



The Church of God International

HOME BIBLE Study Course

7

Understanding Perfection

Opening Statement:

Down through the years, the admonition given by the writer of the book of Hebrews to be "perfect" has puzzled and confused many who tend not to realize how much words can change in connotation, and even denotation, during long passages.

Webster defines *perfect* as "being entirely without fault or defect," "flawless," "satisfying all requirements," "accurate," "corresponding to an ideal standard...", "faithfully reproducing the original," "pure," "total," "lacking in no essential detail," and "complete."

Some Christians view perfection as a visionary's utopian dream—an idealistic, unobtainable goal. The attitude that "nobody can live a perfect life anyway" causes some people to excuse their lack of effort to overcome the weaknesses of the flesh.

Fortunately for the Christian, this viewpoint is incorrect in the pure sunlight of God's Word.

When God calls a person out of this world, granting him repentance and giving him His Holy Spirit, this newly converted person wants with all his heart to obey God. He really means it. All too often he finds himself failing and becoming discouraged. What he fails to realize is that his human nature, which we are all born with, is still with him, pulling him down. Even though he buried his human nature in the waters of baptism, the old man wants to come back to life.

Total conversion is a lifelong

process. We will be in a battle with our human nature as long as we live in this human body. Growing up spiritually takes time. We must not allow ourselves to ever give up. We must understand that we are not alone in our battles; Jesus Christ and God the Father will be with us through them all. We must understand that we are not perfect in this life.

The very words used by the writer of Hebrews tell us that we are *going on* to perfection. If we are going on, we have not yet arrived. But we will arrive when Jesus Christ returns and raises us up in the first resurrection. In the meantime, let's continue to go on!

Final Instructions

If you ever have any trouble knowing what to pray about, first on your agenda should be to thank God for all our blessings. Very few people acknowledge that every good and perfect gift comes from God Himself. Study God's Word and find out what God's true servants prayed about. We all want to be children of the Most High God. Entering His kingdom should be utmost in our mind. So do as Paul asks, and pray for God's servants, for the work of the church, and for others you know.

Each one of us has only a certain amount of time. We must use our time—our life—as wisely as possible. When our life is over we have no more time. So we must use our time where it counts. Our spiritual food should be more important, or at least as important, as our physical food. We should never allow our lives to become so unbalanced that we are too busy to drink in of the spiritual things of God. Our physical life will be over soon enough, but once we are born again into God’s very kingdom, there will be no end to our eternal life. Which life is the most important to ensure?

Therefore, through prayer, this intimate contact we can have with our Creator will give us a peace of mind and quiet confidence that no test or trial can destroy. This confidence we have will not be in ourselves, but in the greatest power there is. We have the right as children of God to call on the supreme Power of the universe, the active and living God who reveals Himself in the Bible—and that is why we are involved in the *Home Bible Study Course!*

The men and women in the Bible whose lives pleased God did not have easy lives. They were constantly facing trials, tests, and troubles of every sort. This caused them to cry out to God for deliverance. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19). We must, through much

tribulation, enter the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). All that will live godly lives in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

If you have your Bible and other study tools ready, and if you have prayed for God’s help with this lesson, you are ready to begin. May God bless you in your study of His Word!

Understanding Perfection: What Does

“Perfection” Mean?

The biblical writer states in Hebrews 6:1 that we must “go on to perfection.” But how can we mortal human beings obey that injunction?

The Greek word translated “perfect” in Matthew 5:48, as well as in many other verses throughout the New Testament, is *telios*. Most modern translations render it “mature.”

The *Analytical Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (page 400) uses the following English phrases to define *telios*: “Brought to completion, fully developed”; “full grown, of ripe age.

The primary personal goal of the Christian, as Paul stated in Ephesians 4:13, is to “come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [*telios*, mature] man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

So Paul is telling us that we must go on to maturity. In order to

become “mature” in our understanding, we need to move beyond (but not away from) the basics to a more complete understanding.

Among Christians and among those who are not converted, there are any number of attributes, qualities, traits, and characteristics which are considered to mark those of maturity. The absence of these certain virtues would indicate immaturity.

The great influence and power of the Holy Spirit, however, should help the Christian to gain a maturity which is more whole, more fully advanced than that attainable by those of the world.

