

faithful service rendered by Elder Hans B. Ringger and Elder Durrel A. Woolsey, truly giants of the Lord.

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will now speak to us.

## Elder Russell M. Nelson

### Perfection pending

If I were to ask which of the Lord's commandments is most difficult to keep, many of us might cite Matthew 5:48: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."<sup>1</sup>

Keeping this commandment can be a concern because each of us is far from perfect, both spiritually and temporally. Reminders come repeatedly. We may lock keys inside the car or even forget where the car is parked. And not infrequently we walk intently from one part of the house to another, only to forget the reason for the errand.

When comparing one's personal performance with the supreme standard of the Lord's expectation, the reality of imperfection can at times be depressing. My heart goes out to conscientious Saints who, because of their shortcomings, allow feelings of depression to rob them of happiness in life.

We all need to remember: men are that they might have joy—not guilt trips!<sup>2</sup> We also need to remember that the Lord gives no commandments that are impossible to obey. But sometimes we fail to comprehend them fully.

Our understanding of perfection might be aided if we classify it into two categories. The first could pertain uniquely to this life—*mortal* perfection. The second category could pertain uniquely to the next life—*immortal* or *eternal* perfection.

### Mortal perfection

In this life certain actions can be perfected. A baseball pitcher can throw a no-hit, no-run ball game. A surgeon can

perform an operation without an error. A musician can render a selection without a mistake. One can likewise achieve perfection in being punctual, paying tithing, keeping the Word of Wisdom, and so on. The enormous effort required to attain such self-mastery is rewarded with a deep sense of satisfaction. More importantly, spiritual attainments in mortality accompany us into eternity.<sup>3</sup>

James gave a practical standard by which mortal perfection could be measured. He said, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a *perfect* man."<sup>4</sup>

Scriptures have described Noah, Seth, and Job as *perfect* men.<sup>5</sup> No doubt the same term might apply to a large number of faithful disciples in various dispensations. Alma said that "there were many, exceedingly great many,"<sup>6</sup> who were pure before the Lord.

This does not mean that these people never made mistakes or never had need of correction. The process of perfection includes challenges to overcome and steps to repentance that may be very painful.<sup>7</sup> There is a proper place for chastisement in the molding of character, for we know that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."<sup>8</sup>

Mortal perfection can be achieved as we try to perform every duty, keep every law, and strive to be as perfect in our sphere as our Heavenly Father is in His. If we do the best we can, the Lord will bless us according to our deeds and the desires of our hearts.<sup>9</sup>

### Eternal perfection

But Jesus asked for more than mortal perfection. The moment He uttered the words "even as your Father which is

in heaven is perfect," He raised our sights beyond the bounds of mortality. Our Heavenly Father has eternal perfection. This very fact merits a much broader perspective.

Recently I studied the English and Greek editions of the New Testament, concentrating on each use of the term *perfect* and its derivatives. Studying both languages together provided some interesting insights, since Greek was the original language of the New Testament.

In Matthew 5:48 the term *perfect* was translated from the Greek *teleios*, which means "complete." *Teleios* is an adjective derived from the noun *telos*, which means "end."<sup>10</sup> The infinitive form of the verb is *teleiono*, which means "to reach a distant end, to be fully developed, to consummate, or to finish."<sup>11</sup> Please note that the word does not imply freedom from error; it implies achieving a distant objective. In fact, when writers of the Greek New Testament wished to describe perfection of behavior—precision or excellence of human effort—they did not employ a form of *teleios*; instead, they chose different words.<sup>12</sup>

*Teleios* is not a total stranger to us. From it comes the prefix *tele-* that we use every day. *Telephone* literally means "distant talk." *Television* means "to see distantly." *Telephoto* means "distant light," and so on.

With that background in mind, let us consider another highly significant statement made by the Lord. Just prior to His crucifixion, He said that on "the third day I shall be perfected."<sup>13</sup> Think of that! The sinless, errorless Lord—already perfect by our mortal standards—proclaimed His own state of perfection yet to be in the future.<sup>14</sup> His *eternal* perfection would follow His resurrection and receipt of "all power . . . in heaven and in earth."<sup>15</sup>

The perfection that the Savior envisions for us is much more than errorless performance. It is the eternal expectation as expressed by the Lord in His great

intercessory prayer to His Father—that we might be made perfect and be able to dwell with them in the eternities ahead.<sup>16</sup>

The Lord's entire work and glory pertains to the immortality and eternal life of each human being.<sup>17</sup> He came into the world to do the will of His Father, who sent Him.<sup>18</sup> His sacred responsibility was foreseen before the Creation<sup>19</sup> and was foretold by all His holy prophets since the world began.<sup>20</sup>

The atonement of Christ fulfilled the long-awaited purpose for which He had come to the earth. His concluding words upon Calvary's cross referred to the culmination of His assignment—to atone for all humankind. Then He said, "It is finished."<sup>21</sup> Not surprisingly, the Greek word from which *finished* was derived is *teleios*.

