



The Sermon on The Mount
Bible Study Session 12
Matthew 5:48



Study By
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Greek NT

Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν.

La Biblia de las Américas

Por tanto, sed vosotros perfectos como vuestro Padre celestial es perfecto.

NRSV

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

NLT

But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

The Outline of the Text:

You have heard it said...

But I say to you...

The challenge of perfection, v. 48:

1. The Holiness of God in the Old Testament

Lev. 19:2. “1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: **You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.**” (LXX: Λάλησον τῇ συναγωγῇ τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραηλ καὶ ἐρεῖς πρὸς αὐτούς Ἅγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἅγιος, κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν)¹

God’s holiness is His ‘otherness’ from humans.

Deut. 18:13. “**You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God.**” (LXX: τέλειος ἔση ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου).

The LXX Greek τέλειος translates the Hebrew תָּמִים (tāmîm) which means ‘without defect’ or ‘blameless.’

2. Post Enlightenment Issues with Holiness

Modern tendency to absolutize concepts unknown in ancient world.

Holiness movement in Protestantism fails to understand the scripture & falls prey to heresy.

3. The meaning of Matthew 5:48²

a. Compare with // in Luke 6:36. “**Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**” (γίνεσθε οἰκτίρμονες

¹For a similar emphasis to this one of Jesus, also playing off this Old Testament verse, see 1 Peter 1:15-16, “**15 Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’**” (NRSV; 1.15 ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν καλέσαντα ὑμᾶς ἅγιον καὶ αὐτοὶ ἅγιοι ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ γενήθητε, 1.16 διότι γέγραπται ὅτι Ἅγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἅγιός εἰμι.).

²For the wide range of translation words / phrases used for the Hebrew and Greek note the following:

NRSV: 13 You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God.

RSV: 13 You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.

TNIV: 13 You must be blameless before the Lord your God.

ZB 2007: 13 Du sollst dich ungeteilt an den HERRN, deinen Gott, halten.

NASB95: 13 You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.

NIV: 13 You must be blameless before the Lord your God.

The Message: 13 Be completely loyal to God, your God.

LB 1912: 13 Du aber sollst rechtschaffen sein mit dem HERRN, deinem Gott.

HCSB: 13 You must be blameless before the Lord your God.

GNT: 13 Be completely faithful to the Lord.”

VBCLEM: 13 Perfectus eris, et absque macula cum Domino Deo tuo.

AV 1873: 13 Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God.

VUL SESB: 13 perfectus eris et absque macula cum Domino Deo tuo

EU 2: 13 Du sollst ganz und gar bei dem Herrn, deinem Gott, bleiben.

NET: 13 You must be blameless before the Lord your God.

NCV: 13 But you must be innocent in the presence of the Lord your God.

NirV: 13 You must be without blame in the sight of the Lord your God.

NKJV: 13 You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.

NLT: 13 But you must be blameless before the Lord your God.

KJV: 13 Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God

ESV: 13 You shall be blameless before the Lord your God,

BFC97: 13 Pour vous, conduisez-vous de manière irréprochable à l’égard du Seigneur votre Dieu.

καθώς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν οἰκτίρμων ἐστίν)

b. Impact on 5:21-47

Pericope 1: vv. 21-26

Premise: 21 You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.”

Antithesis: 22 But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool,” you will be liable to the hell of fire.

Expansion 1: 23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Expansion 2: 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

1. vv. 21-26

2. vv. 27-30

3. vv. 31-32

4. vv. 33-37

5. vv. 38-42

6. vv. 43-47

v. 48

Pericope 2: vv. 27-30

Premise: 27 “You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.”

Antithesis: 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Expansion 1: 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Expansion 2: 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

Pericope 3: vv. 31-32

Premise: 31 It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.”

Antithesis: 32 But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Pericope 4: vv. 33-37

Premise: 33 Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.”

