

YOU ARE TO BE JUST LIKE YOUR FATHER
Matthew 5:43-48

INTRO.:

1. I want to begin this AM with a pop quiz, but you will not have to think real hard about your answers.
 - a. I just want you to answer as you feel you should.
 - b. Question #1: How many of you believe you are perfect?
 - c. Question #2: How many of you believe it is possible for someone WHO IS STILL LIVING to become perfect?

2. Why is it that so few of us raised their hands?
 - a. I suspect that part of the reason is that for many of us our definition of “perfection” means “sinlessness.”
 - 1) Since we know that “*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23), we know that it is impossible to be perfect.
 - 2) But is that really the case?
 - b. Consider these scriptures:
 - 1) Gen 6:9: “*Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.*”
 - 2) Phil 3:15: “*Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude;...*”
 - c. Now one of two things is possible here.
 - 1) Either these people lived a totally sinless life in opposition to what Rom. 3:23 says.
 - 2) Or there is something about the Biblical concept of “perfection” that we do not understand.
 - d. I believe in our text for today that Jesus indicates that maybe there is something about “perfection” we do not understand.
 - e. When we use the word “*perfect*” we often think of it as being without any flaw or blemish.
 - 1) And since we all know that there are flaws & blemishes in our life no matter how hard we try to be perfect, we see this as an impossible goal.
 - 2) But the Greek word that is used here also means “mature, fully equipped, ready and able to do the job that needs to be done.”
 - 3) I feel that this is what Jesus was referring to here.
 - 4) He expects us to be mature enough to in putting into practice in our relationship with others what God has done for us.

3. In our text Jesus calls for us to “*love our enemies,*” “*pray for those who persecute you,*” and “*be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.*”
 - a. Perhaps our very first reaction when we hear these words is to think that Jesus is being unrealistic and telling us to do something that we cannot possibly do.
 - b. But since we know that Jesus does not make impossible demands, we have to dig a little deeper.

4. I believe that what He is saying here is that when people look at us, they should see a family resemblance between us and our heavenly Father.
 - a. Jesus is saying, “When people see you, I want it to be obvious that you are children of your Father in heaven. And just as your Father shows His love to everyone, I want you to learn to do the same thing.”
 - b. ILLUST.: Often we see children who look just like one of their parents.
 - 1) Someone may say that the son is a “spitting image” of his father.
 - 2) That is he looks like his father; he talks like his father; he walks like his father.
 - 3) And one day someone may even mistake him for his father.
 - c. So they way that we show we are perfect is by the love that we have for others, even our enemies.
 - d. The way that we show we are perfect is by expressing the same type of Love that our Father in heaven has.

5. In our lesson today we will be dealing with the subject of love as that is what Jesus chose to prove to the world that we are children of our heavenly Father.

6. I want us to notice three things Jesus taught about how we can be perfect, just like our heavenly Father is perfect.
 - a. First we will look at God's marvelous love.
 - b. Next we will look at mankind's faulty love.
 - c. And finally we will look at the mature Christian's love, or that which makes us perfect.

LESSON:

- I. 1st: Notice what Jesus said about God's marvelous love (vs. 45).
 - A. In this passage Jesus tells us two things about God's love:
 1. 1st: God shares His sun with all mankind.
 - a. It is God's sun since He made it.
 - 1) We could not exist in this world without it.
 - a) The sun that provides light and warmth to the earth.
 - b) Without it, we would live in perpetual darkness.
 - c) Nothing would grow in our soil.
 - d) Life on this planet would be totally impossible if it were not for God's sun.
 - b. And yet, God freely shares it with everybody.
 - 1) God shares it with the good and bad alike.
 - 2) His generosity is not determined by man's goodness or by our faithfulness to Him.
 - 3) And we can be very thankful that it is not.
 2. 2nd: God shares His rain with us.
 - a. He sends His rain on all as an unselfish expression of His love.
 - b. Think about what God is doing for us.
 - 1) What if God were to say to us, "I'll give you some sunshine today if you go to church on Sunday?"
 - a) Do you think our attendance would increase?
 - b) Do you think that it would cause more people to become concerned about their relationship with God?
 - 2) Or what if God were to tell us, "I'll send you some rain provided you ready your Bible and pray to me every day next week."
 - a) Do you think we might spend a little bit more time in His word and in prayer?
 - b) Or maybe if we were getting too much rain, spend a little less?
 3. 3rd: In addition to the sun and rain that Jesus mentioned here, the Bible also tells us that God owns everything – the silver, gold, cattle on a thousand hills, etc. (Psa. 50:100; Haggai 2:8).
 - a. Somehow man has concluded that all these things belong to us.
 - b. Our faulty reasoning has caused lot of problems in the world today.
 - 1) We say, "If you have enough money I will let you have some of my oil."
 - 2) Or, "If you will be my ally and support me I will let you have some of my wheat."
 - 3) Or, "If you behave just right and do what I tell you, I will let you have some of my corn."
 - B. But in every case, that is not what God does.
 1. God showers His blessings upon all mankind.
 - a. The righteous and the unrighteous.
 - b. Those who call upon His name and those who do not.
 - c. Those who worship Him and those who deny His very existence.
 2. And Jesus says, "That is the example of God's love that I want you to follow."
 3. "That is the example of love you must exhibit if you are going to be perfect just like your Father."
 4. How thankful we should be that God does not give sunshine and rain on the merits of our goodness - or withhold it on the lack of our goodness.

II. 2nd: Notice what Jesus said about mankind's' faulty love.

- A. What separates man's love from God's love is that man divides people into categories to determine who should be the recipients of his love and who should not.
1. There are some people we put in the "I love you" category.
 - a. These are the people who are attractive to us, or we happen to like.
 - b. They are the people who can benefit us, so we put them in the "I love you" category.
 2. Then, there are some people we put in a neutral category.
 - a. They are just border line.
 - b. We like them, but not quite as much as the people in the first category.
 - c. So we put them in the category of "I will love you when it is convenient for me to do so."
 3. Finally, there are the people we cannot stand.
 - a. These are the people we do not like, or those who do not like us – our enemies.
 - b. So we put them in the category of, "I do not love you."
- B. With these three categories in mind, think of the mess this world would be in if we controlled the sunshine, rain, etc.
1. If you suddenly became the wizard of Oz sitting behind the giant control box of the world what would you do?
 - a. To the first group of people in the "I love you" category.
 - 1) We might push the button and give them lots of sunshine.
 - 2) Then, when they have had enough sunshine we would pull another lever and give them just the right amount of rain.
 - 3) And we would keep doing this as long as they are in the "I love you" category.
 - b. To the second group of people who are kinda in the middle category.
 - 1) We might say, "If you behave yourself just right, and if you toe the line then I will send you some sunshine and rain.
 - 2) As long as you are the kind of people I think you ought to be, I will see that you get what you need.
 - 3) But if you ever change, you will not get anything."
 - c. To the final group of people you cannot stand, you might say:
 - 1) "Because I do not like you, you will not get anything."
 - 2) "Because you have mistreated me, or said some bad things about me, I will push the button so long that you will be begging for mercy."
 - 3) "Because you are my enemy I will pull the lever and wash you and everything you own away so that I will not have to be bothered with you anymore."
 2. While this is a fictitious illustration, sadly that is the way that we often behave toward others.
 - a. We are like little children fighting over a toy.
 - b. "It's mine and you cannot have it! I am not going to share it with you unless you behave exactly the way I want you to behave!"
 - c. You see our love can be faulty because we do not know how to put it into practice in our lives.
- C. So Jesus comes along and knocks all the props out from under us.
1. He says:
 - a. "I want you to love in such a way that when someone hits you on the right cheek, you will turn the other one as well."
 - b. "I want you to love in such a way that if someone asks you to go with them a mile, you will go with them two."
 - c. "I do not want you to love just your friends, but also your enemies."
 - d. "And I want you to pray for those who are persecuting you."
 2. Thus what Jesus is calling for is hard for us to understand.
 3. Jesus says, "I want you to love those people that are unloved and unlovable."
 - a. "I want you to love even the people who hate you, who are your enemies."
 - b. "For if you just love those who love you back, you are no better than the tax-collectors or Gentiles."

