

Be Perfect

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[0 : 00] Our text for this evening is verse 11. 7 Corinthians 13 and verse 11. Finally, brethren, farewell.

Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace shall be with you.

Finally, brethren, farewell. These were Paul's last words written to the Corinthians.

The church at Corinth was very special to him. He had spent one and a half years laboring amongst them.

You remember that after he had gone to Corinth, he got a vision one night. And God came to him and said, Be not afraid.

[1 : 09] Speak out without fear. No man shall hurt you. For I have much people in this city.

Encouraging words as Paul began and continued his ministry there in Corinth. I have much people in this city, God said.

God had his elect people. And there were many of them in Corinth. Corinth, as you know, is on the isthmus between the north of Greece and the south.

And it has a port to the west facing towards Italy and to the east facing towards Europe, the port of Cancra on the east.

And it was a great seafaring place, a great trade centre, very busy. Lots of boats coming in and out.

[2 : 12] Lots of cargos passing from east to west and from north to south. It was an important place. A place with lots of people coming and going.

And it was a place where God's spirit was working. God had his people there. But the devil was also busy there.

It was a great centre of sin and immorality and wickedness. The Corinthian church was richly gifted with charismatic gifts.

Tongue speaking, prophesying, healing and so on. There was a lot of blessing there. But at the same time, the devil was active.

So often when there is blessing, the devil can be found even more active than usual.

[3 : 18] In Corinth there were divisions. Some people were saying, I'm of Paul. Others, I'm of Apollos. Others, I'm of Cephas. The party spirit.

And then there was the individual engaged in a particularly nasty form of fornication. And he hadn't been disciplined by the church.

And then there were problems with fellow Christians going to law with one another. There were all kinds of problems.

People drunk at the Lord's table. So on one hand, you had this church. A going, thriving church. Lots of people in it.

And God's spirit working. Spiritual gifts manifest. At the same time, you had party spirit and division. And immorality.

[4 : 16] And quarrelling and bickering and so on. There's a warfare. Spiritual warfare going on. A warfare in the church.

And a warfare in the hearts of men and women. The apostle has a great love for the church at Corinth. Did he not spend a year and a half there?

There weren't many places that he spent so long working in. And so he writes to them two very long epistles.

He writes more to the church at Corinth than he writes to any other church of the New Testament. And here, at the very end of the second epistle, he is drawing his message to a close.

And I think the words that he uses in his farewell are very significant. Very relevant. Very important for the church at Corinth, yes.

[5 : 32] But not just for the church at Corinth. Very important for us today as well. He says four things. Be perfect. Be of good comfort.

Be of one mind. Live in peace. Four exhortations. And then he adds, And the God of love and peace shall be with you.

And he finally closes with a benediction. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you.

So let's look tonight at the four concluding exhortations of the apostle to the Corinthians.

First one, be perfect. Now the apostle Paul never taught perfectionism. Now the apostle Paul never taught perfectionism. He never taught that it is possible for individuals in this world to reach a state of perfection.

[6 : 41] John Wesley, remember, who was the founder of the Methodist, he taught perfectionism. He said it was possible to have that perfect love which casts out fear.

And that you could reach a state of perfect love. And then at the beginning of this century there was the Keswick movement. And they too taught perfection.

You don't just believe in Jesus to have your sins forgiven. You are to believe in Jesus to be sanctified. And when you let go and let God, then you're perfect.

When you yield to the Spirit of God, and when you give in to God, and give your heart to the Lord, then you become perfect.

You enjoy the second blessing. The blessing of perfect sanctification. That was never the teaching of the apostle Paul.

[7 : 53] Remember how in Romans 7 he taught that there's a battle going on in the Christian. The good that I would, I do not. But the evil that I would not, that I do. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?

From the body of this death. Remember in 1st Timothy chapter 1 now he says, This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of whom I am chief. The chief of sinners. In another place he says, I am less than the least of all the saints.

