interior was beautiful and without flaw. Someone had gone the extra mile to make sure the car was just right. I remember walking around the car and admiring the workmanship and sheer beauty. I said to myself "It's perfect".

I want to talk about the idea of being perfect in relation to our own lives. I know all of us have made the statement "nobody's perfect". We usually mean no one is sinless, which is correct. When we think of perfection, we usually think of God in His glory and refer to Him as perfect and complete. Of course, God is the creator and our concept of perfection, as it relates to Him, is limited. We can't fully understand the scope of our infinite God's perfection with our finite mind. Please think on this idea as we read the following passage.

TEXT

Please turn your attention to 1 Kings 8:59-61. Let's read this passage together. "59 And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: 60 That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else. 61 Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day." (KJV)

GENRE

This passage is located in a historical book of the Old Testament. It is important when we read scripture that we understand the type of writing or genre. Genre is a French word that simply means a classification, category, or type. The Old Testament is especially rich in

different literary classifications or genres. For example, the passage we just read was an example of historical record. The portion of 1 Kings Chapter 8 we read is a quote from Solomon. If you were to look at more verses in Chapter 8 you would find a narrator who provides insight and commentary. When reading biblical historical accounts it is important to recognize a couple of distinguishing characteristics. First, Biblical history is national – specifically relating to Israel. Even though acts of individuals are recorded, the scope is national. Second, Biblical history contains a series of accounts with cause-effect sequences. History does not really have a plot like narrative, but weaves certain proceedings into a record that tells the reader about the events in the life of the nation of Israel. 1 Kings is a book of history; and the portion we are reading contains an account that relates actual events relative to Solomon and the nation of Israel.

Other examples of genre include psalms which are poetic in nature. Proverbs are a genre that offer wisdom and are classified as wisdom literature. Old Testament genre can be broken down into 3 major categories: Prose, Prophecy, and Poetry. Each of these separate and distinct genres must be read and understood appropriately. There are at least 10 genres within these categories themselves in the Old Testament and there is usually some overlap in genre. For example, the book of Isaiah is a book of prophecy. However, much of prophecy is poetic in nature. Thus, when we read what Isaiah speaks, we must be cognizant of the fact that we may be reading poetry inside his prophetic message.

I hope that gives you an idea of how important understanding genre is in biblical interpretation. Many scholars believe genre is the most important aspect of interpretation. It may be difficult for me to say it is the **most** important, but I know it is **very** important. There are three levels of context in biblical interpretation: immediate, middle, and distant. Genre is within the middle context and is sometimes referred to as literary form. In our study today, we will look at all three levels of context.

So, our passage is historical and it is important for us to recognize it as such. When we look more closely at it, we understand we are not reading a psalm or proverb, even though Solomon is speaking. We understand we are reading a historical account of what actually happened more than 2500 years ago.

A CLOSER LOOK

Lets look at the passage again a little more closely. “59 And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: 60 That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else. 61 Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.” (KJV)

Let’s talk about what we may classify as the distant context of this passage. Israel was, and still is, God’s chosen earthly people. The Bible says in Exodus 4:22 “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn:” (KJV) The significance of Israel being referred to as God’s firstborn son is huge. God chose the **nation** of Israel out of all nations upon the earth to be a special people to serve Him. We can see just how special Israel is to God when we consider Romans 9:4-5. “4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the

service of God, and the promises; 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” (KJV)

No other nation was given more by God than Israel. He led them out of Egypt, where they were in hopeless bondage and promised them a better land – a land flowing with milk and honey. I think it is extremely important that we keep this fact, the special place in God’s heart for Israel, in mind when we read scripture, especially the Old Testament. With this in mind, let’s look closer at the immediate context.

Israel is celebrating and dedicating their new temple in Jerusalem. Solomon is their King and he has just finished praying. Solomon is the third king in Israel’s history, and he was privileged to be able to build the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. 1 Kings Chapter 8 records his prayer of thanksgiving and dedication. In our selected verses, Solomon is addressing the people of Israel with a blessing and admonition. Notice what he says in verse 59 “And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require.” You can see he is referring to Israel as God’s people and that they have a cause or purpose. Solomon wants the people to be aware of his petition before the Lord as it relates to his purpose and Israel’s purpose. Solomon’s cause is to lead the people of Israel, and I think verse 60 gives us some insight into part of what God purposed for the nation of Israel.

Verse 60 says “That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else.” Israel was to spread the good news of Jehovah to the whole world. Every person, whether Jew or Gentile, was to know and understand that the LORD is God via the ministry of the nation of Israel. Satan held the world in deceit and it was Israel’s job to proclaim the Lord to the lost and deceived nations. It is important to take note of Solomon’s understanding of this purpose for Israel.

A QUESTION

Let’s now take a look at verse 61. It contains an interesting admonition given by Solomon to the people of Israel. Verse 61 says “Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.” Solomon uses the word “therefore” to summarize and close his address to the people. He says for the people of Israel to have a perfect heart. What does he mean by this statement? **Is it possible for fallen man to have a perfect heart?** We all know “no body’s perfect”!

