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The Nature and Attainability of Biblical Perfection

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this thesis is to develop a definition of Biblical perfection so as to clarify its nature and attainability in Christian experience. The study is designed with three facets in view: (1) the nature of Biblical perfection, (2) the attainability of Biblical perfection, and (3) a theological synthesis.

The first section develops a general understanding of the scope of connotations possible for the related Hebrew and Greek words. The focus in what constitutes the body of the study is on ten key Scripture selections, subjected to close analysis in context. The themes emerging from the first section are then applied to two Biblical characters, to discern the attainability of such perfection. The third section incorporates discussion from related literature, in examining the concepts deriving from the Biblical study.

A proper concept of Biblical perfection and a recognition of its attainability comprise the primary outcome of the study. Four major themes were found integrally associated with perfection: divine standards, maturity, devotion, and communion. By properly understanding these concepts one may experience the Biblical ideal: confidence and intimacy with God.

THE NATURE AND ATTAINABILITY OF BIBLICAL PERFECTION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Man's ability to distinguish quality has sent him in relentless search of the ideal. Whether in philosophy or industry, man has aspired to excellence. Although he may accept the mediocrē, he does so with an acute awareness of the exquisite. Man pursues the ideal particularly in the realm of character. Perfection forms an undercurrent quest for anyone possessing a glimmer of self-worth.

The search for perfection intensifies in the Christian community. God serves as both the author and the measure of perfection for those maintaining a Christian world view. One writer observes that the Scriptural imperative to be perfect "is no arbitrary demand; in the very nature of things God can ask for nothing less."¹ However, perfection appears despairingly beyond man's reach, by definition reserved for the divine. Even for those claiming reconciliation with God there looms the terrible imperative, "Be perfect."²

Theologians have wrestled throughout centuries with the elusive concept of perfection. Some have resigned it to

¹Andrew Murray, Be Perfect (Minneapolis, Minn.: Dimension Books, 1965), p. 9, original was fully underscored.

²New American Standard Bible (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House Publishers, 1974), Matthew 5:48. All Biblical cites hereafter are from this version unless otherwise stated.

the article of death, while others have perceived it at work in the simplest appeal for divine mercy. Notions of perfection have fluctuated to extremes, inflicting a chimera of hopelessness or a blithe indifference. Any who have attempted to integrate perfection into their common doctrines have risked considerable misunderstanding. As noted by Metz:

The term perfection is a favorite whipping boy in theology. The use of the term automatically gives rise to pictures of sour, proud, self-styled saints who wear their religion like Pharisaical garments [underscoring original].³

The Wesleyan movement of the eighteenth century focused fresh attention on the teaching of perfection. Consonant with Wesley's method, perfection was ushered into the arena of common life and personal experience. The misunderstanding he encountered caused him to remark:

There is scarce any expression in holy writ, which has given more offence than this. The word perfect is what many cannot bear. The very sound of it is an abomination to them; and whosoever preaches perfection, (as the phrase is,) that is, asserts that it is attainable in this life, runs great hazard of being accounted by them worse than a heathen or a publican [underscoring original].⁴

³Donald S. Metz, Studies in Biblical Holiness (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1971), p. 221.

⁴John Wesley, Works, Vol. VI, p. 1, quoted by Metz, p. 223. At one point Wesley reached the verge of categorically omitting mention of perfection, so acute was the controversy (Wesley's Letters, Vol. V, p. 93, quoted by Metz, p. 222).

Despite the controversy surrounding perfection, Flew states that "the seeking of an ideal that is realizable in this world is essential to Christianity."⁵

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Can perfection be Biblically defined so that its nature and attainability may impact contemporary Christian experience? An affirmative response represents the thesis of this study.

DELIMITATIONS

The scope of study is limited to sources of information which directly illumine Biblical texts dealing with perfection. In addition to immediate interaction with Old and New Testament texts, lexica and commentaries comprise the primary resources. The commentaries most frequently consulted include those by John Calvin,⁶ Adam Clarke,⁷ Keil and Delitzsch,⁸ and John Peter Lange,⁹ as well as edited works such

⁵R. Newton Flew, The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 398.

⁶John Calvin, Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948-63).

⁷Adam Clarke, The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments with a Commentary and Critical Notes, 6 vols. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, [1942]).

⁸C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966).

⁹John Peter Lange, ed., A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, 25 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884).

as International Critical Commentary,¹⁰ The New International Commentary of the New Testament,¹¹ and The Wesleyan Bible Commentary.¹²

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Four basic presuppositions determine the theoretical framework governing this study. First, God is eternal and personal, holy and loving, and triune. Second, man is a special creation of God, alienated from God by willful rebellion. Third, the sixty-six books of the Bible were divinely inspired and are authoritative for conduct and reconciliation with God. Fourth, Biblical concepts may be more clearly discerned by use of contextual study and by the analogia fidei,¹³ particularly when the concept appears in identical terms in various passages.

Since the study presumes an understanding of only the most common terms, extensive definition of technical terms will not be necessary. In a sense, the remainder of the paper formulates a definition of the principal term, perfection. The distinction between "Biblical perfection" and "Christian perfection" should be noted at this point. The former spans

¹⁰Samuel Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Briggs, eds., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1930).

¹¹N.B. Stonehouse, ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

¹²Charles W. Carter, ed., The Wesleyan Bible Commentary, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967).

¹³I.e., comparing the intent of similar Scripture passages, illuminating one by the other.

whatever may be connoted by the Biblical use of those terms generally suggesting "perfection." Philosophical and theological implications are secondary in "Biblical perfection." "Christian perfection," on the other hand, refers to the more refined concept of the ideal as developed in doctrinal discussions through the ages. While the writer could not utterly divorce himself from his doctrinal heritage, he has given primary attention to the Biblical concept of perfection.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature related to the area of Biblical perfection is scarce. George Allen Turner's volume, The Vision Which Transforms, provides the most useful overview of Hebrew and Greek terms pertaining to perfection.¹⁴ Turner also integrates the study of Biblical perfection with Christian perfection, as indicated by the subtitle, "Is Christian Perfection Scriptural?" Turner reflects a Wesleyan theological stance.¹⁵

Several other works proved useful, although they concentrate more exclusively on Christian perfection. The most significant book in this category is The Idea of Perfection, by R. Newton Flew.¹⁶ Studies in Biblical Holiness, by Donald S. Metz, treats perfection briefly, correlating it primarily to

¹⁴George Allen Turner, The Vision Which Transforms: Is Christian Perfection Scriptural? (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1964).

¹⁵Biblical perfection is well represented with a devotional emphasis in Andrew Murray's book, Be Perfect, op. cit.

¹⁶Flew, op. cit.

holiness in Wesleyan doctrine.¹⁷ The Theology of Christian Perfection, by Antonio Royo and Jordan Aumann, contributes valuable discussion regarding the personal discipline of perfection when considered from a Roman Catholic vantage.¹⁸ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield's work entitled Perfectionism would prove useful in a study of the historical development of current views, but contributes little to the theme of Biblical perfection.¹⁹ John Wesley provides significant insights in his brief book, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, yet it deals only minimally with Biblical perfection.²⁰

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

The research has followed a three-fold design. The first portion deals with the nature of Biblical perfection. Two procedures are applied to the research of this area in both the Old and New Testaments: (1) examination of primary words in the Hebrew and Greek texts pertaining to perfection, incorporating dictionary studies and immediate observation of the Scriptures to form a general word study; and (2) analysis of key passages referring to perfection, utilizing study of

¹⁷ Metz, op. cit.

¹⁸ Antonio Roy and Jordan Aumann, The Theology of Christian Perfection (Dubuque, Iowa: Priory Press, 1962).

¹⁹ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, Perfectionism, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931).

²⁰ John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (Louisville, KY: Pentecostal Publishing Co. [n.d.]).

of the Scriptural contexts and commentaries to discern the connotation of perfection in each passage.

The second portion concerns the attainability of Biblical perfection. The lives of two Bible characters are examined in the Scriptural accounts to determine to what degree the standards developed in the first section have been achieved in human experience.

The third and final portion compares the discussion of related literature with the concepts emerging from direct study of the Biblical text. This portion forms a theological synthesis.

Andrew Murray casts a challenge before us: "Let us not evade its force, or hide ourselves from its condemning power, by vain subterfuge that we do not fully know what it [perfection] means."²¹ On this counsel the study will consider first the nature of Biblical perfection in the Old Testament.

²¹Murray, p. 19.

CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE OF PERFECTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The nature of perfection in the Old Testament may best be examined by an overview of the primary Hebrew words, and by a careful study of key selections. In the following pages, a section devoted to general word study will consider definitions and illustrations of Hebrew words. The attention then will turn to five key selections. These texts will be examined in context, to perceive the Biblical connotation of perfection.

GENERAL WORD STUDY

Hebrew words translated "perfect" include binah (a peculiar usage intensifying the faculty of understanding), gemar (complete, or come to an end), kun (entire, whole), mikloth or taklith (complete, perfect), shalem (complete, sound), and tam, tom or tamim (complete, finished, sound). Two of these words comprise 86 percent of the occasions translated "perfect." Those words are shalem and tamim (including the less frequent tam and tom). Since their meanings are very similar, shalem and tamim will not generally be distinguished in the following pages.

Definition Summary

A summary of dictionary articles shows that shalem

and tamim are nearly identical in meaning. Tamim describes something which is whole, entire, sound, or unblemished.²² Shalem may likewise be rendered as full, whole, complete, sound, or unharmed.²³ In the realm of character, tamim may be translated as upright, sincere, or honest. Shalem carries a slight distinction in covenant relationships, where it connotes dependability, integrity, or harmony.²⁴

Absolute, ideal perfection is not generally an accurate translation of either shalem or tamim. Campbell addresses the question of translating perfection in less than the ideal sense. He remarks:

This is not a misuse, or even a loose use, or language, for in all the languages with which we are now concerned the words which are rendered in English "perfect" and "perfection" denoted originally something other and less than ideal perfection.²⁵

Ideal perfection is properly inferred when the Old Testament uses tamim to describe God's way, work, knowledge, and law as being perfect (cf. II Sam. 22:31; Deut. 32:4; Job 37:16; Ps. 192:7, respectively). God is the author and judge of perfection.²⁶

²²Benjamin Davies, ed., A Compendious and Complete Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament (Boston: A. I. Bradley and Co., 1879), p. 691.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 647.

²⁴David Hubbard, "Perfection," Baker's Dictionary of Theology, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 401; Davies, p. 647.

²⁵J. Y. Campbell, "Perfection," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, Vol. III (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 730.

²⁶Hubbard, p. 402.

Old Testament Illustrations

Shalem and tamim are variously translated in the Old Testament. The choice of a fitting translation depends on the context. The many contexts using tamim and shalem may be generally divided into the categories of material and figurative perfection.

Material perfection. Illustrations of material perfection largely appear in a religious context.²⁷ Frequently the instruction was repeated: sacrificial animals must be perfect or complete, without blemish or defect. This was the explicit standard to be met, before God would accept the sacrifice (Lev. 22:21). In a similar passage, the sacrificial animal would be accepted as perfect only if it had never been yoked for farm labor (Num. 19:12). Similarly, altars were to be constructed of perfect stones, meaning that they were to be uncut, that no iron tool had been used to diminish their natural appearance (Deut. 26:6; Josh. 8:31). Another ceremonial instruction stipulated that the sacrificial portion itself was to remain perfect, or intact (Lev. 3:9). These regulations concerning sacrificial animals, altar stones, and sacrificial portions all prescribe a wholeness of devotion to God.

Material perfection in the religious context is also mentioned in construction of the temple. Complete preparation

²⁷ Frequent use of "perfect" in religious settings is significant, since it gives sheer statistical weight to associating perfection with one's relationship to God.

was to characterize the stones sent by craftsmen to the temple site. No sound of final trimming was heard as the temple was erected, for the stones were perfect or unprepared (I Kings 6:7). When at last the construction was concluded, the temple was described as perfect or completed (II Chron. 8:16). These two illustrations from construction describe perfection in terms of an architect's design being fulfilled, or the eventual satisfaction of a predetermined standard.

Outside the religious context, material perfection was graphically demonstrated by reference to a merchant's weights. Perfect or full weights were also called "just." Imperfect and unjust weights would only cheat the customer (Deut. 25:15; Prov. 11:1). Weights were to comply with a predetermined standard of wholeness for these measurements.

A standard of wholeness was also suggested when Amos prophesied the deportation of Gaza inhabitants to Edom (Amos 1:6,9). Without reservation, without remnant, the entire population would be taken captive.

The last example of material perfection in this study is the perfection of time. Seven perfect or complete sabbaths separated the celebration of First Fruits and Pentecost (Lev. 23:15). When Joshua battled the Amorites at Gibeon, the sun delayed setting for a whole or a perfect day (Josh. 10:13). Fulfillment of a unit of time was a frequent connotation of material perfection.

Figurative perfection. Not all uses of shalem and tamim are so measurable as those in the material category. The Bible does not hesitate to use "perfect" in intangible realms as well. Three areas sketch the scope of perfection in the figurative category: 1) attributes of God, 2) man in relation to God, and 3) man in relation to man.

The attributes of God described as perfect include His knowledge, His law, His way, and His work. God's perfection of knowledge was mentioned by Elihu to Job (Job 36:4; 37:16). God revealed His knowledge in the following chapter (Job 38).

David identified God's law as perfect and said that it was effective to transform the soul (Ps. 19:7). Right, sure, clean, true, and pure are qualities linked with perfection in this psalm. These amplify its connotation of purity and strength.

At another point David wrote of God's way as perfect (II Sam. 22:31). This followed David's escape from Saul's manhunt.

God's work was described as perfect by the aged Moses as he reviewed God's care though previous decades (Deut. 32:4). Moses linked God's justice, faithfulness, righteousness, and uprightness together with the perfection of His work.²⁸ Thus

²⁸A selection by lot is also described as "perfect." Following the Michmash victory, Saul cast lots to identify the one who violated his fast. He sought a perfect lot, suggesting accuracy and trustworthiness (I Sam. 14:41).

the concept of perfection applies directly to several attributes of God. The most lofty and idealistic connotations of perfection belong to this area, the perfection of God. Aspects such as righteousness, faithfulness, and justice provide a framework for understanding perfection, since they are laid side-by-side in Biblical writings.

Man in relation to God comprises the second area of figurative perfection. Old Testament passages coupling perfection with man's relationship to God appear in two forms. First, men are instructed to be perfect. Second, men are described as perfect.

Abraham received the earliest record instruction for a man to be perfect. "Walk before Me and be blameless [tamim]" was God's instruction to Abram as he awaited the promised heir (Gen. 17:1). If he behaved in a perfect or blameless way, God would establish an everlasting covenant with him and would multiply his descendants.

A second instruction to perfection came as Joshua gathered the Israelites at Shechem. He gave them this instruction:

Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity [betamim] and in truth; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord (Josh. 24:14).

Two parallel concepts amplify the meaning of perfect in this passage. First, truth is placed alongside perfection, showing that it will not deceive. Second, perfection is found in the realm of service or devotion to God.

David also instructed Solomon in perfection. Before he delivered the temple plans to Solomon, he gave these instructions:

As for you, my son, Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole [shalem] heart and a willing mind. For the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts (I Chron. 28:9).

The king stated that perfection was to issue from the heart.²⁹ The perfect heart was linked with a mind submissive to God's direction. Since God examines the heart and comprehends the mind, He would easily distinguish Solomon's actual intent.

Solomon restated his father's instruction several years later. After building the temple and offering a prayer of dedication, King Solomon addressed the people:

Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted [shalem] to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day (I Kings 8:61).

As with David's instruction, perfection is again associated with the heart. Such perfection or entire devotion would be demonstrated by obedience to God's instruction.

