Was Adam Created Perfect?

I am now back from my trip to Thailand, back to the comfort of a temperate clime and a bug-free home. While my journeys to SE Asia are always an exciting adventure, it is always an unavoidable realization upon returning that there is no place like home!

Just prior to my departure for SE Asia last month, I posed a question to my readers. The question was:

<p align="center">**Was Adam created perfect?**</p>

Much to my delight, my question sparked a lively discussion among several visitors to my blog. And though the discussion did not wholly go in the direction I had originally in mind (and that's not at all a bad thing!), I encourage readers to peruse the comments section of that blog and ponder many of the points that were made there. Very interesting food for thought can be found there, and I am grateful to those visitors who contributed to the discussion.

As for the question, *Was Adam created perfect?*, the answer to this question of course depends on whom you consult.

In the comments section of my blog in which I posed this question, Robert Bumbalough stated:

> Since the two Genesis creation accounts are fictional, then the only creation that occurs, perfect or otherwise, happens in the brains of those who fantasize about those stories.

And of course I agree with the essence of Robert's statement here. In that case, one could say I've posed a trick question. Since there is no god, no creation, no Adam, then obviously the question as to whether Adam was created perfect or not, is purely academic.

But if we focus our sights on the internals of Christian thought, the question acquires special gravity. Christians have throughout history affirmed the historical reliability of the book of Genesis in one sense or another (the New Testament clearly assumes its historicity), and even today typically insist that there really was an Adam and that this Adam really was created by a supernatural deity. But even here we find a conspicuous lack of uniformity on the issue which my question raises. The answer seems to vary depending on who's providing it. In the same comments section, a Christian who calls himself Vytautas made it clear that he does think Adam was indeed created perfect when he responded:

> Yes, since God made him very good. He did not have any defects such as being dead in sin, which causes men to hate God. Also he was made with the potential to fall into sin, so that he had free will with respect to whether or not to obey God.

So here's one Christian's vote for Adam having been created perfect. And Vytautas is by no means alone on this. Christian apologist Cornelius Van Til agrees that Adam was created perfect (at least at one point [1]). He writes:

> ...I have frequently explained that by the term "autonomous man" I mean the idea of a man who *virtually* denies his createdness. As created in paradise man was a distinct ontological entity over against God. As **made perfect** he recognized that God his creator was also his lawgiver. (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 188; emphasis added)

But then there's Christian apologist John Byl, who writes:

> Adam, the first man, was created good and upright, in the image of God. Though good, **he was not yet perfect**: he had the potential to fall. He could freely choose between good and evil. He had the capacity to serve God. Unhappily, Adam chose not to serve that glorious purpose. Giving in to the devil, he wilfully subjected himself to sin and death. Thereafter man became enslaved to sin. (Free Will and Responsibility; emphasis added)

In contrast to Van Til, Byl explicitly contends that Adam was *not* created perfect. Such disagreement between two

Christian thinkers is perplexing. Both Van Til and Byl are Christians, and as Christians, they're supposed to be "led by the Spirit," that is, the Holy Spirit. Or so we've been told? But the views they affirm are in direct conflict with one another. Either Adam was created perfect, or he wasn't. It can't be both.

It is noteworthy that, while Vytautas takes the claim that Adam was created "very good" to indicate that Adam was therefore created perfect, Byl allows that Adam "was created good and upright," but still "was not yet perfect." For Vytautas, being created "good" is an indication of perfection, while Byl apparently thinks it is possible to be "created good and upright" and still be "not yet perfect." Also, Byl's phrase "not yet perfect" seems a bit misleading, since according to the story Adam never becomes perfect (or in Van Til's case, regains his perfection after the fall). Byl is happy to point out that Adam "had the potential to fall," but he does not explicitly state that Adam also had the potential to achieve perfection. A "fall from grace," which is typically how Christians characterize Adam's spiritual decline, is not necessarily a *fall from perfection*. And while the book of Genesis does, in umbrella fashion, appear to affirm that Adam was "very good" (Gen. 1:31, which occurs after Adam was created, reads "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good"), "very good" does not necessarily mean or imply "perfect." "Very good" and "perfect" are not synonymous. I can score 97% on a test and be said to have a "very good" score on it, but my performance on that test was not in fact perfect.

