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#M075

The Perfect Sermon

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“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Mat. 5:48)

It occurred to me this week that I’ve probably never preached a perfect sermon, so I figured I’d better get that taken care of. After all, the word “perfect” is found ninety-nine times in the Bible, fifty-seven times in the Old Testament and forty-two in the New Testament. And, as our text reveals, Jesus did command us to be perfect.

I’d like for us to cover a great many of those verses, so I’ll not take much time with introductory remarks. Under three main headings, I’d like to bring to you the doctrine of Biblical perfection. We’ll first deal with the *confusion* about perfection. Then we’ll look at some *commands* for perfection. Finally, we’ll look at a few *characters* of perfection.

I. The Confusion about Perfection

When I say “the confusion about perfection,” I am referring to the fact that most Christians have the wrong understanding of perfection. Many times you have heard someone say, “Well, nobody’s perfect.” Most of the people who say that are professing Christians. Now, why would a professing Christian speak against the words of Jesus Christ? As our text says, Jesus commanded us to be perfect, yet we run around saying that no one is perfect. I think it can be summed up by stating two basic truths: people don’t know what Jesus said, and they don’t care. They’re too busy serving the whines and whims of their own carnality to be bothered with the challenging words of Jesus. So, they justify their lukewarm lives and press on in their ignorance by claiming that no one is perfect, obviously implying that no one *can be* perfect, so why bother trying?

Now, if you happen to be a little deeper than that, a little more concerned with the will of God, then it might interest you to know that being perfect in the Bible does not mean being sinless. Even Webster missed that one. Sin is a transgression of the law (I John 3:4), a moral thing, yes, but also a very technical thing. If you drive one mile per hour over the speed limit, then you are technically a lawbreaker, and the highway patrolman can give you a ticket. But *will* he give you a ticket? No, not usually, because you haven’t shown any significant disrespect for the law. One mile per hour isn’t enough for him to measure any real negative attitude on your part. But if he clocks you running ten

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miles over the limit, then he figures that you deserve a ticket. Now, what's the difference? Both are illegal, yet only one earns you a ticket. Why is that? It has to do with your heart attitude toward the law. At one mile per hour over the limit, you are only *technically* breaking the law, and you might not even know it, even if you looked at the speedometer. At ten miles per hour over the limit, you are breaking the law with an attitude of disrespect and carelessness, and you know it very well. He doesn't know it, and you might have never thought of it, but the state trooper is mostly concerned with your heart attitude. Is your *heart* right with the law? That's his concern. At one mile per hour over the limit, he figures that your heart is still right. At ten miles per hour over, he figures it isn't.

So, one can break the law and still have a perfect heart. I know that seems strange to some of you, but that's because of your confused definition of perfection. You'll have to accept God's definition in order to understand it.

Okay, let me show it to you. II Chronicles 25:1-2 says, "**Amaziah was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart.**" There's a man who did the *right* thing, yet not with a perfect heart. No matter how much right that he did, he could never be perfect by the Mathew 5:48 standard because his heart wasn't right. The Pharisees were much like that. They often did the right things, but with the wrong heart attitude, so they were never perfect before God.

Now, for contrast, look at I Kings 15:14: "**But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days.**" Look at that. Asa did a lot of good, but not *totally* good, yet he still had a perfect heart. Like the individual driving one mile per hour over the speed limit, there isn't enough error to determine that he has a bad heart attitude toward the law, so he isn't given a ticket.

So, let's remember that perfection is not sinlessness. A perfect man (and there are some) is a man who is wholehearted toward God, a man who loves God and tries consistently to keep his heart right with God.

II. The Commands for Perfection

The Bible commands God's people to be perfect, so no Christian has any business justifying his flaws by saying, "Well, no one's perfect." Some people *are* perfect, and you and I should be perfect as well. Let's consider some of God's commands for perfection.

The first is our opening text, Matthew 5:48: "**Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**" Is that not a command of Jesus? Indeed, it is. Now, may I ask you a question? Would Jesus command you to do the impossible? No, He would not. Therefore, it must be possible

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for you to be perfect. “But, I thought Christians weren’t perfect, only forgiven.” That’s because you’ve been reading too many bumper stickers and not enough Bible. The Bible says that you *can* be perfect, and that you *should* be perfect, and it says it numerous times.

In Genesis 17:1, God told Abram, “. . . **I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.**” I don’t like that any more than you do, but there it is. God does command His people to be perfect.

Look what God commanded His people in Deuteronomy 18:13: “**Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God.**” Oh, but Brother Melton, that’s under the Old Testament law. We’re in the New Testament today. We opened this message with a *New Testament* verse on perfection, and we’ll be seeing plenty more shortly. It’s all through the Bible. God commands His people to be perfect.

