

Biblical Perfection

Matthew 5:48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

(Matthew 5:48)

The Apostle Paul admitted that he was imperfect. He said, “I have not obtained all of the promises or yet been made *perfect*” (Philippians 3:12). Yet, just three verses later he makes this interesting comment, “All of us who are *perfect* should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you” (Php 3:15). The interesting thing is that Paul uses the exact same Greek word for perfect: *Teleios*. He in effect says that he is not perfect yet he is perfect at the same time. What are we to make of this?

James does the same thing using the same word. “We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says he is a *perfect* man, able to keep his whole

body in check” (James 3:2). Yet, he began his book with these words, “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be *perfect* and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:4).

This strange paradox is found all over Scripture. On the one hand you have verses about unrighteousness and sinfulness. Proverbs, “Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?’” (Prov 20:9). Psalm 130:3 says, “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins... who could stand?” (Ps 130:3). Job asks, “How can a mortal be righteous before God?” (Job 9:2). Answer: He can’t! For elsewhere Scripture says, “There is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10).

On the other hand you have verses about righteousness and *blamelessness* from very same men. “In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was *blameless* and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). Psalm 18:23, “I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin.” Proverbs 11:5, “The righteousness of the blameless makes a straight way for them.”

Let me state right here up front that this tension demonstrates that whatever the “perfection” is that Christians have, it is not intrinsic to them. It can’t be. If we continue to sin and yet are somehow viewed as righteous, then this righteousness cannot originate in us, because we are sinful. Also, we cannot be perfect and imperfect at the same time in the same respect, because that would be a logical contradiction. The Bible therefore explains the paradox this way. The righteousness we have is an *alien righteousness*. It comes from somewhere else. The Scripture calls it *the righteousness that comes from God* (Rom 10:3; cf. Php 3:9).

Far too many people are busy working away to get God to approve of them. They are establishing *their own righteousness* through their own idea of good works. *Muslims* blow up infidels in order to be rewarded by Allah in the afterlife. As a good work that they alone are capable of, *Buddhists* seek enlightenment by realizing that they are part of the divine. *Atheists* do good things to others so that it will not come back to bite them later.

Even many **Christians** are duped into holding to a form of self-righteousness when they do something, for example “**making Jesus the Lord of their life**” or “**letting go and letting God**,” which becomes the one smart choice that they made as they improve upon the grace that God gave them. In this way, the world becomes like the Jew who Paul says did not submit to God’s righteousness but sought to establish his own. There is a **zeal that people have for God that is not in accordance with knowledge (Rom 10:2)**.

Combining zeal for God with true knowledge of God is absolutely critical if one hopes to inherit eternal life. And so we come to our text this morning. At the end of **Matthew 5** Jesus has this remarkable concluding statement about how kingdom people are to relate to the Law of God. “**You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect**” (**Matt 5:48**).

What a summary of the Law! When he began this section on the Law in **5:17-20**, Jesus said that if you wish to enter the Kingdom of God your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisee. Now he seems to be telling

us what that righteousness must look like: You must be perfect.

The all important question of course is what does he mean by perfect? I hope to give you a biblical answer for this by the time we are finished here this morning. Whatever our answer is, it has to make sense of the tension I raised at the beginning. It has to be able to explain how we are perfect and yet how we are not perfect at the same time.

I believe this is vitally important for each of you to be able to understand *and articulate* to others. Because herein lies the answer to both how God may *justly* save sinful people *and* what those sinful people look like once they are saved. If you can't explain this to other people, then you can't explain to them Christianity. And if you can't explain Christianity, then there is a chance that you don't know what it means to be a Christian yourself.

So then, what did Jesus mean when he said you are to be perfect? **First**, you should know that there are various English words that we use to translate this one

Greek word. For example, there is the word “**mature**.” In **1 Cor 14:20** Paul says, “**Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be *adults*.**” That is, “be mature,” not like little kids. Here, the word has **a component of development**.

But the word also has the idea of **fullness; as in completion or totality**. **Heb 9:11**, “**When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more *perfect* tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.**” A more perfect tabernacle is not a mature tabernacle, but a more excellent one; a heavenly sanctuary; a *perfect* sanctuary.

