

THE COMPLETE PERSON

“SPIRITUAL MATURITY”

By George Creach, M.A., L.P.C., H.M. Motsinger, Ed.D., L.P.C.
Edited & Arranged by Buck Griffith

I. Introduction

In our modern world, the idea of a person being complete or perfect is one in which he is without fault or defect. The perfect person is considered to be one who has reached some abstract ideal standard of what it means to be the ultimate person. Most of us believe that few – if any – can ever reach the point of perfection and completion. When we look at what the Bible says about a person becoming perfect, we see that the command is for all to become perfect or complete. What is the difference between what the Bible commands and what we believe today? The Bible uses two Greek words that are usually translated into the English language as “perfect”, *mature*, or *complete*. In the Bible they all mean the same thing.

One of the words is **telos**. It carries the idea of reaching a goal, accomplishing something, completing something – whole. This is the word Paul uses to describe his goal in Colossians 1:28.

The other word is from the **artios** word family. It carries the idea of putting in order, restoring, making complete, preparing – being capable. This is the word Paul uses when he tells Timothy in Second Timothy 3:16-17 to be perfect and complete.

From the context of these verses we see that Paul is not talking about some future, heavenly time when men will live with God in eternity. He is talking about man as he lives and serves God while living in a fallen world. Jesus not only set the example, He tells us to look to God for what it means to be *perfect*. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells the crowd . . .

“You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”
(Matthew 5:48)

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasizes that we are to treat others with love, care, and concern. He says that because God loves us, we should love Him and those He loves. It sounds easy, doesn’t it? But Paul assures us that it is not! In Philippians 3:12, he tells readers: “. . . not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus . . .”

II. The Complete Person Is One of Hope

A. The Hope that Is in Us

The complete person is a person of hope. To most of us today, hope is nothing more than wishful thinking. We really *want* something to happen, but we do not expect that it will

actually happen. In the Bible “hope” means something else. It is the expectation of a future good event. *It is the belief that not only can something happen, but that it will happen.* This is the difference that Christ makes in our lives. Peter told his readers . . .

“ . . . sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you . . . ”

(First Peter 3:15)

Not only does the complete person have hope, he *knows* he has it and he knows how to explain that hope to others. The hope that Peter is talking about is not wishing to obtain some type of material possession . . . It is not to make us self-aware or make us better people, although it does so. It is to help us know about God and His Son and what they did for us. It is about the salvation that they freely give to us.

B. The Answer that Hope Provides

In all cultures, in all ages, three questions have challenged man . . .

#1 – *Where did I come from?*

#2 – *Why am I here?*

#3 – *Where am I going?*

Philosophers and religious leaders have tried to answer these questions. The answers that they develop never satisfy man’s longings or needs. *It is only in Christianity that the answers to these questions can be found.* The Bible says that God created man (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:7-8). Man is uniquely different from the rest of God’s created universe. It is said only of man, that he was created in God’s image. This usually is understood to mean that besides being a physical being, man is also spiritual. Man can reason. He has emotions. He is creative. And, he is a moral and ethical being. Man’s purpose is to rule over and care for God’s universe (Genesis 1:28), but this is only a part of his purpose of being. Solomon says that our duty is to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Jesus made a similar statement in Matthew 22:37-39 . . .

“ . . . You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself . . . ”

Because our origin and purpose are in God, so is our destiny. For those who have fellowship with God, our destiny is to dwell with Him for all eternity. There we will be transformed from our physical bodies to glorious spiritual bodies (Psalm 23:6; Matthew 25:31-39; John 14:1-4; Philippians 3:20-21). Those who have rebelled against God’s purpose and commandments are bound for eternal destruction (Matthew 25:41-46; Philippians 3:18-19).

III. The Complete Person Is an Achiever

A. Achieves Stable Relationship

In Second Peter 2:13 through 3:12, Peter tells us how the Christian is to live his life in relationships with others. He summarizes it in First Peter 2:17 when he writes: “Honor all men; love the brotherhood; fear God; honor the king.” The idea of showing honor or respect to others is almost a lost thought today. Our culture and news media ridicule and slander people. Too often we have accepted this worldly view that looks for the worst in people and then tells everybody else about it. Peter tells us not to be like that.

