

THE PROCESS OF PERFECTION, PART 1

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48, NIV)

THE CONCEPT OF PERFECT IS UP FOR DEBATE. Perfection in many disciplines is synonymous with precision; there is only one perfect. In other arenas, it is only a subjective approximation. For instance, if I told you that my wife and I have “the perfect relationship,” you would request an explanation. Does this mean we’ve never argued, that I always get my way, that our checkbook balances every month—all of the above and more? There is a lot of wiggle room there!

Golf can be the same. You and I can both hit “perfect” drives, yet our balls may be several steps apart. I can hit a “perfect” putt and watch it shyly lip out, while you can slam yours into the back of the cup, where it pops up in the air, and clumsily falls in. Your result certainly looks more perfect than mine.

Perfect can really leave us guessing.

This is no less true when we consider Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount, that we should be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect. Surely God does not expect us, admitted sinners, to be perfect. In fact, God himself came as Jesus in order to go to the cross and pay for our countless sins. And now we are to be perfect? Crazy!

There is, however, a nuance to the Greek word, *teleios*, from which we derive “perfect” in our English translations. It is the idea of completion. In God’s eyes, what is complete has been made perfect.

Consider as well the context of the statement. It comes in the midst of Jesus’ comparative ethics. “You see the tax collectors and pagans doing such and such,” he was saying. “You must do so much more.” Then, “You see the ultra-religious behaving like this and that. Your approach must be quite different.”

So here is our best insight into Jesus’ meaning in this passage: It is time to move away from the imperfect examples you have been given and move toward the way God would have things done—with love for those who are difficult to love, with humility when some kudos would be nice, with meaningful relationship rather than superstitious repetition. As you surrender your heart and mind to the Holy Spirit, he will work in you to reflect the Father’s true perfection; he will steer your course toward completion in him.

Opening questions How would you define a perfect golf shot? • What do we mean when we say we’ve had a “perfect day”? Do you think this plays too loosely with the meaning of perfection?

READING Matthew 5:43-6:15; Philippians 1:4-6; Hebrews 10:10-14

The context of perfection
Reading in Matthew 5 and 6, what examples of God’s plan for perfect living do we find compared to the acts of the ultra-religious and the irreligious?

The ongoing completion
According to Philippians 1, what can believers be confident of? Who does this work? What do you think it looks like?

The end and the process
How do we see both the end result and the work in progress in the Hebrews 10 passage? How is Christ able to do the perfecting work we need?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2015 Links Players International. A 5-minute video accompanies today’s study at <https://youtu.be/QOFXiejlypA>