



"The problem with incompetence is its inability to recognize itself."
—Orrin Woodward

15-Mar-19

The Peter Principle (Part One)

We have all been in a restaurant, a store, or a bank, and the employee serving us—perhaps newly hired or in training—just cannot complete the task. We ask to see the manager, and when he comes over, if he is good at his job, he solves the problem quickly and efficiently. If he is not competent in his position, he might swoop in aggressively or with a surly attitude, and the situation only becomes worse.

It could be that he is inept, and the Peter Principle has come into play. The Peter Principle is a concept in business management developed in 1969 by Laurence J. Peter. It states, simply, that people in a hierarchy tend to rise to their level of incompetence.

The Peter Principle asserts that a person good at his job will be promoted to a higher position, one requiring a new set of skills. If the person promoted does not have those new skills, he will be incompetent at his new position and not be promoted again. However, he will not return to the former job in which he excelled, but for the rest of his career, he will plateau at the job for which he is not qualified. If he is good at his new job, he will be promoted repeatedly until he eventually reaches a level in which he is incompetent. Laurence Peter's research concluded that this outcome is inevitable, given enough time and assuming enough positions in the hierarchy to promote competent employees.

For instance, a competent mechanic may make an incompetent foreman. Or, a

CGG Weekly: The Peter Principle (Part One) (15-Mar-19)

competent school teacher may make a competent assistant principal but then go on to become an incompetent principal, not to be considered for promotion to assistant superintendent. In each case, the higher position required skills not needed at the level immediately below. The mechanic had to know only how to fix cars, but as a foreman he needed to be able to manage the other mechanics and deal with customers. Seldom will an individual admit that he was better in a lower position and ask to be demoted. Human pride is too strong.

Some apparent exceptions to the Peter Principle exist. For example, when an individual is incompetent but promoted nonetheless (kicked upstairs, as it were) is called a "pseudo promotion," a move from one unproductive position to another. Peter calls it a "lateral arabesque" when a person is moved out of the way and given a longer job title.

Sometimes, the competence of an employee is measured by the employer rather than the customer or the public. We might run into a person who seems to stink at his job, yet he follows the rules of the company to such an extent that it defies common sense and hurts the company. Even so, his immediate supervisor thinks him competent because, in Peter's words, "internal consistency is valued more highly than efficient service."

He also gives examples in his book of the super-incompetent and the super-competent, who disrupt the company's hierarchy and so must be expelled, a process he calls "hierarchical exfoliation." Consider a super-competent teacher of special needs children. She is so effective at educating her charges that after a year they exceeded all expectations at reading and arithmetic, but she is still fired because she had neglected to devote enough time to bead-stringing and finger-painting.

Disheartening as it may be, the Peter Principle contains a great deal of truth, but it is certainly not true in every case. It misses a key factor: God's [Holy Spirit](#). We few members of God's church look at our jobs a bit differently. We grow—hopefully. We overcome—also hopefully. We know that we are not truly in charge. When we leave the house to go our jobs, we have already prayed and studied; we have suited up in our spiritual armor and are ready for battle. If we are doing it right, we are not just going through the motions at work, treading water, marking time, and watching the clock. We have a greater purpose—not necessarily trying to advance, although that is not wrong—to do an honest day's work for our wages. We are responsible for the administration of our gifts. As [Jesus](#) says in [Luke 12:48](#), ". . . to whom much is given, from him much is required."

For clarity, the management principle of Laurence Peter will be called the Physical Peter Principle in contrast to the Spiritual Peter Principle, named after the apostle Peter, a

man much like many of us. From what we read in Scripture, we can assume that he was somewhat impetuous, impulsive, and sometimes eager to the point of speaking before thinking things through. He was fallible, as we are. Yet, following his story from fisherman to church leader, we can also see how he grew as a Christian.

This same Peter writes in [1 Peter 4:10](#) "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of [God](#)." The word translated "minister" is a verb meaning "to serve." It is an action rather than a position. The word translated "stewards," however, *is* a position, the Greek *oikonomos*, "manager" or "overseer, a fiscal agent, governor, superintendent of the city's finances, the treasurer of a city." Used ten times in the New Testament, it refers in many cases to the apostles and other Christian teachers and leaders.

Adam Clarke comments, "Whatever gifts or endowments any man may possess, they are properly speaking, not his own; they are the Lord's property." Notice this verse in the *Good News Translation*: "Each one, as a good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift he has received from God" (*Good News Translation*® (Today's English Version, Second Edition) Copyright © 1992 American Bible Society. All rights reserved.).

