



Unity Church of Christianity
Perfecting
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Today I would like to explore with you a word that's been around a long time. It has been used in many ways and may not be fully understood. The word is perfect. I thought that would get you, perfect. What do we mean when we say, "Perfect?" What do we mean by that word perfect? We say things like, "It's a perfect day," or, "It's a perfect painting." What is it that we call perfect? Is there a perfect house? Is there a perfect car? Is there a perfect pet? Some of you think there is, and it's yours, I know. Is there a perfect spouse? Is there a perfect husband? Is there a perfect wife? Is there a perfect child? Is there a perfect parent? Is there a perfect person?

Does religion have anything to say about what is perfect? You know some of us have been confused around the idea of perfection that is often promoted through religion. One is to be perfect in some way, and I was a bit fuzzy with that when I was growing up.

What is it that the *Bible* says about this? Well we can go to the most popular verses that are drawn upon regarding this. One is taken from Genesis, chapter 17, the first verse in which we have Abram before he had the breath sound of Abraham. We're told, "He was 90 and 9 years

old,” in the first verse of chapter 17. It goes on to say, “The Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him this, “I am the Almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect.”

Then we can go to the *New Testament*, and we can look at the works of Jesus and His teachings. *The Sermon on the Mount* is sometimes stated to be a summary of the main teachings. In chapter 5, 6, and 7 of the *Gospel of Mathew*, there you will find Jesus saying, “Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Remember those lines and word, okay?

It would seem that this is pretty important. Abraham and Jesus are telling us that we are to be perfect, but what does that mean? Are we to strive for perfection? Is that what it’s about? Is that to be our main aspiration? Is perfection a really good thing?

After all, there is that song that goes, “Oh, Lord, it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way.” So there’s your out, but perfect is hard to conceive isn’t it? What is perfect? It’s a tall order. Have you ever seen or met a person who you would label, “They’re perfect.” Growing up, a teenager might say, “Oh my God! I met the perfect girl!” Or, “I met the perfect guy!”

Is perfection then the goal of life? Is it really realistic? Who determines when you get there? If you’re there, what constitutes getting there? Are we to become perfect before we die? Are we to become perfect in order to get to heaven? Sometimes that kind of thought has been projected, and some could ask, “Is it really a healthy thing to strive for perfection?” Doesn’t that sort of label set people apart? You know, “I’m perfect, they’re not,” or, “They’re perfect.” From the idea of superiority and inferiority comes a sense of separation. Do we really want to play around with that word as a label? Are we asked to become as perfect as God? What would that be? How would that look?

If we demand perfection of ourselves, do we then set ourselves up to never be good enough, to never measure up, to always feel like we’re falling short in some aspect of our lives? It would be rather defeating.

The question of the day is what is meant by this statement, “Be ye perfect?” What is meant by the emphasis on the idea of perfection? How do we engage with it and integrate it? Well let’s recall one of the teachings here at Unity that we are all a perfect idea in the mind of God. Every one of us is a perfect idea in the mind of God. There is a divine ideal from which we were created. The spirit of you, the essence of you, is whole and complete. There is a divine blueprint if you will. There’s the spark of God, the divine seed which the *Old Testament* refers to as that part of you made in the image and likeness of God. So whether you’re expressing it by virtue of

free will or not, the fact remains there is a seed idea of you, held in the mind of God, that is whole and complete and perfect.

It's just like the seed of a flower. Contained within the seed are all the makings of transformation necessary to become a beautiful flower. There are certain conditions that have to be met. There has to be adequate soil, moisture, and sunlight. If those ingredients are present that little seed will become something amazing.

We could say that it's somewhat similar for us in the sense that we are like the seed of God. We've been planted in this Earth experience in the realm of form. We've been planted here to grow. We have to hunger and thirst after the Spirit. We also have to seek the light of God, and out of that we become the light. We are just like a seed going through this transformation of growing in love and wisdom. We develop and attain some of the characteristics and attributes of the nature of God. This is the process that we are going through.

