

**BE YE PERFECT**  
**Fourth in a Lenten Series: "The Holiness of God"**  
**Matthew 5: 43-48 –March 15, 2015**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

The early Christian, Marcion, was deemed a heretic by the early church around 140 B.C. ("A History of the Christian Church, Walker, p.54). Marcion sought to eliminate what he referred to as "the God of the Old Testament" believing that the Old Testament God had been superseded by the God now revealed in Jesus Christ. He omitted God's judgment and His holiness. Like a lot of people, he didn't like it. The core of the Apostles' Creed (180 A.D.) was largely written to counteract his viewpoint. So that when I am asking us to gently hold onto the notion of the holiness of God and that one day we will all stand in the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy God some folks probably don't like this, a-la Marcion, and leap to conclusions like –"Well, its all about grace" or "Now that Jesus has come its all about love". We don't like the idea of judgment and holiness and that we have been saved through Jesus in order to goodness, in order that the Holy God might be at work through us. Don't eliminate the Old Testament, please. As educated Presbyterians we always love to leap to conclusions without first savoring and understanding how we get there. But as we look this week at Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount on the Law, we begin to turn a corner, and see how both God is still Holy (contra Marcionism) but that there is a new standard at work, not a lesser standard may I say, but a higher way...

I want us to consider that the holiness of God is like a huge multifaceted gem; it has infinite facets to the gleaming diamond from which shines forth the glory of God. How can God be both perfectly loving AND perfectly just? His holiness, his complete "other-ness" is why. How can our faith be both about grace AND there is a day of judgment? How can these two seemingly opposite and non-reconcilable ideas be held together by the same faith? God's holiness, His set-apart-ness, is the explanation. How can God be Sovereign and yet there is still free-will? God's holiness is its explanation. How can we be saved by grace and not by works and yet good works must still issue forth from our life? God's holiness. How can there be predestination and also God needs us as moral actors in His creation? God's holiness. As I have thought about it and prayed about it over the years, there are so many, many seemingly logical contradictions in the faith. How do they hold together and make sense? Not by us trying to reconcile them logically and reduce God down to just one thing, love or grace or mercy. No, it is the creative tension between two seeming opposites that lies at the heart of who God is and, may I say, God's holiness. Don't reduce God down to just one facet of a gem but rather hold God up to the light of truth and see all of His glory and all of His aspects shining through the Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty. How do we as unholy people stand in the presence of a Holy God? God's holiness will do what we could never hope to do for ourselves...

Jesus' seminal teaching in the Sermon on the Mount from our scripture lesson for today helps us to understand God's holiness and the place of the Old Testament law now that the Savior has come. Jesus in Matthew 5 has a whole section about "love our enemies" (Matthew 5: 44) and then concludes the section by stating: "You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5: 48) Anyone notice the immediate parallel with the holiness code from Leviticus? –"You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy." (Leviticus 20: 26) Be ye perfect, says Jesus. Be ye HOLY, says God. Be ye perfect, says the Sermon on the Mount. Be ye holy, says the Holiness Code. Obviously, something is going on here; Jesus as the second lawgiver and Son of God is interpreting the Old Testament Law. The word "perfect" that Jesus uses is certainly NOT a dumbing down of the word "Holy". If anything, Jesus is upping the ante; increasing the standard; if holiness was hard and downright impossible to achieve on our own then perfection is absolutely impossible. The Greek word is "teleoi" which can be translated "perfect" or

“whole” or “complete”. It comprises also our word, “teleological” meaning “relating to design or purpose”. God has a plan and God has a design for humanity; that design is for humanity to be perfect as God is perfect, complete and whole, as we were designed by God to be. The perfection of which Jesus is speaking is illustrated by Jesus when he unpacks, say the commandment against murder by saying if we have ever even been angry with someone once then we have violated the commandment against murder. Or the commandment against adultery –if we have ever even looked at someone with lust in our heart then we have violated the commandment against adultery. We don’t have to do the action; we just have to have the intention within our heart. We don’t have to will to do something which is unholy and against the law; we merely have to think some thought which pertains to the same intention of a murderer or adulterer and we have sinned, violated the law, and offended God’s holiness. Jesus says you don’t have to do the thing in order to sin; you just have to have the same internal emotional reaction and it is the same as doing the thing. Clearly, this interpretation of the law makes it harder, not easier, to obey. This is the perfection of which Jesus speaks. This is what he means when he says our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Be ye holy, means to follow the letter of the law and to not do actions contrary to God’s holiness. Be ye perfect, means that even our thoughts and our heart have to be right perfectly with God all the time or we fall. And God in Jesus Christ shows no partiality; there is not one category of people better than another; there is not one person who is holier than someone else; we are all in exactly the same boat; we are all sinners; all have sinned and fallen short of the glory...and the holiness...and the perfection of God. We are not condemned because we have a tattoo under the Holiness Code, because its not about the outside, its about the inside; its about the nature and condition and intentions of our heart. God doesn’t reject whole categories of people, Jesus is saying; no, we all need a Savior; we all need God to do something for us that we cannot do for ourselves. There is a wonderful egalitarianism to God. The adulterer and the Pharisee are inherently equal. The person society deems an outsider is no more an outsider than anyone else where God is concerned. Jesus, how can we be perfect? If even our thoughts and our intentions are weighed in the balance of holiness how can we ever hope to stand? Jesus, this is impossible for me to do this –Jesus, this is hopeless for me ever to measure up to your standard of “Be Ye Perfect”. I thought holiness was tough. But perfection is tougher. When I die, how will I ever stand in the presence of a Holy God and Jesus as Lord who asks perfection?

