PERDITION, SONS OF

See: Sons of Perdition

PERFECTION

Through all generations, God has commanded his children to be perfect. His mandates to Abraham, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect” (Gen. 17:1), and to the Israelites, “Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God” (Deut. 18:13), were one with his charge, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48; cf. 3 Ne. 12:48).

Although the Savior’s injunction is an unequivocal call to perfection, Latter-day Saints recognize that only he was totally without blemish or stain and was perfect in an infinite and absolute sense. “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9).

Human beings are required to seek perfection in certain respects that are attainable in mortality only through Christ. The New Testament refers to “them that are perfect” (1 Cor. 2:6; cf. Matt. 19:21; James 3:2; Heb. 12:23), and the Greek word teletos, meaning “perfect,” also means “complete, whole, fully initiated, mature.” Such maturity and completeness consist of receiving the fulness of the gospel, walking by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repenting of one’s sins, receiving necessary ordinances, being faithful to covenants with the Lord, obeying the Lord and submitting to his will, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and having charity, “the bond of perfectness and peace” (D&C 88:125).

Latter-day prophets have taught that men and women can become perfect “in the spheres in which [they] are called to act . . . [and] that we may become as perfect in our sphere as God is perfect in his higher and more exalted sphere” (Smith, p. 252; cf. JD 6:90; 2:129; 10:223). Mortal beings have the comforting assurance that God “giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Ne. 3:7).

Mormons believe that Jesus Christ provides the means for all humans to become perfect. He is “the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by [him]” (John 14:6). Through his atoning sacrifice all men and women can repent and become perfected by having their sins and errors and the desire for sin removed. Ultimately, eternal life and godly perfection are gifts of God (D&C 14:7), rooted in the grace of God, redemption, individual righteousness, and being born of God. Human effort falls short; God’s gift of grace compensates for this shortcoming. “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Ne. 25:23).

The process by which faithful Saints advance toward perfection is gradual, made step by step. Just as the Savior “continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness” (D&C 93:13), so God gives his children milk before meat (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12; D&C 19:22). “It is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (Mosiah 4:27). This process is variously described as a “ladder” (TPJS, p. 348), a “road” (DS 2:18–19), and a “process to be pursued throughout one’s lifetime” (Kimball, p. 6). In 1831 the Lord admonished the Saints to “continue in patience until ye are perfected” (D&C 67:13).

Although to many the goal of perfection seems overwhelming, Christ promised, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). While obedience to the commandments is essential, the spirit of perfection is contrary to ever-lengthening checklists of outward acts visible to others. Rather, prophets invite all to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness . . . and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you” (Moro. 10:32). Therein lies the power to overcome sin and discouragement.

The man or woman who seeks the perfection of the Redeemer participates in the Father’s work of saving and exalting mankind: “He proceeds to help his frail fellow men in their attempts to progress; thus becoming a partner with God in working out the plan of salvation” (Widtsoe, p. 180). Latter-day Saints believe that they must become perfected and one in spirit, as individuals and as a body (Eph. 4:12), in order to inherit the kingdom of God.

[See also HOLINESS; SANCTIFICATION.]
PERPETUAL EMIGRATING FUND (PEF)

To assist Latter-day Saints in the eastern United States and Europe to gather to Church headquarters in the West (see GATHERING), the Church inaugurated the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company in 1849. It is probable that before its demise in 1887, the Emigrating Company assisted more than 30,000 individuals to travel to Utah.

The PEF used Church assets and private contributions to assist individuals commensurate with their inability to pay. With limited funds, fewer individuals could be assisted than wished to participate. Those receiving priority included individuals with skills urgently needed in the West, those whose relatives or friends had contributed to the PEF, and those with longest membership in the Church. Cost-cutting measures, including group contracting, doubling up families in wagons, and organizing HANDCART COMPANIES, were also adopted to make the available funds stretch as far as possible.

PEF assistance was always extended as a loan rather than as a gift. Sponsored emigrants signed a note obligating themselves to repay the PEF as they were able. Though it sometimes required years, and some never fully retired their debt, many repaid their loan in cash, commodities, or labor. In 1880, on the fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the Church, President John Taylor, in the tradition of the Israelite jubilee year, forgave half of the outstanding debt owed by the poor to the fund, while those who were able to pay were still expected to do so. In late 1887, under provisions of the Edmunds-Tucker Act (see ANTIPOLYGAMY LEGISLATION), the U.S. government dissolved both the Corporation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company.

[See also Immigration and Emigration.]