

# 'Be perfect,' but don't expect to do it alone, prof tells Truett crowd

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WACO—In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs his disciples to “be perfect,” but he didn’t mean they had to do it alone, philosophy professor Robert Kruschwitz told an audience at Baylor University’s [Truett Theological Seminary](#).

Jesus told his disciples to be perfect, but he never told them they had to achieve perfection on their own, Robert Kruschwitz, philosophy professor in Baylor University’s Institute for Faith and Learning, told a chapel service at Truett Theological Seminary. Kruschwitz delivered the T.B. Maston Foundation lecture. (PHOTO / Ken Camp) “It will not be by our own efforts that we will become perfect, but through reception of divine grace which is communicated to us in two ways—through the indwelling Spirit and by a vision of God regularly mediated to us through Jesus the Word, the word pictures of Scripture and the companionship of other disciples who are being drawn toward perfection,” said Kruschwitz, senior scholar in Baylor’s [Institute for Faith and Learning](#).

Kruschwitz delivered the [T.B. Maston Foundation](#) lecture in Christian ethics, named to honor the legacy of a pioneering 20th century ethics professor at [Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary](#).

While Jesus challenges his disciples to press on toward the ultimate goal of perfect wholeness, he also calls them to faithfulness in the gradually unfolding process of growth and movement toward wholeness along the way, he noted.

## **Maturity / completeness**

“As our natural human capacities develop, as our sinful dispositions are redeemed, and as we are drawn to know and embrace ever more fully God’s purposes for our lives, Jesus calls us to a perfection—that is, a maturity or completeness—that is appropriate for that moment in our journey,” Kruschwitz said.

“This implies that his injunction to be perfect involves an ever-moving target. Just as we are led to achieve one level, the goal ratchets up to the next level. But it also means the target is always in reach for us, that we can move to it from just where we are.”

Since no two Christians follow exactly the same journey and each matures at a different rate, the call to perfect wholeness varies from one person to another, he observed.

“The ultimate goal remains the same for everyone, but the immediate content of Jesus’ command to a person varies with her capacities, gifts and divinely approved location in life,” he said.

Jesus calls his followers to become perfect together, not in isolation, Kruschwitz emphasized. The command has a plural subject—“ye” rather than “thou” in King James English, or “you all” instead of “you” in Southern vernacular, he noted.

Challenges arise in churches because Christians mature at different rates and follow different faith journeys, he observed.

## **Differing moral antennae**

“Each will make progress toward perfection, but not on the same path as others. Therefore, they may develop differing moral antennae,” Kruschwitz said.

“One may become very sensitive to contemporary issues of environmental degradation, another to violence toward prenatal life, a third to sexual purity and so on.”

Because Christians respond to ethical issues with “differing moral antennae,” they may “get in one another’s way and interfere with one another’s projects in a world that is broken in so many places and in such complex ways,” he acknowledged.

“To the extent that disciples differ in their insight and commitment, and in their wisdom to apply these to a significant moral issue, rallying others to one’s stance may be very frustrating and lead one to despair of any faithful, united witness,” he said.

Kruschwitz pointed to an insight from [John Cassian](#), who traveled among the desert Christians in the fifth century. Cassian noted the Christians who retreated to the desert to escape worldly distractions individually failed in their pursuit of perfection.

“They all had blind spots, character flaws and weaknesses,” he said.

### **Making ‘spiritual honey’**

But Cassian observed if a discerning Christian moved from one of them to another like “a most prudent bee,” drawing on the flowering virtue of each one but not expecting any individual to possess all the virtues, a believer could make “spiritual honey.”

Whether in the fifth century or the 21st century, nobody can find absolute perfection in the lives of individual Christians, but it can be glimpsed in the collective body of Christ—the church, Kruschwitz concluded.

And individual Christians within the church—limited by their differing perspectives—grow in the image of Christ as they learn from other

believers in community, he added.

“So, here’s the good news we discover when we wrestle with the problem of differing moral antennae: Our variations in insight, concern and practical wisdom are actually signs that the perfect human being, Jesus Christ, can only draw us into his fullness through his very body, the church,” Kruschwitz said. “And he will do this, if we humbly and patiently yield ourselves to him.”