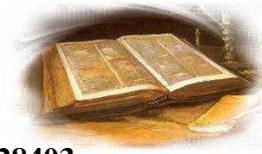


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The Word "Perfect" in the New Testament - by Jimmy

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There is a certain ambiguity attached to the English word "perfect," particularly as it appears in various passages of the New Testament in the King James Version. Most people look upon the word as referring to sinlessness. The disciple of the Lord should indeed be perfect, but not in the sense that some of the sects use the word in their teaching and preaching. The most satisfactory way to establish the meaning of the word as it is found in the New Testament, is to inquire into the usage of the Greek word from which it is translated. The most frequent words translated "perfect," are the Greek words *telefos* (adjective form), and *teleloo* (verb form).

The Englishman's Greek Concordance reveals the fact that *telefos* is translated "perfect," one time it is translated "men" (**1 Cor. 14:20**), and in at least one instance it is translated "of full age" (**Heb. 5:14**). The verb form (*teleloo*) is translated "had fulfilled" (**Lk.**

2:43; Jno. 19:28), "perfected" (**Heb. 10:14**), "finished" (**Jno. 14:4**), and several times "made perfect." Space will not allow our looking into the synonymous terms in the Greek.

Vine tells us that these two Greek words mean "Having reached its end, finished, complete, perfect." Thayer's Lexicon of The Greek New Testament gives the following meanings: brought to its end, wanting nothing necessary to completeness; when used of men it means full-grown, adult, of full age, mature. Arndt and Gingrich follow this definition in their Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament. The word is used of persons and things.

"Perfect" With Reference To Persons

When used of persons the word perfect simply means attaining the full limits of stature, strength, and mental power within their reach. It conveys the idea of full; completed growth as contrasted with childhood. In **Heb. 5:14**, the writer

says, "but strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age" (emphasis mine, JTT). The New American Standard Bible translates it, "but solid food is the mature." It is obvious that *telefos*, translated "of full age," is in contrast to the word "babe" **verse 13**. The idea behind "babe" is that of immaturity, being untaught, or unskilled and is so defined by the expression, "is unskillful in the word of righteousness" (**Heb. 5:13**). Those spoken of as being "of full age" (or, perfect) are those who are spiritually mature.

In **Eph. 4:13-14** the contrast between the perfect man and the spiritually immature is made clear: "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children." The "perfect man" of this text is the one who has attained "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." He has completed his growth (that for which he was intended), namely to be a man in Christ. Having reached this goal, there are higher ends to be reached, for one is to always "study to show thyself approved of God" (**2 Tim. 2:15**). This is precisely what Paul had in mind when he said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and

reaching forth unto those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press onward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: . . ." (**Phil. 3:13-15**). In **Phil. 3:12**, Paul said he was not yet perfect, and in the text quoted above he admonishes those who have attained perfection to be thus minded. There is no contradiction! He is simply saying that he has not reached the place where further advances are not needed. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (**1 Cor. 10:12**). When one reaches maturity there is still room for advances.

In connection with the foregoing remarks, one should have no problem understanding that the Christian can be perfect without being sinless (**1 Jno. 1:6-8**). They must strive for spiritual maturity, for to this end is the prayer of our Lord uttered: "that they may be perfect in one."

"Perfect" With Reference To Things

Just as the word "perfect" is used with reference to persons, so it is applied to things in the New Testament:

(1) In **Jas. 1:4** we are told to "let patience have her perfect work." Patience means "abide under," and

in this instance, under trials (V. 3). This perfects the character of the Christian in that it causes one to want nothing to completeness. One should keep in mind that fellowship with Christ involves fellowship in His patience and this is one of the conditions upon which they will reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). For this the Christian is strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man (Col. 1:11; Eph. 3:16).

(2) The Word of God is called the "perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25). This law of liberty wants nothing to completeness. Hence, the Christian is told to "speak ye, and so do, as they that be judged by the law of liberty" (Jas. 2:12).

(3) The love of God is said to be perfected. This takes place in "whoso keepeth his word" (1 Jno. 2:5). If we love one another, "his love is perfected in us" (1 Jno. 4:12). In these Scriptures, along with that of 1 Jno. 4:16, love for one another assures God's presence and causes the Christian's love to be perfected (1 Jno. 4:17).

(4) Faith that works is described as a faith made perfect (Jas. 2:22). The context is talking about Abraham who made his faith perfect in the sense that he made it complete in good works, i.e., submission to God. Abraham's obedience consisted in preparing to sacrifice his son Isaac, hence, in

submitting to God's will. In this way it was made complete. When we submit to God's will, our faith can be made perfect in the same sense. We then become the children of God by faith (Gal. 3:26-27).

(5) Another interesting passage in this respect is Heb. 9:9, "which is the figure for the time present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience." The conscience is spoken of as being perfect. What does this mean? It simply refers to the inability of the typical sacrifices themselves to bring the believer's conscience to a state of completeness. The blood of goats and calves could not remove the sins of the people, and the very fact of the constant repetition of the sacrifices showed him that sin had not yet been actually paid for (Heb. 9:12-14). The blood of Christ purges the conscience, thus the obedient believers today have that complete sense of forgiveness which was lacking under the Old Testament (Heb. 10:14). Their appeal to God for a clear conscience is fulfilled and made perfect.

There are many other things in the New Testament that are referred to as being "perfect." Space will not permit our covering all of these occurrences.

In Conclusion

The brief study before us should help us to better understand the use of the word "perfect" in the New Testament. "Be ye therefore perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The faithful child of God shall be "perfect" in that he will aim by the grace of God to be furnished and firmly established in the knowledge and practice of the things of God (Jas. 3:2; Col. 4:12). But merely having the presence of all the parts necessary to completeness is not enough. The Christian must adapt these parts for the ends which they were designed to serve. He is therefore furnished (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and accomplished for the carrying out of the work to which he is appointed. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:11-12). Let those who would be thus minded strive for perfection. — Via Truth Magazine, XX:1, p. 9-10 January 1, 1976

HEAVEN & HOW TO GO THERE REV. 21:10-25

WHAT I THINK	BE FAITHFUL - REV. 2:10	A	BEING FAITHFUL
JER. 10:23 - PROV. 14:12 - ISA. 55:8,9	GO TO PERFECTION - HEB. 6:1	M	STRIVING FOR PERF.
	BE STEADFAST - 1 COR. 15:58	O	BEING STEADFAST
FOOL TRUSTS IN HEART - PR. 28:26	ADD TO FAITH - 2 PET. 1:5:11	S	ADDING TO FAITH
NO CONFID. IN FLESH - PHIL. 3:3	BE BAPTIZED - ACTS 2:38		BEEN BAPTIZED
HEED THE SPIRIT - JO. 14:26:16:13	CONFESS - ROM. 10:9,10		CONFESSED
LAW OF SPIRIT FREES - ROM. 8:2	REPENT - ACTS 17:30	3:3	REPENTED
WITNESS OF SPIRIT - ROM. 8:16:17	BELIEVE - JO. 20:30,31		BELIEVED
	HEAR - MT. 17:5		HEARD