Jehoshaphat admonished his newly-appointed leaders to judge "in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and whole [shalem] heartedly" (II Chron. 19:9). These priests and elders

²⁹In the Biblical conception, the heart referred to the totality of one's inner being. It represented the source of feeling, thinking, and willing, "the innermost spring of the individual life," R. C. Dentan, "Heart," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, Vol. II (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 549. In the heart man meets God, and may experience conversion to Him, T. Sorg, "Heart," The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 181.

were charged before God to execute their duties as judges in a manner reflecting uprightness and integrity. Again, this attitude was to issue from the heart. Parallel concepts such as "fear of the Lord" and "faithfully" indicate that perfection was synonymous with reverence and dependability.

These illustrations of figurative perfection in relation to God have been drawn from various instructions. Further passages illustrate man's relation to God when perfection was actually attributed to an individual.

Noah was the first man described as perfect: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless [tamim] in his time" (Gen. 6:9). The nature of Noah's perfection will be discussed in a later section. The context quickly suggests that his perfection was confirmed by righteousness. In the next phrase we are told of Noah's close communion with God, that he "walked with God." Thus, uprightness before God and intimate fellowship with God illumine the author's concept of perfection achieved by Noah.

Job was also described as perfect:

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless [tam], upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil (Job 1:1).

The perfection of Job is confirmed repeatedly (cf. 1:8; 2:3). Again a handful of parallel terms amplify the author's concept of perfection. Uprightness distinguishes the character of Job. Reverence of God shows his submission. Abhorrence of evil is also set parallel to perfection.

Solomon was the third character described in terms of perfection. Unfortunately, Solomon held a negative place among those called perfect:

For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted [shalem] to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been (I Kings 11:4).

From this negative illustration the heart is once again identified as the locus of perfection. Turning the heart away from God forms the antithesis to perfection. Two verses later this is expanded by saying, "Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done" (I Kings 11:6). The practice of evil and pursuit of a path leading away from the presence of God characterize one who is not perfect with God.

A second negative illustration appears in the writings of Amos. As he described leaders of the Northern Kingdom the prophet lamented, "They hate him who reproves in the gate, /And they abhor him who speaks with integrity [tamim]" (Amos 5:10).

The leaders would suffer God's punishment because they disdained those who spoke perfectly, after God's pattern. By setting perfect speech parallel to reproof, Amos indicated that perfection is resolutely faithful in the face of contradiction. This illustration offers a rare association of perfection with speech (cf. Jas. 3:2).

Several further descriptive statements about man in perfect relation to God are made in a general manner, with no reference to a historical figure. One such statement is worth particular attention. In Psalm 18:31-32 the poet wrote:

For who is God, but the Lord?
And who is a rock, except our God,
The God who girds me with strength,
And makes my way blameless [tamim]?

This writer described his own way as perfect, and explained that God had made it so. A few phrases earlier he described God's way as perfect (18:30). Earlier still, the writer professed perfection for himself: "I also was blameless [tamim] with Him, /And kept myself from iniquity" (Ps. 18:23). Thus the poet's upright actions and obedience resulted in a perfect relationship with God whose way is perfect and who makes man's way perfect.

Perfection in man's relationship to God forms a principal element of figurative perfection in the Bible. Even today, this is the area of perfection causing man the greatest interest or concern. From even so brief an overview, one may see that the Bible clearly does not hesitate either to instruct man to walk perfectly with God, or to describe certain individuals as having achieved a perfect relationship with God.

Perhaps the single most important observation from this overview is the repeated link between perfection and the heart. As Joshua told the people to serve God perfectly, he

also instructed them to incline their hearts to serve the Lord (Josh. 24:14,23). David instructed his son to serve God with a perfect heart (I Chron. 28:9). King Solomon instructed the people to devote their hearts perfectly to God (I Kings 8:61). This same king's error came as his heart was not perfect with the Lord (I Kings 11:4). Jehoshaphat's judges were to rule with perfect hearts (II Chron. 19:9). The prominent link between perfection and the heart suggests that perfection is comprised primarily of uncompromised devotion and unfractured affection to God.

One further connotation of perfection appears in this overview. Perfection is consonant with righteousness or departing from evil (Gen. 6:9; Job 1:1; I Kings 8:61; Psalms 18:23).

The third category of figurative perfection is smaller yet significant: man's relation to man. The Bible mentions this once in the period of the Patriarchs, once during the period of the Judges, and once (for this study) in the period of the kings of Israel.

Jacob's daughter Dinah was defiled while the Israelites lived near Shechem. The twelve brothers pretended to offer a chance for the foreigner to marry their sister, but actually plotted the destruction of Shechem. The suitor persuaded his fellow citizens to submit to the Israelite requirement of circumcision. He explained, "These men are friendly [shalemim] with us; therefore let them live in the land and trade in it" (Gen. 34:21).

The framework of the story lends a connotation of peace and harmony to the term "perfection." The leader of Shechem was not claiming that the Israelites were faultless allies, but merely that they were cordial and not at cross-purposes with the economy of Shechem. This claim was revised three days later.

Ironically, Shechem is the site where perfection was mentioned during the period of the Judges. Here it is used to underscore a deficiency. After Gideon's death, Abimelech, who was Gideon's son by a Shechemite concubine, rallied the support of Shechem for his leadership. To confirm his position he killed sixty-nine of Gideon's sons. Fugitive Jotham was the only remaining full heir. When Jotham protested Abimelech's coup, he called to the men of Shechem with these words of challenge:

If then you have dealt in truth and integrity [betamim] with Jerubbaal [Gideon] and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech (Judges 9:19-20).

As in the example from the patriarchal narrative, peace is also a connotation of perfection in this example. Yet the concept of uprightness forms a stronger notion in Jotham's speech. He was protesting the brutal and unprovoked purge of Gideon's sons. Abimelech violated the standards of perfection by instigating a political massacre.

The last example of perfection in human relations is found in a general reference from King David (Ps. 101:6-7):

My eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that
they may dwell with me;
He who walks in a blameless [tamim] way is the one
who will minister to me.
He who practices deceit shall not dwell within my
house;
He who speaks falsehood shall not maintain his posi-
tion before me.

The term "faithful" provides the principal amplification of perfect in this passage. Negative comparisons are also helpful: deceitful, false, worthless (v.3), perverse (v. 4), slanderous and arrogant (v. 5). Perfection connotes dependability and honesty rather than deceit and arrogance. Such qualities marked the sort of advisor favored in King David's court.

In concluding this area of figurative perfection one may note that the standards of perfection appear to move in descending steps from God's attributes, to man in relation to God, and finally man in relation to man. Shalem and tamim are living, supple terms, adaptable to the context in which they are found.

The connotation of perfection in the Old Testament has been examined in this section through a general word study. A summary of various dictionary articles has shown that shalem and tamim are nearly identical. Their translations range widely, according to the context where they appear. Numerous Biblical contexts using shalem or tamim were examined. These have formed a framework for detecting the flux of

translations appropriate to communicate the Hebrew connotation of perfection. Material perfection was contrasted with figurative perfection. Within figurative perfection, three areas were discussed: God's attributes, man in relation to God, and man in relation to man. The next section will isolate and examine key selections containing special significance.

KEY SELECTIONS

Five Old Testament appearances of perfection have been selected for special examination. These build on the general word study of the previous section, yet bring a greater depth by considering more carefully each context. Primary attention will be focused on the Biblical text, augmented by insights from commentaries. In reporting, the object of perfection will first be discussed: i.e., did perfection point to a nebulous or to a specific achievement? Second, significant phrases from the context will be examined, as they help clarify the meaning of perfection. A brief summary will conclude each passage studied.

Genesis 6:9

The first selection to be examined refers to Noah: "These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless [tamim] in his time; Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). The object of perfection in this passage appears rather nebulous. Noah's participation in God's

plan began with the usual generation formula. Then the writer of Genesis reviewed Noah's character before identifying him as God's choice to survive the deluge. Thus "perfect" describes Noah's life in general, without reference to any particular incident. Calvin equates Noah's perfection with upright or sincere living. This refers not to those "who are in every respect perfect, and in whom there is no defect; but who cultivate righteousness purely, and from their heart."³⁰ Clarke states, "He was in all things a consistent character, never departing from the truth in principle or practice."³¹

Three words or phrases in the context clarify the implication of perfect. The first such phrase is "in his time" or "in his generations." Noah's perfection was correlated to his immediate social setting. According to Skinner, "in his time" implies that Noah was unique in the setting of his society. However, "that Noah's righteousness was only relative to the standard of his age is not implied."³² Calvin adds that to mention Noah's social setting only extols his blameless living, since the world was in severe moral decay.³³

³⁰John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, trans. John King, Vol I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans [1948-1963]), p. 251.

³¹Adam Clark, Genesis to Deuteronomy, Vol I, The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments with a Commentary and Critical Notes (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, [n.d.]), p. 69.

³²John Skinner, Genesis, International Critical Commentary, eds. Samuel Driver, Alfred Plummer, Charles Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), p. 159.

³³Calvin, p. 252.

Some disagree with Skinner and Calvin, maintaining instead that "in his generation" lends a relative connotation to the lofty attribute "perfect."³⁴

The second clarifying term is "righteous." This suggests that Noah was faithful, truthful, and "gave to all their due."³⁵ Skinner explains that righteous is "a forensic term [which] denotes one whose conduct is unimpeachable before a judge."³⁶

The third significant phrase is "walked with God." Noah's close communion with God was, according to Calvin and Lange, the source of his righteousness.³⁷ The author first used this phrase to describe Enoch's intimacy with God (Gen. 5:24). One would not be surprised to associate some form of perfection with this rare individual whom God exempted from a customary death. Skinner compiles the following passages from I Samuel, Micah, and Malachi to show Biblical meanings of "walk with God."³⁸ All Nabal's shepherds enjoyed safety while they went about with David's men (I Sam. 25:15). Thus close companionship is one factor. In Micah God reduced His guidelines to an ideal minimum. One of these guidelines was "walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Malachi recorded God's

³⁴Lewis holds this view in his notes to Lange's volume, John Peter Lange, Genesis, trans. Tayler Lewis and A. Gosman, Vol. I, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, gen. ed., trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), p. 292.

³⁵Clark, p. 69.

³⁶Skinner, p. 159.

³⁷Calvin, pp. 252-253; Lange, p. 297.

³⁸Skinner, p. 131.

covenant with Levi: "He walked with Me in peace and uprightness" (Mal. 2:6). Thus to walk with God as Enoch and Noah walked meant to enjoy close fellowship, in a context of moral and religious perfection. Calvin writes concerning Enoch:

Lest he should be drawn aside by the corruptions of men, [he] had respect to God alone, so that, with a pure conscience, as under his eyes, he might cultivate uprightness.³⁹

The reference to Noah as perfect may be concluded by observing that this was not immaculate perfection, but perfection in comparison to and in spite of the maelstrom of his times. This perfection supported Noah's forensic righteousness. Noah's practice of the presence of God strengthens and partially explains his perfection.

Job 1:1

The second use of perfection considered in this study is found in Job 1:1. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless [tam], upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil."

The same method of study will be applied to this passage as was used in the Genesis passage. First the object of perfection will be considered, whether it is nebulous or concrete. Then the meaning of perfection will be amplified by noting significant phrases in the context.

The object of perfection in Job 1:1 is similar to the object in the passage concerning Noah. Again one is confronted with perfection being applied generally to an individual.

³⁹Calvin, p. 231.

Perfection must here be interpreted as referring to a nebulous achievement, rather than a tangible quota of completeness. Since Job acknowledged his sinfulness, his perfection must not be construed as sinless perfection (cf. 13:26; 14:16). Charles Carter makes careful note of this: "His 'blameless perfection' . . . is not to be extended to the idea of faultlessness. Such a claim is not made by him nor for him."⁴⁰ Yet Carter seems to diminish the broad implications of Job's perfection by describing it as "blameless."⁴¹ Perfection here, rather, suggests a unity or wholeness of character, not employing crooked or deceitful means.⁴² Davidson writes of Job that "he was a righteous man and free from specific sins such as were held to bring down the chastisement of heaven."⁴³

Two factors underscore the prominence of perfection in the character of Job. First, Job is introduced three times with a reference to his perfection, once by the narrating author (1:1), and twice by God as recorded by the author (1:8; 2:3). Second, perfection is maintained by Job himself, both

⁴⁰Charles W. Carter, "Job", Job to Song of Solomon, Vol. II, The Wesleyan Bible Commentary, gen. ed. Charles W. Carter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 24.

⁴¹Perfect "is more than amemptos [LXX], 'blameless,'" Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Book of Job, Vol. I, The International Critical Commentary, eds. Samuel Driver, Alfred Plummer, Charles Briggs (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), p. 3.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 3-4.

⁴³A. B. Davidson, The Book of Job, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, ed. A. F. Kirkpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), p. 2.

during heated debate (9:21) and at the end of the struggle (27:2,5,6). Even his wife recognized his purity, although she felt his present calamity rendered any measure of perfection worthless (2:9).

One commentator suggests that Job's perfection refers primarily to his excellent physical condition prior to his demise.⁴⁴ Connotations of physical wholeness and completeness noted in the general word study may be applied to Job's perfection, yet these are no longer valid when the emaciated figure still contends that he is perfect, despite his pitiful physical condition (9:21). Terms such as "upright" in the surrounding context also recommend an ethical rather than a physical connotation to Job's perfection. The study will now turn to examine these significant phrases in the nearby context.

Three parallel concepts are presented in Job 1:1: "upright," "fearing God," and "turning away from evil." Upright connotes motion in a straight or straightforward manner. It also implies loyalty.⁴⁵ Clarke explains that Noah was complete (perfect) in his heart and mind, while in his moral conduct he was straight (upright).⁴⁶

Fear of God provided a motivational principle, according to Delitzsch.⁴⁷ Clarke offers a fitting elaboration of

⁴⁴Carter, "Job", p. 24.

⁴⁵Driver and Buchanan, Job, p. 4.

⁴⁶Adam Clarke, Job to Solomon's Song, Vol. III, The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testament: with a Commentary and Critical Notes (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., [n.d.]), under section 1:1.

⁴⁷Quoted without cite from Delitzsch by John Peter

this phrase: Job held God "in continual reverence as the fountain of justice, truth, and goodness."⁴⁸

The last phrase, turning away from evil, links closely with fear of God. Anyone with proper reverence of God rightly will shun evil. By implied contrast, Job habitually drew near to God, continually avoiding the presence of evil.⁴⁹

An examination of Job's perfection reveals that it did not represent sinless perfection, but rather denoted a character generally free from defect. This perfect or complete character was displayed in upright conduct which his peers would not censure. Job's relationship to God forms a significant component, accounting for his perfection. He was continually reverent toward God, and continually on guard against the infiltration of evil.

II Samuel 22:24

The third select Old Testament passage occurs in a psalm written by David toward the end of his reign (II Sam. 22 and Ps. 18). The historical context provided by II Samuel indicates that David's life was nearly ended. In this psalm, he graphically recounted how God repeatedly rescued him. A rationale for his rescue is indicated (vv. 20-27). David

Lange, The Book of Job, trans. L. J. Evans, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, gen. ed., trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 289.

⁴⁸Clarke, Job to Solomon's Song, under section 1:1.

⁴⁹Ibid.

professed to be "blameless [tamim] toward Him" (v. 24).

Repayment constitutes the primary theme in David's rationale for receiving God's rescue. Twice he referred to his righteousness and cleanness, saying that God's help came "according to" or on account of these qualities (vv. 21,25). Between the double mention of righteousness and cleanness are listed six other qualities. While David's claim to these qualities may appear boastful, they must be balanced with his confession of utter dependence on God's help (vv. 7,36, 49).⁵⁰

The six traits in verses 22-24 form three couplets. First, David spoke of keeping the ways of the Lord and not acting wickedly against God (v. 22). The "ways of the Lord" refer to "the rules of human conduct given in His law, which David's enemies had wickedly transgressed."⁵¹ He likely compared his character with the scheming traits of King Saul. David reinforced this assertion of fidelity by stating that his very actions were not wicked. A more literal translation reflects a spacial quality: he was not "wicked from God," or "fall away from God because of wickedness."⁵²

⁵⁰Cf. John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Vol. I, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 279.

