

Prayer - 1 Peter 5:10, 11, Part 3

by A.W. Pink

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer in seeking God's perfection, stablishment, strengthening, and settling of believers, and the role of suffering in the Christian life.

Scripture: Acts 24:16, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 10:32, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Philippians 1:10, James 1:27, James 4:4, 1 John 2:15, 1 John 2:28

Topics: "Christian Integrity", "Righteous Living"

Description

The preacher delves into the Greek word 'aproskopos' which means blameless, without offense, and not causing others to stumble. Christians are called to live lives of true integrity that do not lead others into sin. The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a blameless conscience before God and men, avoiding actions that could cause others to stumble. The ultimate goal is to be filled with the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ, leading to glory and praise of God on the Day of Christ's return.

Transcript

Having considered in the two previous chapters the supplicant, setting, Object, and plea of this prayer, let us now contemplate, fifthly, its petition: "the God of all grace... make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." The proper force of the Greek grammar would make the petition read like this: "the God of all grace... Himself make you perfect: Himself stablish you, Himself strengthen you, Himself settle you." There is far more contained in these words than appears on their surface. The fullness of their meaning can be discovered only by a patient searching of the Scriptures, thereby ascertaining how the several terms are used in other passages. I regard the words "Himself make you perfect" as the principal thing requested. The three words that follow are in part an amplification and in part an explanation of the process by which the desired end is reached, though each of the four words requires to be considered separately. Ancient expositors, who went into things much more deeply and thoroughly than many of our modern expositors do, raised the question as to whether this prayer receives its fulfillment in the present life or in the life to come. After carefully weighing the pros and cons of their arguments, I have concluded--taking into view the remarkable scope of the Greek word *katartizō* (no. 2675 in Strong and Thayer), here rendered make perfect--that this petition is granted in a twofold answer: here and hereafter. I shall therefore take in both in my comments.

Two Relevant Significations

Katartiz³³³; signifies to make perfect (1) by adjusting or articulating so as to produce a flawless object; or (2) by restoring an object that has become imperfect. That you may be enabled to form your own judgment, I shall set before you the passages in which the Greek word is variously translated elsewhere. In each passage quoted the word or words placed in italics is the English rendering of the Greek word translated make perfect in our text. When the Savior says, "a body hast thou prepared me [or "thou hast fitted me," margin]" (Heb. 10:5, ital. and brackets mine), we are to understand, as Goodwin said, that "that body was formed or articulated by the Holy Spirit, with the human soul, in all its parts, in one instant of its union with the Son of God," and that it was immaculately holy, impeccable, and without spot or blemish. Katartiz³³³; is used again to express the finishing and perfect consummation of God's work of the first creation: "the worlds were framed by the Word of God" (Heb. 11:3, ital. mine). That is to say, they were so completed that nothing more was needed for their perfection; for as Genesis 1:31 tells us, "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

But this same Greek word has a very different sense in other passages. In Matthew 4:21 it is found in the phrase "mending their nets," in which it denotes the repairing of what had been damaged. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness" (Gal. 6:1, ital. mine). In this text it signifies a restoring such as of a limb that is out of joint. No doubt this was one of the significations that the Apostle Peter had in mind when he wrote this prayer, for those for whom he prayed had been disjointed or scattered by persecutions (1 Peter 1:1, 6, 7). Paul also had this shade of meaning before him when he exhorted the divided Corinthians to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10, ital. mine). Again, the word is sometimes used to express the supply of a deficiency, as it does in 1 Thessalonians 3:10: "that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (ital. mine). The word lacking implies a deficiency. Once more, the word occurs in Hebrews 13:2 1: "Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight." Here the apostle prays that the saints might advance to further degrees of faith and holiness in this life.

Our Being Made Perfect Has to Do with the Process of Sanctification

It will thus appear, from its usage in other passages, that the Greek word rendered make perfect in 1 Peter 5:10 may yield a significance something like this: "The God of all grace... Himself make you perfect in all these successive degrees of grace that are necessary in order for you to reach spiritual maturity." This significance does not necessarily imply any personal fault or failure in those prayed for, just as a child is not to be blamed for not having yet reached the full stature of an adult or not having attained to the knowledge that comes with mature manhood. It is with this principle in mind that God has promised to bring to perfection the good work He has begun in the souls of His people (Phil. 1:6). A Christian may walk up to the measure of grace received from above without any willful divergence in his course, and still be imperfect. This was the case with the Apostle Paul, one of the most favored of God's children, who confessed, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Phil. 3:12). There have been, and are, some privileged souls who never left their first love, who have followed on swiftly in pursuing the knowledge of the Lord, and who (as to the general tenor of their lives) have carried themselves according to the light received. Yet even these have needed further additions of wisdom and holiness to make them more fruitful branches of the Vine and to move them ever in the direction of a consummation of holiness in heaven.

