

How to Be Perfect

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"You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
(Matthew 5:43-48 HCSB)

Matthew wrote that when Jesus came back from the wilderness after His baptism, He began to have large crowds following Him. One day, in the presence of one of these crowds, He went up a hill or mountain, sat down, and began to teach. Matthew only mentioned in 5:1 that His disciples followed Him there, but at the end of chapter 7, he made it clear that the crowds were astonished at His teachings, so the teaching seems to have been offered to anyone who would listen, and many people were listening by the end of the time of teaching.

Jesus took ideas that were Jewish, either from the law God had given them through Moses, or the laws that their leaders had imposed on them, and declared that God wanted more out of His people than obedience to those rules. In fact, God wanted His people to be perfect!

What could Jesus mean by saying to the people that they should be perfect? The people were under the laws Moses received from Yahweh. The laws were given only to the descendants of Israel who were led out of Egypt by Moses and called by Yahweh to be His nation. The laws made them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The promise that was given with the laws was that anyone who obeyed them ALL would gain life. Blessings would chase down anyone who obeyed ALL of the laws, and benefits would be unavoidable.

A problem that developed for every person who received the laws, however, was that every one of them broke at least one. In fact, for a person to only break one was probably extremely exceptional. Most people probably broke many laws. This was a serious problem because another promise that was given with the laws was that anyone who did not obey ALL of the laws would be chased down by curses. The curses were very clear, and Moses recorded both the blessings and the curses in Leviticus chapter 28.

So, the people Jesus was speaking to on the mountain were descendants of generations upon generations of Jews who had all failed to keep the law perfectly, because they were, of course, imperfect people. His instructions were very clearly spoken. Whether they could have been clearly understood is questionable, I believe. An appropriate question to have come from the crowd or the disciples might have been, "How can this be?"

Zechariah asked that question when a messenger from Yahweh informed him that he

would have a son supernaturally after a very long time of marriage. His wife Elizabeth had never been able to become pregnant, and they were both old. He responded to the angel, "How can this be?" (Luke 1:5-25)

Mary asked that same question when the same messenger from Yahweh informed her that she would have a son supernaturally at a very young age and before having had sex with any man. She was betrothed, or promised, to Joseph, which in practical terms meant that they were in the first stage of being married. They were not at the stage of the process of marriage at which they had lived or slept together, and therefore, she responded to the angel, "How can this be?" (Luke 1:26-38)

When Zechariah asked the question, the response of the messenger implies that he was questioning the possibility of the prophecy being true. When Mary asked the question, the messenger's response implies that she was seeking information about how it was going to happen. He replied by giving her the steps Yahweh's Spirit would take to bring it about, answering her with "Here's how:" That's the way we are going to ask Jesus, "Be perfect?! How can we do that?!" And the answer we get will be like the one Mary got. "Here's how..."

Part of the answer is in the actual meaning of the word that is translated into English as "perfect." Using a Bible study tool created by James Strong, it is possible to see what Greek word was used by Jesus in Matthew 5:48 that has been translated "perfect." The Greek word was what would sound like "teleios." Strong numbered it NT:5046. Using the Englishman's Concordance, it is possible to see that this word appeared 19 times in the texts translated by the King James Version translators. 17 times, they translated it, "perfect." The other 2 times it was translated "of full age" once and "men" the other.

A couple of the verses in which it appeared include the time Jesus was answering the rich young ruler's question about how to obtain eternal life (Matthew 19:16-30). Jesus said, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." Jesus did not clearly teach the connection between the giving away, the following, and the being perfect. It is possible that the process of giving and following would make the man perfect, and it is possible that the process would simply put him in a position or condition in which the Holy Spirit could perfect him because of his surrendered heart and mind. Or, Jesus just knew that by following Him, the man would eventually be born again and therefore be perfected.

