

The Perfection Which God Requires (Phil. Iii, 8-15)

by Seth Rees

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the concept of perfection in Christianity, which is a state of being sanctified wholly and free from willful transgression.

Scripture: John 14:15, Philippians 3:8, Philippians 3:12-13, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 6:1, Hebrews 10:14, 1 John 1:7, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Christian Perfection", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Seth Rees preaches about the concept of Christian perfection, emphasizing the distinction between perfection from creation and perfection from redemption through Jesus Christ. He explains that Christian perfection is not about achieving absolute perfection like God, but rather having a perfect heart filled with perfect love, controlled by the Holy Ghost. Rees highlights the importance of maintaining a perfect heart towards God, even if our service may not be perfect, and encourages believers to focus on pressing forward towards the high calling in Christ, leaving behind past experiences and trusting God to keep their souls in good order.

Transcript

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. 12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. -- Phil. 3:8-15

The word "perfect" when applied to salvation is so widely misunderstood that we are compelled to repeat again and again the New Testament line of teaching, and the New Testament thought with regard to what Christian perfection is.

You notice that the word "perfection" is used twice in the lesson which I have read.

First, referring to a perfection yet to be reached, a perfection yet deferred until the resurrection out from among the dead -- the first resurrection.

Second, a perfection which the apostle professes that he has, and he addresses those who have the blessing and says, "Let as many as be perfect be thus minded."

Men seek perfection with diligence in everything else but religion. They are desperately in earnest to reach perfection in agriculture, science, art, invention, in fact everything but salvation. Men do not hesitate to use the term when applied to things temporal, material, or things perishing. They speak of a perfect day, a perfect machine, a perfect fit, a perfect gentleman, a perfect flower, in fact, you can hear the word almost everywhere until it comes to the great Gospel of our God, then when we talk about perfection men lift their hands in horror; they say that is going too far. Everybody understands, and especially those of you who have read something of theology, (and I hope you are not afraid to rub up against it) that the apostle here is not talking about absolute perfection, the perfection of God, for as we have been made perfect we will make progress not only here, but hereafter and to the increase there shall be no end, but for that we will never reach a place where we will approximate the perfection of God, nowhere is it promised that we are to be gods, and we want to be careful to stay where we belong. So we are not talking about the perfection from that standpoint but there is something required of us, a perfection we ought to have, and I trust we may be able to get at an intelligent understanding of what God expects of us. The apostle here is not talking about perfection that comes from creation, but from redemption. All that you or I have, or ever will have, or be, we get through redemption. Our first parents had a perfection that was by creation, but they lost it, and the estate squandered we have never been able to regain. It was lost -- absolutely lost. All that we have, or ever will have, we have through Jesus Christ, and around the cross clusters everything that is nearest and dearest to us this afternoon, and from it we must never wander a single step. There is no place on earth or in Heaven where we will get beyond the cross of Jesus Christ. The very privileges that we will enjoy through all the cycles of eternity are purchased through the Blood; and we will sing about the Blood age upon age as the centuries roll along. The Lamb that was slain, the Blood that was shed, the Christ that volunteered to lay down His life to redeem us, will forever be our theme. Glory to His name!

If this perfection is not the perfection of creation then it cannot mean the perfection of our bodies or our minds. I am confident that serious error and sometimes shipwreck comes as result of misunderstanding God's salvation in this particular. Nowhere in the Word are you commanded or promised to have a perfect head. There is an idea abroad in these days that people have got to get saved so that they will make no mistakes. This is not true. It is not a perfection of mind but of spirit. The only perfection taught between the covers of the Book is that perfection of heart which comes when we are sanctified wholly and filled with perfect love. John Wesley was right when he said, "The only thing you can add to the experience of perfect love or entire sanctification is more love." The reception of the Holy Ghost is always subsequent to regeneration, always after conversion, is never one and the same with it. When we receive the Holy Ghost we receive a heart made free from sin and filled with perfect love, and when the Holy Ghost comes in and makes us perfect in heart; while he greatly aids our heads and corrects our erroneous thought and false teaching, preserves us from mistakes in many matters, and while He enables us to see clearly things that seemed mystical and hard to be understood before, He does not give us perfect heads and he does not fix us up so that we do not make any mistakes.

The devil is an accuser of the brethren and he does not want anything better than to get us to accusing ourselves when there is no occasion, or accusing others when there is no evidence against them. If sin is removed from our hearts it is impossible for it to get back without our consent. For as a flaming sword guarded the gate of Eden after sin was driven out, so after we are cleansed from inbred sin, the Holy Ghost keeps guard at the gate and sin can never reenter the human soul without the consent of the will.

Some people seem to have an idea that they can get into sin unconsciously and unbeknown to themselves. Not at all. If you ever get into sin after you are saved, you get into it from your own choice, you go into it deliberately. There is no sin about ignorance. God means not only to give us perfect hearts but to guard and preserve and keep us true to Himself. A child a few weeks old shows signs of anger and strikes at its mother. This would be sin if it had knowledge, but where there is no knowledge, no law, there can be no sin. The Blood stands for all mistakes. The Blood atones for the child up to the years of accountability, until that time he is held free from guilt though he is filled with carnality.

