

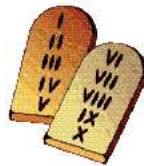
## “Be Perfect”

**G**OD LOVES YOU. He truly loves you and me, and He wants what is best for us. That’s why Jesus came to earth as a human being, to suffer and die to pay the penalty for our sins, so you and I can have God’s very best for us—eternal, joyful life, together with the Father and the Son in Heaven.



That’s also why God gave us His Word, the Bible, and that’s also why he gave us commands. His commands are His

instructions for living. They are entirely meant to help us achieve what is best for us now, as well as eternally.



And that includes this command from Jesus: *“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)*

Whoa! Really? Is Jesus commanding His disciples (and us!) to be like God; to be perfect in every way, without even a single flaw?

Well, actually no, He isn’t. That’s one of the problems with Bible translation—sometimes there is no English word that means exactly what the original Greek or Hebrew word meant. Without getting into the study of Greek, we need to understand that the word in this verse that is often translated as “perfect” actually means something like “complete” or “mature,” or even “completely mature.” Jesus is actually saying something more like this: “Keep growing up toward spiritual maturity; keep becoming more and more like God in the way you love and serve others.” Some of the good paraphrase versions of the Bible express it this way.

It’s also important to remember that Jesus didn’t ask or expect us to do this without His help. He told us, *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ... The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:18,26)* And also, *“... the Spirit of truth ... will guide you into all the truth.” John 16:13)*

This theme of spiritual growth is echoed in several other places in the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Let’s look at a few passages, starting with something David wrote in one of his psalms.

*How can a young man keep his way pure?  
 By guarding it according to your word.  
 With my whole heart I seek you;  
 let me not wander from your commandments!  
 (Psalm 119:9-10)*

There is a wealth of wisdom in these two small verses. Let’s look at some of it.

First, David acknowledges that he is a “young man”—someone who need guidance and instruction. He also confesses that keeping “his way pure” is something that he should care about; that he should do.

Next, he answers his own question. “By guarding it,” he says—in other words, by paying attention to how he is behaving, and comparing his behavior to what? To God’s expectations, as described in His word. David didn’t have the whole Bible as we do, but there was plenty of guidance in the holy writings that he did have, from Moses and the prophets. But “guarding” means more than just observing; it means he should make sure that he behaves as God intends.

Then David addresses his motivation: “With my whole heart I seek you.” Here he is saying that what he wants most in the world is to be with God, and to please Him—to be the man God wants him to be. Then he asks God to guide him and help him be obedient and “pure,” rather than rebellious and sinful.

David was called “a man after God’s own heart.” By and large David had God’s approval most of the time. Was he perfect? No, he wasn’t. He messed up really badly with Bathsheba, and he made a few other mistakes. But, by and large, he stayed true to his desire to be with God, and to please God.

Let’s look at another example—Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul. He said this about himself:

*“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem], educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.” (Acts 22:3)* His “zealous for God” echoes David’s seeking God with his whole heart.



After meeting Jesus on the Damascus road, and becoming His Apostle, Paul remained just as zealous as he worked to bring the Gospel to the non-Jewish people of the Mediterranean world. Indeed, no person other than Jesus did more for the Christian cause than Paul.

Was Paul perfect? No. Here's what he wrote in a letter to the Christians at Rome:

*For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. (Romans 7:15-19)*

*So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (Romans 7:21-23)*

Here is Paul—commissioned by Jesus and filled with Holy Spirit power to bring God's truth to the whole non-Jewish world—and he is saying, as we also must confess, "I do things that I know are wrong, and I neglect to do things that I know I should do."

So what's our bottom line? Was Jesus kidding when He said, "Be perfect"? Was He making a joke? Or was He setting up a target we could never hit, and telling us to aim for it anyway?

No, and No. He was giving us instruction. He was saying, "Work at this. Keep trying to be all you can be, with the guidance of God's word and the help of the Holy Spirit. Apart from me you can't do anything useful; but with me, all things are possible. Abide in me, just like the branches abide in the grapevine, and together we will be fruitful and useful to the Father."