In another Scripture, the word is used by Paul. It is in Romans 12:2, where he used it to describe God's will as being perfect. 1 John 4:18 is the verse in which John wrote, "...perfect love drives out fear." Part of the answer we are looking for is given by James in his letter in the Bible. He used the word 5 times in the 5 chapters his letter was divided into. The locations are: in 1:4 (twice), 1:17, 1:25, and 3:2. In verses 2 through 4 of the first chapter, he wrote that we can be perfect and complete, lacking nothing! His description of the process that ends in our becoming entire and perfect says that we face trials, the trials test our faith, the testing of our faith produces patience or endurance, and when patience or endurance have had the opportunity to perfectly affect us, we will have become perfect and complete, lacking no thing. We should, therefore, rejoice any time we face any trials, he wrote. We should rejoice, because the problems are the stones that make up the pavement on the road to our perfection!

Perceiving the value of the trials that we face to be like that of treasure boxes, holding valuable items like character and wisdom and love and peace and many other contributions to our perfection, is difficult. It is even rare. We normally respond to our trials with declarations that, "The devil is a liar," and any other rebuke we can dream up to cast at the problem. We attempt to push away the items that we could use as tools to aid in the process of our becoming perfect. We look at them as tools of our enemies, expecting them to destroy us rather than perfect us.

Dynamite is only used once. Nails are intended to stay where you put them when you use them. A scaffolding is built during the construction of a building or its facade. When the work is finished, the scaffolding is removed and stored. We should not be quick to cast aside some trial just because it is offensive or obnoxious or embarrassing or deadly. Being thrown in jail on a holiday was Peter's ticket to seeing some pretty supernatural activity by some angels (Acts 12). Being thrown in jail unlawfully was Paul's and Silas' ticket to seeing the jailer's family baptized and to being escorted through the streets of the city by its officials as honored visitors (Acts 16). If your most recent trial looks like dynamite, let it explode and be done with whatever its work is and expect your God to restore anything it damaged that you need to be perfect. If it looks like nails, stop pulling them out.

The proper response to any trial is to first ask the Spirit of God what to do to respond to it. He knows what value it hides as a pavement stone on the road to your perfection. He knows what any usurper intends to use it for that would be stealing or killing or destroying. He can make you wise regarding how to use it and how to overcome it. It is not out of His reach or beyond His understanding.

John saw a war in heaven in chapter 12 of the Revelation of Jesus. Since there is no explanation of much of the imagery in that Revelation included with the revelation, we do not know if what he was seeing happened long ago or has yet to happen. My guess is that it is a picture from the past. My guess about the binding and casting of satan into a pit that has no bottom in chapter 20 is a picture from the future. The devil is going to be in the abyss for 1000 years. No apparent fight, no recorded argument, no sense that the mission of binding him could fail or that he could escape before the millennium ends and he is again released with a God-given purpose. He is not out of control today, just destructive.

His presence is part of God's well thought through plan for perfecting a Bride for His Son. He is one of God's tools. If you want to be changed into the likeness of Jesus, expect to encounter devils that are sent to be power tools in the hands of the One Who dreamed you up and drew you out and plans to make you perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Ask Him how to cooperate on the workbench to avoid being damaged or injured instead of converted and perfected. Ask Him when to move and when to be still.

Another set of clues on how to make the mental transition to understanding the value of some of the agenda for our perfection is revealed by Paul in his first letter in the Bible to the church at Corinth. In the beginning of chapter 10, he offered them warning about particular mistakes made by the descendants of Jacob as they left Egypt and went through the wilderness on their way to the land Yahweh intended to give them. He wrote that we, as the church at the end of the ages, could look at what happened in the stories recorded

by Moses about that trip and learn how to be who we should be.

Paul wrote that what happened to them happened, and was then recorded, so that we could learn the lessons that they failed to learn. How not to lust after evil things. How to refuse to participate in idolatry. How to overcome sexual immorality. This is a description of a corporate perfecting as well as individual. The times that the new nation encountered difficulties and asked Yahweh how to respond, He showed them the strategy. When they didn't ask for direction, they made mistakes that were costly.

The three things I believe were the purposes of Yahweh leading them through the desert to take them to the land that had belonged to Canaan are: Learning Who Yahweh is, Learning who He said the people were, and Learning what their purposes were to be when they entered the land of promises.