Antithesis: 34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

Expansion: 37 Let your word be “Yes, Yes” or “No, No”; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

Pericope 5: vv. 38-42

Premise: 38 You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

Antithesis: 39 But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer.

Expansion 1: But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also;

Expansion 2: 40 and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well;

Expansion 3: 41 and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

Expansion 4: 42 Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

Pericope 6: vv. 43-47

Premise: 43 You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”

Antithesis: 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

Expansion 1: 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Expansion 2: 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Diagram of Matthew 5:48

5:48 Therefore,
62 **You shall be complete**
 as your Heavenly Father is complete.

The future tense verb Ἔσεσθε has an imperatival tone reflecting the Septuagintal use of the future tense for admonitions in translating the Hebrew Bible. The main clause, “**you shall be complete**” (Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι), is set up by comparison to the subordinate clause, “**as your Heavenly Father is complete**” (ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν). Thus the standard of completeness is that present in the Heavenly Father. The disciple’s progress toward completeness is always measured by this standard, and no other. By placing the verb in the main clause as the first word in the sentence, Matthew highlights emphasis on the urgency of becoming complete. In the subordinate comparative clause the subject and predicate adjective are placed next to one another and followed by the linking verb. This is standard pattern in biblical Greek to stress close relationship between the verb subject and the quality defined by the predicate adjective. Thus completeness is a significant trait in the essence of God.

The coordinate conjunction “**therefore**” (οὖν) makes explicit something implied in the preceding sentence(s). Although some difference of opinion exists, most scholars are convinced with good reason that the previous thoughts being appealed to here include both vv. 43-47 and vv. 21-47. The implications of this are significant.