Not worthy to be called an apostle. He doesn't talk of himself as perfect. Indeed he says in Philippians chapter 3, If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

He's talking about his longing to attain to the perfection that will be ours when we rise from the dead. And then he says, Not as though I had already attained.

[9 : 11] Either were already perfect. That we follow after. If that we might apprehend that for which also we were apprehended of Christ Jesus.

We press on toward the mark. But we haven't reached it. And if the apostle Paul didn't reach it. You and I won't either. Not in this life.

The flesh wars against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. The good that you would, you cannot do. You cannot achieve. There is a battle going on.

Only when we reach heaven will we be perfect. But yet we must strive for perfection.

We must seek to be holy. What is holiness? Holiness is keeping God's commandments. It's living a life in conformity to God's word.

[10 : 16] And the apostle Peter says to us that we are to be holy because without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

Be ye holy for I am holy, says God. And Jesus says to us in the Sermon on the Mount be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.

There he's talking particularly about love. And he's saying how you ought to love even your enemies because God sends his reign upon the just and upon the unjust and he causes the sun to shine upon the righteous and the wicked.

Be ye perfect therefore as your father in heaven is perfect. Love your enemies. Love your enemies. Even the Samaritans.

Even those whom you despise you must love. You must not despise. You must overcome these evil attitudes and seek to love and to respect all men.

[11 : 29] Love the brethren. Love those who are your fellow Christians. But love all men because all are made in the image of God.

The whole law can be summarized in love.

Loving God and loving your neighbor. Violence, lust, stealing, lying, covetousness, they're all a lack of love.

Love. We should be glad when God gives richly to others. We must battle away with sin. In each one of us, old Adam can be found.

Original sin. Original sin. We are the children of Adam. And in Adam we sinned and fell. And from Adam we inherit a sinful nature.

[12:36] And therefore, within each one of us, there is a tendency to do evil. It's so easy for us to sin. Our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Who can know it? How twisted, how corrupted our hearts are. And that's why we need to pray to God for help to fight against sin and temptation.

We need the Holy Spirit to sanctify us because we ourselves are weak. Weak in ourselves. We sin in thought, in word and in deed.

It's a great thing to be a gifted person. It's a great thing, you Corinthians, to speak with tongues and to prophesy and to cast out devils.

And some of you are so spiritually gifted. But remember that sanctification is more important.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

[13:50] Though I have the gift of prophecy, though I understand all mysteries, and have not charity, and have not love for God, and have not holiness of life, it profiteth me nothing.

There's a battle going on for our souls. The devil is fighting to keep us, to lead us astray, to destroy us.

And God's word says, fight the good fight of faith. Ally yourself on the side of the Spirit of God, and fight with God's Spirit against sin and against the devil.

Be perfect. Finally, my brethren, my beloved brethren, my last word to you, the word that I want you to remember, the word that summarizes all the other words that I have spoken in this epistle and in my previous epistle.

It's this, be perfect. Don't be content while you are still imperfect. Don't be content while sin still rules in your body.

[15:15] Don't be content while you are still yielding to temptation and speaking things you shouldn't speak and thinking things you shouldn't think. But be perfect.

Strive to be holy. Long for the day when you will be perfect. When you shall be glorified and perfected by the Spirit of God and you shall enter heaven without spot and blameless.

Perfect. And yet, you mustn't just wait for that day. You must strive for it. You must reach towards it. It is something you are to battle for.

We are pilgrims. We are to be making progress in the Christian life. We are to be walking along the pilgrimage road. We are to be running the race. Are we making progress in holiness?

Are we growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ? Are we overcoming sin? Mortify, therefore, sin in your members and put to death the works of the flesh and grow more and more.

[16:17] And grow more and more like Christ. Be imitators of me as I am of Christ, says the Apostle Paul. Be perfect.

Don't let sin reign in your members. Be perfect. Be perfect. Be perfect. Be perfect. The second exhortation is, be of good comfort.