⁵¹John Peter Lange, The First and Second Books of Samuel, ed. David Erdmann, trans. C. H. Toy and John A. Broadus, Vol. V, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, gen. ed., trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 573.

⁵²Ibid.

The second couplet states that God's ordinances and statutes were before David. At this point, the psalmist used a more objective criterion to evaluate his righteousness before God. To observe written ordinances and statutes is more measurable than to keep the "way of the Lord."

In the third couplet David reached his most direct statement: "I was also blameless [tamim] toward Him" (v. 24). This appears as the climax. Calvin notes that David's statement used a future tense, to emphasize that perfection does not consist of an isolated good work, but of a continual, persisting path.⁵³ David explained his perfection by continuing, "I kept myself from iniquity." Perfection, as described by David, implied self-control to refrain from committing iniquity.

Thus, these three couplets develop a concept of perfection identified with following God's path, not defecting from God in rebellion, observing His recorded injunctions, and restraining oneself from iniquity.

Two phrases in this psalm suggest that perfection is associated with God's presence: to act wickedly against versus to be perfect toward God (vv. 22-23). In the first instance, David did not "fall away from God because of wickedness."⁵⁴ He did not withdraw himself from God's presence through rebellion. In the second instance, he was perfect

⁵³ Calvin, Psalms, Vol. I, p. 283.

⁵⁴ Lange, The First and Second Books of Samuel, p. 573.

toward God. David realized that his perfection must not only stand before the scrutiny of the Author of perfection, but must also consist of an attitude always directed toward His presence. Lange makes succinct note of this.⁵⁵ Abraham similarly was required, "Walk before Me and be blameless [tamim]" (Gen. 17:1, underscoring added).

After referring to perfection among the six qualities of verses 22-24, David mentioned it again in verse 26: "With the blameless [tamim] Thou dost show Thyself blameless [titamam]." Again the repayment principle is evident. God's response corresponds directly to man's behavior. The principle is repeated in three adjacent parallel phrases. These provide additional concepts which clarify perfection. The concepts are kindness or loyalty, purity, and the absence of perversion (vv. 26-27).

David may appear to claim absolute perfection. His claim to having fulfilled the principles of God's objective law suggests sinless perfection. Yet the story of David's life clearly contradicts such a claim. Either he meant to say that God rescued him when he had recently been walking obediently, or he meant that through God's forgiveness and through his own whole-hearted submission God restored him to a place of

⁵⁵Lange states that toward Him "denotes the immediate relation to God, in contrast with outward works, which are done for one's own sake or for men's. The 'with him' of the Psalm [18:23] expresses still more exactly the cordial communion of life with God," Lange, The First and Second Books of Samuel, p. 573.

perfect communion (cf. Ps. 32:1-2; 51:1-17). Calvin states that David's perfection "is not [sinless] perfection, but sincerity, which is opposed to hypocrisy."⁵⁶ Sincerity appears to be the highest allowable connotation for perfection in David's experience. Keil and Delitzsch comment that David's righteousness was not perfect, but relative, as compared to those who were near him.⁵⁷ However, if relative perfection were intended, it should be noted as "toward others." Instead, David stated that his perfection was "toward God," implying that he met God's standards. David could properly attribute such perfection to himself only if he was referring to his restored place in God's presence after his sins were forgiven. Thus David's perfection involved sincerity and communion with God restored by forgiveness.

I Chronicles 28:9

The fourth Old Testament selection occurs as David instructed Solomon about the temple he would build. All the royal officials, stewards, and commanders were present as the king rehearsed God's choice of Solomon, heir to the throne. David instructed the royal leaders to "observe and seek after all the commandments of the Lord your God" (I Chron. 28:8).

Then he turned to the crown prince (v. 9). He gave to him a twofold instruction, a twofold description of God, and a twofold condition. The instructions were to know and

⁵⁶Calvin, Psalms, Vol. I, p. 283.

⁵⁷C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), pp. 476-477.

serve God. The description depicted God as the One who searches hearts and understands thoughts. The twofold condition was that if Solomon sought God, God would allow Himself to be found; if he forsook God, God would reject him forever.

The concept of perfection appears in David's twofold instruction: "Know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole [shalem] heart and a willing mind" (v. 9). After Solomon began to know or become acquainted with God, he was to devote all his heart to serve Him.

Two parallel concepts clarify the meaning of perfection in this passage: volition and submission.⁵⁸ Volition is implied by the words "heart" and "willing." David located perfection in the heart. A theological dictionary identifies the heart as "the seat of man's spiritual and intellectual life, . . . the seat of man's feeling, thinking, and willing."⁵⁹ Zockler renders "perfect" by "undivided."⁶⁰ The connotation emerging from "perfect heart" is one of full and unstinting devotion which encompasses the entirety of one's being. This involves primarily a volitional response.

⁵⁸The concept of God's presence is also conspicuous in this passage. David promised that for the one truly seeking Him, God will permit Himself to be found (v.9). This promise is given to those who serve God with a perfect heart and a willing mind.

⁵⁹Sorg, p. 181.

⁶⁰Otto Zockler, Chronicles, trans. James G. Murphy, Vol. VII, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. John Peter Lange, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1877), p. 156.

"Willing" also lends a volitional tone to the use of "perfect." In the phrase "with a perfect heart and a willing mind," willing is placed synonymously parallel to perfect. By this grammatical link one may properly infer a compatibility between "perfect" and "willing." "Heart" and "willing" lend a clearly volitional complexion to perfection in I Chronicles 28:9.

Submission forms the second concept clarifying perfection in this passage. Submission is suggested by the verb "serve." Service to God comprises the activity most predominant in the perfect heart and willing mind. The context of "perfect" in this passage strongly recommends a connotation of volition and submission rather than a connotation of mechanical faultlessness.⁶¹

Prior to this verse, David quoted God's instructions for Solomon. From the mention of objective commandments and ordinances, one might expect an injunction to observe "perfectly" the regulations. Yet the concept of perfection is notably absent: "And I will establish his kingdom forever, if he resolutely performs My commandments and My ordinances, as is

⁶¹An identical connotation appears with perfection as the temple materials are collected in the next chapter: "Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the Lord with a whole [shalem] heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly" (I Chron. 29:9). "Offered" suggests submission; "willingly" suggests volitional devotion to God. The statement, "for they made their offering to the Lord with a whole [shalem] heart," explains this volitional attitude of submission.

done now" (I Chron. 28:7).⁶² Instead, perfection is associated with a volitional attitude of submission as noted in the context.

Psalm 15:2

The final Old Testament selection of perfection appears in the Psalm 15:1-2:

O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent?
Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?
He who walks with integrity [tamim], and works
righteousness,
And speaks truth in his heart.

The dominant theme of this psalm is a search for genuine security in the presence of God.⁶³ The poet set forth the means of gaining "access to God."⁶⁴ After listing eleven conditions, the poet concluded the search by stating, "He who does these things will never be shaken" (v. 5).

⁶²However, perfection is present in a parallel passage nearby: "O Lord, . . . give to my son Solomon a perfect [shalem] heart to keep Thy commandments, Thy testimonies, and Thy statutes, and to build the temple, for which I have made provision" (I Chron. 29:18-19). Yet even in this prayer David made clear reference to the importance of inner heart attitude and intentions: "Preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Thy people, and direct their heart to Thee" (v. 18).

⁶³"The temple was really the house or palace of Yahweh; sometimes conceived as the place of His royal presence, to which He admits His servants, either as guests or to shelter them from their enemies," Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, International Critical Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Vol. I, trans. Francis Bolton (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. 113.

⁶⁴Calvin, Psalms, Vol. I, p. 205.

A perfect walk forms the initial condition leading to security. Although nebulous, it paints a backdrop which will determine the remaining hues of the poet's scene.⁶⁵ The remaining qualities found in the context will help disclose the connotation of perfection in this passage.⁶⁶

The poet continued with two positive traits. One who dwells with God "works righteousness." He practices honesty and fairness toward his neighbors. Also, he "speaks truth in his heart." Not only his actions, but also his words are honest. "In his heart" signifies honesty in great depth. Even his private meditations meet God's standard of righteousness.

Three negative traits are listed (v. 3). First, "he does not slander with his tongue." No defamation springs from the one who walks perfectly. "Does not slander" is

⁶⁵Delitzsch asks the grammatical question of whether one should read "walking as an upright man" or "one who makes righteousness his way, his mode of action." He favors the latter, but neither reading significantly alters the force of this initial condition. Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Psalms, Vol. I, trans. Francis Bolton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 212.

⁶⁶Calvin and Clarke provide the following insights for "walk perfectly": "In other words, . . . men should conduct themselves in all their affairs with singleness of heart, and without sinful craft or cunning," Calvin, Psalms, Vol. I, p. 206; "[He] sets God before his eyes, --takes his word for the rule of conduct, --considers himself a sojourner on the earth, and is continually walking to the kingdom of God. He acts according to the perfections of God's law . . .," Adam Clarke, Psalms to Isaiah, Vol. III, The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, with a Commentary and Critical Notes (New York: Emory and Waugh, 1829), p. 54, underscorings original.

parallel to "speaks truth in his heart."⁶⁷ Second, he does no evil to his neighbor. This appears parallel to the second positive trait, "works righteousness." The third negative trait, not reproaching a friend, links with the over-arching theme, "walks perfectly." Thus loyalty and trustworthiness are consistent with the one who walks perfectly.

The poet continued by balancing the negative triad with a positive triad (v. 4). He who abides with God despises the reprobate, esteems those who reverence the Lord, and keeps his word even when injurious to himself. These qualities amplify the connotation of perfection by associating it with esteem for others. One who walks in a perfect way will share God's evaluation of others' conduct. He will also sustain personal difficulty to maintain the integrity of his promise.

A diad of negative qualities follows, both dealing with the proper use of wealth (v. 5). First, as a man walks perfectly he does not loan his funds at exorbitant interest rates. In the historical setting of this psalm, men were known to charge interest rates of one-fifth to one-half of

⁶⁷Moll would rather link this with the "walks perfectly" clause of verse 2. However, reference to not slandering is more evident in "speaks truth" than in "walks perfectly," Carl Bernhard Moll, The Psalms, trans. C. A. Briggs, J. Forsyth, J. B. Hammond, and J. F. McCurdy, Vol. IX, Old Testament, Containing the Book of Psalms, ed. J. P. Lange, gen. trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 118

the entire principal.⁶⁸ Second, he will not "take a bribe against the innocent." His truthfulness cannot be diluted by compensatory gains.

Finally, this man "will never be shaken." He will certainly gain the deeply desired abode in a secure place with God.

Three concepts parallel to perfection are developed in this psalm: speech, fidelity, and wealth. In the area of speech, the man walking in a perfect way will be thoroughly truthful. Slander and reproach find no place on his tongue or even in his heart (v. 2). He is also characterized by fidelity. He is faithful to friends and promises, and also to his convictions for godly character (v. 4). His wealth is held in proper perspective, not undermining his integrity (v. 5). These three concepts are portrayed in neighbor relations. Little is said about man's relation to God, except as God's patterns are reflected in relations with other men.

Thus Psalm 15 amplifies the concept of perfection by prescribing neighbor relations which demonstrate right speech, fidelity, and a proper view of wealth. These usher one into permanent residence in God's presence along the perfect way.

⁶⁸Joseph Addison Alexander, The Psalms, Translated and Explained (Grand Rapids: Zondervan rep. from 1864 ed.), p. 64, cited by W. Ralph Thompson, "Psalms 1-72," Job to Song of Solomon, Vol. II, Wesleyan Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 211.

OLD TESTAMENT SUMMARY

Three observations conclude the study of perfection in the Old Testament. First, one may observe that the meaning of perfection is flexible, rather than conforming to a single, narrow concept. The wide range of translations for shalem and tamim underscores this flexibility. Flexibility also appears when one notes the decline of standards as perfection is used to describe first the attributes of God, man's relationship to God, and finally man's relationship to man. "Perfection" derived from shalem or tamim requires a careful contextual study to determine the intensity of perfection intended.

Second, contextual studies lead to the observation that perfection is frequently associated with volition and inner attitude. Rather than stipulating perfection in terms of objective attainments, inspired Biblical writers clearly prefer to speak of perfection issuing from heart attitudes of submission (e.g., I Chron. 28:9; I Kings 8:61). The perfect heart demonstrates a wholeness or integrity of devotion to God. One may even infer a subtle relativity in the standards of perfection (cf. Gen. 6:9).

Finally, the concept of God's presence is conspicuous in a study of perfection in the Old Testament. From Abram who was to walk before God (Gen. 17:1), and David who was perfect toward God (II Sam. 22:24), and who sought security in God's presence (Ps. 15:1-2), to Solomon who was instructed

to serve God with a perfect heart (I Chron. 28:9), the theme of God's presence forms a frequent companion to perfection.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE OF PERFECTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Perfection is a significant theme in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament. Several Greek terms express the New Testament concept of perfection. Among these are akribōs (accurately or exactly), artios (complete, proficient), katartizō (to restore, complete, or create), plēroō (to make full, to complete, or to finish), and teleioō (to end, complete, accomplish, fulfill, or make perfect). The last word, teleioō, and related words with the tel- root (e.g., teleō, telos, teleios, teleiōsis, teleiōtēs, and teleiōs) appear 115 times in the New Testament. Because the tel- word family forms the most frequent and most direct correlative of "perfection," the present New Testament study is limited to appearances of this word family. The various words built from the tel- root are so closely related in meaning that they will generally not be distinguished from each other in the following pages.

The categories of presentation used in the New Testament section closely resemble those used in the Old Testament section. First a general word study will provide a definition summary and illustrate the range of possible translations. Then five key selections will be examined closely to discern the connotations associated with perfection in the respective contexts.

One major difference distinguishes the approaches used to study perfection in the Old and in the New Testaments. The books of Philippians, Hebrews, and James refer to perfection with such frequency that it will be necessary to consider the context of each entire letter, rather than limiting the study to the context of a single paragraph or chapter.

GENERAL WORD STUDY

The purpose of the general word study is to show the connotation of words based on the tel- root as listed above. This will be accomplished by summarizing dictionary articles and by examining varied uses in the New Testament.

Definition Summary

Greek words with the tel- root originally referred to the action of a hinge as it turned around a particular point, or "the culminating point at which one stage ends and another begins."⁶⁹ Thus "fully grown" or "mature" aptly represent early uses of the adjectival form, just as the Latin perfectus originally meant "thoroughly made or done."⁷⁰ Classical writers describe various aspects of life as telos or teleios. For Artemidorus, when the goal of marriage was achieved life gained a sense of the telos (Onirocritus 2, 49); for Plato death was a telos (Mexenus 249a).⁷¹ In classical literature, the moral

⁶⁹Schippers, p. 59.

⁷⁰Campbell, p. 730.

⁷¹Schippers, p. 59.

connotation of perfection was secondary to the implication of mature development. Thus Aristotle could describe both doctor and thief as perfect, if they demonstrated prowess in their respective professions (Metaphysics 4, 16p, 1021b, 15ff.).⁷² As a verb, to perfect suggested to carry out or to put into practice, as opposed to merely making a promise.⁷³

Before tel- words appeared in the New Testament they developed connotations from use in the Septuagint.⁷⁴ Concepts of boundary and eternity are reflected by instances of telos in the LXX. Teleō is used for Hebrew ideas of fulfillment and of consecration in religious service. Teleō also suggests to carry through or to actualize.⁷⁵ Teleios and teleioō are often used as the Greek equivalent for Hebrew shalem and tamim, stressing wholeness or perfection.⁷⁶ Teleiotes and teleiosis refer to perfection/integrity and to devotional consecration, respectively.⁷⁷

Old Testament apocalyptic literature introduces a further aspect of perfection which may be studied from the

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Gerhard Delling, "Teleō," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Vol. VIII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 57.

⁷⁴Schippers, p. 60; so also the remainder of the paragraph unless otherwise indicated.

⁷⁵Delling, p. 58.

⁷⁶Cf. p. 8.