Now, in Matthew 5:48 all of the English translations say we are to be “perfect” rather than “mature.” And I think the reason why is because of the comparison that is made between us and God. Thus, the **second** point.

You will notice that this word describes a quality that God himself possesses. **Be perfect *as your heavenly Father is perfect***. Now, God is not mature in the sense

that he grew up. He is perfect in the sense that he is morally upright and always has been. He is the unchanging standard, not some growing and developing standard.

Thus, in the OT we find verses like this. **Psalm 18:30**, “As for God, his way is *perfect*; the word of the LORD is *flawless*.” Note the comparison between God’s ways and his word. The *Law* of God is perfect because the *way* of God is perfect. The Law is a reflection of God Himself. God is perfect. Jesus is saying we are to be like God in this way.

Third, there is OT background that you need to know about where Jesus gets this verse from. The form of Jesus’ teaching here is found **Leviticus 19:2**, “Be *holy* because I, the LORD your God, am *holy*.” Just insert the word “perfect” for “holy” and you have the same thing.

Now, the word in Hebrew for “holy” is *qadosh*. The Greek LXX translates it as *hagios*. In Matthew’s account, Jesus uses the word *teleios* rather than *hagios*. And so we are left to wonder, if he is quoting from **Lev 19:2**, why

change the word? Peter quotes from **Lev 19:2** and doesn't change the word at all (**1 Pet 1:15-16**). Why does Matthew? Apparently, Jesus is not merely interested in holiness, though that is obviously implied in the word perfect. Instead, Jesus is getting at something more than even holiness.

Perhaps Luke can help us understand Matthew's point. There is a parallel account of these things in **Luke 6:36**. Luke says, "*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*" Luke's context is identical to Matthew's. He has just talked about loving your enemies and now Jesus says this. The problem is that once again the word is different from Matthew's. Luke's word is *oiktirmon*. If Matthew meant mercy, he could have used Luke's word. But he doesn't. Again, he uses the word "perfect." While this does not negate the fact that we are to be merciful, it does not really explain the difference between Matthew and Luke.

There is one more OT Scripture that I think can help us out. **Deuteronomy 18:13** says, "*You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.*" The word for blameless is

the Hebrew: *tamim*. The really interesting thing about the word *tamim* or “blameless” is that the Greek LXX often translates it as *teleios* or “perfect.” For example, God commends Noah as a blameless man (**Gen 6:9**). When it says “**You shall be blameless before the LORD your God,**” this is also same word Jesus uses.

So when Jesus says you are to be perfect, he is saying you are to be blameless, like Noah and Job were. Thus, I think what is happening in our verse today is that while Jesus is using the *form* of **Leviticus 19:2** in the Sermon on the Mount in the book of Matthew, he is using the *word* of **Deut 18:13**.

In light of this, Jesus is not summing up the Law by making up a new command. He is once more pointing out the heart of the Law of Moses that has always existed. He does this by combining two ideas into one. Jesus is telling us what the Law demands and what God demands of kingdom people. It has always been the case that we are to be perfect.

Yet, this does not explain the paradox. For, Noah and Job were in fact *sinnners*. The Scripture says that they were blameless or “perfect” and yet they sinned. This paradox gets to the very heart of the Christian message. If such a thing has never bothered you, then you don’t understand God’s holiness or your own sin very well. There is a mystery here that has been revealed in these last days through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the reason I am taking an entire Sunday to discuss this one verse.

Remember, this same “blameless” or “perfect” Job once asked, “**How can a man be righteous** (Heb - *tsadhaq*; LXX – *dikaio*) **before God?**” If Job already was perfect, then why would he ask how anyone can be righteous before God? Righteousness, you see, is what allows a person to be perfect. Can you imagine a blameless person who is unrighteous? Job’s question is as important today as it was back then. **How can a man be righteous before God?**

Friend, **Job knew the answer.** He knew that **it was *not* to be found in establishing his own righteousness.** Rather, he understood that the righteous live *by faith*.

Listen to Job's great declaration of faith in Jesus Christ, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27). This is one of the great declarations of faith in Christ in the entire OT.

