

“You Are To Be Perfect”

Matt. 5:43-48

Acting Like Our Father

Introduction.

I. Jesus once uttered these words which contain one of His hardest sayings.

MAT 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.'

MAT 5:44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you

MAT 5:45 in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

MAT 5:46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same?

MAT 5:47 "And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

MAT 5:48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

II. The words Jesus uttered in verse 48 are most difficult.

MAT 5:48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

III. What is the meaning of these words?

A. God is absolutely sinless, and He cannot even be tempted. (Jas. 1:13).

B. Is Jesus in Matthew 5:48 referring to the sinlessness of God?

C. If so, is Jesus affirming we must be sinless?

I. His Words Do Not Teach We Must Be Sinless

A. Men are sinners and stand under condemnation. (Rom. 3:11, 23).

B. We are saved by God's grace. (Eph. 2:8-10).

1. There is nothing we can do to merit or earn forgiveness and salvation.

2. By the grace of God all our sins are washed away. (Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5).

3. When we emerge from the waters of baptism, our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus. (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Tit. 3:5).

C. It is not long, however, before we sin.

D. Baptism does not keep us from sinning or mean we can become sinless by virtue of our new birth.

- E. The Bible emphatically teaches a Christian cannot live above sin. (Jas. 3:2; 1 Jn. 1:8, 10).
- F. The best a Christian can do is to seek to do right and confess his sins. (1 Jn. 1:7, 9).
- G. All need to pray for forgiveness as Jesus instructed. (Matt. 6:12).
- H. The one born of God seeks never to be an habitual sinner. (1 Jno. 3:6, 9), but he can never come close to living above sin. (1 Jn. 1:8, 10).

1JO 3:6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

1JO 3:9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

- I. The best of saints recognize they are not sinless and continue all their days to confess their sins - “God, be merciful to me, the sinner.” (Lk. 18:13).
- J. Jesus did not command us to do the impossible, that is, be sinless. No mortal can be sinless.
- K. **Most of us, at times, feel like Paul.** (Rom. 7:12-24).

ROM 7:12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

ROM 7:13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

ROM 7:14 For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

ROM 7:15 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

ROM 7:16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good.

ROM 7:17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me.

ROM 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

ROM 7:19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.

ROM 7:20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

ROM 7:21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good.

ROM 7:22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

ROM 7:23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

ROM 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

1. It is very important that this passage be interpreted in light of what Paul wrote before and after it.
 - a. It made it clear earlier in this epistle that the Christian is to “walk in the newness of life” and the Christian is dead to sin as a way of life. (Rom. 6:4, 6, 11-13).
 - b. In chapter 8 he shows that the Christian is not in a state of wretchedness. (Rom. 8:1).
2. Romans 7:12-24 is a description of the struggle of the flesh under the law of Moses.
 - a. The law was from God and the law was holy and righteous and good. (Rom. 7:12).

- b. The law was “spiritual.” (Rom. 7:14).
 - c. There was not a problem with the law. The problem was man’s inability to keep that law due to his fleshly nature.
3. It is not a description of the person in Christ.
- a. Paul expressed a different view of the one in Christ. (1 Cor. 10:13; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21; 4:13).
 - b. John also revealed that the Christian can have great confidence in Christ and is not a habitual sinner who lets sin dominate his life. (1 Jn. 3:6, 9; 2:3; 3:14, 18).
4. The best of Christians have a battle within. They desire to do right, but often fail. (1 Jn. 1:8, 10).
- a. Some days there may be little conflict, but other days the struggle is great.
 - b. The Christian continues to walk in the light, and confesses his sins. (1 Jn. 1:7, 9).
 - c. The Christian has victory in Jesus. (1 Jn. 5:4, 5).

II. Context

A. In the immediate context Jesus has been talking about turning the other cheek, going the second mile, helping others, loving neighbors and enemies.

- 1. He reminded them that the law taught one to love his neighbor. (Lev. 19:18).
 - a. Some Rabbis falsely interpreted this verse to teach it was proper to hate enemies.
 - b. Exod. 23:4,5; Prov. 25:21, 22.

EXO 23:4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him.

EXO 23:5 "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.

PRO 25:21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;

PRO 25:22 For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the Lord will reward you.

- 2. He teaches Christians are to conduct themselves on an higher level than the unconverted.
 - 3. We are to love our enemies that we may manifest we are children of God. (Matt. 5:43-45).
 - 4. God blesses both the good and the evil. (Matt. 5:45; Rom. 2:4).
 - 5. God gave His Son for sinners. (Rom. 5:8).
- B. Jesus teaches even the Gentiles and tax-collectors (the worse of men) do good to those who do good to them.
- 1. See Lk. 6:33 “sinners” instead of “Gentiles and tax-collectors.”

2. LUK 6:33 "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

III. **Meaning Of “Perfect”** - Greek is “teleios” [teh lay ahs]. The verb form is “teleioo” [teh lay ah oh].

- This word is only used one other time in the gospels. (Matt. 19:21).
- The Hebrew “tam” [tawm] the equivalent of the Greek “teleios”, is used of both Noah and Job (Gen. 6:9; Job 1:1), but neither of these men were sinless. (Rom. 3:23).
- Those who are “perfect” are wholly, totally, completely devoted to following God’s example and word.
- See Lev. 18:2-4; 11:44.

