The Perfecting of Human Character in God's Plan

To carry out this extraordinary plan of making beings in His own image, and to bring them to the perfection their standing as His sons requires, God made the heavens and the earth, and man received a body from the dust of the ground. (...that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else. Isaiah 45:18)

God did not choose the heavenly Kingdom as man's dwelling place, as He did for the angels. Instead, He made the earth and everything on it, because this is the place that meets every condition needed to bring man to the perfection He requires. It is not a place sheltered from danger, since the devil and his angels were cast down to the earth.

There are a few questions we can ask ourselves, and their answers are hidden from the careless eye. When God created man, why did He not place him directly in His presence, as He placed the angels? Why did He set him where he was in constant danger of being influenced by the devil and his angels?

Why did God have to cast Satan down to the earth and not somewhere else? Why did He let him tempt man? Why did man, in his state of innocence, have to be such easy prey for Satan and end up in the wretched condition in which billions of people find themselves today?

Life on Earth

We must notice that God's plan was perfect. It had no flaws, and He is now bringing it to completion. (His work is perfect. Deuteronomy 32:4)

If we read the Bible more carefully, we can easily see that man's fall was foreseen in His perfect plan. (...he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world... having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:4) We can also see that His plan provided both for man's restoration (the new birth) and for his perfection.

So God created the perfect setting in which man, living on earth in Satan's presence, would pass through all kinds of trials. Without them no one can reach the stature that the Kingdom of God requires. (Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:21)

Man, the crown of His creation, made in His image and likeness, was placed in this visible world (the universe we can see with our own eyes), in the presence of Satan. This was not a mistake on God's part. It was planned with great care in His eternal purpose.

God created this visible universe, the earth and all the constellations of the sky, to fulfil His purpose for mankind: to bring us up to the stature of the Lord Jesus, His Firstborn, to the

perfecting of our character.

It is the ideal place for man to be raised, tried, tested and brought to the perfection God requires. It is amazing to see how perfect His plan is.

The Forerunner

We can see that the Lord Jesus too was made perfect through the things in which Satan tempted Him and which He overcame. The Lord Jesus was made perfect through the suffering that came from Satan, and He overcame Satan through His death on the cross. (For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Hebrews 2:10)

When we look at natural human life, we see that no one is born perfect. Perfection comes only through hard work and perseverance, copying our teacher down to the smallest detail. (Think of the long road a pianist travels to master the piano.)

The perfecting of our character comes only through work. It is not a state we are born with, nor one we will be handed after we die.

Living Out the Word of Christ

In no area of practical life can anyone reach perfection by study alone, without practising what they study. Still less can anyone reach the perfection required of a son of God through a passive, merely mental faith, which Scripture compares to the faith of devils. (Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? James 2:19-20)

When the rich young man asked the Lord Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life, the Lord Jesus answered his question. He made inheriting eternal life depend on the state of perfection the young man had to reach.

The Lord Jesus answered him firmly: "If thou wilt be perfect... come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21). In other words: leave behind the cares of this life, come and live as I live, learn from Me, follow Me in all things, and you will become perfect. In that way you will inherit eternal life.

You cannot master the piano just by studying sheet music in theory, without copying your teacher and giving a great deal of your life to actual practice. In the same way, our faith that we can be like Him can only be made perfect by practice, through the works of faith. (Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? James 2:22)

It is the same in spiritual things. **To perfect your character**, to become perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, you must first believe it is possible. Then you must work at it, imitating and copying the Teacher in everything He does, and give time from your life to living out His teachings down to the smallest detail. (Think how many hours a day a pianist practises to master the instrument.)

It is easy to see that if man had been created perfect, like the One who made him, there would have been no need to place him on earth in Satan's presence. He would have lived in heaven, directly in God's presence.

But to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, we must put in the hard work of a disciple who copies his Teacher. Only in this way can we reach the perfection that the standard of God's Kingdom requires.

Perfect in the Things Above

The perfection God requires is not in music, in painting or in walking on water. It is perfection in longsuffering, in kindness, in meekness, in love... and it is gained only by going through His school and imitating Him.

God's work in us is completed only as it was with the Lord Jesus: through victory over the trials that come upon us. (My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. James 1:2-4)

Our character is not made perfect merely by believing in the sacrifice of the cross. It is made perfect through real work and real struggle in the temptations that come from Satan and that God allows for our growth.

To overcome these trials, man has God as his partner. God is faithful and will not allow a trial greater than man's strength to come upon him. (God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:13)

It is easy to see that the qualities of the Lord Jesus, such as love, meekness and longsuffering, can only be gained through work and perseverance... with the Lord Jesus as our model. (Come... learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart. Matthew 11:29)

No one who is born again is born with longsuffering, meekness and love already in place. These qualities must be formed through God's work in a person. For this work we have the school of Christ at our disposal. There we find the Word that works in us, the Holy Spirit who urges us on and guides us, the Body of Christ, which is the Church, and our own work in obedience to the Word.

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