

PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING.

"Who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and, being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec." – Heb. 5:7-10.

WE take up the examination of this scripture under the following five heads: – (1) In the days of his flesh; (2) What he feared, and from what he was saved; (3) He was a Son; (4) In what sense he was made perfect; and (5) To whom he is the author of eternal salvation.

These words of the Apostle give us an insight to the experiences of our dear Lord which help us to appreciate the load he bore for us in the days of his flesh. We notice particularly this expression –

"IN THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH,"

because there are some who claim that in our Lord's existence there can be no distinction between days when he was in the flesh, and days when he was no longer in the flesh; for, say they, his resurrection life is his humanity, his flesh, glorified. Others there are who claim that he had no existence prior to his human life. But the reverse of both these ideas is not only implied in this statement of the Apostle, but is also definitely expressed in other scriptures, e.g., "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise *took part of the same*;" he "was *made flesh*, and dwelt among us;" "Though he was rich, for our sakes he became *poor*." Then he said, "*My flesh* I will *give* for the life of the world." (See Heb. 2:14; John 1:14; 2 Cor. 8:9; John 6:51.) Yes, his human body was the body of his humiliation, the "body prepared" for sacrifice (Heb. 10:4,5), and which was

sacrificed; and which, being sacrificed, was never taken back: it was *given* as the price of our redemption. Therefore he no longer lives the life in the flesh, the human life, but, having sacrificed that, he is now highly exalted and ever liveth as our divine high priest. "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now, henceforth, know we him [so] no more." – 2 Cor. 5:16.

His humiliation, therefore, was not an eternal humiliation, but was followed by a glorious exaltation, even to the divine nature and to the glorious body which belongs to that nature – "the express image of the Father's person" (Heb. 1:3), who dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto, but which Christ's faithful followers may one day see; for it is written that "we shall be like him, and see him as he is" – not as he was. For this he prayed while he was yet in the flesh, saying, "Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me shall be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." – John 17:24.

And yet, though changed, our Lord is the very same **[R1806 : page 106]** Jesus; for, says the Apostle, "He that descended [into the grave] is *the same also* that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." (Eph. 4:10.) The change of nature from the human to the divine no more destroyed his identity in this case than did his change from the spiritual to the human nature at his incarnation. Of himself he said after his resurrection, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore." – Rev. 1:4,18.

It is with grateful hearts that we accept the statements of Scripture that the Son of God was indeed made flesh; and we thank God also that his days in the flesh were numbered and few. With him, as with us, they were "few days and full of trouble." Especially after his consecration to the work of sacrifice, they were days of affliction, sorrow, disappointment and trouble, days that led him often to the throne of the heavenly grace to find help in time of need. It was our Lord's custom, therefore, often to seek the place of prayer after the busy

days of service were ended. The mountains and the deserts were his closets, and not infrequently he spent the whole night in prayer.

It was from these seasons of secret communion with God that he drew spiritual strength, consolation and comfort. They were seasons of precious communion when he could open up his heart to the Father as to no one else; when he could tell him all his sorrows and burdens and fears; and when the Father manifested himself to him in tokens of loving approval and sustaining grace.

WHAT HE FEARED, AND FROM WHAT HE WAS SAVED.

What, says some one, in surprise, did our Lord have any fears? Yes, the above words of the Apostle indicate the great mental conflict through which the Lord passed on our behalf "in the days of his flesh." This conflict began in the temptations of the wilderness, immediately following his baptism, and reached its culminating point in the garden of Gethsemane, where, probably as never before, "he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared."

That which the Lord feared was not that the love or the promises of God would fail. He knew that "without faith it is impossible to please God," that God is a covenant-keeping God, and that all his conduct and dealings are founded on the eternal principles of truth and righteousness, from which to vary in the least iota would be a moral impossibility. But he knew, too, that the plan of human salvation was all made dependent upon the obedience of the anointed high priest to every jot and tittle of the law concerning him, as shown in the typical service of the tabernacle.* Not only must the sacrifice be made, but it must be made and offered exactly as prescribed. If the typical high priest, Aaron, had at any time failed to conform to the directions given for the offering (See Lev. 9:16), if he had forgotten or ignored any part of the directions, or if he had substituted some feature of his own ideas, he would not have been allowed to sprinkle the blood of such imperfect sacrifice upon the mercy-seat; his offering would not have been

accepted: he would have died, and could never have come out and blessed the people. – Lev. 16:2,3.