⁷⁷Schippers, p. 61.

Greek in the LXX. Cosmic eschatological completion in Daniel is rendered synteleia (Dan. 8:19).⁷⁸ The present study of perfection will not pursue the eschatological aspect, with the exception of certain discussion in Philippians.

The New Testament takes these connotations from the LXX and clothes them in the context of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A few lexical distinctives should be noted before proceeding to New Testament illustrations of the meaning of perfection. The 115 appearances of tel- stem words in the New Testament distribute as follows: telos 41 times, teleō 28 times, teleios 29 times, teleioō 23 times, teleiotēs twice, teleiōsis twice, teleiōs once, and teleiōtes once.⁷⁹

A brief overview of the uses of these words shows that teleō may refer to achieving an ultimate goal or concluding a speech.⁸⁰ In Pauline literature teleios frequently describes someone as mature or adult; in James it links with teleioō to suggest wholeness.⁸¹ Hebrews offers the largest concentration of the tel- word family.⁸² Connotations in Hebrews often reflect Old Testament concepts of shalem and tamim with their cultic overtone.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid. Telos, however, is seldom included in the scope of this study since it generally refers to a simple or eschatological concept of conclusion. It does not speak significantly to the area of perfection.

⁸⁰Schippers, pp. 62, 63,

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., p. 63.

The concept of perfection derived from these words involves "the consummating conclusion of a dynamic process" . . . rather than a "mechanical cessation of movement."⁸³ As Schippers notes:

The NT does not speak of ethical perfection which is to be realized by degrees Rather, when viewed against the background of the OT concepts of tāmim and šalēm and applied to people's actions, teleios signifies the undivided wholeness of a person in his behaviour.⁸⁴

From this foundation of lexical information the study will turn to actual uses of tel- root words in the New Testament. These have been selected to be demonstrative of the scope of meanings which may be associated legitimately with words of the tel- family.

New Testament Illustrations

An examination of tel- root words in actual New Testament usage best conveys the scope of valid connotations. The study will now focus on illustrations of New Testament usage of this word family.

The illustrations align themselves under one of two broad categories: material or figurative. When a particular illustration refers to perfection which may be measured, it is considered material perfection. If, however, the example refers to a less distinct, non-measurable perfection of character, then it is described as figurative perfection. Material perfection will be examined first.

⁸³Ibid., p. 65.

⁸⁴Ibid.

Material perfection. New Testament writers applied perfection to four material areas. The most frequent area involved perfection or completion of a discourse. Matthew used etelesen as a standard literary cue for the conclusion of Jesus' teachings (cf. Matt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This usage connotes that an intended goal has been achieved, i.e., the full expression of an instruction or admonition.

Perfecting a communication also underlies the second area, but a deepened significance emerges. The second area involves fulfillment of prophecy. In one sense, the very expression of a prophecy is imperfect until capped by its fulfillment, even though this may occur centuries after the prophecy has been silenced. Thus New Testament writers pictured prophecy fulfillment as the point in history when the words of a prophet finally reached their intended goal (cf. Luke 18:31; 22:37; Acts 13:29; Rev. 17:17).

Completion of time is the third area of material perfection. This corresponds closely to prophecy fulfillment. Time perfection may refer merely to the expiration or casual passage of time (cf. Luke 2:43). But the correlation of perfection with time may also conceal a latent concept of divine fulfillment (cf. Rev 20:3,5,7).

The fourth area of material perfection concerns the execution of an assignment or task. This appears in the completion of an apocalyptic series of plagues (Rev. 15:8), the satisfaction of a moral code assigned by the Mosaic law (Luke 2:39;

Rom. 2:27), or the payment of prescribed taxes (Matt. 17:24; Rom. 13:6). The most profound example of such perfection appears in Jesus' last words, as He signaled the consummation of His entire life mission in His death (John 19:30; cf. Acts 20:24; II Tim. 4:7).⁸⁵

The four areas mentioned above are largely measurable, or material. The areas to follow belong to the figurative category since they are less tangible. Despite their nebulous nature they hold a prominent role in the New Testament use of perfection.

Figurative perfection. Figurative perfection points primarily to the achievement of a life-state of completeness. This may refer to the deepening of a single trait such as faith or love (Jas. 2:22 and I John 2:5, respectively; cf. Heb. 2:10). Or it may refer to the consummation of an entire life (Phil. 3:12). Ideal perfection may be inferred from passages describing attributes or provisions of God, such as His will or His gifts (Rom. 12:2 and Jas. 1:17, respectively). Full moral acceptability of man before God is described as perfection (Heb. 10:1,14).

⁸⁵The intensity of Jesus' statement, "It is finished," appears in two observations from the Greek text (tetelestai, John 19:30). First, the ultimacy of this exclamation is underscored by the use of the perfect tense. Not only has perfection/completion been achieved, but it has been achieved in a sealed, completed sense. Second, tetelestai in the setting of death closely corresponds to teleutaō, meaning to complete one's life or to die. This correspondence is similar to the dual meaning of the English "execute": to conclude a task or a life. Thus Jesus' last word conveyed an intense message of perfection.

Tel- root words often connote a state of completeness or inward maturity attained after a period of natural growth (cf. I Cor. 2:6; Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28; Heb. 5:14; Jas. 1:4). Corporate maturity of the body of Christ links with perfection of unity or singleness of heart (John 17:23; Phil. 3:15).⁸⁶ Paul once used teleō to signify the actualization of impure desires (Gal. 5:16). This usage typifies the figurative connotation of perfection, since it suggests fruition of a condition which was at one time only a mental mock-up of the final product.

Thus one may observe that tel- root words describe a variety of circumstances. Mere expiration of time or the termination of a discourse may be referred to as perfection in the material framework. Perfection also may assume the figurative notion of individual and corporate character refinement, gradually attaining the plentitude outlined by God Himself. From this background of lexical information and New Testament illustration, the study will now turn to examine the implications of perfection in five Biblical selections. Since personal perfection forms the major area of inquiry for the study, the ensuing selections will deal quite exclusively with figurative perfection.

KEY SELECTIONS

Five key selections are discussed below to determine what each New Testament writer meant by reference to perfection.

⁸⁶Cf. pp. 32, 33.

The first three selections deal with Philippians, Hebrews and James. Since perfection appears repeatedly in these letters, the study will consider perfection in the scheme of each entire book. The remaining passages from Matthew and II Corinthians will concentrate more selectively on the immediate context.

Philippians

Philippians contains some of the most significant New Testament material dealing with perfection. This is due to themes woven throughout the epistle which affect the connotation of perfection. The scheme of study will be to examine initially three such themes, then consider specific references to tel- root words in the third chapter.

Related themes. Perfection as a concept in Philippians is clarified by its association with three themes appearing throughout the book. The first such theme is death. Death often crowded to the surface of Paul's thoughts in Philippians. As a prisoner in Rome, he realized that his life continued each day on a very thin strand. Yet he also realized that the strand was divinely spun, and would support him as long as he needed to remain in this life (1:20-24). He was ready to be "poured out as a drink offering" (2:17). His comrade, Epaphras, had only recently recovered from a near-fatal illness (2:27,30). When viewed in the shadow of death, perfection suggests the attainment of "the blessed hope," the athlete's final rest after

agonizing toward that ultimate finish line. This instance of perfection connotes confident possession of heaven.

A second key theme in Philippians is the Day of Christ. Specifically referred to three times, this goal marks the completion of character development (1:6), the celestial gate which admits only the sincere and blameless (1:10), and the arena of celebration shared by those who have proven true to Christ (2:17). A fourth reference alludes to the second advent of Christ, but in different terms: "from which [heaven] also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (3:20). "The Day of Christ" influences perfection in Philippians in much the same way as did the theme of death. The eschatological hope of final, immutable peace forms the goal which the struggling, imperfect-yet-holy ones pursue (1:1; 3:12,14).

Struggle and goal-pursuit commingle to suggest a third theme in this brief epistle. Paul exhorted his readers to work out their own salvation (2:12). He anticipated joy in heaven because the fruit of his labor and the prize of his race would be preserved in the resolute faithfulness of the Philippian believers (2:16). As he reviewed past treasures of legal righteousness and exemplary religious conduct in his own life, he found them thoroughly worthless. The only gain worth pursuing was the knowledge of Christ, with the righteousness found in Him alone (3:7-9). While he had not yet laid hold of the final goal, he determined to press on, carefully retaining every gain already secured (3:12,14,16).

On the opposite side stood another goal (teleios) and glory for the enemies of the cross. The goal toward which they were pressing was destruction, and the only glory which they enjoyed was shame (3:19).

The theme of struggle and goal-attainment brings two connotations to perfection in Philippians. First, it suggests active participation in progress toward perfection. While man does not yet achieve this progress independent of God (2:13), yet he holds in his will the key for the selection and pursuit of his goal. Second, struggle and goal-attainment suggest a singularity of focus. As a disciplined athlete, Paul pursued the goal of knowing Christ rather than any lesser goal. Thus perfection involves achievement by active participation and pursuit of a single goal, when viewed in the light of struggle and goal-achievement in Philippians.⁸⁷

Death, the Day of Christ, and struggle/goal-pursuit clarify perfection in Philippians as a whole. These themes form the backdrop for the ensuing discussion of specific references to perfection.

⁸⁷Moral purity or holiness is often associated with spiritual perfection. Purity is a minor theme in Philippians, appearing in two diads: "sincere and blameless" (1:10), and "blameless and innocent" (2:15). In the first pair one may find a condition for eschatological confidence, since it refers to a character of life leading up to the Day of Christ. The second pair speak less to the issue of ultimate perfection, and more to the need for an unmistakable beacon of transformed ethics in a "crooked and perverse generation" (2:15). Thus purity only mildly influences the connotation of perfection in this letter.

Specific references. The primary references to perfection in Philippians 3 appear in verses 12 and 15:

Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect [~~te~~teleiomai], but I press on Let us therefore, as many as are perfect [teleioi], have this attitude"88

Related contextual components will first be examined, followed by more direct discussion of the meaning of perfection. The appearance in 3:12 will be considered first.

The first component related to perfection in Philippians 3:12 appears in the context immediately preceding. In 3:1-11 Paul had described the futility of his legalistic search for confidence before God. Although he fully satisfied contemporary religious standards, a simple encounter with Jesus Christ overturned his supposed security. Now he could only say that this initial search for confidence was displayed as a deficit on the ledger of his spiritual pilgrimage (vv. 7,8).

The second contextual component quietly introduces the nature of the new goal sought by Paul. Without naming it as "perfection," the apostle outlined his new source of confidence with its attendant qualities. He determined foremost to know Christ (vv. 8,10). Along with this goal, he desired to "be found in Him," possessing God's righteousness (v. 9), to know "the power of His resurrection," "the fellowship of His

⁸⁸Two secondary tel- root words also appear in Phil.: epitelesei (1:6) and telos (3:19). The former connotes full completion or bringing to an end of the good work begun by Christ in the Philippian believers. Paul was confident that Christ would bring about this fullness until the "Day of Christ." The telos passage will be noted later in the discussion.

sufferings," to be "conformed to His death" (v. 10), so as to eventually attain to the resurrection of the dead (v. 11). A distinctly mystical tone characterizes this passage.⁸⁹

A third contextual component unfolds with the imagery of Olympic games.⁹⁰ Terms such as goal, prize, pursue, lay hold of, stretch out towards, arrive at, and attain each convey the figure of an athletic contestant striving to achieve a predetermined finish line (vv. 11-16). By using the Olympic allusion, Paul first underscored that the spiritual goal demands sustained pursuit, and second, that he was himself still running the race.⁹¹ He could not yet boast with the confidence of a wreathed victor. These contextual components concerning Paul's former confidence, the nature of his later goal, and his athletic pursuit of that goal influence the meaning of perfection in verse 12.

The connotation of perfection in Philippians 3:12 depends on the object toward which it proceeds. This object has been variously perceived. It may refer to a goal of martyrdom, which marks the completion or perfection of earthly life.⁹²

⁸⁹George A. Turner, "Philippians and Colossians," Romans to Philemon, Vol. V, The Wesleyan Bible Commentary, ed. Charles W. Carter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 472.

⁹⁰Adam Clarke, Romans to the Revelations, Vol. II, The New Testament with a Commentary and Critical Notes (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, [1942]), p. 502.

⁹¹Cf. John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, trans. and ed. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 101.

⁹²Clarke, Romans to the Revelations (1942), p. 502.

It may refer to resurrection of the just, suggested by Paul's aspiration in verse 11.⁹³ Beyond death and resurrection, it may refer to the glorification brought to believers in the Day of Christ, or the second Advent.⁹⁴ Finally, perfection may refer to the complete knowledge of Christ, as mentioned in verses 8 and 10.⁹⁵

If perfection for Paul depended primarily on his having expired (as in the case of martyrdom suggested above), he would not have needed to protest any notion that he was already perfect. His non-attainment of death was obvious. Yet verses 12 and 13 express an emphatic disclaimer against his arrival at the ultimate goal.⁹⁶ Thus one might infer that the goal did not involve death.

This view counters the undercurrent eschatological anticipation appearing in much of the epistle.⁹⁷ A clue in

⁹³Marvin R. Vincent, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon, The International Critical Commentary, eds. Charles Briggs, Samuel Driver, Alfred Plummer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), p. 107.

⁹⁴Jacobus J. Müller, The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon, Vol. XII, The New International Commentary, ed. N. B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 42.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 125-26.

⁹⁶Note the vocative, "Brethren!" and the emphatic ego emauton of v. 13. The text variant oupō for ou in Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus would only emphasize the eventual attainability of this perfection, Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al., eds., The Greek New Testament (2nd ed., New York: United Bible Societies, 1968), p. 688, nt. 3.

⁹⁷Cf. pp. 48-49.

verse 13 may unravel the tension between the eschatological theme and perfection which appears to precede death. Grammatically, Paul climaxed his discussion of confidence before God (3:1-16) with his emphatic protest in verse 13 and with his exhortation in verses 15-16. That Paul needed to protest his achievement of the ultimate goal implies a caution against false teaching.⁹⁸ Evidently some at Philippi taught that one could reach such a level of confidence before God as would afford relaxation, like an athlete who had passed the finish line. Perhaps the "evil workers" of verse 2 taught this error.

Paul countered that his earlier rationale for confidence had evaporated when he was caught hold of by Christ (vv. 4,12). The trophy which warranted ultimate confidence still remained before the divine Judge presiding over the contest. No victor had yet been named, for the games still progressed. Those games would conclude on the Day of Christ. Then the redeemed would fully know Christ Jesus their Lord, would possess the righteousness by faith, would know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, would share conformity with His death, and would obtain the resurrection of the dead.

Thus the question of death-perfection gives way to the primary goal of knowing Christ and sharing in the plenitude

⁹⁸Karl Braune, Philippians, trans. Horatio B. Hackett, Vol. VII, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. John Peter Lange, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 56.

of the attendant relationship. Death is at once essential yet incidental to the goal, as the cocoon is essential yet incidental to the newly-emerged butterfly. Without death, perfection as described in this Pauline passage is detained; yet merely to attain death is not to achieve perfection. Perfection is the realm of confidence beyond the guidepost of death. Paul permeated this passage with a persuasive conviction that the resurrected state will unveil a stunning sense of fulfillment scarcely comprehensible in this life. Such an interpretation meshes well with the exhortation to press on after his example (vv. 14-15). As long as earthly life permits, the quest for full knowledge of Christ persists.

Some commentators debate whether Paul restricted full moral perfection to the eternal state. Müller maintains that Paul deferred moral aspects to the eternal state and was describing here "the entire sanctification, spiritual and moral maturity and perfection which he has not yet attained."⁹⁹ But Clarke states:

St. Paul, therefore, is not speaking here of any deficiency in his own grace, or spiritual state, he does not mean by not being perfect that he had a body of sin and death cleaving to him, and was still polluted with indwelling sin, as some have most falsely and dangerously imagined; he speaks of his not having terminated his course by martyrdom This he considered the teleiōsis or perfection of his whole career [underscoring original].¹⁰⁰

While debate depends in part on differing definitions of "moral maturity," morality is nevertheless a significant concept in the theme of perfection. It may be more fully understood by

⁹⁹Müller, p. 121.

