

The Exhortation to Participate in the Fulfillment of the Eternal Will of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Corporate Perfection of Redeemed Humanity

by John Pester

The Epistle to the Hebrews is often regarded as complex in both its structure and content. The focus of this Epistle, however, is revealed in a simple proclamation from the Son: “Then I said, Behold, I have come (in the roll of the book it is written concerning Me) to do Your will, O God” (10:7). Concerned, perhaps, that the import of these words might be missed by the Hebrew believers, whose hearts had been hardened by disobedience to the voice of the Lord, Paul then confirms the Lord’s word, saying, “He then has said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will’” (v. 9). Thus, within the span of three verses, the implicit focus of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the fulfillment of the eternal will of God, is highlighted with words attributed to the Lord, with reference to the words in the scroll of the Old Testament, and with words spoken by an apostle of the new covenant ministry. Even though the will of God seems to be only a minor point in a later chapter of a long treatise that explicitly focuses on the superiority of Christ to angels, to Moses, and to Aaron and on the superiority of the new covenant to the old covenant, the fulfillment of the eternal will of God is the implicit focus of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Will of God in Hebrews

The exclamatory utterances related to the will of God in chapter 10 are the culmination of the preceding revelations concerning the superiority of Christ. The preceding chapters speak of the person and work of Christ in His coming as a man through incarnation and of His continuing ministry as a High Priest, which was made possible through His perfection as a man in His human living, death, and resurrection. Without His coming as a man, there would have been no sacrifice for sins and, hence, no redemption. And without His coming as a man, there would have been no High Priest according to the order of

Melchizedek in resurrection and, hence, no heavenly ministry that could continually impart the indestructible life of God into redeemed humanity.¹ With His coming, however, the reality of redemption is available to humanity, and with His coming, the reality of the corporate perfection of redeemed humanity is also possible.

The ultimate goal of the Lord’s coming through incarnation and of His ministry in resurrection is the fulfillment of God’s eternal will, which is the corporate perfection of redeemed humanity to be an enlarged expression of the Triune God. This fulfillment involves humanity and depends on humanity, first, in relation to Christ Himself as the incarnated Son and then in relation to redeemed humanity. Since the fulfillment of the eternal will of God is worked out in time, Hebrews speaks of its fulfillment both from an eternal perspective and from the perspective of the believers’ experience in time. Hebrews acknowledges the ultimate fulfillment of God’s will when it speaks of those who have been perfected forever by the one offering of Christ (10:14), but it also traces the fulfillment of God’s will from the starting point of the believers’ sanctification when, in the same verse, it speaks of “those who are being sanctified.” The corporate perfection of redeemed humanity involves sanctification, and the expression of this sanctification will be an enlarged, corporate expression of the Triune God through the church in this age, the kingdom in the next age, and the New Jerusalem in eternity. This is the will that Christ came to fulfill, and this is the will that the believers have been called to fulfill.

All the attainments and obtainments of Christ in His person and work, revealed in chapters 1 through 9, can be subsumed under the broad designation of doing the will of God in verse 7 of chapter 10. The content of chapters 11 through 13 also pertains to the fulfillment of God’s will.

Chapter 11 focuses on the way of faith as the means for the believers to participate in the corporate perfection of the people of God (v. 40). Chapter 12 describes not only the loving discipline of the Father that brings believers into a practical and experiential fulfillment of God's will by enabling them to partake of His holiness but also describes the corporate expression of this fulfillment as the city of the living God, the church of the firstborn, which is built with the spirits of righteous men made perfect (vv. 22-23). Chapter 13 concludes with a final charge for the believers to participate in works that fulfill the will of God, and it contains a final assurance that the perfection needed for our participation is being supplied through the ministry of the great Shepherd, who ministers to sheep who are obedient to His voice, which is expressed through the word of the apostle's exhortation (vv. 20-22).

The Epistle to the Hebrews, ultimately, is an exhortation to the believers to participate in the fulfillment of the eternal will of God, which is the corporate perfection of redeemed humanity. The matter of perfection runs throughout this Epistle,² beginning in 2:10 with a reference to Christ being made perfect through human sufferings and ending in 13:21 with the apostle's confirming word of Christ's intention, as the great Shepherd, to perfect the believers for the practical fulfillment of God's will in this age. The discussion of perfection in Hebrews, however, is not unique to this Epistle, because it is not an isolated or peripheral point in the divine revelation. Rather, this word concerning perfection had its beginning in being spoken by the Lord in Matthew 5:48 and John 17:23, it was confirmed in 1 Peter 5:10 by one who heard it, and it was borne witness to by Paul in Ephesians 3:2 and Romans 12:2 through a stewardship of grace that was distributed to him by the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's speaking in Matthew 5:48 reveals that perfection is not an issue of human effort; it is an issue of receiving the divine life of the Father. There is nothing in our fallen humanity that can enable us to attain to the standard of perfection spoken of by the Lord in chapters 5 through 7 of the Gospel of Matthew.³ However, our Father is perfect, and because we have been regenerated with the divine life that has the power to perfect, there is a divine capacity within redeemed and regenerated humanity to attain perfection by being joined to the One who is perfect. The Lord's prayer in John 17:23 further reveals that perfection is not an issue of individual expression; it is expressed corporately through the perfection of the believers into one, which is the oneness of the Triune God in glory. Indeed, we shall be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, and our perfection will be into one. This perfection, after we have suffered a little, will be expressed in eternal glory (v. 22; 1 Pet. 5:10), a glory that is far greater in worth in comparison to the sufferings of this present age (Rom. 8:18). These sufferings,

combined with the supply of grace from the God of all grace, will perfect us just as Jesus was perfected through sufferings. Perfection comes from God and has God as its goal; perfection is the will of God.

Paul links our corporate perfection with the will of God in Romans 12:2, saying, "Do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect." It is the believers' calling to prove the will of God, and this will is something that is good, well pleasing, and perfect. Many Christians, I think, assume that *good*, *well pleasing*, and *perfect* refer to practical items related to our human existence that we hope come under the auspices of God's will for us, such as a good job, a well-pleasing wife and family, and even perfect circumstances devoid of conflict and suffering,⁴ but this understanding does not, I suspect, reflect the understanding that is central in the mind of Paul or even one that is based on the divine revelation in the Bible. Only the Father is good (Luke 18:19), only the Son, the One in whom the Father delights, is well pleasing (Matt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22), and only the Spirit is the source of perfection (13:32; Rom. 1:4).⁵

Hence, the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God that redeemed humanity has been called to prove is nothing less than the reality of the Triune God Himself. In the context of Romans 12, this calling is not a call to prove the existence of the Triune God apologetically but rather a call to prove the existence of the Triune God experientially through a living, organic, and corporate expression of Him. This expression is the Body of Christ, the church (vv. 3-8; Eph. 1:22-23). The calling of redeemed humanity is to be a multifarious display, a proof, of the wisdom of God, which is Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God (3:10; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30). In Ephesians 3:11 Paul confirms that this display through the church is "according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Corporate Perfection of Redeemed Humanity in Hebrews

In Romans 12 the will of God is related to the corporate practice of the Body life (vv. 3-8), which is made possible by the renewing of the principal component of the soul, the mind, and in Hebrews the will of God is related to the corporate perfection of redeemed humanity that results in the corporate practice of the Body life, a practice that is made possible by the sanctification of the soul with the divine life (10:39). Sanctification produces transformation, and transformation is the expression of sanctification. A renewed mind is a sanctified mind, a mind that has been separated unto God in its thoughts and intentions, having been renewed by the sanctifying operation of the Spirit through the word that is sharper than any

two-edged sword (4:12). Whereas Romans 12:2 speaks generally of the will of God being proven through the transformation of redeemed humanity, the Epistle to the Hebrews presents the details of the divine operation that perfects redeemed humanity in order to produce a corporate expression of the Triune God, thereby proving both God and His will.

In Hebrews God's eternal purpose, His eternal will, is to have a corporate expression of Himself, which is manifested through the spirits of righteous men who have been made perfect (12:23), through sons who have been perfected through the sanctification of the Spirit, which is applied in our practical situations involving obedience and suffering (10:14), thereby building up a corporate dwelling place of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the consummation of His glorious expression as the church of the firstborn (12:22-23). All these realities are brought into being through the perfecting operation of the divine life in redeemed humanity, which cannot be separated from the Triune God and which can only reproduce the Triune God.