An example of this appears in the case of the Thessalonian saints. Not only had they experienced a remarkable conversion (1 Thess. 1:9), but they conducted themselves in the most God-honoring and

exemplary manner so that the apostle gave thanks to God always for them on account of their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 2, 3). Not only were their inward graces healthy and vigorous, but in their outward conduct they were made "ensamples [patterns] to all that believe" (v. 7, brackets mine). Nevertheless, Paul was most anxious to visit them again, that he might perfect that which was lacking in their faith (1 Thess. 3:10). He longed that they might be blessed with further supplies of knowledge and grace that would promote a closer walking with God and a greater resistance to and overcoming of temptations. To that faith which rests on Christ for pardon and acceptance with God, which He bestows at conversion, there is also a conscious faith that lays hold of our acceptance with God. Paul refers to this as the "full assurance of understanding" (Col. 2:2). With this blessed assurance God gives us the rich experience of "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8) and the making of our calling and election sure, so that an abundant entrance into His kingdom is begun in this life (2 Peter 1:10, 11). Yet this perfecting also applies to the recovery and restoration of lapsed Christians, as is evident from Peter's own case.

Peter Prays for the Establishing or Confirming of Their Faith

But suppose that God should thus mend and restore those overtaken in a fault, yet might they not fall again? Yes indeed, and evidently Peter had such a contingency in view. Thus he adds the word "stablish." Peter longed that they should be so confirmed in their faith that they would not fall away. For the fickle and vacillating it was a request that they should be no more tossed to and fro, but fixed in their beliefs. For the discouraged that, having put their hands to the plow, they should not look back because of the difficulties of the way. For those who were walking closely with the Lord, that they might be established in holiness before God (1 Thess. 3:13); for the most spiritual are daily in need of supporting grace. The Greek word (*stērizeō*; no. 4741 in Strong and Thayer) in a general way signifies to make firm or confirm. It occurs in Christ's words in Luke 16:26, "there is a great gulf fixed" (ital. mine). It is found again in connection with Christ and is translated, "he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51, ital. mine). It is the word directed by the Lord to Peter himself: "and when thou art converted, strengthen [or "fix firmly"] thy brethren" (Luke 22:32, ital. and brackets mine). Our Lord was commissioning Peter in advance to reestablish those of his fellow disciples who also would yield to the temptation to deny their Master. Likewise, Paul desired to establish and comfort concerning their faith the Thessalonian saints, and that in relation to temptation or trial (1 Thess. 3: 1-5).

Peter Prays that God Will Impart Moral Strength to Them

But though we may be so confirmed by the grace of God that we cannot totally and finally fall away, yet we are weak and may be laboring under great infirmities. Therefore the apostle adds to his petition the word "strengthen." This Greek verb (*sthenō*; no. 4599 in Strong and Thayer) is not used elsewhere in the New Testament, but from its position here between "stablish" and "settle" it appears to have the force of invigorating against weakness and corruptions. I am reminded of the prayer that Paul offered on behalf of the Ephesians, that they would be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). Paul employs a negative noun (*asthenēs*; no. 772 in Strong and Thayer), formed from the same root, in Romans 5:6: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (ital. mine). In our unregenerate state we were entirely devoid of ability and enablement to do those things that are pleasing to God. Not only is the state of spiritual impotency of an unregenerate soul called being "without strength," but the state of the body when dead is expressed by a noun (*astheneia*, no. 769) derived from *asthenēs* (no. 772). "It is sown in weakness," that is, it is lifeless, utterly devoid of any vigor. But, by contrast, "it is raised in power" (1 Cor. 15:43); that is, it is to be endued and furnished with all

the abilities of rational creatures, even such as the angels have (Luke 20:36) who "excel in strength" (Ps. 103:20). Thus, this request for the strengthening of the saints is to be understood as supplies of grace that will energize weak hands and feeble knees and enable them to overcome every opposing force.

Peter Prays that They May Be Settled In Faith, Love, and Hope

Though we be confirmed so that we shall never be lost, and though we be strengthened to bear up against trials, yet we may become shaky and uncertain. Therefore Peter adds the word "settle" to his petition. He is concerned that they be unremitting in their faith in Christ, love toward God, and hope of eternal glory. The Greek verb (*themelio*, no. 2311) is rendered founded in Matthew 7:25, lay the foundation of in Hebrews 1:10, and grounded in Ephesians 3:17. In our text it appears to be used as the opposite of waverings of spirit and doubtings of heart. Peter is saying something like this: I pray that you may be able confidently to say, "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12), and that you turn not from the path of duty because of the opposition you encounter. No matter how good the tree, if it be not settled in the earth, but moved from place to place, it will bear little or no fruit. How many might trace the unfruitfulness of their lives to the unsettled state of their hearts and judgments! David could say, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed," and therefore he added, "I will sing and give praise" (Ps. 57:7). This, too, is a blessing that God alone can impart. "Now to him that is of power to stablish you," says Paul (Rom. 16:25). Yet, as Deuteronomy 28:9 and 2 Chronicles 20:20 show, we must use the appointed means.