*We are to look for the best in a person. We are to treat others with honor, consideration, and respect. It is human nature to treat someone as he has treated you. Jesus talks about this in the Sermon on the Mount. He tells the crowd . . .
 “Treat others as you want to be treated” (Matthew 7:12).*

If we want to be treated with consideration and respect, we must treat others that way.

Besides our obligation to treat others with consideration and respect, we have a special obligation to treat fellow church members (the *brotherhood*) with love. The word that Peter uses here for “love” is agape. It carries the idea of wanting only the best for someone else. This is the type of love that God demonstrated to mankind when He sent Jesus into the world to save us! Part of our obligation to honor and love one another is to show honor to the government (king). Paul tells us in Romans 13:1-7 that government is “ordained” by God. Its purpose is to ensure that we have a safe and stable social environment in which to live. Those who obey the government are doing God’s will. Those who do not are more than just disobeying a law. They are in rebellion against God. Not only do we have obligations to one another, we have an obligation to fear or show reverence to God. Few people today show reverence to God. God, the Creator and Master of the universe, is denied or blasphemed by the vast majority of people. We show reverence to God when we accept Him, respect Him, and obey His commandments. When we learn to show reverence to God, we will have no problem honoring all men, loving the brotherhood and honoring the government.

B. Achieves Mastery of the Developmental Stages in Life

Often people believe that they just *exist*. They do not. As they grow older, they pass through different “stages” of life. Erik Erikson says that as we grow and develop, we pass through eight “stages” of development . . .

STAGE	AGE	MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS
<i>Infancy</i>	0-1	Trusts in self and others
<i>Early Childhood</i>	1-3	Learns that self-control creates a sense of independence
<i>Play Age</i>	3-6	Mobility and curiosity encourages the initiative to master the environment
<i>School Age</i>	6-12	A sense of industry is developed through school work and control of imagination
<i>Adolescence</i>	12-20	A sense of uniqueness as a person, a desire for a meaningful role and place in society, sense of identity
<i>Young Adulthood</i>	20-30	Wish to unite one’s identity with others leading a person to seek intimacy; love, the capacity for mutual devotion in sharing relationships
<i>Adulthood</i>	30-65	The need to create children, ideas, products and to care for them
<i>Mature Age</i>	65+	Review of one’s life, to ensure that it has had order and meaning; preserves wisdom and passes it to others

When we learn the lessons of each stage, we will develop into mature and competent persons. The mature individual *acts his age*. He does not act like he is living in either an earlier or later stage of development. He enjoys the stage in which he is now living, but is not afraid to move into the *next* stage of development.

IV. The Complete Person Can Love

Throughout the Bible, God's *love* is declared. It is such an important part of His character that First John 4:8 says: "God IS love." Since we are created in the *image of God*, we have the capacity and need to express love. Four Greek words are translated "love" in the English versions of the Bible. These four words show different aspects of love. The English word "love" is defined as *strong attraction for another arising out of kinship or personal ties*. Love contains no unselfish loyalty and has only the highest concern for the best interests of the one loved.

A. Stergo

Stergo is the mutual love of parents and children. It is unconditional acceptance. It makes no demands on the one loved. The parents accept their child because he is a person of value and worth. A child does not have to earn his parents' love. They *give* it to him because he is their child. This does not mean that the parents must accept all the child's actions – positive or negative. They do not. The idea is to love the child unconditionally . . . not *everything the child does*. The child is to demonstrate the same type of love to his parents.

B. Agape

Agape is sometimes called "divine" or "spiritual" love. It is the kind of love that God shows toward men. It is unconditional love, too. It is always positive. It seeks the greatest good for others. It is the love that Jesus modeled for us when He came to earth, lived among us, and died for our sins. It is the love that motivates us to love one another.

*Once we become Christians, the love that we show one another is agape.
During what the world calls the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples,
"A new commandment I give you, that you love one another,
even as I have loved you, that you also love one another"
(John 13:34).*

Agape is the word that Jesus used to tell His disciples how He loved them and how they should love one another.

C. Phileo

Phileo means to "show affection and hospitality." It is used for the love that exists between friends and for those people who are bound together in faith.

