

Spiritual Maturity (7)

Ponder: Loving and Being Loved

Scripture: “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48, NKJV).

Well-intentioned brethren have quoted the passage above and claimed it commands us to be absolutely without sin because God is sinless. There is no telling how many people have been sent on a guilt trip and made to feel hopeless because they know they aren't flawless and never will be flawless this side of heaven.

Should we resist sin and strive to be obedient? Of course! But we should also read Scripture within its context, and the context of Matt. 5:48 is not “perfection” in the sense of flawless behavior. In fact, the New Testament never uses “perfect” in regard to sinlessness. Rather, Jesus was dealing with the subject of mature love. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies . . .” (5:43-44a).

Immature people love only those who love them. Such “love” is incomplete, being based on emotion, or how appealing someone is. Jesus challenged His disciples to have a more mature, complete love: “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? (5:46-47).

The Lord does not tell us to do anything He is unwilling to do Himself. God demonstrates His love, even for His enemies, as “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” In view of this, Jesus exhorted His disciples to “be sons of your Father in heaven” (5:45, that is, be like Him, as children imitate the characteristics of their father).

Mature love is based not on emotion, but on commitment. You resolve to seek what is in the other person's best interest, regardless of their attitude or behavior toward you. That's what Jesus did, and He taught us to do likewise.

Song: “I Love You With The Love Of The Lord”

Prayer: Loving Father, We are thankful that You love us even though we are unworthy. We thank You for the love of Jesus, and pray that You will help us to love as He loved. In His name, Amen.