Be perfect. Be perfect. Be perfect. Be perfect. But I'm not perfect. I'm trying to be perfect, but I fail. I'm such a failure. I'm such a wretched man. I'm such a useless sinner. I made such a mess of my life.

Lord, I've sinned again. What hope is there for me? And here we have a second exhortation, so relevant, so apposite.

[17:28] Just the word that is needed at this very time. Be of good comfort. But how can I be of good comfort when I'm breaking God's law and God is angry with me, when I'm sinning and God is demanding perfection?

Be of good comfort. Your sins are forgiven you. Go in peace. You have been justified. Everyone who believes in Jesus as their Savior, their sins, past, present, and future are forgiven.

You will never be more justified than you are today, not even in heaven. And in justification, your sins are forgiven. They are all washed away.

They are cleansed in the blood. No, you mustn't allow yourself to be miserable. Remember, your sins are forgiven.

Remember the finished work of Christ. It's completed. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding.

[18 : 47] Trust in the Lord and be strong, casting your burden upon him. Just this morning, I was reading Psalm 18 in my private worship.

And I was struck with these words. In dwellings of the righteous I heard the melody of joy and health.

Joy and health. Is that to be heard in your home? In my home? The happy home? Joy and health? Spiritual health and strength and holiness and completeness and joy and gladness?

Rejoicing? The melody of joy and health? Be of good comfort. On the one hand, the apostle is saying to us, be perfect.

And he's pressing us and persuading us to strive for perfection, to wrestle, to fight, to pray, and we feel such failures and we feel we're coming short.

[19 : 59] But then he says, on the other hand, be of good comfort. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice. Be glad Christ died for you on the cross.

Be glad God the Father loved you from all eternity and chose you to be his own. Be glad you are the temple of the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of the Lord dwells in you.

Rejoice! Be of good comfort. No one else ought to be comfortable, but you should be. You should be comfortable because you have a good hope through grace.

You are sure of where you're going. You're not a lost soul. You have a guide leading you through this pathway, the pathway of this life. You have one who will take you to heaven.

You have a home in front of you. Rejoice! All things work together for your good. God loves you. God cares for you.

[20 : 57] God is guaranteeing your eternal happiness. Rejoice! Be of good comfort. Let the joy of the Lord be your strength.

You feel weak. You feel pathetic. You feel beaten and battered and bruised. You feel the devil has got such a grip over you. You feel the world is trampling you down.

But be of good comfort. Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! You're saved. You're saved.

Your sins are forgiven you. God loves you. You are adopted into his family. God loves you. You are adopted and you are adopted in your life.

What comfort we do have. Every verse of scripture is a verse of comfort for us. He who has the Son has life.

[22 : 10] We have life, this life and the next life. God is controlling everything for our benefit and God is preparing a great reward to bestow upon us at the end of life's journey.

Be of good comfort. God knows if you know you are going to be able to achieve something how much easier it is to do it.

Someone who knows that they are going to win the race what confidence it gives them what strength it gives to their legs.

And friends, you are in a race you're going to win. You're going to get the crown of glory. You're going to be successful.

What encouragement that should give you. You cannot be beaten. Satan is a defeated foe.

[23 : 26] He's thrashing about, but only with dying gasps. You will stand upon his neck.

He shall be bruised under your feet shortly. Be perfect. Be of good comfort. The two things go together so well.

Striving for perfection. Seeking to overcome sin. Feeling that we come short. Oh, wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord.

If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things are made new. There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.

The vital thing is you've got to be in Christ. And there's some of you here tonight and you're not in Christ. And if you're outside of Christ, I've got no comfort for you.

[24 : 42] And there's no comfort in the Bible for you. It's all against you. You've got to repent of your sins and believe in Jesus or there will be no comfort for you.

Thirdly, be of one mind. That's not the easiest thing and yet it's vital. In our day and our century there has been great emphasis upon ecumenicity.

The importance of the churches coming together. and there have been tremendous advances in ecumenicity. The World Council of Churches has been formed.

And you've got the British Council of Churches. In our own country, in 1929, the two largest churches came together to form the pleasant Church of Scotland.

