

## **“Becoming Perfect”**

*2 Corinthians 5:17; Matthew 5:48*

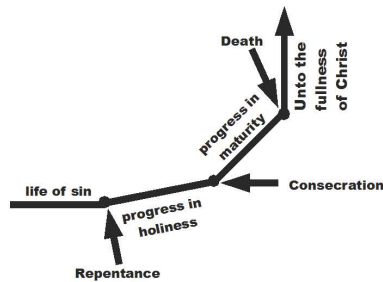
“Perfect Understood more perfectly”

“Telios”

– a dynamic process of achieving maturity

To become completely mature requires us to cooperate with the sanctifying grace of God.

*- Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 2:10-11; Romans 12:1; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Peter 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:23*



The Holy Spirit entirely sanctifies what the believer fully surrenders.

*- John 14:6*

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com

**West Valley Church**  
**May 17, 2026**  
**Michael O'Neill**

## **Becoming: Perfect<sup>1</sup>**

Today we continue in our series called, “Becoming,” and we’re talking about something called “sanctification.” That’s a big word in the Bible and I will use it a lot today because it means a lot. But basically it means this: sanctification, or being “sanctified,” means to be made holy or being holy. More simply, it means to be made like Jesus, or to be Christlike. Sanctification is a description of the expected Christian life.

What would you say if I told you that you can be perfect? You might say no one besides Jesus is perfect. But God says clearly in his word he wants *us* to be perfect in this life. We’d better figure out what that means so we can be it!

Let me try to show what this means for us by using something we are very familiar with in this valley: apples.

Here’s a picture of some unripe apples. Can anyone tell me what kind they are? A little hard to tell at this stage. These are unripe Honeycrisp apples. Now, Let’s say that these apples represent new believers. The saving grace of God draws us to himself and makes us into something new: a new creation! The Bible says:



“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:  
The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, niv)

These new creations have the potential to become mature, delicious, ripe apples. They have all the components of an apple: they have an apple core surrounded by a skin and are in the shape of apples, but they still need to grow and mature to reach their intended goal.

*These* apples, on the other hand, have become full grown and ripe Honeycrisp apples. The core has sweetened, the shape has enlarged somewhat, and the skin has turned red to indicate that they have matured.

These are both the same kinds of apples, but one set is more mature than the other. They look different, and they taste different.

These apples illustrate the process of spiritual maturity. The green apples illustrate an authentic Christian, but they have not fully matured yet.

The ripe apples illustrate full spiritual maturity – like the Christian that has reached God’s intended goal of Christlike maturity.



These apples also show the difference between God’s “saving” and “sanctifying” works of grace. The green apples illustrate what the saving grace of God can do in the work of new creation. The ripe apples represent the work of the sanctifying grace of God, which is to

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on a sermon series, Copyright © 2026 USA/Canada Regional Office, Church of the Nazarene. Permission to reproduce for ministry use only. All rights reserved.

mature us into Christlike disciples.

You could describe the ripe Honeycrisp apples as “perfect” in the sense that they have reached the intended goal of maturity—sweet and ripe and crisp and red. But would you say they are flawless? No. They are perfectly *mature*, but not perfectly *flawless*.

They aren’t flawless because you could find some small blemishes on the skin. Or there might be some slight irregularities in the shape, and there may be a small soft spot or cut in the skin.

The ripe apples are “perfect” in that they’ve reached the goal of being completely mature, but they are not “flawless.”

“Perfect” *can* mean flawless, or it can mean completely mature. You could say these apples are perfectly mature, but no apple is flawless. Are you following me?

The goal of the saving and sanctifying grace of God is for us to become completely mature disciples of Christ, like these ripe apples. But that is not the same as becoming flawless. We can never be flawless in this lifetime, but we can become completely mature, while still growing.

We will only become flawless once we are glorified and ultimately removed from the presence of sin and freed from our flawed humanity (in other words, when the Christian dies). Until then, we can continue to seek and maintain perfection in spiritual maturity despite our bumps, bruises, and blemishes.

We will *always* have room for growth in Christlikeness, which is why there will be additional steps of obedience to take even as mature disciples.

With this in mind, let’s turn to Matthew 5:48, where Jesus used the word “perfect” in a command given in the Sermon on the Mount.

In that sermon, Jesus laid out his radical teaching of the kind of Christlike character that pleases God.

The disciple Matthew gave us the most complete version of this sermon, beginning in chapter 5 and continuing through chapter 7. I can’t cover all of the teachings in this sermon, but I want to clarify what Jesus meant when he used the word “perfect,” because that can be confusing if we don’t understand it.

