

# Be You Perfect – Matthew 5:48

**Matthew 5:48** [NIV] *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

This scripture is a powerful challenge to the converted mind of a Christian.

**Matthew 5:48** [R.S.V.] *“You therefore, **must** be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”*

This makes the command even more emphatic.

Many think that this verse tells us that as Christians we must attain perfection in the human flesh as part of our Christian experience.

How many Christians do you know who fit this description?

If we are honest, precisely none.

## **Can we achieve perfection?**

The dictionary tells us that perfection means – being without flaw or defect, an exemplification of supreme excellence.

Can we in this life be entirely without flaw or defect?

Can we in this life exemplify supreme excellence?

Is it mentally healthy to hold such an understanding of perfection?

Is this the correct understanding of **Matthew 5:48**?

## **First let us think about human existence.**

Do you know anyone who is without flaws, weaknesses and shortcomings?

Have you or I ever lived a month, week or even a day, without the reality or thought of what we know is sinful?

Don't we find recorded in God's Word, the Christian Bible, many godly men and women who sinned, disobeyed or in various ways failed to live by the standards of God's ways?

Yes, many!

Noah, Moses, Abraham, David, the disciples and apostles all record the struggle of sin in their daily lives.

We find that the apostle Paul gives us a brutal honest description of his struggle that we all have as our human nature resists God's nature and the attitude of the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 7:14-25** [NIV] *“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil*

*is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."*

Don't we all relate to this struggle?

Let us also note other basic scriptures –

**Romans 3:23** [NIV] *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"*

Where then is this perfection we have just read we must have? No-one comes near the perfection of God.

**Romans 3:10** [NIV] *"As it is written: 'There is no-one righteous, not even one;'"*

No-one has perfect righteousness.

**1 John 1:8** [NIV] *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."*

If we claim to be sinless we are deceiving ourselves.

**1 John 2:1-2** [NIV] *"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*

The aim should still be to become perfect, sin-free.

These scriptures plainly indicate that human existence, both in and out of the Christian church, is a flawed, imperfect existence.

**Philippians 3:12** [NIV] *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."*

Hold onto this thought as we continue to study perfection.

### **Maturity –**

Let us now examine the word *"perfect."*

In the Greek it is *"tēlēiōs"* which denotes fulfilment, completion, an end accomplished as a result of a process, mature.

The word implies the end result of a process.

Englishman's Greek New Testament translates the Greek *"shall be."*

The Jerusalem Bible continues the context of love of God by rendering the verse *"you must therefore set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none on His."*

**Amplified Bible** – *"You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect [that is, grow into complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity.]"*

**1 Corinthians 2:6** [NIV] *"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing."*

Paul states that he was expressing the message of truth or wisdom to those who are “*mature*” and uses the Greek word “*τέλειος*.”

Paul was writing to the Corinthian church which had numerous problems, receiving the truth and God’s wisdom was for all not just those who had attained perfection.

What is being implied is that after committing our lives to Jesus Christ and the way of life He preached and lived, we have started on the road to the maturity and completeness that God the Father always has been.

We are being told that our love for even those who are at this time our enemies has to be complete, **not** partial. [Matthew 5:43-47; Luke 23:34]

We try with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit to avoid sinning, but cannot do so perfectly.

**Hebrews 4:14-16** [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

When we commit sin we have an advocate in Jesus Christ to Whom we may go to find forgiveness.

A high priest who knows the temptations that every human being faces.

**Hebrews 11:40** [NIV] *“God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”*

The writer of Hebrews assures us that we will be made perfect at the same time as all the great people of faith in the Old Testament.

**Only God is perfect.**

**Human perfectionism**, being conscientious to extremes, can lead to many undesirable fruits.

Health problems, interpersonal and emotional problems, fanaticism and even mental illness.

This is the end result of a misunderstanding of **Matthew 5:48**.

This perfectionism also leads to self-righteousness, and a critical and judgemental attitude towards others.

**Finally let us consider this –**

If we could be perfect as human beings, we would **not** need Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

God does **not** have unrealistic expectations towards us.

**Psalms 103:13-14** [NIV] *“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”*

God knows how limited is our ability to resist sin and become perfect.

**Romans 8:1** [King James] *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”*

In Jesus Christ there is no condemnation as long as we have faith in what He has done for us, through His birth, life, death and resurrection.

Then allow the Holy Spirit to develop the “*fruits*” of God within us. [**Galatians 5:16, 22-25**]

Human perfectionism is **not** the goal of Jesus Christ in us.

Becoming perfect implies a pattern of growth that comes through learning. Learning from our mistakes and failures to resist sin.

**Romans 12:1-2** [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

This is how this growth takes place.

Surrender our lives to Jesus Christ out of gratitude of what He has done for us.

Then yield to the Holy Spirit so that we can be re-educated in thoughts and actions, that will gradually comply more to the character of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.