

Perfecting the Saints

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Matthew 5:48

I. REVIEW - In the Sermon On The Mount the perfect standard of God had been replaced by a more convenient standard of men which pleased men's flesh and made it easier for men to develop their own marks of righteousness. The purpose here was to elevate themselves above others and even their own consciences!

You'll remember that earlier we read

Matthew 5: 38 - 42 - You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

What happened is that the fallen and natural self love; a love which supersedes any love for God, was driven by a powerful self-protection. James talks about our arguments and quarrels being driven by our lust for what we don't have; what we don't get. So when others don't bow down and worship us with the honor that we are due, then the mighty wrath of man is unleashed!

James 4: 1 - 6 - What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. ⁴You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? ⁶But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

This same spirit is what drove men to warp the plain teaching of God's Word concerning Civil Justice meet out by a magistrate to one of personal vendetta and vengeance. Jesus corrected that teaching which, instead of humbling in the face of adversity, fed the self-serving flesh.

In our last class we discussed the sixth of six corrections that Jesus made to the twisting of the Old Testament principles and laws. We looked at it from three points of view:

Three Points Of View: Scribes and Pharisees / Old Testament / Jesus

A. The Viewpoint Of The Scribes And Pharisees On Neighbors, Brothers, Strangers, & Aliens

The unbelievers (Gentiles) and Jews who did not have as good an understanding of the law and traditions as themselves were seen as suspect. As an example, look at the Pharisees and the Chief Priests. While they were normally rivals and enemies who together made up the Sanhedrin (a group of 70 men with the Sadducees more concerned with political power than spiritual power and the Pharisees (the "separate ones") more focused on keeping ceremonies). Together they decided to send the temple guard who were a group of Levites / officers who functioned like police to seize Jesus when he went up to the Feast of Booths at the Temple. We pick it up in John 7 at verse 40.

John 7: 40 - 49 - Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet." ⁴¹ Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" ⁴³ So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him. ⁴⁵ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." ⁴⁷ The Pharisees then answered them, "**You have not also been led astray, have you? ⁴⁸ No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? ⁴⁹ But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed.**" ⁵⁰ Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) *said to them, ⁵¹ "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" ⁵² They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee."

These temple guards; Levites, were trained in the Law and Prophets and they recognized in Jesus teaching and character such a stark difference that they could NOT seize him. When the Pharisees realize what happened, they lash out with and reveal their pride and prejudice, not only against the Levites, but against anyone who was not in their little group.

B. The Old Testament Viewpoint On Neighbors Brothers, Strangers, & Aliens

CONCLUSION: The teaching of the Old Testament, and the example of many of the patriarchs was that men are commanded by God to be kind even to those who stood as adversaries, enemies, strangers, aliens,

Deuteronomy 10: 17 - 21 - For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen.

C. The Viewpoint Of Jesus On Neighbors Brothers, Strangers, & Aliens

All around Jesus were walls and fences. He came for the very purpose of bursting those barriers so that love - pure, warm, divine, infinite love - would be able to flow straight down from the heart of God. Hence from His own marvelous heart, into the hearts of men, His love overleaped all the boundaries of race and nationality and party and age and sex. When He said, 'I tell you love your enemies,' He must have startled His audience, for He was saying

something that probably never before had been said so succinctly, positively, and forcefully.

New Testament Commentary On Matthew - William Hendrikson

II. APPLICATION - LIVING OUT JESUS VIEW OF NEIGHBORS BROTHERS, STRANGERS, & ALIENS

A. Love Them

Romans 12: 17 - 21 - Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

A wrong done against love is like a spark that falls into the sea and is quenched.

Chrysostom

Don't just say you love people. Show it. Put feet on it. Demonstrate it.

B. Pray For Them

Love your enemies. I'm sure you would admit that the Irish race are not the most forgiving when it comes to their enemies. I read an Irish prayer this week that went like this: 'May those that love us love us, those that don't love us may God turn their hearts, and if He doesn't turn their hearts may He turn their ankles so we'll know them by their limping!'. That is often the sentiment of folk from Ulster and indeed Ireland, and in fact any folk that can call themselves sinners - and all are sinners. That is the natural reaction of humanity to those whom we class as our enemies.