D. Eros

Eros is "romantic" love. It is that shared love that exists between a man and woman. It includes longing, craving, and desire for each other.

V. The Complete Person Is Versatile

A. Not Afraid of Emotions

God created us with a full range of emotions. Some of these emotions are...

vigilance	rage	Loathing	grief
amazement	terror	Adoration	ecstasy
anger	annoyance	Disgust	boredom
sadness	pensiveness	Surprise	distraction
apprehension	fear	Love	joy
contempt	remorse	Disappointment	awe
submission	optimism	Aggressiveness	acceptance
rejection	frustration	Horror	satisfaction

Emotions vary in intensity. Some are mild while others are extremely intense. All of our emotions are divided into such families of emotions that they progress in intensity from mild to intense. An example would be annoyance. It is a mild emotion, but when it becomes more intense, it is *anger*. When a person becomes extremely angry and loses control, he is said to feel rage! It is natural for us to have emotions and to express them. If one is not able to express or to control his emotions, he has failed to develop into a mature, complete person. When we suppress or repress our emotions, we are setting ourselves up for serious mental health problems.

B. **Makes the Most of Assets**

When God created man, He provided him with certain assets that help him live in our world. A few of these are intellect, physical strength, creativity, ability to cope, emotions, and use of time. We all have the same assets but we do not all have them to the same degree. Whereas one person has the potential to be a great artist, another has the potential to accomplish great feats of physical strength. The complete person knows what his assets are and uses them to his fullest potential. An example of using our assets is controlling stress. The fast paced, demanding, artificial environment of our modern world creates an increased sense of stress.

The complete person has learned to cope with a reasonable amount of stress and to ignore the rest. Not only can he cope with stress, he uses it to his advantage.

It is like the actor or public speaker who has butterflies in his stomach (fear) before performing or speaking. Instead of giving in to fear and freezing or running away, he channels it to help him perform at his best.

In a fallen world, many have some form of physical or mental handicap. They are either born with it or obtain it sometimes in later life. The complete man might not enjoy or like his handicap, but he will accept it and develop coping skills that will reduce it as much as possible (II Corinthians 12:7).

C. **Confronts and Solves Problems**

The complete man can confront and solve his problems with help from above (Philippians 4:12-13). This sounds simple, but it is not. Most of us are afraid to confront our problems or do not know how to solve them. Confronting and solving problems is not only hard work – it also takes courage. Many people would rather run away from their problems than face them. *A complete person accepts responsibility for his problems and for solving them.* This does not mean that he “enjoys” problems, but he does not hide from them. Only when we confront and solve our problems can we continue with our lives. When we try to hide or run away from them, we are only creating additional problems for ourselves.

VI. Conclusion

God created man perfect, complete, and mature. God wants only the best for us. We know this because God sent His Son into the world to be an example for us and to redeem us. When we follow Jesus' example, we can become the perfect, complete, mature people that God wants us to be (Philippians 4:13). God created us to be bold and to soar with the eagles (Isaiah 40:31).

STUDY QUESTIONS

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

1. In the Bible, the word "perfect" means
(a) without weakness (b) sinless
(c) mature or complete (d) none of these
2. Jesus tells us to be *perfect* because God is
(a) perfect (b) a harsh judge
(c) eager to condemn us (d) all of these
3. "Hope" carries with it the idea of
(a) defeat (b) chance
(c) human merit (d) expectation
4. The Bible answers the question:
(a) "Why am I here?" (b) "Where are *you* going?"
(c) "Whose wife will I have in heaven?" (d) "How many children will I have?"
5. Man's basic purpose is to fear God and keep
(a) alive (b) whatever he earns
(c) God's commands (d) a list of the wrongs of others
6. *Stergo* refers to love between parents and
(a) animals (b) friends
(c) strangers (d) children.
7. *Agape* is the love God shows toward
(a) animals (b) mankind
(c) birds (d) aliens
8. It is natural to express
(a) feelings (b) divine wisdom
(c) nothing (d) none of these
9. A complete person knows his assets and uses them to
(a) control others (b) appear superior
(c) their fullest potential (d) obtain large loans
10. The mature person has problems but can
(a) act like he has none (b) solve them
(c) forget them (d) deny them