

## No Exceptions, Exclusions, or Exemptions!

[Text -Matthew 5:38-48]

Pastor Dave Shackle

August 14, 2016

In the Sermon on the Mount, after Jesus tells us that we should “turn the other cheek...go the extra mile...love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us” he then instructs us to do something that makes those daunting tasks sound like child’s play. “Be *perfect*, therefore, as your Heavenly Parent is perfect.” Well, I’m out! Seriously, I can barely live-up to the admirable level of my *human* parents; and Jesus expects me to “be perfect” - as my *Heavenly* Parent is perfect? I’d like to think he’s just kidding, or maybe exaggerating for effect; yet there is precedence for what Jesus is asking us to do. In both the New and the Old Testaments, there are statements that indicate that the Holy One actually expects people to strive for - and to attain - an exceptionally high and honorable standard of behavior. From the beginning, in *Genesis*, we are told that God “creates humankind in the Divine image and likeness.” And from Mount Sinai, Moses delivers this message from the Holy One: “You shall be Holy, even as I am Holy!” So maybe before throwing-in the towel, it might be worth taking a closer look at what Jesus is proposing, when he calls us to be “perfect”.

To say that people are created in the Divine image and likeness, indicates the belief that people can reflect and express Divine qualities and attributes - such as compassionate and kindness, justice and goodness. Calling for people to “be Holy, as God is Holy” suggests that you and I can actually achieve a genuine *righteous*. This doesn’t mean that we possess a moral perfection; but rather that we relate to others in ways that are *right* and wholesome, kind and caring. Similarly, being “perfect” as our Heavenly Parent is perfect, means that you and I will reflect a Divine excellence in what we say and do. And while that is easier said than done, there is a mind-set which we can adopt that will help us aim for that Divine perfection.

The Greek word translated as “perfect” in Matthew 5:48 is *teleios*, which means “aiming for and reaching one’s goal.” According to Scripture, the Divine intention and aim - from the very beginning - is for humankind to evolve and grow, as we set our sights on the God-like goal of compassion and justice, even for those we see as our enemies. Jesus says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Heavenly Parent; who makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what have you gained? And if you welcome only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Parent is perfect.”

The Holy One’s aim is perfect! Eventually, it hits the goal of providing gracious love to all people - impartially, equally and completely. And the key to this, isn’t a surgically precise targeting aimed solely at us wonderful saints; it’s a wide-spread scattering of love and grace that also covers us woeful sinners! So since the Holy One “makes the sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” maybe you and I should be more expansive in the way we spread and show our love.

The freely flowing Water of Holy Baptism is an excellent example and image of the gracious and equitable way in which the Holy One welcomes and affirms us all. And when we allow it, the Water of our Baptism can help wash-away our desire to harbor hatred toward our enemies, or to respond with violence against those who hurt or anger us. Blood may be thicker than water, but through the water of our Baptism we become One Family, with an undeniable connection to *all* God’s children - Christian or not, baptized or not! And as children of our One Heavenly Parent our aim is to offer our love - and God’s love - equally and impartially, with no exceptions, exclusions, or exemptions! This is how we show that we are genuine children of our Heavenly Parent, who also loves equally and impartially.

So, come rain or shine, our calling remains the same: to warmly welcome and receive every child of god with the same compassion

and grace that welcomes us. And while we may not always perfectly achieve it, that's perfectly O.K - as long as we keep aiming in the right direction and stay focused on that wonderfully Divine goal!