

## What are you doing more than others? (Identity implies action)

Before we look at this question that Jesus asks in Matthew 5:47b it is important to realize some truths. Jesus is not talking about a way to work ourselves into heaven for salvation comes by grace through faith and that salvation from sin is a gift from God. He is not trying to teach us "do this and live", but "live and do this". So grace is not a matter of achievement. However, Jesus never taught that faith is something that just happens to you. And throughout the bible we can see that faith does not consist of words, "*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*" (James 1:22). It's also not in (pharisaic) comparison to the ones around us. We are all measured by God's standard which is, according to Matthew 5:48 "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*"

### Impossible?

The knowledge of our own imperfections, Ecclesiastes 7:20 "*There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.*", makes us wonder how God can expect this from us. We agree upon the things he teaches us, "*For in my inner being I delight in God's law*" (Romans 7:20), but obviously we sometimes fail to carry it out: even worse we do the opposite, "*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*" (Romans 7:15).

1. What do you think about this statement of Jesus, what does He mean with: "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*"?

### Identity

Would Jesus tell us to be like Him without making it possible for us? Let's take a good look at that question.

*"(...) we may well expect more from Christians than others, because it is a fact in the case of those who are truly Christians that they are more than others. It is not mere talk, it is a fact that the believer in Christ is born again. He is not only as other men are, made by God, but he has been twice made, new born, new created in Christ Jesus. It is no fiction but a matter of truthful experience; we have passed from death unto life. We have received the Spirit of God into our souls, which has implanted in us a new nature higher than the nature of other men, as much higher than the common soul of man as the soul of man is above the nature of the beast; for the children of God are partakers of the divine nature, God dwelleth in them, and the Spirit of God inhabits them as a king inhabits his palace. They are more than other men. They are so not only because of their regeneration, but because of that eternal act of God which set them apart in the covenant of grace or ever the earth was. God has a chosen people. "I have chosen you out of the world," saith Christ."* C.H. Spurgeon

### Called out

Identity is where it starts. If you don't know who you are, you certainly have no idea whether what you are doing makes sense or not.

We are members of Christ's body the Church. The Greek word for Church is "Ecclesia". This means called out, summoned. Our identity is that we are called out to be the hands and feet of Christ. Not because of our own achievement, but only because it was/is God's plan to do so. Our identity, called out, is rooted in the divine decision of God to call out people: by His grace only.

2. To what extent do you realize that you are called out, set apart? What, in your life, is proof that you believe in (that is realize and act according to) this new identity?

**Created in Christ**

So we see that it's not a matter of striving to obtain righteousness, but that Jesus has endowed us with a new nature that is led by His Holy Spirit. That is the reason why we cannot claim to be Christian and still live like we always used to. God's grace isn't merely a pardon for our sins, it's much more. The Holy Spirit changes our way of life, even though we fail from time to time, He keeps on shaping us into the likeness of Jesus. We are a new creation so we cannot be content to live in sin or mediocrity anymore. It is not "a nice option" to become like Jesus in what we do: it's a consequence of God's grace. *"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."* (James 2:26)

Ephesians 2:8-10 *"8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that<sup>1</sup> not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

3. Verse 10: what do you gather from the Bible as "good works" and how do we "walk in them"?

**Application**

*"What are you doing more than others?"* Jesus said. And: *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* We have just read about the basis (identity) that ensures us He will work on/in/through us when we obey Him. So what does this mean, to "do more" and to "be perfect"? We need to look for practical answers.

Ephesians 4:22-24 *"22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

4. What do the underlined sections in the passage of 22-24 mean in your life (speaking in the practical way)?

James 1:27 *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."*

5. How can we apply this verse to our own lives?

6. What do the Bible and your relationship with God tell you to do in order to "do more" and "to be perfect"?

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<sup>1</sup> Verse 8: "that" refers to salvation from sin, not to faith. A more thorough examination of "that" can be found in the gender of "that" (touto in Greek). "Touto" is neuter in gender, while the word faith (pistis) is feminine. Since the general rule in Greek grammar is for the gender and number of a relative pronoun to be the same as its antecedent, then some extenuating linguistic circumstance, special idiomatic use, or other similarly mitigating factor would need to be demonstrated to justify linking "that" to "faith." If such reasonable justification cannot be made, then one is compelled to continue studying the passage in order to know assuredly what "that" gift of God is. The overall context of the first three chapters of Ephesians is man's salvation found in Christ. These two verses (8 and 9) thoroughly document how a person is saved, not how a person believes.

Admittedly, faith might be categorized as a gift from God in the broad sense in which all things come from God (e.g., the bread for which we work is an indirect gift from God Matthew 6:9-13), but faith is not a direct gift from God given to some and not to others. As Paul wrote in his letter to the church at Rome, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Faith in Christ as the Son of God is found only in those who have first heard the Word of God, and then believed (John 20:31).