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“Be Perfect”? How?

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“Be Perfect”? How?

Day 32

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.... 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? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-44, 46-48)

Jesus tells us, “Be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” But how can we possibly be perfect like that? Don’t Jesus’ words just set us up for failure? What does He mean?

Webster’s Dictionary defines perfect as “being entirely without fault or defect, flawless ... having excellence in every part ... as in an unattainable state.” The world tells us “perfect” is being at the top of the class. It is breaking the track record each time you run a race. Religion drives us to think “perfect” involves obeying every law in the rulebook.

And so we work hard for good grades. We strive for fast race times. We try to obey the rules, especially the ones we feel are most important. And when we succeed, we are praised. Teachers, coaches, bosses, friends, and family give us approval, and we feel valued ... conditionally ... for a time.

But when we inevitably fall short, we feel less-than. How easy it is to believe Satan’s lies that because we don’t achieve some high standard, we are defective and unacceptable.

You and I were not created to be “perfect” in the way the dictionary defines the term. Being “perfect” by the world’s definition is actually a denial of our humanity.

The Greek word for perfect, *teleios*, actually means living out the goal set for each of us by God. *Teleios* is not an end to be reached; it is a way of continual life. It does not imply that we are without sin. Rather *teleios* refers to a condition in which we

imperfect, messed-up humans are in ongoing relationship with our perfect Creator.

On the cross, Jesus took our sins and imperfections; we are complete in Him. The Father sees us wrapped in the perfection of His Son. We are perfect when we give up our own striving to be perfect (by the world's definition) and rest in the perfection of our Savior.

We were not created to live as independent beings. The world and religion say, "*I can do it. I can pull myself up to that standard.*" Satan said, "*I will exalt my throne above the stars of God*" (Isaiah 14:13). But our soul—the *I* of us—was created to be led by the Spirit. We were created to say, "O LORD, You are my God. *I will exalt You. I will praise Your name*" (Isaiah 25:1).

Acknowledging Jesus as our Savior—exulting our Lord—gives Him proper place in our lives. Being perfect—living life as God created you to—comes from accepting yourself as you are and living in ongoing surrender and obedience to the perfect One. He welcomes you and cherishes you as you are.

God's definition of "perfect" is based in His perfect love. He is the source of the love that makes us perfect. Jesus' love goes beyond loving your neighbor. It blesses those who curse you. It is kind to those who hate you. It prays for the ones who abuse and persecute you. God's love extends even to your enemies.

It isn't in you or me to love like that. Maybe a good person could love a neighbor ... but to love an enemy? Only God can do that. You are perfect when you live in Christ and let His love radiate through you to all, including your worst enemy.

Ponder for a Moment

How might you have tried to make yourself "perfect" in the past?

How might embracing God's definition of "perfect" change your opinion of yourself?

How might it change your opinion of God?