

Perfection and Free Will

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Question: How can it be said that angel or man was created “perfect” and yet be capable of sin? The potential for which would suggest that it was really created less than perfect?

How is “Perfect” used in Scripture?

Let’s consider that in the context of a created being, namely the angel Lucifer and the man Adam. Lucifer first.

In the **Ezekiel 28:12** it says that Lucifer was perfect. How so?

NIV – You were the **model of perfection**, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty

NKJV – You *were* the **seal of perfection**, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

ESV – You were the **signet of perfection**, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

Three different attributes are ascribed to Lucifer:

- He was the “model (seal, signet) of perfection”
- He was “full of wisdom”
- He was “perfect in beauty”

We will deal with the last two attributes first then come back to the first attribute later. First, note that the passage states that Lucifer “was” these things, implying he once was but is not now.

Full of wisdom – The word translated “wisdom” is the Hebrew *chokmah khok-maw* and is correctly translated “wisdom”. The word can refer to skill in war, wisdom in administration, shrewdness, or wisdom or prudence in religious affairs. The word translated “full” is male’ *maw-lay* and means full, fullness, that which fills. I think “full of wisdom” is used to describe Lucifer as highly intelligent and possessing an exceptional body of knowledge and understanding. It describes Lucifer’s supreme intelligence.

Perfect in beauty – “Perfect” is *kaliyl kaw-leeel*. It is *not* the same word used in the phrase “model of perfection”. This word means entire, all, perfect, or whole. “Beauty” is *yophiy yof-ee* simply refers to physical appearance that we would think of as beauty. This term describes his exceptional physical beauty, beautiful in every way. Verse 13 goes into more detail about his beauty, using very hyperbolic language.

Model (seal, signet) of perfection – The word translated “perfection” is *tokniyth tok-neeth* and means measurement, pattern, or proportion. It is usually translated sum or pattern in reference to a measurement. Here it used with a qualifier, the Hebrew *chatham khaw-tham* which usually means to seal up or a seal. The meaning of the term appears to be idiomatic and is uncertain according to Strongs. Since the other two attributes are referring to his physical and mental attributes, this one must be referring to something else, and the only thing left is his moral character or what Scripture usually calls “righteousness”. His possession of righteousness is supported by a later comment in verse 15.

Ezekiel 28:15 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.

Let's pick that apart. "Blameless" is tamiym *taw·meem* and that means without blemish, perfect, wholesome, unimpaired, innocent, and having integrity. "In your ways" is the Hebrew *derek deh·rek* and means journey, direction, manner, habit, way as in one's course of life or moral character. And he was such "from the day you were created". This is very clearly speaking of his integrity and moral perfection. He was created with perfect righteousness.

A perfect God can/will only create perfect creatures. We are compelled to consider Lucifer, as he came from the hand of God, was an incredibly beautiful and intelligent being of high moral character.

The Creation of Man

Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."

The word translated "make" is one we have seen before. It is 'asah *aw·saw* and it means to create something after a pattern, in this case, according to God, it is "in our image, after our likeness". "Image" is tselem *tseh·lem* and means likeness or resemblance. "Likeness" is dâmuwth *dem·ooth* and means likeness or similitude. The two words have similar meanings. I am suspecting the idea repeated using different language may be for emphasis.

It goes on to say in verse 27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him..." "Created" in both cases is bara' *baw·raw* and means to create something from nothing.

My father-in-law struggled with this passage because he interpreted it in a physical sense, that man *physically* looked like God. I don't think that is the intention of the passage, although some expositors do go there. Well, what exactly is the passage saying when it says man was created in the image of God?

Bible expositors are all over the place on this one. Many don't even touch the subject and most who do pretty much agree that they don't know what it means. Bob Thieme comes, I think, the closest to capturing the idea behind the statement. He says certain attributes from the essence of God were entered into the soul of mankind, which includes: self-consciousness ("I am"), self-perception ("I think"), the function of volition ("I ought"), and self-determination ("I will"). Man was created a free moral agent with the ability to decide a course of action for themselves as seen in the function of their volition and self-determination.

What the passage is saying is that a perfect God created from nothing a perfect man that was totally free of any imperfections. [He did, however, "form" man's body from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7).] We know they were free of imperfections because they were in the likeness of God, and Adam and the woman had fellowship with God (walked with God in the Garden).