¹⁰⁰Clarke, Romans to the Revelations (1942), p. 502.

noting the succeeding context.

Moral uprightness forms the principal theme of verses 17-21.¹⁰¹ In these verses Paul distinguished clearly the attitude and outcome of men with moral deficiency. They are described as "enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, . . . whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things" (vv. 18-19). In contrast, Paul and his comrades are described in a positive moral sense as citizens of heaven (v. 20). The Apostle did not impugn the moral qualifications of believers in the quest of ultimate perfection. His judgment of a deficiency in moral standards only pertained to unbelievers, "enemies of the cross of Christ" (v. 18). Thus, morality was a present possession for Paul's audience, not merely a possibility restricted to the eternal state.

Based on this discussion, we conclude that the connotation of perfection in Philippians 3:12 consists of knowing Christ fully, for which death serves an essential yet incidental requisite. This interpretation has more contextual warrant than the views mentioned above. Their weakness may be summarized as follows: martyrdom provides an incidental/essential

¹⁰¹The textual variant in 3:12 also addresses the concept of morality in perfection. Papyrus 46 and uncials D and G^c insert dedikaiōmai, "I have been justified," before teteleiōmai, Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 614. This view would suggest that full justification (to reflect the perfect tense) or morality remains unattainable in

link to full knowledge of Christ; resurrection is only the positive inversion of martyrdom; glorification encompasses the entire resurrected state, but does not point specifically to knowing Christ as stressed in Philippians 3.

Perfection also appears in Philippians 3:15 as the theme of athletic pursuit continues. Paul exhorted "as many as are perfect [teleioi]" to press on with him for the eternal goal of a complete knowledge of Christ. The meaning of "perfect" is again governed by context, as follows. First, since Paul counts himself with the teleioi, this may in no way imply ultimate perfection in the eternal sense (cf. v. 12). Second, perfection is linked to the realm of attitude (touto phronōmen). This is an attitude of singular pursuit after the call of God in Christ Jesus (v. 14). Third, the phrase, "keep living by that same standard to which we have attained," suggests that those described as perfect would not be entitled to relax any discipline of godly conduct, but must rather persist in holy living (v. 16). These elements from the context outline the connotation of teleioi. It does not refer to ultimate fullness in the knowledge of Christ, but is attainable in this earthly life. It assumes a measure of godly behavior which must be continued. Most critically, this perfection is attitudinal.

this life, just as ultimate perfection. Since papyrus 61^{vid}, uncials Aleph, A, B, and D^C support the shorter reading, the United Bible Society committee favored omission of dedikaiōmai with strong certainty ("B"), *ibid.*, pp. 614-15. Thus the preferred text does not limit the degree of morality attainable in the present life.

The direct connotation of perfection will now be discussed by examining interpretations proposed by various commentators. Some commentators link this passage with the custom of describing believers as saints (hoi hagioi, cf. Phil. 1:1; II Cor. 1:1), despite non-attainment of ultimate holiness (hagiasmos). Wiesinger succinctly remarks, "As hagion einai is the strongest obligation to hagiasmos, so the teleion einai presents the strongest incentive to strive after the teleiousthai."¹⁰² This view interprets perfection in 3:15 as a futuristic potential, referring to an ultimate sort of perfection, not attainable at the present time. Yet futuristic potential does not fit Paul's frank discussion of his present spiritual condition. He wrote to individuals who were at that time teleioi. Wiesinger's view infers a symbolic sense dissonant to the context.

Müller proposes a positional connotation. He contrasts verses 12 and 15 by stating,

We have just to differentiate here between the principal perfection which all believers in Christ possess, and the ethical perfection toward which all must constantly strive, and of which no one can boast that he has already attained it.¹⁰³

The weakness of Müller's position lies in his statement that all believers possess the measure of perfection noted in 3:15, implying that it is bestowed at regeneration. There may be such a quality of perfection. However, Paul was calling to a

¹⁰²Braune, p. 56, quoting Wiesinger without cite.

¹⁰³Müller, p. 125, nt. 9.

select cadre of committed disciples intent on "pressing on." These he distinguished as "perfect." While not explicit, one may reasonably infer that some Philippians were true believers, but had not yet focused their determination to the single goal of God's upward call, and thus were not "perfect." Paul designated someone other than the simple believer by the term teleioi.

Sarcasm, according to Turner, may underlie the reference to perfection in 3:15. He links teleioi with the implied false teachers who claimed ultimate perfection and suggests that Paul is summoning them to follow his pattern of devotion, if they are indeed perfect.¹⁰⁴ Yet Turner's view does not allow for Paul's admitted inclusion among those perfect ones in verses 15-17:

Let us therefore, as many as are perfect . . . ; let us keep living by that same standard Join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us [underscoring added].

Turner's suggestion depends too heavily on unproved inference.

The objections to the above interpretations are satisfied in a fourth view. In I Corinthians 2:6; 14:20 and Hebrews 5:14, teleioi bears a clear connotation of maturity.¹⁰⁵ The mature (teleioi) discern wisdom in God's message, as contrasted to "the rulers of this age" who detect only folly (I Corinthians 2:6, 8). In the same epistle Paul urged readers, "Do not be

¹⁰⁴Turner, Philippians and Colossians, p. 474.

¹⁰⁵Clarke, Romans to the Revelations (1942), p. 503.

children in your thinking, yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature [teleioi]" (I Cor. 14:20).¹⁰⁶ The contrast of teleioi with children and babes strongly supports translating it "mature." In Hebrews the writer explains that the teleioi are characterized by the ability to eat solid food, unlike babes who are restricted to milk (5:13,14). The contrast with children again endorses the translation "mature." If teleioi is rendered "mature" in Philippians 3:15, then there is a proper admission of present (although limited) perfection (cf. Wiesinger), the distinction between any believer and the teleios is retained (cf. Müller), and there is no violence done to the plain sense of Scripture by inferring false teachers as sarcastic "perfected ones" (cf. Turner).¹⁰⁷

Summary. The treatment of perfection in Philippians provides a vital perspective for the entire Biblical theme. The uses of tel- root words in 3:12-16 give two views of the same concept, distinguished by eternal and temporal settings. From the eternal vantage, Paul anticipated a completed, ultimate perfection unattainable in the present life. As Greijdanus

¹⁰⁶Thinking as the locus of maturity resembles maturity in attitude (Phil. 3:15), further endorsing "mature" as the proper translation in Philippians.

¹⁰⁷Beyond teleioi in Philippians 3:15 an additional tel- root word appears (3:19): "whose end [telos] is destruction." While telos is not generally included in the scope of this study, its appearance here is worth noting. First Paul exhorted the readers to follow his example, reaching for the ultimate prize of fully knowing Christ. Then he turned to disclose another ultimate goal, the goal of destruction. This use of telos underscores the ultimacy connoted by teteleiōmai in 3:12.

notes, this ultimate perfection is primarily composed of "the true connection with Christ, the true faith in Him, the true knowledge of Him."¹⁰⁸ Such a true knowledge of Christ is possible only beyond death's doors. Only in this sense does the Bible teach perfection via death.

The second use of a tel- word in the same paragraph emphasizes the possibility of perfection in the present life. Paul claimed it, and included a number of Philippian believers with him. This perfection is best construed as maturity. It is characterized by a singular attitude in pursuit of God's call. It does not allow for relaxation of the confident, crowned victor, for the ultimate perfection remains unsecured. Perfection assumes a different quality in the mind of the author of Hebrews. The discussion will now turn to the Hebrews selection.

Hebrews

The epistle to the Hebrews contains the greatest frequency of significant tel- root words in the New Testament. For this reason the book will be examined first to discover general themes related to perfection, and secondly to discuss specific references to perfection.

Related themes. Five themes surface in Hebrews which affect the concept of perfection. First, the epistle frequently

¹⁰⁸Greijdanus, quoted without cite by Müller, pp. 125-26.

refers to one article being replaced by a better article (cf. 1:4; 7:18; 11:4,16,40; 12:24). The articles laid aside are termed "copies" (9:23) or "shadows" (10:1) of the authentic. Primarily the replacement process deals with areas where Christ fills up the form or expectation outlined by temporary examples (e.g. priestly mediation in chapters 5 and 7, and sacrifices in chapters 9 and 10). In this sense the "better" article found in Christ provides a fulfillment of earlier promises, corresponding to one connotation of perfection.

The theme "better" suggests ultimacy or finality in its extreme form. Certainly this was true in the initial paragraph, where the author introduced Christ as the better and ultimate revelation of God (1:1-4). The new covenant also holds a sense of ultimacy (cf. 8:6-13; 9:15). Christ's presentation of His sacrifice was "once for all," a profoundly complete and final act (cf. 9:12; 10:12). The city sought by Abraham was ultimate, "whose architect and builder is God" (11:10,16). Perfection similarly suggests improvement over the imperfect and also the ultimate stage in a series of progressions.¹⁰⁹ The example of the enduring city built by God bridges into a second theme relating to perfection, the eternal.

The eternal is contrasted with the temporal in Hebrews, forming a second perfection-oriented theme. Jesus is noted

¹⁰⁹Marva J. Sedore, "A Theology of Weakness: Word Studies from the Greek Text of II Corinthians 12:9 in Context with Exegesis of Seven Select Passages of Scripture" (unpublished Masters thesis, Western Evangelical Seminary, 1978), p. 25.

for His unending throne and life (1:8,12). As a priest the unending life bears special significance, resembling the enigmatic Melchizedek (5:6; 7:24-28). The non-eternal or transient appears in a variety of settings: Jesus' earthly life of submission ("for a little while lower," 2:9), Egypt's "passing pleasures of sin" offered to Moses (11:25), and the persecution or discipline which must be endured for a time (3:6; 6:11-12; 10:23; 12:1-11). Perfection also has an eternal dimension, signifying that which is not subject to decay or revision. The transition point of temporal-to-eternal forms the next theme.

As a temporary distress passes into the promised rest, it crosses a point of transition. The concept of transition point is one of the graphic connotations of perfection, and thus forms the third perfection-related theme in Hebrews.¹¹⁰ The author exhorted his audience to "hold fast . . . until the end" (3:6). When one reached that "end" he might relax his diligence, since the state of distress would be transformed into a state of success (cf. 10:23). The author illustrated the transition into rest by describing the wilderness journey culminated by entry into Canaan (chs. 3-4). In a similar illustration, he urged readers to "run with endurance the race" (12:1). By this analogy he implied that their struggle included a goal or transition point which would mark the beginning of their rest. Rest, particularly in the Canaan illustration, results from a promise fulfilled.

¹¹⁰Cf. p. 41.

Fourth, perfection is latent in the theme of promise. When an unfulfilled promise still remains, the wearied struggler gains incentive to persevere (4:1,11). The audience is encouraged to forge ahead in hope because "He who promised" is trustworthy (10:23). While the Law failed to provide perfect mediation in the priesthood, God's oath (promise) appointed Christ as the ultimately effective priest (7:11,19, 28). Each of these references to promise demonstrates the perfection-related idea of fulfillment. The highest sort of promise given to man provides for his reunion with God through purification. Thus spiritual purification will be linked with perfection as a concluding theme.

Spiritual purity forms the last theme corresponding to perfection in Hebrews. Here the effect of former sacrifices is compared with the effect of Christ's ultimate sacrifice. Symbolic animal sacrifices could never "make the worshiper perfect in conscience," but would only "sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh" (9:9,13). Christ's sacrifice, however, penetrated to cleanse even the guilt-stained conscience (9:14; 10:22). The symbolic sacrifices brought only a shadow of forgiveness, but Jesus made His followers genuinely holy (10:11, 14,17). Perfection similarly bears the connotation of spiritual purity; this may comprise the most common use in Hebrews.¹¹¹

Thus the concept of perfection is accompanied by several related themes in Hebrews. The close links between the various

¹¹¹Cf. the discussion of conscience, p. 69.

and "better" articles, the eternal, the transition-point to rest, promises, and spiritual purity strongly suggest that this family of concepts forms with perfection a ~~not~~ voice in the message of Hebrews. As perfection is ~~and~~ in the following paragraphs, one must perceive more ~~brief~~ phrase enclosing a tel- root word. Rather, one ~~is~~ related to detect the added impact of supporting themes ~~is~~ related to perfection throughout the epistle.

Specific references. The applicability of perfection ~~the~~ author of Hebrews appears in three major areas. First, ~~perfection~~ pertains to the person of Christ. Second, it measures ~~perfection~~ among believers. Third, it describes the divine ~~perfection~~ available to believers.

The person of Christ forms the first area. Perfection ~~an~~ instance of Jesus deals with His qualification to serve ~~as~~ priest for the human race. Christ's qualification is ~~found~~ in 2:10:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect [teleiōsai] the author of their salvation through sufferings.¹¹²

Sufferings refer to His "suffering of death . . . for ~~us~~" (2:9). Not only was this vicarious suffering for ~~us~~, but it was also an evidence that Christ identified

¹¹²Cf. F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, The International Commentary on the New Testament Series, ed. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 45.

completely with the experience of humanity: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise took part of the same . . ." (v. 14). The concept of thorough identity with mankind appears again at the climax of the paragraph: "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things . . ." (v. 17). "In all things" corresponds to the ultimacy of His "perfection" in verse 10.

These observations from the context help to solve the riddle of describing the divine Christ as becoming perfect. The connotation of perfection in this passage involves Christ becoming complete by thoroughly sharing in the experience of humanity, even in its death.¹¹³ He thus became completely qualified to serve as "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God" (v. 17).

The theme of priestly qualification through suffering-perfection surfaces again in Hebrews 5:8-10:

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect [teleiōtheis], He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation; being designated by God as a high priest

Since this passage matches 2:10 so closely, it will not be explored as thoroughly.¹¹⁴ But one new facet should be noted:

¹¹³Cf. Charles W. Carter, "Hebrews," Hebrews to Revelation, Vol. VI, The Wesleyan Bible Commentary, ed. Charles W. Carter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 48.

¹¹⁴"A Son, made perfect [teteleiōmenon] forever" (Heb. 7:28), echoes the same concept. Here the perfect identity with mankind is coupled with the authority of an endless life to resoundingly declare the effectiveness of Christ's priestly mediation.

perfect identity with mankind followed from Christ's filial obedience. F. F. Bruce neatly summarizes 2:10 and 5:9 by stating:

An atonement efficacious in itself could be presented only by a high priest whose sympathetic self-identification with his people was unreserved, and at the same time by a high priest whose obedience to God was unmarred by any reluctance--not to say refusal--to obey.¹¹⁵

Thus Hebrews first treats perfection by pointing to the ultimate, divine high priest. Although perfect in Himself because of His divine nature, still the author declared that His sharing in human suffering must also be complete if He would serve as the Messianic high priest. He concluded that this sharing was indeed complete, and the qualification was satisfied.

The second category of perfection turns from the perfection of Christ to the perfection of maturity of Christians. Since Hebrews 5:14 and 6:1 are adjacent verses, they will be considered together with their twin usage of tel- root words:

But solid food is for the mature [teleiōn] who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity [teleiōtēta]

Several comments in the context cast the implication of these two tel- words. The failure of the audience to develop spiritually was apparent when the author scolded his readers

¹¹⁵Bruce, p. 44.

for yet remaining at the student level, rather than becoming instructors (5:12). The next verse describes them as unweaned spiritual babes. They are yet unable to receive advanced teaching of the word of righteousness.

Such notes from the context give to perfection a connotation of growing maturity rather than stagnant achievement.¹¹⁶ Maturity is characterized by the ability to discern good and evil, and by the ability to utilize advanced teaching.¹¹⁷

The final category of perfection involves divine fellowship between God and believers, and how it is effected by Christ's priestly ministry. The author drew a contrast between the deficiency of the old covenant and the adequacy of the new covenant.