This is vitally important to understand. There is a righteousness that is by the Law. God will grant this righteousness as just compensation for faithfully acting out the terms of the covenant of works. "What is that?" you ask? The covenant of works is a mutual bond established by God with all people on earth. It is what makes all people responsible for their actions. The requirements of this covenant are written on your hearts. This is why even the unbeliever has a conscience that accuses or defends him when he sins (Rom 2:15).

This covenant, like all covenants, has terms. The terms are that if you perform your part of the covenant, God will reward you with eternal life. If you do not, God will curse you with everlasting damnation. This is what the

Law itself said. “The man who does these things will live by them” (Lev 18:5; Rom 10:5). This was not just a misunderstanding of Moses by the Jews. They did not make up the idea of salvation by works. It is right there in the Law itself.

God is fair. “To all those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life” (Rom 2:7). He will do it as a matter of simple justice, like an employer paying the employee for what he has done. “To the man who works, his wages are not credited as a gift, but as an obligation (Rom 4:4).” Thus, Scripture is abundantly plain. Under the terms of the covenant of works, “It is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous” (Rom 2:13).

But the all important question now is this. What are the terms of this covenant? In a word: Perfection. Friends, Christianity today has completely missed the question. We aren’t even asking it. We tell people that the problem with them is that they are not fulfilled and happy, when the real problem is that they have violated the terms of the covenant of works and are going to hell

for it. The problem is not that we are unsatisfied. The problem is that God's wrath abides upon those who wish to live under the terms of this covenant.

Friend, if you wish to inherit eternal life by being righteous according to the law, you must be perfect and do all the law. As Moses said in another place, "If we are careful to obey *all* this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, **that will be our righteousness**" (Deut 6:25). How much of obedience does the law require? All¹ obedience. Spurgeon said once, "even if you were absolutely perfect in every sense from this moment on, it wouldn't do anything to justify *past* disobedience".

But thanks be to God, this is where Jesus comes in. God has graciously sent Jesus to us to provide representation through another covenant. We call it the covenant of grace. Since as we have seen, no child of Adam is capable of perfect obedience even though the Law demands it, God condescends in pure grace to save us

¹ All = כל as in אֶת-כָּל-הַמִּצְוָה (if you do *all* the law).

another way. This way comes because Jesus obeys the terms of the covenant of works as a representative for all who trust in him by faith. This is how Job knew that he would live. He had a *redeemer*: The Lord Jesus Christ.

You can see this even in the Sermon on the Mount by going back to **Matt 5:17**. Jesus said, “**I have not come to abolish the law... but to *fulfill* it.**” Jesus’ preface shows that whatever the law commands a human to do will be fulfilled and done *by him*.

You simply cannot understand **Matt 5:48** apart from **5:17**. It is not that we fulfill the Law as we apply his teachings to ourselves. It is that he fulfills the very law that he is commanding us to obey. There is a reason why Jesus is called “**The Lord *our* Righteousness**” by Jeremiah (**Jer 23:6**). It is not merely that he is the Lord *of* Righteousness, but that he becomes *our* righteousness. There is another way to heaven. It is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this verse, Jesus identifies with his listeners. He has become one of them. He has come down from heaven.

He became a man. He was born under law. He was circumcised and baptized. He was tempted by the devil. He has become True Israel. He obeys as one of them where they fail to obey themselves. **In this way he fulfills the law.** He is the Better Moses not because he is giving a new Law, but because he is the perfect mediator of that Law. He obeys where even Moses fell short. He is the perfect one. He is the one you are to look upon by faith to remove the curse of your sin.

The idea of the covenant of works is that God credits the righteousness of Jesus to the account of any who trust in His righteousness rather than their own. You see, though the God is fair and will reward those who obey the law with a declaration of righteousness, all of us are sinful. Therefore, even though Scripture says **“It is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous (Rom 2:13),”** it nevertheless **concludes** that **because of sin “No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law” (Rom 3:20).**

But **“Christ is the end of the law,”** the Bible says, **“so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes”**

(Rom 10:4). This is the good news of the gospel. The righteousness Job sought was found by faith and not by works. The blamelessness of Noah and Job and of all Christians throughout time is found by trusting in the righteousness of God to **impute** or credit the righteousness of Jesus to their account even though they are not themselves righteous. This is what it means to submit to God's righteousness rather than establishing your own.