Their lack of knowledge regarding Yahweh's identity is clearly revealed in chapter 32 of the Exodus. Beginning in chapter 20, He gave Moses laws. Since Moses had been gone for quite a while, and the last time the people had seen him he was climbing a mountain that had been covered with thick cloud and much terrifying lightning and thunder and ground shaking activity, they presumed that he had been destroyed. They talked Moses' brother Aaron into building an Egyptian style god so that they would be safe in the desert. He took gold from the people and made a calf like object for them to worship. The people pointed at the calf and said, "Israel, this is Elohim, who brought you up out of the land of Israel!" He took them into dangers to introduce Himself to them as One Who delivers from enemies; as One Who heals; as One Who provides; as One Who loved them and hated idols.

He also wanted to give them an environment in which He could introduce them to their real identity as His people. You do not know if you are a swimmer if you have never been wet. You cannot know what it means to be a Kingdom if you have no idea what a King expects of you. You cannot be priests effectively if you do not know the protocols for intercession and revelation. In the place of temptation and danger and lack, He wanted to reveal to them that they were the people He intended to protect and give strength and character and provision.

When they responded to the opportunities with complaining and murmuring and accusation of evil intentions, they failed to obtain the blessings hidden in the troubles. When their responses were filled with desires of returning to slavery, they were rejecting the process that Yahweh had designed to cause them to become a nation set apart to Him in the earth, and a Kingdom of priests who could intercede for a Lamb Who could take away the sins of the world.

When we are more concerned about our comfort or our fears or our stubbornness than we are being converted to the likeness of Jesus, we are choosing to remain unconverted. When we rebuke the tools rather than asking the Craftsman what He is doing and how we can cooperate, we effectively remain blocks of wood or piles of clay.

The process is related to our souls. Our spirits were born of God when we submitted to the conviction of the Holy Spirit to be forgiven of sin and reborn by Him. Our spirit was born in

Adam's likeness when we were born of our mothers (Genesis 5). It was born doomed to spiritual death. When we were reborn, of God, our spirit was replaced with a new spirit, born of Him, and having His nature. It is perfect.

Like John wrote in his first letter in the Bible (3:9), anyone who is born of God cannot sin, because God's seed, His sperm, His DNA, is in a person who was born of Him. Like Paul wrote in the 7th chapter of his letter to the church at Rome, when he was troubled by actions that he had decided never to do again, but couldn't stop doing, or when he wanted to build a new habit, but couldn't maintain the new works, it was not Paul failing, but sin that was in his flesh. He wrote that twice, once in verse 17 and again in verse 20. His spirit was born of God. His mind was struggling to be converted to reflect his true identity.

Jesus was not wagging His finger at the people on the mountainside, saying, "Your Father is perfect, so you be perfect!!" He was doing what He always does when He gives us a command. He was inviting them to the reality of what He was telling them was true. He invited them to perfection, with the intention of empowering them into the realization of it. He was announcing to them the availability of perfection. Those whose response was like Zechariah's could have it but never bear evidence of it. Those whose response was like Mary's could step into the place of the glory of God where truth is manifest.

The place where the things of heaven are impossible has to submit and become the place where all things are possible when we decide to overcome the barriers, because we are in Christ. The place where destruction and death and theft and rust rule becomes the place where our true identities are revealed by the responses we are led into by the Holy Spirit. Our converted spirits are the strength on which He builds the manifestation in our hearts and minds and emotions of the fruit that reveals Him. Peace and joy and agape and the rest of what Paul called "the fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22 are given to us as manifestations in this place where flesh rules by the strength of His Spirit becoming one with our spirits.

When we seek His answer to the question, "How do I respond to _____?", with the blank filled in with the description of a problem or attack or failure, we are shown how to use the moment as a transition time on His workbench, being given more revelation about Who He is, or who He says we are, or what our purpose is in some situation. Spend less time rebuking the devil and more time submitting to God and your pain and discomfort are less likely to be wasted. More importantly, maybe, they are also less likely to need to be repeated!

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