Consequently, Hebrews focuses on the sanctification and perfection of redeemed humanity, that is, believers who are under the influence of sin-contaminated and fear-enslaved souls that all too easily shrink back to ruin (12:1; 2:15; 10:39), who have no boldness to come forward to the throne of grace nor to enter into the Holy of Holies (4:16; 10:19), who have heard the good news but have no capacity to mix what has been heard with faith, and who, as a consequence, come short of the promised rest (4:1-2). With eyes on themselves and their own condition, such believers misinterpret the discipline of the Father and turn away from participating in the fulfillment of God's will (12:5-11, 25), being hindered in a corporate walk by paralyzed knees (v. 12). Hence, there is a need to remind them of the exhortation that reasons with us as sons, an exhortation that has been forgotten and needs to be recovered (v. 5).

The Exhortation in Hebrews

When Hebrews is viewed as an extended exhortation to participate in the fulfillment of the will of God, many of the seemingly disparate elements in Hebrews begin to coalesce into a cohesive revelation. These elements include the purpose, focus, and intended audience of the five warnings, the emphasis on obedience and faith, the discussion of discipline, and the practical points in the final chapter.

Conveyed through Warnings

The exhortation to participate in the fulfillment of God's will is conveyed through five warnings that speak of both positive and negative consequences (2:1-4; 3:7—4:13;

5:11—6:20; 10:19-39; 12:1-29). In the first warning there is positive encouragement to enjoy the great salvation that Christ has accomplished, but the possibility of receiving a just recompense for neglecting this salvation is also presented (2:2-3). In the second warning there is positive encouragement to be partners of Christ in the fulfillment of God's will, but the possibility of testing, displeasing, and provoking God with disobedience and unbelief to the point of being denied an entrance into the rest of His millennial kingdom is also presented (3:14, 16-19). In the third warning there is positive encouragement to become full-grown by heeding the word of righteousness, to inherit God's promise of corporate multiplication, and to live with an anchored soul within the veil (5:13-14; 6:12-14, 19), but the possibility of not being brought on to maturity, of being disapproved to participate in the kingdom during the coming millennial age, and of being near a curse is also presented (vv. 1, 5, 8). In the fourth warning there is positive encouragement to enter into the Holy of Holies with boldness in the blood of Jesus, to have a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, to assemble corporately, to be a

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spectacle both in reproaches and in afflictions with partakers who are being treated the same, and, ultimately, to gain in this age a transformed soul, which can be fully enjoyed in the coming millennial kingdom (10:19, 22, 25, 33, 39). But when the Coming One comes as a vengeful and judging God, the possibility of a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fervor of fire for failing to participate with endurance in the fulfillment of His promise, by one who tramples underfoot the Son of God, treats the blood of the covenant as a common thing, and insults the Spirit of grace, is also presented (vv. 37, 30, 27, 29). In the fifth and final warning there is positive encouragement to run the race by looking away unto Jesus, to accept the loving discipline of the Father as sons so that we might partake of His holiness and enjoy the peaceable fruit of righteousness, to come forward to Mount Zion as overcomers in the millennial kingdom, which is the precursor to the enjoyment of all believers as the heavenly Jerusalem—the city of the living God, the church of the firstborn—for eternity, and to receive an unshakable kingdom (12:1-2, 5-11, 22-23, 28). But the possibility of falling away from the grace of God, of forfeiting the

birthright of participating in the blessings of the millennial kingdom as a mature son, blessings which cannot be regained even through repentance, and of not escaping from the One whose voice will shake the earth and the heavens is also presented (vv. 15-17, 25-26).

Focused on the Kingdom

The focal point of these five warnings is the millennial kingdom, which will be a corporate display of the fulfillment of the will of God for a thousand years, comprised of the perfected part of the people of God, that is, those who have been perfected through their participation in the sanctifying operation of the Spirit. Positively, the millennial kingdom is obtained by giving heed to the word that we have heard concerning the so great a salvation that has been accomplished, which brings us into the experience of this salvation by operating on the thoughts and intentions of our heart. When the word in our heart is mixed with faith in our spirit, there is profit through the gaining of the soul, which qualifies the believers, who have been matured by coming forward to the Holy of Holies and by running the race with endurance, to enter into the rest of the coming millennial kingdom (2:1-3; 4:12, 2; 10:39; 6:1; 10:19; 12:1; 4:1). Negatively, the millennial kingdom, as a corporate display of rest in and enjoyment of God, will be withheld as a just recompense to those who have neglected the so great a salvation that has been made available to redeemed humanity. This neglect deprives these believers of growth and maturity in the divine life, stirs up the displeasure and wrath of God, and strands them in a state of infancy with an unanchored soul, a heart hardened to the voice of the Lord, and paralyzed knees. Without a supply of the divine life, these believers have no capacity to run the race toward the goal of God's corporate perfection through the sanctification of their redeemed humanity, leaving the Lord with no recourse but to righteously withhold His presence from them in the coming kingdom (6:1; 3:10-11; 5:13; 12:12, 14).

Spoken to Redeemed Humanity

When the millennial kingdom is seen as the focal point of the warnings in Hebrews, including their particular emphasis on growth and maturity in the divine life through the sanctification of the soul, it is not difficult to see that believers, not unbelievers, are the intended audience for these warnings. Despite the fact that many interpreters apply the hard verses in these warnings to unbelievers (6:4-6, 8; 10:26-27, 39; 12:15), the focused emphasis on sanctification in these warnings argues against this. God's operation of sanctification is centered on the transformation of the soul, and such an operation can occur only within redeemed and regenerated humanity. The application of redemption and the regeneration of the human spirit precede the sanctification and transformation of the soul.

God cannot righteously sanctify those who have not been redeemed and regenerated. Alternately stated, an untransformed soul cannot be divided from an unregenerated human spirit. When Hebrews speaks of redemption, it does so for the purpose of establishing a predicate for its exhortation to redeemed believers to participate in the second step of the fulfillment of the will of God, which is the sanctification of the soul unto the gaining of the soul according to the economy of God. In Hebrews the believers' experience of redemption is assumed, but their experience of sanctification is not. The redemptive aspect of Christ's work receives far less attention in this Epistle than the sanctifying aspects of His work because the reward of the kingdom is based on maturity in the divine life, which is an expression of sanctification and transformation. The believers' need for sanctification in order to see the Lord not only in this age but also in the next also explains the strong emphasis in Hebrews on the ongoing, heavenly ministry of Christ as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, a ministry that operates to bring the believers into the reality of perfection through sanctification, a perfection that He is authoring in us according to the pattern of His own perfection.

Fulfilled through the Obedience of Faith

A proper response to the exhortation in Hebrews depends upon obedience. However, the obedience that is needed to fulfill the will of God is not a natural human response; it is not part of our fallen human constitution. Having begun by the Spirit, we cannot be perfected by the flesh (Gal. 3:3). The perfection that reflects the fulfillment of God's will comes from the obedience, and this obedience is an obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Obedience issues forth from faith, and faith produces obedience. This correlation between faith and obedience explains the extended emphasis on faith in chapter 11 of Hebrews. All the accounts of faith in this chapter point to the fulfillment of various aspects of the eternal will of God by the people of God in the Old Testament: Abel offered sacrifices that pointed to the sacrifice of Christ; Enoch's testimony reflected a well-pleasing living that expressed God; Noah followed divine instructions to build an ark for the salvation of his house; Abraham was called to a place of inheritance and obeyed to go out, reconciling his living in tents with the higher expectation of a city whose Architect and Builder is God; Sarah conceived seed necessary for the fulfillment of God's covenanted promise; Abraham offered up Isaac in obedience to God as a proof of resurrection, which is necessary for the perfection of redeemed humanity; Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau with blessings related to God's will; Joseph confirmed God's will that His people would be sanctified and set apart by giving orders related to the exodus of the sons of Israel and his bones; Moses exemplified maturity in life through his choices to be ill-treated with the people of God, to

separate himself from the temporary enjoyment of sins in the world, to institute the means for the people of God to leave the land of Egypt under the control of God's enemy and to pass through the waters of separation; Joshua and the children of Israel corporately dispossessed the enemies of God from the land, subjecting them under their feet, signifying the coming subjection of all things under the feet of Christ; and Rahab joined herself to the people of God, assembling with them for her salvation (vv. 4-31). All these people of God in the Old Testament were running a race toward corporate perfection, and, with a cohort of New Testament believers who are equally obedient through faith, both they and we will be made perfect (v. 40). Chapter 11 concludes with the corporate perfection of the people of God. This is a clear indication that the purpose of the chapter is to exhort the New Testament believers to participate in the fulfillment of the eternal will of God through the obedience of faith.