[The Sermon On The Mount](#) - David Legge

Pray for your persecutors, pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you." Praying here is simply beseeching God on their behalf. When somebody comes along and does despite to you or does evil to you or harms you, injures you, persecutes you, what are you to do? You are to go before the Lord on their behalf and intercede for them; they need a Savior. That's what Jesus did on the cross. That's what Stephen did.

C. The Motive - Reflection Of Our Heavenly Father

1. He Causes The Sun To Rise On The Evil And The Good

2. He Sends Rain On The Righteous And The Unrighteous

It is God's perfection to forgive injuries and to entertain strangers, and to do good to the evil and unthankful, and it will be ours to be like him. We that owe so much, that owe our all, to the divine bounty, ought to copy it out as well as we can.

D. The Motive - Difference!

Matthew 5: 46 - 47 - For if you **love** those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you **greet** only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Remember who Jesus is speaking to here. He's addressing the Pharisees who, for the sake of their own self-love, self-aggrandizement, self-righteousness look down on everyone else. forgetting how God says in Proverbs, I hate pride.

James 4: 6 - God is **opposed** to the proud, but gives grace to the humble

Proverbs 6: 16 - 19 - KJV - These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a **proud look**, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Jesus asks if we go around love the people in our little group, are we commended? What's so hard about loving someone who is just like you?

Think about the stinging indictment against the Pharisees with what Jesus says here? Tax collectors - synonymous with lying, cheating, frauds and turncoats! These were traitors! Renegade Jews who have gone off of the reservation and sold themselves out for money. Remember they called Jesus a friend of tax collectors and sinners? Jesus said that if you ONLY love those in your little group, then you're no better than traitors and renegades and publicans, because they love their own little tribe too!

Loving only Christian people doesn't prove that we are members of Christ's kingdom. Murderers have something in common, so do thieves, robbers, adulterers and extortionists.

How about **greeting**? If all you could do is warmly embrace," and the word 'greet' having to do with a warm embrace with a kiss, is as it was done in the East, "If you only have a warm and affectionate embrace for your brothers, you're no better than a **Gentile**." Boy, that cut them to the quick! Gentiles were dogs! The Pharisees would not eat with a Gentile, not go into Samaria, would shake the dust off of their clothing if they traveled on Gentile land.

He's saying that religious people are no better than heathens! people. He's saying that people who function in the temple are no better than people who extort. "You're all sinners," you see. It's just a matter of kind of sin. You're no better than the rest. What do you do more than anybody else? What makes you different?

QUESTION - What makes us different in the world? Are we different on the job because our ethics are different, our conversation is different, our attitude is different, our love is different? Are we different in our homes, are we different in our communities? Because if we're not different, we have nothing to say to this society that they're going to believe.

The Master expects from His disciples such conduct as can be explained only
in terms of the supernatural.

J. Oswald Sanders

If we're to speak to this age and call this godless age to Jesus Christ and let them know that there's something real about Christ, it'll be when our lives are unique have no other explanation than that God is there.

Who can do this? The answer is: NO ONE! See what Jesus says next in verse 48:

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

The point is this, you and I are to be like God. You say, "That standard is too high." You're right, and that's exactly what He wanted the Pharisees and all of His disciples to know. We can't make it.

Recall Jesus earlier words:

Matthew 5: 20 - For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

What Jesus is saying in the Sermon on the Mount is the same thing, "Be perfect." They're supposed to say, "But I can't be perfect!" And that's when He says, "Right. If you fall short of perfection, you need a Savior."

You may have heard that some people say that they "keep the Sermon on the Mount". In light of Jesus call that we should be perfect, that sort of statement is a smoke screen, a portrait of ignorance about the Sermon, and a person's own sin.

We feel that the Ten Commandments, the ordinary moral standards of decency, are difficult enough; but look at these statements about not even looking with lust, about going the second mile and throwing in the cloak together with the coat, and so on. There is nothing more discouraging than the Sermon on the Mount; it seems to throw us right out, and to damn our every effort before we have started. It seems utterly impossible!

The Sermon On The Mount - Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

A Christian is somebody who knows he can't be perfect and comes to Jesus Christ for forgiveness for the sin of falling short, and receives from Christ the forgiveness and the power to begin to live with a hunger and passion for righteousness and to have an ambition to be pleasing to God.