4. Remember that Jesus words were originally addressed to the Jewish people.
 - a. The two lowest categories of humanity to a Jew were the tax collectors and the Gentiles.
 - 1) The tax collectors were Jews who had made a deal with the Roman govt. to collect taxes from the Jewish people.
 - a) They often charged far more than the law required and pocketed the rest as their fee.
 - b) They were wealthy individuals who had gained their wealth at the expense of their Jewish neighbors.
 - 2) The Gentiles, or course, were also considered outcasts by the Jewish people.
 - b. Thus when Jesus said that if you only love people who will love you back in return, you are no better than these outcasts, Jesus got their attention.
5. The point Jesus was making was that He wants our love to be like that of our Father in heaven.
 - a. Rather than just loving those who love us, or treat us nicely, we are called to love all men.
 - b. Just like God sends the rain on the just and unjust, we are to show our love to the righteous and the unrighteous.

III. 3rd: Finally let us notice the mature type of love Jesus calls for in His disciples to possess.

- A. In Matt. 22:37-40 we find a dialogue taking place between Jesus and a Jewish lawyer: (Read).
 1. On this occasion Jesus was asked by the lawyer, "*What is the greatest commandment?*"
 2. In His response Jesus said that first and foremost we are to love God with every bit of our being – heart, soul, and mind.
 3. Then He added, we are also to love our neighbor as our self.
- B. There is something interesting we can notice in Jesus' response.
 1. You cannot "*love your neighbor as yourself*" until you have first learned to love yourself.
 - a. So when you love God with everything that is within you, then you will love what God has created.
 - b. And since we were created by God and in His image, we will love the fact of who we really are.
 2. The fact is that we need to learn to accept ourselves for what we are - with all our limitations and all our gifts.
 - a. We are a creation of God.
 - b. We are made in His image and contain His Spirit.
 - c. And we need to rejoice in the fact that we are God's people, created in His image.
 3. When we recognize and understand this fact then we will begin to love ourselves and our neighbors, as undesirable as they might seem to be.
- C. The point that Jesus was making is that it is not our right to separate and divide people into categories.
 1. Instead, our love is to be like God's love, a love that reaches out to all classes and races of people.
 2. And when we do that, there is a power found in our Christian love.
- D. After reading what Jesus said here you may be saying, "I just cannot do that. Jesus, what you are asking is the impossible."
 1. But Jesus says, "You are wrong. I did it. I am the example. And you can do it too."
 2. I have set the example for you to follow (Heb. 12:1ff).
 3. Follow in My footsteps and you can learn to love as I love and as your Father in heaven loves.
 4. You can be perfect as He is perfect if you practice my example of love.

CONC.:

1. ILLUST.: Some years ago Collier's Magazine published a story about a little girl in an orphanage.
 - a. She was quite unattractive and had many annoying habits, which resulted in her being shunned by the children and disliked by the staff.
 - b. The director of the orphanage looked for any good excuse to ship her off to some other institution.
 - c. Now for some time it had been suspected that she was writing clandestine notes to people outside of the orphanage.

- d. And then one afternoon their suspicions were confirmed.
 - 1) One of the children reported, "I saw her write a note and hide it on a tree near the stone wall."
 - 2) The director hurried to the tree and found the note, then passed it silently to his assistant.
 - 3) The note read, "To whoever finds this: I love you."

2. APPLIED: Someone else wrote a note and put it on a tree outside the city wall.
 - a. Of Him, too, it was written, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men."
 - b. Because of this they sought to get rid of Him.
 - 1) They took Him out to Calvary's hill where they crucified Him.
 - 2) They nailed Him to a tree.
 - c. But when men go to that tree, they find on a note that reads, "To whoever finds this: I love you."
 - 1) He loved us and He still loves us, and He is the one who gives us the power to love like that, as well.
 - 2) We cannot do it on our own.
 - a) It is humanly impossible.
 - b) But with Christ as our example, we can begin to have that kind of love, too.

3. Will you come and share in that love as you accept Jesus into your life?