The Apostle Paul got this message, and passed it on in his letters.

*Not that I have already obtained [the resurrection from the dead] or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)*

Like all of us, Paul was a work in progress, being trained and shaped by the Holy Spirit, being made ready to live joyfully in Eternity with the Father and

the Son. And like a horse at the end of a work day, he was straining forward to get home.

Paul also gave us this encouraging word:

*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)*

If you are reading this, then certainly God has begun His "good work in you" and He intends to finish that work. When Jesus commands that you "be perfect," He is telling you to cooperate with that good work of God in you—to work with the Holy Spirit, rather than resisting His help. When you sin, don't run from God; run to Him, confessing your sin and asking for His help.

On the night of the Last Supper, after Jesus had given the disciples a lesson in servanthood by washing their feet, He said to them, "*I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ... If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.*" (John 13:15,17)

We can study and learn a lot about the Christian life, but the blessing comes only from doing—from putting our knowledge of Bible truth into practice.

And it's a process. Habits of a lifetime, short or long, can't be overcome easily or quickly. It takes hard work and determination (a.k.a. stubbornness) to make real progress. Keep inching forward. Keep asking for guidance and help. You can do it, with God's help. And one day you will hear the Savior say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Come, enter into the place I have prepared for you."

## **BE PATIENT — GOD ISN'T FINISHED WITH YOU YET.**

Jesus died and rose again so that all who believe in Him might "die to sin" and be raised from death, to live joyfully forever with God the Father and Jesus. The gift He gave us, having paid for it with His life's blood, was eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Why? Why would God send His Son to die, to save us? Why would Jesus willingly suffer and die for us?

Because that's who He is. That's the kind of God we have. He loves us. It doesn't matter who we are, or where we're from, or what we've done. His love is unconditional and unending. We really need to love Him back, as He works toward making us perfect.

God bless you, my brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, and give you His peace —

*Brother Roland*

## The Father's Care

Do you know the story of the Cherokee Indian youth's rite of passage?



The young boy's father would take him deep into the forest, seat him on log or a tree stump, blindfold him, and leave him alone. The boy was required to sit still the whole night and not remove his blindfold until the rays of the morning sun shone through it. He could not cry out for help or make any sound. Once he survived the night, he had become a MAN.

He was not allowed to tell the other boys of this experience, because each lad must come into manhood on his own.

The boy would naturally be terrified. He could hear all kinds of noises. Wild animals must surely be all around him—not to mention those he couldn't hear. Or maybe some human being might even want to do him harm.

The wind would blow through the trees and the grass, maybe even shaking his log, but the boy must sit stoically, never removing the blindfold. It was the only way he could become a man!

Finally, after a terrifying and seemingly endless night, the sun would rise, and the boy could at last remove the blindfold. It was then that he would discover his father sitting on the log beside him. His father had been on guard the entire night, protecting his son from from any harm.

We, too, are never alone. Even when we don't know it, our Heavenly Father is watching over us, sitting on the log beside us. When trouble comes, all we have to do is reach out to Him. He is there.

Do you have a question about the Bible or the Christian life? Send me your question. I'll try to answer it or find an answer for you, and maybe share it with others via the "Good News Guide." Write to:

**Brother Roland, P. O. Box 14, Fayetteville, PA 17222**

## GOD CAN USE YOU

The next time you think that GOD can't use you, just remember...

- ✦ Noah was a drunk
- ✦ Abraham was too old
- ✦ Isaac was a daydreamer
- ✦ Jacob was a liar
- ✦ Leah was ugly
- ✦ Joseph was abused
- ✦ Moses had a stuttering problem
- ✦ Gideon was afraid
- ✦ Samson had long hair and was a womanizer
- ✦ Rahab was a prostitute
- ✦ Jeremiah and Timothy were too young
- ✦ David was an adulterer and a murderer
- ✦ Elijah was suicidal
- ✦ Isaiah preached naked
- ✦ Jonah ran from God
- ✦ Naomi was a widow
- ✦ Job went bankrupt
- ✦ Peter denied Christ
- ✦ The Disciples fell asleep while praying
- ✦ Martha worried about everything
- ✦ Mary Magdalene was, well, ...
- ✦ The Samaritan woman was divorced, more than once
- ✦ Zaccheus was too short
- ✦ Paul was too religious
- ✦ Timothy had an ulcer
- AND ...
- ✦ Lazarus was dead!