Jesus Christ is our teacher and model. He said that He is the light of the world, but he also said that you are to become the light of the world and to let your light shine. He is saying to let the seed in you grow and become your true image and likeness. He said, "Follow me." He didn't mean just follow Him physically. He meant follow His teachings into the light.

I wanted to see what the dictionary had to say under the word perfect. It was interesting and had quite a lot. This is what I drew out of it, "Expert, proficient, accurate, corresponding to an ideal and faithfully reproducing the original." Pick that up, "Corresponding to an ideal, and faithfully reproducing the original," and also the words pure and complete.

One of the words was expert, and perhaps we could see that being perfect means becoming an expert in life. It used the word proficient, and that could also mean being proficient in life, understanding life, and really going with its flow. The word accurate also makes sense in that it refers to the saying, "To sin is to miss the mark," and that we're always aiming for a higher way in life. In archery, when you miss the target you have to take aim again. We're trying to perfect ourselves by taking aim again and again.

The definition also said, "Faithfully reproducing the original." The original is Christ. We're not talking about Jesus the man. We're talking about Christ the principle. The principle of Christ existed before Jesus came on the Earth. He modeled that in himself, but it was there before he ever arrived. It was created and birthed with Creation, the perfect idea of man in the mind of God. Christ is the word that represents the divinity of God coming into full expression. You and I are in the process of aligning our will to the higher will within us.

I need to sound a warning about this word perfect and the idea of being perfect. There's an unhealthy side to the idea of being perfect, and many people believe it's about perfectionism. That's not what God ever intended. We misunderstand and move into perfectionism. We become a perfectionist which is a very self-defeating behavior.

Another definition mentioned in the dictionary was "Entirely without any flaws, defects, or shortcomings." Some people think that's what they're supposed to be in life. They work with such tenacity at being flawless, without defects or shortcomings. They become possessed with perfectionism to a fault.

A perfectionist is someone who really lives in fear of anything appearing out of order, flawed, or imperfect. It's not a happy way to live your life, and it's not easy to live with a perfectionist. It's not spiritually based but fear based. Seeking to be perfect, with the ego in the driver's seat rather than the spirit, is fear based.

The tendencies of perfectionism are related to personal insecurities. An intense perfectionist is a person dealing with low self-esteem. This person feels inadequate and will do almost anything to hide their self-determined flaws and defects. They have unrealistic expectations of themselves and others. They have difficulty in not only accepting themselves but also accepting others. The way that we treat ourselves is the way we treat others. If a person expects perfection from themselves, they will also expect it from those around them. They are never satisfied with their own progress or with the progress of those around them.

A perfectionist will tend to be embarrassed by the behavior of others. They are sarcastic, demanding, and bossy. They tend to put others down, either directly or continually within their own mind. They always keep a scorecard. They act at the expense of other peoples' feelings. They tend to make decisions for others and take choices away because they know best. They want to be in control. They want to be in charge. They tend to be very rigid. There are no grey areas with a perfectionist. They think and speak in absolutes using the words always or never a lot.

There is definitely a cost to perfectionism. There is a depletion of one's life when living in this dynamic. We're not making a perfectionist out to be a bad person. It's something for us to heal. All of us have elements of perfectionism along the way. Perfectionists don't let others in. "Don't get too close to me," because you might see that they're not perfect. They often crave validation from everyone for everything they're involved in. There's a hidden fear of disapproval. There's a

fear that they will be thought less of, and so there's a tendency to be bossy, impatient, and intolerant.

Some of you are slinking in your seats. I don't know why, but sit back up. There is a tendency to not feel satisfaction with one's accomplishments because of the belief that it could've been better. There's never a sense of "Wow! This is a great!" A perfectionist chooses to hide and retreat from life. They don't want to be noticed because they don't measure up. Often times they don't attempt a challenge or take on a desired goal because they want everything to be perfect before they actually do it. They want to make sure they look really good and have everything perfect before they launch into it. Therefore, they put it off, and put it off, and never really get started.