That Jesus attained eternal perfection *following* His resurrection is confirmed in the Book of Mormon. It records the visit of the resurrected Lord to the people of ancient America. There He repeated the important injunction previously cited but with one very significant addition. He said, "I would that ye should be perfect *even as I*, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect."<sup>22</sup> This time He listed himself along with His Father as a perfected personage. Previously He had not.<sup>23</sup>

Resurrection is requisite for eternal perfection. Thanks to the atonement of Jesus Christ, our bodies, corruptible in mortality, will become incorruptible. Our physical frames, now subject to disease, death, and decay, will acquire immortal glory.<sup>24</sup> Presently sustained by the blood of life<sup>25</sup> and ever aging, our bodies will be sustained by spirit and become changeless and beyond the bounds of death.<sup>26</sup>

Eternal perfection is reserved for those who overcome all things and inherit the fulness of the Father in His heavenly mansions. Perfection consists in gaining eternal life—the kind of life that God lives.<sup>27</sup>

### Ordinances and covenants of the temple

Scriptures identify other important prerequisites to eternal perfection. They relate to the ordinances and covenants of the temple.<sup>28</sup> No accountable individual can receive exaltation in the celestial kingdom without the ordinances of the temple. Endowments and sealings are for our personal perfection and are secured through our faithfulness.<sup>29</sup>

This requirement also pertains to our ancestors. Paul taught “that they without us should not be made *perfect*.”<sup>30</sup> Again, in that verse, the Greek term from which *perfect* was translated was a form of *teleios*.<sup>31</sup>

In latter-day revelation the Lord was even more explicit. His prophet wrote: “My dearly beloved brethren and sisters, let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation. . . . They without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect.”<sup>32</sup>

### Encouragement from the Savior’s example

Our climb up the path to perfection is aided by encouragement from the scriptures. They hold the promise that we shall, if faithful in all things, become like Deity. John the beloved Apostle wrote:

“We should be called the sons [and daughters] of God. . . .

“ . . . When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”<sup>33</sup>

Continuing encouragement comes as we follow the example of Jesus, who taught, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.”<sup>34</sup> His hope for us is crystal clear! He declared: “What manner of men ought ye to be?

Verily I say unto you, even as I am.”<sup>35</sup> Thus our adoration of Jesus is best expressed by our emulation of Jesus.<sup>36</sup>

People have never failed to follow Jesus because His standards were imprecise or insufficiently high. Quite to the contrary. Some have disregarded His teachings because they were viewed as being too precise or impractically high! Yet such lofty standards, when earnestly pursued, produce great inner peace and incomparable joy.

There is no other individual to compare with Jesus Christ, nor is there any other exhortation equal to His sublime expression of hope: “I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.”<sup>37</sup>

This divine entreaty is consistent with the fact that as begotten children of heavenly parents, we are endowed with the potential to become like them, just as mortal children may become like their mortal parents.

The Lord restored His church to help us prepare for perfection. Paul said that the Savior placed in the Church apostles, prophets, and teachers “for the perfecting of the saints, . . . for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a *perfect* man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”<sup>38</sup>

The *perfect* man described in Paul’s quotation is the completed person—*teleios*—the glorified soul!

Moroni taught how to gain this glorious objective. His instruction stands in any age as an antidote for depression and a prescription for joy. I echo his plea: “Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; . . . love God with all your might, mind and strength. . . . [Then] ye may be perfect in Christ, . . . holy, [and] without spot.”<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, brothers and sisters, let us do the best we can and try to improve

each day. When our imperfections appear, we can keep trying to correct them. We can be more forgiving of flaws in ourselves and among those we love. We can be comforted and forbearing. The Lord taught, "Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now . . . ; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected."<sup>40</sup>