See TABERNACLE SHADOWS, page 78.

Thus we see that in undertaking the great work of redemption, the high priest not only bore in himself the issues of life and death for the whole human race, but for himself as well. Figuratively speaking, he took his own life also in his hands. No wonder, then, if, under the weight of his responsibility, the Lord feared. The tension of the great trials to which he was subjected was too great for even the perfect human nature unaided by divine grace. And therefore it was that he so often sought the place of prayer. Consider the great fight of afflictions through which he passed – the subtle and deceptive temptations in the wilderness,+ the contradictions of sinners against himself, and the base ingratitude of those he came to save: consider also his poverty, his loss of friends, his labors and weariness, and homelessness, his bitter and relentless persecutions, and finally his betrayal and dying agony. Surely the tests of endurance and of obedience to the exact requirements of the law of sacrifice under these circumstances were most crucial tests. What carefulness it wrought in the Lord; for he feared, lest the promise having been left him of entering into the rest that remaineth and the glory to follow the day of atonement, he should come short of the full requirements of his office as a priest to render acceptable sacrifice. So also, says the Apostle (Heb. 4:1), should we fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should come short of it.

See our issue of Aug. 1, '94.

When the Lord came to the last night of his earthly life, then it was that the questions came to his mind with increased force, Have I thus far done everything in exact accordance with the will of God? and now, in full view of the agony it will cost, am I able to drink the bitter

cup to its very dregs? Can I endure, not only the physical agony, but also the ignominy and shame and cruel mockings? and can I do it all so perfectly as to be entirely acceptable with God in my own righteousness? Can I endure to see my disciples scattered and dismayed and my life-work apparently destroyed, my name and the cause of God covered with infamy, and my enemies triumphant and boastful?

Such was our Lord's last conflict. Doubtless the powers of darkness were busy in that awful hour, taking advantage of the circumstances and of his weakness and weariness to discourage his hope and to fill his mind with fears that after all he should fail, or had failed to do the work acceptably, and that a resurrection therefore was by no means certain. No wonder that even the perfect human heart sank before such considerations, and that an agony of emotion brought great drops of bloody sweat. But did he yield to the discouragement and give up the struggle when **[R1806 : page 107]** the crucial test was thus upon him? No; he took these human fears to his Heavenly Father, "to him who was able to deliver him out of death," in order that his human will might be reinforced by divine grace to go forward and complete his sacrifice acceptably to God – to freely submit to be led away as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so to open not his mouth in self-defence. – Isa. 53:7.

And his prayers to the Father were not in vain: "he was heard in that he feared." Though his words were few **[R1807 : page 107]** because no words could express the emotions of his soul, his chastened spirit was all the while making intercession for him with groanings that could not be uttered. (Rom. 8:26.) And God sent an angel to comfort and minister unto him; to assure him still of the divine favor, and thus to give him fresh courage, strength of mind and steadiness of nerve to endure all that was before him, even unto death. With this assistance of divine grace our dear Lord went forward from that moment with undaunted courage to finish the work that was given him to do. Calmly he could come now and say to his beloved, but weary and bewildered, disciples, "Sleep on now, and take your rest." The bitterness of the mental conflict

was now over, and the light of heaven shining into his soul had chased away the deep gloom that had hung over him like a funeral pall, making him exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Yes, "he was heard in that he feared," the fear was all taken away, and, strong in the strength which God supplied, he felt that he was able to offer the acceptable sacrifice, to meet every jot and tittle of the requirement of the law in doing it, and hence that his salvation *out of* death, his resurrection, was sure.