The perfection we gain is first and foremost a *legal* status that God credits as your sins are taken away in Jesus' death. God considers you as perfect because by faith – which is itself a gift of God - you are united to Christ, hidden in him and clothed with his righteousness. The metaphor of clothing is critical to think about.

Job says, “I put on righteousness as my clothing” (Job 29:14). The Psalm says, “May your priests be clothed with righteousness” (Ps 132:9). And Galatians says, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:26-27).

Clothing is something you “put on.” It is not a part of who you are. In other words, righteousness is a status you have even though underneath you remain sinful. This is why Martin Luther used the idea of being a little piece of dung covered with snow to get at the biblical idea that we are simultaneously just and sinners.

This is the essential difference between Roman Catholicism and the Reformed Protestantism. We believe the Scripture talks about being *imputed* with someone else’s righteousness and that this imputation is applied by God through the instrument of faith alone. Rome on the other hand believes that faith is not the instrumental cause of justification. The sacraments are. Faith is necessary in Rome’s teaching, but it is not the first and only ground of justification. Because of this, justification is *not a declaration in the Roman view*, at least not until we stand before God after we die. On earth, justification is an *infusion* of righteousness. That is, the righteousness that God looks upon the believer as having is not Christ’s righteousness. It is their own. It

is Christ's righteousness infused into them not credited to them.

The problem, as many Catholics are aware is that we continue to sin. Thus, the justification that begins with the churches faith as you are baptized can be lost if you commit a mortal sin. And so, in order to regain your righteous status, you have to receive another sacrament: penance. This is what happens when justification rests upon your own righteousness, even if it is given like a transfusion of blood from Christ. If you do the wrong things, your righteous status is toast because it rests upon you and not Jesus Christ. Hence, Catholics have no assurance of salvation. They can't. Their justification ultimately depends as much upon them as it does upon God because in this system, justification only comes to a person at the end of their life.

But the Scripture declares that justification is completed at the initial stage because it rests upon Christ's righteousness credited to a believer. Therefore, it cannot be lost. Listen to the way Scripture speaks.

David said, “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will *never* count against him” (Ps 32:2; Rom 4:8). When it says God will not count sin against a man, the meaning is that he will not credit it to his account; not *ever*. The key word is “credit.” It means “imputation.” The idea is that sin will not be used against him in a court of law. God will not impute or attribute guilt *even though he is guilty*.

This is a revolutionary message unknown to all the religions of the world. And if it does not thrill you and cause you to gasp, then you do not know what it means to be justified.

But this is nothing new to the NT. This has always been the way of it. Abraham was not justified by what he did. Abraham did what he did because he was justified. Paul tells us that if Abraham was justified by works that he would have had something to boast about in front of God (Rom 4:2). He could have said to God, “Look at what I did for you.”

Instead, Abraham believed God and it was *credited* to him as righteousness (**Gen 15:6**). God gave Abraham a promise which was to give him a Seed. This person would save his people from their sins by becoming the sacrifice to appease the wrath of God. Abraham learned this lesson when God asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac. This story became a prefigurement of the sacrifice of Jesus. Abraham believed and trusted in God's promise and so in spite of his own sinfulness, God credited the righteousness of Jesus to his account. And in this way he became a blameless, perfect man.

This righteousness comes through faith, and yet faith is not the one good work you do that can cause you to boast. Rather, faith is the gift of God. Scripture says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (**Eph 2:8-10**).

Most people stop at **verse 9** to demonstrate that faith is the opposite of works. You can see how if faith originates in you that it would have to be a work because it would be something you could boast about before God. But since it is the gift of God, no one can say to God, “**I was smarter than others,**” or “**I was more righteous than they.**” No one may boast by saying, “**I trusted you when so and so did not.**” They can only say this out of gratitude for the gift that God so generously granted to them according to his electing love in Christ Jesus.

But now, **it is truly significant that Paul goes immediately from verse 9 to verse 10.** He says that salvation by faith alone has this implication which God prepared from all eternity to be another gift that would accompany faith. This gift is “**good works.**” We are not saved just to believe, but to act and do good works. We don’t do good works in order to receive grace. We receive grace in order to do good works.

