

**“Be Ye Perfect”**  
**Matthew 5:48**

During a brief devotional message, one of my pastor friends said: “The older I get the more the Bible comes alive to me – even some of those passages which have always been difficult for me to understand.”

Thinking about that statement challenged me to examine anew and afresh some of those Bible verses which have troubled me for many years. One such verse is Matthew 5:48 where Jesus said: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.” What I learned about this verse in my study of it, I now share in sermon.

1. Matthew 5:48 is not the only verse in the Bible which speaks of the believer’s perfection.

Deuteronomy 18:13: “Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God.”

Genesis 17:1: “I am the Almighty God. Walk before me and be thou perfect.”

II Corinthians 13:11: “Finally brethren, farewell. Be thou perfect.”

Ephesians 4:13: “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, unto a perfect man.”

Hebrews 6:1: “Let us go on unto perfection.”

James 1:4: “But let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and mature, wanting nothing.”

The whole Bible is a call to this kind and quality of life.

2. Focus only on Matthew 5:48. In that verse the word translated “perfect” is the Greek word “TELEIOS.”

In the Greek a person or a thing is perfect if that person or thing fully realizes the purpose for which that person or thing was made. William Barclay writes: “It is the whole teaching of the Bible that we only realize our manhood by becoming Godlike. The one thing which makes us like God is the love which never ceases to care for men, no matter what men do to it. We realize our manhood, we enter upon Christian perfection, when we learn to forgive as God forgives and to love as God loves.”

The Greek word “TELEIOS” also means mature. It is a dynamic word filled with vigor and vitality – real life. For the true Christian, becoming teleios – perfect – is a process of growth. The process starts when we accept Christ as Savior and Lord and continues day

in and day out as we remain faithful to God. God is developing us if we use our freedom of choice and allow Him to do so.

With this understanding of Matthew 5:48, I literally tremble when I think of the possibilities of a person's life if that person's life is guided completely by the Spirit of God.

3. God led me to realize that there is only one way to fulfill our Lord's command and to live that quality of life which Jesus had in mind when he said in Matthew 5:48: "Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." That one way is total dedication to God.

In connection with this thought I read the story of a Methodist Bishop who was visiting some of the churches of his denomination in the south. On Sunday morning he sat on the platform as the distinguished guest while the local pastor preached. It was a masterful sermon on the cross and near the middle of the sermon as the preacher began to stress the love of Jesus, the Bishop saw a strange sight. About halfway back in the congregation a woman rose to her feet, moving quietly and quickly she came to the front, folded her hands, and began to sway back and forth before the pulpit. No one seemed to be bothered and eventually she went back to her seat.

The Bishop was amazed and when the service was over, he made his way to that woman and said: "Forgive me, but why in the world did you get up from your seat, come to the front and sway back and forth before the pulpit? I just don't understand."

The woman smiled and answered, "You see, sir, my preacher was telling about Jesus, and I love Jesus so much that when someone starts talking about Him like that I just have to do something. It is natural to get up and move back and forth before the altar in order to show how much I love Jesus. And then when I leave here I go out to live for and serve the Jesus I worship here."

The Bishop was scheduled to preach that night and all afternoon he worried: What if that woman should do the same thing while he was preaching! And then he realized what the real concern was: What if she did not do the same thing while he was preaching! It would mean that he had not said the thing that touched her heart. So all afternoon the Bishop prayed that in the evening service he would be led to say something to touch that woman's heart.

As the Bishop preached that night he watched that woman carefully but she made no move. When his sermon was almost over, he was discouraged with a sense of failure. But as he came to the close, he began to talk about the love of God in sending His Son to redeem us from our sins. And suddenly, the woman was on her feet and moving to the front. She folded her hands and began to sway back and forth before the pulpit. In a soft, sweet voice, she began to sing an old spiritual. The front row of the congregation took it up and it swept across the crowd drowning out the voice of the Bishop. And this is what she sang:

I'm a-gonna tell Moses  
And I'm a-gonna tell David  
And I'm a-gonna tell Samuel too,  
God wants you to be a hundred percent  
Ninety-nine and a half won't do.

I'm a-gonna tell Peter  
And I'm a-gonna tell Paul  
And I'm a-gonna tell Matthew too,  
God wants you to be a hundred percent  
Ninety-nine and a half won't do.

Jesus said: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect."  
And we will never have that kind and quality of life until we surrender all we have and are to God. I wonder! Does God have us a hundred percent or are we trying to get by on ninety-nine and a half percent or less? The old spiritual is Biblical: Ninety-nine and a half percent commitment to God just will not do – in time or in eternity.

The hymn writer got it right:

All to Jesus I surrender.  
All to Him I freely give.  
I will ever love and trust Him.  
In His presence daily live.

Reverend Phillip R. Morrow Sr.