

# The Command to Be Perfect



## Progress to Perfection (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week sharing with you Keys To Successful Living which God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

First, let me say thank you to those of you who've been writing to me. Before I finish this talk we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. It means a great deal to me to hear how this radio ministry of mine has been helping you and blessing you. So please, take time to write—even if it's only a brief note.

The title I've chosen for my talks this week is "Progress to Perfection." This title brings out two important points about the Christian life. First, there is a goal for us to attain to. Second, there are definite steps that we have to take in order to attain that goal.

I want to emphasize the importance of having an aim in life. So many people merely drift through life. They're like ships without rudders and without anchors. They're at the mercy of every wind and current that comes into their lives, they're carried hither and thither. They have no stability, no fixed destination. And frequently, such lives end in shipwreck. I remember saying to somebody once, "If you aim at nothing you can be sure you'll hit it." We must have an aim in life.

In the Christian life there are two main kinds of goals. The first is the goal of external accomplishment, what we do for God. This is important but it is not sufficient by itself. The second is the goal of internal development, what we become in God. Sometimes we become so occupied with the external that we lose sight of the internal. We may have our minds set on many good things such as witnessing, distributing tracts, increasing church membership, raising money for the kingdom of God. All these things in themselves may be good but if we concentrate on them at the expense of our own internal personal development, the result is tension and disharmony. Tension between what we are doing and what we are. And often our character negates the effects of our activity. People don't merely look at what we say or what we do, they look at what we are. And if we are not in harmony with what we do then people conclude that we really don't

have something real to offer them. We're just giving them labels, but we're not able to produce in our own lives. So, it's very important that we remember the goal of internal development. And, this is what I'm going to be speaking about all this week.

I want to set before you a specific goal. One that was set before all of us by Jesus. This goal is summed up in one all-embracing word, perfect. Let's look at what Jesus says in Matthew 5:43–48.

> "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that. Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

You see, that's a clear, positive command. Be perfect. Simple, straightforward. So many people are scared by that word "perfect." Sometimes they're associated with some kind of unrealistic teaching. Sometimes the phrase used is "sinless perfection." Believe me, Jesus is not talking about something unreal and unattainable. The whole Christian life is very real and very practical. Jesus is setting before us a practical goal which, by the grace of God, can be attained. And we have no right to bring God's standards down to the level of our ability. We have to trust God to raise the level of our ability up to his standards. And that's his standard. Be perfect.

And furthermore, the standard of perfection is again stated very clearly. "Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect." So, the standard is God the Father. We are to be as perfect as our Father.

We need to look into the meaning of this word "perfect." It has various meanings. It can sometimes be translated "mature"—fully developed. It can sometimes be translated "complete"—that is, not lacking in any respect. However, when we take God the Father as the standard, it is not sufficient to translate it "be mature" or "be complete." We have to accept it in its fullest meaning. "Be perfect."

As I've said, this often frightens people but I'd like to use a little simple example from mathematics. Let's take the use of the word "round." There's only one standard for round. A thing is either round or it's not round. And if a thing is round, it's a circle. And there's just one kind of circle. There's not three or four kinds of circles. However, there are many different sizes of circles. Now, God the Father is the great circle, the measureless circle that encompasses the whole universe. Jesus doesn't expect us to have the same magnitude as God but he does expect us to have the same character as God. You and I may be very tiny little circles, just in some small area where God has placed us, with apparently trivial, hum drum duties. You might be a housewife, I might be who knows what, a bus driver. But, each in our own little area, God wants us to be a perfect circle there. Perfectly round. Just as round as that great circle which is God the Father, which encompasses the whole universe. So think of it when Jesus says, "be perfect." Think of it in terms of "be round." Don't be lopsided, don't have little bulges, don't have deficiencies. You may not be very big but you can be a perfect circle.

The example that Jesus gives us of perfection in God the Father makes it clear that perfection is related primarily to attitudes and to relationships. For instance, in speaking about God the Father Jesus says, "God is good to the evil, to the good. He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." In other words, God's character is not in any way changed or affected by those he relates to. Whether he related to the evil or to the good, to the righteous or to the unrighteous, he's always perfect. He's always completely round.

You see, this is very important. If we're God's sons in this world we cannot let the way people treat us change what God has done in us. In other words, the way people treat you must not be allowed to take the initiative in your life. No matter how wrongly people may treat you, you've still got to demonstrate the character of a child of God to them.

In Romans 12:14–18 Paul gives us some practical examples in words of exhortation to us as Christians. Let me read these words to you.

> "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

That's really a pretty good practical application of what it means to be perfect, no matter whether we are dealing with nice people, nasty people, good people, or bad people. It doesn't change us. For instance, if people persecute us, we

don' get angry, we don't be vicious, we don't get resentful; we bless them. If we're with those who rejoice, we rejoice, too. But if we're with those who mourn, we sympathize, we empathize with them, we share their mourning.

One of the key words there is "live in harmony." I believe harmony and perfection go close together. When we have accomplished perfection in our character there's harmony between what we say and what we do and in our relationship with others.

Paul goes on to say, "Don't be proud, but will to associate with people of a low position." I'm sure you know people who treat the socially privileged and the elite in one way, the humble and poor in another way. That's not being perfect. And it says, "Don't be conceited. Don't repay anyone evil for evil." In other words, if people do us evil it mustn't produce evil out of us. "...be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody." And then very practical, at the end, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

You see, the Bible is a very practical book. It doesn't say we can live at peace with everybody but it says if there isn't peace it mustn't be our responsibility. We must do our best to live at peace with everybody. We are responsible for our actions, but we're not always responsible for the reactions of others.

Well, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be sharing further with you on this week's challenging theme, Progress to Perfection.

Radio Program

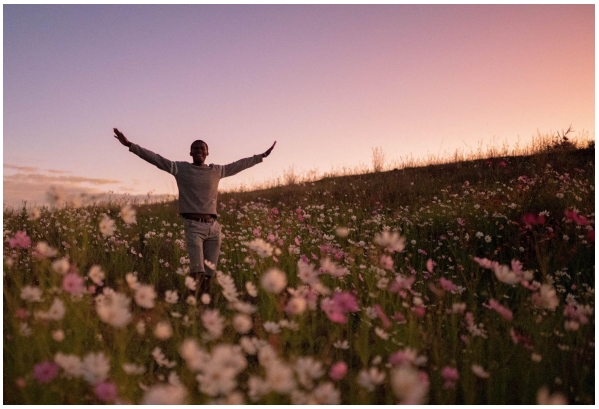
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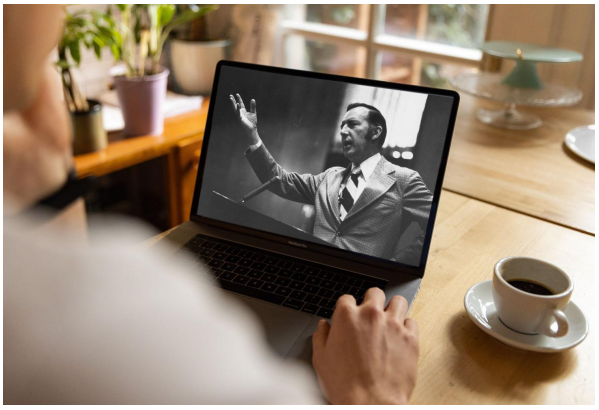
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