This fear on the Lord's part was not a sinful fear: it was a fear such as we also who are striving to walk in his footsteps are told to have, lest we fail to realize the precious promises vouchsafed to us upon conditions that are positive and unalterable. (Heb. 4:1.) It was a fear begotten, not of doubt of the Father's ability and willingness to fulfil all his promises, but of a knowledge of the righteous principles which must in every case govern the Father's course of action, of the inflexible law which righteously affixed the reward of eternal life and glory to his fulfilling of his covenant of sacrifice, while at the same time he began to realize that of himself as a human being, though perfect, his heart and flesh would fail unless reinforced by divine grace. The Psalmist expressed this fear of the Lord, and the source from which his help came, when he said, "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psa. 73:26.) It was a filial fear, a fear entirely compatible with his relationship to God as a recognized Son; for

THOUGH HE WERE A SON

yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. His continual recognition by Jehovah as a Son was a guarantee of his perfection, and to sin at any time would have been to forfeit that relationship. On the same principle, we, the Church, are recognized as sons of God, because we have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith.

And yet, though he was a recognized Son, and hence perfect, without sin, the Apostle speaks of him as being *made perfect* – as being perfected in *some sense* through a process of experience – of experience of humiliation and suffering. In what sense, then, we inquire, was he perfected? The answer is implied in the words of the text – "Yet learned he *obedience* by the things which he suffered; and, being made perfect [in this lesson], he became," etc. Although he was a recognized Son of God in whom the Father was always well pleased, and one who had never disappointed in the slightest degree the fondest hopes of that righteous Father; although he had always recognized the Father as the source of his being, and the fountain of all wisdom, goodness and grace, and as that superior Being to whom he owed the deepest gratitude for life and all its manifold blessings, in whom also dwelt all wisdom and honor and glory and power, and whose perfect will was therefore the supreme law, the expression of the most perfect righteousness and truth, the profoundest wisdom and the deepest love and grace; to whom, therefore, was due the most loyal and loving obedience at all times and under all circumstances; and although he was a Son who had always recognized and delighted to do the Father's will; yet he was not counted perfect in the sense of that established and demonstrated character which was the necessary requirement for the priestly office to which he was called. For this office he must be proved beyond all peradventure by the severest tests, and that before many witnesses, in order that all might know the strong foundation upon which they could build their hopes. It was for this purpose that his sense of loyalty was put to the severe test which it met in Gethsemane. Possibly even our Lord himself did not realize the strength of his righteous character until brought face to face with this last trial. There he was tried and proved to the uttermost, and under the fiery ordeal his character, always perfect to the full measure of its testing, gained by divine grace its glorious perfection of completeness.

Thus, through suffering, he learned obedience to the perfect will of God down to the lowest depths of self-abnegation; and God permitted it so to be, because such proving was necessary, both for the

development and manifestation of that perfection of character which would be worthy of the high exaltation to which he was called.

It should ever be borne in mind that perfection of being and perfection of character are two different things. Perfection of being is the work of God, while perfection of character is the work of the intelligent creature, wrought out in obedience to divine law and under the divine direction and supervision. Adam was a perfect being, innocent, free and glorious in his pristine beauty; but in the work of character-building he soon failed, and hence lost his perfection. Character cannot be developed wholly without trial. It is like a plant: at first it is very tender; it needs an abundance of the sunshine of God's love; frequent [R1807 : page 108] watering with the showers of his grace; much cultivating through the applied knowledge of his character as a good foundation for faith and inspiration to obedience; and then, when thus developed under these favorable conditions, it is ready for the pruning hand of discipline, and is also able to endure some hardness. And, little by little, as strength of character is developed, the tests applied to it serve only to develop more strength, beauty and grace until it is finally fixed, developed, established, perfected – through suffering.

In the case of our Lord, this valuable plant of character, perfect in its infancy, maintained its perfection through all the tests applied to it, until it was finally made perfect in completeness, being established, strengthened, settled. This brings us to the last topic of our text, viz., –

TO WHOM IS CHRIST THE AUTHOR OF ETERNAL SALVATION?

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation *unto all them that obey him*; called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec."

There is much food for thought in this introductory phrase, "And being made perfect," – and that, too, as previously shown, through the

painful discipline of suffering. Being thus made perfect, he is now a suitable one to fill the office of a high priest, a mediator between God and men. This office, it is declared, he will fill on behalf of all men who obey him. The disobedient and wilful, who do not love the right ways of the Lord, and who have no desire to walk in them, will receive none of the benefit of his mediation; but to those who do obey him he will be "a merciful and faithful high priest;...for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor [to assist, comfort, relieve] them that are tempted.