"Himself make you perfect: stablish, strengthen, settle you." The ultimate object seems to be mentioned first, and then the steps by which it is to be reached. But whether regarded in conjunction or singly, they all have to do with our practical sanctification. The piling up of these emphatic terms indicates the difficulty of the Christian's task and his urgent need of constant supplies of Divine grace. The saint's warfare is one of no common difficulty, and his needs are deep and many; but he has to do with "the God of all grace"! Therefore, it is both our privilege and duty to draw upon Him by importunate supplication (2 Tim. 2:1; Heb. 4:16). God has provided grace answerable to our every need, yet it flows through the means He has appointed. God will "perfect: stablish, strengthen, settle" us in response to fervent prayer, by the instrumentality of His Word, by His blessing to us the various ministries of His servants, and by sanctifying to us the discipline of His providences. He who has given His people a sure hope will also give everything necessary to the realization of the thing hoped for (2 Peter 1:3); but it is uniquely our part to seek the desired and necessary blessing by prayer (Ezek. 36:37).

Our Suffering with Christ Must Precede Our Being Glorified with Christ

Sixthly, we come to ponder the qualification of this prayer: "after that ye have suffered a while." This clause is intimately connected with two others: (1) "who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus"; and (2) the petition "himself make you perfect. ..." The apostle did not pray that believers be removed from this world as soon as they be regenerated, nor that they be immediately relieved of their sufferings. Rather, he prays that their sufferings should give way to eternal glory "after a while," or, as the Greek signifies, "after a little while," because all time is short in comparison with eternity. For the same reason the severest afflictions are to be regarded as "light" and "but for a moment" when set over against the "eternal weight of glory" that is awaiting us (2 Cor. 4:17). The sufferings and the glory are inseparably connected, for "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). The Apostle Paul clearly teaches that those of us who are God's children shall indeed share in Christ's inheritance, "if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17). If one bear no cross, he

shall gain no crown (Luke 14:27). All who have suffered for Christ's sake on earth shall be glorified in heaven; but none shall be glorified save those who, in some form or other, have been "made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10). Some of the believer's sufferings are from the hand of God's providence, some from "false brethren" (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4), some from the profane world, some from Satan, and some from indwelling sin. Peter speaks of "manifold temptations" or "trials" (1 Peter 1:6), but they are counterbalanced by "manifold grace" (1 Peter 4:10). And both are directed by "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10)!

Our Conformity to Christ Necessarily Includes Our Having Fellowship with Him in His Sufferings

The abounding grace of God does not preclude trials and afflictions, but those who are the recipients of Divine grace have been "appointed thereunto" (1 Thess. 3:3). Then let us not be dismayed or cast down by them, but seek grace to get them sanctified to us. Sufferings are necessary to the saints on various accounts. First and foremost, they are appointed in order that the members might be conformed to their Head. "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" (Heb. 2:10). Sufficient then for the disciple to be like his Master, that he should be made perfect after he has suffered awhile. Peter himself alludes to this Divinely prescribed order in the way of salvation (namely humiliation, then exaltation, which applies not only to the Head but to His members also) when he refers to "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:11). It was the Divine will that even the incarnate Son should "learn... obedience [submission] by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8, brackets mine). There was a turning point in His ministry when Jesus began "to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matthew 16:21, ital. mine). Why did He have to suffer thus? It is because God had ordained it (Acts 4:28). Was Christ tempted by the devil merely on account of Satan's malice toward Him? No, for Jesus was "led up of [by] the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4:1, brackets mine; cf. Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1, 2). Remember, dear saints enduring trials, that the Savior Himself entered the kingdom of God "through much tribulation" (Acts 14:22), even as we must do. Thus, "in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor ["relieve" or "help"] them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:18, brackets mine). Therefore, let us "count it all joy when ye [we] fall into divers temptations" (James 1:2, brackets mine), for suffering "as a Christian" is a means by which we can glorify our redeeming God (1 Peter 4:16). The privilege of experiencing "the fellowship of his sufferings" is one of God's appointed means by which we may know that we are in Christ, and no longer identified with the world that now abides under God's wrath (Phil. 3:7-11). Hear the words of our Master (Matthew 5:10-12):

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

God's Grace Is Magnified in Meeting Our Needs and Confounding Our Enemies

Secondly, the God of all grace has made this appointment because His grace is best seen in sustaining us and is most manifest by relieving us. Hence, we find the throne of grace magnified by God's giving us "grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). Much of the glory of God's grace appears in His supporting the weak, in delivering the tempted, and in raising the fallen. The Lord exempts us not from conflict, but maintains us in it. Effectual calling ensures our final perseverance, yet it does not render needless

continual supplies of grace. As Manton expressed it, "God will not only give them glory at the end of their journey, but bears their expenses by the way."