Associated with Loving Discipline

Obedience results in suffering, but this suffering is often misinterpreted as either punishment or divine indifference. Hence, chapter 12 presents the divine perspective that suffuses the motives and actions of the Author and Perfecter of our faith (v. 2). The divine answer to the misplaced thought that God is either punishing or indifferent is that our sufferings are related to discipline, which proves our genuine status as sons of God in life and nature and promotes our sanctification through partaking of His holiness (vv. 5-10, 14). Only after speaking of obedience and faith in chapter 11 can the unveiling of the purpose of the discipline from our loving Father be fully received and appreciated. Hence, chapter 12 concludes with an exhortation to be obedient by not refusing Him who speaks (v. 25). Such obedience will bring us to the consummation of His eternal purpose—the building up and expression of the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem as the church of the firstborn (vv. 22-23). Prior to this consummation, verse 22 also speaks of the expression of the fulfillment of the eternal will of God, which will be displayed through the overcomers as Mount Zion in the millennial kingdom.

Chapter 12 concludes with the reward that is substantiated by the operation of faith that is presented in chapter 11, the corporate display of perfection in the millennial kingdom and in the New Jerusalem. Faith is the basis of the believers' qualification to receive the reward of the millennial kingdom, because "without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him, for he who comes forward to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (v. 6). In our initial response to the word of God, faith brings us into an organic union with the Triune God in our human spirit, because our spirit is born of Spirit through the hearing of

faith (John 3:6; Gal. 3:2); and in our continuing response to the word of God, faith enables us to come forward to God, and it supplies us with the divine life that keeps us from falling away from the living God (v. 5; Heb. 3:12). Thus, in our experience we realize and enjoy the life of the living God and become qualified to receive the reward of entering into the kingdom as His life spreads into the inward parts of our soul for our sanctification (Phil. 1:8; Col. 3:12).

Expressed in the Practical Church Life

A proper response to the exhortation to fulfill the will of God produces an expression of sanctification, which qualifies redeemed humanity to see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), both in this age of grace and in the coming age of the kingdom. This practical expression is spoken of in the final chapter. Floyd V. Filson notes that the "different content, tone, and form of this chapter," which moves from an "argument [that] has been closely knit and carefully developed" to a "varied series of imperatives, which present a wide range of pastoral instruction," has raised the question

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among some scholars as to "whether chapter 13 is in whole or in part an addition to the original writing" (13-15). Filson rejects this view, arguing that "chapter 13 fits effectively into the form used" (16), and indeed it can be said that chapter 13 encapsulates and summarizes the content of the previous chapters by speaking of the virtues that are prominent in the corporate display of perfection in the practical church life. These corporate expressions are the result of receiving the divine supply of grace through the perfecting ministry of Christ as a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. These expressions include (1) a measure of brotherly love that continues beyond our natural human capacity for love and that does not wane; (2) practical hospitality for the saints and others, which speaks of a commonality of possessions for the sake of the well-being of the saints and others; (3) a remembrance of those who are in need; (4) the honoring of human relationships and the honoring of one another in these human relationships, particularly the relationship of union in marriage; (5) contentment in situations involving deprivation, trust and faith in the Lord's unwillingness and inability to abandon us in any circumstance; and

(6) remembrance and appreciation for those who have spoken the word of God to us, whose lives of faith are worthy to be imitated (vv. 1-7).

In these practical and corporate expressions of the perfection of redeemed humanity, there are experiences of Christ, who, in these experiences, is the same yesterday, today, and forever (v. 8). Our participation in these experiences through the altar of the cross brings us into the enjoyment of God's grace in Christ (v. 10), empowers us to go outside the camp of religious practices based on human effort and will (v. 13), shifts our vision from that which will not remain to the corporate city that will remain (v. 14), and practically joins the believers into an assembly of mutual praise and sacrifice (v. 15). In such an assembly, which is outside the camp, the people of God are being sanctified and perfected by the great Shepherd of the sheep to fulfill the will of God in every good work (vv. 20-21).

This book unveils to us that God's heavenly calling is to make us a holy people (3:1), a people sanctified unto God. Christ is the Sanctifier (2:11). He suffered death on the cross, shedding His blood, and entered the Holy of Holies with His blood (9:12) that by the heavenly ministry (8:2, 6) of His heavenly priesthood (7:26) He might be able to do the sanctifying work, and that we might enter within the veil by His blood to participate in Him as the heavenly Sanctifier. By participating in Him in this way, we are enabled to follow Him outside the camp by the sanctifying pathway of the cross. (Recovery Version, 13:12, note 1)

All these experiences of Christ, however, can be lost if strange teachings that go against the speaking of God in the Son, in the Scriptures, and in the new covenant ministry are given any ground in our being, thereby enabling them to carry us away from the operation of the word of the exhortation in this Epistle, which is summarized in verses 20 through 21:

Now the God of peace, He who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in the blood of an eternal covenant, perfect you in every good work for the doing of His will, doing in us that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The content of this word of exhortation is the work of Christ in resurrection, as a Shepherd, a man perfected in His created humanity, who ministers according to an eternal covenant to perfect redeemed humanity, His sheep, in every practical work in this age for the fulfillment of His will, which is the reproduction and enlargement of Himself as the well-pleasing Son, the One who is the effulgence of God's glory and the express

image of His substance. R. C. H. Lenski speaks of these verses as illustrating the "blessed concursus of grace," that is, the operation of the grace of God within and among His finite creation, saying, "This very epistle exhibits it: through it God is doing his work in the readers; and so by doing it the readers will do his will, and thus God will produce in them the thing that is pleasing before him" (495-496). What a sobering and encouraging exhortation is this Epistle!

The Content of the Exhortation

Hebrews is an exhortation to those who are wavering (13:22; 10:23), to those who are shrinking back (v. 39), and to those who have lost their boldness to come forward to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace for the perfection of their redeemed humanity (4:16; 10:19, 35). Boldness is a response of faith that is derived from access to and confidence in the divine realities.⁶ When the eyes of our heart are enlightened to see that the hope of our eternal calling is not contingent upon our untransformed condition in time, there is a resulting boldness to participate in the fulfillment of God's eternal will by running after the eternal and true elements in His economy. Hebrews speaks of these eternal elements, including our eternal salvation, our eternal redemption, the eternal Spirit, our eternal inheritance, and God's eternal covenant (5:9; 9:12, 14-15; 13:20), but it also acknowledges the feelings of our weaknesses, our lack of vision, and our tendency to faint under the loving discipline of our Father who desires to perfect us (4:15; 2:8; 12:5). Hence, Hebrews is a sensitive recognition of our need for words of exhortation that will enable us to see what we do not yet see, words that will both provide comfort and instill sobriety.

The focus of the apostle on the eternal things in God's economy⁷ and his insight into the time-contingent condition of redeemed humanity are clearly seen in a passage contained in the section on the superiority of Christ to the angels (1:4—2:18), which focuses on Christ's status as the Son of God as God (1:4-14) and on His status as the Son of Man as man (2:5-18).