God, in a miracle of salvation, does for us what we could never do for ourselves; make us like God.

2 Peter 1: 2 - 4 - Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³ seeing that ***His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.*** ⁴ ***For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.***

This *perfection* does not mean *equality*, but relates solely to resemblance. However distant we are from the perfection of God, we are said to be *perfect, as He is perfect*, when we aim at the same object, which he presents to us in Himself. Should it be thought preferable, we may state it thus. There is no comparison here made between God and us; but the *perfection* of God means, *first*, that free and pure kindness, which is not induced by the expectation of gain;—and, *secondly*, that

remarkable goodness, which contends with the malice and ingratitude of men. This appears more clearly from the words of Luke, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful*: for mercy is contrasted with a mercenary regard, which is founded on private advantage.

Harmony Of The Gospels - John Calvin

III. GOD MAKES US PERFECT AS HE IS PERFECT

Remember Ernie God's sermon: "It's Time To Wake Up"? (02/02/14). In it he said that God saves His people in three phases. This is called **progressive sanctification**. It a **progressive** work that continues throughout our earthly lives. This part of the application of redemption is called sanctification.

A. The Phases Of Progressive Sanctification

1. Phase 1 - When First We Believed

That's when He justifies us. That's the starting point of our spiritual relationship with Christ. We weren't born believing, we weren't baptized as babies into believing, we don't just slide into Christianity unconsciously, or trust that the church will get you in, or even waiting for God to do something, to give you a feeling. No, you must consciously believe. When the Philippian jailor asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul made it very simple: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Have you for sure come to Christ consciously repenting of your sin and bowing the knee of your heart to Christ and His work on that cross for sinners? There must be a beginning of faith, when you first believed.

Titus 3: 5 - He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit

1 John 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

Once we have been born again we cannot continue to sin as a habit or a pattern of life

1 Corinthians 6: 11 - Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Paul looks back on a completed event when he says to the Corinthians, "But you were washed, **you were sanctified** you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (). Similarly, in

Acts 20: 32 - And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Paul can refer to Christians as "all those who are sanctified."

Romans 6: 17 - 18 - But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Paul says that Christians have been “set free from sin” ([Rom. 6:18](#)). In this context, to be dead to sin or to be set free from sin involves the power to overcome acts or patterns of sinful behavior in one’s life.

In practical terms, this means that we must affirm two things to be true. On the one hand, we will never be able to say, “I am completely free from sin,” because our sanctification will never be completed (see below). But on the other hand, a Christian should never say (for example), “This sin has defeated me. I give up. I have had a bad temper for thirty-seven years, and I will have one until the day I die, and people are just going to have to put up with me the way I am!” To say this is to say that sin has gained dominion. It is to allow sin to reign in our bodies. It is to admit defeat. It is to deny the truth of Scripture, which tells us, “You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” ([Rom. 6:11](#)). It is to deny the truth of Scripture that tells us that “sin will have no dominion over you” ([Rom. 6:14](#)).

2. Phase 2 - From Faith Till Death

Phase #2 is from the time you first believed until either you die or Jesus comes back for you. You probably have this figured out, but we’re in phase 2 right now. It’s called sanctification. This is the stretch of time when we are growing and changing and when Christ is scrubbing us with the water of His Word and the power of His Spirit. It’s right here where we can fall asleep. We can get lethargic. We can become lukewarm when we aren’t wide awake and applying God’s truth to our lives. So Paul says, “Wake up, Billy! It’s later than you think!” You’ve got some changing to do.

Sanctification is NOT a one-time post-conversion event that allows us to live on a "higher plain" and never consciously sin again.

There is a different usage of the word **sanctified** in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition within Protestantism. In these circles the experience of sanctification is sometimes viewed as a single event subsequent to conversion in which a Christian attains a higher level of holiness, a level sometimes known as "entire sanctification" or "sinless perfection." Within this tradition, sanctification is seen as an experience one seeks for in the Christian life and is sometimes able to attain.

[2 Corinthians 3: 18](#) - But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

We are progressively becoming more and more like Christ as we go on in the Christian life. Therefore he says

Philippians 3: 13 - 14 - Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Though such an aim is never fully realized in this life, yet we must say with Paul, "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" (Phil. 3:12). In view of such a confession by the eminent apostle, how baseless and absurd is the pretension of those claiming to have already reached sinless perfection. The fact is that the closer we walk with God, the more will it work in us self-abasement and humiliation and not self-complacency and pride.

