

He redeems us from the curse of the law; and by means of the new spirit of life which is in Him, He sets us free from the law of sin and death. And so Paul sums up the innermost meaning of His words when he said: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believeth."¹

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CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

I.

THE WORD "PERFECT" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

IN modern religious life, the use of the word *perfect* to describe a definite stage of spiritual development and Christian character has been a matter of much discussion. Some have claimed for themselves or others, or as attainable, a measure of spiritual or moral maturity which may, they think, be fairly called *Christian Perfection*. Others have strenuously resisted all such claims. And this controversy has given rise to discussions about various side issues bearing upon the Christian life.

Inasmuch as the word *perfect* is found in the English Bible, in both Authorized and Revised Versions, as a description of Christian character, I shall introduce the subject by discussing in this paper the meaning of the word or words so rendered, and expounding the teaching of the Bible about the persons and character thus described. In a second paper I shall call attention to other important teaching of the New Testament closely related to the subject before us. And in a third paper I shall discuss Wesley's teaching about Christian perfection, and certain modern controversies on the same subject.

¹ Rom. x. 4.

Of the words rendered *perfect* in the New Testament, the most important is τέλειος, an adjective derived from the substantive τέλος, usually rendered *end*. But this latter word denotes the end, not as mere cessation in time or space, but as a goal attained or to be attained, the accomplishment of a purpose, or the full outworking of a tendency. Its meaning is well reproduced by the phrase "end and aim." This meaning may be detected even where the word seems at first sight to mean only cessation. So Luke i. 33, "of His kingdom, there shall be no *end*": *i.e.* it shall never have run out its complete course as did the ancient empires which have passed away. Similarly, Mark iii. 26: "if Satan hath risen against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but hath an *end*." If the supreme power of evil be divided, his power has run its full course: which is not the case. In other places, the idea of a goal or aim is more conspicuous. So 1 Peter i. 9: "receiving the *end* of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Also 1 Timothy i. 5: "the *end* of the charge is love out of a pure heart."

This idea of a goal to be attained or the full outworking of inherent tendencies underlies the entire use of the adjective τέλειος. This last never denotes that which pertains to cessation, always that which pertains to a goal reached. The τέλειοι are those who have attained a measure of maturity. This is made very evident by the other words with which the word *perfect* is contrasted. So 1 Corinthians xiv. 20: "be not children in mind, but in malice be babes; on the other hand, in your minds become *full-grown men*." Similarly Ephesians iv. 13, 14: "till we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a *full-grown man* (ἄνδρα τέλειον), to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we be no longer babes." Still more definite is Hebrews v. 12-14: "ye are become such as have need of milk and not of solid food. For every one that partaketh of milk is inexperienced

of the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But solid food is for *full-grown men* (τελείων), for those who by reason of use have their sense exercised to discern good and evil." The animal and mental and moral forces latent in the child find in the adult their full development. The latter is therefore called, in contrast to the child, τέλειος.

In 1 Chronicles xxv. 8 (LXX.) we have the contrast of *τελείων καὶ μανθανόντων*: i.e. of those whose education is complete and those who are still pupils.

The above passages, which might be indefinitely multiplied from classical Greek, make the meaning of τέλειος quite clear. It describes an object in which inherent tendencies have attained full development, in which the ideal is fully realised.

In the LXX. the word τέλειος is used to describe an ideal man. In Genesis vi. 9 (compare Sirach xlv. 17) Noah is said to have been "righteous, *perfect* in his generation." In Deuteronomy xviii. 13, after a warning against sorcery, the writer adds "thou shalt be *perfect* before the Lord thy God." In 1 Kings viii. 61, Solomon urges the people, "let your hearts be perfect towards the Lord our God, to walk in His ordinances and to keep His commandments as at this day." He thus bids them tolerate no divided allegiance. In chapter xi. 4, we read that Solomon's "heart was not *perfect* with the Lord his God as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians." David, with all his sins, was loyal to the worship of God: his son worshipped other gods. Similar language is found in chapter xv. 3; and a contrast in verse 14. This frequent use of the word *perfect* in the LXX. to describe whole-hearted loyalty to God is in complete harmony with the root-idea of the word: for such loyalty was the immediate aim of the spiritual education of Israel.

In the recorded words of Christ, the word τέλειος occurs

three times, once to describe the character of God, and twice to describe a moral goal to be pursued by the disciples of Christ. In Matthew v. 45, the example of the God of Nature, who does good to all men whether good or bad, is set before His children on earth for their imitation; and in verse 48 our Lord adds, "ye therefore shall be *perfect* as your heavenly Father is *perfect*." He means that just in proportion as we treat men not according to their deserts but on the principle of doing them good we approach the goal of human excellence, and the pattern set before us by the action of God Himself. Similarly, in Matthew xix. 21, Christ says, "if thou desirest to be *perfect*, go, sell thy possessions and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." In each of these passages the word rendered *perfect* describes the goal of human excellence; this being looked at from one particular point of view.

