

Perfect Love

Ponder: Are you perfect as God is perfect?

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

Misapplication of the verse quoted above has sent countless souls on an unnecessary guilt trip! After all, who among us would dare to claim to be "perfect" (without fault; flawless)? If we claim to be without sin, we're lying and deceiving ourselves (1 Jn. 1:8-10).

Fortunately, "perfect" in the New Testament doesn't mean sinless or flawless. It means complete or mature (as opposed to partial or childish). Paul used this word to contrast "that which is perfect (complete)" to "that which is in part" (1 Cor. 13:10). He used it again to contrast "a perfect (mature) man" to "children tossed to and fro" (Eph. 4:13-14). In neither case did it have anything to do with sinlessness or flawless behavior.

Jesus commanded perfection as He concluded a segment of teaching about love. Conventional wisdom back then said, "love your neighbor and hate your enemy" (Matt. 5:43). But such "love" (if you can even call it that) was woefully incomplete. By contrast Jesus taught, "Love your enemies" (v. 44).

What? Love my enemies? Preposterous! You can almost see people rolling their eyes. Why would anybody love their enemies? But here's the clincher: God loves not only His friends, but His enemies! He demonstrates that love by sending blessings (sunshine, rain) on the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. We expect sons to imitate their fathers. If you want to be sons of your Father in heaven, you must love your enemies as He loves His (Matt. 5:45).

Loving only those who love you makes you as good as a despised social outcast (tax collector, Matt. 5:46). That's not exactly something to write home about! Jesus demands better from us. He wants us to have a perfect (complete) love like the love of God.

Don't let misguided people send you on a guilt trip because you aren't sinless or flawless. Jesus didn't command that! He did, however, require us to have a complete love like that of our Heavenly Father. That's a tall order, but we can fulfill it by His grace.

Hymn: "I Love The Lord"

Prayer: Loving Father, we praise and thank You for loving us even when we were Your enemies. Help us to love our enemies as well as our friends, and above all to love You. In Jesus' name, Amen.