Remember, shortly after I came to Portria, I was talking to a Church of Scotland woman and she was saying, why don't we all come together? It would be so much better if we were all united.

[26 : 15] We could all be together, praying together, praying for revival and united and working together for the kingdom of God. here in Portria and throughout the sky, throughout Scotland, throughout the world.

Be of one mind. It sounds great, doesn't it? Unity is strength, is it not? Let's have ecumenical unity. Unity. The problem is, what the Apostle is talking about here is be of one mind.

What the ecumenicals are talking about be of one structure, one organization. there's such a difference between being of one mind and being of one big organization or one big denomination. you look at a denomination like the Church of Scotland. Are the people there of one mind? You get some people in the Church of Scotland who believe the same things as us.

[27 : 37] Believe the Bible and try and follow it. You get other people in the Church of Scotland and they hardly believe one word of the Bible from the beginning to the end. You get some people who believe that there's a heaven and a hell and some people who believe that there's no resurrection.

In the same Church, is that being of one mind? And it's the same, of course, with all the large denominations and even more so in the World Council of Churches.

All the various churches and denominations of the world. Some who teach that the way of salvation is through the sacraments and ritual. Some who teach that the way of salvation is through good works.

And some who teach that the way of salvation is through faith in the blood of Christ. Three very different ways of salvation. Some people say they all lead to God.

All the different pathways lead to God. That's not what our Bible teaches us. It teaches us that there's only one pathway to God. And Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[28 : 55] No man cometh unto the Father but by me. And our Bible teaches us that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

God. So when it says here, be of one mind, it's not talking about the ecumenical movement and forming one big super church throughout the world that includes all kinds of heresies within its bounds.

what it's talking about is being of one mind, one thought pattern, one way of thinking, one theology, one way of salvation.

Be of one mind in thinking the one way. And what way is he wanting us to think? In the way, lay down in scripture. Let God's word group you and group every one of you so that you are united in the truth.

That is the real ecumenicity that we're looking for. A union in the truth. Not in error and falsehood and covering up our differences and forgetting about the distinctive teachings of God's word and trampling God's law and his Bible and his gospel under foot, but knowing the truth.

[30 : 26] understanding God's word, the Holy Spirit, enlightening your minds and the knowledge of Christ so that you are at one mind, filled with the Holy Spirit and filled with the teaching of the Spirit and knowing the way of God and united in the truth.

That's the unity that we are looking for. And that's the unity that is missing in every church. And it's the unity that we are to strive for in the free church and between ourselves and other Christians in the one church of Jesus Christ on the earth.

Be of one mind. Know the truth. Share the truth. Be led by the Spirit of God.

Enlightening your minds in the knowledge of Christ. Taking up the things of Christ and revealing them unto you. Delight in the truth. Beware of foolish questions which will cause division and disharmony.

Endless arguments about meaningless little points that make no great difference. That's one error.

[31 : 52] That's one wrong way of going. Arguing about little points and creating a great fuss over tiny little points. And on the other hand beware of heresy.

False doctrine that destroys people's souls. We have to love the truth. And we have to love it as it is taught us in the Bible.

And treasure every teaching of God's word. And not use scissors to cut bits and pieces out of the Bible and say I believe this and I think this is good and I think that's good but I don't like this bit or that bit.

taking the whole word of God and building upon it as our foundation. Beware of pride and jealousy. Most often these are the causes of division and disharmony. Beware of party spirit and loyalty and loyalty to people as over against other people.

[32 : 59] Our loyalty must first of all be to the king and head of the church. Call no man father on earth said Christ.

Call no man rabbi. You have one father in heaven. You have one great teacher. be the disciples of the Lord not of any near man.

Be taught by the Holy Spirit humbly submitting to the truth. So there we have another great exhortation. Be of one mind.

This has to be a great aim with us. unity in the truth not in the dark.

Some people want unity in the dark. Unity by covering up the truth and pretending the truth doesn't exist. That's not the unity that the Bible is speaking of.

