

## **Progress, not perfection should be our life goal**

The popular belief of Christian evangelicals is that in order to get into Heaven, one must become perfect, because there is no room in Heaven, or in the presence of God, for imperfect beings. They have told us that unless we become perfect, we remain under God's wrath and condemnation. Because it is impossible for anyone to achieve perfection, one must become clothed in the righteousness of Christ instead. Our sins need to be washed in the blood of Christ in order to make us fit for heaven. The righteousness of Christ must be substituted for our own. A belief in the substitutionary atonement fits right into all this. Instead of paying for our own sins and learning from the process, we heap our sins onto a scapegoat and are artificially cleansed, instead.

I once heard an evangelist say that his purpose in life was to go to heaven some day and take as many people with him as possible. This is a very noble aspiration, but misguided, nonetheless. In my view, Christian salvation should not be regarded as a ticket into heaven or an escape from Hell. The purpose of our human existence is not to depart from it and go to heaven. If that were the goal, then why bother entering this physical world in the first place? Why not just remain in our true home, which heaven, where sorrow, hardship and death do not exist? We didn't come into this world to escape from it, we came here in order to experience its positive and negative aspects, learn from them, and make progress in our spiritual development. The goal of our spiritual journey is not to get back into heaven. Instead it is to be made into the likeness of Christ, not only in word, but also in deed.

*Agape*, self-sacrificing love cannot be experienced or exercised in a heavenly world which is devoid of hardship, sin and suffering. Christ did die for us on Calvary, but not instead of us. He died for our benefit, not in our place. He demonstrated God's self-sacrificing love, and showed us how to experience and exercise that same kind of love by following in His footsteps.

My personal goal in life is not to qualify for heaven or help others do the same. We are already saved, loved by God unconditionally, and technically residing in Heaven. We are experiencing our Earthly existence as though in a very realistic dream. The physical world has no actual physical substance to it. It is real only in the sense that our experience of it is real. We are here to learn, not escape.

We are also here to have fun and enjoy the experience. Jesus wants us to have an abundant life, filled with the fruit of the Spirit of God, which include love, joy and peace. At the same time, He wants us to develop qualities of character that include patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We are not here to save the world. God has that all under control. We are here to experience all the love, peace and joy that the world has to offer, and at the same time help others to do the same. These two goals are not mutually exclusive. It is in giving that we receive. The more love, joy and peace we spread out there, the more we receive.

The weight of the world is not on our shoulders. Everybody is going to be OK regardless of what we do. We are free to progress at whatever pace we desire. Christian salvation, which is a

process of becoming like Christ, is experienced by grace. There is no legal requirement that we measure up to some impossible goal of perfection in order to become fit for Heaven. We are already residing in Heaven. We don't have to earn or in other way qualify for God's unconditional love and acceptance. We are already basking in God's love. Although it might seem at times that God has abandoned us, He has never left us. He lives inside each of us, all around us, and everywhere else, for that matter.

Our goal in life should be to enjoy it as much as possible and help others do the same.