Ah, that was why he was first made perfect through suffering. The heavenly Father knew through what suffering, ignominy, shame and sorrow his beloved followers all through the Gospel age must pass. His omniscient eye foresaw the fagot, the torch, the rack, and the thousand refinements of cruelty with which Satanic ingenuity would fight the Church on her journey through this wilderness to the promised land. He foreknew how the fiery darts of the wicked, even bitter words, would wound them (Psa. 64:2,3), and therefore "It became him [Jehovah]...to make the Captain of their salvation perfect *through sufferings*." (Heb. 2:10.) He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, so that we might know that we have a high priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and so come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:15,16.) Ah, how carefully and wisely our heavenly Father foresaw and considered the interests of all his people! Through these glimpses of his character and dealings we can see how true were our Lord's words to his disciples, – "The Father himself loveth you."

But, aside from the process of perfecting for the office of priesthood, – through suffering, – there is the *fact* of the perfection of our High Priest, to be considered for our comfort, satisfaction and consolation. He is one who, though when surrounded by sin and tempted in all points to sin, yet "knew no sin; neither was guile found in his mouth." He was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from

sinners," yet acquainted with our griefs and bearing our sorrows. Through bitter experiences he was perfected as our High Priest – to mediate for us (1), by presenting to God an acceptable sacrifice which made our salvation a legal possibility; (2), by undertaking to cleanse, purge and purify us until we also can stand approved of God and blameless – a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

The absolute perfection, both personal and official, of our great High Priest, and the fact that he was ordained of God for this office, is the strongest possible demand and incentive for the Church's obedience to him, just as the **[R1808 : page 108]** heavenly Father's perfection and office were the all-sufficient reasons to our Lord for his obedience to the Father. God has not set over us a novice, nor one actuated by selfishness, nor by any ignoble motive; but he has made us a great High Priest whose every command is wise and good and in love calculated to lead us on from grace to grace until we also, like him, shall be established, strengthened, settled.

The discipline through which he leads to this glorious end must of necessity be, in some measure at least, such as he himself experienced, a discipline of suffering. And since the Church is called, not only to perfection in righteousness, but also to share with Christ in the priestly office as members of his body, it is theirs also to follow him in the pathway of humiliation and sacrifice, even unto death. To obey him now, in this age, signifies all of this; for this is the will of God and the will of Christ, even our sanctification. – 1 Thes. 4:3.

In submitting ourselves fully to this great High Priest, the Church has the fullest assurance of his love, of his perfect integrity of character and purpose, of his superior wisdom and grace, and that in all things he is actuated by the purest and loftiest principles of virtue, love and benevolence. Never once has he been swayed from the most exact line of perfection, though assailed by the fiercest temptations. Every exhibition and testimony of his character inspires the fullest

confidence, so that obedience to him signifies progress toward perfection at every step of the way. And to those who follow in this way he is the author of eternal salvation. Praise God for such a High Priest! – glorious in his perfection and glorious in his office, one touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but himself having no infirmities, no shortcomings, no sins. If he were an imperfect human being with only some superior qualifications, but liable like ourselves to err, to fail in judgment, or to be moved by selfishness or inferior considerations of policy, or who with a beam in his own eye would seek to extract the mote from ours, well might we fear to commit ourselves to his direction, and wonder why the Almighty gave us such a high priest. But our High Priest is not so. His [R1808 : page 109] perfection is testified by Jehovah himself, and his great love for us has been manifested in a thousand ways, chiefly in that *he gave himself for us*.

Previous to his incarnation the evidences of our Lord's loyalty to the will of God – which always was the law of righteousness – were the acts of delightful service in cooperation with God in the works of creation and in things pertaining thereto. The humbling to human conditions was a step down from that exalted service, yet cheerfully and gladly undertaken. Then followed the trials of his earthly life; and last of all came the severe test of Gethsemane and Calvary. Here was a test of his fidelity to God which would cost him all that he had. Beyond this he could hope for nothing, save by the mercy and love of God, to whose wisdom, love and power he commended his spirit. (Luke 23:46.) It was indeed a crucial test, and though at the time he evidently could not see the necessity for every feature of it (Matt. 26:39,42,44), he nevertheless knew that the love of God was too great to allow a needless pain to afflict his beloved Son, and therefore he trusted him where he could not at the time trace his inscrutable ways.