There is the mild and the serious as I say. A child comes home with a report card and hands it to their parent. The parent looks at it and goes, "Straight A's? You couldn't do any better than that?" That's a severe case of perfectionism.

I know a lot about perfectionism and all that I've been telling you because I am one. I'm not as severe as I used to be, but I still have waves of it that come over me. I'm much more aware now and I soften it. I have elements like that going on in me. A lot of these things develop in childhood. It's not that you're bad, or evil, or anything like that. We all have elements of this.

I have come to know these aspects of myself. There was a time when I was asked to be chair of the Board of Directors at Unity World Headquarters, and I was going to turn it down. My reason for turning it down was that I would be taking over for a guy who had been in this position for a number of years. He had done a really wonderful job, and my mind said, "Whoa, it would really glare your mess-ups as chair." So there was a part of me that didn't want to do it, but the Board was very inviting and wanted me too. I finally faced that. I saw what I was doing in my mind and what talk was going on. It was the old perfectionism. I went ahead and took the job. I am now chair and enjoying it.

There are things that we can see in ourselves. The way out of perfectionism and that self-defeating behavior is simply learning to accept yourself where you are in this moment in time. It's removing the harsh demands and unrealistic expectations that we have placed on ourselves. Some we learned while growing up, that others put on us, and we thought that's what we're supposed to have on ourselves all the time. It's also removing the focus from ourselves. We're so focused on ourselves. We need to take the perception away from us and be more involved in what we can do and how we can serve out there as opposed to how we're going to be perceived. We have to give up the fear that we may not do things perfectly. We have to give up the

scorecard inside our head and work on acceptance of ourselves and others. We need to give ourselves permission to fail, to take life less serious, and to be willing to laugh at ourselves. We need to recognize the fears that are there and unhook from them.

Years ago I was on the board of a recovery center in North Carolina for about 8 or 10 years. During that time, I met a lot of people going through recovery. Recovery is not just substance abuse. Recovery is being healed of all kinds of things and opening up to the spirit of light within us. One of the things covered in recovery is perfectionism. They have 30-day programs there, and during the 30-day program, people write a grief letter about what their issues have taken from their life. There was this one fellow who wrote a grief letter to the perfectionist inside of him. He shared it with me, and I've kept it to share with you. It's very powerful.

This is what he wrote, "Dear Perfectionism, I awakened this morning with you on my mind, and I wasn't sure why. It then came to me that I had to tell you of my sadness of having to let you go. You've been a false friend of mine for years and years. You were always loyal to me, and you served me in so many ways. You were the friend that allowed me to procrastinate. You convinced me not to start something until all the necessary conditions were in place. You safeguarded me from risk, "Don't try something unless you're sure you can succeed or at least can do it as well or better than everyone else." You kept me safe from other people, "Don't expose yourself to them, or him, or her, unless you already know they think you're great." You kept me from loving, "Don't give or receive the love until I and the other person meet all the necessary qualifications." You categorized and conditioned my love of my children. They must be this perfect picture, and you set the standard for my love of them, rather than just allowing me to love their being. You allowed me to rationalize and minimize my marriage vows, since the marriage and my wife were not perfect in every way, why look at valuing, nurturing, and safeguarding it, and her? You were my rationalization for my abusive behavior toward my employees, "John's really a nice guy. He just has high standards for us and the company." You were the fool that fueled my workaholism and allowed me to rationalize my isolationism. You were my bully's best friend."

It's the idea we have a bully inside, and he's speaking to the bully now.

"You helped him to appear bright, caring, and involved so that no one would know what a ruthless jerk he really was. You were the foundation for and camouflage of his arrogance, judgmentalism, impatience, and intolerance. You sugarcoated him so well that anyone around him, and especially me, couldn't even see him. Well old friend I've seen you for what you really are, and I've surrendered you out of my life. Oh, I know you'll keep knocking on my door and trying to get back inside of me, but I know you now, and I'll be watching for you. My love for

God, for myself, and for others has taken your place, and I know that as long as I accept, value, and nurture that child-like love in my heart, there'll be no room for you in me. So this is goodbye. I set you free and release you. I forgive you for all the harm you caused me. I'll never forget you because I want to be able to recognize you whenever you reappear, but I set myself free from you now. Goodbye."

