Question: What is the difference between being holy (1 Peter 1:15–16) and being perfect (Matthew 5:48)?

Answer:

A holy person is someone who has been sanctified, cleansed, set apart, and does what is good. The Bible teaches us to be holy just as our Father in heaven is holy:

> *1 Peter 1:15–16*
>
> *“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”*

This command is repeated in the Old Testament:

> *Leviticus 19:2*
>
> *“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.’”*

But a perfect person is a holy person who has gone further—who has reached maturity in holiness. There are those who are holy but not yet perfect, and those who are both holy and perfect.

A perfect person does something extra in their holiness that sets them apart from others and makes them more like God. Jesus gave examples of this in Matthew 5:

> *Matthew 5:43–48*
>
> *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’*

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

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

So, we must pursue not only holiness, but also perfection.

Here are some comparisons:

- A holy person fasts and prays for themselves, but a perfect person fasts and prays both for themselves and for others.
- A holy person reads the Word and prays, but a perfect person reads the Word, prays, and teaches others what they have learned so that they too may be blessed.
- A holy person serves God faithfully with the hope of receiving a reward in heaven, but a perfect person, while also hoping for a heavenly reward, is most concerned that others will not perish in eternal fire. Their heart aches for lost souls.
- A holy person may dedicate one day a week to gathering with God’s people, but a perfect person goes beyond that.
- A holy person keeps all of God’s commandments, but their heart may still cling to wealth. A perfect person obeys all the commandments and is free from attachment to wealth—unlike the rich young man who came to Jesus.

> *Matthew 19:16–22*

> *Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”*

“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

“Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

This shows us that we must not stop at holiness alone—we must strive for perfection.

The Bible gives us examples of people who were considered perfect:

- Noah was called a righteous and blameless man in his generation, and that is why he and his family were saved from the flood (Genesis 6:9).
- David was called perfect in heart, and that is why he was loved by God more than any other king (2 Samuel 22:24).
- Job was described as blameless and upright, and that is why, even in trials, he saw God (Job 1:1).

In the same way, when we become perfect, we too shall see God.

May the Lord bless you.

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