

Spiritual Perfection By Means of Forgiveness

Introduction:

1. Not many people believe me when I tell them I am perfect.
2. Even if they don't know me very well and they can't think of any particular imperfection they remind me, "all have sinned are fall short of the glory of God."
3. If I insist that I am perfect it is not long until they begin to identify things that I have done wrong (or they ask my wife and she fills them in).
4. Perfection seems like something unachievable. Yet, passages like Matt. 5:48 ring in our ears: "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
5. What is spiritual perfection? Is it achievable? What is God expecting of me?

Discussion:

- I. The "telieos" word family denotes "completeness."
 - A. Most often when we think of the concept of perfection we think of "NOT having any faults," but the idea in the N.T. suggests a completeness associated with being mature.
 1. Being mature is not an absolute state like being without fault is an absolute state.
 2. One can be mature and complete without being absolutely faultless.
 - B. The "telieos" word family as used in the N.T.
 1. Used in Phil. 3:15 in association with the attitude of pressing on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The NASB marginal reading is "mature."
 2. Heb. 7:19 says, "the Law made nothing perfect." The idea is that the Law did not bring to completion the plan of God.
 3. Heb. 11:40 speaks of those of faith as not being made perfect apart from us. The idea again seems to be that God's plan was not fully realized (made complete) through them as it has been in us, the new covenant people of God. Cf. Heb. 7:11
 4. James 1:4 says, "Let endurance have its perfect result that you may be perfect and complete," another way of saying "hang in there until the end."
 5. "To be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," means that you treat others, even your enemies, with love and kindness, be mature like your heavenly Father is mature (Matt. 5:48). We may not be able to be faultless as God is faultless, but we can be gracious like He is gracious.
 6. Jesus said to the rich young ruler, "If you wish to be perfect (complete), go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). The idea is NOT, "If you want to be faultless," but if you want to be complete, then make a full commitment to follow the Lord.
 - C. It is just this full commitment that makes us complete or perfect, BUT it is not by our own power.
 1. While the rich young ruler was unwilling to make such a commitment and it is indeed impossible by mere human power to enter the kingdom, with God it is possible.
 2. But how is it possible?
- II. In the previous lesson we identified three ways we can view the idea of spiritual perfection.

1) We are made spiritually perfect by means of our initial forgiveness. 2) We move toward greater spiritual perfection as we constantly “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:1ff; 2 Cor. 7:1). And 3) We will reach spiritual perfection at the resurrection when our bodies are “transformed into conformity with the body of His glory” (Phil. 3:21). The focus in the rest of this lesson will be on spiritual perfection by means of initial forgiveness.

A. How has God made it possible for us to be perfect by forgiveness?

1. Heb. 10:14-18: “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified . . . their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” Note when we enter into covenant relationship with God we are forgiven.
2. Rom. 5:6-11: “Christ died for the ungodly. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us . . . justified (pronounced “not guilty”) by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”
3. 2 Cor. 5:21: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”
4. Isa. 53:4-5: “Our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried . . . He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.”

B. Why did He have to do it this way? “I forgive people of the sins they have committed against me without sacrificing my son for them. Why can’t God do the same?” Justice demands payment for sin.

1. God cannot simply sweep sin under the carpet.
2. Sin is not merely a violation of a particular commandment it is an attack on God, a crime committed against Him (2 Sam. 12:9, 10; Psa. 51:4).
3. Wrath is God’s holy action against sin. He abhors sin and sinners.
 - a. We sometimes say that God hates sin and loves the sinner. Not entirely accurate. Psa. 5:5 says, “Thou does hate all who do iniquity.” Psa. 11:5 says, “The one who loves violence His soul hates.” Cf. Prov. 6:16ff.
 - b. We soften it. God doesn’t.
 - 1) Dog returning to its own vomit (2 Pet. 2:22).
 - 2) Prodigal longing to fill his stomach with what the swine were eating (Lk. 15:16).
 - 3) Rotting carcasses (Matt. 23:27-28).
 - 4) Disgusted with Israel’s disloyalty. Described as lusting after her lovers, whose flesh is like the flesh of donkeys and whose issue is like that of horses (Ezek. 23:20).
4. The holiness of God in action. Ron Edwards.

“Whenever you see the half-eaten fruit of the garden laying at the feet of a cherub wielding a flaming sword and two sets of footprints leaving the garden but not returning, you see the holiness of God in action. Next time you see a great body of water swell out of its banks let it be a perpetual reminder of the holiness of God in action during the days of Noah. Next time you smell the smell of sulfur, turn to Gen. 18 and 19 and remember Sodom. Next time you hear of an earthquake remember when the earth opened up and gobbled up Korah. Next time you read the obituary column, remember Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. When you read about violence in your neighborhood remember Nadab and Abihu who were

torched from heaven, remember Uzzah, struck down like he was hit by a sniper when he touched the ark. And when you meditate on the sacrificial system with its grace, mercy and substitutionary atonement, flip that coin and meditate on the other side. See the mountains of charred and mutilated animal carcasses. See the streams of blood flowing through Jerusalem as if they were arteries rather than streams of water.

- C. The cross is not a pleasant picture.
 - 1. Yes we like to see there our forgiveness, God's kindness demonstrated to us, His love.
 - 2. But the cross is about God's white-hot anger against sin.
 - 3. He paid the price that we might be free from the death that we deserve.
 - 4. This is the means of our spiritual perfection. It is not that we are not guilty, but that He pronounces us "not guilty," treats us as though we had never sinned, while taking the consequence of our sin upon Himself.
 - 5. Perfect, yes, but only by means of what He has done to make us perfect.
- D. Christianity is the only religion where spiritual perfection is achieved by what God has done. All other religions are works oriented. The worshiper labors to make himself/herself perfect before God. In Christianity we are made perfect by the power of God.
- F. Faith is the only appropriate response. We trust in Him for the forgiveness we need but do not deserve. We are dependent upon Him who has dealt with our faults. Let us then show gratitude then offering up a sacrifice of praise in reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28).

Conclusion:

- 1. Are you perfect? I am not asking whether or not you are faultless. I know you have many faults.
- 2. I am asking, "Have you allowed God to make you perfect (complete) by forgiving you of your sins?"
- 3. Are you still trying to be good enough or have you accepted God's payment for your sin?