Jesus used the word “perfect” to summarize all the moral commands that he made in chapter 5, ending with verse 48:

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48, niv)

Wow. Does Jesus expect us to be flawless? If so, I can’t do it, and neither can any of us! So, what did Jesus mean by “perfect”? That’s what we are going to learn today.

## “Perfect” Understood More Perfectly

First, let’s look at the Bible’s understanding of “perfect.” Since the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language, we need a Greek lexicon (which is like our English dictionary) to understand the meaning of the word. The Greek word for perfect is...

## [teleios / tel-i-os/],

...which means in English: “1 brought to its end, finished. 2 wanting nothing necessary to completeness. 3 perfect. 4 that which is perfect. 4a consummate human integrity and virtue. 4b full grown, adult, of full age, mature.”

Next, let’s look at the meaning of “teleios” from the ancient Near East (ANE) mindset of ancient Israel. Our Western worldview understands “perfect” as achieving an ideal, a static state of being – reaching perfection. But the Bible, written from the ancient Near Eastern worldview, understands...

- “perfect” as **a dynamic process of achieving maturity**. It emphasizes internal growth instead of a final, concrete endpoint.

We, in our Western culture, think of “perfect” as a flawless ideal. But we must keep in mind that the Bible was written in the ancient Near Eastern culture with the understanding of “perfect” as completely mature.

Like the ripe apple, we are called by Jesus to the goal of becoming completely ripe and mature disciples. We all start out green, but Jesus doesn’t want us to stay that way. We need to keep maturing until we are made completely ripe in Christlikeness by the sanctifying grace of God – even while we still have flaws.

Understanding this is important because if we don’t get it, then this call of Jesus to be perfect is unreachable, and we are destined to a life of repeated failures. If we think Jesus meant that we should be flawless, then that idea of perfection becomes a carrot on a stick or like a rainbow; it’s elusive and we keep chasing it but never reach it. But why would Jesus tell us to be perfect if it wasn’t possible? We believe that Jesus meant what he said in his call to be teleios – perfect. However, teleios must be properly understood as a call to complete spiritual maturity achievable only through the sanctifying power of God’s grace.

We believe this sanctifying power transforms our character so that we are actually changed into Christlike disciples. We believe God can actually change us!

So the call of Jesus to be teleios – perfect – is the call to actual “complete spiritual maturity.”

The question then becomes, “How do we become spiritually mature (teleios) as Christlike disciples?”

## **To become completely mature requires us to cooperate with the sanctifying grace of God.**

Our cooperation with God is necessary because we were created by God with a free will to accept or reject his grace. God does not manipulate our will – he will not coerce or control us; in his goodness he woos us by his love. The Holy Spirit persuades our will to cooperate by his indwelling presence, by his Scripture, and by the help of other believers.

In this process, grace and faith work together.

Think about when you are saved. We can only be saved by God's grace, amen? But – that salvation is accessed through our faith. Our faith is required to receive the grace of God.

Think about being saved this way: maybe you've heard me say this before, but imagine it's Christmas, and I have a present for you under the tree. It's all wrapped; it even has a tag with your name on it. I picked it out just for you. But while it sits under the tree, is it yours? Technically, but not in reality. Not until you come over, receive it, unwrap it, and take it. It could sit there for sixty years, but it's not yours until you accept it. Grace to be saved is the gift of God to you, but you must accept it. That's faith. Grace and faith. That is God's salvation plan—grace and faith working together.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”  
(Ephesians 2:8–9, niv)

Salvation is by God's grace, and we accept it through our faith. In the exact same way, sanctifying grace also requires our cooperation. We must respond by engaging our free will in complete dedication of ourselves to God.

Our free will must be voluntarily dedicated to God. In theological terms, this is called consecration. It means the process of full dedication—full surrender to God.

This voluntary consecration of our will to the will of God demonstrates that we acknowledge that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God.

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”. (Philippians 2:10–11, niv)

Consecration means – as already Christians – we bow our knees in complete submission to Jesus, and we confess that Jesus is Lord—Lord of everything in our lives. It means we voluntarily bring the control of our lives under the lordship of Jesus.

Your act of consecration means that you present yourself to Jesus for his purposes on earth; your life is his, and so the outcome of your life is for his glory.

Paul makes this clear in Romans 12:1:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1, niv)

The believer who desires complete maturity in Christ must begin by willingly offering themselves on the proverbial altar of consecration as a living sacrifice.

This is the offering of the entire self—heart, mind, will, past and future—all given to God as a living sacrifice. This is what worship really is.

Jesus set the example of surrender for us to follow.

Jesus obeyed the will of the Father in offering himself in physical death for our sins. This was the once-and-for-all, perfect sacrifice for sins, which never needs repeating.