The old covenant was deficient in its priestly mediation and in its sacrifices. In 7:11 the mediation is discussed:

Now if perfection [teleiōsis] was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Aaron?

The connotation of perfection in this verse is clarified by the evidence of Levitical imperfection given in the context. The Law-instituted priesthood lacked eternal mediation (7:17, 21,23) and original purity (7:27).¹¹⁸ Jesus, by contrast,

¹¹⁶Cf. John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Vol. XI, New Testament Commentaries, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 129; also Bruce, p. 111.

¹¹⁷For a discussion supporting actual perfection rather than the more general term "maturity," cf. Wayne McCown, "Such a Great Salvation: The Soteriology of the Epistle to the Hebrews" (a paper presented at the Pacific Northwest Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Western Evangelical Seminary, Spring, 1975), p. 17.

¹¹⁸Moffatt aptly comments, "The uselessness of the Law

"holds His priesthood permanently" (7:24) and is "holy, innocent, undefiled" (7:26). The lack of perfection through Levitical mediation meant lack of reconciliation with God.¹¹⁹

The deficiency of the sacrificial system appears in 9:9: "Both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect [teleiōsai] in conscience."¹²⁰ Two notes from the context clarify this mention of perfection. First, the discussion preceding verse 9 described the temple furniture and ritual as "a copy and shadow of heavenly things" (8:5). The outer tabernacle served as a "symbol" (9:9). Regulations were temporary, lasting until a "time of reform" (9:10). Such comments introduce the connotation of fulfillment into this use of perfection.

Second, perfection is located in the conscience (9:9). Delitzsch amplifies perfection in conscience to include "an inward consciousness of perfect reconciliation with God, perfectly satisfied desires after salvation, or a perfected and inward peace."¹²¹ In verse 14 a parallel phrase again reflects

lay in its failure to secure an adequate forgiveness of sins, without which a real access or fellowship (eggizein to theō) was impossible; ouden teteleiōsen, it led to no absolute order of communion between men and God, no teleiōsis," James Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, The International Critical Commentary Series, ed. Alfred Plummer (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1948), p. 98.

¹¹⁹"The Law made nothing perfect [eteleiōsen]" (7:19) states that weaknesses in Levitical mediation stem from weaknesses in its source, the Law or old covenant.

¹²⁰Calvin prefers to supply "sanctify" for "make perfect," Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 194.

¹²¹Franz Delitzsch, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Vol. II, trans. Thomas L. Kingsbury (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 71.

this sense: "the blood of Christ . . . [will] cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." The Law's failure to make perfect (teleiōsai, 10:1) is elaborated as a failure to cleanse and remove consciousness of sins (10:2). One may reasonably infer that perfection of conscience is equivalent to the cleansing of conscience.

The idea of conscience and residual consciousness of sins surfaces in four other passages. One of the principal features of the new covenant was the obliteration of the record of sins in God's accounting: "For I will be merciful to their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more" (8:12, quoting Jer. 31:34). Since this same quotation is repeated in 10:17, it forms a crucial link in the argument of the author. According to 9:26, Christ's purpose was to dispatch sin: "But now once at the consummation He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." The weakness of Law-instituted sacrifices lay in their inability to remove the worshiper's residual "consciousness of sins" (10:2). Instead, the old covenant sacrifices provided "a reminder of sins year by year" (10:3). Thus the continued consciousness of sin evidenced that repeated sacrifices offered by Levitical mediation could never bring cleansing or perfection of conscience. Divine fellowship could not be established until man was perfected in conscience by a decisive cleansing secured by perfect mediation.

The author exposed in an unrelenting manner the shortcomings in the old covenant. This candor was due to the profound

adequacy he found in the new covenant's provision for divine fellowship. Three passages relate this adequacy to the concept of perfection. In 9:11, Christ is noted as ministering in "the greater and more perfect [teleiotes] tabernacle." At last the mediation and presentation of sacrifice has left behind the mere shadows and hand-made copies of the heavenly sanctuary: Christ has entered the true tabernacle (8:5;9:11).¹²² The connotation of perfect in this passage involves the eternal and heavenly which replace the temporal and physical.¹²³ Also, the concept of prefiguring shadows and copies lends a tone of fulfillment to the use of "perfect."¹²⁴

The second passage describing the new covenant appears in 9:14, three verses later:

¹²²The identity of the new tabernacle is Christ's body, according to Calvin and Clarke, Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 202, and Adam Clarke, Corinthians to Revelation, Vol. VI, The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testament with a Commentary and Critical Notes (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, [n.d.]), under Heb. 9:9. However, this does not correspond to the simple explanation of 9:24: "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Thus Moffatt's view, "the upper heavens," is a preferred interpretation for the tabernacle, Moffatt, p. 120.

¹²³For further evidence of the adequacy of Christ's mediation, note His becoming perfect and His Melchizedek-like office, 5:9-10. Cf. pp. 65-67.

¹²⁴This passage is unusual in its comparative use of teleios. The author viewed perfection as a goal which a subject may achieve by degrees or in a relative sense. He did not consider perfection as a static all-or-nothing ultimatum. This use of perfection resembles the author's frequent use of "better," but in a more exalted degree.

How much more [than the blood of goats and bulls] will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Perfection does not directly appear in the above quotation. Yet this verse meticulously answers the crucial passage in verse 9 ("sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience"), and corresponds to 10:1,2, where perfection of worshipers, cleansing, and cancelled consciousness of sins are grouped as one. Thus, the meaning of "cleanse your conscience" may reasonably be construed as "make your conscience perfect." The author boldly proclaimed that the previously elusive cleansing or perfecting of conscience was decisively secured by Christ. The connotation of perfection in this network of verses is freedom from guilt through cleansing, and the cancellation of one's consciousness of sins by Christ's removal of them.

The final passage relating the new covenant and perfection appears in 10:14: "For by one offering He has perfected [teteleiōken] for all time those who are sanctified." The argument of the first nine chapters of Hebrews reaches a climax in 10:1-18, leading to a hortatory mode predominant in the remainder of the book. The climax utilizes repetition to emphasize key points: the singular effectiveness of Christ's offering ("one sacrifice . . . for all time" in vv. 12 and 14), and the divine fellowship established by that sacrifice ("we have been sanctified . . . having offered one sacrifice for sins . . . their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more . . . where there is forgiveness of these things . . .")

in vv. 10, 12, 17 and 18). In the settings of sacrifices and sanctification, McCown comments:

The verb to perfect is appropriate in this connection, primarily because it is so descriptive of the sufficiency of the saving work of Christ, in comparison with the former priestly and sacrificial arrangements.¹²⁵

Since the passage surrounding 10:14 functions as a climactic summary, one may reasonably infer that concepts found there depend on earlier discussion to provide connotations. The connotations associated with perfection in earlier verses point to a perfection of conscience marked by cleansing from the stain and memory of sins (9:9,14; 10:1-3). Christ's sacrifice made this possible (9:14; 10:10,12).¹²⁶

The perfection brought by the new covenant does not encourage relaxation on the basis of an achievement gained. Rather, believers are exhorted to draw near to God (10:22), to "hold fast the confession of our hope" (10:23), and to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (10:24). The foundation of this exhortation is the confidence which believers now

¹²⁵McCown, p. 16.

¹²⁶Calvin interprets perfection as "completely to free them from the imputation of sin, to make them fully clear from guilt, or in other words, fully to take away their sins, which was never done by the sacrifices of the law," Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 390. Bruce states that "the sacrifice of Christ . . . brought [them] into that perfect relation to God which is involved in the new covenant," Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 241. These comments support the view that perfection in Hebrews bears at times the connotation of initiating divine fellowship. It involves a restoration of relationship.

enjoy in God's presence because of forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice (v. 19). Thus perfection marks the satisfaction of God's righteous requirements for man, made possible by the grace of Christ's sacrifice and mediation. Man need no longer cower in fear, but may confidently draw near to the holy God and enjoy communion restored. This is the consequence of perfection found under the new covenant.

Summary. Three primary uses of perfection have been noted in Hebrews. First, Christ is said to have been perfected as He fully identified with humanity by obediently suffering. He then qualified to serve as high priest for mankind. Second, believers are found short of maturity (a specialized use of teleios) when unusually slow to assimilate advanced spiritual teaching. Third, believers are described as perfect when the old covenant goal of cleansing from the consciousness of sins is fulfilled in Christ's new covenant. This gives access to divine fellowship. Divine communion forms an undercurrent theme to perfection in Hebrews. Christ invaded humanity and perfected His identity with man so that by His ultimate sacrifice, mediation, and consequent cleansing, He might restore man to confident communion with God.

James

The epistle of James contains several references to perfection. Before examining the connotation of specific references, one should note three themes affecting the concept of perfection.

Related themes. The first theme is an exhortation to endure trials (cf. 1:2-4,12; 5:7-11). The concept of trial involves both temptation to sin (peirasmos) and assaying metallurgical purity by testing (dokimion).¹²⁷ Perfection represents: first, the condition of a test which has completed its course; and second, the refined condition of a subject which has successfully passed a test.

The second theme deals with the need for loving actions to accompany sound faith (cf. 1:21-27; 2:14-26). The author linked perfection with works when he wrote that practical concern comprised fulfillment (teleite) of the perfect (teleion) law (2:8 and 1:25, respectively). Works served to perfect faith in Abraham's surrender of Isaac (2:22).

The third theme concerns Christian maturity. This involves the use of one's tongue (3:1-12) and the use of divine wisdom (3:13-4:12).

Related themes of trials, works, and maturity determine, in part, the features of perfection in James. Specific uses of tel- root words will now be considered.

Specific references. Specific references to tel- root words begin with a double usage in James 1:4: "And let endurance have its perfect [teleion] result, that you may be perfect [teleioi] and complete, lacking in nothing."¹²⁸ One

¹²⁷Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 646 and 202, respectively.

¹²⁸The varying Biblical meanings of perfection may

note from the context illumines the meaning of "perfect result." In 1:15, James wrote of sin's progressive growth with these words: "Then when lust was conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." The sequence of maturation to "accomplishment" uses a tel- root word to signify the goal to be achieved (apotelestheia), and thus resembles the connotation of "perfect result." In verses 3 and 4 James viewed trials as a process which must proceed uninterrupted. Thus "perfect" describes the natural conclusion to the process of trials.

The impact of the "perfect result" leaves the suffering subject in a "perfect" state. Two notes from the context clarify this use of teleioi. "Complete" (holoklēroi) stands parallel to "perfect," suggesting an intact condition, with all components in place.¹²⁹ The concept is further amplified by "lacking in nothing," or in no way suffering inadequacy or being left behind. These form a connotation of fully equipped for the second use of perfect in 1:4.¹³⁰

be noted by contrasting Hebrews, where endurance served as consequence rather than cause of perfection (cf. pp. 73-74).

¹²⁹Cf. James Hardy Ropes, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James, The International Critical Commentary Series, ed. Alfred Plummer and Francis Brown (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1948), p. 138.

¹³⁰Lange explains, "Where endurance has its perfect work, the Christian, as to principle, is perfect and deficient in nothing. For where Christian endurance holds sway, there the power of sinful selfishness is broken . . .," J. P. Lange, and J. J. Van Oosterzee, The Epistle General of James, trans. J. I. Mombert, Vol. IX, The New Testament Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. John Peter Lange, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 43.

The second passage involving perfection appears in James 1:17: "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect [teleion] gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow." Notes from the context develop three aspects of this reference. First, the perfect gift is genuinely good. Second, it derives from a divine source, God Himself. Third, it does not deceptively harbor evil designs, but resembles the constancy of the Father of lights. Ropes remarks that perfect "excludes any element of evil in the gift."¹³¹ Thus teleion in 1:17 connotes the divinely suitable gift.

The usage in James 1:25 couples the concepts of law and good works:

But one who looks intently at the perfect [teleion] law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

From the context one may identify the perfect law with "the word implanted" (1:21), "the law of liberty" (1:25; 2:12), and "the royal law" (2:8). In general this refers to the Scriptures, specifically including the decalogue (cf. 2:11) and the instruction to love one's neighbor (2:8). Yet the perfect law also involves the Gospel. Lange comments:

It is the Gospel conceived as that completion of the law which transforms the outward, enslaving law into a new principle of life communicating itself to the inner man and absolutely liberating him [underscoring added].¹³²

¹³¹Ropes, p. 159.

¹³²Lange and Van Oosterzee, The Epistle General of James, p. 66; cf. Alexander Ross, The Epistles of James and John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series, ed. N. B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p.42.

Despite the classification of this law as perfect, it requires the ingredient of practical works in order to be fulfilled (teleite, 2:8). Blessing follows the "effectual doer," not the "forgetful hearer" (1:25). Thus James used "perfect" to identify the ultimate, divine standard of freedom which would bring blessing and approval when personally implemented.

The fourth reference, in James 2:22, summarizes Abraham's surrender of Isaac by stating, "You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected [eteleiōthē]." Several other concepts in the passage describe the relationship between faith and works. Works serve as agents giving evidence to faith (v. 18). Faith in isolation of works (vv. 17,25) prevents justification (v. 24) and is thus useless or dead (vv. 20,26). By these contextual correlations the apostle implied that for faith to be perfect it must be made complete, united with works.¹³³ Even demons practiced belief without works (2:19). Faith in isolation of practical concern comprised futility. Thus perfect in this passage implies unity with an essential counterpart.

The last mention of perfection appears in James 3:2:

For we all stumble in many ways. If any one does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect [teleios] man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

The context indicates that perfection is the antithesis of

¹³³In 2:23 the author noted the fulfillment of Scripture with plēroō rather than the stronger teleō. With this distinction he retained a bold emphasis in the argument for completing faith by works. If he had used teleō for fulfillment, the stress on perfection in 2:22 would have been weakened.

stumbling. Stumbling suggests ungainly movement of the legs, a failure to reckon with the terrain. Perfection, on the other hand, involves the ability to "bridle" or control movement. Control is illustrated in verses 3 and 4 by horses' bits and ships' rudders. These correspond to the profound influence of the small human tongue.

Attainment of perfection in speech-control appears to be beyond hope: "For every species of beasts . . . has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue . . ." (vv. 7-8). Double-talk seemed inevitable (vv. 9-11). Yet James did not despair of attaining such self-control. He only defied the effectiveness of self-improvement techniques to reach this goal. By submitting to God the double-minded might be purified.¹³⁴

Thus perfection in James connotes maturity demonstrated by self-control in speech.¹³⁵ James felt justified in locating perfection in a small zone because mastery of this area led to mastery of the whole body. Feasibility of such perfection depends upon purification by God.

Summary. Perfection in James' epistle reflects a wider variety of connotations than seen in Hebrews or in Philipians.

¹³⁴Cf. Lange and Van Oosterzee, The Epistle General of James, p. 94.

¹³⁵The writer differs with Ropes' statement that "the idea of 'maturity,' 'adult growth,' either physical (Heb. 5:14; I Cor. 14:20) or spiritual (I Cor. 2:6; 13:11; Col. 1:28; 4:12), does not seem present in James' use, which is rather akin to that of Mt. 5:48; 19:21," Ropes, p. 138.

The Philippians concept of ultimate or divine perfection corresponds with the perfect gift from a divine source (Jas. 1:17). The Hebrews concept of long-awaited fulfillment corresponds with the perfect law which now truly liberates (Jas. 1:25). Beyond these shades of meaning lies the connotation of completion. In James 1:4, the second use of perfection suggests "completely equipped" through the process of trials. Faith becomes functionally complete when joined with works (2:22). Complete maturity evident in self-control is suggested by the final usage, in James 3:2. These last three references in the category of completion correspond respectively to the related themes of trials, works, and maturity. Perfection formed a crucial role in the message of James as he exhorted readers to discover the life of a completed Christian.

Matthew 5:48

One of the most incisive references to perfection was made by Jesus in Matthew 5:48: "Therefore you are to be perfect [teleioi], as your heavenly Father is perfect [teleios]." Earle describes this standard as "only a counsel of despair," unless modified from its absolute sense.¹³⁶ The context provides certain modifying factors which should be examined.

