

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

We might be tempted to dismiss Jesus' words as impossible, and therefore not applicable.

But we'd be mistaken.

What Jesus is asking is not only possible,  
it is motivating – it propels us into action.

To be perfect is not to be flawless,  
but rather to be **mature**,  
**ripe**,  
**fulfilling one's purpose.**

To be perfect as God the Father is perfect is to see the big picture  
– to be mature in how we live as children – imitators – of God.

Immature children see the world revolving around them.

They are the center of attention and believe everything exists for their benefit.

Immature children ask – what's in it for me?

Jesus is calling his followers away from an immature life.

Jesus is calling attention to the reality

- That violent revenge is immature.
- That hating our enemies is immature.
- That expecting a life without persecution,
  - without difficulties,
    - without pain is immature – imperfect.
- That base human nature is immature.

*Be perfect --=mature-- as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Spiritual maturity anticipates the attacks of Satan through other people and seeks to respond

- not with revenge, or with defiance
- but with the shame of humiliation.

What Jesus is saying here recalls a saying from Proverbs 25:

*If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat,  
and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,  
<sup>22</sup> for you will heap burning coals on his head,  
and the LORD will reward you.*

It's a form of the principle – Keep 'em off balance.

If someone gives you a black eye or breaks your jaw, that person would expect you to punch back.

But instead of punching back, You show yourself publicly all black and blue and let everyone know who did it.

That puts your enemy in the humiliating seat of shame.

Or if someone insults you, give that person a reason to be kind and loving toward you.

Or if someone sues the pants off you, make that person the bad guy by revealing the poverty you will be in when he takes your living away.

Or if your boss makes you work overtime on your child's birthday or your anniversary

– put her into a position of begging you to go home by volunteering to work beyond the legal limit.

Isn't that the way God handles us?

- God doesn't send vengeful lightning bolts down on us when we sin or mess up.
- God doesn't zap us into line when we go astray.

**No, God continues to act mercifully toward us,**

**putting us to shame for turning away from him.**

Placing us in the position of humility and gratitude.

God gives everything – his only beloved Son

– to be humiliated,

- persecuted, and Killed.

So that those who look upon him might know the guilt of their actions that put him there and **seek reconciliation with God**

**This is the spiritually mature, godly way to handle encounters with wickedness and evil doing.**

...

God is always drawing people in – desiring relationship with us.

Human ways of vengeance and antagonism push people away,

Our human history is full of bloodshed,

- deportations,
- walls,
- and racial hatred
- – all with the result of pushing people away, keeping people out.

Jesus preaches another way

- a way that breaks down barriers,
- overcomes hatred,
- and seeks to bring all people into the family of God.

**Jesus' message was counter-cultural in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. and it is counter-cultural today.**

It goes against the grain of what is considered proper living.

In this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was speaking to Jews who were living under Roman oppression

- their sacred temple had been burned down by the Romans
- they were rising up in anger and vengeance against their enemies.

And here is Jesus

- calling them to follow him on a different path.
  - A path that builds bridges,
  - that overcomes hatred with love
  - and violence with peace.

*Be perfect – spiritually mature – as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

In our world, where human nature says we're supposed to make enemies of those who are different from us

- whether by race, or religion,
- or culture, or sexual orientation,
- or political views --

Jesus says love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Jesus has enemies, those who push him away

- the Father has a single enemy with countless minions
  - Satan the source of lies and violence.

And yet, God lovingly sends rain for all and makes the sun shine on all.

**Jesus died for all.**

**Who are we to contradict God with our hatred?**

Who are we to refute God's grace with our violence against others?

– be it fists, weapons,  
legal wrangling, Twitter insults,  
or Facebook lies?

Our loving heavenly Father makes the sun to shine on both the evil and the good

And the rain to fall on the righteous and unrighteous alike.

We have God's gracious life-giving presence in common with those we consider enemies.

**And By our dependence on God's provision of life itself,**

**we are drawn in together with those we consider enemies to worship him and praise him.**

We are drawn into relationship with the One

- who knit us together in our mothers' womb,
- who gave us the breath of life,
- who gave us the new birth in Baptism
- and filled us with the Holy Spirit:

**The heavenly Father who knows our names and who claims us as his own beloved children.**

In this relationship, we are transformed from being slaves to our baser human nature to sharing God's own life and growing up to maturity – to perfection – in Christ.

As Jesus was preaching this sermon on the mount, I can imagine people dropping away little by little–

Too hard

He's crazy!

“I'm not doing that!

I can't put my family, career, future in jeopardy.

Discipleship is not easy – it is demanding.

As God draws us closer to him, we are pulled out of our comfort zone.

We are placed behind Jesus – able to see and repeat what he does.

- Touching the lepers
- Calling sinners like Zaccheus and Matthew, the adulterous woman and Paul to repentance even as he forgives them.
- Making the lame to walk and the blind to see.
- Forgiving the repentant thief on the cross.

Loving others as God first loved us.

Ephesians 4 echoes our Lord's call to spiritual maturity:

*Christ chose some of us to be apostles, prophets, missionaries, pastors, and teachers,<sup>12</sup> so that his people would learn to serve and his body would grow strong.<sup>13</sup> This will continue until we are united by our faith and by our understanding of the Son of God. Then we will be mature, just as Christ is, and we will be completely like him.<sup>[a]</sup>*

*<sup>14</sup> We must stop acting like children. We must not let deceitful people trick us by their false teachings, which are like winds that toss us around from place to place.<sup>15</sup> Love should always make us tell the truth. Then we will grow in every way and be more like Christ, the head<sup>16</sup> of the body. Christ holds it together and makes all of its parts work perfectly, as it grows and becomes strong because of love.*

It is such a maturity – rooted in Christ – that we are called to practice daily

– in our conversations about the latest thing tweeted by the White House,

In our consideration of how to vote in the primary elections;

In our encounters with other people

– especially those we might be tempted to treat as less than...or not worthy of...

Let us indeed be perfect – mature – in the love of God so deeply and freely given to us in Jesus Christ.

Amen