This act of obedience set an example for all disciples to follow a humble lifestyle in submission to the Father's will.

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5–11, niv)

Jesus modeled entire devotion to God—entirely consecrated to God—being entirely surrendered to God.

This state of entire devotion is the goal of the sanctifying grace of God in the life of every believer. Sanctification is entering a lifelong posture of the entire devotion of a mature Christlike disciple.

So here's how it works: at this point in time – as much as I know how right now – I surrender all that I am to God. Is that all of me to surrender? *Yes*, because it's all I know right now. *No*, because I'll have more to surrender tomorrow. But right now – today – I surrender all of myself. In fact, throughout each day I'll have more things that God reveals to me that I'll need to surrender. And tomorrow, as God reveals, I will surrender more.

Surrender and dedication of our will is our part in the process of sanctification. We can't sanctify ourselves or make ourselves holy; if we could Jesus wouldn't have had to suffer and die for us. Only God can make us holy. But we consecrate ourselves to him so that he can sanctify us. Consecration is our part; sanctification is his part.

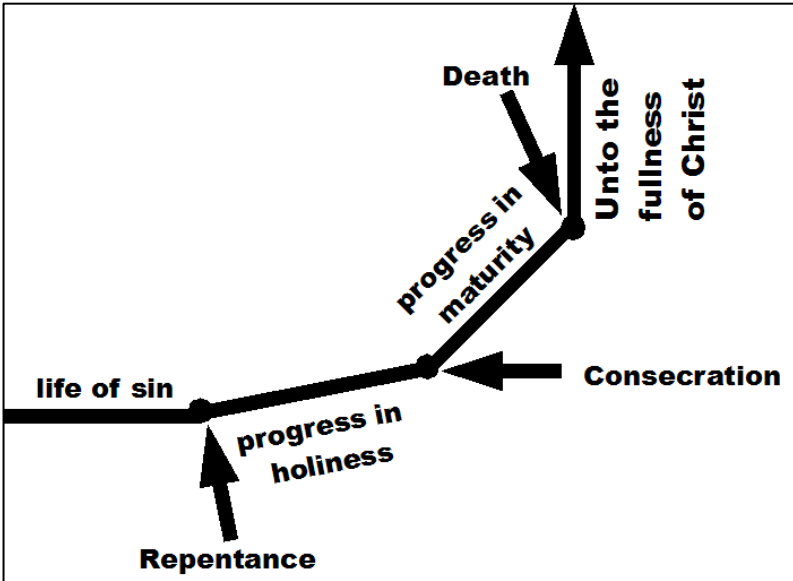
The goal of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification is holiness of heart and life. God's goal from day one is to make us holy. That's why the Bible says:

“For it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:16, niv)

But this command to “be holy” can be hindered by our unwillingness to cooperate with the Spirit. If we drag our feet and resist the sanctifying grace, our progress will be slowed.

On the other hand, if we are eager to grow and cooperate with the Spirit, the pace of sanctification can move forward more quickly. This gradual growth leads to a moment of crisis, entire sanctification.

Let me explain it this way:



This moment of entire sanctification comes when the sanctifying grace of God draws the growing believer to a place of full surrender that goes to a deeper level than ever before.

At that moment of full surrender, the Spirit does his work of heart cleansing—empowering that involves the whole body, soul, and spirit!

This term “entire sanctification” comes from the Bible in Thessalonians:

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, niv) (verse 24 says: “the one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”)

Entire sanctification involves consecrating the whole person—the whole will, heart, and life. It’s here that every *known* area of resistance and sinful impurity is sanctified – cleansed by the Spirit (remember the ladder?). In short...

### **The Holy Spirit entirely sanctifies what the believer fully surrenders.**

After the full surrender of the believer, the Spirit entirely cleanses the heart of all sinful impurities and breaks the power of sin.

This invasion of the heart with the Holy Spirit brings a deeper love for God and others. It brings a new power to live a holy life in victory over sin. The sky’s the limit in what God can do through us.

The believer then maintains this relationship of entire devotion to God as they remain in this state of entire sanctification by daily surrender.

Our call is always the same. Christlike disciples are called to full surrender to the will and way of God.

Let me give you an example.

Imagine that this book is your life. I can hold it up for a while, but after time my arm will get tired. Why? Because the pull of gravity is constant and unrelenting. It’s ultimately stronger than me. But if I put the book on this table, has gravity changed? No. What’s different? I’m no longer fighting gravity in my strength. I’m letting the table fight gravity. And the table is stronger than the pull of gravity.