Review

1. *Going on to perfection means to proceed toward maturity throughout our physical life.*
2. *All Christians must grow in knowledge and maturity until we reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:

Matthew 5:48; Ephesians 4:13

Four Facets of Maturity

Just as the polished facets on a diamond make it sparkle, let us examine now four facets of maturity.

I. A Realistic View

The first facet of maturity is to

have a down-to-earth view of ourselves and others. This requires that we perceive all of mankind from God's point of view.

What is God's perspective of mankind? First, He sees it as the crowning point of His physical creation. We know that is true because of what God said in the beginning: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;...Then God blessed them" (Genesis 1:26,28). Second, He sees mankind as disobedient and sinful, in need of a Savior. However, once an individual turns from his own chosen way of life and turns back to God through repentance and conversion, he then becomes a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are new creations, beginning a new life under a new Master, with a new relationship with God and our fellow man.

Maturity is seeing yourself as an individual and as you really are. Paul stated, "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:3,4). We must not compare ourselves to each other, but rather to Christ. His example will inspire us and bring out our best, but when we fail in our goals, His loving acceptance will comfort us.

In spite of our human frailties, we must accept one another as children of God, and therefore as worthwhile persons. That acceptance, however, does not imply

approval of anyone's sinful behavior. But if we are mature Christians we will know how to "hate the sin but love the sinner." The mature "called-out one" can accept others in spite of human differences based upon race, color, creed, ethnic origin, or socio-economic status. "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34).

Jesus stated it this way: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39; cf. Leviticus 19:18). We need to be aware of the fact that we ourselves are sinners in need of salvation, and that that state is part of God's plan. We must love ourselves in the sense of acceptance. How we love our neighbor, in terms of quality and quantity, is dependent on our love of self.

Review

1. *Mankind, made in God's image, is the crowning point of God's creation.*
2. *Mankind is also sinful and in need of salvation.*
3. *Mankind can become a "new creation" by repentance and conversion.*
4. *An individual must see himself as he is and not deceive himself.*
5. *We must not compare ourselves to each other, and we must accept one another, in spite of frailties, as worthwhile persons.*
6. *The mature Christian can*

accept others in spite of any differences.

7. *We must love our neighbor as ourselves.*

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:

Genesis 1:26-28; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:3,4; Acts 10:34; Matthew 22:39

II. Goals

A second important facet of Christian maturity is to live in the present while having long-range goals.

The long-range goal of a Christian is being born again as a spiritual son or daughter of God, receiving the gift of eternal life, and entering into God's kingdom. Reaching this goal depends a great deal upon how we live in the present.

Unmistakably, Jesus' admonition to His disciples—"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33)—was set in the context of instruction about how to live in the present. He mentioned to not be worried, anxious, or preoccupied with concerns about those needs that God promises to provide (verse 25).

Worry may damage your health, cause the object of your worry to consume your thoughts, cause you to treat others badly, and reduce your trust in God. Jesus goes on to point out how God takes care of everything in nature, and then asks, "Are you

not of more value than they?" (read Matthew 6:26–34).

While there is much in life that is beautiful and desirable and enjoyable, we should not let anything take priority over our long-range goal, the Kingdom of God.

The Christian life demands great balance, and that takes maturity. The tendency of many is either to focus on the present needs or circumstances to the exclusion of any concern about the future, or else to be so concerned with some future goal that too little thought is given to the daily affairs of life.

Planning for the future is time well spent; to worry about it is time wasted. When done well, planning eliminates worry.

By contrast the worrier is consumed by fear, and loses trust in God. We must not let worries about tomorrow affect our relationship with God today.

God expects us to take care of our families, and that takes planning. Care for the family should be planned before we bring the family into existence. "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).

In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul describes the Christian life as a race with a prize (Philippians 3:14). He speaks of his former life (as a prominent Pharisee) which he gave up for

Christ. In verse 10, Paul says he forsakes all things "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Paul goes on to state that he does not consider himself to have already obtained the goal of his life but that he is actively forgetting the past, reaching out to the future, and pressing on to obtain the prize of the high calling of God. And in verse 15, Paul exhorts, "Therefore let us, as many as are mature [*telios*], have this mind."