Now, I could understand two heavy-weight Christian thinkers conflicting on something utterly trivial, such as whether Abraham left Ur (cf. Gen. 11:31) on a Tuesday morning or on a Tuesday afternoon; it's hard to see how either position on such an issue would have much doctrinal significance. But on a matter such as whether or not Adam was created perfect, conflict among Christians is rather surprising. Wouldn't Christian doctrine be clear on such a matter? Wouldn't the Holy Spirit protect believers from error on such a point? Would we be wrong to expect Christianity's more tutored representatives to speak "with one accord" on such fundamental matters? How could two Holy Spirit-filled Christians disagree like this?

Byl explains his view that Adam "was not yet perfect" with the premise that Adam "had the potential to fall. He could freely choose between good and evil." Do Byl and other Christians think their god can "freely choose between good and evil," or do they think that it is constrained from such choices as this? If the Christian god "could freely choose between good and evil," it seems that, according to Byl's reasoning, it would therefore have "the potential to fall" as well. I doubt Byl and other Christians would care much for this implication, which seems plain enough to me from the statements given. If the Christian claims that his god is a free agent, possessing freedom to choose its actions (as Christianity typically does claim about its god; states [one source](#): "God is a free agent, who does what pleases him"), then according to the Christian worldview it is apparently possible to possess free will and yet never fall short of glory, never sin, never do evil, or what have you. But curiously, Christians typically seem to think that their god could not have created Adam both as a free agent and also as a being which could refrain entirely from all evil, sin, or what have you. In spite of the claim that the Christian god created Adam after its own image, this god seems quite unable to replicate its own qualities in what it creates. Was Adam created perfect, omniscient, infallible, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, infinite, incorruptible, etc.? Christian apologists will likely insist that their god chose to create Adam without these qualities. But this not only raises concerns against the claim that man was created "in God's image," but also questions as to why it would have so chosen, given its own alleged perfection. In effect, Christians taking this course of defense are saying that their god chose to create something imperfect. How can we call a creator "perfect" when it creates something less than perfect, whether intentionally or not?

Of course this leads to the problem of evil, which in fact is part of a broader problem within Christianity, a problem to which [Franc Tremblay](#) refers as "Problems of Deficiency," or what I call simply *the problem of imperfection*.

In regard to the problem of evil, commonplace are evasive responses such as [the following](#):

> the Bible says that everything that God creates is good so why did He create evil? Evil is not a "thing." God did not create evil. Evil is an illusion created by a wrong choice. That choice was man's choice. So if evil is the result of man's free will, then does that mean that God created evil by creating free will?

It seems odd to say on the one hand that "God" created everything distinct from itself, and on the other hand that it is *not* responsible for the profusion of evil which is virtually ubiquitous throughout its creation. Byl himself insists that "God is not responsible for moral evil; he is not the *author* of sin," and holds that "the moral responsibility of sin remains with those who actually *do* the sin." Though this is a typical position among many Christians, it's hard to see this as anything other than a case of blaming the creation for its faults (even though they were allegedly created by a

"perfect" creator which created exactly what it chose to create). Paul, in Romans 9:21, asks: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" One would think that a potter would have such power over his clay, especially if he were perfect and omnipotent, as we are expected to believe in regard to the Christian god. But why would a potter, *especially if he is rational*, spend his efforts in making a vessel "unto dishonour"? What would motivate someone to do this? If Paul is saying that his god has deliberately created some human beings "unto dishonour," it strikes me that Paul's god is rather deranged, certainly not rational, and itself not perfect (for a perfect creator would not deliberately create something "unto dishonour"). The idea that we are created either "unto honour" or "unto dishonour" by a supernatural being can only mean that we are here to serve someone else's ends, which essentially reduces us to slaves. And many Christians in fact believe this: we are either slaves to their god, or to the devil it created for no rational purpose. Even worse, Christian claims make it clear that we are essentially puppets of their god. Greg Bahnsen, for instance, in his radio debate with George H. Smith, declares, "…I've got a heavenly father who created the entire universe and controls every detail, even to the hairs on my head…" According to the Christian worldview, we are all under the insuperable control of an invisible magic being. This amounts to what I have called the cartoon universe premise of theism. So to say on the one hand that the Christian god "controls every detail," but then say that man chose to "create evil," is to affirm two horns of a contradiction. So-called "compatibilist" theories which are deliberately contrived to untangle this problem ring hollow and are entirely unconvincing. Indeed, they appear to have been concocted entirely for the purpose of trying to conceal this contradiction.