Powerful isn't it? It really makes a statement about the cost of perfectionism in his life. Some of us can see ourselves in there a little bit, sometimes a lot. Again, don't be too harsh on yourself if you do. It's about moving beyond that. It's not what God meant when he said, "Be perfect," through Abraham or through Jesus.

I want to share with you two *Bible* commentaries on this word perfect. In one *Bible* commentary interpretation, it says, "The call to be perfect could be an appeal for maturity and completeness." That's important for maturity and completeness. There's something completing itself in you. There's a sense of spiritual maturity that is evolving in you. It's a process.

Translated from Aramaic, the language of Jesus, is a commentary from the scholar George Lamsa, "The Aramaic word *ghimara* means perfect, but it also means complete, whole, mature, thorough, inclusive. It goes on to say, "This verse does not refer to being perfect in character as God is perfect. It refers to being perfect or complete in understanding." Jesus knew that no one could be perfect like God.

Jesus wanted His disciples and followers to have a complete understanding of God's kingdom. They were to be open and receptive to all people and to treat everyone in the same manner as God would. It goes on to say, "They were not to be exclusive, but all inclusive just as God lets His rain on the just and the unjust, and lets the sun shine on the good and the bad." They were to be wise, pure, alert, gentle, and courageous. It concludes in this commentary, "Therefore, be inclusive even as your Father who is in heaven is inclusive."

It's really talking about an understanding of oneness. An understanding that takes you to a maturity, a completeness, a wholeness; that's what the word perfect is talking about. Perhaps that's what Jesus meant when He used the word perfect and oneness together in prayer. He prayed, "The glory which Thou has given me, I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and Thou in me, that they may become perfectly one."

So, "Be perfect" is really talking about becoming complete and mature in the understanding of oneness, in the understanding of what love is, and the understanding of inclusivity. When you read through all of the scriptures, the word perfect is often used, and if you substitute

understanding in front of it—I could give you the chapter and the book and so forth, but I won't. There are things like. "Perfect love casts out fear." "He that is perfect knowledge is with you," perfect knowledge and understanding of knowledge, "Thou will keep him in perfect peace whose mind has stayed on thee." It's a kind of peace where you have an understanding going on within you.

"Perfect strength is made perfect," and, "Let patience have her perfect work that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Again, it's all tied—it talks about faith, patience, all of these things.

There's a story where Jesus is asked by a young man, "What can give me eternal life?" He said, "Well the Ten Commandments." He said, "I've lived them since youth." He said, "Love the lord your God and love your neighbor." He said, "I've done that." And then Jesus said, "Okay, if you want to be perfect go sell everything that you have, give it to the poor, and come follow me." The young man went away very sad and sorrowful. He couldn't do it. He wasn't ready. He wasn't ready to understand what giving was. Giving is another dimension of understanding just as love and patience and all of these things. We have to move into an understanding.

He said, "It's easier for a camel to move through the eye of a needle," then for a person to get this sometimes. What he was saying is that we get possessed by our possessions, especially in our youth. We make them who we are, and in the passage this was a young person.

It's important to grasp the idea that we are in a process of learning and growing. It's important to accept where we are and to love ourselves forward. It's stated in First Corinthians, "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

It's a process that's always going on inside of you. Greater understanding, perfect understanding of who you are, your relationship to God, to love, to faith, to hope, all these things, and then the other falls away.

I close with a statement from *John 1*, and actually it's the idea that no man has seen God; therefore, they've really not seen perfection. It states in this passage, "No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us." It's all about understanding and having all of these qualities and attributes of God perfected in us. Go ye and be love, be oneness, be inclusivity with understanding. God bless you all.