Okay, look at I Kings 8:61: “**Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.**” You see, perfection has to do with the *heart*.

Psalm 101:2 offers a strong admonition for us to be perfect: “**I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.**” That will clean up the television time, won’t it? You won’t be squabbling and fighting all the time with your brothers and sisters, if you walk within your house with a perfect heart. You see, instead of going around saying, “Well, nobody’s perfect,” we ought to be saying, “How can I become perfect? What heart adjustments do I need to make?”

Okay, let’s come over to the New Testament. In Matthew 19:21, Jesus said, “**If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.**” Why would Jesus say that a man can be perfect if (1) it isn’t possible, and (2) He doesn’t desire it? It is possible for us to be perfect, and our Lord expects us to strive for that goal. He said so in Matthew 5:48, and He said it here.

In II Corinthians 13:9, Paul tells the Corinthians, “**For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.**” He repeats it in verse 11: “**Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.**” You see, the perfection that God wants for us has to do with our hearts, our attitudes toward God and toward others. The attitude naturally affects the actions, but the attitude comes first, so that’s what God is watching, not just the actions.

Ephesians 4:13 speaks on this same subject: “**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.**” He didn’t say “if we could;” he said “Till we all come,” which is a more definite thing, a goal that can be reached.

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Paul brings this goal up again in Philippians 3. Verse 12 says, “**Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.**” Paul said that he hadn’t reached his goal of perfection yet, but he was striving for it. He had not thrown out the possibility that he could be a perfect man. He believed it was possible, and he was working toward that end. In verse 15, he went on to say, “**Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.**” So, some folks there had reached the goal of perfection, and they were expected to remain there.

Colossians 4:12 is very clear with what Christian perfection is all about: “**Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.**” He said you *may* stand perfect, which means it *is* possible, and it has to do with being *complete*, or, as we have already pointed out, *wholehearted*.

Paul tells us in II Timothy 3:17 that the word of God is given “**That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.**” If you want to be perfect, get in the book. It’s a perfect book, and it can make you perfect.

Hebrews 6:1 says, “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection . . .” That’s the goal for the Christian, but you’ll never reach that goal, if you throw out the idea altogether, thinking it’s impossible.

Okay, one more verse, then we’ll move onward. James 1:4 says, “**But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.**” You see, perfection has to do with what you *are* (“that ye may be”). It concerns the inner you, the heart, the real you that produces the thoughts, the words, and the actions. Is that real you a perfect being, or is he or she less than perfect? That’s the issue.

III. The Characters of Perfection

Finally, let’s look at a few characters of perfection, some people in the Bible who were perfect. We won’t look at them all, but just a few examples.

First on our list comes Noah. Genesis 6:9: “**These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.**” At a time when others were corrupting the earth with wickedness, Noah kept his heart perfect and found grace in the eyes of the Lord as he kept his family right with God and separated from the world.

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I like David as an example of perfection. Speaking of Solomon, I Kings 15:3 tells us that David had a perfect heart: **“And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father.”** We know that David sinned, yet God says that his *heart* was perfect. Some folks will never understand that because they are too focused on the *outward* man. They are so focused on the results that they overlook the motives. The Pharisees had that problem.

Another good example of perfection is Asa, mentioned in I Kings 15:14: **“But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa’s heart was perfect with the LORD all his days.”** He didn’t do everything that he should have done, but his *heart* was always right. That is, he might have technically broken the speed limit a little, but not with a rebellious heart attitude.

In Isaiah 38:3, we see that Hezekiah also had a perfect heart: **“ . . . Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight . . .”** You see, perfection concerns the heart, not the deeds. You’ll never understand these passages without understanding that.

Okay, let’s look at Job. We read in Job 1:1 that **“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.”** According to the Holy Spirit, Job was a perfect man, and his perfection had to do with his attitude toward God and toward evil. He feared God, and he eschewed evil. That’s the general rule of his life, and that’s what made him a perfect man.

But, there is a catch. Being perfect should be your goal, but you probably won’t know it, if you ever reach that goal. Read Job’s words carefully from Job 9:20-21: **“If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.”** That’s the trick. Part of being perfect is never thinking that you are and always looking to improve yourself! That’s what a perfect heart does: it strives for continual perfection. It never says, “Hey, look at me! I have arrived! I have reached the goal!” That’s what a Pharisee would say.

So, what should we do? We should strive for perfection, keeping our hearts in tune at all times. The outer results will usually be right, but maybe not always. But we can keep the heart right. You can have a perfect heart, and God will take notice: **“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him . . .”** God took note of Noah, David, Asa, and Job, and He will take note of you and I, if we believe His words and strive for the goal of perfect hearts.