But one has solemnly testified somewhere, saying, "What is man, that You bring him to mind? Or the son of man, that You care for him? You have made Him a little inferior to the angels; You have crowned Him with glory and honor and have set Him over the works of Your hands; You have subjected all things under His feet." For in subjecting all things to Him, He left nothing unsubject to Him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him. (vv. 6-8)

When the apostle considers Christ, he cannot help but acknowledge the reality of His eternal accomplishments,

particularly in relation to the subjection of all things under His feet. As a man, He was made a little inferior to the angels. He was crowned with glory and honor as a man and set over the works of God's hands, and all things have been subjected under His feet. This subjection of all things is so complete that there is nothing that has been left unsubject to Him. However, when the apostle considers us, the redeemed of humanity, he equally recognizes that "now," in time, we do not yet see all things subjected to Him. Instead, we see much that seemingly is unsubject to Him—our sins, our self, our weakened condition, our lack of endurance, our flesh, and our attachment to a sin-corrupted world with its hold on our will. When we look at ourselves, it is hard to find anything that we can state with boldness has been subjected to Him. Hence, there is a need for exhortation—but not an exhortation to improve ourselves. Instead, we need an exhortation to see the eternal realities that have been incorporated into the human living of a man who was tempted in all respects like us (4:15) and that have been manifested through the death, resurrection, and ascension of a man into the divine glory. We need to see the possibility of our perfection, based on the perfection of Jesus. Consequently, he reminds the Hebrews, saying,

But we see Jesus, who was made a little inferior to the angels because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of everything. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (2:9-10, emphasis added)

Hebrews is an exhortation to us, as redeemed humanity, to focus our attention on Jesus who is the Author of our salvation. It is an exhortation to look away from ourselves and our condition to the One who is the Author and Perfecter of our faith (12:2). He is the source of our consummate salvation because He authored the pattern of our salvation in His person and through His work, and He is the guarantee of our perfection in salvation because the pattern that He authored is being imparted into our being through His heavenly ministry as a High Priest in resurrection. Although we may not see Christ from the apostle's eternal perspective, we can see the incarnated Christ, Jesus, from our perspective in time, even though this perspective is impacted by our contact with a world that is filled with sin, temptation, and death, a world under the temporary control of the one who has the power of death. And so Hebrews begins by speaking of the Jesus whom even "now" we can see, speaking first of His perfection as a man and then of the application of His perfected life to redeemed humanity, an application that will bring us into the divine glory, actualizing the eternal realities that motivate the operation of God's eternal will.

The Process of Perfection in Hebrews

Although Edward Fudge observes that the verb associated with *make perfect* is a "frequent one in this epistle," being "used both of Christ (2:10; 5:9; 7:28) and of those covered by His sacrifice (7:19; 9:9; 10:14; 12:23)" (145), James Kurian admits that there is a lack of consensus "among authors about what τελειοῦν involves in Hebrews" (222). Although he acknowledges that there is "considerable disagreement as to what this *perfection* terminology in Hebrews involves," he accepts the "general or basic meaning of τελειοῦν" as being to "bring something or someone to the state of entirety, or to the ideal state: 'to complete and perfect'" (220). In this definition two words stand out—*bring* and *complete*. *Bring* in the context of the definition implies a process, and *complete* implies a consummate and great outcome of this process.⁸

This is an apt understanding of its usage in Hebrews because this Epistle reveals that perfection involves a process toward a consummate end for both Jesus and

We need an exhortation to see the eternal realities that have been incorporated into the human living of a man who was tempted in all respects like us and that have been manifested through the death, resurrection, and ascension of a man into the divine glory.

redeemed humanity. Both Jesus and the believers are spoken of as having been perfected. In regard to Jesus, 2:10 says, "It was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings," and in regard to redeemed humanity, 10:14 says, "He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." The focus of the process of perfection in Hebrews is on humanity, both on the incarnated sinless humanity of Jesus and on the redeemed yet sinful humanity of those who are His partners (3:14).

To make Jesus perfect was to make Him perfect in terms of qualification. It does not imply that there was any imperfection of virtue or attribute in Jesus, but only that the completing of His experience of human sufferings was needed to make Him fit to become the Author, the Leader, of His followers' salvation.

As the self-existing and ever-existing God, the Lord Jesus is complete from eternity to eternity. But He needed to be perfected through the processes of incarnation, the

partaking of human nature, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, that He might be qualified to be God's Christ and our Savior. (Recovery Version, 2:10, note 5)

The perfection of the believers is made possible through the process of perfection that Jesus passed through in the days of His flesh (5:7), a process involving incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension, which resulted in His consummate entrance into glory, not only in His eternal status as the Son in His deity but also in His newly acquired status as the firstborn Son in His deified humanity, a humanity that has been crowned with glory and honor. The perfection of the humanity of Jesus, in the sufferings of His human life and in His resurrection, now serves as the basis for the impartation of His processed and consummated humanity into redeemed humanity through His heavenly ministry as our High Priest in ascension, a ministry which imparts the law of life upon our hearts and upon our minds (10:16). Hebrews shows that the Perfecter, who perfects our redeemed humanity, was first perfected in His humanity, thereby authoring a salvation that is great in its ability to perfect.

The Perfection of the Perfecter

There is debate as to when the perfection of the Son occurred, and although this may seem inconsequential, the pattern of His perfection has direct bearing on our perfection. In His perfection He has become the Perfecter, and His perfecting reproduces His pattern of perfection within redeemed humanity. Some commentators associate perfection with His death on the cross because both 2:10 and 5:9 speak of perfection in the context of suffering. The connection in verse 8 between learning obedience and *the things which He suffered* reinforces this interpretation because His death on the cross was the preeminent act of obedience in the universe (Phil. 2:8). Other commentators argue that the perfection of the Son occurred on the day of His resurrection. G. H. Lang says, "It was the restoration to Him of His original divine glory that was Christ's perfecting, and this took place by resurrection and ascension to the Father. It is thus, and only thus, that the people of Christ can be perfected" (229).

This understanding reflects the Lord's own speaking in Luke 13:32: "Behold, I cast out demons and accomplish healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I am perfected." This debate over when the Lord's perfection occurred is nuanced, but it can impact our understanding and, hence, our experience of perfection, if the former interpretation is stressed over the latter.⁹ What is lost or perhaps overlooked in this debate, because it is in plain sight, is the fact that Jesus' perfection through learning obedience and suffering occurred in His humanity, a humanity that was passing through a process of human living, which

ultimately involved both death and resurrection. He was perfected in His humanity, and He will be eternally in possession of this perfected humanity. He did not put off His humanity either in death or in resurrection. Through the incarnation He became a man, joining divinity to humanity, and in resurrection His was raised as a man, joining humanity to divinity. Now He is eternally a God-man with complete divinity and perfected humanity.

It is His human nature, not His work, that was perfected. This is not to say that His work was inconsequential; in fact, His work was the means through which His perfection was accomplished, and the efficacy of this work was incorporated into His perfected humanity. However, it was not His work that was perfected; it was His humanity, a humanity that suffered, that learned obedience, that died on the cross, and that was raised in resurrection and glory.

The significance of His divinized humanity is the focus of the contrast in Hebrews 7:1-28 between the high priests under the law and Christ as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Verse 28 says, "The law establishes men as high priests who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which was after the law, establishes the Son, perfected forever." "The Son of God here must be not just the only begotten Son but also the firstborn Son, who has been perfected forever through His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection" (Recovery Version, note 1). The primary weakness of the earthly high priests was that they died (v. 8), and their death prevented them from continuing to minister sacrifices (v. 23), which, even though they enabled God to temporarily pass over the sins of His people (Rom. 3:25), were only a shadow of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1). The weakness of death, combined with the weakness of sin, which required the priests to offer sacrifices even for themselves (7:27-28), made the humanity of the Levitical priests unfit for the fulfillment of God's will. Only Jesus in His perfected humanity, the One who was appointed a High Priest according to the power of an indestructible life (v. 16), is qualified to be the source of eternal salvation.

