

# Be Thou Perfect!

by F.B. Meyer

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of whole-hearted devotion to God, surrendering one's being to Him and following His will.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 17:1, Psalm 28:1, Matthew 5:48, Matthew 6:22, Galatians 3:7-29, 2 Timothy 3:17, Hebrews 8:10, Hebrews 13:20-21

**Topics:** "Trust in God's Promises", "Whole-hearted Devotion"

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## Description

F.B. Meyer emphasizes God's call to Abraham to 'walk before Me, and be thou perfect,' highlighting the importance of whole-hearted devotion to God. He reflects on the long silence Abraham experienced, which tested his faith and reliance on God's promises. Meyer clarifies that perfection does not equate to sinlessness but rather to a complete surrender and commitment to God. He encourages believers to seek a life of undivided devotion, trusting in the Almighty God who empowers them to fulfill His calling. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep, personal relationship with God, where His presence guides every aspect of life.

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## Transcript

"I am the Almighty God: walk before Me, and be thou perfect." -- Genesis 17:1.

Thirteen long years passed slowly on after the return of Hagar to Abraham's camp. The child Ishmael was born, and grew up in the patriarch's house -- the acknowledged heir of the camp, and yet showing symptoms of the wild-ass nature of which the angel had spoken (16:12 RV). Not a little perplexed must Abraham have been with those strange manifestations; and yet the heart of the old man warmed to the lad, and clung to him, often asking that Ishmael might live before God.

And throughout that long period there was no fresh appearance, no new announcement. Never since God had spoken to him in Charran had there been so long a pause. And it must have been a terrible ordeal, driving him back on the promise which had been given, and searching his heart to ascertain if the cause lay within himself. Such silences have always exercised the hearts of God's saints, leading them to say with the Psalmist: "Be not silent to me; lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit" (Psalm 28:1). And yet they are to the heart what the long silence of winter is to the world of nature, in preparing it for the outburst of spring.

Some people are ever on the outlook for Divine appearances, for special manifestations, for celestial voices. If these are withheld, they are almost ready to break their hearts. And their life tends to an incessant straining after some startling evidence of the nearness and the love of God. This feverishness is unwholesome and mistaken. Such manifestations are, indeed, delightful; but they are meant as the bright surprises, and not as the rule of Christian life: they are flung into our lives as a holiday into the school routine of a child, awakening thrilling and unexpected emotions of Joy. It is true that they are liable to be withheld when we are walking at a distance from God, or indulging in coldheartedness and sin. But it is not always so. And when the child of God has lost these bright visitations for long and sad intervals -- if, so far as can be ascertained, there is no sense of condemnation on the heart for known unfaithfulness -- then it must be believed that they are withheld, not in consequence of palpable sin, but to test the inner life, and to teach the necessity of basing it on faith, rather than on feelings however gladsome, or experiences however divine.

At last, "when Abram was ninety years old and nine," the Lord appeared unto him again, and gave him a new revelation of Himself; unfolded the terms of His covenant; and addressed to him that memorable charge, which rings its summons in the ear and heart of every believer still: "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect."

#### (1) THE DIVINE SUMMONS

"Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." Men have sadly stumbled over that word. They have not erred, when they have taught that there is an experience, denoted by the phrase, which is possible to men. But they have sadly erred in pressing their own significance into the word, and in then asserting that men are expected to fulfil it, or that they have themselves attained it.

"Perfection" is often supposed to denote sinlessness of moral character, which at the best is only a negative conception, and fails to bring out the positive force of this mighty word. Surely perfection means more than -- sinlessness. And if this be admitted, and the further admission be made, that it contains the thought of moral completeness, then it becomes yet more absurd for any mortal to assert it of himself. The very assertion shows the lack of any such thing, and reveals but slender knowledge of the inner life and of the nature of sin. ABSOLUTE SINLESSNESS is surely impossible for us so long as we have not perfect knowledge; for as our light is growing constantly, so are we constantly discovering evil in things which once we allowed without compunction: and if those who assert their sinlessness live but a few years longer, and continue to grow, they will be compelled to admit, if they are true to themselves, that there was evil in things which they now deem to be harmless. But whether they admit it or not, their shortcomings are not less sinful in the sight of the holy God, although undetected by their own fallible judgment. And as to MORAL COMPLETENESS, it is enough to compare the best man whom we ever knew with the perfect beauty of God incarnate, to feel how monstrous such an assumption is. Surely the language of the Apostle Paul better becomes our lips, as he cries, "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect; but I follow after." Perhaps in the dateless noon of eternity such words will still best become our lips.