As I said, Jesus in this section in the Sermon on the Mount is speaking about loving our enemies and difficult people and then links this to His commend to “Be Ye Perfect”. Elsewhere, Jesus sets forth His NEW COMMANDMENT –“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you.” (John 13: 34) Elsewhere, all the law and the prophets are summarized by reducing the two tablets of the law to two statements –“You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10: 27) The new commandment of Jesus is that we are to love one another exactly like He has loved us. The summary of the Old Testament Law is that we are to love both God and neighbor with ALL of our heart, ALL of our soul, ALL of our strength and ALL of our mind. 100%, ALL, perfectly LOVING GOD and perfectly LOVING ONE ANOTHER. We are to love one another AS JESUS HAS LOVED US. To love God as Jesus loves God and to love one another as Jesus loves us is the standard of perfection inherent in the statement --“Be Ye Perfect.”

So let’s dust off the way God loves us. Let’s pick up the precious jewel which is the holiness of God’s love and examine it. God is a jealous God, the Bible says. He wants ALL of our love, not just a part of it. God’s love is a relentless love; He is the “hound of heaven”; He will NEVER leave us nor forsake us. Sometimes like a kid in high school with their parents they’d just as soon be “let be”; Just let me alone, Mother, Dad, just let me be like the other kids; just don’t be my parent who loves me this weekend.

Nope. Relentless, never-ending, “steadfast love and faithfulness” is how the Bible puts it. You will never not be my child and I will never not be your God. You are mine. You are precious and beloved in my sight. You are the apple of my eye. I am passionate about you. My love for you is FIERCE and powerful and focused. This is not the way we think we are to love God. No, we say something like, “Well I love God in my heart and little puppies, and rainbows, and fluffy bunnies, and sunrises and quiet walks on the beach. And I love you, Jesus, just the same.” No, you hold up the multifaceted gem that is the holiness of *God’s* love and it is not the rank sentimentalism with which we often describe love. It is not puppy love; it is the holiness of God’s love. And it has come to claim us. And it has come to ask you to love in the same way, not with part of your heart but with ALL of your heart; not with a sentimental love but with a fierce steadfast love.

So how does God love us? And what is more, how does Jesus love us? I think about it this way. Say, you make an appointment to come to my office and you say, “Stu, I really love you as my pastor and my brother in Christ.” And you have brought with you the most priceless possession that you own –you have a Chinese porcelain collection and have discovered some Chinese VASE that you picked up on Ebay for a song is actually worth some \$25,000. And you say to me, this VASE is the most precious thing I possess and I love you so much, Stu, watch what I will do with this VASE...and you take it and throw it on the floor of my office and smash it into a thousand shards of worthless glass. Beloved, God’s love isn’t rank sentimentalism; frankly, it is a little scary. For the HOLY, HOLY, HOLY God took His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the very thing HE loved MOST, who preached the new commandment of love, and smashed HIM into a million smithereenies on a hill called Mount Calvary to demonstrate His HOLY, HOLY, HOLY love for us. The steadfast love of the Lord is jealous and exclusive, powerful and fierce, never-ending, never-changing and will never let you go, and if I may say, just a little bit scary and otherworldly. It is holy and set apart; different from anything we have ever experienced in this world.

So, have we ever loved, *perfectly* loved, as Jesus has loved us? Have we ever loved God and our neighbor with ALL of our heart? So how do we stand in the presence of a HOLY God who asks us to love as Jesus loves? All I can say, is in that day when I go to meet my Maker, I want the Lord Jesus standing right by my side. Come back next week to find out more. “*Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*