We are *managers*, each one of us. We manage the gifts God has given us to use in the service of others. The Physical Peter Principle says a person rises to his or her level of incompetence. Conversely, the Spiritual Peter Principle says God has blessed us with certain gifts, talents, divine endowments, which we do not deserve, and we are to manage those gifts.

In other words, we are to get better—improve—at living this life! As Christians, we will not reach our potential until we die. Our trajectory is unlike those laboring under the Physical Peter Principle, where many reach a level unsuited to them, and there they stay. Say, for instance, a Christian was happy as a teacher, but he is miserable as an administrator. If only his pride would let him admit it and return to the lower position—or push himself to work harder to learn the skills necessary to be effective as an administrator.

Under the Spiritual Peter Principle, we are *never* to stop advancing to perfection ([Matthew 5:48](#); [Hebrews 6:1](#)). Next time, we will see more of this spiritual principle in God's Word.

- Mike Ford

World News Highlights

[Canadian Court Ruling: Opposing Child's Transgenderism Is Committing Family Violence](#)

Prophecy News Watch 07-Mar-19

[The Iowa Supreme Court Struck Down the State's Medicaid Ban on Transgender Surgeries. Here's Why.](#)

The Des Moines Register 08-Mar-19

['Parliament No Longer Represents the People': May Loses Control of Own Motion Hijacked by Hardline Remainers](#)

Breitbart 13-Mar-19

[May Heads for Defeat in Brexit Vote](#)

Reuters 12-Mar-19

[Click to Copy<https://apnews.com/ce9e1d267af149dab40e3e5391254530> Related Topics Ap Top News Religion International News Immigration New Zealand Shootings Prayer Terrorist Attacks Asia Pacific Mosque Shootings Kill 49; White Racist Claims Responsibility](#)

Associated Press 15-Mar-19

[Nerves Fray, Tempers Flare as Venezuela Blackout Hits Fourth Day](#)

News.Trust.org (Reuters) 10-Mar-19

[Facebook, Youtube and Twitter Struggle to Deal With New Zealand Shooting Video](#)

CNN 15-Mar-19

[Being Odd Is the New Mental Illness](#)

The Daily Conspiracy 01-Mar-19

[Students Around the World Skip Class to Demand Action on Climate](#)

France24 15-Mar-19

[Harvard University Uncovers DNA Switch That Controls Genes for Whole-Body Regeneration](#)

Yahoo/The Telegraph 14-Mar-19

New Transcripts

[1366c: One Answer to Distractions](#)

Given by John W. Ritenbaugh on 04-Mar-17

[1367c: The Climate-Change Hoax](#)

Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 11-Mar-17

[1477c: An Unequal Comparison](#)

Given by Richard T. Ritenbaugh on 09-Mar-19

Prayer Requests

New prayer request updates have been posted for the following people:

[Shelly Fenwick](#)

[Arthur and Naomi King](#)

[Leslie McCullough](#)

[Mary Tisher](#)

[Paulette Williams](#)

[Carney Williams](#)

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Striving for Perfection](#)

by Ted E. Bowling

Ted Bowling, focusing on the topic of moving toward perfection, affirms that God wants all of us to become as spiritually mature as our Elder Brother by practicing the beatitudes and maintaining the fruits of the Spirit. God is systematically putting together a spiritual temple or body in which everyone will have been trained, equipped and perfected for a perfect task. As each physical tool is equipped to do a specific task, such as the Phillips screw driver turning a Phillips screw, we will have been perfected for a spiritual task in which we have been uniquely qualified.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Perfection...Piece by Piece](#)

by Mike Ford

What is perfection? Does God require perfection of us? Mike Ford defines Biblical perfection and shows to what standard God holds us accountable.

Featured Audio Schedule

Friday Night Bible Study

The next Bible Study will be **Absalom: A Study in Narcissism**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh** on **Friday 15-Mar-19**. The Bible Study will be continuously available from **6:00 pm Friday** until **12:00 pm Saturday (EST)**.

Daily Audio Programs

Hear previous sermons, sermonettes, and Feast of Tabernacles messages, **Sunday through Friday**. [Available from the homepage.](#)

Date	Title
Sunday 17-Mar-19	Contend for the Faith
Monday 18-Mar-19	Esther (Part One)
Tuesday 19-Mar-19	Vulnerable
Wednesday 20-Mar-19	Appearing Before God
Thursday 21-Mar-19	Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 2)
Friday 22-Mar-19	Jesus Christ: First Savior, Second High Priest, Third King

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page.](#)