Thirdly, our Father leads us through fiery trials in order to confound those who are opposed to us. Grace reigns (Rom. 5:21), and the greatness of a monarchy is demonstrated by its subduing of rebels and vanquishing of enemies. God raised up the mighty Pharaoh in order to show forth His own power. In the context (1 Peter 5:8), as we have seen, He suffers the devil, as a roaring lion, to rage up and down opposing and assaulting us. But He does this only to foil him, for "the prey [shall] be taken from the mighty" (Isa. 49:24, brackets mine), and shortly God shall "bruise Satan under your [our] feet" (Rom. 16:20, brackets mine).

Suffering Proves Our Graces and Makes Heaven More Glorious

Fourthly, suffering is necessary for the trying and proving of our graces: "the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:3). Consider what Peter says concerning us who have been "begotten... again unto a lively hope":

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6, 7).

It is the wind of tribulation that separates the wheat from the chaff, the furnace that reveals the difference between dross and gold. The stony-ground hearer is offended and falls away "when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word" (Matthew 13:21). So, too, for the purifying and the brightening of our hope, our hearts have to be more completely weaned from this world before they become set upon things above.

Fifthly, the glory of our eternal inheritance is enhanced by our enduring affliction. Hear the words of Thomas Goodwin:

Heaven is not simply joy and happiness, but a glory, and a glory won by conquest--"to him that overcometh" [are the promises made] in each one of the seven epistles of Revelation 2 and 3. It is a crown won by mastery, and so by striving, according to certain laws set to be observed by those that win (2 Tim. 2:5). The glory won by conquest and masteries is the more valuable. The portion Jacob won "with my sword and with my bow" was the one he reserved for his beloved Joseph (Gen. 48:22). We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

Grace Is Provided for Both Internal and External Conflicts

It is a mistake (made by some) to restrict either the afflictions of verse 9 or the suffering of verse 10 to outward persecutions and trials. But all inward assaults (whether from our own lusts or Satan), and so all temptations whatsoever, are to be included. The context requires this, for the words "be sober, be vigilant" have respect to our lusts as well as to every other provocation to evildoing, so that the call to resist the devil clearly relates to his inward temptations to sin. The experience of all saints requires it, for their acutest pangs are occasioned by their own corruptions. Moreover, as Goodwin has pointed out, our setting of God before the eyes of our faith as "the God of all grace" argues the same; for His grace stands principally ready to help us against inward sins and temptations to sin. Furthermore, the all of His grace

extends not only to all sorts of external miseries, but to all internal maladies, which are our greatest grief, which require His abundant grace above all others, and to which His grace is chiefly directed (Ps. 19:14; 119:1-16; Prov. 3:5-7; 4:20-27). His grace is the grand remedy for every evil to which the believer is subject. Some are guilty of worse sins after conversion than before, and were not the God of all grace their God, where would they be?

Perfection in Grace Is Both Progressive and Eschatological

"After that ye have suffered a while, Himself make you perfect: stablish, strengthen, settle you." This may well be regarded as a request for grace to enable us to obey the exhortation found in 1 Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." We are to be constantly opposing sin and striving to be holy in all manner of conversation. This request receives a partial fulfillment in this life, but a complete and more transcendent one in heaven. Saints are advanced to further degrees of faith and holiness when, after seasons of wavering and suffering, God strengthens and establishes them in a more settled frame of spirit. Yet only in our fixed condition after death will these blessings be fully ours. Not till then shall we be made perfect in the sense of being fully conformed to the image of God's Son. Our hearts will be established "unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 3:13). Only then will all our weakness end and our bodies be "raised in power" (1 Cor. 15:43). Then indeed shall we be eternally settled, for the Divine promise is this: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out" (Rev. 3:12).

A Doxology of Infallible Hope

Seventh and finally, we come to the great ascription of this apostolic prayer: "to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." "The apostle, having added prayer to his doctrine, here added praise to his prayer," says Leighton. It expressed the apostle's confidence that the God of all grace would grant his request. He was assured that what he had asked for on behalf of the saints would be to the Divine "glory," and that the Divine "dominion" would infallibly bring it to pass. There is thus a practical hint implied for us in this closing doxology. It intimates where relief is to be obtained and strength is to be found in the midst of our suffering: by eyeing the glory of God, which is the grand end He has in view in all His dealings with us; and by confidently trusting in God's dominion in working all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28). For if His be the dominion, and He has called us to His eternal glory, then what have we to fear? So certain is our glorification (Rom. 8:30) that we should give thanks for it now. The abundant and infinite grace of God is engaged to effect it, and His omnipotent power guarantees its performance.

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