

LIVING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

THE PERFECTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I don't think I could ever dream up a statement like Matthew 5:48.

Be perfect like God?

Who can do that?

Who would have the audacity to even suggest we entertain the idea?

It is hard enough to read it out loud - in public.

We all scramble for the end of the line.

We suggest someone else go first.

It is a challenging verse and so much is riding on this. (read v. 48)

What comes to your mind when you hear the word perfect?

If this wasn't said by Jesus Himself we might just dismiss it.

Jesus is telling us to be perfect - not by human standards but God's standard.

He is telling us to be as perfect as God our Heavenly Father.

How are you doing with that?

How is your perfection measuring up to God's perfection?

Is Jesus setting an impossible standard?

This is not the only place Jesus uses the word perfect.

In fact, Jesus gives us the formula for being perfect.

"Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'"

(Matthew 19:21)

Is that all?

Sell everything!

Then give everything away, to the poor.

Then follow Jesus who has no home, and you have no money.

It's going to be perfect.

Being perfect comes at a high price.

The cost is so high, in fact, that most go away sad.

There are no discounts for experiencing perfection.

Instead there seems to be is a "disconnect" between life in heaven and life on earth.

If we study the context of vs. 48 we make some discoveries.

In verse 45 Jesus refers to His "Father who is in heaven."

In Matthew 6:1 Jesus refers to His "Father who is in heaven."

In Mt. 6:9 Jesus says, "Pray then like this; Our Father who is in heaven."

Jesus is teaching us something about His heavenly Father.

He wants us to experience something that is not natural to this world.

To be a follower of Jesus demands super-natural living.

Jesus uses something very near and dear to our hearts to bring that super-natural living into focus.

Jesus talks about rewards.

Rewards are great motivators in life; trophies, prizes, degrees, points.

In verse 46 He asks, "what reward have you?"

The unspoken answer is 'none', 'nada', 'zilch'.

In Mt. 6:1 He says, "you will have no reward."

What is the basis of an unrewarding life?

Living with the wrong definition of love.

The "disconnect" between heaven and earth is at the point of love.

Jesus is telling us how His Father in Heaven defines love.
And He is telling us how we on earth define love.
Earthly love has zero heavenly reward.
Heavenly love has zero earthly reward.

Alexander Maclaren says, **"To love because we shall gain something, either in this world or in the next, is not love but long-sighted selfishness"**

(*Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6, page 219*)

What does earthly love look like?

Jesus sketches a graphic picture of earthly love.

It loves only those who are loveable.

It hates enemies.

It gives time and acknowledgement only to kin, family, brethren.

Earthly love has no use for people who don't like us.

For centuries Israel's scholars had been debating love.

They had come to the conclusion that they should love their neighbor.

That was part of the law of Scripture.

But who, exactly, is the neighbor I need to love?

They came to the conclusion that they should hate their enemy.

No where in scripture is that suggested.

But there is no scarcity of hating enemies being demonstrated.

So they defined neighbor narrowly so they could broadly define enemy.

A neighbor worthy of love could only be found in Israel.

And only a descendent of Isaac qualified as a neighbor in Israel.

Any one outside of Israel was held with contempt.

The duty to love was restricted to a tiny circle.

Everyone else was left out in the cold.

In fact it became a virtue to hate an enemy.

Retaliation wasn't enough to satisfy this virtue.

An eye for an eye was too good a response for enemies.

Earthly love included pure hatred that knew no limits.

Enemies deserved the worst form of retaliation.

Earthly love results in fragmentation all around, hatred everywhere.

Israel demonstrated earthly love perfectly.

And everyone needed to know just how pious you were.

Earthly love, by its nature, is always flaunted.

There is a great show of how much we love and hate.

What does heavenly love look like?

Heavenly love loves enemies.

Heavenly love prays for persecutors.

Heavenly love provides for the just and unjust equally.

Heavenly love makes no distinction based on worthiness.

Heavenly love sees everyone being of worth.

Heavenly love is not puffed up or boastful but is done in secret.

Jesus calls us to be under-cover expressions of heavenly love.

He called heavenly love perfect.

Jesus prayed for perfect unity among His disciples.

And as did, He removed the "disconnect" between heaven and earth.

He connected perfect unity with loving perfectly.

"I am in them and You are in Me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that You sent Me and that You love them as much as You love me." (John 17:23)

Paul knew this was God's perfect will for anyone who followed Jesus.

"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

Paul says to the Galatians:

"Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the

desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would." (Galatians 5:16)

Earthly love and heavenly love are diametrically opposed.

Anything birthed in fleshly desires is against the Spirit.

Anything birthed in the Spirit's desires is against the flesh.

John pulls all of this together in his first letter.

1 John 3:1-3, 23-24; 4:7-13, 16-21

So, what does perfect love look like?

Does it guarantee that every thought will be perfectly expressed?

Does it mean that we will never hurt someone with our actions?

Does it mean we will always have the right response?

Does it mean that our attitudes will be flawless?

Does it mean we will never need to say "I'm sorry" again?

We can answer no to all these questions.

Jesus is not calling us to perfect performance.

A pianist can strive to perfectly play the musical score.

Hours and hours of practice can produce a flawless recital.

I have heard and been amazed at that kind of quality.

But that is not the perfection of Matthew 5:48.

Jesus is not calling us to perfectionism.

Jesus is calling us to be complete, to lack nothing of God.

We are not to settle with partial obedience to God's will.

We are not to dabble half-heartedly in His divine presence.

We are to surrender our life totally to the Lordship of Jesus.

We embrace His Holy Spirit who in-fills us with God.

The Holy Spirit is the breath, the wind, the purifying fire of God's presence.

The Holy Spirit is the fullness of God's presence.

The Holy Spirit is the perfection of God that penetrates and grips our lives.

God calls us to be perfect and holy as He is, but not in our strength.

God's call is intertwined with the call to be in the Spirit.

There will still be struggles and points of weakness.

Paul understood that when he wrote to Corinth.

He was in prayer with Jesus about a thorn in his side.

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

These imperfect vessels were created to contain God's awesome glory.

"For it is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us." (2 Corinthians 4:6-7)

Here are God's instructions through Paul.

"Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God." (2 Corinthians 7:1)

"None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him,' God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." (1 Corinthians 2:8-12)