Besides all this, the word "perfect" bears very different renderings from those often given to it. For instance, when we are told that the man of God must be PERFECT (2\_Timothy 3:17), the underlying thought, as any scholar would affirm, is that of a workman being "thoroughly equipped for his work," as when a carpenter comes to the house, bearing in his hand the bag in which all necessary tools are readily available. Again, when we join in the prayer that the God of Peace would make us PERFECT in every good work to do His will, we are, in fact, asking that we may be "put in joint" with the blessed Lord; so that

the glorious Head may freely secure through us the doing of His will (Hebrews 13:20-21). Again, when our Lord bids us be PERFECT as our Father in heaven is perfect, He simply incites us to that "impartiality of mercy" which knows no distinctions of evil and good, of unjust and just, but distributes its favors with bountiful and equal hand (Matthew 5:48).

What, then, is the true force and significance of this word in that stirring command which lies before us here, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect"? A comparison of the various passages where it occurs establishes its meaning beyond a doubt, and compels us to think into it the conception of "whole-heartedness." It denotes the entire surrender of the being; and may be fairly expressed in the well-known words of the sweet and gifted songstress of modern days:

"True-hearted, whole-hearted, faithful and loyal, King of our lives, by Thy grace will we be."

This quality of whole-hearted devotion has ever been dear to God. It was this that He considered in Job, and loved in David. It is in favor of this that His eyes run to and fro to show Himself strong (2\_Chronicles 16:9). It is for this that He pleads with Abraham; and it was because He met with it to so large an extent in his character and obedience that He entered into eternal covenant bond with him and his.

Here let each reader turn from the printed page, to the record of the inner life lying open to God alone, and ask, "Is my heart perfect with God? Am I whole-hearted towards Him? Is He first in my schemes, pleasures, friendships, thoughts, and actions? Is His will my law, His love my light, His business my aim, His 'well-done!' my exceeding great reward? Do others share me with Him?"

There is no life to be compared with that of which the undivided heart is the center and spring. Why not seek it now? --and, turning to God in holy reverie, ask Him to bring the whole inner realm under His government, and to hold it as His for evermore. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matthew 6:22).

And such an attitude can only be MAINTAINED BY A VERY CAREFUL WALK. "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." We must seek to realize constantly the presence of God, becoming instantly aware when the fleeciest cloud draws its veil for a moment over His face, and asking whether the cause may not lie in some scarcely-noticed sin. We must cultivate the habit of feeling Him near, as the Friend from whom we would never be separated, in work, in prayer, in recreation, in repose. We must guard against the restlessness and impetuosity, the excessive eagerness and impatience, which drown the accents of His still, small voice. We must abjure all expedients He does not inspire, all actions He does not promote. We must often turn from the friend, the poem, the landscape, or the task, to look up into His face with a smile of loving recognition. We must constantly have the watches which we carry next our hearts synchronized by His eternal movements. All this must be. And yet we shall not live forced or unnatural lives. None so blithe or light-hearted as we. All the circles of our daily life will move on unbroken order and beauty; just as each shining moon circles around its planet, because the planet obeys the law of gravitation to the sun. Would you walk before God? Then let there be nothing in heart or life which you would not open to the inspection of His holy and pitiful eye.

## (2) THE REVELATION ON WHICH THIS SUMMONS WAS BASED

"I am the Almighty God" ("EI-Shaddai"). What a name is this! And what awful emotions it must have excited in the rapt heart of the listener! God had been known to him by other names, but not by this. And this was the first of a series of revelations of those depths of meaning which lay in the fathomless abyss of

the Divine name, each disclosure marking an epoch in the history of the race.