In John xvii. 23, we have the derived verb *τελειόω*. Christ prays that His followers "may be men perfected into one": *ἵνα ὧσι τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν*. He here sets before them unity to be attained by full development of the individual. All defects of character tend towards discord. Christ prays that His disciples may become so mature as to be one harmonious whole. In John iv. 34, v. 36, xvii. 4, the same word denotes the work of Christ, complete or to be completed: *e.g.* "having *completed* the work which Thou gavest Me in order that I might do it." So Paul desired, in Acts xx. 24, to *complete* his course. In John xix. 28 it denotes the *fulfilment* of prophecy; and in Luke ii. 43 the *conclusion* of the appointed days of the feast.

In 1 Corinthians ii. 6 St. Paul says that, although to the Corinthians he did not use persuasive words of human wisdom, he nevertheless does "speak wisdom among the *full-grown*": *ἐν τοῖς τελείοις*. But he adds in chapter iii. 1, "and I, brethren, was not able to speak to you as to

spiritual men but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. With milk I fed you, not with meat: for ye were not able to bear it." We have here again the contrast, noted above, of babes and full-grown men. The immaturity of the persons referred to, which revealed itself in their contentions, unfitted them to comprehend the deep things of God.

In Philippians iii. 12 St. Paul disclaims perfection: "Not that I have already obtained, or am already *perfected*; but I pursue, if I may also lay hold of that for which I have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus." In other words, the goal is still before him: but he is pressing on towards it. On the other hand, in verse 15, putting himself among the men in Christ, or those who claim to be such, he says, "let us, so many as be *perfect*, be of this mind." That St. Paul here puts himself among the full grown and a few verses earlier disowns full growth, proves that with him the word *τέλειος* did not describe one definite stage of spiritual development.

In Colossians i. 28 St. Paul declares the aim of his apostolic activity to be to "present every man *perfect* in Christ." And in chapter iv. 12 he describes Epaphras as agonising in prayer on behalf of the Christians at Colossæ in order that they "may stand *perfect* and fully-assured in every will of God." In each case, the word denotes that full development of character in his flock which ought to be the aim of every Christian pastor. In Ephesians iv. 13, already quoted, the aim of the Christian pastorate is said to be the growth of each member of the Church "into a full-grown man" in contrast to the instability of childhood. In these passages, the word *perfect* describes, not actual attainment, but a moral and spiritual goal to be kept in view and pursued.

In Galatians iii. 3, we have the cognate verb *ἐπιτελείσθε* (derived however not from *τέλειος*, *perfect*, but from *τέλος*, *an end*), denoting progress towards a goal in contrast to the

commencement of a course. The Apostle asks, "having begun by the agency of the Spirit, are ye now being led to the goal by means of the flesh," *i.e.* by something pertaining to the bodily life? The same contrast is found again in Philippians i. 6: "He who hath *begun* in you a good work will *complete* it until the day of Jesus Christ." In 2 Corinthians viii. 6 the same words are used in reference to the collection of money for the poor Christians at Jerusalem. In chapter vii. 1 St. Paul urges his readers to cleanse themselves "from all defilement of flesh or spirit, *accomplishing holiness* in the fear of God." He desires in them a realisation of the conception of holiness. Similarly, in the tabernacle or temple the priests, as we read in Hebrews ix. 6, *accomplish* (*i.e.* *perform*) the sacrifices.

In close agreement with the use of the same word elsewhere in the New Testament, we read in James i. 4, "let endurance have its *perfect* work, in order that ye may be *perfect* and entire, (τέλειοι καὶ ὁλόκληροι,) in nothing lacking": *i.e.* bear up bravely under all hardship in order that in you such endurance of hardship may produce its full outworking, and in order that so ye may attain full moral and spiritual growth, and lack no essential element of character. In chapter iii. 2 we read, "if any one do not fail in word, he is a *perfect* (or *full-grown*) man (τέλειος ἀνὴρ) able to rein in also the whole body." The writer means that speech is an absolute test and measure of character; that he who is unblameable there has attained the goal of moral discipline.

In James ii. 22 we read that Abraham's faith received its perfection from works: ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη. We have here the same word already found in John iv. 34, v. 36, xvii. 4, 23, xix. 28, Luke ii. 43, Acts xx. 24. The writer means that in the offering of Isaac Abraham's inward faith attained its goal by outward manifestation. This language is the more appropriate because this outward

manifestation always reacts in strengthening the inward disposition from which it springs.