The perfection of the humanity of Jesus involved both suffering and the learning of obedience.¹⁰ These elements were incorporated into His humanity throughout the entirety of His human living, not just at the point of His death. Hebrews 5:7 speaks of "the days of His flesh" before focusing on the specific day of His prayer related to doing the will of the Father with "strong crying and tears." The suffering that He passed through in the days of His suffering in the flesh constituted Him with a mind to suffer to fulfill the will of God on the day of His crucifixion (1 Pet. 4:1). Similarly, the obedience that He learned as a man through these sufferings constituted Him with an understanding of the obedience required by God from man for the fulfillment of His will. C. S. Lovett comments

on the totality of Christ's human experience as the backdrop for His learning of obedience, saying,

Since we know He was God in human form, it is hard for us to think that He needed to be perfected in anything. But the truth is, God had never been a Man before. He had never been in the position of having to OBEY before. Beyond that, God had never been tempted before. When did God ever suffer or go through death? All these things God had to learn...AS A MAN. Until He went through them, as a man, He couldn't be man's Savior...Without the **complete** human experience, the Lord could never stand before God as man's High Priest. But having gone through it, He could sympathize fully with those He represented...It was going through the human experience that perfected Him as our Savior. Without it, He never would have qualified, even though He was God. (45)

Although the perfection of the humanity of Jesus involved suffering and obedience prior to His death, His humanity was perfected in His resurrection and through His glorification. After speaking of Christ as the Son who learned obedience from the things "which He suffered" in verse 8 of Hebrews 5, verses 9 and 10 continue, saying, "And having been perfected, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being addressed by God as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek." Given the sequential proximity of the phrase *which He suffered* to the phrase *and having been perfected*, it is easy to assume that *perfected* points back to His death, but *perfected* is also associated with the word *became* in the same verse, and this points forward to what He became, that is, a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, a becoming that occurred in His resurrection. Kurianal astutely points out that the Son is not the subject of the perfecting action but rather the object. He was perfected; He did not perfect Himself, that is, glorify Himself (v. 5).

In Hebrews, the verb *τελειοῦν* is used three times referring to the perfection given to Christ, and Christ is the real object of *τελειοῦν* in all these occurrences (2,10; 5,9; 7,28), that is, in perfecting Christ, he himself is not the subject of the action, but it is always conceived as an action of God. (227)

While the Son was the subject of every act of suffering and obedience, He was not the perfecting subject but rather the object of perfection in His perfection; that is, as the Son, He was perfected forever by God. On the day of Christ's resurrection, God declared Him to be a Priest forever "with the taking of an oath" (7:21), and it was by the word of this oath that Jesus was established as the Son with divinized humanity, being perfected forever (v. 28). Hebrews 5:5-6 shows that His designation as a Priest occurred on the day of His resurrection: "He who said to Him, 'You are My Son; this day have I begotten You';

even as also in another place He says, 'You are a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" The day of His designation and perfection is linked to the day of His resurrection in Romans 1:4, which says, "Who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Finally, the connection between perfection and resurrection corresponds with the New Testament revelation of glorification. The Lord's resurrection was His glorification (John 7:39; 17:1-5). "In His resurrection...His whole being, including His humanity, was brought into glory (Luke 24:26), and in that the Father's divine element was expressed in His resurrection and glorification" (Recovery Version, John 17:1, note 1). Kurianal completes a proper understanding of the relationship between resurrection, glorification, and perfection, stating,

The perfection terminology is used of Christ for the first time in Hebrews in 2,10. It is important to look for clues for understanding the meaning of the *perfection* given to

In resurrection Jesus was crowned with glory and honor; He was perfected in His humanity, and He authored a great salvation that reproduces His pattern of perfection through resurrection and glorification within redeemed humanity.

Christ in the first occurrence of it. The parallel character in 2,9-10, recognised by many scholars, suggests that, in this passage, *Jesus being crowned with glory and honour* (2,9) parallels *Jesus being given perfection* (2,10). In 2,9, the relation between Christ's death and glorification is introduced for the first time and is formulated using the vocabulary found in other NT books. (228)

In resurrection Jesus was crowned with glory and honor; He was perfected in His humanity, and He authored a great salvation that reproduces His pattern of perfection through resurrection and glorification within redeemed humanity. Consequently, He is now reproducing both the pattern and the reality of His perfection through His ministry as a glorified High Priest in resurrection (5:5). In this ministry He is imparting the divine life as grace to perfect the redeemed and to lead many sons into glory (2:10).¹¹

The Perfection of Redeemed Humanity

The fulfillment of God's will is being manifested progressively from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18) through the

perfection of redeemed humanity according to the heavenly ministry of Christ that is now leading many sons into glory. When Lang writes, “The burden of *Hebrews* is not the rescuing of sinners from hell, nor even the blessings of *children* in the vast family circle, but it is the bringing of *sons* unto *glory*” (58), he draws a distinction between the content of *Hebrews* and the common view that it speaks of the objective accomplishments of Christ as they pertain to redemption.¹² He also affirms that its burden is related to the sanctification and perfection of the many sons of the Father, the many brothers of the Firstborn (1:6; 2:11-12). Andrew Murray elaborates on the great salvation of perfection that is the true burden of the Epistle:

The perfection brought by Christ was that which was revealed in His own personal life. He came to restore to us the life of God we had lost—a life in the will and love of God. This alone is salvation. God perfected Him through suffering—wrought out in Him a perfect human character, in which the divine life was fully united with the human will. He learned obedience through suffering, and manifested perfectly the humility and submission and surrender to God, which is man’s duty and blessedness. So, when He had been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, because He now had that perfected human nature which He could communicate to them. And so He was appointed High Priest—a Son, perfected for evermore. As Son of God, He was to take us up into the very life of God; as High Priest, He was to lift us, in actual spiritual reality, into God’s fellowship and will and presence; the way in which He was perfected through obedience was the living way in which He was to lead us;—as the Son, perfected through obedience, who had found and opened and walked the path of obedience as the path to God, and would animate us with His own Spirit to do it too, He, the perfected One, can alone be our salvation. (188)

The speaking in *Hebrews* concerning the perfection of the Son is presented primarily in chapters 1 and 2. This speaking establishes a base for its exhortation concerning the perfection of redeemed humanity. In chapter 3, which begins by asking the holy brothers, the redeemed, to “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus” (v. 1), the focus of the Epistle begins to turn toward the heavenly ministry of Christ, which operates to perfect redeemed humanity. This heavenly ministry is carried out by a superior priesthood, it is based on a superior covenant, and its effectiveness is based on better sacrifices and better blood.

Each of these superior elements is extensively covered in this Epistle—the superior priesthood in 4:14–7:28, the superior covenant in 8:1-13, and the better sacrifices and better blood in 9:1–10:18, and it is instructive to note that the perfection of redeemed humanity is included as a

prominent item in the speaking related to these elements. In regard to the superiority of Christ’s high priestly service according to the order of Melchizedek, which is contrasted with the priesthood of Aaron, verse 11 of chapter 7 says,

If indeed then perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people have received the law), what need was there still that a different Priest should arise according to the order of Melchizedek and that He should not be said to be according to the order of Aaron?

This verse indicates that the purpose of the priesthood is the perfection of those being served, and in His heavenly ministry Christ is serving us—redeemed humanity. In regard to the superiority of the new covenant, which is in contrast to the covenant under the law, verses 18 and 19 say,

There is, on the one hand, the setting aside of the preceding commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness (for the law perfected nothing), and, on the other hand, the bringing in thereupon of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Verse 1 of chapter 10 also speaks of the old covenant and its inability to perfect, saying, “The law, having a shadow of the good things to come, not the image itself of the things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, perfect those who draw near.” These verses indicate that the purpose of the new covenant is to perfect those to whom the covenant has been promised, and in His heavenly ministry Christ is both the surety and Mediator of the better covenant to the inheritors of the promise—redeemed humanity (7:22; 8:6; 6:17; 9:15; 10:36).

In regard to the better sacrifices and better blood, which is in contrast to the blood of bulls and goats (9:13; 10:4), verse 9 of chapter 9 refers to the earthly tabernacle, saying, “According to this tabernacle both gifts and sacrifices are offered, which are unable to perfect, according to conscience, him who worships.” This verse indicates that the purpose of the better sacrifices and better blood is the purification of the conscience, and in His heavenly ministry Christ is dealing with the sins and the lawlessnesses of those in whom His laws of life have been imparted—redeemed humanity (10:16-17). With a purified conscience it is possible for the redeemed to serve the living God by coming forward to the Holy of Holies with hearts that have been sprinkled from an evil conscience and a true heart in full assurance of faith to enter into and even be the house of God, manifesting corporate perfection through assembling together (9:14; 10:21-22, 25). In *Hebrews* 10:1-18, which speaks of the one sacrifice for

sins that fulfill the will of God (v. 12) through the one offering of Christ (v. 14), the culminating item is the perfection of those who are being sanctified, showing that the perfection of redeemed humanity is the focus of Christ's superior priesthood, superior covenant, and better sacrifices and better blood.