In God's dealings with men you will invariably find that some transcendent revelation precedes the Divine summons to new and difficult duty; promise opens the door to precept: He gives what He commands, ere He commands what He wills. And on this principle God acted here. It was no child's play to which He called His servant. To walk always before Him -- when heart was weak, and strength was frail, and the temptation strong to swerve to right or left. To be perfect in devotion and obedience, when so many crosslights distracted, and perplexed, and fascinated the soul. To forego all methods of self-help, however tempting. To be separated from all alliances that others permitted or followed. This was much. And it was only possible through the might of the Almighty. Abraham could only do all these things on the condition, on which the Apostle insisted in after-days, that God should strengthen him. And, therefore, it was that there broke on him the assurance: "I am the Almighty God." It is as if He had said: "All power is Mine in Heaven, and upon earth. Of old I laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of My hands. I sit upon the circle of the earth; and its inhabitants are as grasshoppers. I bring out the starry hosts by number, calling them all by names, by the greatness of My might, for that I am strong in power: not one faileth. Hast thou not known - -- hast thou not heard -- that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary?"

All this is as true today as ever. And if any will dare venture forth on the path of separation, cutting themselves aloof from all creature aid, and from all self-originated effort; content to walk alone with God, with no help from any but Him -- such will find that all the resources of the Divine Almightyness will be placed at their disposal, and that the resources of Omnipotence must be exhausted ere their cause can fail for want of help. O children of God, why do we run to and fro for the help of man, when the power of God is within reach of the perfect heart? But this condition must be fulfilled ere that mighty power can be put in operation on our behalf. "To him that overcometh I will give a white stone, and in the stone a new name written." In Abraham's case, that name, graven on the glistening jewel, was "I am the Almighty God"; for Moses it was "Jehovah"; for us it is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".

### (3) THE COVENANT WHICH WAS DIVINELY PROPOSED

"I will make My covenant between Me and thee." A covenant is a promise made under the most solemn sanctions, and binding the consenting parties in the most definite and impressive way. What mortal would not consent when the Almighty God proposed to enter into an everlasting covenant with His creature, ordered in all things and sure, and more stable than the everlasting hills!

#### IT REFERRED TO THE SEED

And there was a marked advance. In Haran it ran thus, "I will make of thee a great nation." At Bethel, thus, "Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth." At Mamre, thus, "Count the stars; so shall thy seed be." But now, three times over, the patriarch is told that he should be the father of many nations, a phrase explained by the Apostle as including all, of every land, who share Abraham's faith, though not sprung from him in the line of natural descent (Galatians 3:7-29). In memory of that promise his name was slightly altered, so that it signified the "father of a great multitude". Nations of thee, and kings of thee" (Genesis 17:6). WE are included in the golden circle of those words, if we believe; and we may claim the spiritual part, at least, of this covenant, which was made with Abraham before he was circumcised.

#### IT REFERRED TO THE LAND

"I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession." This promise waits for fulfillment. The word "everlasting" must mean something more than those few centuries of broken, fitful rule. The recent immigration of Jews to Palestine may be an initial stage to its realization. But there is a time, no doubt, at hand when our covenant-keeping God will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and will repair the ruins thereof; and the land, which now sighs under the cruel despotism of the infidel, shall be again inhabited by the seed of Abraham His friend.

#### IT REFERRED TO THE COMING CHILD

Till then Abraham had no other thought than that Ishmael should be his heir. But this could not be: (1) because he was slave-born; and the slave abideth not in the house for ever: (2) because he was a child of the flesh, and not the direct gift of God. Abraham had been left to wait till the hope of children had become as remote from him as it had been for years from his wife; so that the heir should be evidently the creation of the Almighty God, whose name was disclosed, ere this astounding announcement was made. This is why we are kept waiting till all human and natural hope has died from our hearts, so that God may be All in all. "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac" (ver.19).

For us there is yet a crowning sweetness in the words, "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed"; words repeated, in Hebrews 8:10, so as certainly to include us all, if we believe. Who can unfold all the wealth of meaning of these words? All light, and no darkness at all. All love, and no shadow of change. All strength, and no sign of weakness. Beauty, sweetness, glory, majesty, all are in God, and all these will be thine and mine, if God saith to us, "I will be a God unto thee."

Nor shall this heritage be ours only: it shall belong to our children also, if we exercise Abraham's faith. God pledges Himself to be the God of our seed. But it is for us to claim the fulfillment of His pledge. Not in heart-rending cries, but in quiet, determined faith, let us ask Him to do as He has said.

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