

Introduction

I begin with a piece of trivia. According to Major League Baseball, 23 "**perfect games**," as it calls them, have been pitched in its history. In 23 games, a pitcher allowed no opposing batter to reach base. But let's think of that in relation to a literal "**perfect**" game. A pitcher throws 81 pitches, all of which are strikes, and none of which a batter hits. He has 27 strikeouts and no fielder has to make a play to get a batter out. No pitcher has ever done that and none ever will.

That illustrates one of the peculiarities of human life. We routinely apply the word "**perfect**" to a host of persons and things. We talk about perfect mothers, perfect jobs, perfect food, and on it goes. But in reality none of the persons and things we call perfect actually is.

I say that to say this. None of us has ever known or experienced perfection. Perfection means absolute flawlessness on the negative side and absolute completeness on the positive side. None of us has ever known or experienced absolute flawlessness and completeness.

But one day, according to our remarkable text, we will and that's what I'm going to preach about today and next week.

Perfect Environment

We begin in verse 1 with a word combination it uses twice, "**heaven and earth**." Genesis 1:1 and other verses imply that it refers to the universe. John mentions the "**first**" heaven and earth, which is our universe now. He also mentions the "**new**" heaven and earth, which is our eternal universe after Jesus comes again – what we call "**heaven**."

The Greek word translated "**new**" is the same one Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5:17. One who decides to follow Jesus is a "**new creature**." "**New**" there obviously doesn't mean a different person suddenly comes

into existence to replace "**the one**" who decided to follow Jesus. It means that "**one**" is given a different regenerated nature.

"**New**" has the same meaning in verse 1. It doesn't mean a

different universe will suddenly come into existence to replace the **“first,”** the one we have now. It means the one we have now will be given a different regenerated nature. God will dramatically transform it in other words so that it will be suitable to heavenly life.

This transformation has to do with the ways He'll make the new universe work. We talk about **“natural laws”** of physics, chemistry, and so on. But, in reality, they aren't **“laws”** at all. They don't govern the universe. God does. They're just explanations of the ways that He makes it work. Those laws operated before Adam and Eve's sin, operate now, and will continue to operate in the new universe. But God will dramatically transform them. He'll make the new universe work far differently than the first universe does now. The difference is so radical that the first can be said to have **“passed away,”** to quote verse 1.

An experience of the Israelites, recounted in Deuteronomy 8:4, illustrates what I mean. It relates to a law of physics, the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics. Pursuant to that law, clothing eventually wears out. The molecules that make it up gradually break down from complex to simple. But that didn't happen to the Israelite's clothing during the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness. God altered the Second Law of Thermodynamics as it applied to them. The molecules that made up their clothing didn't break down. They remained complex.

That particular incident foreshadows what God will do to the first universe, the one we have now, to make it new. It's two things.

First, He'll modify natural laws. The 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, for instance, has detrimental consequences, like our clothes wearing out. But it has beneficial consequences as well, like friction, which enables us to walk without slipping. That's typical of natural laws now. They have both beneficial and detrimental consequences. But they won't in the new

universe. God will enhance their beneficial consequences and eliminate their detrimental ones. Nothing in it will wear out for instance, which points to one thing He'll do in the new universe. Modify natural laws.

He'll do a second thing. Create new **"natural laws"** that are in addition to the ones now. Those new ones, for the most part, are beyond the grasp of our imaginations. They'll open up a whole new world of natural sciences and thus activities and experiences to us.

Those then are two things God will do in the new universe. Modify natural laws and create new ones. Astrophysicist and Christian apologist Hugh Ross describes the result in these rousing terms: **"One day God will release humankind from the 'playpen' of this universe with all of its restrictive dimensions and physics. He will usher those who worship Him into a new creation replete with physics and dimensions or transdimensions that permit ultimately satisfying relationships with Him and one another."** To **"ultimately satisfying relationships"** I'd add **"ultimately satisfying achievements."** It's clear. The perfection of our environment will always enhance and never oppose the mind-boggling life God has for us.

Perfect Persons

There's a second perfection we'll know and experience.

Look at the generic term **"men"** and the words **"His people"** in verse 3. They teach us that a community of persons will inhabit the new universe. That is in fact God's overriding intention in human history. It's to bring out of it an eternal community of redeemed persons.

Verse 8 discloses who the members of that community will not be. The adjectives and nouns in it are representative. They stand for those who reject following Jesus. They don't want him running their lives. They

want to run them themselves and do. That's why they end up in what verse 8 calls "**the lake that burns with fire and brimstone**" or hell. That's the world for which their chosen character suits them.