The main thought in vv. 1-18 is that Christ has removed sins, accomplishing what all the Levitical sacrifices were unable to do. Having put away sin once for all, Christ has now imparted Himself into us as the divine life so that through the working of this divine life we may become the corporate reproduction of Himself. (Recovery Version, v. 10, note 1)

The corporate reproduction of Christ equals the corporate perfection of redeemed humanity, and in His heavenly ministry Christ is both authoring and perfecting this great salvation by imparting the elements of His perfection into us through the operation of the law of life in our inward parts. This is possible because with the transfer of the priesthood to Christ, there has been a transfer of law as well (7:12). "This was a transfer from the law of letters to the law of life, according to which Christ has been appointed a living and perpetual High Priest (v. 16)" (Recovery Version, v. 12, note 2). In chapter 10 the corporate reproduction of Christ is manifested through His brothers who are being perfected to enter with boldness into the Holy of Holies and to assemble together in spirit as the house of God (vv. 21-22, 25; cf. 1 Cor. 5:4).

Corporate Perfection in Hebrews

Perfection in Hebrews ultimately is corporate in nature and expression. As believers, we each, as a matter of personal responsibility, will have to give an account to the Lord for the things that we have done through the body,¹³ but the worthiness of our works will be measured principally by the extent to which they reflect the operation of the perfecting ministry of Christ, and this operation has a corporate focus: As the Author of our salvation, He is bringing many sons into glory (2:10); as the Son, He is praising the Father in our midst (v. 12); as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, He is building us up as the house of God (3:1, 6); as the Perfecter of our faith, He is supplying us to run the race that is set before us (12:1-2); and as the Mediator of a new covenant, He is bringing us forward to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem as the city of the living God, and to the church of the firstborn, all of which are expressed through the spirits of righteous men made perfect (vv. 22-24). Christ is not perfecting individuals to be individuals; He is perfecting many into one (John 17:23).

The matter of corporate perfection is uniquely illustrated in Hebrews 11, which presents the outstanding individual

works of faith by the Old Testament people of God. Seemingly, these works should be sufficient to earn the reward of perfection, but this is not indicated. Instead, the apostle refers to them as a great cloud of witnesses, who are observing our participation in the fulfillment of the will of God, because without our perfection, they will not be made perfect (12:1; 11:40).

Both the participation in the kingdom for one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6) and the sharing in the New Jerusalem for eternity (Rev. 21:2-3; 22:1-5) are corporate matters. The kingdom feast will be for the overcomers of both the Old and New Testaments (Matt. 8:11). The blessed New Jerusalem will be composed of both the Old Testament saints and the New Testament believers (Rev. 21:12-14). Hence, apart from the New Testament believers, the Old Testament believers cannot obtain what God promised. To obtain and enjoy the good things of God's promise, they need the New Testament believers to perfect them. Now they are waiting for us to go on that they may be made perfect. (Recovery Version, Heb. 11:40, note 3)

In His heavenly ministry Christ is authoring and perfecting a great salvation of corporate perfection by imparting the elements of His perfection into us through the operation of the law of life in our inward parts.

The perfection of the New Testament saints is needed for the perfection of the Old Testament saints because the perfection of the New Testament saints is the perfection of the Old Testament saints. In the eyes of the apostle, the two categories of perfected saints are viewed as one because they are one. They are looking to us, but we also have an obligation to run the race for their perfection, which intrinsically involves our perfection. The reward that we will enjoy is the fruit of their work, and the fruition of our participation in the fulfillment of the will of God, the corporate perfection of redeemed humanity, will usher in the reward that they are eagerly awaiting. The reward of the New Testament saints will be the reward of the Old Testament saints.¹⁴

Conclusion

Given our condition and the fact that our eyes are focused more on our condition than they are on the Author and Perfecter of our faith, there is a need for exhortation. Given our tendency toward disobedience and our lack of endurance, there is a need for exhortation. And given our

willingness to shrink back in the face of suffering and hardship, there is a need for exhortation. The exhortation that we need is not related to inspirational speaking but to words that impart faith through hearing, grace through ministry, and life through the operation of the Spirit. With such a speaking, the limitations that we labor under are lifted and replaced by a supply that comes from our heavenly High Priest, who is superior in His priesthood, in His sacrifices, and in His mediation of a new covenant, a covenant that embodies the will of God for the corporate perfection of redeemed humanity. The exhortation that is needed for those who *now* do not *yet* see is contained in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and when the words of this exhortation are allowed to penetrate deep into our being, faith produces a response of hope that points to the fulfillment of God's will through our participation in His promise and His process of perfection. And it is this hope that empowers us to shift our focus from what is now to what is yet to come. [AFC](#)

Notes

¹Hebrews is focused on redeemed humanity. The redemptive aspects of Christ's work are referenced primarily to establish a narrative base for the focus in Hebrews on the corporate, post-redemptive journey of the people of God. As such, Hebrews is not a word to those who are in need of redemption; rather, it is a speaking to those who have been redeemed, a speaking in the Son "to us" (1:2). When it speaks of the superior sacrifices and superior priesthood of Christ, its emphasis is post-redemptive and related to the building of the house of God, whose corporate house we are (3:6).

²There are numerous references to the matter of perfection in this Epistle in relation to Christ in His person and work and to the believers. In His person Christ was made perfect through sufferings, learning obedience from the things that He suffered (2:10; 5:8), and His perfection is forever according to the word of God's oath (7:28). In His work as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, Christ is fulfilling the purpose of God, the perfection of the believers, by ministering according to the power of His indestructible life, overcoming the weaknesses of the law, the Levitical priesthood, and the old covenant sacrifices (vv. 11, 16, 18-19; 9:9; 10:1). By His one offering, He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified (v. 14), and as the great Shepherd of the sheep, He is perfecting the believers (13:20-21), demonstrating that He is the Author and Perfector of their faith (12:2). By participating in the fulfillment of God's will, the believers are being sanctified as a precursor to their eternally promised perfection. Furthermore, they enjoy a conscience that is perfect and a fellowship of spirit that has righteousness as its base and corporate perfection as its expression (10:14; 9:9; 11:40; 12:23).

³Perfection to many believers is an unattainable goal, because they view it as the product of their own efforts for self-improvement rather than as an issue of the operation of the

divine life of the Father in us. Rather than being encouraged by the Lord's charge and promise in Matthew 5:48, many believers dread this verse because their eyes are on themselves and on the entanglements of their sins (Heb. 12:1-2). If, instead, we would look away unto Jesus, according to the apostle's exhortation in Hebrews, the condemnation that we sense could be relegated to "the things which are behind," things that should be forgotten, so that we could stretch forward and run the race that we all, as Christians, intuitively know that we must run (Phil. 3:13).

⁴I do not exclude myself from this category.

⁵The Lord was perfected in His humanity on the day of His resurrection, as indicated in Luke 13:32, which says, "Behold, I cast out demons and accomplish healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I am perfected." On the day of His resurrection, He was designated the perfected Son of God in His humanity in power according to the Spirit of holiness, as declared in Romans 1:4, which says, "Who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Thus, the operation of the Spirit is the basis for the Lord's perfection on the day of His resurrection.

⁶The boldness that we need in order to participate in the fulfillment of God's eternal will depends upon two factors that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 3:12—access and confidence, which he associates with the will of God in verse 11, saying, "According to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Him." Boldness involves action, and action requires a continuous and energizing supply. As believers, who have been encompassed with not only weakness but even with the feeling of our weaknesses (Heb. 5:2; 4:15), we need to be assured that the supply to run the race before us is not sourced in our fallen, human condition. We need an assurance that there is access to a divine source with a divine supply. Boldness also requires confidence. As believers, who have lame feet that have been put out of joint (12:13), we need to be assured that persons of our mien can complete the race that is set before us. We need an assurance that instills a confidence in the capacity of the divine supply that comes from the divine source. Hebrews provides these assurances throughout the entire Epistle, but it also succinctly offers them in the words of the apostle, who exhorts us to look away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith (v. 2).