Paul said he wanted to be like Christ and to know Him, being all he could be that Christ had in mind for him. Paul felt sorrow for the past because he held the coats of those who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr. We have all done things in the past that we are not proud of. Because our hope is in Christ, we can let go of the past and look toward the future.

We must not dwell on our past sins, but grow in the knowledge of Christ by concentrating on our relationship with Him now. We must know we are forgiven, or can be forgiven upon our repentance, and then move on to spiritual maturity.

Review

1. *Our long-range goal is eternal life in the Kingdom of God.*
2. *Reaching this goal depends a lot on how we live*

in the present.

3. *Jesus said we are not to be anxious or worried about our physical needs.*

4. *We should not let the enjoyment of this life overshadow our long-range goal of the Kingdom of God.*

5. *God expects us to care for our families.*

6. *Paul speaks of forgetting the past and reaching out to the future, to gain the prize of the high calling of God.*

7. *Paul encourages us to have this mind.*

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:

Matthew 6:25–34; 2 Timothy 5:8; Philippians 3:14,15

III. Personal Values

A third facet of maturity is having eternal values.

The value system of this world appeals to the flesh and the intellect of the human mind. While many values people have are laudable, they in so many cases fail to have real lasting value, because they are built on the foundation of human reason. As Proverbs 14:12 reminds us, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Many decisions people make are made because it requires nothing of them. It is the easy way. They do not have to change their lifestyle. Be careful of shortcuts.

It is vital for Christian maturi-

ty to accept and follow God's value system.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8,9). In Psalm 111:10 we find this admonition: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” Those who only agree to conform to a set of values belonging to someone else, whether God's or man's, are less mature than those who have made these values—the whole value system of God—their own.

In Deuteronomy 30:19, God set before ancient Israel two opposing alternatives and exhorted them to choose life. The choice was theirs to make. God gives us free moral agency. Without freedom of choice we would be nothing more than robots. God does not want robots, but rather sons and daughters.

God does not force His will on anyone. He allows us to choose whether we will obey and accept His value system or reject it. The decision, however, is a life-or-death matter.

At a later time Joshua appealed to those same people to “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

Review

1. *Human values that seem right to man lead to death.*

2. *To become spiritually mature we must make God's value system our own.*

3. *God's thoughts and ways are much higher than ours.*

4. *Our awesome respect for God is the first step toward wisdom.*

5. *Keeping His commandments will give us a good understanding.*

6. *We must unlearn the false concepts of the world.*

7. *The Christian, led by the Spirit of God, receives a whole new value system.*

8. *This godly value system is completely opposite to the desires of the flesh.*

9. *God has given us the privilege of free choice.*

10. *Without free choice, we would be like robots.*

11. *God does not force His will upon anyone, but we must choose whom we will serve.*

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:

Proverbs 14:12; Isaiah 55:8,9; Psalm 111:10; Galatians 5:17,24; Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15

IV. Developing Personal Talents

The fourth facet of maturity is developing one's abilities and interests, and coping with the task of living.

Jesus' parables of the pounds and talents not only point out that

we have differing degrees of ability, but also that God expects each individual to take interest in his talents and develop them as much as possible. God certainly requires and expects us to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). In addition He expects us to develop the talent He has given us and will reward individual initiative on the part of His children to grow.

The fearful, timid, retiring, and stagnating individual in the parable was sharply rebuked for his approach to life (read Matthew 25:14–30).

Paul admonished Christians to work, to earn their own living (2 Thessalonians 3:6–13), and if necessary to work to help care for needy relatives (1 Timothy 5:8). He also exhorted us to do our daily work from the heart, as though working for Jesus Christ (Ephesians 6:5–8). Improving ourselves and preparing ourselves for greater service and responsibilities is a requirement of an effective Christian.

A mature Christian will also recognize that there is much in our human physical life to be interested in, and from which we can gain enjoyment and at the same time be pleasing to God (James 1:17; Philippians 4:8).

To a great extent, what we put into our minds determines what comes out in our words and actions. Paul tells us to fill our minds with thoughts that are pure

and lovely, along with other virtues. “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). So replace harmful input with wholesome material. We must ask God to help us focus our mind on what is good and pure.

