

In the following verses, the Lord continues to show the standard of perfection required under God's law to attain and maintain a right standing and relationship with God Who is righteous and holy and can have no fellowship with sinners to whom sin is imputed. Here, He shows this by the high standard of God's law in requiring perfect love to God, to our neighbors, and to our brethren in Christ. This is the kind of love that no sinner has by nature. It is shed abroad in our hearts when we are born again by the Holy Spirit as He reveals the magnitude and nature of God's love to us in Christ (Rom. 5:1-11; 1 John 4:7-12). This is God's love for us that constrains and motivates us in the obedience of love and faith (2 Cor. 5:14-15; Gal. 5:6). And when we see and experience this kind of love within our hearts, we see how far short we fall from the standard of perfection set forth in the righteousness of Christ. As we who are saved by grace can say honestly that we do love God, our neighbor, and our brethren, because of the remaining corruption of sinful flesh, we cannot say that our love is perfect so as to measure up to the righteousness of the law. Again, the Lord proves that we need righteousness we cannot produce, and our only hope of salvation is HIS righteousness imputed to us and received by God-given faith.

(Matt. 5:38) - This law is recorded in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. As a judicial law, this was not unjust. It was to be enforced by the civil court and simply stated that the punishment must fit the crime. The greatest example of this law being fulfilled perfectly is in the obedience unto death of Christ when He suffered the full and just punishment of God's wrath against the sins of His people imputed to Him. As the wages of sin is death, there is nothing unfair about the death penalty for sin as sin is the transgression of the law. And though our Lord did no sin and knew no sin, as our Surety He was made sin by the legal charging of the debt of our sins to Him. He willingly agreed to suffer unto death for our sins (Heb. 2:14). And we who are sinful are justified by His righteousness imputed to us (2 Cor. 5:16-21). It was (and is) the perfect love of the Father and the Son for the elect that sent Christ to die and satisfy (eye for eye and tooth for tooth) the justice of God for us.

(Matt. 5:39-42) - Here the Lord shows how that even though the law of retaliation is good and fair, it prohibited personal vengeance against one who has wronged us. Some were using this law to get even with others. They reasoned that if a person has sinned against us, then it is only right that we should respond in kind, thinking that this was not sinful. This kind of personal retribution violated other passages of God's Word such as Leviticus 19:18 - *"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD"* (cf. Prov. 20:22; 24:29). *"Resist not"* means do not set yourself against the evil person who has injured you. Our Lord is teaching His disciples to endure personal wrongs in a patient way and refrain from retaliating against those who do us wrong. This must not be interpreted to mean that a believer cannot defend himself or his family when life is threatened. Christ is not speaking of life and death situations.

The clear indication here is that true believers should live by the rule of the cross. When our Lord died for the sins of His people, satisfying divine justice as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer, those who killed Him were certainly committing a great evil, but *"He endured the cross, despising the shame"* (Heb. 12:2; see also Isa. 50:6). He sought no personal revenge against His murderers. He prayed, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34). Romans 12:19-21 is an excellent commentary on this subject. Our Lord shows how the perfect law of love demands unconditional forbearance, tolerance, and self-restraint. Have we not experienced this kind of unconditional love in our own salvation by His grace through Christ? We have wronged God over and over again, and yet He

has not been vengeful toward us personally. He does chastise us, but that is not vengeance; it is love (Heb. 12:5-8). God's vengeance upon us was inflicted on our Savior, our most glorious Substitute. Let us, therefore, strive to restrain ourselves from personal vengeance and manifest to others that, by God's grace and power in Christ, we are different from the world. This attitude is to prevail even when a person sues us and takes us to court, when someone asks us for help or assistance. We all reason that there is a limit to what we can or desire to do. But remember now, the Lord is showing here the requirement of PERFECT love, and His love for His people was (and is) limitless.

(Matt. 5:43-48) - The self-righteous religionists among the Jews taught that we should love our neighbor, but it is fine if we hate our enemy. The perfect law of love shows us that our neighbor includes our worst enemies and that we are to love them also. We are to be kind, merciful, and forgiving, even when others are cruel and hateful towards us. We are to fight hatred with love, cursing with blessing, persecution with prayers for their good (Acts 7:54-60). We know that even to try to live this way in a godly manner is impossible apart from the grace and enabling power of God the Holy Spirit. But remember that we ourselves cursed God through many years of rebellion and unbelief, yet He had already *"blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 1:3). Though we hated the Savior without cause (Psa. 69:4; Rom. 5:6-10), He came into this world to do the ultimate good for us by His death for us on the cross. Though we mistreated Him, He prayed for us (and still does) as our Mediator and Great High Priest (John 17:9,15,20; Rom. 8:34).

"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:45) - If this means that we become children of the Father by or because of our love to others, if we are honest, then there is no hope for any of us. Salvation is by grace, not by our works (Eph. 2:8-10). It is God's love for us in Christ, not our love for Him, that makes us true children of our heavenly Father (Rom. 5:8-10; 1 John 4:10). We are children of God by the election, adoption, and redemption of grace that comes to us through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 5:21). And this is made known to us by the grace and power of regeneration which is also freely given to us and in us by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:4-6). *"That ye may be"* means "that you may resemble, or be like, your heavenly Father" (cf. Eph. 5:1-2).

The Lord gives two strong arguments to enforce His principles of mercy and love: (1) Be a kind, loving, and forgiving person toward all people, even enemies, because this is the command of our heavenly Father Who sends material mercies upon all men, whether wicked or righteous. The *"good"* refers to sinners saved by grace based on the imputed righteousness of Christ and who have been made believers by the Spirit in new birth. (2) Be a kind, loving, and forgiving person towards our neighbors (including our enemies), because to be otherwise is to conduct ourselves like those who know nothing of the unconditional love and forgiveness of our God and Savior. To love only those who love us and treat us right is natural. Even unbelievers do that. But to love those who sin against us, or even hate us, is Christ-like and evidences the Spirit of grace and mercy within us.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48) - We know that perfection can only apply to us as we stand legally in the merit of Christ's righteousness imputed. The law continually drives us to Christ for forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life. But we are to strive to be like Christ in our attitude and conduct. We are to fight the flesh (self-righteousness, self-love, and all sin). We are to grow in grace and in knowledge of our Savior. This includes growing in knowledge and in attitude and conduct. But know this - Our only hope of passing the test of God's law is the grace of God in Christ!