The claim that the creation of evil "was man's choice" seems to overlook another important aspect of Christian doctrine. According to the gospels and other NT documents, there exist demons and devils, invisible supernatural beings which are evil and look for ways to cause havoc on human beings, particularly "the elect." Were these demons and devils created by any human being? Of course not; human beings don't create supernatural entities. So according to Christianity, no human being had a choice in the existence of these malicious supernatural beings. Even in the case of the serpent in the Garden of Eden which tempted Adam and Eve, neither Adam nor Eve created the serpent. So the existence of these menaces could not be man's doing, and therefore that they exist (as according to Christianity they do) could not be man's fault. Why isn't their creator to be faulted for creating them? Wells makes a topical point on this matter: "The most important task of such a theology [as derived from gospel exorcism accounts and related material] would, I suggest, be to explain why an all-powerful and all-benevolent deity permits legions of supernatural entities to practice untold evil." (*The Jesus Myth*, p. 170.) Apologists, perhaps recognizing the incoherence of blaming human beings at this point, may take the position that their existence is all part of their deity's "perfect plan." One could say this about any deity one imagines. The question at this point is how *any* imperfection could have a place in a "perfect creation" or a "perfect plan"?

Perfection is not a work in progress, and as such, it seems that it would be an unchanging state. Something in motion is either in motion toward a goal, or toward no goal. If it is in motion toward a goal, that can only mean that the goal has not yet been met. If the goal has not been met, we have a condition of incompleteness. If something is in motion toward no goal, and yet it is ultimately in the control of a volitional agent (cf. Van Til's claim that "God controls whatsoever comes to pass," *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160), then we have a volitional agent which controls things to move for no particular purpose, for the sake of achieving no goal. Such action would be arbitrary, for there would be no objective criterion behind the choice to move it; it would be choice divorced from goal-achievement. Neither condition would qualify as a perfect state.

But going back to our question – namely whether or not Adam was, according to Christianity, created perfect – it is important to keep in mind that Christianity clearly and explicitly puts the blame for the existence of evil in the world squarely on the shoulders of Adam (and the rest of humankind as some kind of inheritance). This view is sufficient to give us a clue as to whether or not Adam was created perfect. We saw above that "evil is an illusion created by a wrong choice," and "that choice was man's choice." (That Adam is not specifically named here is no accident; all human beings are said by Christianity to be guilty of a choice made by one man.) This choice was made by Adam in the Garden after being tempted. A man's choices, particularly those made apart from the duress of emergency situations, follow from his *judgment*. I see no indication in the Genesis story which suggests that Adam was under any duress when he chose to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. On my reading of the story, this was not a choice made in the heat of an emergency. Consequently, if Adam's choice to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was "a wrong choice," this could only mean that Adam's choice to do so was not governed by perfect judgment. A volitional creature which makes any choice not governed by perfect judgment would clearly be a defective creature, assuming perfection as the operative standard. The conclusion here is inescapable: Adam was created *without perfect judgment*. He had at best imperfect judgment. Which means: Adam was not a

perfect creature. And tracing this defect back to its creator, the conclusion that Adam's creator was not a perfect creator, is also inescapable. Had Adam been created with perfect judgment, he would not have made a "wrong choice"; any choices he made would have been in line with his perfect judgment.

So clearly Christians must be wrong to suppose that Adam was created perfect, for his most infamous act is characterized by choice governed by imperfect judgment. And if Adam was created imperfect, as the story of his fall clearly and unequivocally implies, then it would be entirely wrong to call Adam's creator a *perfect* creator. It does reason no justice to blame the faults of a perfect creator's creations on its creations themselves, without considering the involvement of the originating source. A perfect creator would, by definition, create perfect creations; otherwise, it is a violation of the concept 'perfect' to call it "perfect."

by Dawson Bethrick

[1] Van Til does not seem to be wholly consistent on whether Adam was created perfect or not. In the same book, he goes on record to acknowledge as a "fact" that "[man's] being, as finite, was inherently defective" (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160). It would be conceptually incoherent to call something "perfect" and yet at the same time admit that it is "inherently defective."

Labels: Adam, Creation, Original Sin, problem of evil, Problem of Imperfection

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