This is in the context of saying that he is not already perfect but he presses on to achieve all of the purposes for which Christ has saved him ([vv. 9-12](#)).

Colossians 3: 9 - 11 - Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Sanctification even involves increasing likeness to God in our thoughts as well as our words and deeds.

Indeed, the more sanctified the person is, the more conformed he is to the image of his Savior, the more he must recoil against every lack of conformity to the holiness of God. The deeper his apprehension of the majesty of God, the greater the intensity of his love to God, the more persistent his yearning for the attainment of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, the more conscious will he be of the gravity of the sin that remains and the more poignant will be his detestation of it...Was this not the effect in all the people of God as they came into closer proximity to the revelation of God's holiness?

Redemption Accomplished and Applied - John Murray

3. Phase 3 - Glorification

Phase # 3 is this salvation that is closer now than ever. It's when we go to be with Jesus, called what? Glorification. What a day that will be, when our Jesus we shall see!

Hebrews 12: 22 - 24 - you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel.

The author of Hebrews says that when we come into the presence of God to worship we come "to the spirits of just men **made perfect**"

This is only appropriate because it is in anticipation of the fact that "nothing unclean shall enter" into the presence of God, the heavenly city ([Rev. 21:27](#)).

Philippians 3: 21 - For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

We await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, and he “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body”

1 Corinthians 15: 49 - 57 - Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. 50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is “at his coming” ([1 Cor. 15:23](#)) that we will be made alive with a resurrection body and then we shall fully “bear the image of the Man of heaven” ([1 Cor. 15:49](#)).

B. God's Role And Our Responsibility In Sanctification

1. God’s Role In Sanctification.

Sanctification is primarily a work of God

1 Thessalonians 5: 23 - Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

a. God the Father Disciplining / Training / Chastening Us As His Children

i. Working & Working A Willingness

Philippians 2: 13 - God is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure causing them to want his will and by giving them power to do it.

ii. Equipping

Hebrews 13: 20 - 21 - Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

iii. Ordaining

Hebrews 12: 11 - All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Philippians 1: 27 - 30 - NASB - Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you

are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by *your* opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

Philippians 1: 28 - 29 - KJV - And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;

iv. Predestining

Romans 8: 28 - 39 - And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?³⁶ Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

B. God The Son, Jesus Christ Earned Our Sanctification And Is Our Example

1 Corinthians 1: 26 - 31 - For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But ***by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification***, and redemption, so that, ³¹ just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

God made Christ to be "our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption"

Jesus is also our **example** for we are to run the race of life "looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"

[Hebrews 12: 2](#) - Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God

1 Peter 2: 21 - For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps

From all that He had said, Christ now drew this excellent consequence, exhorting His followers to perfection in all the duties of love. "Be ye therefore perfect" is the unchanging requirement of the Law, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" is the exalted standard which the Gospel presents to us. The moral excellency of the Divine character is the copy and rule set before us, and nothing short of that is to be our sincere, ardent and constant endeavour.

The Sermon On The Mount - "The Law and Love-Concluded" - Arthur W. Pink

c. God The Holy Spirit Works Within To Change Us

2 Thessalonians 2: 13 - But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

He works within us to change us and sanctify us, giving us greater holiness of life. Peter speaks of the "sanctification of the Spirit" (**1 Peter 1:2**, author's translation), and Paul speaks of "sanctification by the Spirit" (**2 Thess. 2:13**). It is the Holy Spirit who produces in us the "fruit of the Spirit" (**Gal. 5:22-23**), those character traits that are part of greater and greater sanctification. If we grow in sanctification we "walk by the Spirit" and are "led by the Spirit" (**Gal. 5:16-18**; cf. **Rom. 8:14**), that is, we are more and more responsive to the desires and promptings of the Holy Spirit in our life and character. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of holiness, and he produces holiness within us.

While God is the origin, mover and driver in this process, the saints have an undeniable participatory role for which they are held accountable.

