



Links Players

Perfection

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

There is not a lot of perfection in golf. Yes, you may see the occasional ace or the 50-foot lag putt that inexplicably goes in. But these are always embedded in a round in which none of the other holes show a 1 on the scorecard. More than likely, players missed more than a few fairways and greens and hit bunkers instead. “I left a few out there,” comes up often when winners are interviewed.

A common description of successful golf is that it is a game of “limiting or managing your mistakes.”

You don’t play golf for long before your criteria for perfection relaxes a bit. Sure, every putt that doesn’t go in is technically a failure, but most players would consider a 30-foot downhill curving putt that breaks twice and ends up within a foot of the hole to be well within a standard deviation of perfection. It’s certainly in excess of reasonable expectations.

In fact, it’s our expectations that really define perfection in golf. Most of us would see the putt described above as perfect. There would not have been any reasonable hope that it would go in. Anything within a two-foot radius then seems “perfect.”

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But be perfect? Seriously? As your Heavenly Father is perfect?

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But the command to “be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” sets the bar high. By high. I mean truly unattainable. And the admonition to be perfect comes on the heels of the instruction that we are to love our enemies. Jesus also requires that (my paraphrase) “your righteousness needs to exceed that of the Pharisees.”

This request, of course, is clever. Pharisees were known for their knowledge of and adherence to God’s Law, as delivered to their ancestor, Moses. By setting the righteousness bar at “higher than that of the Pharisees,” Jesus implies that the Pharisees don’t make the cut. The Pharisees, being quick on the uptake, tumbled to this immediately, and their estimation of Jesus began to go from bad to worse.

But be perfect? Seriously? As your Heavenly Father is perfect?

One way to take this requirement is as Law: “It is your responsibility to be perfect.” This direction makes it something for you to do. But let’s be realistic; I don’t see a lot of perfection in

myself, and, frankly, I don't see that much in you, either. I don't know you, but I know your type: sinners. As for me, I struggle enough with perfection in the realm of four-foot putts, not to mention personal righteousness.

The Pharisees upbraided Jesus for dining with sinners. But, hey, it was that or eat alone.

Another way to view the “be perfect” thing is as gospel. If we follow Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, where he uttered these words, he'll eventually wind his way south to Jerusalem, to the cross. Here, he played the Messiah card in a way nobody anticipated—other than the Old Testament prophets, events, and many spotless lambs who foreshadowed it..

At the cross, Jesus took our sinfulness on himself and made his righteousness available to us. His perfect righteousness.

He makes us perfect “as your Heavenly Father is perfect!”

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for providing us with the righteousness that you require of us.

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Peter Muller

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The Links Daily Devotional appears Monday-Friday at linksplayers.com.