

Be Different (Part VI) – Be Perfect (Be Loving)

2/14/2010

The notes that follow each question below come from discussions that occurred after the sermon or further consideration of some of the issues raised. They should not be considered the “correct” answers by any means. It is hoped that they will provide a starting point for developing your own discussion of Pastor Steve’s sermons.

1. This series is entitled “Be Different”. This week, the instruction is to Be Perfect. Read John 17:22-23 and Hebrews 6:1 to help as you describe what that means.

While we think of perfection as something that has no flaws or no mistakes, the Bible talks about perfection as being whole, complete, finished, and mature. [See also: Col. 1:28, James 3:2, and 1John 2:4-6.]

2. Pastor Steve stated that we can have a lot wrong with us and still be perfect. Does that make any sense to you?

It doesn’t if it means without sin. However, if it describes someone having the presence of a reconciling spirit who is open to the leading of God and then responds with a loving grace, then it starts to make more sense.

3. In this study we consider relationships with those we consider our enemies. In previous discussions in this series, we have considered relationships with people we know (brothers & sisters in the church, spouses, business associates, and adversaries). It seems strange to even both talking about “love” and “enemies” in the same sentence. Do perfect people have enemies?

Jesus was perfect, but he had enemies. Jewish religious leaders were constantly trying to trip him up, and eventually plotted to kill him. But it’s not clear that He saw them as His enemies (even though they saw Him as an enemy to all they were trying to do). It would seem clear that Jesus saw Satan as His enemy, however. That’s a different dynamic, since Satan is an angelic creature and his fate is already determined, while other humans still alive on earth have the opportunity to be converted.

4. How do we make or identify our enemies?

- a) What the did – tax collectors, cheaters, terrorists, liar, thief
- b) Who that are – Muslims, Gentiles, political opponents

5. Read Matt 5:43 – 45. Here we find God treating everyone the same, whether they love Him or hate Him. That seems neither fair nor reasonable. Why would He do that?

God's love is not about keeping score. He offers His mercy and grace to everyone. We just have to decide whether or not to accept it. He puts everyone in the same circumstances and then sees who come running to Him and who runs away from Him.

6. Matt 5:45 talks about us being sons (children) of our Heavenly Father. How is loving God as a child loves his father different from loving God as a servant would love his master?

The love of a servant is often an act of fear. The relationship is forced upon the servant and both sides keep records and expect rewards in return for efforts expended. In this context we would love our enemies because we must (because the Bible tells us to). We ask how far we must go (and try to do the minimum).

The love of a child involves unconditional affection. It is instinctive and part of our nature. We want to love, so there is nothing forced about it.

7. This is not just a New Testament teaching. Take a look at Leviticus 19:16-18. How does God contrast Himself from us?

We are concerned about actions, so He gives lots of commands related to our actions. However, He just says "I am the Lord". For God, this is about character, not actions. If we get who were are right, correct actions will follow.

Note that the command to love all your neighbors as yourself is not something new to Jesus, but has been expected of God's people from the beginning.

8. Prov. 24:28-29 sounds a lot like a directive that we teach our children. What is it and how is this different?

Verse 29 sounds like the Golden Rule, but it reverses the sequence. It talks about us giving back to the person what they gave us. In the Golden Rule, we take the first step by treating others the way we would like to be treated. Verse 29 allows evil to be in control. We need to take the initiative.

9. In Proverbs 25:21-22, we hear some difficult words to swallow. Do we help our enemy to get rewards?

If we love as God loves, it has no strings attached. We pray for our enemies and treat them with love and respect. The Marshall Plan after WWII would be an example of the winners in a war situation devoting significant resources to helping the losers rebuild and establish a better relationship with their neighbors.

[Note to leaders: this passage may start a discussion of whether Christians must be pacifists, avoiding conflict and war. You will have to decide whether that is a fruitful path to go down for your group. Obviously, there will be a wide spectrum of opinions.]

10. Read Matt 5:46-48. God expects different behavior from believers. What does that look like?

We are to reach out for beyond our close relationships. We are to love our enemies, which involves turning toward them in Jesus name, acting with favor toward them, caring what happens to them, and praying for them. We need to avoid being like Jonah, who was afraid to be God's emissary to Nineveh because he didn't want them to be saved from destruction. It is not for us to judge who should be saved and who should not.

11. Read Luke 6:26-28 What specific actions are we commanded to do as we love our enemies? What possible logic would justify such an approach?

Do good to those who hate us but helping them. Bless those who curse us, but saying nice things about them. Pray for those who hurt us, petitioning to God for good things to happen to them.

None of this is natural. None of these things make any sense within the bounds of our need for justice and balance. However, they are a perfect reflection of the Kingdom of God. God loves all of us even though we are all sinners and undeserving of His love.

In the Kingdom of God, enemies look very different. They are opportunities for evangelism. They are lost souls waiting to be saved. They are potential recipients of the influence we can have as the salt and light of the world.

We simply have to choose to Be Different in character from what our earthly tendencies might invoke. Instead of getting even, we need to show love. Instead of taking preemptive actions to protect ourselves, we need to be mature, complete Christians and demonstrate the grace that God has shown us.