The same verb is found in an important group of passages in the First Epistle of John. In 1 John ii. 5 the writer declares that any one who professes to know Christ and yet does not keep His commandments is a liar; and adds, by way of contrast, "But whoever keeps His word, in this man truly is the love of God *perfected*": *τετελειώται*. A question at once arises whether the writer refers to God's love towards man or to man's love towards God. The former meaning of this phrase is indisputably found in chapter iv. 9: "in this was manifested the love of God in our case, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world in order that we may live through Him." The latter meaning is found in chapter ii. 15: "if any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." This ambiguity reminds us that between these two manifestations of love there is close connection. "We love because He first loved us." Man's love to God and all spiritual love of man to man are a reflection and appropriation of God's love to man. Since God's love to man is the source of all Christian love, and in the absence of any indication otherwise, it is perhaps better here so to understand the phrase. But the practical difference is slight.

The same phrase, *love perfected*, meets us again in 1 John iv. 12. In verse 10 the writer says, "in this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins." To this historical manifestation he adds a practical moral inference: "if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." He goes on to say that if we do so, in us dwells the unseen God and His love is *perfected* in us. It is most easy to understand the love of God in verse 12 in the same sense as in verse 9, viz. the love manifested in the mission of His Son to save man. This Divine love works out in us its full tendency in

moving us to love our fellows. It does this by moving us to love Him who first loved us, and then to love those for whom He gave His Son to die. Thus in the believer's love for his fellow-men the essential love of God, manifested historically in Christ, finds its full manifestation, and thus attains its goal.

In verse 16 the writer asserts, after a similar assertion in verse 8, that "God is love"; and adds that he who dwells in love, *i.e.* who has love for his inward environment, dwells in God and God dwells in him. He then goes on to say in verse 17, "in this (mutual indwelling), love *is perfected* with us, in order that we may have boldness in the day of judgment." It is needless to give here to the word *is perfected* any other meaning than that already found in verse 12 and in chapter ii. 5. The eternal love manifested in the historic mission and death of the Son of God finds in the mutual indwelling of God and man its full outworking and manifestation. In this sense it is perfected in them, just as Abraham's faith was perfected in the offering of Isaac. And the aim of this manifestation is that in the day of judgment those who in this evil world are like God may have holy boldness. The love thus *perfected* is in verse 18 called *perfect love*: ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη. The man who is still afraid of future punishment has not received this full outworking of God's love towards him: οὐ τετελείωται ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ.

The teaching of the whole chapter is that God designs His servants to love one another, love being the normal relation of man to man, that to this end He revealed, in the historic mission of His only begotten Son, the love which is His own essential nature, that where this manifested love has its unhindered course it evokes in man not only love to God but love to our fellow-men, and that where this mutual love of man to man is not found there the manifested love of God has not its complete manifesta-

tion and outworking. This exposition gives to the word *perfected* the same appropriate meaning in the five places in which it occurs in this epistle, a meaning in close harmony with its meaning in James ii. 22.

If the above exposition be correct, the words *perfect* and *perfected* denote in the First Epistle of John, not a definite stage of spiritual life, but a full outworking of that love which is the essence of God.

Another Greek word, etymologically quite distinct from the word whose meaning we have just discussed, is used by Christ, in Luke vi. 40, as a description of a degree of spiritual attainment: "a disciple is not beyond his teacher, but every one that is *fully equipped* (*κατηρτισμένος*: R.V. *perfected*) shall be as his teacher." The same word is found in 1 Corinthians i. 10, "that ye may be *fully equipped* in the same mind"; in 2 Corinthians xiii. 11, "be *fully equipped*"; in Hebrews xiii. 21, "may God *fully equip* you in every good thing, in order to do His will"; and in 1 Peter v. 10, "the God of all grace will fully equip you." Cognate substantives are found in 2 Corinthians xiii. 9, "we pray for your *full equipment*"; and in Ephesians iv. 12, "for the *full equipment* of the saints." A simpler form of the same word and another cognate verb are found together in 2 Timothy iii. 17, "in order that the man of God may be *equipped*, for every good work *fully equipped*": ἄρτιος . . . πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐξηρητημένος.

The root idea of the word ἄρτιος and its cognates here used seems to be fitness for use or work. This is conspicuous in Matthew iv. 21, Mark i. 19, where fishermen are described as "mending their nets," *i.e.* preparing them for the sea: *καταρτίζοντας τὰ δίκτυα*. This idea of fitness for use distinguishes the family of words now before us from *τέλειος* and its cognates, which denote full development, full realisation of inherent tendencies. These ideas of full equipment for work and mature development are found together

in Ephesians iv. 12, 13, in a fine description of the purpose of the Christian pastorate. And they are essentially connected. For all Christian maturity fits for active service.