I have focused a great deal so far on the imputation of righteousness that allows a person to have this perfect

status before God. You must get the order right in your mind and you must keep it right lest you begin with the Spirit but finish with the Law. But really, Jesus has already established this in the beatitudes. Prior to ever giving a law he has explained what kingdom people are like. And in those beatitudes he has even given a kind of order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) which presupposes the very thing I've talked with you about so far this morning.

In light of this, there is something entirely different about the command to “**be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect**” that we now need to discuss. It is absolutely vital that you understand this. It is this other side of the paradox and some Protestants have become guilty of ignoring it. Because of the status received by faith, God can rightly call sinners perfect. Hence, this command is attainable for every Christian.

Importantly, it is not attainable through self-righteousness. It is only attainable through Christ's righteousness. Nevertheless, we were created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Thus, when Jesus says “**Your**

righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees,” he is talking about more than the imputation we have already talked about. He is talking about actual righteousness that is found in observing the Law of God. For some reason, many Christians have come to the conclusion that obedience to the law is contrary to salvation as if law and grace are in mutually exclusive terms.

Here is where so many Protestants just absolutely fail to understand the Reformed doctrine of justification. It is also where Rome fails to understand the same. So many people think that justification by faith alone means that if you just say a prayer and walk an aisle that this is justification. It’s the old “once saved always saved” business that never has to incorporate obedience. Friend, that is not justification but self-deception. In fact, if there is no transformation of life, then this action is nothing more than just another form of self-righteousness. Walking an aisle is the furthest thing imaginable from biblical perfection.

Rome accused our Protestant fathers of teaching that faith alone means a faith that is alone. In others words,

they accused Calvin and Luther and others of teaching a faith that is not accompanied by works. But in this they like so many others completely missed the point. **The Reformers were concerned about the *ground* of justification.** The ground is not our works. It is not participation in the sacraments. It is not our righteousness that comes through infusion. It is Christ's righteousness that comes through accreditation.

With that said, R.C. Sproul writes,

The Reformers did not exclude the infusion of grace from the justified sinner. Indeed grace is poured into the soul via regeneration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit... The Reformers did say we are justified by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, but they did not say that this imputation excludes the infusion of grace into the believer.²

You see, we do not throw out infusion just because Rome taught it. **The issue is the order of it all.** Rome denies forensic imputation and calls it a legal fiction.

² Sproul, *Faith Alone*, p. 128.

They opt entirely for infusion of righteousness. We believe, however, that imputation becomes the grounds by which God can *justly* infuse righteousness into the heart of a sinner. Imputation comes first and it alone always remains the grounds for God's declaration that we are not guilty.

This is critical to your very salvation, because if we sin, we have a mediator who is faithful and *just* to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. We don't have to go through some kind of self-righteous penance to gain forgiveness. We go directly into the throne-room of God himself, to the place where Christ sits to intercede on our behalf. *He* forgives us of our sins because *he* is our righteousness. We have been clothed with Christ.

Thus, Calvin writes, "It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone: just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth, and yet in the sun it is not alone, because it is constantly conjoined with light." So, God considers us

legally perfect before we are actually perfect, and this explains *perfectly* our paradox.

Now, with this in mind, I hope it does not surprise you to be informed that every commentator I read, including Calvin and Luther, say that the perfection Jesus is talking about here is something we are to aim at. In all honesty, **Jesus is not concerned so much with the status of perfection, but with actually obeying God. It's not the motives here, but the obedience itself. It's not making up your own laws like the Pharisees, but knowing and obeying God's laws. Look at every single instance of blamelessness in the OT and you will see that it is always related to what the person does in relation to God's Law.**

The key is we do not obey because somehow God judges upon our sincerity. Nor does not weigh the scales such that if you meet the requirements 51% of the time that is enough. We do it *because* we have the status of perfection already.