Once these four facets of maturity are all present in a person, we will find an individual who is thoroughly mature and whole in character. Repeatedly throughout the New Testament, Christians are exhorted to become mature, to grow up in Christ. “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28).

“Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature” (1 Corinthians 14:20).

Living the Christian life takes all our energy. We can forget the past and move on into the future with a pure conscience, knowing that as we strain for the goal of spiritual maturity, there is a crown

of life at the race’s end promised by Christ.

As athletes repeat workout exercises to tone their bodies, so we must on a daily basis repeat spiritual exercises to be spiritually fit.

A Christian life is a constant battle against evil forces from without and great temptations from within. If we remain true to our Savior through it all, He promises us eternal life.

It is the purpose of the Church of God International, through the *Home Bible Study Course* and other of our publications, to help those God has called out of the world to reach their highest Christian maturity on their way to perfection (Ephesians 4:11–15).

Review

1. *God expects us to develop whatever talents and abilities we have as we cope with the task of living.*
2. *We should certainly grow in grace and knowledge of Christ.*
3. *We will be rewarded in the*

future for our individual initiative.

4. *The servant who buried his talent was rebuked by Jesus.*

5. *Christians are encouraged to work, to earn their living, and even to help needy relatives if necessary.*

6. *Our work should be done with the attitude that we are working for Christ.*

7. *We can gain much enjoyment in life by pursuing worthwhile goals.*

8. *We should prepare ourselves as much as possible for greater service to God.*

9. *God’s Word exhorts us to become mature and grow up in Christ.*

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite:

- 2 Peter 3:18; Matthew 25:14–30;
- 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13; 1 Timothy 5:8; Ephesians 6:5–8; James 1:17; Philippians 4:8; Proverbs 23:7; Colossians 1:28; 1 Corinthians 14:20; Ephesians 4:11–15

Notes:

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Understanding
Perfection

Test Yourself

Write your answers to the questions on a separate sheet of paper. Check *your* answers with the answers found at the end of the test.

Detach the return coupon at the bottom of the page and mail back to us. We will send the next lesson in the series to you.

HOME BIBLE Study Course E

True or False Questions

1. Paul stated that we should go on to perfection.
2. We must see ourselves and others from God's perspective.
3. From God's perspective, man doesn't need anything.
4. Man is already perfect because he is in the image of God.
5. After repentance and conversion, we are a new creation in Christ.
6. We do not have to see ourselves as sinners.
7. We need to approve of everyone's sin.
8. We are no longer in need of salvation because we love others.
9. Our main goal is to make a lot of money and retire.
10. The life we live at present has no bearing on our goal of the Kingdom of God.
11. We should always be worried and concerned about physical things.
12. Jesus considers us of much more value than birds.
13. We should not let God's kingdom get in the way of our personal

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- goals.
14. Planning for the future is time well spent.
 15. Planning helps minimize worry, if done well.
 16. God isn't concerned about our care of the family.
 17. Paul said he was forgetting the past and reaching out to the future.
 18. Man's ways always lead to everlasting life.
 19. Our thoughts are just as good as God's thoughts.
 20. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
 21. Keeping God's commandments will give us a good understanding.
 22. The flesh lusts against the Spirit.
 23. Man's ways are not contrary to God's ways.
 24. If you belong to Christ you have crucified the flesh.
 25. Mature Christians make God's value system their own value system.
 26. God forces us to accept His ways.
 27. God expects us to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ.
 28. God does not care if we develop or improve any talent we have.
 29. God considers those who do not care for their families the same as infidels.
 30. If we do good, we can expect to receive the same from Christ.
 31. There isn't much in our physical life we can gain enjoyment from.
 32. It doesn't matter what we allow into our mind.
 33. God never forces His will on anyone.
 34. We are not to remain children in understanding.

Answers to True or False Questions: Score Yourself: Miss 0-3 = Excellent; Miss 4-6 = Good; Miss 7-9 = Fair

Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True; 6. False; 7. False; 8. False; 9. False; 10. False; 11. False; 12. True; 13. False; 14. True; 15. True; 16. False; 17. True; 18. False; 19. False; 20. True; 21. True; 22. True; 23. True; 24. True; 25. True; 26. False; 27. False; 28. True; 29. False; 30. True; 31. False; 32. False; 33. True; 34. True