A mistake is not a sin and you will cripple your experience and weaken your influence by a confession of sin when it was only an unintentional mistake. Sin is a willful transgression of the law of God. If a man sins he knows it. If the Holy Ghost does not let me know that I have sinned I will never believe it, no difference who charges me with it. I cannot take what people say about it. He will notify me when there is anything wrong. It is the will that is the king of the man. Where goes the will there goes the whole man. God says if any man willeth to do His will he shall know of the doctrine. Then if I will to do His will He has engaged to keep me from guilt and from the consequences of sin. So I trust we will be careful about accusing ourselves or accusing others. "If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."

There is no darkness, no real spiritual darkness unless there is willful transgression of God's law. There may be circumstantial or providential darkness and there may be no outlook from a human standpoint, but there is always a hole in the top; you can look up when you can look nowhere else.

John was mistaken in his judgment when he thought that God's messenger was the angel of the Lord, and he was mistaken again in his practice when he got down and worshipped him. The messenger said, "No, don't do that. I am one of the Lord's servants. That is all."

Then we must recognize the fact that our treasure is in earthen vessels, and I do not believe it is a bad idea to exercise care about being too positive that the Lord is speaking to us or that the Lord is leading us. We often hear, "The Lord said this to me," and "The Lord told me to do that," or "I dreamed a dream and the Lord told me in the night." Now, the Lord is not the only one that speaks to folks. The Holy Ghost does guide us, to be sure, but He has a threefold guidance, not always by a voice; He guides by providence, by the written Word, and by spiritual intuition or impressions made on our minds which are sometimes almost as clear as an audible voice. But as we are commanded to try the spirits so we must try the voices, for Satan often speaks, he is a ventriloquist and can throw his voice so as to sound as if he was in the center of your being and attempt to make you think that it is the Lord talking. Let us lie low at the feet of Jesus and try every spirit and every voice by the written Word. Some claim to get the voice by opening the Bible at random and other ways almost like lottery. I would not say that the Lord does not sometimes use such means, but they are certainly not always reliable. In these and other ways some have fallen into grievous mistakes.

It was all right for Gideon to put out the fleece and ask that it should be wet and the ground around it dry and I think I can see reasons for his putting it out the second time and asking that it should be dry and the ground wet, but we are now in altogether a different dispensation and the Lord does not speak so much to us through signs as He does through His Word, Providences, and the Spirit.

That was not a bad clause in the old Quaker discipline under which I was brought up in regard to being careful about the assertion that our messages were of Divine authority, rather allowing the message itself to be the evidence. If a thing is Divine, it will prove itself. Sometimes I have seen people label their messages before they were born and when they appeared they did not fill the bill. The Holy Ghost has all our interests at heart, and He will give us time to find out His will. It is not necessary for us to be in a hurry and run after strange voices. The best and solidest convictions are formed in solitary retirement with His presence. As a rule when you feel somebody driving you and pushing you, it is the devil, and should be looked on with suspicion at least. The Lord is so good and kind that if you have any doubts about a matter He will give you time to weigh it, test it, hold it before Him until you get convictions born of Heaven, and feel settled in regard to it.

Again, I want to say it is not a perfection of service. There is a vast difference between a perfect heart filled with perfect love, controlled by the Holy Ghost, and a perfect service. We will never do a perfect service in this life. There is a vast difference between a perfect service and serving the Lord with a perfect heart.

I remember one time when I was pastor and my little boy was four or five years old, I sent him down the street for five distinct articles of merchandise. He was delighted to go shopping. In a little while he came back filled with childish glee, but was much mortified to find that he only had four bundles. His service was not perfect, but he had certainly rendered the service of a perfect heart, and it was just as satisfactory to me as if he had gotten the rest, so I kissed him and pressed him to my heart and praised him.

The Lord has treated us that way so many times. We have started out with a perfect heart to do a perfect service and thought we would get it all done, but when we came in and laid down the bundles we found there was one missing; then the Lord has taken us up and caressed us and made us feel just as if we had done everything for the very best. What would He care about the amount of service anyhow, if it is done with a perfect heart? What did I care about the bundles that my little boy brought? I did not send him so much for the bundles as to give him the lesson. What I cared for was the perfect obedience of the child. What God cares is to see that your heart is perfect towards Him and that you are doing your best to do His will. It is just like Satan to come and talk to you about the fifth bundle and call your attention to your mistake and ask why you did not get the other bundle, but if you did your best the Lord says it is all right, and He may let us go shopping again some time, so remember there is a difference between the service of a perfect heart and a perfect service. Satan will accuse you and charge you with everything that is bungle some and awkward and when you have prayed in public your sentences were not completed and grammar incorrect, Satan whispers "What a fool you have made of yourself." No; you did not make a fool of yourself. You did not get all the bundles, but you did your best and you got enough to please the Lord. Sometimes when you have publicly testified, your heart was full and you broke down and wept and did not say all you intended or had thought to say. When you sit down the devil whispers, "What a fool you have made of yourself." No, you did not make a fool of yourself; you just forgot one of the bundles, and probably had all you could carry.