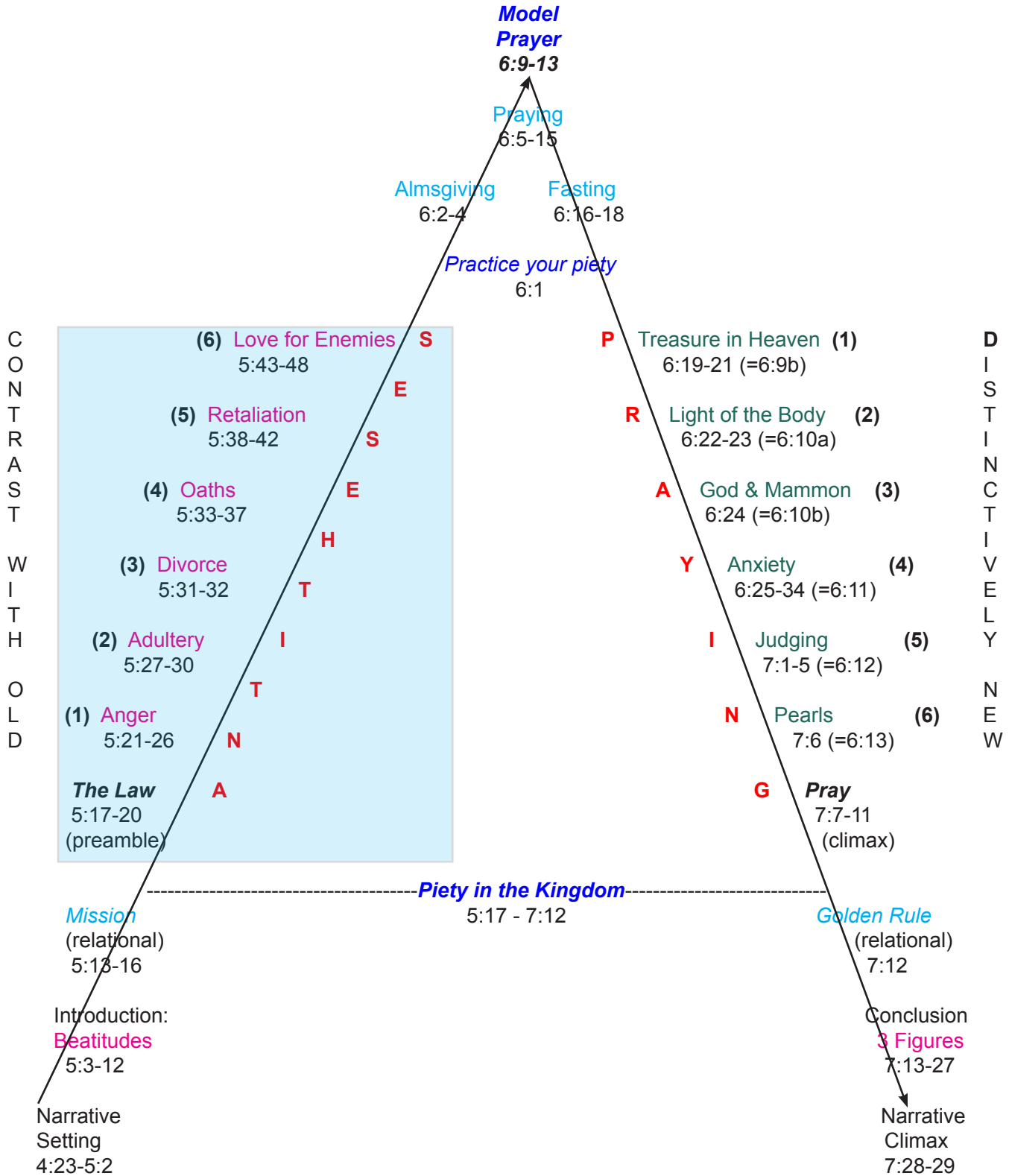
First, the admonition to be complete like God grows out of the call to love our enemies in vv. 43-47. Living by the assumed standards of the Old Testament -- love neighbor; hate enemies (v. 43) -- leaves one with major deficiencies, and thus falling far short of the completeness of God who loves the sinner as well as the saint, as verse 45 claims: “**so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.**” In order to be complete like God we must love our enemies just as He loves the sinner and the rebellious (cf. Rom 5:7-8). To be clear, God hates sin and the unrepentant sinner will eventually come under the wrath of God in final judgment. Both the Old and New Testaments make this point unquestionably. But divine love is always present and reaches out to the sinner with the beckoning call to come to Christ and experience the new life that Christ brings as John 3:16 asserts. As the people of God in Christ, we are to take that same love into our life and allow God to love the sinner through us as well, and particularly when that sinner becomes our enemy. This is the only way to achieve the completeness, the wholeness of character that typifies our God.

Second, our completeness encompasses more than just loving our enemies. As the ‘therefore’ also reaches back to the entire section in vv. 21-47, it implies that completeness is made up of all six of these qualities advocated by Jesus. When one carefully examines each of the six topics, as we have done in lessons 06 through 11, you begin to grasp the larger aspects of spiritual wholeness being advocated here. Completeness measured by God’s character touches on anger, adultery, marriage, truthful speech, retaliation, and loving one’s enemies.

Now we can begin to see the meaning of the introductory formula in vv. 17-20 more clearly. Jesus clearly affirmed the ongoing viability of the Law of Moses, but made it clear that much of the interpretation of it by the religious leaders of His way was worthless and false. They had refocused religious obedience away from God and on to self-efforts at adhering to legal regulations which they had themselves developed. Although assuming these regulations to be based on the Law of Moses, their interpretations consistently misunderstood and misapplied the teachings of Moses. Thus, because of this Jesus made His shocking declaration in verse 20: “**For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**” Their self achieved righteousness had none of the character of God in it; thus, they failed miserably to achieve the wholeness of God.¹² Spiritual completeness that leaves nothing out means taking on the character and nature of God. And this is not theory. It includes living by these six principles set forth by Jesus in vv. 21-47.

Thus, the Pharisees had it wrong in Jesus’ day (v. 21), just as much of modern Christianity still misses the boat.

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lorin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.