

God is Perfect

God's perfection may be something that we take for granted, or apply our own understanding of "perfect" to, but there's much more to be discovered and amazed by when we study the words the Bible uses to tell us that God is perfect.

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At the conclusion of his final speech to Israel, Moses sings a song which starts by declaring that God is perfect (Deuteronomy 32:1-4). The Hebrew word that Moses uses which we translate "perfect" is "tamim", which can mean unblemished, healthy and whole. It's often used to describe animal sacrifices made to God, the substitutes whose deaths took the place of the people who had failed to live God's way. Because of what they represented, they had to be the very best they had, the ones without any faults, and Moses declares that this same principle applies to God and His ways.

God never makes mistakes, nor does He do anything wrong. He is never unfair or unfaithful or unable. There is no fault in Him – nor even the possibility of it. This was different to the religions of the other nations around Israel whose gods were fickle and unreliable. Statements of God's perfection can trouble us as we think about tragic or unjust events in our lives or world history, and the things in God's Word that we struggle with. However, Moses makes this statement after a huge amount of hardship and discouragement, and knowing that there is more trouble to come. He is using a different method of measurement to us.

(This isn't to say that Moses doesn't have dialogues with God, strong discussions about what God is doing which we might even call arguments. Throughout the Old Testament we find many faithful people doing the same, giving us permission and patterns to do the same.)

God's perfection means, in part, that He doesn't experience imperfection, moral weaknesses and faults like we do (e.g. Habakkuk 1:13, Jeremiah 7:31). If He is perfect, will he want anything to do with us? Jesus, the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15, John 8:47, 19:6), gives us the wonderful answer in Mark 2:17. God's faultless perfection includes perfect love, perfect compassion, perfect mercy – so He came to rescue us (John 1:29, Hebrews 10:14).

Given that God has loved us so perfectly, should we not love Him in return, and trust His love at all times (1 John 4:16-18)? Let's also not be fooled into thinking that God only has affection for or interest in perfect people: that is a lie meant to keep you out of the embrace of your heavenly Father's arms. It is God's delight to share His perfect love with those who don't deserve it and can barely imagine it. Perfectionism is not required here, just some trust. We're released from a drive to perform and we can be honest with one another.

The Greek word used in the New Testament for “perfect” is “telos”, which has a slightly different range of meaning from the Hebrew “tamim”. The sense is of maturity, completion, fulfilment, the achieving of an intended goal. Sometimes we confuse perfection with simply avoidance, and might think that the holiest people we know are those who don’t do lots of things but the Old and New Testaments both command us to action, in imitation of the God who acts, whose love overflows. Jesus lived this way (Mark 7:37).

Jesus is “the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2) – He started it and He will bring it to its completion, its fulfilment. The way Christians experience that at this moment is His Holy Spirit is at work in us. Slowly, patiently, powerfully, He is changing us to be perfect like He is (Philippians 3:12), the very image of God (Genesis 1:27, Colossians 1:15).

The Day is coming when all sin and failure will be banished as justice is finally done, the children of God will become fully like the Son of God. The two words we’ve looked at today, which are always true of Him, will become true of us: we will be without fault forever, we will be living life in its complete fullness, with Him. Appropriately enough, in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes that Day as “when the perfect comes” (verse 10).

Questions for small group discussion:

How did Sunday’s message help you to love God more?

How would you describe God’s perfection to someone you knew who wasn’t a believer? *

Luke said that affirming God’s perfection does not mean we can’t discuss with Him when we’re unhappy or confused about what he has done. Moses is one example of this - where would you go in the Bible if you wanted to wrestle with God about difficult things that have happened to you or others?

Do you think you are more tempted to perfectionism or apathy in your life as a follower of Jesus? What are the dangers of this for you? What does Philippians 3:12-15 teach us about this? How can small group members help each other with this?

** If this questions gets you into a discussion along the lines of “If God is perfect, then why...?”, then it might be worth looking at a couple of articles which challenge the premise of The Problem of Evil: [“The Odyssey of Theodicy”](#) and [“Epistemic Pelagianism \(or, What’s Wrong With Apologetics\)”](#). Rebecca McLaughlin deals with the problem of evil in a more traditional manner in her recent book, *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions of The World’s Largest Religion*.*