

## 74 "Be ye therefore perfect ..."

I wonder how you react to the Lord's instruction to His followers to "be perfect" (Matthew 5.48)? Our first reaction is likely to be, "Oh dear, I'm far from that - there's not much hope for me as far as perfection is concerned".

And such a reaction is quite correct, and quite normal! - for of course none of us, apart from the Lord Jesus Himself, is "perfect", if "perfect" in this context is all about our losing our sinfulness.

This is one of those cases where a little delving into a good Concordance can be helpful. In there, we find that the Greek word being translated here in English as "perfect" is "teleos". Now true enough, "teleos", in part, is about perfection, that is spotlessness, but its fuller meaning is something slightly different, which happens to be a great deal more encouraging for us!

One or two "teleos" references in Hebrews will serve to clarify this (using the NIV). In Hebrews 2.10 we read - "... it was fitting that God ... should make the author of their salvation (that is, Jesus) *perfect* through suffering". And again, in Hebrews 5.9 - "Although he (that is, Jesus) was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and, *once made perfect*, he became the source of salvation for all who obey him ....".

In both these texts, we gather that Jesus *became* "perfect", in His case via the route of suffering. So this shows that the perfection described by "teleos" can have nothing to do with sin as far as Jesus is concerned (for Jesus, uniquely, is sinless, eg Hebrews 4.15 / John 8.46 / II Corinthians 5.21), and only partly to do with sin as far as the rest of us are concerned.

We see from these two sample references that the essence of "teleos" is not quite "spotless perfection" as such, but rather *completeness, finished-ness, arrival*.

Once we get hold of that, we see more clearly what the Lord is telling us whenever this word "teleos" crops up.

Jesus Himself did therefore move from a state of *incompleteness* to a stage of *completeness* (as in Hebrews 2.10 and 5.9), and that journey was achieved in the Lord's case via a path of suffering. It was *after* He had suffered, that the Lord reached that state of "teleos" Himself - the state of His full, finished *completeness* as Himself, for it was at that moment that His obedience to His heavenly Father reached its full, final expression. We can see how His great cry of relief and victory, "It is FINISHED" (John 19.30), is a beautiful expression of the "teleos" of that moment.

We realise that in Jesus' case, His journey towards "teleos" had nothing to do with a move from sinfulness to sinlessness, for He was sinless in the first place. Yet His life, because of His humanity, still involved some change, some growing, some learning, some maturing - until "teleos" was reached.

But in our case we are members of fallen, sinful humanity, and for us, a wonderful "double teleos" applies!

First, in terms of our sins and salvation and forgiveness, the wonder is that all those who place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord are *already "perfect" in God's sight*, that is, forgiven, redeemed, complete, counted as righteous and as having "arrived"; in other words, as being, right now, in a state of what we can call "*salvation teleos*", which is wholly God-given and through no merit of our own (eg Ephesians 2.5-9 / Romans 5.1 / Romans 10.9 / John 3.16-18 / and others). We praise the Lord indeed!

Secondly comes the journeying part of "teleos". This journey involves our patiently practising the old truths - of our "abiding in Christ" (John 15), of our offering our "bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12), of our "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12), of our "pressing on towards the goal" (Philippians 3). These are but a few descriptions of the spiritual process in which we are all involved - the gradual change in our lives from "short-of-teleos" to "*character teleos*" itself. Just look again at that wonderful prayer of Paul for the Ephesians (Ephesians 3.14-19) for a flavour of what this part of "teleos is all about"!

So let us be of very good cheer! The Lord *accepts* us as we are, freely granting us "salvation teleos" right at the start, by our simple faith in Christ as Lord. He then sets to work: He *expects* us to move towards "character teleos", which involves our wills and efforts, and His gracious help through the Holy Spirit.

And at journey's end, when each of us can give our own tiny cry "It is finished", the Lord will be waiting to receive us, with those simple, precious words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant".

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