

Last week we discussed **Matthew 5:43-47** – “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

What do you think Jesus is telling us here? Why should we as Christians act in this way?

Matthew 5:48 – “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

What do you think Jesus is telling us here?

Addison Hodges Hart (1956 -) is a pastor, college chaplain, and spiritual director. He is the author of ten books, including nine volumes of non-fiction and a novel, *Confessions of the Antichrist*, published by Angelico Press. His most recent book is *The Voyage of Life: The Sacred Vision of Thomas Cole* (2023), a work combining art history, philosophy, spirituality, and biography. A native of Ellicott City, Maryland, Hart has drawn on his own experience of that region in writing this collection of spooky tales. He currently resides in Norway.

Perfect: a: being entirely without fault or defect : **FLAWLESS** - a *perfect* diamond

b: satisfying all requirements : **ACCURATE**

c: corresponding to an ideal standard or abstract concept - a *perfect* gentleman

d: faithfully reproducing the original - *specifically* : **LETTER-PERFECT**

e: legally valid

What “perfect” do you think Jesus is referring to when he says “Be perfect”?

Hart says, “The word for “perfect” in Greek is “teleios”, and it refers to making something “complete,” or bringing something to the “end” and “goal” for which it exists and toward which it tends. It likewise means “maturity.” When Jesus says, “You therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” he is referring to the subject of the passage, which is “love.” What does this mean?

2 Sam. 22:31 – (930 BC) “As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.”

What does this scripture say to you?

Heb. 10:11-14 – “Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

When will Jesus’s enemies be made his footstool? Who has been made perfect forever? What does “being made holy” mean?

1 John 4:16-18 – “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgement, because in this world we are like him.”

What does “living in love” do for us? How will that make us feel when Christ returns? Why?

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

What does this tell us about the relationship between “fear” and “love”? Where can we see this in our world today?

I Cor. 13:10 – “but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.”

“perfection” – the Greek word *teleiotes* can mean “end”, “fulfillment”, “completeness” or “maturity”.

What is the fulfillment this verse is referring to? What will happen then?

Hart says, “Indeed, the point of the passage, and its parallel in **Luke 6:32** – “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.”, is precisely that we should work against our prejudices, anger, dislikes, hatreds, and maybe even our desires for revenge, and do good anyway.” Is love a chosen lifestyle that we can pursue? How difficult is that?

Jürgen Moltmann (1926 - 2024) was a German protestant theologian known for his books such as the *Theology of Hope*, *The Crucified God*, *God in Creation*, and other contributions to systematic theology. His works were translated into many languages.

“We have been enemies of our enemies long enough. In the discipleship of Jesus we experience the liberating power of love, love that is quite literally disarming.” What is **Moltmann** telling us?

“In his life (Jesus), his suffering, and his death, he revealed to us the perfection of God.” How did Jesus reveal God to mankind?

“God sustains and preserves everything, because he has hope for everyone. His perfection is his limitless capacity for suffering.”

Could this be why God allowed Satan to live and evil to continue in this world? What does this tell us about God’s character?

“God’s children are enemies who have been overcome. God’s children live from a hard and costly love. It cost God the death of the Son.” What is **Moltmann** saying about those who have been saved and what it cost God?

Chiara Lubich (1920 – 2008) was the Italian founder of the Focolare Movement which aims to bring unity among people and promote universal family.

“Our heavenly Father does not love us because we are good or spiritually beautiful and so deserve his attention and kindness. On the contrary, by loving us, he himself creates in us the goodness and spiritual beauty of grace, making us his friends and his children.”

“...wherever we are we will feel urged to be distributors of this love which belongs to God and which Jesus brought to earth...”

Can you go and show the love of God to others, especially those who may not be kind or good?