Being "Made Perfect"

"for it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering" (Hebrews 2:10).

Our opening quotation describes how that the Lord Jesus Christ was made perfect, and that this was accomplished by his passing through "suffering". Again, in a similar vein we read a few chapters later: "though he were a son, yet ***learned he obedience*** by the things which he suffered: and being ***made perfect,*** he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him ..." (Heb. 5:8-9). Here, we are told that he was "made perfect", and that he "learned obedience" – terms which would make no sense if he were part of a triune godhead! For God to have to "learn obedience" begs the question, who was he obedient to – Himself? But Scripture provides the answer: Jesus was the Son of God, not God the Son, and he was obedient to his Father: "then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). In this way, "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and ***became obedient*** unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).

Likewise, the Lord was "made perfect" – which if he were God, would make no sense: how can God be anything but perfect?! Again, we see the simple truth of Scripture, that he was "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4), and being a Son of mankind, he was perfected through the things he endured. Those "things" strengthened his mind and character, so that he was able to suffer the ignominy and anguish of crucifixion.

But in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have displayed a pattern of the way in which his brethren might also be "made perfect". Even so, Peter wrote:

> "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, ***make you perfect,*** stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Pet. 5:10).

Just as Jesus was "made perfect", even so it is with his brethren – they can become "perfect" in him (Col. 1:28)!

CREATION

A common mistake when considering this aspect of *perfection,* is to say that the Creation described in Genesis was made in a perfect state and condition. But the Scriptures do not so speak – all that God made was pronounced "very good", not "perfect". Perfection had to be developed out of that "very good" state, through trial and obedience. Evidently, if Adam and Eve had not sinned, they would after their probationary period be permitted to eat from the tree of life. But in the event, they did sin – yet the Creator's Purpose was not frustrated. He ordained a way in which sinful men could nevertheless be "made perfect" by an appointed way, and on His Terms.

The word translated "perfect" does not signify, as in modern English, moral sinlessness, or without fault. Rather, it is defined as "completeness, maturity, and reaching a

designed purpose". This type of Perfection can be developed: it is the way in which the "designed purpose" of the Creator can be reached. By evolving good out of evil, the human race can be reconciled to God through his work in Christ. As the BASF has it, this is the purpose: "... sin and death having been taken out of the way, and the race completely restored to the friendship of the Deity" (BASF, Clause XXX). This will be a perfect state, when the earth is filled with "... just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). This is something to attain to, and is not a present condition – as is evidenced by the state of the world around us.

The Divine Method of perfecting His Sons, is the endurance of trials. Hence the words of James:

> "... knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, ***that ye may be perfect and entire,*** wanting nothing" (Jas. 1:3-4).

Tried faith is the basis of being made "perfect and entire". Patience, or *endurance* as the original word is, is the basis by which Messiah himself was perfected, and it is so with his brethren also. Whilst we might have a feeling of inadequacy in relation to the revealed righteousness of God, we can lift up our heads in hope, for those who "endure to the end, the same shall be saved" (Mat. 24:13). These will comprise a glorious multitude, incorruptible and perfect in nature and character – a vision of glory for us to look towards.

"PERFECTION" IN HEBREWS

This theme of perfection is one which runs like a golden thread throughout the book of Hebrews, and is profitable for us to consider. Hebrews 7:19 reads:

> "for the Law ***made nothing perfect,*** but it was the bringing in of a better hope, by the which we draw nigh to God."

And again

> "for the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of those things, ***can never*** with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually ***make the comers thereunto perfect"*** (Heb. 10:1).

But what the Law could not do in its various sacrifices, was accomplished in Christ: "for by one offering he hath ***perfected for ever*** them that are sanctified" (vs. 14). Again, we must note that the word "perfect" here, is used in the sense of completion and maturity – reaching a designed purpose.

Other references in Hebrews are as follows:

> "... these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be ***made perfect"*** (Heb. 11:39-40).

> "to the general assembly and ecclesia of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men ***made perfect"*** (Heb. 12:23).
>
> "now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep … ***make you perfect*** in every good work to do his will …" (Heb. 13:21).

There is another aspect to being made perfect, or complete. That is, the maturity of the one body of Christ. Hence we read that the Holy Spirit gifts were provided:

> "for ***the perfecting of the saints,*** for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto ***a perfect man,*** unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13).

The Spirit Gifts then, were a temporary bestowal to provide for the early fledgling ecclesia until they reached a state of completeness in maturity. This is something that all believers must aspire to: a development in the Truth to become mature, and part of that one "perfect man". It is in this way that the Lord spoke of their unity:

> "… the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that ***they may be perfect in one;*** and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me" (Jno. 17:22-23).

It is evident then, that a body which is divided amongst itself is not the one Body of Christ. They are not "perfect in one", and are not "a perfect man," and "if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mrk. 3:25).

But although moral perfection comes through a development into spiritual maturity, perfection is not currently part of our physical condition. Hence Paul describes how he was not presently perfect, speaking of eternal life: "not that I have already obtained this or ***am already perfect,*** but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Phil. 3:12, ESV).

This reference is very helpful, for there is always a danger when considering the perfection of the Lord, that we might feel overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacy. We are not yet complete, or perfected: this will be given at the judgment seat when Christ will come again. We are currently still developing in the process of being perfected, and will continue to do so until then. Hence Paul speaks of the working of God in the believer: "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it ***to completion at the day of Jesus Christ"*** (Phil. 1:6 ESV).

In the above, we have a merging of different aspects of perfection. There are 3 aspects to consider:

1. In terms of flawless moral performance, perfection is not a current reality.

2. In terms of their current standing and maturity, the believers who are sanctified, are "perfected for ever," (Heb. 10:14), because to them, there is "no condemnation" (Rom. 8:1).

3. In terms of their physical nature, the future glorification of the saints will achieve this, when the work is finished, and every believer will be presented perfect in Christ Jesus (Col. 1;28).

There is also a fourth aspect: the word in 2 Timothy 3:17 is only used once, and has a different meaning:

> "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ***that the man of God may be perfect,*** throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim 3:17).

Here, the sense is not that men of God are sinless, or flawless, being without fault. Other renderings show the sense more clearly:

> "… so that the servant of God may be ***thoroughly equipped*** for every good work" (NIV)

> "that the man of God might be ***complete, equipped*** for ever good work" (ESV)

The idea here, is that the man of God has a complete array of tools at his disposal to use in his work. He is "thoroughly equipped" to do that which is required of him – and that equipment is provided through the Word of God itself.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

We saw at the beginning, that the Lord Jesus Christ himself had to be "made perfect": "for it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to ***make*** the captain of their salvation ***perfect through suffering"*** (Hebrews 2:10). The Lord is thus presented as "the captain" of salvation to those who believe in him, and trust in his power to save. He himself spoke of his own perfecting:

> "… behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day, ***I shall be perfected"*** (Lu. 13:32).

Evidently, the perfection described here, is not a correction of any moral failing – for in this sense, Messiah was sinless. But rather, his physical nature was perfected – and this is the basis of our own salvation: "being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). In his death upon the cross, his mortal mission was "finished" (Jno. 19:30), and it laid a basis for his rising again. In his resurrection, his victory was complete, and the *diabolos* in him was destroyed. And this is he "who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:21). This is the hope of all the saints!

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