It is important that we look at the word “perfect” and define it in its immediate context. We will do this by examining the Hebrew word in Strong’s concordance and by looking at a few other English translations. Strong’s defines the Hebrew word translated “perfect” as being “complete” either literally or figuratively. Other places in the KJV translate this word as full, just, made ready, peaceable, quite, and whole. The NIV translates the word as “fully committed”; the NASB supplies the words “wholly devoted”; while the NKJV uses the word “loyal”.

Sometimes we mistakenly assign a preconceived definition to a word. Many times we forget or ignore the fact that words also have more than one meaning depending on context. I think this would be easy to do with the word “perfect”. As you can see, in relation to man, it does not generally mean sinless when used in scripture. It conveys the thought of completeness,

commitment, and loyalty. I want us to look at some other passages that use this word to further enlighten ourselves and help answer our question.

Turn to 1 Kings 11:4 “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was **not perfect** with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.” (KJV) Wow! Solomon turned away from his own admonition. He was seen here following after other gods and out of fellowship with God. Later in his life he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes and proclaimed “all is vanity”. He realized his many mistakes and paid a terrible price for walking contrary to the Lord. I think it would be accurate to say that having a perfect heart involves being in full fellowship with God. Fellowship certainly includes walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments. Our text verse, 1 Kings 8:61 points this out to help define a “perfect heart”. Let’s examine some other scriptures to further substantiate this premise.

2 Kings 20:3 says, “I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a **perfect heart**, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.” (KJV) We see Hezekiah weeping before the Lord and telling Him how he had lived his life. Hezekiah describes a life of meaningful fellowship with God. Now, it is important to note that according to Hezekiah, it is possible to have a perfect heart. In this verse, Hezekiah refers to a walk with God, which again refers to a fellowship with the Lord. Also, notice what 2 Chronicles 15:17 says, “But the high places were not taken away out of Israel: nevertheless the heart of Asa was **perfect** all his days.” (KJV) Again, we see a man with a perfect heart.

At this point I think it is important that we distinguish between relationship and fellowship. Relationship is what we many times refer to as the salvation or born again experience. When we are born again, we become a child of God and have a relationship with him – He is our father and we are His child. Our relationship with God can never change. Fellowship, on the other hand, cannot exist with God unless it is preceded by a relationship with Him. Fellowship speaks of our daily walk with the Lord. It many times can change and is largely dependant upon us. Thus, Hezekiah and Solomon both had relationships, but both experienced different levels of fellowship. Hezekiah was, for the most part, obedient to the Lord while Solomon, for the most part, was not obedient.

Notice what 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is **perfect** toward him.” (KJV) God is looking to come to the aid of those who have a perfect or committed heart! What an incentive to seek the Lord! God wants full fellowship with His children!

APPLICATION

Having a perfect heart takes work on our part. Our flesh is bent toward opposing anything spiritual. We must seek wisdom from God’s word on a daily basis. We must be in prayer on a daily basis. We must seek God’s will and way in **every aspect** of our lives. There are some practical ways to help us achieve a “perfect heart” toward God. 1. **Regular planned quiet time with the Lord.** We should set aside at least 15 to 30 minutes a day to pray and meditate upon the Lord and His Word. I think it is best to do this first thing in the morning. As we grow in the Lord we will experience increasing levels of fellowship or maturity. 2. **Meaningful and systematic Bible study.** This can be accomplished through regular attendance in Sunday school and church services. Most Sunday schools have a predetermined curriculum.

We should diligently seek involvement in weekly Bible study and try to master the lesson each week. Topical studies are beneficial but systematic expository study is invaluable. Sunday school is the most effective way to insure we are studying to show ourselves approved to God.

3. **Involvement at a local church.** We should seek to be **involved** in a local church. God made us in such a way that we need each other. Serving the Lord includes serving others. Each member of the body has a specific function. We need to use the gift(s) God has given to us for His glory and the benefit of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

4. **A readiness to share our faith.** We should be **prepared** to share our faith with others. When we do this, it allows us to be a part of God's will - that all people hear the good news! This may mean coming to church on specific days for evangelist efforts. It may mean carrying tracts with you to hand out in the community. It definitely means asking the Lord **daily** to put someone in your path with whom you can share Christ.

CONCLUSION

I think there is a great lesson to learn from Solomon's admonition to have a "perfect heart". God wants us to be in full fellowship with Him for several reasons. He created us with a special purpose in mind – to serve and glorify Him. Verse 59 of 1 Kings Chapter 8 makes this point. In order to do this we must be in fellowship with God. Amos 3:3 says, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (KJV) God did not save us to only make us children. He saved us to enable us to mature in Him and serve Him with joy! He wants us to spread the good news of the gospel to the world. This applied to Israel and applies to us today. If we are not walking in full fellowship with the Lord, our witness will be ineffective. If we are in fellowship with God, we will be filled with His Spirit and those in the world will see the works of God through our lives.

God rewards those who seek him diligently. Solomon knew this when he made the speech to Israel in 1 Kings Chapter 8. Unfortunately, he did not heed his own advice. We should not make the same mistake Solomon made. Strive to have a "perfect heart", it is possible, and the effort is worth all the work!