The chapter climaxed by this verse contains numerous instructions which jarred Jesus' audience from the usual cultural code. Blessing ascribed to the poor in spirit (v. 3), the

¹³⁶Ralph Earle, "Matthew," Matthew to Acts, Vol. IV, Wesleyan Bible Commentary, ed. Charles W. Carter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 35.

mourning (v. 4), and to the persecuted (vv. 10-11) countered commonly cherished values. New ripples appeared as Jesus upset usual leniency in anger, lust, divorce, oaths, revenge, and hate. He laid bare and censored the subtle thought prompting the admittedly wicked act. In order to gain the heritage as "sons of your Father who is in heaven," one must replace enemy hatred with love (v. 45). Only loving behavior would match the pattern set by the Father, whose sunlight and rain fell indiscriminately on evil and good, righteous and unrighteous. To fall short of this standard was to revoke one's part with the heavenly Father, and to join with tax-gatherers and Gentiles (vv. 46-47).

Four elements in this context refine the implication of perfect: first, it is to be contrasted with the imperfect external customs of the day; second, it derives from supernatural hereditary likeness; third, it incorporates love for the rebel; and fourth, exclusion from celestial sonship forms the only alternative to being perfect.

The parallel message in Luke 6:35-6 retains the emphasis on unqualified love, but alters the mention of perfection:

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke seemingly lowered the hurdle for sonship, and "thus seems to express more accurately the meaning intended."¹³⁷

¹³⁷Campbell, p. 730.

But Campbell wisely continues, "It is as clearly impossible for men to be merciful as God is merciful as for them to be perfect as God is perfect."¹³⁸

Christ's imperative remains overwhelmingly lofty, even when modified from absolute perfection to a perfection of love or mercy. Requirements of holiness (Lev. 19:2, which is remarkably parallel to Matt. 5:48) and righteousness (Matt. 5:20) set similarly lofty standards. Perhaps these hold the clue to the attainment of perfection in love. Just as God graciously enables helpless man to present himself holy and righteous through Christ, He may also be depended on for perfection in love (cf. Rom. 5:5).¹³⁹ When, to the best of his conscious ability, a man cooperates obediently as a channel of God's unqualified love, then he shares in the sonship contingent on perfection. Calvin offers a similar but slightly diluted interpretation:

However distant we are from the perfection of God, we are said to be perfect, as he is perfect, when we aim at the same object, which he presents to us in himself [underscoring original].¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ This should be viewed as a synergistic arrangement requiring cooperation (Matt. 5:44,46,47) and obedience (I John 2:5; cf. Ora D. Lovell, "The Present Possession of Perfection in First John", Wesleyan Theological Journal, VIII (Spring, 1973), pp. 38-44).

¹⁴⁰ John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Vol I, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [n.d.]), p. 308; cf. John Peter Lange, The Gospel According to Matthew, Vol. I, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, the New Testament, ed. John Peter Lange, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 118.

Thus perfection in Matthew 5:48 should be identified as the daily demonstration of unqualified love for mankind, which is implicit in a right relationship with God.

II Corinthians 12:9

The last selection to be examined appears in II Corinthians 12:9. Hughes describes this passage as "the summit of the epistle, the lofty peak from which the whole is viewed in its proportion."¹⁴¹ While defining his credentials as a true apostle, Paul referred to a "messenger of Satan," that "thorn in the flesh" which curbed his boasting (12:7).¹⁴² He prayerfully sought its removal three times, but was left with the infirmity. In this setting, he received a reassurance from the Lord, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected [i.e., *itai*] in weakness" (12:9). Paul resolved, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me. . . . when I am weak, then I am strong" (12:9,10).

The connotation of perfection is clarified by three parallel concepts in the context. First, the general setting of a petition presumes a deficiency which needs to be satisfied or completed. Paul identified the deficiency as a weakness or infirmity, a lack of strength (*a-sthenōs*).¹⁴³ Alongside

¹⁴¹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 451.

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 442-47.

¹⁴³ Sedore, p. 20.

this category he listed insults, distresses, persecutions, and difficulties (12:10). Second, perfection is marked by an irenic adequacy. Grace (charis) and power (dunamis) identify the supply promised by God (12:9,10). God's supportive grace would satisfy Paul's encumbering weakness by an adequate supply of power. Such a promise dismissed Paul's anxiety so that he was "well content with weakness" (12:10). Similar to contentment, God described His grace as "sufficient." Both terms fall into the realm of perfection, specifying an irenic adequacy or completeness. Third, the clause "power is perfected in weakness" finds a close parallel in the purpose clause, "that the power of Christ may dwell in me." For Christ's power to be perfected means that it resides in the one who suffers weakness. A hapax legomenon is used to identify the infusion of power, and may be more literally rendered "to tabernacle" (episkēnōsē).¹⁴⁴ These three elements from the context refine perfection in 12:9 to imply thorough satisfaction of a deficiency by the indwelling of God's corresponding adequacy for man

¹⁴⁴Clarke describes this as overshadowing, Clark, Corinthians to Revelation, under Heb. 12:9. Hughes comments, "The Apostle seems to have in mind a picture of the power of Christ descending upon him and taking up its abode in the frail tabernacle of his body during the course of his earthly pilgrimage (cf. 5:1), as the shechinah of the divine glory descended upon the mercy-seat in the tabernacle of Moses during the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel on their way to the promised land. The presence of the shechinah was a guarantee of the presence of the God of Covenant in the midst of His people in all His favour, protection and power", Hughes, p. 452. Quoting

(e.g., power).¹⁴⁵

Some deduce that perfection here refers to the termination of power spent in overcoming the subject's resistance toward God. When the subject assumes a posture of full submission or weakness, the power may then be channeled "through" him to reach others, rather than "on" him to produce submission.¹⁴⁶ Yet the natural sense of tel- root words deals with ending as culmination rather than termination.¹⁴⁷ For this reason the writer disagrees with the interpretation of power terminated in its exertion on the subject. Rather, perfection refers to the fulfillment of a divine potential facilitated by its thorough indwelling of a weak subject. This potential is most completely displayed when relied on most completely.¹⁴⁸

J. H. Bernard (without cite), Hughes continues, "Philo says that the sacred skēnē was a symbol of God's intention to send down to earth from heaven the perfection of His divine virtue (Quis div. haer. 23)," Hughes, p. 453, underscoring added. These observations underscore the divine intensity of episkēnosē, and likewise of teleitai by parallel inference. They also link perfection with communion with God. For further discussion, see Sedore, p. 39.

¹⁴⁵Plummer translates, "Where there is weakness, strength reaches completeness," because God's eternally consistent power then becomes more distinguishable, Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, The International Critical Commentary Series, eds. Francis Brown and Alfred Plummer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 354. Calvin employed the same emphasis: "Perfected has a reference to the perception and apprehension of mankind, because it is not so perfected unless it openly shines forth, so as to receive its due praise," John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Vol. II, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 378, underscoring original.

¹⁴⁶Sedore, p. 31. ¹⁴⁷Cf. p. 44.

¹⁴⁸One may note a strikingly similar construction in John's first epistle: "But whoever keeps His word, in him the

NEW TESTAMENT SUMMARY

Words from the tel- root family form a key element in the New Testament message. They describe both material and figurative conditions. When limited to figurative settings, three significant themes appear from an overview of New Testament usage. While these themes resemble categories noted in earlier connotation studies, they represent here a more comprehensive scope, and bridge more than one book.

The first theme concerns the divine standard. Perfection involves recognizing in a subject, or drawing a subject to, an intended standard of divine completion or fulfillment. In Hebrews the inadequate former covenant was replaced by the new covenant with its attendant aspects of perfection. Only in the new covenant did worshipers find fulfillment of divine standards for reconciliation foreshadowed in the old covenant (cf. Heb. 7:11,19,22; 9:15; 10:1-2). The standard in Hebrews is represented by reconciliation. In James 1:17 the concept

the love of God has been truly perfected [teteleiōtai]. By this we know that we are in Him" (I John 2:5). In both II Corinthians and I John perfection pertains to a divine quality (i.e., power and love, respectively). In each case perfection is described in the passive voice, "made perfect" by some agency other than the recipient, and the recipient plays a dependent or obedient role. The recipient is an individual in both verses. Each reference links perfection with intimate communion: the power of Christ dwells on the subject in II Corinthians, and the subject abides in God in I Jn. The I John passage supports an interpretation of "make complete" or "thoroughly display" for the II Corinthians use of perfection.

of standard appears with reference to God's perfect gifts. The gifts are complete because they meet a standard of divine suitability. The divine standard is also related to the perfect law in James 1:25. The affirmation "power is perfected in weakness" (II Cor. 12:9) also involves a divine standard. Power reaches Christ's divine standard of adequacy in man's moment of weakness. Perfection in each of the above settings is determined by the attainment of a divine standard.

The second theme involves the maturity of Christians. Philippian believers were described as perfect or mature because of a singularity of intent to pursue the call of God (Phil. 3:15). The audience of Hebrews failed the maturity test because of inexperience, inability to discern good from evil, and slowness to become instructors (Heb. 5:11-6:1). James urged readers to exercise careful self-control in speech. This would bring maturity or perfection (Jas. 3:2). As noted in these instances, perfection may connote maturity as displayed in determination and self-control.

The third theme relates to communion or fellowship. Communion comprises the most significant theme in New Testament perfection. In Philippians communion appears in Paul's determination to know Christ fully (Phil. 3:10-12). When ultimate celestial perfection was at last achieved, it would consist of "the true connection with Christ, the true faith in Him, the true knowledge of Him."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Greijdanus, quoted without cite by Müller, pp. 125-26.

Hebrews portrays Christ thoroughly identifying with suffering humanity. Such profound communion by incarnation qualified Him to serve as the perfected mediator (Heb. 2:10, 14,17; 5:8-9). On the basis of Christ's mediation, man can receive a perfect or cleansed conscience (Heb. 9:9,14). He may then "draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith," and enter God's presence (Heb. 10:21). This "confidence to enter the holy place" (Heb. 10:19) denotes the stunning privilege offered to man: intimate communion with his Creator. In Hebrews the concept of perfection for man resembles justification and forms the basis of divine fellowship.

James' reference to faith perfected by works suggests "unity with an essential counterpart" as a connotation of "perfect" (Jas. 2:22). Although this unity does not involve persons, it nevertheless supports the concept of communion among parties related in perfection.

The fourth key selection, Matthew 5:48, also stresses communion in perfection. The feature which distinguished God's perfection was His unqualified kindness toward mankind. Christ's followers likewise were to relate to fellow-men with unqualified kindness. This sort of communion with men would enable them to share communion in relation to God as sons.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰As noted earlier, perfection closely parallels the indwelling of Christ's adequacy in II Cor. 12:9. The concept of indwelling also suggests communion (cf. John 17:23).

The three themes of perfection emerging from New Testament study intertwine to form a cohesive whole. The remainder of the chapter will consider the inter-relationship of these themes under the spectrum of perfection.

The element of divine standards focuses on God's transcendence in the divine-human relationship. Divine character cannot be compromised if there is to be genuine repair of the cosmic fracture caused by man's sinful alienation. Recognition of the divine standard confesses what Kierkegaard described as the infinite qualitative distinction separating God and man. Also, this initial facet of perfection identifies as divine the source and quality of regenerated man's adequacy, whether in purity (Heb. 13:14) or power (II Cor. 12:9). The divine standard forms the qualification of character to be achieved in man. Holiness and love may be isolated as specific reference points in the qualification.

Maturity describes man's inclination toward the divine standard. When confronted by the standard involved in perfection, man may respond with ambivalence, disdain, or with a determined singularity of intent to pursue the qualification set by God. The degree to which a man marshals his conduct in pursuit of the qualification signifies the extent to which he displays maturity pertaining to perfection. Man admittedly is powerless to reach perfection conclusively. Yet he does hold certain reins of goal-selection. He is responsible to manage these reins in a course resolutely tending toward the divine standard. Maturity represents man's volitional

determination to cooperate in the synergistic achievement of a divine standard.

Communion or fellowship between God and man forms the goal of perfection. God schemed restoration of the sin-fracture to produce fellowship. He traversed the desolate wastelands of human ruin to place man once again in proper relation to Him. Unimpaired communion in the vocabulary of love characterizes the repaired bond between Creator and creature. Communion is thus the goal of perfection, comprised of restored intimacy between God and man made possible as man in mature determination synergistically satisfies the qualification set by the divine standard of God's character.

The study of perfection to this point has emphasized the theoretical nature of the concept as outlined in Scripture. Yet simply to state the theoretical nature only partially answers the original confusion surrounding Biblical perfection. One must also be able to examine its attainability. The following chapter forms a response to the question of attainability.

CHAPTER 4

THE ATTAINABILITY OF BIBLICAL PERFECTION

The nature of perfection assumes new clarity when examined in the Scriptures. Yet the question persists: Is Biblical perfection humanly attainable? The purpose of this section is to examine two individuals to determine whether they match the elements of perfection assembled from Old and New Testament study. Those elements consist of divine standards, maturity, devotion, and communion (including the "presence of God" concept). Maturity and devotion should be clarified to avoid confusion: maturity involves personal integrity or discipline and an advanced comprehension of spiritual instruction; devotion refers to submission or loyalty, especially during persecution.

One character has been selected from the Old Testament and one from the New. Daniel was selected because of his singular leadership, and because numerous episodes describe his character in a compact section of the Old Testament. The second individual, Paul, was selected because of his impact in the early church, and because of the excellent New Testament description of his character. In each case, biographical data will be restricted to that included in the Biblical record.

DANIEL

The exile, Daniel, will be considered first. The following paragraphs seek to determine from the Biblical record

whether Daniel displayed perfection as described by the contextual studies of the Old and New Testaments. Although the available material pertaining to Daniel is brief, his experiences bring an uncommon impact because of his exile setting. The Babylonian court was not conducive to serving the God of Israel.

Divine Standards

The divine standards facet of perfection includes ideal perfection found only in the character of God. Thus, there are no references to Daniel achieving a divine character. Lack of this sort of perfection is proper.

Divine standards also involve abilities in humans which evidence divine origin, although they do not measure up to the fullness of those same traits found in God. The perfection of love in Matthew 5:43-48 and power in II Corinthians 12:9 are illustrative. In this connection, Daniel confessed that his portion of wisdom and insight derived thoroughly from a divine source (2:28,30).¹⁵¹

Maturity

Daniel displayed perfection involving maturity in two areas. When scheming commissioners and satraps tried diligently to find cause for demoting the alien, they "could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him" (4:4). Daniel's record of conduct before his

¹⁵¹Cf. the humility of Ps. 18:32.

peers was flawless. Not even a technicality could be brought against him. This high degree of personal integrity underscores the maturity evidenced in Daniel in his professional responsibilities.

Discipline in the spiritual realm also demonstrates maturity. Daniel showed maturity of discipline when, despite a three-week resistance, he continued to pray in deep earnest (10:3). One may also note spiritual maturity in his effectual intercession (cf. 9:4 ff.).

Devotion

Daniel displayed devotion both toward men and God. When Daniel disclosed to Nebuchadnezzar the dream of the great statue he carefully stated that his purpose was to serve the king, not to exalt himself (2:30). His attitude showed an integrity of loyalty, not division between service and self-aggrandizement. Years later he stood before the same king to interpret another dream. When he perceived that the dream prophesied decline for Nebuchadnezzar he protested, "My lord, if only the dream applied to those who hate you, and its interpretation to your adversaries" (4:19). Perhaps Daniel used flattery to avoid reprisal for bringing a dismal interpretation. Yet his unstinting honesty diminishes the probability of flattery. Daniel's sincere submission to his ruler caused him to desire his prosperity rather than demise.

Devotion to God appears in two situations. Soon after he and his companions arrived at Babylon they were prescribed

a royal diet. To eat these meals was to become defiled. Daniel resolved to honor God (1:8). He would have sacrificed advancement and perhaps his life (cf. 1:10) to maintain devotion to God.

