

The Kingdom Way of Life

Perfection

Series Overview

In this series, we're exploring several chapters in Matthew that show us what it looks like to live our lives as citizens of Jesus' kingdom.

Sermon Introduction

What does it mean to be perfect? Most people would probably say that "to be perfect" means to never make a mistake, never do the wrong thing, and never make the wrong choice. But in Jesus' estimation, the highest standard of perfection is demonstrated in love for one's enemies.

Passage: Matthew 5:38-48 (NIV)

Matt. 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

Matt. 5:39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Matt. 5:40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

Matt. 5:41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Matt. 5:42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Matt. 5:43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

Matt. 5:44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Matt. 5:45 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.

Matt. 5:46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

Matt. 5:47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

Matt. 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

1. Read the passage. Was there anything that surprised you? Was there anything you found confusing?

2. “Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” (v. 38) was an ancient standard of justice that limited retaliation to an injury to a proportionate punishment. In other words, if someone hurt you, you were not permitted to hurt them beyond what you had been injured. What’s the difference between justice and revenge? Why is God for justice but against vengeance? (cf.

Romans 12:19)

3. Read vv. 39-42. What is Jesus' point? Do you agree with him?
4. Is there any qualification you'd make to Jesus' teaching? If so, why?
5. In v. 45, Jesus reminds us that God "causes his sun to right on the evil and good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous." What does this say about God's character? What does it say about our relationship with our enemies?
6. Read vv. 46-47. How is Jesus telling us we should treat our enemies as compared to those who love us or are in our families?
7. Why does Jesus connect loving one's enemies with the height of spiritual and moral perfection (v. 48)?
8. What do you think it means to love one's enemies? What does it *not* mean?
9. Do you think Christians in the U.S. in general are doing a good job of loving our enemies right now? How so?

10. How are you demonstrating love toward your enemies? How might you grow in love for them (cf. v. 44)?

Prayer

Often a position of submission helps us physically connect with the spiritual reality that occurs. A posture of kneeling with open hands can demonstrate our willingness to submit to God's power.

Heavenly Father, thank you that you loved us even when I was your enemy. Jesus, thank you that you gave your life for me when I was your enemies. I want to be perfect like you, to love even when hate seems so strong. Help me to love the people who hate me. Help me to love the people who hurt me. I pray that they would experience blessing and life from you, just as I have found life in you. It is in your powerful name I pray, amen.