



A Spiritual Encouragement Message November 6, 2020

Perfection

by Derrick Victor

Jesus is the master teacher. Even Pharisees were coming to Him for knowledge (**John 3:2**). When I find myself at odds with the teachings of Jesus, it is usually because I am at odds with myself. I cannot see the reality of the important words that Jesus has to teach. One of those teachings that I find myself at odds against, is found in the Sermon on the Mount.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:43-48)

I am at odds with this teaching for a number of reasons. To begin, I do not want to love my enemies. They are my enemies for a reason. They are vicious, mean, wicked, and heartless. They are enemies because they harm people. After all, I’m a pretty good person, so anyone who is my enemy must be really bad, right?

Well, not right... Many times, people become my enemy because they disagree with me. They tell me things I do not want to hear. Or they become enemies because they made a mistake and I wouldn’t let it go. I just knew that the mistake was the evidence of who they really were! Indeed, if we could see what God sees, we would be appalled, right?

Also, not right...

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Rom. 5:8, 10)

We were enemies of God, and He loved us enough to send His Son to die for us. I can barely

muster enough strength to smile at my enemy, let alone offer a sacrifice of life!

I wish this were the only thing I was at odds with, in Jesus' section about loving your enemies. But, alas, it is not. Jesus also went and threw in a small, but terrifying sentence, **“You therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48)**

Perfection and loving enemies... If anyone ever tells you that Christianity is a crutch, just point them to the Sermon on the Mount. I've never seen a crutch that challenged my walking so much! Yet, as I said in the beginning of the article, the reason I am at odds with Jesus' words are because I am at odds with myself. I do not like these commands, because they are hard. They hurt. In fact, sometimes, I want to lean in on the other sections of the NT where we talk about judgment, wrath, justice, and removing the sinful brother among us. These, while challenging, at least seem to demonstrate a wisdom in protection and righteousness. Where is the lesson in “loving my enemy”? It only seems to hurt. It feels like I'm being taken advantage of, or that I'm not standing up for myself.

Folks, herein lies the message. I am most often at odds with Jesus' words when I am at odds with myself. The reasons I gave above for being hurt or wanting justification, all have one thing in common. They are overly focused on “me”. How do “I” feel, as opposed to how does God feel? How do “I” feel, as opposed to what matters most.

The entire Gospel message is summed up in the fact that God loved us while we were still sinners. In fact, that message, is what “pricked the hearts” of those listening to Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**. Later, the Hebrew writer would say of the Word of God, that it is **“living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12)**

The Word of God is not so because the ink is poisonous, sharp (like a literal sword), or dangerous for any other physical reason. The Word of God is so because of the message found within. The message of love that crosses enemy lines. The message that demonstrates a kind of love to enemies that moves them from enemies, to family. Of course, this is the kind of love Paul desires the brethren at Corinth to show one another (**1 Cor. 13:4-7**). After all, this is the kind of love God has shown you and me.

When we can attain this kind of love, then we will find ourselves living in “perfection”. You see, Jesus wasn't saying to be perfect as in never making a mistake. “Perfect” in the scriptures is often complete, mature, total. Therefore, Jesus was saying that our love should mature to a point in which we are mature enough and complete enough to love our enemies. Loving our enemies is how we live out the Gospel in our daily lives. So, if you're not quite sure how to evangelize, why not start where God did? Love your enemies. Be perfect!