As the Author of our faith, Christ was perfected in His humanity through sufferings (2:10). The very constitution of His divine-human person, which was humanized through incarnation and divinized through resurrection, is the proof of God's perfecting operation. As such, He is the basis for our confidence and boldness. As the Perfector of faith, Christ was declared by God to be a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek in His resurrection (5:7-10). He is now the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him. As such, He also is the basis for our access and boldness (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). In His heavenly ministry, Christ is perfecting the believers by providing access

into the Triune God through the veil of His flesh, and He is perfecting the believers by ministering a divine supply of grace through the inscribing operation of the law of the Spirit of life in our inward parts. The boldness that we need in order to participate in the fulfillment of God's eternal will is provided in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is an extended exhortation to prove the Triune God through an enlarged expression of Himself, consisting of the perfected Son and the perfected sons of God.

⁷The eternal, rather than time-contingent, perspective related to the fulfillment of God's will is seen quite clearly in Romans 8:30, which says, "Those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified," and in Ephesians 1:4-5, which says, "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." Although glorification and sonship, which are the issue of growth and maturity in the divine life, have yet to be realized in our experience, Paul assures the Romans and Ephesians that these items of God's eternal will have been fulfilled.

⁸In a footnote to 7:28 the Recovery Version reiterates the essence of Kurianal's definition, saying, "*Perfected means brought to an end by being completed*, implying to be made qualified" (Note 1).

⁹When the process of Jesus' perfection is limited to His death on the cross, it is easy to associate perfection with Christ's obedience unto death and then to regard it as an objective accomplishment. When perfection becomes merely a matter that must be acknowledged as a point of truth, it also becomes very easy to view sanctification and perfection as objective constructs that merely need to be acknowledged rather than appropriated in our experience. This tendency can be seen in discussions related to use of the past tense form of the word *perfect* in Hebrews 10:14: "By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." William R. Newell, unintentionally, I think, undermines the importance of the process of sanctification that produces perfection when he rightly points to the eternal certainty of our perfection based on the offering of Christ on the cross, saying,

It is emphasized further that **by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified—separated** unto God. This can have no reference to our "growth in grace," which belongs, as we have seen, to the operation of the blessed Spirit. **Perfected forever** must therefore refer to the absoluteness of the effect of Christ's work on the Cross. (340)

Sanctification clearly is a matter of growing in grace, and although Christ's work on the cross is absolute and enduring related to our ultimate perfection, our participation in the process of sanctification that produces perfection involves subjective experiences of growing in grace. Newell disassociates

sanctification from the experience of growing in grace by objectively associating it with the eternal perfection that is the result of Christ's work on the cross. Consequently, it becomes an objective matter with little impact on our living. Fudge also regards sanctification objectively, saying, "Those trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus are perpetually and completely sanctified. This has been argued already, and to this the Holy Spirit agrees as witnessed in the Old Testament Scriptures" (108). Newell contributes to an objective understanding of sanctification with the insertion of his bracketed comments and exposition of the following quotation: "Verse 14: **For by one offering He hath perfected [in standing] forever them that are sanctified [made to be saints]:** When the heart realizes that sin has all been put away forever, the conscience becomes 'perfected'" (342). To accept Fudge's and Newell's statements is to accept at least the seed of a thought that we are already sanctified and that the perfection related to our conscience is merely a matter to be realized in our mind. But as the entire Epistle to the Hebrews demonstrates, we, as redeemed humanity, are desperately in need of sanctification, which is the issue of the grace that we access by coming forward to the throne of grace, that is, by

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actively participating in and cooperating with the ongoing heavenly ministry of Christ. Since Hebrews also points out that we always go astray in our heart (3:10), which includes our mind, a mere acknowledgement of the efficacy of Christ's work is not enough to bring us into the company of those who are being sanctified in this age, which is qualification for our participation in the kingdom in the coming age.

¹⁰Participating in the will of God depends upon obedience to God because by definition only God's will counts. Robert Govett says, "He came '*to do the Father's will.*' The Saviour's body was primarily prepared for active *obedience during life*, and not only to suffer death" (326). The active obedience demonstrated by Christ was an obedience that He learned through suffering in His human life (5:8). As the eternal Son, there was no need for Him to learn obedience; it is ever present within the eternal Godhead. But as the incarnated Son in possession of human nature with a human will, there was a need to learn the experience of obedience as a man so that the experiences of obedience in His humanity could be incorporated into the great salvation that He authored. Filson says,

To be the qualified perfect high priest he had to learn

obedience through suffering in his earthly life. To achieve this he necessarily 'for a little while was made lower than the angels' (2:9) and 'had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of his people' (2:17-18). (33)

George Milligan builds upon this point, saying,

Not, mark! "learned to obey," as if He had ever been disobedient, but "learned the obedience"..., obedience in all its completeness, the spirit that is of complete self-surrender which came from making the Father's will His own at each step of His earthly experience; and whose result in His own case was seen in this, that "having been made perfect, He became unto all them that obey Him the author of eternal salvation" (ver. 9). As His "perfection" resulted from "the obedience" which He had learned amid the sufferings of earth, it was in its turn the condition, so far as disposition went, of His being able to apply the benefits of His work to all who in their turn "obey" Him...

This "perfection" was not reached all at once, but was realized step by step in the experiences of Christ's earthly life. He has been "made perfect," and the true nature of His humanity is seen in this, that each stage of His earthly life was intended to fit Him more completely for that state to which it became God to raise Him, and in which He could "perfect" others through fellowship with Himself. (81-82)

Obedience is learned though suffering because human living involves suffering related to the temptations of sin and the certainty of death. George Allen Turner says,

If Jesus could not have sinned and thwarted God's plan, as a real man, His temptations would not have been real. This does not mean that He had to be sinful in order to be tempted since temptation is not necessarily an appeal to unholy desires. Temptation is rather an appeal to the unlawful gratification of a lawful desire. (60)

In His human living, Christ never unlawfully gratified any lawful human desire. Turner illustrates this point by referring to the lawful human need for food, which Christ did not gratify by turning stones into bread for His own benefit. However, Turner does not point out that Christ did not lawfully gratify even a lawful human desire according to His human will. Rather, He gratified only God's will, putting aside His human will, so that the human experience of living in and according to the will of God could be incorporated into the divine life and be subsequently imparted into redeemed humanity. This point can be illustrated by Christ's experience on the evening prior to His crucifixion. Having lived a perfect human life, there was no lawful human or even divine basis for requiring His death on the cross. Hence, He could have lawfully beseeched the Father for more than twelve legions of angels to rescue Him from the arresting arms of the chief priests and the elders (Matt.

26:47, 53), but He did not, because this was not the Father's will as expressed in the Scriptures (v. 54). He also could have lawfully rejected the sentence of death on the cross because no cause for crucifixion could be found in Him by standards either human or divine (Luke 23:4, 14; 1 Pet. 1:19), but He did not, because it became clear through His prayer that His death on the cross was according to the Father's will. Lang appropriately contextualizes the learning of obedience as an experience unique to the Son in His incarnation:

It was through these prolonged and painful experiences that He, though Son to God His Father, learned what obedience to the Father's will costs in a world ruled by that Father's enemy and by sin. He did not learn to obey; that He knew from the first by the instincts of His sinless heart: but He learned the nature and the benefit of obedience, for thereby He became perfectly, experimentally fitted to be the "cause of eternal salvation" to those who in their turn learn to obey Him as He obeyed the Father. (91)

In our experience, an unlawful response to a lawful human need results in suffering because such a response stirs up the nature of sin and manifests the activities of sin, which pierce us through with many pains (1 Tim. 6:10). However, even a response to lawful human needs according to our human will brings in suffering because it involves disobedience of the most fundamental order, that is, disobedience to living according to the divine will. Having been perfected in His humanity through sufferings, Christ is a source of eternal salvation to those who obey Him (Heb. 5:9), that is, to those who participate in the fulfillment of God's eternal will, which is intrinsically embodied in God's circumstantial will. Without such obedience, there is no possibility of entering into God's rest in the millennial kingdom, which then becomes a just recompense for our disobedience (2:2; 4:6, 11).