2 Peter 1: 2 - 11 - Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³ seeing that *His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.* ⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. ⁵ Now for this very reason also, **applying all diligence, in your faith supply** moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, ⁶ and in your knowledge, **self-control**, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, ⁷ and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For **if these qualities are yours and are increasing**, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brethren, **be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;** ¹¹ for in this way **the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.**

2. Our Responsibility In Sanctification

a. Willing And Trusting Dependence

Romans 16: 12 - 13 - Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but ***present yourselves to God*** as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Romans 12: 1 - Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to ***present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice***, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

b. Active And Rigorous Effort

Romans 8: 13 - If you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but ***if by the Spirit you are putting to death*** the deeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 8: 13 - KJV - For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but ***if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body***, ye shall live

Philippians 2: 12 - 13 - So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, ***work out your salvation with fear and trembling***; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Hebrews 12: 14 - ***Pursue*** peace with all men, and ***the sanctification*** without which no one will see the Lord

James encourages his hearers, "***Be doers of the word, and not hearers only***" ([James 1:22](#)), and Peter tells his readers, "***Be holy yourselves in all your conduct***" ([1 Peter 1:15](#)).

The old hymn wisely says, "**Trust and obey** for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

C. Joy, Rewards, And Glory Of Sanctification

1. The Joy And Peace Sanctification

It would not be right to end our discussion without noting that sanctification brings great joy to us. The more we grow in likeness to Christ, the more we will personally experience the "joy" and "peace" that are part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit ([Gal. 5:22](#))

Galatians 5: 21 - 23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, ***joy***, ***peace***, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law

Hebrews 12: 11 - All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the ***peaceful*** fruit of righteousness

EVEN JOY TO OTHERS

3 John 1: 2 - I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

and the more we will draw near to the kind of life that we will have in heaven. He realizes that this is the source of our true joy. "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" ([Rom. 14:17](#)). As we grow in holiness we grow in conformity to the image of Christ, and more and more of the beauty of his character is seen in our own lives. This is the goal of perfect sanctification which we hope and long for, and which will be ours when Christ returns. "And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" ([1 John 3:3](#)).

2. The Rewards

Romans 6: 22 - But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life

Paul says that as we become more and more obedient to God, "the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life" ([Rom. 6:22](#)).

The struggle for perfection will not go unrewarded. It is exactly to those who strive to attain the goal that the victory is assured. When they reach the glorious shores of eternity their ideal will be realized. It will be God's gift to them.

New Testament Commentary On Matthew - William Hendriksen

3. The Glory

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

Desiring God - John Piper

God's glory is His holiness. To glorify God is to yield ourselves that God in us may show forth His glory. It is only by yielding ourselves to be holy, to let His holiness fill our life, that His glory can shine forth from us. The one work of Christ was to glorify the Father, to reveal what a glorious Holy God He is. Our one work is, like Christ's, so by our obedience, and testimony, and life, to make known our God as "glorious in holiness," that He may be glorified in heaven and earth.

When the Lord Jesus had glorified the Father on earth, the Father glorified Him with Himself in heaven. This was not only His just reward; it was a necessity in the very nature of things. There is no other place for a life given up to the glory of God, as Christ's was, than in that glory. The law holds good for us too: a heart that yearns and thirsts for the glory of God, that is ready to live and die for it, becomes prepared and fitted to live in it. *Living to God's glory* on earth is the gate to living *in God's glory* in heaven. If with Christ we glorify the Father, the Father will with Christ glorify us too. Yes, we shall be like Him in His glory.

Like Christ - Andrew Murray

SOURCES:

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Perfectionism

There have always been some in the history of the church who have taken commands such as [Matthew 5:48](#) (“You, therefore, **must be perfect** as your heavenly Father is perfect”) or [2 Corinthians 7:1](#) (“let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and **make holiness perfect** in the fear of God”) and reasoned that since God gives us these commands, he must also give us the ability to obey them perfectly. Therefore, they have concluded, it is possible for us to attain a state of sinless perfection in this life. Moreover, they point to Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly” ([1 Thess. 5:23](#)), and infer that Paul’s prayer may well have been fulfilled for some of the Thessalonian Christians. In fact, John even says, “No one who abides in him sins” ([1 John 3:6](#))! Do these verses not point to the possibility of sinless perfection in the life of some Christians? In this discussion, I will use the term **perfectionism** to refer to this view that sinless perfection is possible in this life.