We need not be dismayed if our earnest efforts toward perfection now seem so arduous and endless. Perfection is pending. It can come in full only after the Resurrection and only through the Lord. It awaits all who love Him and keep His commandments. It includes thrones, kingdoms, principalities, powers, and dominions.<sup>41</sup> It is the end for which we are to endure.<sup>42</sup> It is the eternal perfection that God has in store for each of us. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. Those words were given additional intensity in the Joseph Smith Translation: "Ye are therefore commanded to be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (JST, Matthew 5:50).
2. See 2 Nephi 2:25.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:18–19.
4. James 3:2; italics added.
5. See Genesis 6:9; Doctrine and Covenants 107:43; Job 1:1.
6. Alma 13:12.
7. See Hebrews 5:8.
8. Hebrews 12:6.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 137:9.
10. Incidentally, the feminine form of this noun is *teleia*, the Greek term for a period at the end of a sentence.
11. Footnote *b* for Matthew 5:48 states: "GR complete, finished, fully developed" (LDS edition of the King James Version of the Bible [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979], p. 1195).
12. A few examples include:
  - "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast *perfected* praise" (Matthew 21:16; italics added).
  - "The disciple is not above his master; but every one that is *perfect* shall be as his master" (Luke 6:40; italics added). In both of these verses, *perfect* came from the Greek term *katartizo*, which means "to fit out, equip, put in order, arrange, adjust; to fit or frame for one's self"—an act of preparation.
  - Another speaks of "*perfect* understanding" (Luke 1:3; italics added). In this instance, *perfect* came from the Greek adverb *akribos*, which means "exactly, accurately."
  - Another verse refers to those who touched the hem of the Master's garment and "were made *perfectly* whole" (Matthew 14:36; italics added). *Perfect* in this instance came from the Greek *diasozo*, which means "to preserve through danger, to bring safely through, to save, keep from perishing, to rescue."
13. Luke 13:32; italics added.
14. In the Greek text of that proclamation, the verb *teleiono* was again used, in its *future tense*—*teleiouma*.
15. Matthew 28:18; see also Doctrine and Covenants 93:2–22.
16. See John 17:23–24.
17. See Moses 1:39.
18. See 3 Nephi 27:13.
19. See Moses 4:1–2; 7:62; Abraham 3:22–28.
20. See Acts 3:19–21.
21. John 19:30. In modern revelation Jesus used similar language. He said, "I partook and *finished* my preparations unto the children of men" (D&C 19:19; italics added).
22. 3 Nephi 12:48; italics added.
23. See Matthew 5:48.
24. See Alma 11:45; Doctrine and Covenants 76:64–70.
25. See Leviticus 17:11.
26. "A resurrection means to become immortal, without blood, yet with a body

- of flesh and bone" (LDS Bible Dictionary, p. 761).
27. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1946), p. 331; Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 237.
  28. Joseph Smith taught, "Being born again, comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 162).
  29. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-56), 2:45.
  30. Hebrews 11:40; italics added.
  31. *Teleioo*
  32. Doctrine and Covenants 128:15; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 159.
  33. 1 John 3:1-3. For additional commentary, see Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, pp. 7-9.
  34. 1 Peter 1:16; see also Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26.
  35. 3 Nephi 27:27.
  36. See Neal A. Maxwell, *We Talk of Christ, We Rejoice in Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984), p. 145; Hugh B. Brown, *The Abundant Life* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), p. 199.
  37. 3 Nephi 12:48.
  38. Ephesians 4:12-13; italics added.
  39. Moroni 10:32-33.
  40. Doctrine and Covenants 67:13.
  41. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.
  42. This concept is supported by the fact that in verses of the New Testament that refer to the *end* for which we are to endure, the Greek word from which *end* was translated was also derived

from *telos* (see Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13).

### President Monson

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has just addressed us.

It will now be our privilege to listen to President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved President of the Church, who will be our concluding speaker.

Before hearing his address, we express appreciation to the combined ward choirs from the Cottonwood Utah Region, the Mormon Youth Chorus, and the Tabernacle Choir and to their conductors and organists for the beautiful and inspiring music for this conference.

We thank our city officials for the cooperation given the conference; the doctors, Church Health Unit nurses, and ambulance services who have been on hand to render assistance; the ushers and the vast army of interpreters; and those who are responsible for the beautiful flowers on Temple Square and in the Tabernacle.

We express appreciation to local and national press representatives for the coverage of the conference. We're grateful to the Bonneville International LDS Radio Network and the owners and operators of the many other radio and television stations and cable systems who have given time and made facilities available to carry sessions of the conference in many countries.

Following President Hinckley's remarks, the Tabernacle Choir will sing "Abide with Me!" The benediction will be offered by Elder Claudio R. Mendes Costa of the Seventy.