

Last week we discussed **Matthew 5:48** – “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

What did we determine the meaning of “perfect” (teleios) was? Why is this important?

Matthew 6:1, 16-18 – “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.” “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

What do you think this scripture means? Why is Jesus telling us this?

Sinclair Ferguson (1948 -) is a Scottish minister and Reformed theologian. Known for his teaching, writing, and editorial work, he has been Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary since 2017, commuting from Scotland.

“He (Jesus) says, “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them.” In saying this, Jesus is directing attention to motives. Why we do something is significant as well as what we do.”

What is Ferguson saying here? Why is motive important in our willingness to do ‘acts of righteousness’?

Acts of Righteousness - Acting righteous means behaving in a manner that is morally sound, just, and upright, often aligned with divine, religious, or high ethical standards. It involves living honestly, treating others with mercy, and doing what is right, rather than simply appearing good to others.

Key Aspects of Acting Righteous:

- **Moral Integrity:** Living in accordance with a strict ethical code, often free from sin or guilt.
- **Right Relationships:** Maintaining proper relationships with God, other people, and society through justice and compassion.
- **Actions, Not Just Words:** Involves tangible, positive actions like helping the poor, defending the marginalized, and showing honesty.
- **Motivation:** True righteousness stems from inner conviction, humility, and sincerity, rather than performing for recognition.

Can you see righteous acts in others? What does acting righteously do for you? What does it do for God?

In discussing “giving”, “praying”, and “fasting”, “He (Jesus) indicates in what he says about each of these activities that sacrifice, self-discipline, and self-denial are called for in the Christian life.”

Why does Jesus tell us to do these things as a matter-of-fact way of life for a Christian? Why does he expect us to live this way?

Have you ever thought that as a follower of Christ, this is just the way you are to live? Jesus assumes you will.

Ferguson goes on to say; “Why is it that donors (large and small) seem to feel a need for people to know of their donations? Give! Jesus says. But when you do so, forget about yourself. And forget about others. Keep it between yourself and the Lord, and do it “as unto the Lord.” How does keeping things just between you and the Lord effect your relationship with God? Why?

In **Matthew 6:6**, Jesus says “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.”

Ferguson says, “Many Christians begin well in their quest for holy lives, as the Pharisees did, but become ensnared by their desire to have a reputation before men rather than before God.” What drives us to want recognition from others and be well looked upon?

Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907 - 1972) was a Jewish rabbi, scholar, activist, and philosopher. He was a Polish American rabbi and one of the leading Jewish theologians and Jewish philosophers of the 20th century.

“A moral deed unwittingly done may be relevant to the world because of the aid it renders unto others. Yet a deed without devotion, for all it effects on the lives of others, will leave the life of the doer unaffected.”

What is Heschel saying here? Why is the life of the doer unaffected?

“The true goal is to be what we do.” What does this mean?

“Even before Israel was told in the Ten Commandments what to do it was told what to be: a holy people.”

What is the difference between doing and being? Can you think of examples of those that do but may not be?

“The more we do for God’s sake, the more we receive for our sake.” When have you received more from something you have volunteered for or done for spreading the good news of God’s word?

John Flavel (1630 – 1691) was an English Presbyterian clergyman and Puritan.

“He who performs duty without the heart, that is, heedlessly, is no more accepted with God than he who performs it with a double heart, that is, hypocritically.” What does this mean?

“.....A neglected heart is so confused and dark that the little grace that is in is not ordinarily discernible: the most accurate and laborious Christians, who take most pains and spend most time about their hearts, do yet find it very difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit there.” What is Flavel saying here?

“Sincerity, which is the thing sought, lies in the heart like a small piece of gold on the bottom of the river; he who finds it must stay till the water is clear, and then he will see it sparkling at the bottom.” What is he saying about “sincerity”? Who seeks “sincerity”?

“That the heart may be clear and settled, how much pains and watching, care and diligence, are requisite!” What is he saying? Go and be sincere in your quest to do good and righteous acts and others will sense God in you.