

Christian Perfection

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect".

(Matt. 5:48)

What does perfect mean?

Once a person repents of all sin they are justified (saved) and the process of sanctification (perfection) begins. Sanctification is the cleansing of all outward and inward sin. We all know that no one will be sinlessly perfect while on this earth so what does Jesus mean when He tells us to be perfect? The word perfect in this verse does not mean sinless perfection but rather it means "mature" or "complete". In Matt. 5:43-48, Jesus tells us that, as well as loving our neighbours, we are to love our enemies also and in the last verse He says, *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"*. The perfection Jesus is talking about is being perfect in love, mature in our faith, and it is achieved by loving everyone, even our enemies.

What is love?

There is no gift, no service, nothing at all which comes near to love. To stress the importance of love, Jesus gave a new command: *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another"* (John 13:34). Then Rom. 13:9 tells us that that all the commandments *"are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'"*, and v.10 continues on to explain what love is - *"Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law"*. So we can see that love, which is the fulfilment of the Law, is doing no harm to our neighbour. If we lie or steal or hate or lust or covet etc. then we are not loving our neighbour but rather we are harming him. So, Jesus' command to be perfect means that we should be striving to love God and all mankind by not sinning against them and, of course, to do good as we are able.

Some other passages urging us to perfection

Jesus' command to be perfect in love is not isolated. The Bible continually urges us to perfection, holiness and sanctification. Here are some examples -

- 1) The definition of a perfect Christian is one who strives to obey the two great commandments to *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength [and] love your neighbour as yourself"*, (Mark 12:30-31).
- 2) 1 Pet. 1:16 says, *"Be holy, because I am holy"*. This verse speaks for itself.
- 3) 1Thess. 5:23 says, *"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"*. Paul's prayer clearly tells us that God wants to sanctify our entire being so that we are blameless at the coming of Jesus.
- 4) Eph. 5:25-27 tell us that Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might present it to Himself as a glorious church, not having stain, wrinkle or blemish, but that it might be holy and blameless.

From these examples we can see that perfection, being holy and blameless, is God's desire for everyone in Christ, so we should pursue it with all our might.

Considering our sinful nature, how do reach this state of perfection?

Loving all people does not come naturally to anyone. If we are to *"love one another deeply, from the heart"*, (1 Pet. 1:22), then we need a new heart, and that is exactly what God provides. In Ezek. 36:25-27 God says, *"I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws"*. God renews our stony hearts and sends His Holy Spirit to guide and empower us to follow His decrees ... decrees such as *"Be holy, because I am holy"*.

The following two passages explain how the Spirit perfects us -

2 Pet. 1:3-4 say, "*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness [so that] you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world [which is sin] caused by evil desires*".

Rom 8:4 tells us that "*the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit*".

From these two passages, we see that the Spirit guides and empowers us to escape the corruption of sin so that we can FULLY meet God's righteous requirements. So, it is through the God's Divine Power, the Holy Spirit, that we are able to be perfected.

The process of perfection (sanctification)

There is no doubt that being perfect in love is possible because Jesus commanded it and the Bible continually urges us toward it. The process of being sanctified "*through and through*" is a tough road but nothing is impossible for God. How close you or I come to perfection is entirely our choice. If we say, "Ahh, it's rubbish! No one can be perfect in love", then we can be sure that we will never reach the goal ourself. However, if others are seeking it then we shouldn't be so unwise as to ridicule them as they are simply being obedient. What grounds can anyone have for objecting to someone seeking to be motivated by the love of God in all he says and does?

So, how do we achieve this goal? The answer is given in the likes of 2 Pet. 1:3-4 and Rom. 8:4, previously quoted. In these verses, it is God's promise that, through the Holy Spirit, we can fully meet His righteous requirements and escape the corruption of sin. This is done by humbly confessing our sins as soon as the Spirit convicts us. 1 John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*". The promise in this verse is that once we confess, we are forgiven and will be purified from all unrighteousness – that is, we will be perfected. This takes time and determination.

Even though we are bound to stumble from time to time and may feel that we are wasting our time, let's immediately get up and persevere because the Lord is able to bring us to the goal He has set for us. James 1:4 says, "*Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*".

We are told that "*perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love*" (1 John 4:18). Christian perfection is God's love filling our entire being and governing all our words and actions and it results in "*the peace of God, which transcends all understanding*" (Phil. 4:7). There is no greater goal in Christianity than perfect love ... and seeking anything else is missing the mark.

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