

## “Perfect” in Christ

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*“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)*

The honest man is painfully aware of his imperfections. Not only can he recount his many mistakes, he even reflects upon his failures when he intended to do better. He agonizes over his repeated errors, failing to get a handle on a particular weakness. Or, seeing the damage done by certain faults, she still finds it difficult to successfully change her attitude and/or behavior. No, “perfect” we are not. Far from it. And yet, doesn’t the above passage hold forth a perfect standard of achievement expected of us by God? In fact, don’t some people shy away from becoming a Christian because they know they can’t live up to the requirement of flawless living?

The word “perfect” comes with many shades of meaning:

1. Being entirely without fault or defect: flawless.
2. Satisfying all requirements: accurate.
3. Corresponding to an ideal standard or abstract concept.
4. Faithfully reproducing the original.
5. Lacking in no essential detail: complete.

*(Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary)*

The goal of the Christian is total transformation, not merely the eradication of a troublesome vice or an uncomfortable character flaw. Change is not merely for the purpose of making our lives better or so that we can be more likeable to ourselves and others. Rather, God has put in place certain doctrines, spiritual incentives, examples and other motivating forces to help mold us into His image (more specifically, the image of Jesus, who lived among us in human form).

While the goal we pursue may be flawless behavior, the reality (as God knows it to be) is that we will never ultimately achieve this standard. But what we can do is continue to learn God’s word, understand its application in various circumstances, curb our carnal appetites, increase the fervency of our worship, foster unity among brethren, teach and advise others toward sound spiritual decisions – i.e., we can reach various levels of maturity commensurate with our individual capability. This is the meaning of the Gk. term *teleios*, sometimes translated “perfect” (as in Col 1:28).

Elsewhere Paul says “*we speak wisdom among those who are mature*” (1 Cor 2:6). A.T. Robertson says that Paul here speaks “to the necessary difference in teaching for babes (3:1) and adults or grown men (common use of *teleois* for relative perfection, for adults) ... some were simply old babes and unable in spite of their years to digest solid spiritual food” (*Word Pictures*, Vol. 4, pp. 83-84).

The Hebrew writer notes that “*solid food belongs to those who are of full age*” (*teleios* – Heb 5:14). He upbraids his wavering brethren not for failing some flawless standard but for their neglect of revelation: “*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God*” (5:12). This immaturity left them vulnerable to discouragement and the temptation to abandon Christ.

God be thanked that He does not ask of us what we cannot give Him (righteousness via works, flawless perfection – Rom 3:21-22; 4:5). Rather, by His grace He is willing to accept what we *can* give: faith that is built upon an ever-expanding knowledge of His will and service consistent with that knowledge. When we sin, forgiveness is available. This understanding should compel us with gratitude and gladness to be all we can be in a given moment of our existence. Are you growing or coasting?