The sufferings that enable redeemed humanity to learn the truth, the reality (Eph. 4:20-21), of the obedience that is in Jesus are not, as many think, the pains and sorrows related to human discomforts or even to human tragedies; rather, they are the sufferings that come after being enlightened concerning the will of God (Heb. 10:32). Being enlightened means that we have an intrinsic understanding that there is another will in the universe besides ours. Based on this understanding, we then are confronted daily with the choice of following either the divine will or our human will. If we choose to be sluggish toward the divine will (6:12), having a hardened heart with a stiff neck, there will be suffering in this age and in the next. This is suffering related to sin. However, even if we are empowered by grace to be obedient to participate in the fulfillment of God's will, there will be suffering, specifically the suffering that comes from the denial of the human will (Phil. 2:8): "Yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt 26:39; cf. John 18:11). This is suffering related to death, the death of the cross. As a man, Christ understood the implications of taking the divine will as His way, and He was willing to endure the death of the cross. As men, we also intuitively understand the implications of taking God's will as

our way, which is the inability to gratify our will through the denial of the enjoyment of our soul-life in this age. Regrettably, we often take our way because we know that choices that are aligned with the divine will by definition eliminate the possibility of living according to our will and preferences, and to many this is seen as an unacceptable price to pay. Such a view reflects the base tendencies of our fallen human nature, but to the apostle it was a price that was little in comparison to the suffering that Christ endured to enable us to participate in the fulfillment of the will of God: "Compare Him who has endured such contradiction by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary, fainting in your souls. You have not yet resisted unto blood, struggling against sin" (Heb. 12:3-4). We also refuse to listen to the voice of the Lord because we often see no unlawful reason to not follow our will as our way. If, however, our view is sourced in faith, we will see, as did the Lord, that there is joy set before us in the doing of His will no matter the appearance of our outward circumstances (10:34; 12:2), and in our obedience, we will walk by faith, not by appearance (2 Cor. 5:7), and stay on the course that leads to the fulfillment of the will of God.

¹¹Kurialan provides a concise summary of the process that perfected the Perfecter in the quotation below. The words *transformed* and *transformation* are used in relation to the process of completion that is implied in the Greek meaning of the word *perfect*.

Jesus had been made perfect through suffering. Through suffering of death he was glorified (2,9), that is, through the suffering of death as a human being (5,7: "in the days of his flesh") and through the resurrection (5,8: "having been heard"), Jesus was transformed. This transformation given to Christ through suffering brought him to the ideal state in which he was declared a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, and thereby, he is able to lead many sons to glory and to be a source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. (232-233)

¹²When the revelation in Hebrews is viewed primarily from the perspective of redemption, either as a speaking to those who are in need of redemption or as a speaking to provide assurances about the efficacy of Christ's work of redemption to those who have been redeemed, it becomes objective, and to a certain extent it becomes inconsequential in the living of the redeemed. This is because many believers, who have an assurance of salvation based on an accurate understanding of the truth concerning Christ's redemption, may feel little need to give heed to the Lord's speaking in this Epistle, thinking that it does not apply to them because they are believers who rightfully acknowledge the efficacy of Christ's redemption.

With a perspective based on the objective aspects of redemption, it is also possible to view all the content in Hebrews objectively, including sanctification. Turner illustrates this tendency:

The end result of Christ's work is to render the sanctified one "perfect forever." This does not mean that his is a perfect love which necessarily lasts forever. It means

rather that those "sanctified," i.e., those who are Christians, are by this atonement rendered pleasing to God with no need of further sacrifices or offerings. The divine resources released by Christ's death are fully adequate for both present and future needs. Here also the author is chiefly concerned about showing the adequacy of the objective grounds of one's perfection rather than with its subjective effects. (208)

Although Turner acknowledges that there are subjective aspects of sanctification, he does not elaborate on them. However, given his final statement and the statement that those who are sanctified are Christians who have been "rendered pleasing to God with no need of further sacrifices or offerings," the matter of whether our living is truly sanctified and separated unto the will of God is not even called to our mind.

¹³This will occur at the judgment seat of Christ, which will be an accounting of the nature of our works, not the quantity of our sins (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:13-15).

¹⁴I am aware that the notion of corporate perfection, which

*Jesus gratified only God's will,
putting aside His human will,
so that the human experience
of living in and according to the will
of God could be incorporated into
the divine life and be subsequently
imparted into redeemed humanity.*

is strongly implied in 11:40, is not simple to grasp, especially when the Old Testament people of God are considered within the sphere of the perfected. Nevertheless, the Word of God speaks of them as being made perfect, and it is not up to us to determine what to accept or reject of the divine revelation based on our limited understandings. Equally important, however, is the need to refrain from speculation when an understanding is not forthcoming to our mind so that we do not trivialize the divine revelation with our "interpretations" of the Scriptures. Lenski does this in his attempt to explain what perfection means with regard to the Old Testament saints. He relates their perfection to the number of sinners who are saved rather than to the condition of the sinners who have been saved. He writes,

I Cor. 15:6 speaks about the existence of only 500 believers when redemption was complete. Would it have been a better thing to bring in the consummation soon after this? God is still delaying its coming; faith is still spreading to millions. Not without all these will the noble Old Testament believers be brought to completeness but will share this blessing in company with us.

Many are coming from the east and the west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom, Matt. 8:11. What joy when the last day comes with its τελείω-σους [perfection]! (422)

In essence Lenski is suggesting that the consummation related to the corporate perfection of redeemed humanity is dependent upon the salvation of a specific number of sinners and that the Old Testament saints are waiting until this number is fulfilled. To a certain extent this reflects many Christians' understanding of the "Great Commission," that is, that the Lord will return when the gospel has been preached to the whole inhabited earth. The fallacy in this line of thought is simple: If five hundred believers is an insufficient number of believers to usher in the perfection of the Old Testament saints, is there any number, in and of itself, that is? Similarly, if the Lord's return is contingent upon every person in the whole inhabited earth being given an opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel, can this ever occur since new, but still fallen, sinners are being born every day? Perfection is a matter of condition, not of numbers, and when there is even a remnant, a corporate remnant (Rom. 9:27; 11:5), that has been perfected through the heavenly ministry of Christ, the Lord will return, usher in the kingdom, and bring the Old Testament saints of faith into it so that they can enjoy the benefits of the corporate perfection that they participated in bringing into being.

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Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"Who, being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance and upholding and bearing all things by the word of His power, having made purification of sins, **sat** down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3).

sat: This book, having the concept that all positive things are heavenly, points us to the very Christ who is in the heavens. In the Gospels is the Christ who lived on the earth and died on the cross for the accomplishing of redemption. In the Acts is the resurrected and ascended Christ propagated and ministered to men. In Romans is the Christ who is our righteousness for justification and our life for sanctification, transformation, conformation, glorification, and building up. In Galatians is the Christ who enables us to live a life that is versus the law, religion, tradition, and forms. In Philippians is the Christ who is lived out of His members. In Ephesians and Colossians is the Christ who is the life, the content, and the Head of the Body, the church. In 1 and 2 Corinthians is the Christ who is everything in the practical church life. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians is the Christ who is our holiness for His coming back. In 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus is the Christ who is God's economy, enabling us to know how to conduct ourselves in the house of God. In the Epistles of Peter is the Christ who enables us to take God's governmental dealings administered through sufferings. In the Epistles of John is the Christ who is the life and fellowship of the children of God in God's family. In Revelation is the Christ who is walking among the churches in this age, ruling over the world in the kingdom in the coming age, and expressing God in full glory in the new heaven and new earth for eternity. In this book is the present Christ, who is now in the heavens as our Minister (8:2) and our High Priest (4:14-15; 7:26), ministering to us the heavenly life, grace, authority, and power and sustaining us to live a heavenly life on earth. He is the Christ now, the Christ today, and the Christ on the throne in the heavens, who is our daily salvation and moment-by-moment supply.