On closer inspection, these passages do not support the perfectionist position. First, it is simply not taught in Scripture that when God gives a command, he also gives the ability to obey it in every case. See chapter 24, p. 499, for a discussion of the fact that God’s commands in Scripture do not always imply that we have the ability to obey them. God commands all people everywhere to obey all of his moral laws and holds them accountable for failing to obey them, even though unredeemed people are sinners and, as such, dead in trespasses and sins, and thus unable to obey God’s commands. When Jesus commands us to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect ([Matt. 5:48](#)), this simply shows that God’s own absolute moral purity is the standard toward which we are to aim and the standard for which God holds us accountable. The fact that we are unable to attain that standard does not mean that it will be lowered; rather, it means that we need God’s grace and forgiveness to overcome our remaining sin. Similarly, when Paul commands the Corinthians to make holiness perfect in the fear of the Lord ([2 Cor. 7:1](#)), or prays that God would sanctify the Thessalonians wholly ([1 Thess. 5:23](#)), he is pointing to the goal that he desires them to reach. He does not imply that any reach it, but only that this is the high moral standard toward which God wants all believers to aspire.

John’s statement that “No one who abides in him sins” ([1 John 3:6](#)) does not teach that some of us attain perfection, because the present-tense Greek verbs are better translated as indicating continual or habitual activity: “No one who lives in him **keeps on sinning**. No one who **continues to sin** has either seen him or known him” ([1 John 3:6](#) niv). This is similar to John’s statement a few verses later, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” ([1 John 3:9](#) niv). If these verses were taken to prove sinless perfection, they would have to prove it for all Christians, because they talk about what is true of everyone born of God, and everyone who has seen Christ and known him. [1 John 5:18](#) is to be understood in a similar way.

Therefore, there do not seem to be any convincing verses in Scripture that teach that it is possible for anyone to be completely free of sin in this life. On the other hand, there are passages in both the Old and New Testaments that clearly teach that we cannot be morally perfect in this life. In Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, he says, “If they sin against you—for **there is no man who does not sin**” ([1 Kings 8:46](#)). Similarly, we read a rhetorical question with an implied negative answer in [Proverbs 20:9](#): “Who can say, “I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin’?” And we read the explicit statement in [Ecclesiastes 7:20](#), “**Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.**”

In the New Testament, we find Jesus commanding his disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread; and **forgive us our sins** as we also have forgiven those who sin against us” ([Matt. 6:11-12](#), author’s translation). Just as the prayer for daily bread provides a model for a prayer that should be repeated each day, so the prayer for the forgiveness of sins is included in the type of prayer that should be made each day in a believer’s life.

As we noted above, when Paul talks about the new power over sin that is given to a Christian, he does not say that there will be no sin in the Christian’s life, but simply tells the believers not to let sin “reign” in their bodies nor to “yield” their members to sin ([Rom. 6:12-13](#)). He does not say that they will not sin, but says that sin will not dominate or “have...dominion” over them ([Rom. 6:14](#)).

The very fact that he issues these directions shows his realization that sin will continue to be present in the lives of believers throughout their time on earth. Even James the brother of our Lord could say, “**We all make many mistakes**” ([James 3:2](#)), and if James himself can say this, then we certainly should be willing to say it as well. Finally, in the same letter in which John declares so frequently that a child of God will not continue in a pattern of sinful behavior, he also says clearly, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” ([1 John 1:8](#)). Here John explicitly excludes the possibility of being completely free from sin in our lives. In fact, he says that anyone who claims to be free from sin is simply deceiving himself, and the truth is not in him. See chapter 24, p. 498, n. 16, for a discussion of the view that [1 John 1:8](#) does not necessarily apply to all Christians.

But once we have concluded that sanctification will never be completed in this life, we must exercise pastoral wisdom and caution in the way we use this truth. Some may take this fact and use it as an excuse not to strive for holiness or grow in sanctification—a procedure exactly contrary to dozens of New Testament commands. Others may think about the fact that we cannot be perfect in this life and lose hope of making any progress in the Christian life—an attitude that is also contrary to the clear teaching of [Romans 6](#) and other passages about the resurrection power of Christ in our lives enabling us to overcome sin. Therefore, although sanctification will never be completed in this life, we must also emphasize that it should never stop increasing in this life.

