

IN A PERFECT WORLD

*In a Perfect World.....*would life be different,..... and how would things be?

More than likely, each of our images of a “Perfect World” would be different.

Would it rain only when we wanted it to rain?

Yet, how would that affect a farmer in Manitoba... or Alberta? How could that happen, for it to rain just on time for all who need it?

Could we fall and not get hurt, in a perfect world?

Yet, would gravity have to change? That wouldn't be good. Would we not feel pain,..... and then also not feel the velvety surface of a rose petal?

Would a perfect world be free of diseases,..... yet bacteria and viruses also serve important functions?

Would bullets not be able to fly through the air,..... nor beach balls, wedding bouquets and hockey pucks, too?

Could we extract from the earth and pollute all we want in a perfect world? Would we miss cause and effect? Would we long from the fresh smell of rain and sprouting seeds reaching for the sun?

By definition, Perfection is the ideal, the archetypal model, and the situation without flaws or defects.

And, keep in mind,.. Perfection is NOT stagnant; it is not a static absolute. The athlete with a perfect score 50 years likely wouldn't have a chance, today.

The beauty and wonder of our planet and of life itself is in the moving interaction. There is motion. Perfection is dynamic.

Since, our physical environment seems to nurture and thrive for life pretty well, and since we can not imagine or conjure up a better physical domain, then maybe, just maybe..... God's creation is perfect,..... and... what about humans?

If we are living in a perfect “physical”/ natural world, then something is not right. It seems “OUR” world isn't perfect.

We have not treated nature well, and there are consequences for our actions. Soil depletion, deforestation, pollution are but a few examples.

And, Global warming is grave threat.

In addition, our social human experience is flawed.

We do war and destruction against each other.

Millions in the world are hungry and are suffering. We exploit and abuse people. There is racism and other injustices,.... and we struggle just to keep harmony in our own little world. We have to hire people with guns to keep real and perceived threats away from us.

We sense the pain of the brokenness.

There is a problem,..... and maybe we have made the problem.

I don't believe we are defective. We are able to do better, yet we struggle with our own intelligence / with decision making.

Too often we ignore God or worse, we act as competitive gods / as if we are in control.

The Leviticus passages begins with the statement of who is God, and what is our role.

For God said, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

This is a reminder that we are made in the image of God / that we can be holy as God is holy, and this declaration is an affirmation.

God hasn't given up on us.

God wants to help us do better / "to get it right."

Leviticus is a guidebook for daily living...God's way / in God's world.

It is a book of rules / of practice, and not theory.

Some people appreciate specific rules...all spelled out on how to live, and today's passage from Leviticus presents just that.

To improve social relationships / to live in community harmony then we must set aside part of our bounty / our harvest / our earnings for the poor and for strangers passing by.

In other words, "the haves" must help the have nots. And, note this sharing was planned,... and not just a dig in the pocket when an emergency happens. Also, no questions were asked.

This sharing is the way to live.

Imagine that impact such living would have?

The other guidelines deal with business affairs and how to treat people.

We must be honest and just in business and with employees.

We must not devalue people, but rather focus on the issues of concern.

People should not be put down or abused. All people should be treated equally, regardless of their money or power or lack of it.

And of course, bribes and false accusations are not allowed.

Then, some nice overarching expectations are cited, including not hating, avoid holding a grudge, and a no to doing vengeance,.... and finally God gives the clarity of purpose and motivation: to love our neighbour as our selves.

Love our neighbours..... this requirement is really old, Old Testament stuff. It wasn't a Jesus invention. God's been trying to get this point across for a very long time.

*Oh, And, the loving **self** part is important, too.*

Three things from this passage to remember before we go on to the New Testament passages.
NO, actually, we need to remember all of it.

Better stated: Three things to underline—two were said and one was not.

One: be holy as God is holy!

Two: love your neighbour as your self.

Three, what was not in print: there was no guarantee about the outcome. These required ways of living are just that—a way to be / to live.

Sure, living a just and loving way will yield a higher likelihood of positive social / human relationships,..... but there is no guarantee.

God is just and loving, yet we humans still struggle with our relationship with God, each other and creation,... and we feel it.

Nevertheless, God doesn't give up on us.

That is the nature of God..... of holiness.... of being/ doing love.

To be sure, relationship problems persist.

Divorce happens; people fight and mistreat each other. We turn to hiding or weapons to end a conflict instead of solving it.

There are misunderstandings. There is greed and malice to contend with. Fear is a huge impediment,..... as is laziness and indifference.

Selfishness and arrogance hinder healthy relationships, and so on.

Jesus is a wonderful example of God's endless pursuit of healing broken relationships.

In the flesh with words and by example, we are presented, with even greater clarity, God's way / God's will: God's holiness and love through Christ.

*It all about Relationships / doing and being in relationships.

And, even though the "eye for an eye" policy tried to limit retaliation, as Jesus points out, it wasn't enough. It didn't bring healing.

In contrast, Jesus said, when attacked, do NOT attack back, but..... don't run and hide either.

Submitting and accepting abuse does NOT solve relationship problems. That is disengaging.

Retaliatory attacks / returning violence and abuse is no doubt engaging in the relationship, but in the wrong and destructive way.

Vengeance or surrendering will not solve relationship problems.

God's way brings healing and restoration, and so Jesus said to stand up, resist and confront the attacker with dignity.

Demand justice / to be treated with respect.

Turning the other cheek is not submission.

In the context of Jesus' culture, a slap on the right cheek meant the slap was a insulting, devaluing slap with the back of the hand.

Presenting/ turning the other cheek was a bold declaration demanding respect. It declared, "I will not accept your insult. Treat me as an equal." **I love myself and I will not be abused.