In sharp contrast, verse 7 discloses who the members of the eternal community will be. It's those who "**overcome.**" The reference points of the word "**overcome**" are sin, Satan, secular society turned against God, and the trials and tribulations of life. Who is it that has the power to routinely overcome those forces? It's disciples and friends of Jesus, those who let Him run the entirety of their lives down to the detail. That's why they end up where they do, in the new universe, heaven. That's the world for which their chosen character suits them.

The Bible teaches us two things about those people.

First, they'll have resurrected bodies.

Those bodies will have no structural flaws. They'll be structurally complete. The human face illustrates this. Aestheticists define what they call "**flawless proportions.**" That term conveys the optimum ratios between eyes, mouth, forehead, and chin. The distance between the pupils of the eyes should be just under half of the width of the face, 48%. The distance between eyes and mouth should be just over a third of the distance between the hairline and chin, 34%.

Taking those factors and others into account, here's a picture of the person England found to be closest to perfection. It's 18 year-old Florence Colgate. I said "**closest to**" because as attractive as she may seem, she isn't flawless and complete. Her ratios are 44% and 32.8%.

But in the new universe, every one's ratios will be 48% and 34%. Their faces will have "**flawless proportions.**" Each will be considerably more

striking and attractive than Florence Colgate is, which illustrates my larger point. The resurrected bodies of all those in the new universe will be *structurally* flawless and complete.

They'll be *functionally* flawless and complete as well.

Our cognitive and bodily processes now are flawed and incomplete, even if we're young and healthy. We don't have the mental and physical powers to think and act as we often desire and even need to. I would **"love"** to remember everything important I read and learn, for instance, but I can't. Or I would **"love"** to change the molecular structures of objects and to defy gravity, but I can't.

But I – and you – will in the new universe. Our resurrected bodies will be functionally flawless and complete. We'll have the mental and physical powers to think and act as we always desire and need to. I will remember everything I learn for instance. And I will change the molecular structures of objects and defy gravity.

It's true then. Our resurrected bodies will be structurally and functionally flawless and complete. Or as the Apostle Paul says it, they'll be **"glorious."** C.S. Lewis articulated just how glorious with these awe-inspiring words: **"It's a serious thing . . . to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship."** He was absolutely right. Suppose one of you was suddenly given the resurrected body you'll someday have. You'd be so stunning to the rest of us that we'd be strongly tempted to worship you.

So that's the first thing the Bible teaches about the people in the eternal community God gathers. All will have resurrected bodies that are structurally and functionally flawless and complete.

But there's something else they'll have that's just as vital. It's renovated spirits. They'll be psychologically flawless and complete. Their inner dimensions (mind, feelings, will, soul, and bodily habits) will be totally sound or whole. And all of their actions and reactions, as a result, will be as well.

Think of it in terms of what Paul calls "**the deeds of the flesh**" and the "**fruit of the Spirit**" in Galatians 5.

One deed of the flesh, in verse 20, is "**anger.**" According to one study, one out of five Americans has an anger management problem. According to another, 10 million American men are so angry they're sick. Closer to home, a *WebMD* article begins: "**At one time everyone feels anger bubbling up. Anger is common.**" Actually, it's prevalent.

But it won't be in the new universe. It will be non-existent in fact. There will be "**0**" anger. Not one person will even once feel or express it. Each person will always feel and express its antithesis instead, the "**goodness**" and "**gentleness**" of verses 22 and 23.

That then is a second perfection we'll know and experience in the new universe, the perfection of persons. Everyone will be flawless and complete in body and spirit and so in competence and character as well.

Perfect Relationships

That perfection of persons has several profound implications, one of which is this. It's perfection of relationships. It's a no-brainer really. Do the math. One person perfect in competence and character + another person perfect in competence and character = perfect relationship.

Because all are perfect in competence, we'll know everyone and be known by everyone in an absolute sense. Our cognitive and bodily limitations

now prevent us from touching anyone in the core of their being, and them from touching us in ours. But we'll be able to in our resurrected bodies. Using Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 13, we now know people and are known "**in part.**" But then we'll know and be known "**fully,**" far more deeply than we know our spouses now and are known by them. That's why there will be no marriage in heaven.

Similarly, because all are perfect in character, we'll love everyone and be loved by everyone in an absolute sense. The absence of love is apathy and its opposite is malice. We'll not once have even the slightest degree of apathy or malice toward anyone, or they toward us. We'll always have the highest possible degree of affection and goodwill toward everyone, and they toward us. The result is what 1 John 4:18 calls "**perfect love**" that "**casts out fear.**"

I'd sum up our relationships in the new universe this way. We'll know and be known fully and thus love and be loved fully.

Conclusion

So there you have it – what we'll know and experience in the new universe. It's perfection of environment, persons, and relationships.

But so what? I've not given you in this sermon what I always give, application to real life, which is why it has two parts. The application is next week as I finish explaining our text. Until then meditate on and be inspired by it, our ultimate destiny. It's to always know and experience one day what we never do now – perfection.