I would add only that because they had no knowledge of good and evil, this "likeness" would have included the perfect righteousness of God, which is what they lost with their disobedience. It was the loss of that perfect righteousness that broke their fellowship with their creator. One clue to the importance of the possession of God's own righteousness is that the imputation of divine righteousness is the one thing that restores man to fellowship today, the re-acquiring of that perfect righteousness of God through imputation at salvation.

2 Cor 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Rom 5:17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Phil 3:8-9 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith

A perfect God can/will only create perfect creatures. Adam was created perfect.

Both Lucifer and Adam were created with free wills. Scripture tells us Lucifer used his in an attempt to usurp God's position and power. He made a free will decision to rebel against the authority of God and, in the process, persuaded 1/3 of the angels to use their own free wills to follow him.

Adam and the woman did exactly the same thing. They were given one command by God, and they used their free agency to be disobedient and eat of that forbidden fruit. That act was the same sin as Lucifer's (to be like God) and, in that act of disobedience, they came to know good and evil.

In gaining that knowledge, both Lucifer and Adam lost something: fellowship with God and their "perfection". They were no longer as God had created them, which was perfect. They were now flawed—tainted by sin.

The ability to sin does not equal the act of sinning. I said "ability," not "intent". Ability is not a cause; it is merely "permission" (figuratively speaking). In theory, something created perfect and given free agency (permission), as long as that something does not use his free agency to sin, he remains as created—perfect. If, however, he does sin, then he is rendered, by the act, but not until the act, as imperfect.

I know what you are thinking: what about the part about thinking something makes it a sin?

Matt 5:28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

There are two actions taking place in this example of sinning. The first is that of "looking". That, in itself, is not sin, and nothing in the Greek suggests it could be. The word in the Greek carries the idea of seeing or perceiving something with one's bodily eye. Used alone it has no sinful connotations. There is, however, a qualifier here, and that is the term "lustful intent". The NKJV says "to lust for her," and the NIV says "(looks) lustfully". Clearly, Jesus was implying that with the seeing (not a sin) there was potential for a thought with some level of mental follow through that turned the seeing into a mental attitude sin. Hair-splitting but important.

The implication is, if you think a sin, then you are effectively guilty of that sin. A thought with potential sinful implications may cross your mind, but unless you "mentally act" on it, it remains merely a thought. What constitutes "acting" on it? Obviously "acting" can be either physical or mental. Regarding the latter, it is when you allow the sinful aspects of the thought to have freedom in your mind, in other words, follow through with the thought.

At what point does it go from just “seeing” to “lusting”? I have no black and white answer. However, if you reject the thought in recognition of its potentially sinful character at any point in the thinking process, you have effectively repented and confessed it as sin to be forgiven under the provisions of 1 John 1:9.

We conclude then that one is not guilty of a sin until one actually commits a sin, whether that be in actuality or merely a thought that is allowed to become sinful.

We say that a perfect God would only create something that is also perfect. Scripture indicates the angels and man were created with free agency, but the possession of that, in itself, does not disqualify the creation as less than perfect. God, after all, is a free moral agent. He can technically choose to sin but is self-limiting in that regard, a function of His integrity. Obviously, free agency can be used for evil, but until it is, the mere possession of free agency is not in itself evil. How one uses it does carry the potential for sinful behavior.

Why were we created free moral agents?

We might pause to ask why would God give his creations free agency and with that the potential for disobedience, sin, and evil? Such permission sounds like a recipe for disaster. Obviously, God could have just as easily created angels and man with no free will, thus no potential for evil. They would do only whatever God told them to do. Every angel and every man would spend every moment singing God’s praises. But angels and man were created for fellowship and worship. All through Scripture we see references to man and angels worshiping God built around the concept of fellowship. If His creatures had no free agency, fellowship/ worship would be meaningless for God. Any relationship under those conditions would be empty of any affection or desire on the part of the created. If God’s desire was to have fellowship with His creation, He had to give His creatures free agency and did so with the full knowledge of what could/would happen. It is a potential He was prepared to live with in order to have meaningful relationships with his creatures. From God’s perspective, the fact that some of His creatures reject him gives all the more value to the fact that some do not.