///Responding in that fashion is engaging in the relationship as equal partners!!

The story I'm about to share, some of you already heard. If you've heard it before, you can take a brief nap.

Hey, in my "Perfect world.... everyone would laugh at my jokes.

Anyways,..... When I was in grade seven, there was a notorious bully, and he was appropriately named, "Wolfgang."

On one occasion, I was playing soccer on the school yard with friends, and Wolfgang appeared. He came up to me, and demanded me to give him the ball. I knew his reputation, and he **was** a bully. I didn't trust him, and so I said, "No." Our relationship was off to a bad start, and it got worse.

After I resisted, he punched me in the nose.

Jesus didn't say turning the other cheek would be easy.

To that I replied with simple honesty, and said, "OUCH, that really hurt. How did you get to be so strong?"

I didn't think about what to say; it just came out.

Even so, it was an honest and frank response that treated him with respect,... as an equal.

He paused for a moment, shuffled his feet, and answered in a quiet manner, "Well,... I don't have a mother. I live with my dad, and I have to do all the chores around the house. I guess that's how I got my muscles."

I was touched by his confession, and we shared a good conversation. I learned about how hard it was not having a mother at home.

He was never bully to me again.

Honesty and respect are necessary for a healthy relationship.

Still, there is no guarantee, yet choosing a violent reaction will radically increase the likelihood of more violence and brokenness.

Jesus gave two more examples on how to creatively engage people who are acting mean or abusive.

Giving up one's cloak when a nemesis tries to take one's coat is a nifty way to shame and embarrass the assailant.

Going without a cloak meant being naked, and then, by doing that all the world would see how nasty the aggressor was being by apparently taking everything.

This technique is creatively illuminating the injustice.

As is the example of going the second mile.

In those days, Roman soldier were allowed to make a local Jew carry his backpack for one mile only. He could get in big trouble if he took advantage of that. The Romans didn't want to enrage the locals, yet they still thought a little abuse was fine.

Going the second mile is creatively saying, "NO, I will not submit to your control."

Jesus gave three examples of how to respond to abusers:

One way is to stand up and confront the injustice. A second is to shame them and expose their unjust actions. The third is to get them trouble.

None are violent reactions, and all demand justice and equal treatment.

Relationships..... any kind of relationship, to do it well it takes a lot of time, patience, creative thought, tons of energy,..... and love.

There needs to be a love for justice / for balance and equality / for respect ... and there needs to be love for self and the other person, even if that person is the enemy.

And, then in verse 48, Jesus summed it all up by saying, "Be perfect, ...as God is perfect."

That statement is very similar to the Leviticus requirement to be Holy as God is Holy.

HOW in the world can we be Perfect as God... or as holy as God?

Is this a set up for failure or just lofty theological wishful thinking?

For the most part, we humans do not pursue that path, and so we live in a world full of fear, greed, predatory capitalism, injustices, abuse, genocide, war, hunger, brokenness, and on and on.

Instead of teaching respect, fairness and justice, we build weapons and more prisons.

Instead of encouraging creative responses to abusive actions, we hire others to "keep order"/ to control the bullies,.... or we submit.

Most Canadians were NOT appalled by the police brutality that happened in Toronto, and nearly all protesting was done peacefully.

Peaceful protestors were assaulted.

Most Canadians would rather have stability and order, instead of trying to resolve the messiness of relationships in conflict.

In our world, how do we regard First Nations' youth... or the hungry ... or strangers?
In a church, does everyone have an equal voice or do just the powerful and assertive dominate?

We teach a different way than what Jesus taught and demonstrated which was God's way.

Yet, we call ourselves Christian? What do we mean by that?
Are we followers.... or simply admirers of Jesus.

In First Corinthians, Paul said the only foundation for living / the only way of being is the way Jesus taught and lived,... which was God's way.

In verses 16 and 17 of Chapter three, Paul expands on that by saying, We are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in us.
And, he echoes the Leviticus message, "For God's temple is Holy, and you are that temple."

A temple?????

A temple is not a shrine, nor is it a mere physical static building.

A temple was place to connect with God / to grow in a relationship with God.

A temple was also a place to be honest, to confess, to be reconciled and to find healing. Therefore, a temple was a dynamic place / a place where change/ transformation happened ... and a place for a growing relationship with God.

In addition,..... everyone was welcome to join in, too. It was an inclusive / transforming / vibrant place to be... with God.

**Paul, Jesus and God are all saying the same thing!

We are to be as God / to be perfect/ a temple / holy.

We are to live God's way, as Jesus clearly demonstrated.

This all seems way out of reach – impossible, except maybe in a Perfect World.

I think we get stumped when we try to control the results / the outcome.

Those things are beyond us,... and not the goal, either.

I think we miss the essence if we make perfection a static idol to worship. A temple is a temple because what happens inside.

The enduring wonder and amazing holiness of God rests in God's unending hope and aspiration for us... for all of humanity.

That is love! Love for wholeness, justice, peace and.... healing.
That passion is our path to salvation / wholeness.
We can call that salvation.

The perfect way / God's way is the dynamic, never ending commitment to be in a whole and healthy relationship with you and me.
And, that undying faithfulness truly is love,..... and it is a journey.

By the grace of God and the power of God's indwelling Spirit we are invited to engage in that holy way:
To love justice, to love our enemies, our neighbours and ourselves, and to love God and all of God's creation.

Are we there yet? I don't think so, nevertheless:

God's Perfection is not a destination or static condition, but rather a hope and aspiration for a good relationship / for healing and wholeness.

It is a constant, unwavering decision to love and be loved—a way to be and live.

Maybe, we are made in God's image, and with God, maybe there is hope.