[34 : 05] It's unity in the truth. Unity in Christ. I in them and them in me.

Thou in me and I in them and them in me. The fourth exhortation here is live in peace.

Peace is very important. peace with God first of all. That's the most basic peace that there is. Do you have it? Are you at peace with your creator?

Is God angry with you? Or are you reconciled to God? Have you made your peace with your creator so that you're not afraid to die and to go and meet him and stand in his judgment seat?

Pressing in Christ is the only way to make peace. Christ is the great peacemaker. We've got to put our faith in the blood of Jesus and through Jesus Christ we can approach God.

[35 : 24] Be at peace with your God. Be assured of that peace in your own hearts. Live in peace. Live in the enjoyment of the peace you have.

There are some people and they trust in Jesus and they are at peace with God but they don't know it and they're not enjoying it and they're full of turmoil and worry and doubt and fear.

That's not good. Live in peace. Enjoy the peace of God in your own soul. assurance of God's love and peace in your conscience.

Be at peace with yourself accepting God's plan for your life. Be at peace with the world.

Be peace lovers. Don't be troublesome people. Quarrel some people. Be peacemakers in the sense that you are trying to bring others into a state of peace with the Saviour.

[36 : 40] Blessed are the peacemakers. And live in peace in the church.

Don't squabble. Don't fall out with one another. Sometimes divisions happen over fundamental points of doctrine.

That's necessary. But that's seldom the case. So often the divisions which are amongst us are petty, childish, pride and selfishness.

selfishness. These are the things which cause the division. Party spirit. Trying to score points.

Allowing ourselves to be easily offended at things that shouldn't offend us.

Christians today can be so thin skinned. it's so easy to offend them. We ought to be difficult to offend.

[37 : 57] So full of brotherly love, so full of the family spirit that people could say anything to us. And yet we would take it and still love them.

be at peace among yourselves. Hate divisions.

Do all you can for the love and for the unity of the church, preferring others rather than yourself. We must at times stand for the truth.

And we must at times stand for church discipline. Even though it's difficult, even although it hurts, we have to be faithful.

There are situations in which we have to make unpopular stands. Occasionally we are called upon to stand out clearly and be numbered on the side of Christ.

[39 : 02] There are fundamental points and points of principle which must not be compromised. But let us make sure that we're not making points of principle out of our petty little squabbles.

peace. Be of one mind.

Live in peace. Peaceful people. Christians should be full of serenity and peace.

At peace with themselves, at peace with our God, at peace with the world, and at peace among themselves. And the God of love and peace shall be with you.

If these things seem so difficult, how in this sinful world can we possibly live in peace and be of one mind and of good comfort?

[40 : 15] Remember this. The God of love and of peace shall be with you. The God who gives love, who works it, who produces it. We love him because he first loved us.

The God of love and peace. He puts his peace into your heart and fills your heart with peace. Peace that passes knowledge. peace. Your peace shall flow like a river and your righteousness as the waves of the sea.

The God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with unholy kiss. All the saints salute you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, how we need grace. Everything that we have is built upon grace. God's unmerited favor. The mercy that was purchased for us by the death of Christ.

[41 : 18] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The love of God that is the source of everything good. The communion, the fellowship, the sharing, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost be with you.

What a prayer is involved in the benediction. A great prayer. So encouraging. the grace, the love, the communion of God.

And all the blessing of God so that you and I will strive to be perfect and be of good comfort and be of one mind and live in peace.

Let us pray. Amen. Grant, O Lord, thy benediction to be upon us. Grant that we would strive to walk in the light as thou art in the light, to rejoice in the truth, to be of one mind, to love one another.

Grant, O Lord, that we would be enabled to live in peace in our own individual lives, and in the world and in the church, that we would live in peace.

[42 : 42] Grant that we would strive to be perfect, holy, keeping the commandments, godly, beautiful in our lives, and give to us thy good comfort, filling our hearts.

for Jesus' sake, Amen.