

Perfecting is the Goal, Not Perfection

By Jim Myers

I have been involved in and coached youth sports (first grade to varsity) for many years. One thing I never expected from my players was perfection *“You must be perfect to be part of the team.”* But, I have spoken with many Christians that believed that *“being perfect”* is what Yeshua, the Jesus of history, expects from them because of the verses below:

“You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
(Luke 6:36 & Matthew 5:48)

“You must be perfect like God!” You talk about setting the bar high, how about having to reach heaven to hit it!

The words -- ***You must be perfect.*** . . . **printed in red ink** in New Testaments have caused a great deal of *confusion* and *guilt* in the lives of many English-only Christian readers. The English word *“perfect”* means -- *“completely free from faults or defects.”* If there are two things that are polar opposites its *humans* and *creatures completely free from faults or defects.*

But when we use the [Y Team Bible Study Method](#) and view Yeshua’s words through his 1st century CE Jewish culture and Hebrew language, we discover a very different meaning. Dr. David Flusser (*Jesus* © 1997 The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem; p. 83) places Yeshua’s words in their cultural context and helps us understand what they meant to him.

The best way of translating this saying is:

*“There must be no limit in your goodness,
as your heavenly Father’s goodness knows no bounds.”*

Matthew 5:48 is merely the conclusion to a short homily where Jesus teaches that God reaches out in love to all people, regardless of their attitude and behavior toward Him:

*“. . . for He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good,
and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”*

In this Jesus is not far from the humane attitude of other Jews. R. Abbahu said:

*“Greater is the day of rainfall, than the day of resurrection.
For the latter benefits only the pious, whereas the former benefits pious and sinners alike.”*

R. Abbahu lived about 300 CE, but there is a similar saying dating from Jesus’ time. Thus, it is no wonder that in such a spiritual atmosphere Jesus drew his daring conclusion:

“Love your enemies!”
(Matthew 5:44).

In other words:

ōReturn love to those who hate you.ö

or

ōDo good to those who hate you.ö

(Luke 6:27).

Yeshua's message was this *ōTo the best of your ability reach out in love to all people, regardless of their attitude and behavior toward you, even if they are your enemies or they hate you.ö* Remember, *ōloveö* for Yeshua was not an emotion; he was talking about *ōdoing acts of loveö* *ō acts that protect and preserve lives, make lives more functional and/or increase the quality of lives.*

Take another look at the example he used for *ōGod's love (goodness)ö* *ō He makes the sun rise and sends rain to everyone.* He described God's actions, not emotions. The point he makes is this *ō make doing acts of love a normal part of your life, just like the sun rising and rain falling are part of nature.*

The goal was to create learners that were *ōperfecting,ö* not *ōperfect.ö* Just like in coaching sports, the key moments for teaching players are when they fail to do something correctly. For Yeshua's followers those moments were called *ōsin.ö* In his language the primary meanings of *ōsinö* are *ōto miss the markö* or *ōstray from the path.ö*

Yeshua also taught his followers what to do every time they *missed the mark* or *strayed from the path* *ō TESHUVAH.* The word literally means *ōturn around and try again.ö* TESHUVAH is usually translated *ōrepentance,ö* a word that is theologically loaded for most people. It is often viewed as *punishment* or something *shameful*; those meanings mostly come from other cultures and later dates.

TESHUVAH is accomplished by doing the follow:

- (1) *stop doing the sin*
- (2) *begin doing what is right*
- (3) *feel remorse for the damage or harm that has been done*
- (4) *repair the damage or harm done to the lives of others by the sin*
- (5) *ask the person or people harmed (after doing #4) for forgiveness*
- (6) *ask God for forgiveness*

What I am going to say next is one of the most important things Yeshua taught but it is completely missing from the teachings of Christian churches today:

For Yeshua and the people in culture, God cannot and does not forgive sins people commit against other people until those sinned against forgives the sinner.

The idea that a person can commit a sin against someone and then be forgiven by God in a prayer -- *without the person whose life was affected by the sin being involved* -- would be incomprehensible to Yeshua and his original followers, as well as the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem. Why?

The answer is because leaving the person harmed by the sin out of the process violates one of the most important commandments in the Jewish Scriptures of Yeshua – do justice.

Justice demands satisfaction of the demands of the one harmed by the offender. Justice is also a cornerstone of healthy society. If Christians in America understood this one point, it would dramatically change their expectations of what justice means and how it is done. This is a discussion that every Christian needs to have, after understanding what Yeshua taught.

Y Team member, increasing your skills for doing **TESHUVAH** is a key part of your *perfecting process*. Obviously, most of us will probably have ample opportunities to practice the **TESHUVAH Drill!**

Shalom,
Jim Myers