

# Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

## Lesson 22

### *Aim For Perfection*

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**II Corinthians 13:11 (NIV)** - "...Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."

The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, was making an urgent appeal to the Corinthians to go beyond being nominal (average) Christians. He was calling them to *perfection*. Sometimes, however, just hearing the word "perfection" makes people nervous. We seem to get hung up on things we don't understand, or that appear too difficult. Yet, we need not be disturbed by that word, especially when we learn what perfection really means. The Bible uses the word "perfection" to describe a spiritually mature believer. Those who aim for perfection are, in reality, those who are truly blessed by God. Why? Maturity in the Body of Christ is God's spiritual means of deliverance from Satan's tactics!

A spiritually mature believer is someone who makes Jesus Christ the Lord of their life, who becomes God's vessel of righteousness. Because of that commitment, their body, soul, and spirit becomes *free* to live under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Even their very senses become trained to know the difference between good and evil (Hebrews 5:14). They no longer serve sin, being led by the devil to do his dirty work in the flesh. They are made free by Jesus to turn from sin and dedicate their lives to serving righteousness in the flesh.

**Romans 8:2 (KJV)** - *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

If we do not consciously *aim* for perfection (maturity) we will remain stuck in Satan's domain, being deceived into letting him use our flesh as a trash can for his purposes. Consider the following questions. Do you avoid listening to the Holy Spirit's counsel? Are there issues in your life you continue to put off? If you choose to ignore the Holy Spirit's correction you are keeping the door open to Satan's deceptions.

To keep the door open to the Holy Spirit we must recognize that Jesus Christ met the standard of perfection "on our behalf" when he went to the cross. We must

never forget that our righteousness comes *through* Him. We don't earn righteousness. But we do "grow up" into righteousness by giving the Holy Spirit the opportunity to *workout* our imperfections through repentance. We can keep Satan under our feet by following a principle the Holy Spirit taught me. *We do not have to attain perfection, but we are to strive for perfection, as if we could attain it!*

The beauty of following this truth is that our focus is always on Jesus who is constantly challenging us to a higher level of spiritual maturity. Brothers and sisters, this is an awesome way to live life in the flesh. If we are not aiming for our goal of perfection, we are settling for Satan's plan of destruction. Wisdom tells us to heed the appeal of the Master.

**Matthew 5:48 (Amplified Bible)** - *You, therefore, must be perfect [growing into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity], as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Even though Jesus commands his followers to be perfect, even as our Father in Heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48), many still don't like hearing His appeal to grow up! We don't like hearing that Jesus is expecting more from us than we may be willing to put into the relationship. This is the area where the devil plays on our thoughts hoping to pull us into deception.

Thinking we can't live up to the call to perfection, we start looking for convenient excuses. Lacking faith, we decide we can't go forward to have the new life that Jesus spoke about. Our *flesh* then becomes the target for our excuses. We become so convinced we are going to fail, that our *flesh* is going to get us into trouble, we throw around our "flesh excuses" when we want to feel better about ourselves. I recently heard a verse from a song which said, "I may be a real bad boy, but I'm a good man." We've all heard similar thoughts expressed. "She's a little mixed up, but she basically has a good heart." "Nobody's perfect, after all we are only human." If being human is all we are striving for in this life, it is understandable to settle on doing our own thing. From

God's vantage point, however, doing our own thing in this life is deadly.

**Romans 6:23 (NIV)** - *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

God expects maturity and that maturity comes *through* the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is unacceptable for us to use our flesh as an excuse not to follow Him.

Yet, that is exactly what Satan tempts us to do. One of the most popular "excuses" we use to allow our *flesh* to be dominated by sin, comes straight from the Bible itself. In the Book of Romans we find Paul describing the human condition, the every day experiences we all face with life in the flesh. He describes from first hand experience the constant tug of war between good and evil.

**Romans 7:19-20 (NIV)** - *For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do -- this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*

If we lack faith, we'll stop here at this stage of Paul's journey, throw up our hands and refuse to go on with Jesus. This is exactly where the devil wants us to stop. He wants us to keep on making excuses for *doing the sin*. Paul urges us to recognize the consequences of sin, yes, but not to get bogged down in fleshly excuses to stay in sin. Once we see the stark truth of what sin does to us, it's time to look for the way out.

**Romans 7:24-25 (NIV)** - *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

The Holy Spirit taught Paul to put the emphasis exactly where it should be, on the *Rescuer*, the *Deliverer* of our flesh! We have developed such a mind-set that we must choose between the flesh and the spirit, we have neglected the real message God is conveying to us. If we allow ourselves to get pulled off into sin, the real problem is not with the flesh. The flesh, after all, is only responding to what it has been trained to do. The real problem is in our spirit. Which *spirit* are we yielding to: the spirit of death or the spirit of life? Are we allowing Satan the opportunity to use our flesh as a trash can to house sin? Or, are we allowing Jesus the opportunity to use our flesh as a vessel to house righteousness?

**In summary** - The "excuses" we make for allowing sin to live in our flesh are not acceptable to God, because they demonstrate an unrepentant, rebellious attitude toward Him. God is not patient with excuses, because it keeps him at a distance so we can continue to rebel in doing what we want to do. Having the knowledge that Jesus took our sins once on the cross, does not mean we can repent once and that keeps us always in His grace. On the contrary, knowing we will make mistakes in our journey toward perfection, God provided the gift of repentance that He might train us in righteousness. When we repent, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9).

**II Corinthians 7:1 (KJV)** - *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."*



#### Questions for Personal or Group Study:

1. If spiritual maturity is not something we can attain on our own, what incentive do we have to strive for it?
2. When the pressures of life come against you, which spirit do you turn to? Why?
3. What gift has the Holy Spirit given us as a means to become cleansed of all our imperfections?
4. How does Satan conveniently use our "mind-set", that we must choose between the flesh and the spirit, as a weapon of deception against us?
5. Think back to the last time the Holy Spirit came to correct you of a sin; did you repent or make an excuse for your sin? Why did you respond that way?