

Vision and the Christian Life

(Part 7)

Jesus the Perfect Perception of God

Colossians 1:15 [NIV] *“He is the **image of the invisible God**, the firstborn over all creation.”*

Jesus is the “*window into God*”.

Hebrews 1:3 [NIV] *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the **exact representation** of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”*

Jesus is the exact representation of God.

John 14:9-10 [NIV] *“Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father**. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”*

When we listen to the words that Jesus spoke and meditate on His lifestyle we can begin to have a correct perception of God.

God speaks to us in human language, as it were, by becoming a human being, in Jesus the Son of Man.

Jesus was like us as a human being in all things except sin.

In Jesus God is telling us all He is able to tell us, as finite humans, about Himself.

God is simply too big, too magnificent, too infinite for the finite lenses of our mind to have a perfect and total perception of God.

To really know God we would have to be God, which is impossible.

Jesus began His rabbinical career at the appropriate age of thirty years.

Jesus was a professional rabbi, that is a teacher of the law.

Consequently, Jesus was expected to give most of His time to the work of interpreting the law.

Rabbis were customarily consulted about questions of the law.

Rabbis would then inform their questioners about the requirements of the law in the given cases that were presented to them.

The laws were part of the covenant that God made with His people, the Israelites.

The law however for many people replaced a personal relationship with God.

The Scribes and Pharisees expanded on the law seeking to cover in their expansion every possible event in life, turning it into straitjacketing regulations.

Jesus kept saying that the true perception of God was love that was calling us into an intimate relationship, not a legalistic relationship.

Jesus in His teaching insisted that the prescriptions of the law can never replace a personal relationship of love with God.

Matthew 22:34-40 [NIV] *“Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: **‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**”*

Jesus taught that all the prescriptions of the law were summarised in the one law of love to God and our neighbour.

Matthew 5:17-20 [NIV] *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; **I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.** I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**”*

Jesus made it clear that He had **not** come to do away with the law, but **to bring it to fulfilment and perfection in love.**

The first strategy employed by the Scribes and Pharisees to humiliate Jesus, the reluctant rabbi, was an attempt to make Him solve cases.

This was an attempt to make Jesus a legalistic rabbi, instead of a teacher who was introducing them to a God who was love.

Jesus was saying to the legalistic Scribes and Pharisees what was very important for them and for us.

Matthew 23:23 [NIV] *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill and cummin. **But you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy and faithfulness.** You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.”*

They were very careful to keep every aspect of the extended scribal laws but missing the main purpose of the law, to lead us to the mercy of God and seeking to be faithful to Him.

You can keep the law in this legalistic way without love, but you cannot really love without keeping the spirit and purpose of the law.

Romans 7:7-8 [NIV] *“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed **I would not have known what sin was except through the law.** For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.”*

The purpose of the law is to show us sin and realise our need of Jesus Christ’s loving sacrifice to cleanse us of the result of those sins.

The law points us to Jesus Christ as our Saviour from the result of sin and lack of love in our darkened lives.

Jesus became even more objectionable to the Pharisees because of His association and alignment with the common people, with the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the outcasts and every kind of sinner.

Jesus seemed to prefer and to seek out their company.

The Pharisees openly despised fellow Jews who were **not** Pharisees or their disciples.

The Pharisees considered those common people ignorant of the law and incapable of its observance therefore destined to perdition.

Matthew 9:9-13 [NIV] *“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

Jesus was trying to tell the Pharisees, and all of us, about the infinite love and mercy of God, which He was living out in His life.

Luke 15:1-7 [NIV] *“Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering round to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.” Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

Jesus was saying that the observance of the letter of the law can kill the spirit of the law, which is the spirit of love, for those who are lost.

If you are trying to keep the law out of self-righteousness, because you feel you are “above those other people’s weak sinful nature” you are like a “whitened tomb”, shining white on the outside for others to see, but inside there is **no** love.

Jesus is trying to explain to the legalistic Pharisees that **we deal in a legalistic way only with people we fear.** We feel safe if we have all the clauses and provisions of an agreement stated.

If we meet all the requirements we feel safe and self-satisfied.

Jesus is insisting that God is calling us into a relationship of love.

Such a love relationship is demanding of us far more than any legalistic agreement ever required.

In a legalistic agreement we come to a point when we can say “I have done all that is required”.

True love can never say “I have done all that is required.”

Love is restless, it drives us on.

Love asks far more than legalistic justice.

Such love in the end is the only response that we can make to the loving invitations of our Heavenly Father who is love.

Jesus continues this theme of God’s unconditional love for sinners who have lost their way in life with another parable of the teenage tearaway, let us study this important parable again.

Luke 15:11-13 [NIV] *“Jesus continued: ‘There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. ‘Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.’”*

Jesus portrays the father as allowing his son to leave, but you sense the father’s heart is heavy with regret. There is a special place in his heart for his younger son.

Luke 15:14-16 [NIV] *“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, **but no-one gave him anything.**”*

All his friends turned out to be “*fair weather*” friends.

This young boy is now at his “*wits end*”, everything seems to have gone wrong for him, but his pride stopped him at first to return home for help.

Luke 15:17-19 [NIV] *“**When he came to his senses**, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’”*

With all the other options closed he humbly returns to his father **not** expecting to be his son any longer.

So often this is the only time we do turn to God our Heavenly Father.

Luke 15:20 [NIV] *“So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”*

This was **not** what the son expected, but it was what the father was longing for.

Luke 15:21 [NIV] *“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”*

He gave his prepared humble speech.

Luke 15:22-24 [NIV] *“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”*

The father brushed aside this speech for the joy of his sinning son’s return was the only thing on his mind and looked on this return as something to rejoice about.

Nowhere do we read of this loving father “*laying down the law*” to his returning son.

All the father did was to extend loving mercy towards this returning son.

At the conclusion of this parable I’m sure Jesus looked squarely into the eyes of the Scribes, the High Priests and the Pharisees and said “*this father is who God is. This is how God feels about and reacts to sinners, this is why I fellowship with sinners, people who have lost their way in the darkness of this world.*”

What a stark contrast between Jesus and these leaders of Israel at that time.

After this these leaders of the nation sought how to kill Jesus.

Jesus then prepared to show all humanity the ultimate way to say “I love you” by sacrificing His young life on the cross.

John 15:12-17 [NIV] *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. **Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.** You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”*

Jesus personally showed this “greatest love” on the cross.

Mark 9:33-35 [NIV] *“They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, **“If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”**”*

Luke 22:24-26 [NIV] *“Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, **the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.**”*

Jesus was repeatedly telling His disciples that all authority in God’s Kingdom is a call to sacrificial loving service of others.

Jesus then illustrated this in His personal life.

The Christian perception of God is summed up in these few words of the apostle John, who knew Jesus and personally experienced the love that Jesus had for all humanity.

1 John 4:7-12 [NIV] *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. **Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”*