

Series: God & The Election #1836
Title: Matthew 5; Luke 6
Be Perfect As God Is Perfect

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Glad to have you with us today. And as a reminder we have asked and largely answered this question: as Christ's people, how are we to live in America during the time of the election? We have been focused on the content and language of our message of course not only in these times, but always. Our texts have been many, and right now we are in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke as Jesus gives us His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) and in the plateau (Luke). Let me read these for us and then we have a few verses remaining to discuss.

This is Matthew 5, verses 43-48. Jesus is speaking. **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the evil and the good*, and sends rain on *the righteous and the unrighteous.*⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?⁴⁸ Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."**

And now Luke chapter 6. Luke 6, beginning with verse 27, **"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Down to verse 32.)³² If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (And skipping ahead again to verses 35 and 36 of Luke 6)³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men.*³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."**

Let's focus on these specific words. "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" And "If you love those who love you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners love those who love them." This would have absolutely been very insulting to the Jewish religious rulers who no doubt picked up the sermon of Jesus. The Pharisees and the scribes assumed they were better than everyone else. But here Christ overturns their self-pride. He says, essentially, your love is the same as the tax collectors and the Gentiles. You simply love those who love you. You have a self-centered, a selfish kind of love.

We have to understand what the Pharisees and scribes thought of tax collectors. They saw them as the ultimate traitors, gone to work for the oppressive Roman government. They were dishonest, stealing from the Jews, having sold their souls to the great enemy of the Jewish people, the hated Romans. Therefore, the tax collectors were viewed as completely non-religious. They simply had to be rejected by God for their sinful and renegade ways. And yet, Jesus is *comparing* the love of the Pharisees and scribes to the love of the tax collectors? How outrageous!

And we have to understand what the Pharisees and scribes thought of the Gentiles. They were enemies! There was absolutely no mercy, grace, forgiveness or love available from God to such impure, evil, and irreligious people. To be a Gentile was to be an enemy of God and God's people. And yet, Jesus is *comparing* the love of the Pharisees and scribes to the love of the Gentiles? How outrageous! Christ says the love you have is the same kind of love your worst enemies have. You are no better than they.

And just as these words deeply offended many within Christ's hearing those days I believe these words offend many in Christ's hearing these days. Why? Because many times the Christian person's love is no better than the love which people who are not Christians possess and express. Many believers love those who love them. Many believers greet only their brothers and sisters. But they do not go beyond this. Their loves knows a very firm boundary.

This is self-centered love reserved only for others who love them in-return. And since most non-Christians do not love in return then certainly they will not be loved by the Christian.

And before any of us dismiss this, thinking, "Well, that does not describe me!" Sit with this for a while. Are you and I loving as Christ commands us to love? Do we truly love our enemies? Or do we really only love those who love us? The point Jesus emphasizes in this sermon is that Christ's people are to have a much higher standard for love than the people of this world. As the Lord said earlier, in Matthew 5 verse 16, **"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."** Does our love, especially for our enemies, stand out and shine like a bright light in a dark, evil world? Do we possess and express a lavish love for those who persecute us? Those who do us harm?

Obviously the tax collectors and the Gentiles in today's world do not have that kind of love. We would not expect them to. Why would they? They have not yet been redeemed by God's amazing grace. They are not saved. They do not belong to the people of God. God's love has not transformed their whole lives, from the inside-out, replacing a heart of stone with a heart of love. *But*, God has done and is doing this for us, dear Christian! Remember that old song, they will know we are Christians *by our love*. It's true. I believe many of us really need to hear and apply this teaching to our lives in a very practical way. And politics will really test this in us.

Do people you perceive to be your political opponents sense you love them? When you have an animated discussion about politics and related issues does the person with the opposing perspective know that at the end of the argument you will still love them? Is your tenor and tone *loving*? Or is it harsh, combative, and *unloving*? Friends, we should not expect people who are not Christians to express their opinions in love. But we must expect people who *are* Christians to express our opinions in love. And to emphasize how serious the Lord takes this, listen to verse 48 of Matthew 5. This is a real stunner.

Jesus Christ says, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Wait. What? We are to "be perfect." Only God is perfect. That's right. "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." What is the Lord saying? He is saying, be like God. The Greek word for perfect means to reach an intended end. Several times the word is translated "mature." Here, the meaning is perfection. God the Father is the standard and we all know He is the only perfect One. And you would be right to assume or to know that there's absolutely no way any of us can be perfect in this life *in our own* competency or will power or strength. Perfection is impossible! Correct.

However, as discussed earlier in this very series, when we talked about our total dependence on living by the Holy Spirit, what is impossible with men and women is possible with God. I am quoting Jesus there. Matthew 19, verse 26. **"With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."** In our self-righteousness it is impossible to be perfect. But when the righteousness of Christ is applied to our lives, when the Spirit of the Living God comes to live in us, when *God*, lives in us, well then the impossible becomes possible. We *can* be like God. We *can* live like God. We *can* love like God. Brothers and sisters, we *can* love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. We *can* live by the highest standard for love. God's love.

"You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." This is for genuine Christians this very day. And I hope you catch this implication. This is *only* for genuine Christian people. I am not sure if you have considered this, but as a follower of Christ you are very unique. In the words of one pastor I will soon quote from, Christians are enigmas. We are unusual. There is something very special about us. There is something that separates us from everyone who is not a Christian, and that is only we can love the way Christ commands and exemplifies His love.

I want to say more about this, but it will have to wait until next time. James 1.22 says, **"Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers..."** My prayer for myself and for you is that we will hear God's Word to us today, yes, and also that we will be doers of the Word. Let's practice what Jesus preached. Join us next time because God Is.

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