Moreover, as Christians grow in maturity, the kinds of sin that remain in their lives are often not so much sins of words or deeds that are outwardly noticeable to others, but inward sins of attitudes and motives of the heart—desires such as pride and selfishness, lack of courage or faith, lack of zeal in loving God with our whole hearts and our neighbors as ourselves, and failure to fully trust God for all that he promises in every situation. These are real sins! They show how far short we fall of the moral perfection of Christ.

However, recognizing the nature of these sins that will persist even in more mature Christians also helps to guard against misunderstanding when we say that no one will be perfect and free from sin in this life. It is certainly possible that many mature Christians at many times during the day are free from conscious or willful acts of disobedience to God in their words or their deeds. In fact, if Christian leaders are to “set the believers an **example** in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” ([1 Tim. 4:12](#)), then it will frequently be true that their lives will be free from words or deeds that others will count as blameworthy. But this is far removed from attaining total freedom from sin in our motives and in the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

John Murray notes that when Isaiah the prophet came into the presence of God he could only cry out, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” ([Isa. 6:5](#)). And when Job, whose

righteousness was earlier commended in the story about his life, came into the presence of almighty God, he could only say, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" ([Job 42:5-6](#)). Murray concludes from these examples and from the testimony of other saints through the history of the church:

Indeed, the more sanctified the person is, the more conformed he is to the image of his Savior, the more he must recoil against every lack of conformity to the holiness of God. The deeper his apprehension of the majesty of God, the greater the intensity of his love to God, the more persistent his yearning for the attainment of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, the more conscious will he be of the gravity of the sin that remains and the more poignant will be his detestation of it.... Was this not the effect in all the people of God as they came into closer proximity to the revelation of God's holiness? John Murray, **Redemption Accomplished and Applied** p. 145.

Questions for Personal Application

- Can you remember in your own experience the definite beginning to sanctification that occurred when you became a Christian? Did you sense a clear break from the ruling power and love of sin in your life? Do you really believe that you are even now dead to the ruling power and love of sin in your life? How can this truth of the Christian life be of help to you in specific areas of your life where you still need to grow in sanctification?
- As you look back over the last few years of your Christian life, can you see a pattern of definite growth in sanctification? What are some things that you used to delight in which no longer interest you? What are some things that you used to have no interest in that now hold great interest for you?
- As you have grown to greater maturity and holiness in the Christian life, have you become more conscious of the weight of sin that remains in your heart? If not, why has this not been so? Do you think that it would be helpful if you had a greater consciousness of the sin that remains in your own life? If you had this, what difference would it make in your own life?
- How would it affect your life if you thought more about the fact that the Holy Spirit is continually at work in you to increase your sanctification? In living the Christian life, have you maintained a balance between your passive role and your active role in sanctification, or have you tended to emphasize one aspect over the other, and why? What might you do to correct this imbalance, if there is one in your life?
- Have you thought previously that sanctification affects your intellect and the way you think? What areas of your intellect still need quite a bit of growth in sanctification? With regard to your emotions, in what areas do you know that God still needs to work to bring about greater sanctification? Are there areas or aspects of sanctification that need to be improved with respect to your physical body and its obedience to God's purposes?
- Are there areas where you have struggled for years to grow in sanctification, but with no progress at all in your life? Has this chapter helped you regain hope for progress in those areas? (For Christians who have serious discouragement over lack of progress in sanctification, it is very important to talk personally to a pastor or other mature Christian about this situation, rather than letting it go on for a long period of time.)
- Overall, has this chapter been an encouragement or discouragement to you in your Christian life?

Scripture Memory Passage

Romans 6:11-14: So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

“Take Time to be Holy”

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in him always, and feed on his Word.
Make friends of God’s children; help those who are weak;
Forgetting in nothing his blessing to seek.
Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct his likeness shall see.
Take time to be holy, let him be thy guide,
And run not before him, whatever betide;
In joy or in sorrow, still follow thy Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in his Word.
Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul;
Each thought and each motive beneath his control;
Thus led by his Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.
Author: William D. Longstaff, 1887

Alternate hymn: “Trust and Obey”

- H. Lenski