In 1 Corinthians ii. 6 and iii. 1, we have a bi-partite division of Church members into adults and babes: τέλειοι and νήπιοι ἐν Χριστῷ. That this division was not technical and definite we have already learnt from Paul's refusal to class himself among the full-grown. This inference is confirmed by the fact that in 1 John ii. 12-14 we have a tri-partite division of Church members into children, young men, and fathers. The young men who had overcome the wicked one might claim to be of adult strength. But neither Christ as His words are recorded, nor St. Paul, has in view any higher state than that of full-grown men. That Church members were divided, touching their maturity, into two or into three classes proves that the divisions are not technical or definite.

From the above we learn that in the English New Testament the word *perfect*, whether representing τέλειος or ἄρτιος, or their cognates, describes, not actual persons or actual spiritual attainment, but a moral goal set before men for their pursuit and attainment. The only apparent exceptions are a few places in which the word is used hypothetically or rhetorically. Even St. Paul denies that he is already perfected, but says that he is pressing on towards the goal. This proves that when he classes himself among the *perfect* or *full-grown* he does so only to assert the obligation involved in a claim to spiritual manhood. That he speaks wisdom among the perfect is stated only as a reason for not so speaking to his readers.

We also notice that the goal described by the words before us is not always the same. In one case it is indiscriminate beneficence, like the beneficence of the God of nature. In another, it is a surrender of all material good. Elsewhere it is endurance of trial of faith; and in another

place the perfect man is one who has complete control of his tongue. The perfection which fits a man to apprehend wisdom, *i.e.* to understand the deep purposes of God, but which the Corinthian Christians had not, would have raised them above the petty contentions which divided the Church into parties. It must therefore have been moral as well as intellectual. The maturity which the Apostle desired for the Ephesians would, as we have seen, save them from vacillation and error in doctrine.

Different as are these descriptions of Christian character, they are closely related. Yet each may be a definite object of moral effort. The teaching of the New Testament about perfection, as a whole, holds before us, for our pursuit and attainment, a measure of moral and intellectual and spiritual maturity as much above the actual condition of some of the members of the apostolic Churches as is the strength and development of manhood above the weakness and waywardness of a child. He sets before us a moral and spiritual ideal, suited to every one in every position in life. The value of such ideal as an inspiration and guide has been recognised by all who have risen above their fellows in spiritual stature. For we shall never rise above our ideal. And without an ideal our path in the future will be limited by our attainments in the past, or at best by the attainments of others around us.

How the various ideals embodied in the teaching of the New Testament about perfection are to be realised, that teaching does not state. The way of perfection must be traced in other teaching of Christ and His apostles. In another paper I hope to call attention to other all-important teaching of the New Testament bearing most closely upon the subject now before us, and supplementing the teaching expounded above. But it has no definite bearing on the use of the word *perfect*, nor is it directly connected with the teaching in which that word is found.

Meanwhile we have learnt that some whom St. Paul recognises as possessing the real spiritual life of children of God were yet immature and unstable as children, that before even the most mature he sets a still higher maturity as a definite goal for spiritual effort, that he taught that all spiritual maturity is a relative fitness for the service of Christ, and taught that the surest mark of spiritual maturity is consciousness of the need of, and eagerness for, still further growth.

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NOTES ON OBSCURE PASSAGES OF THE PROPHETS.

THE distinction maintained in one of the XXXIX. Articles between the "four prophets the greater" and the "twelve prophets the less" is, we may hope, on its way to the land of oblivion. Expositors at any rate have found out its unreality, and study the "four" (or rather "three") and the "twelve" with equal humility and respect; or, if a difference is ever made, it is probably in favour of those who used to be called the "minor prophets." Hitzig wrote, in 1838, respecting the earlier commentators on the Dodecapheton: "Too often the flesh of the expositors was willing, but the spirit was weak; and the least in the kingdom of knowledge found in his insignificance a call to take up the explanation of a small prophet."¹ This cannot any longer be said. A prophet is no longer reckoned as a minor one because his record is scanty. Nor are there many specimens left of what Hitzig calls the *Universalkritiker*, the critic who soars above details and gives clever, generalizing views of men and periods; almost everywhere the necessity of the division of labour is heartily recognised.

¹ *Die zwölf kleinen Propheten*, erklärt von F. Hitzig. Leipzig, 1838. "Vorwort," p. vi.