

Imperfectly Perfect

In Matt.5:48, Jesus commands that those of the kingdom are to be “***perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***” Though that’s a TALL order, it may not be so in precisely the way you’re thinking...

The word “*perfect*,” here and in several other NT passages, does not mean “flawless” or “without defect” – though God is surely such also. Instead, *teleios* (the Greek word from which “*perfect*” is here translated) refers to being *mature, whole, lacking nothing, cf. Matt.19:21* where it is rendered as “*complete*” by the NASB. Thus, Jesus is not requiring *flawless, sinless, or without defect* sinlessness, but *wholeness, maturity, and completeness*. And what is the signification of such? When we “love” like God does by *loving*: those who don’t love us, v.46; those who do *evil and unrighteousness*, v.45; and even those who make themselves *enemies* by *persecuting* us, v.44. Then we have reached spiritual *maturity, completeness, and wholeness*.

Now, you’ve likely heard that “There are no ‘perfect’ churches.” This is certainly true if by “perfect” the speaker intends “without flaw” or “defect.” And again, if this definition is the one in mind, the statement is true for the reason that usually follows, “Because they (the *imperfect* church/congregation) are made up of ‘imperfect’ members.” In this vein, I would add that they are also led by ‘imperfect’ Elders, served by ‘imperfect’ Deacons, and taught by ‘imperfect’ Preachers/Teachers despite having a “perfect” Head, cf. Eph.1:22-23 and 1Pet.2:21-25, and a “perfect” Constitution/Law, Jas.1:25. Thus, the ‘imperfection’ lies with us and our less than divinely “perfect” thinking, feeling, and acting. So, instead of constantly searching for *flawless* “perfection” in *imperfect* Elders, Deacons, Preachers, Members, and Congregations...

Perhaps we should concentrate on becoming *teleios* “*perfect*” in the ways that are presently possible – spiritual *wholeness, completeness, and maturity*. To do so, we will at least need the following:

- *Wholeness* in our spiritual bodies (individually and collectively), cf. Heb.12:12-13;
- *Completeness* of character; cp. Matt.19:13-22; and,
- *Maturity* in thought, emotion, and conduct, cf. Heb.5:11-14; 12:1-2.

Perhaps with these *parts* of our house “in order,” we may not only aspire to the *perfection* Jesus commanded, but achieve it by “*loving those who don’t love*” us.

Now, let’s rethink OUR ideas of the “perfect” congregation, elders, deacons, preachers, and members and adopt GOD’S notion as those who are *whole, complete, and mature* enough to *love like He does*. And just as importantly, lets be sure that we - both individually and congregationally, are ourselves truly striving for *perfection*:

- In *keeping His word*, 1John 2:4-5;
- By *cleansing “ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God,” 2Cor.7:1; and,*
- By *putting “on love, which is the perfect bond of unity,” Col.3:14.*

We’re typically pretty good at finding *imperfections* in others. Oh that we were instead adept at becoming “*perfect*” ourselves... and encouraging others toward the same. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)