Daniel's devotion to God stood the test of certain death as his Chaldean peers conspired against him. Despite a royal edict he continued his discipline of prayer, "kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously" (6:10). Even King Darius acknowledged his counselor's devoted service to God (6:20). These episodes demonstrate Daniel's pattern of integrity in devotion.

Communion

Daniel's frequent prayers form the primary evidence of his close communion with God. When Nebuchadnezzar determined to execute all the wise men of Babylon, Daniel and his companions took recourse to prayer (2:18). Nor was this a futile alternative. Soon God disclosed the king's dream with its interpretation. Daniel gained prestige as well as safety. As noted above, the Hebrew prayed on a regular schedule, even when there were no great problems (6:10). In the same passage, he determined to continue praying at the expense of his life. Chapter 9 includes an extended prayer showing Daniel's depth of intercession. He displayed confidence to approach God with an urgent request for mercy.¹⁵²

¹⁵²Cf. pp. 51-52 and 74 regarding perfection as a basis of confidence before God.

Revelations and visions form a secondary evidence to Daniel's intimacy with God.¹⁵³ Extensive sections in chapters 7, 8, and 10-12 tell of Daniel talking with angels, and receiving visions and interpretations. In 7:9 he recorded seeing the Ancient of Days. These experiences underscore Daniel's intimacy in God's counsel.

Data from the life of Daniel shows that he demonstrated perfection suggested in each of the four facets. Daniel attained Biblical perfection. Information from the life of Paul will be examined for the New Testament counterpart of Daniel.

PAUL

Perfection in the Apostle Paul will be examined by the same criteria used in Daniel's case. Evidence for this configuration of perfection appears in the broad scope of Paul's writing and in the book of Acts. The criterion of divine standards will be considered first.

Divine Standards

Paul indicated that his ministry demonstrated standards of effectiveness only attributable to divine enablement. On one occasion he wrote, "We have this treasure [the Gospel of Jesus Christ] in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness

¹⁵³Further evidence may be found in Gabriel's report that the exile was "highly esteemed" before God (9:23; cf. 10:11). Such a high compliment implies close communion with God.

of the power may be of God and not from ourselves" (II Cor. 4:7). God's power appeared in stark relief alongside Paul's admitted personal weakness (II Cor. 12:9-10). The following statements show how clearly the apostle relied on divine enablement: "Our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant" (II Cor. 3:5b-6a);

My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God (I Cor. 2:4-5).

As noted in the study of Daniel, divine standards cannot reasonably be normative for the extent of human ability, but only for the source or quality. The examples stated above demonstrate that Paul's power in personal life and ministry stemmed from a divine source, and thus met divine standards.

Maturity:

Maturity in Paul's life appears in his ability to teach the doctrine of Christ and in his singular focus in following God. At the outset of his missionary activity he was grouped with prophets and teachers at Syrian Antioch (Acts 13:1). In Thessalonica Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence" (Acts 17:2b-3a). He reasoned, persuaded, preached, and taught while in Ephesus and Rome (Acts 19:8-9 and 28:31, respectively). He expressed to the Philipppians his singularity of focus in following God:

I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus . . .

forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12b-14).

Maturity evidenced by these excerpts coupled with resolute devotion further demonstrates perfection.

Devotion

Paul's devotion appears primarily in his faithfulness to serve Christ despite persecution. Whether harassed at Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Philippi, Jerusalem, or Rome, the apostle served his Lord resolutely (cf. Acts 13-14, 16, 21-23, 28). Imprisonment, hunger, whippings, and shipwrecks could not dissuade him (cf. II Cor. 6:4-5; 11:23-28). His own life illustrated his advice to behave in "undistracted devotion to the Lord" (I Cor. 7:35). Even his title depicted devotion: "bond-servant" (cf. Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1). The devotion involved in perfection was faithfully demonstrated by Paul.

Communion

Paul's communion with God appears in his practice of prayer and in the visions he received. One of the first descriptions of the converted Saul was, "Behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11). A few years later he joined leaders of the church at Antioch in concerted prayer and fasting (Acts 13:1). Prayer and praise formed the best recourse for Paul and Silas when consigned to a Philippian jail (Acts 16:25).

Visions from God also suggest a strong link of divine

communion. While Paul was in Corinth the Lord spoke to him in a vision, encouraging him to speak boldly (Acts 18:9-10). The Lord "stood at his side" on the night following the Sanhedrin hearing and strengthened him with the promise of audience at Rome also (Acts 23:11). Paul received supernatural messages on two other occasions as well, although God's voice or person was not directly apparent. When deliberating about God's direction at Troas, Paul received a dream guiding him to sail for Macedonia (Acts 16:9). Later an angel appeared to him promising safety during the heavy storm at sea (Acts 27:23-24). In Colossians Paul refers twice to the impact of revelation as it influenced his understanding of the Gospel (Col. 1:12) and caused him to visit Jerusalem (Col. 2:2).¹⁵⁴

Paul was committed to expanding his bond of fellowship with Christ. He confirmed his determination with this life motto: "That I may know Him" (Phil. 3:10).

Paul, like Daniel, demonstrated perfection according to the four criteria which emerged from Biblical study. The attainability of Biblical perfection is thus sustained. A theological synthesis of Biblical perfection will be discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁵⁴Paul's vision on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3-6) and the vision while blind in Damascus (Acts 9:12) have been omitted since they occurred so early in his relationship with Christ. Early reference to prayer (Acts 9:11) may be discounted for the same reason, except that prayer (unlike visions) involves an act of the will. When appearing soon after one's conversion, prayer gives stronger evidence to communion than do visions.

CHAPTER 5

A THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

Any adequate theology demands sound understanding of the Biblical concept of perfection. Sheer weight of usage in Scripture requires that attention be given to this topic. In the Old Testament alone, Turner observes:

Of the more than 1,000 occurrences of synonyms denoting some phase of perfection, at least 80 refer to man's character. God's ideals for man, as reflected in synonyms for perfection, are too prominent in the Old Testament to be ignored.¹⁵⁵

Perfection deserves careful study because of the "wistful desire" evoked by it in "orthodox and sectarian alike."¹⁵⁶

Man's innate desire to achieve the ideal stirs a longing to understand what constitutes ideal existence, and what is the expectation to which he may aspire.

This chapter will attempt to coalesce the analysis of perfection in earlier chapters. Unlike prior chapters, this section will give greater emphasis to the views of various theologians. The synthesis will pursue the nature and attainability of the Biblical ideal.

¹⁵⁵Turner, The Vision Which Transforms, p. 51.

¹⁵⁶Fredric Platt, "Perfection (Christian)," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, Vol. IX (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 728.

THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL PERFECTION

Four facets comprise the nature of Biblical perfection: it derives from divine standards, it forges a mandate for maturity, it demands devotion, and it facilitates communion. Some would include glorifying God as a further facet of perfection, since it represents man's ultimate goal.¹⁵⁷

Perfection Derives From Divine Standards

The character of God forms the standard for perfection. He serves as author and judge of perfection. Thus for man "the prelude to perfection is [his] vision of God."¹⁵⁸ Man's perfection may satisfy divine standards of quality as it derives from God. Yet, because of God's transcendence, man may never profess the extent or quantity of perfection present in the divine. The extent of man's perfection is therefore relative in nature. Turner comments regarding those in the Old Testament described as perfect:

Their perfection is wholly derivative from the God of Israel; man has no intrinsic merit to make himself righteous. Those relatively righteous or "perfect" are so only as a result of divine grace, not of their own merit or achievement. Perfection therefore, so far as man is concerned, is not a concept which denotes completeness, absoluteness, or flawlessness.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷"The glory of God is the end and purpose of all creation," Roy and Aumann, p. 23; cf. Andrew Murray's definition of "true religion": "the whole heart, the whole will, the whole life given up to the glory and service of God," Murray, p. 26.

¹⁵⁸Metz, p. 21.

¹⁵⁹Turner, The Vision Which Transforms, p. 50.

Man demonstrates perfection deriving from divine standards as he consistently depends on the purity and power which spring from God.

Perfection Forges a Mandate for Maturity

Maturity forms an integral component of Biblical perfection. It suggests a natural process which eventually reaches a predetermined level of development and persists in further development or maturity beyond that goal. The Bible establishes a mandate for maturity as it sets perfection as the goal of Christian development. As stated by a Roman Catholic theologian, "A thing is said to be perfect when it has all the being, all the reality which is due it according to its nature."¹⁶⁰ For the audiences of Hebrews and Philippians, perfection connoted maturity with its ingredients of integrity, discipline, and spiritual comprehension. These traits form the level of development necessary for those who would be perfect.

Perfection Demands Devotion

Devotion emerged as an attitudinal aspect of perfection in the Old Testament study. In his discussion of perfection, Murray appeals for the "enthusiastic devotion of the whole heart to God."¹⁶¹ As Turner remarks, "Perfection involves motive as much or more than performance."¹⁶² Devotion appears as submission or persistent loyalty during adverse circumstances.

¹⁶⁰ Royo and Aumann, p. 121.

¹⁶¹ Murray, p. 26.

¹⁶² Turner, The Vision Which Transforms, p. 46, underscoring original.

Devotion during distress is involved in one of eight principles of perfection assembled by Flew in The Idea of Perfection.

When Flew refers to "the dying out of the temporal realm into the eternal" as a principle of perfection, he implies the recognition that through ardent devotion even "the Cross is an integral element in the ideal life in this world."¹⁶³ Even common agonies of earthly life may stimulate spiritual progress "if accepted as media of our communion with God."¹⁶⁴ Biblical perfection demands the ingredient of such devotion.

Perfection Sanctions Communion

Flew borrows the title, "The Cult of the Passing Moment," to describe another principle of perfection.¹⁶⁵ For Flew this resembles Brother Lawrence's continual "practice of the presence of God." Roy links perfection closely with awareness of God:

The one necessarily flows from the other, for if a person is convinced that God sees him, he will endeavor to avoid the slightest sin or imperfection and will strive to be as recollected as possible in God's presence. If properly used, this spiritual practice will keep the soul in a spirit of prayer and will lead it to contemplation and intimate union with God.¹⁶⁶

God's presence provides the academy instructing man

¹⁶³Flew, p. 413.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Flew, p. 406, from Arthur Chandler, The Cult of the Passing Moment (Methuen, 1914).

¹⁶⁶Roy and Aumann, p. 565.

in perfection.¹⁶⁷ Yet it also constitutes the goal of all development in perfection. Hebrews exuberantly announces that because of perfection in Christ, man may now approach the presence of God with boldness (Heb. 10). Paul's search for confidence before God led him to discard past achievements in favor of pursuing the intimate knowledge of Christ (Phil. 3). God's eternal objective for man is restoration of communion with Him. Turner observes, "The Bible is concerned, not so much with the production of a perfect man, but the union of that man with the perfection of God."¹⁶⁸ Peter Forsyth declares:

God, though He wills that we be perfect, has not appointed sinlessness as His object with us in this world. His object is communion with us through faith We do not need God chiefly as means to our holiness. But we need God for Himself. . . . He does not offer us communion to make us holy; He makes us holy for the sake of communion.¹⁶⁹

One may infer from John Wesley's interpretation of perfection that love forms the language of this communion:

They that love God with all their heart and all men as themselves are scripturally perfect. And such there surely are; otherwise the promise of God would be a mere mockery of human weakness.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷Murray, p. 23.

¹⁶⁸Turner, The Vision Which Transforms, p. 51.

¹⁶⁹Peter Forsyth, Christian Perfection (1899), quoted by Flew, p. xiii.

¹⁷⁰John Wesley, The Letters, IV, ed. John Telford (London, 1931), p. 208. quoted by Harald Lindström, Wesley and Sanctification: A study in the Doctrine of Salvation (London: The Epworth Press, [n.d.]), pp. 151-52; cf. Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, p. 14.

Perfection marks the sanction of an exquisite communion between God and man. However, unless the perfection described in the preceding four facets can be attained, it remains an elusive dream, "a mere mockery of human weakness."

THE ATTAINABILITY OF BIBLICAL PERFECTION

The Biblical discussion of perfection does not conclude with material perfection. Nor does it limit itself to remote generalities when discussing figurative perfection. Boldly, it awards to certain men the ascription "perfect." Turner clarifies such ascriptions in the Old Testament by stating:

A man described as "perfect" is one who is outstanding for his loyalty, goodness, sincerity, righteousness, and love, like God in these moral and ethical qualities.¹⁷¹

Concerning New Testament usage he posits, "The command presupposed the possibility of compliance."¹⁷² He continues:

This is not an absolute perfection, but a relative one--man can become well-pleasing to God as a man. A life is possible in which, by the grace of God, sin is no longer operative and every action is in harmony with the law of love.¹⁷³

Turner is not alone in his assessment of Biblical perfection, as indicated by J. I. Packer's comments:

The Bible nowhere relates the idea of perfection directly to law, nor equates it directly with

¹⁷¹Turner, The Vision Which Transforms, p. 51.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 137, regarding Matt. 5:48.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 159.

sinlessness. . . . The present perfection which, according to Scripture, some Christians attain is a matter not of sinlessness, but of strong faith, joyful patience, and overflowing love.¹⁷⁴

The earlier study of Philippians 3 noted that the experience of perfection for Paul could only be viewed as interminable during this life (cf. p. 55). Wesley echoes this concept of dynamic perfection with the statement, "There is no perfection which does not admit of a continual increase."¹⁷⁵ Flew appropriately reflects this in his third principle of perfection: "No limits can be set to the moral or spiritual attainments of a Christian in the present life."¹⁷⁶

The examination of Daniel and Paul according to the four-fold concept of Biblical perfection strongly endorses the attainability of the ideal in the present life. Yet it must be qualified as Flew concludes:

Our religion offers an ideal that is realizable in time, and to beings of flesh and blood, on the condition that the full ideal for human beings is never to be regarded as attained in the limits of this earthly life. It is an ideal resting on the grace and the promises of God, a God whose command of holiness is mocked if men regard themselves as for ever [sic] destined to moral frustration and defeat in their present battle.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴J. I. Packer, "Perfection," The New Bible Dictionary, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 967.

¹⁷⁵Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶Flew, p. 402. He further notes a personal sense of unworthiness as a concomitant of perfection, pp. 408ff.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 415-16.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Vague expectations form a chief cause of debilitating frustration among subordinates. When a subordinate is ignorant of standards used to evaluate him, he is likely to sense considerable anxiety. Also, he may develop incorrect assumptions of expectations governing his role, impairing effectiveness because of anxiety over failure to meet self-imposed standards.

Dim notions regarding God's ideal may easily lead to the same whirlpool of despair. The purpose of this study has been to clarify God's intended ideal for the Christian. By placing primary emphasis on direct analysis of Scripture passages, rather than on historical doctrines of Christian perfection, the writer has attempted to detect first-hand the nature of Biblical perfection. The four emerging themes of divine standards, maturity, devotion, and communion formed an evaluation grid to test the attainment of perfection for two individuals in the Bible. As a consequence of this study the writer is left with the inescapable conclusion that Biblical perfection represents the expectation for Christians as ordained by God, dynamically achievable in this life, and constituting the preeminent character of eternity.

An examination of the Biblical doctrine of perfection, as in this study, leads to the recognition of two imperatives. First, Biblical perfection should describe the believer's personal commitment. As he permits his life to be governed by divine standards, he is enabled by divine adequacy. Exercising discipline, integrity, and attending to spiritual instruction, he achieves perfection's mandate for maturity. Accepting the demand for devotion, he willfully submits to God, and maintains a determined loyalty despite adversity. And, he welcomes and revels in the communion with God sanctioned by perfection. The incomprehensible honor of boldness in God's presence dwarfs any adversity one may encounter.

Second, Biblical perfection should be proclaimed boldly. The sublime intricacies of God's provision and the expectation of comprehensive devotion on man's part must inform men's minds and transform men's wills. When personal commitment links with bold proclamation, the opacity of Biblical perfection will be transfigured into a crystal doctrine which will engender hope and erect a span of intimate communion across the chasm separating God and man.

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