LEV 18:2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am the Lord your God.

LEV 18:3 'You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes.

LEV 18:4 'You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the Lord your God.

LEV 11:44 'For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth.

Note: The word “perfect” occurs many times in the New Testament.

- It has the idea of “complete, mature, full-grown” in a spiritual sense. (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:15; Heb. 5:14; Col. 1:28; 4:12).
- It is used for something complete. (1 Cor. 13:10).

1CO 13:10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

- It is the work of patience or endurance. (Jas. 1:4)

JAM 1:4 And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- It is used of God’s word. (Jas. 1:25).

JAM 1:25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

- The verb form is used of the ineffectiveness of the Law. (Heb. 7:19).

HEB 7:19 (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. See Heb. 10:4

- It is used of faith made perfect [complete] by works. (Jas. 2:22). He is not speaking of works of merit, but works of faith.
- It is used of the consequence of loving one another. (1 Jn. 4:12).

- It refers to departed spirits. (Heb. 12:23).

HEB 12:23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,

- It is used “of resurrection glory. (Phil. 3:12; Heb. 10:14; 11:40).
- It is used of the love of God operating through him who keeps His word. (1 Jn. 4:12).

1JO 4:12 No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. [Love has accomplished its goal.]

- It is used of God’s will. (Rom. 12:2).

ROM 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- It is used of a love that trusts God. (1 Jn. 4:18).

1JO 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

- “Artios” is translated “perfect” in 2 Timothy 3:17.
- “Teleioo” in Hebrews 5:8, 9 does not mean Jesus became sinless because He has always been sinless. (Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22). It refers to the fact, as a human, He was perfectly completely obedient to God qualifying Him to be our understanding mediator and intercessor with God and our perfect sacrifice for sin. He lacked nothing to be our Savior.

A. The word “perfect” has the idea of complete.

1. The Greek “hos” [as] shows we are to make God our model.
2. It does not mean that we can ever reach His infinite perfection.
3. God’s attributes are all infinite, and ours finite.

B. God’s children are to be complete.

1. They do good to family and friends.
2. They do good to the church. (Gal. 6:10).
3. They do good to “all men” (Gal. 6:10; Matt. 28:19, 20).
4. They even do good to their enemies. (Rom. 12:19-21).
5. They must act like the Good Samaritan. (Lk. 10:25-38).

- C. The followers of Jesus are children of God and they manifest the family likeness by doing good to all, even to those who deserve the opposite treatment.
- D. Their love must be complete, that is, loving all.
- E. They devote themselves to God and His word without holding back on any point, including loving enemies.
- F. Deut. 18:13 "You shall be blameless [upright, sincere, undivided] before the Lord your God."

Conclusion.

- I. Jesus presented a similar idea in Luke 6:36 which is a parallel passage.

LUK 6:36 "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

- A. We can never be as merciful as God.
- B. We must show the family likeness by showing mercy to others.
- C. We recognize we must be merciful to receive mercy. (Matt. 5:7; Jas. 2:13).
- II. "You must be perfect (that is, all-embracing, without any restriction) in your acts of mercy or kindness, for that is what God is like."
 - The idea of "perfect" (Matt. 5:48) is that they were to be complete in love and mercy as God is.
 - God is merciful and loving to all and as His children we must do the same.

Other Observations

1. The one who thinks he is sinless or even near sinlessness will become very self-righteous. (Lk. 18:9-14).
2. Some seeking to be sinless become emotionally disturbed.
 - a. They become frustrated or depressed because they fall short.
 - b. They often conclude God will condemn them because they are not sinless - "they don't deserve to be saved."
3. We should never deliberately sin, but must recognize we will never have full control of our tongues, our thoughts, our actions. See Jas. 3:2
4. We should take every opportunity to do good to all men, including those who hate us. (Gal. 6:10).
5. The person who claims perfection turns others away by his/her arrogant spirit.
6. It is incorrect to think the requirement of loving enemies is too hard for us.
 - a. All kinds of saints have obeyed this commandment.
 - b. Stephen (Acts 7:60).

7. We will not be able to obey this commandment without flaw any more than we love our friends, relatives, and neighbors without flaw.
8. Sinlessness will not be reached in this life.
 - a. We should seek God's will.
 - b. We should seek it without the expectation we can now or ever in this life be sinless.
9. This teaching is intended for all - not just a few exceptional Christians.
10. Nothing we do can be perfect in the infinite or absolute sense, but we should keep on pursuing good.
11. We should not permit failures to keep us from doing good to all.
12. This utterance of Jesus is not as hard to understand as it is sometimes to practice.
13. This utterance also fits well with Jesus' instructions that our righteousness must surpass or exceed the incomplete righteousness of the Pharisees and Scribes who had an outward righteousness and not an inward righteousness. (Matt. 6:1-18).
14. Everyone of us has the power to obey this commandment of Jesus.
15. We may never be a superstar in the eyes of the world, but we can be "perfect" and be a shining light in this world of sin and darkness.

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