The book is your life. Gravity is the constant, unrelenting pull of sin. You can fight it, but

you will eventually get tired and lose. But when you surrender, the table is like the Holy Spirit – your life is resting on Him, and the Spirit is resisting the pull of sin – not you. Now you're free to fly!

As a Christian, when you surrender, you no longer have to wrestle with sin. Because that decision was already made when you consecrated yourself. Not only that, you have the Holy Spirit of God himself changing your heart and giving you the strength to say no to sin and yes to Jesus. No to sin and yes to loving God and loving people.

Let me tell you when this happened for me. It was many years ago. I kept praying about it, kept seeking it, kept struggling with fully surrendering. I felt like my growth just kept hitting the ceiling. I got to the point where I felt like, "This is it, God. If you don't fill me now, I don't think I'm going to ask again."

Well, shortly after that, I was at a prayer summit with some pastor friends of mine. I asked them to pray with me. One was a Presbyterian, one was a Nazarene, one was a Lutheran, one was a Pentecostal, and one was a Baptist with a prayer and deliverance ministry (Baptists don't do that). I figured, if I'm going to be filled with the Spirit, I'm going to cover all my bases!

These men prayed over me. The Baptist prophesied over me (Baptists don't do that either). But when we finished praying, I *knew* that my life was different. I knew the roof was gone and the sky was the limit to my growth in Christ.

The best way I can describe it is this way: before that, whenever I prayed, I was always aware of my sin and failures. I felt like God was in his office at his desk piled with work running the universe. So when I prayed, I had to knock on the door, and when he said I could come in, I had to wipe my feet (because they were dirty), and then I could go in and speak with him, and then leave.

After that day and ever since, anytime I pray, I feel like the door to God is wide open and I can walk in and out any time at all.

I don't know if that makes sense to you, but it does to me. Now, do I still have flaws? You bet I do. Just ask my wife or the other pastors. No, please don't! If I opened this up for you to point out my flaws, we'd be here all week. But I'm working on them, and as my wife and my pastors and you point them out, they become opportunities for me to grow (but there have been people who make up flaws and wrongfully judge my motives...not much I can do about that but love them). But in all of that, my motives are good and right. In all my flaws, I don't sin – unless I reject people or let my pride get in the way or...on and on.

Why is sanctification important? Because it's the only way for you to live the fulfilled, abundant life that God has for you.

For you personally, the relationship you have with God is unfettered and unimpeded. There will always be more for you to learn about Him! When Shelly and I were at the wedding ceremony, I stood with the Pastor and my best man waiting backstage for the time to go into the ceremony. It hit me: *I don't really know this woman*. For the few years we've known each other, there's *a lot* I don't know. You might think I was getting cold feet, but it was the opposite: I get to spend the rest of my life learning more and more about this amazing woman.

The same is true with God – even more so! You will never run out of things to learn about God, and it is always good!

Besides sanctification benefitting *you*, the greater thing is that you are now empowered to be used by God to do great things for his Kingdom. He can work through you completely! He'll work through your natural abilities and gifts and in some cases, he will even work through you supernaturally.

The question for you to consider today is, where are you on this journey of grace to becoming a Christlike disciple?

The call of Jesus to every disciple is to complete maturity. To become that ripe, mature red apple! Are you seeking that maturity of life and character?

Is the Spirit calling you to a new level of surrender of your will?

Are you ready to present yourself entirely to God for his sanctifying work?

*Prayer/altar response*

*Benediction:*

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, niv)

**Life Group Questions**  
**Becoming: Perfect**  
**Week of May 17, 2026**

1. The sermon compares new believers to unripe apples and mature believers to ripe apples. What parts of that illustration stood out to you most, and where do you see yourself in that process of spiritual growth?
2. Read Matthew 5:48 and 1 Peter 1:16. How did the sermon's explanation of "perfect" as spiritual maturity rather than flawlessness change or challenge your understanding of these verses?
3. The pastor said, "Consecration is our part, sanctification is God's part." What is the difference – who does what? What do you think it practically looks like to surrender your life to God on a daily basis?
4. The sermon emphasized that sanctification requires cooperation with the Holy Spirit. What are some ways people resist God's work in their lives, and what helps us stay open and responsive to Him?
5. Which illustration connected with you most—the apples, the Christmas gift, the ladder of surrender, or the book resting on the table? Why?
6. The pastor shared about a deeper moment of surrender and transformation in his own life. Have you experienced a moment where God brought you to a similar, deeper level surrender? Please share your story. How is this moment different than salvation? In what ways is it similar?
7. The sermon ends with the question, "Where are you on this journey of grace?" What is one next step God may be inviting you to take toward greater surrender, to move you toward Christlikeness and maturity?
8. Close in prayer for one another to be fully surrendered, mature disciples.