Martin Luther thus writes about our verse, “We cannot be or become perfect in the sense that we do not have any sin, the way they dream about perfection. Here and everywhere in Scripture “to be perfect” means, in the first place, that doctrine be completely correct and perfect, and then, that life move and be regulated according to it. Here, for example, the doctrine is that we should love not only those who do us good, but our enemies, too. Now, whoever teaches this and lives according to this teaching, teaches and lives perfectly.”³

This brings up really the most important contextual point I can make about this part of the sermon. The problem as we have seen again and again was that the Pharisees self-righteousness was hypocritical. It was hypocritical because it was completely made up obedience. Jesus put it this way, “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men” (Mk 7:8).

³Luther, M. 1999, c1956. Vol. 21: *Luther's works, vol. 21 : The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis.

You see, they had no real interest in following *God's* law. They used God's word to invent their *own* laws. It's the most horrible type of biblical interpretation. They use the Scripture to invent law that are nowhere to be found in the Scripture. They twist and distort its real meaning to justify their hypocrisy. We have seen this at every turn throughout this chapter.

But Jesus demands that our perfection *not* be like the Pharisee. We are not to go around making up our own laws just because they seem righteous to us. “**There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death**” (**Prov 14:12**). Or think of it this way. You are not to say as the world does, “**Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!**” These are... based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (**Col 2:21-23**). Legalistic, unbiblical taboos that we impose upon one another are deadly to the freedom that Christ won for us: the freedom to serve God and obey His law rather than our own.

Instead, beloved, we are to follow *God's* law. This is, contextually speaking, what it means to be perfect. This is how our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisee. As the Psalmist said, “The law of the LORD is *perfect*, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes” (Ps 19:7-8). If you misunderstand justification as imputation with no subsequent working of the Holy Spirit in your life, then you have no way of explaining half of the OT! You won't be able to figure out how a sinner can talk about obeying God and loving his law, because you will see the law as opposed to the promises of God (contra Gal 3:21).

We act like our perfect Father as we follow his perfect Laws rather than our own. I honestly believe this is the main point that Jesus is making throughout this entire section of the Sermon on the Mount. For the believer who has already been transferred into the kingdom of God, is it really such an impossible thing to desire to

obey God's law? Sure, to keep it perfectly is impossible this side of heaven. But Jesus isn't really talking about that. The desire to keep it is the only response to the Law that a true believer can have.

As David the *sinner* said, “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long... I hate double-minded men, but I love your law... I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law... Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (Ps 119:97, 113; 163, 165). Is it any wonder then that Paul would write, “Love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:10). It is not just love in general, but love of the Law itself.

Those who hate God's law do so because it shows them their *unrighteousness*. And this they cannot stand because they are too busy establishing a righteousness of their own to bother with what God says. But the root of the hatred is that they hate God himself. They don't like his law because they don't like him. But the believer loves God's law because he now loves the God who gave it. This is the perfection Jesus is talking about.

And **what does this law tell us?** This law commands us to **love our neighbors** as ourselves. It commands us **not to take personal retribution**, but to leave room for God's wrath. It commands us to **make good on our oaths** by being people of integrity. It teaches us to **take seriously our covenantal vows** of marriage. It shows us that **the heart is the root of adultery and murder**. Therefore, we are **not even to lust after or hate** another person.

When followed, the Law is a lamp unto our feet and light unto our path. Beloved, if you wish to enter the kingdom of God, you must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. You must desire to follow God's law. You must not establish your own laws in its place. Neither can you ignore the law and think that this dead faith is true faith. It is high time that we Christians recapture the proper attitude the Scripture tells us to have about the Law of God. Obedience is not optional. This is the Law.

But if and when it is followed, it is because we trust in a good God and in a perfect Jesus Christ who has shown us what is good and what the Lord requires of us by first

becoming one of us and then obeying the law for us. This is the gospel.

Interestingly, the form that **Matt 5:48** takes can be read as either a command or a statement of fact. It can be translated as, “**You must be perfect,**” or as “**You shall be perfect.**”⁴ The former is the law. The latter is the promise found in the gospel.

In this verse, the two kiss. Obey God. That is the law you are to love and live by faith. And this is the gospel. Christ did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. He came to fulfill them; so that through his obedience and the subsequent obedience he grants to us by the Holy Spirit, we might have eternal life. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and confess him with your mouth and you will be saved.

⁴ Cf. Morris, *Matthew*, n. 171, p. 133.