Now, no more excuses! GOD can develop you and use you to your full potential.

Besides you aren't the message, you are just the messenger.

In the Circle of God's love, GOD is waiting to use YOUR full potential.

And one more thing ... Share this with a friend or two.

## What Should You Do?

The Bible and our society tell us a lot about what we should do. God's Holy Spirit guides us, if we will let Him. But in case you don't know all the things you should be doing, here's a partial list. Most of these are admonitions right from the Bible. Enjoy the puzzle.

### Puzzle:

F E E D T H E H U N G R Y G V H B M L V C J A L F F B D S M  
Q M F F V R G P E M D K E R D Z E S A M H C F O M E E W K L  
J J V V T A O D J M K E L I Z Y N L A K C Z R A H K E X O S  
S E E K J U S T I C E U P E T Y U F P E E G S U A N B V E N  
S E B O A P N B Z Z K B M L N F I W P O I P M N D O E I R O  
R S K N A H T E V I G A A J R J P T C V T B E O D M R E U I  
E C B Y M E F S W X T S X E A H O H E X L H O A E Z P Z F T  
N R P I H S W O L L E F E V A H E Y S E T G E R C E P F D C  
O D L D Z M K U O B K H D Q H M O X T E E U C R N E C N I I  
S N I S S S E F N O C V O D F E B E H H B Y W T S G D R H D  
I R R C I O J T U E I C O M F O R T T H E A F F L I C T E D  
R L O E H Q E E B U S P G K E T O E Q Y S G T Q L V D J Q A  
P G L B A T W L Z J E G A H S L V N W O P P I G Z E O X C L  
T Q S E H D S L M R H B T A C E S G P X I J K F I W G P F L  
I Q I L W G T T Y C T I E W I I E R B I R W Q R T I T R W A  
S K N C E N I H P Q T Z S L A Y R T H G I L D E H S S A L D  
I H G N C A E E E N I D E X H L V N T H T E P U H E U I R I  
V O H K I T V T N B S B D O G Y E B O L F D E I S C R S L O  
Z X Y P F U Q R S E I J U N N M O H Q M I X E M S O T E K V  
B D M T I C V U Z I V B H J D H T E T H L K L N I U H G T A  
C M N E R D P T J W L O L F R Q H T T Y L A P D Y N S O S E  
C M S L C R T H L I A E L E C F E P Y Z E W D X B S X D R W  
M A K E A J O Y F U L N O I S E R C R V D B J Q E E E A A O  
Y I A Y S D O G P I H S R O W X S U I L G U O L S L H L A V  
S H O U T F O R J O Y Y W T S C G G A C B F B Q S S G I F W

### Words:

ACCEPT	GIVE ALMS	REPENT
AVOID ALL ADDICTIONS	GIVE THANKS	SACRIFICE
BE CHEERFUL	GIVE WISE COUNSEL	SEEK JUSTICE
BE HUMBLE	HAVE FELLOWSHIP	SERVE OTHERS
BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS	HELP OTHERS	SET A GOOD EXAMPLE
BE SALTY	LISTEN WELL	SHARE
BE SPIRIT-FILLED	LOVE MERCY	SHED LIGHT
BLESS	LOVE NEIGHBORS	SHOUT FOR JOY
CLOTHE THE NAKED	MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE	SING HYMNS
COMFORT THE AFFLICTED	MAKE PEACE	TELL THE TRUTH
CONFESS SINS	OBEY GOD	TITHE
DENY SELF	OBEY THE LAW	TRUST GOD
ENJOY THE GIFTS	PRAISE GOD	VISIT PRISONERS
FEED THE HUNGRY	PRAY	VISIT THE SICK
FORGIVE	READ THE BIBLE	WORSHIP GOD