The experience of a perfect heart is not exempt from temptation. There is a difference between temptation and sin. There is a difference between impatience and being tempted to be impatient. I only referred to

impatience as a sample of the many temptations that come to us. You cannot be tempted to impatience without having feelings very similar to the feelings of impatience. The devil makes sanctified people feel as if they were very impatient sometimes when they are not. They should simply turn on him and tell him to take his goods and go. Tell him it did not originate in your heart for you do not grow that sort of fruit. Satan comes at sanctified people as an angel of light.

All of this going down every few days, one day you have the victory and the next day the dumps, is not New Testament piety, it is not salvation. The baptism with the Holy Ghost is a definite work; it occurs but once in a lifetime; never will be repeated unless you backslide. When the Holy Ghost comes it is to abide. The fact that you do not feel He is there is none of your business; it is your business to know that He has come in and has sanctified you wholly, and that you are walking in the light. If you know this there is no reason why you should dictate to Him how He should conduct Himself or cause you to feel. There is not power enough in earth or in hell to overthrow you while you remain utterly yielded to God. There are people who would destroy you if they could, but they cannot. He opens and no man can shut. The sanctified are absolutely dead to flattery and to criticism.

What I have said of temptation will apply all the way around. How can you be tempted unless there is something similar to the thing itself? Many a time people have temptations often severe and they do create suffering but it is that we may know the fellowship of His sufferings. Did not Jesus suffer awful temptation in the garden? Did He not sweat great drops of blood? Yet He never had guilt for a moment. Beloved, no difference if sorrows untold, anguish inexpressible, and temptations that seem like torture sweep over you, there is no guilt, there is no pollution as long as the Holy Ghost abides. While you walk in the light and obey God the power of the evil one is paralyzed. There is only one chance for him to regain entrance into your being, and that is through the consent of your will.

Another result of this perfection is that it puts us where we will forget the things that are behind and press on towards the things that are before. He says to the Hebrews, "let us go on to perfection;" that is to be sanctified wholly. Here he says, "Forgetting those things which are behindhand reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ our Lord." Let us get away from our experiences, think of something in the future. What can be accomplished if you run back every day to where we started from.

O for a race of men and women who will get beyond their own experiences and their own interests and commit it absolutely and forever to God. He will care for the deposit, He will keep it forever. Every time you take a spell of the dumps and go down you weaken your faith and injure your influence as a Christian. What would you think of an army of soldiers, just ready to face the foe, if two thirds of them would break ranks and go back for a canteen of water? What we want is to keep in line, stand shoulder to shoulder; be true to God and to each other. You can never gain anything by disturbing your experience, by examination or investigation.

In your covenant you agreed to commit it to God forever.

If my watch should be out of order I should take it to the watchmaker. He made it and he can fix it. When I got it he gave me a written guarantee that he would keep it in repair. He has the number of the watch and keeps the dates. Brother, God has the number of your soul; He has your name graven in His hand; He has given a written guarantee to keep the running gear of your soul in good order. Why not leave it with Him? I see a whole lot of people, spiritually speaking, setting their watches, tinkering with the hands. I have

known people to carry a watch they had to set everyday; always at work with the hands. The difficulty was in the inside; get the inside works right and the clock will strike twelve at noon. God wants us to live so that sinners will look at us any time and see the time of day. They could tell it on your face, and they will want to set their watches by you. This is what Paul said, "Set your watch by me; I have the right time; follow me as I follow Christ." He did not say, "I am afraid there is a cog out of one of my wheels," or that "there is something wrong and if you set your time by me you will go astray." He said, "Here is the time of day; set your watch." Glory be to God! "I wish all your watches were just like mine, except this chain!" "I wish you had everything I have," said Paul, "except this watch chain."

With a perfect heart we must allow a good broad margin for each other and for the Holy Ghost, and we must not get critical either with ourselves or with others, but we must smile and sing and shout and go on and forget the past. Sometimes I have said to someone, "Are you sanctified?" "Well, brother Rees, I have got the victory today," and the very way they said it indicated that they expected to lose it tomorrow.

Brother, let the Holy Ghost abide; talk to Him as a person; court his favor; tell Him how glad you are of His presence; tell Him He is always welcome to the best chair in the house, and that he may always have the head of the table. Many imagine that He comes and goes like their feelings. Why, the Bible teaches us better than that. His purpose is to stay and if we let Him, no one can drive Him from us. I purpose to let Him abide forever; do you? Glory to His name! Hallelujah!

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