

2010 Living Our Legacy: Our Human Legacy - “**Perfect**”

This morning we'll conclude Our Human Legacy series by considering the meaning of **Christian Perfection**. Along with being Created and Loved, Fallen and Forgiven, Called and Gifted, and that we are Empowered; part of our human legacy is the notion that we can be Perfect.

Does that seem like a far fetched idea to you? Me too! With the constant bombardment of multiply reminders of the “fact” that we are human, this seems a silly undertaking today. You might even be questioning the validity of my claim that part of our Human Legacy is that we can be made Perfect. We can tell by looking in the mirror we're not perfect. We can sense from even a cursory analysis of our human reactions, attitudes and behaviors, that we are far from perfect. We can see and observe as we look around that there are few others who meet the ‘qualifications’ of Perfection. And lest we have any final doubts about our imperfections...all we have to do is ask our spouse, or our kids! How in the world can I even stand up here and claim that part of our Human Legacy is that we can be perfect? Well consider this:

*Every priest goes to work at the altar each day, offers the same old sacrifices year in, year out, and never makes a dent in the sin problem. As a priest, Christ made a single sacrifice for sins, and that was it! Then he sat down right beside God and waited for his enemies to cave in. It was a **perfect** sacrifice by a **perfect** person to **perfect** some very **imperfect** people. By that single offering, he did everything that needed to be done for everyone who takes part in the purifying process. The Holy Spirit confirms this: This new plan I'm making with Israel isn't going to be written on paper, isn't going to be chiseled in stone; This time "I'm writing out the plan in them, carving it on the lining of their hearts." He concludes, I'll forever wipe the slate clean of their sins. Once sins are taken care of for good, there's no longer any need to offer sacrifices for them. Heb. 10:10-18*

Oh...now this might start to make sense. This is a sermon about sin. How do we live in relation to the fact that we sin; both before and especially after we have become a believer in Jesus Christ? Do believers, followers, Christians, still sin?

Then how can we be considered Perfect? If believers are not to sin, then does the fact that we do sin, mean that we really aren't believers, or that we have to start all over every time we sin? These are the questions I hope to answer today, but before we delve deeper, I want you to consider one more scripture:

*But you are to be **perfect**, even as your Father in heaven is **perfect**.* Matt. 4:48

That is a difficult standard...being as perfect as the Father. But would God have commanded it, if it were impossible? It seems to me that this quote from the OT, that is reaffirmed in the NT, must mean that since perfection is commanded; and as we read from Hebrews it has been provided by the final sacrifice of Jesus...then perfection is possible.

It might not be a big concern of yours as you struggle to pay bills, and raise kids, and enjoy life...but it ought to be! It is commanded of us that we be perfect! It's not optional, its not debatable, its not negotiable...it is expected of us as part of our Human Legacy! We have received it...and we must achieve it...so that we might leave it, correctly with our succeeding generations. But how? First, by understanding what Christian Perfection is NOT, then secondly, by appreciating what it IS.

1. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT MEAN BEING PERFECT IN KNOWLEDGE.

The reality of this point is that never in this life will we know everything there is to know. Perfection is not about perfect knowledge. Though God may be known as Omniscient: knowing everything, this is not part of our human legacy of perfection. We are limited by space and time and finiteness of understanding. We are humanly incapable of knowing everything; so even in our state of "Perfection"; we dare not be or act like "know-it-alls".

2. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT ELIMINATE MAKING MISTAKES.

Partly due to the fact that we do not know everything, we can be, and undoubtedly will be, mistaken in many things.

The difference between mistakes and sins has largely to do with intention. I'll address that more in a minute. There are many acts and actions that we take that may not be 'sinful', but are still mistakes or mistaken. Being perfect does not eliminate us from making mistakes.

3. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT OVERCOME INFIRMITIES.

Knowing God's love, and being in a relationship with God does not eliminate physical disabilities, raise our IQ's, or make us more articulate, or prevent us from becoming ill or injured or sick, diseased, or die! But, and this is important to note; if these things are not eliminated by our 'perfection' then neither do these conditions keep us from experiencing and sharing God's love. Our standard of Christian Perfection is not modeled after or based in any way on our culture's view or definition of what "perfection" might look like.

4. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT MEAN BEING FREE FROM TEMPTATION.

We will always be surrounded by things that can lead us away from God. But with God at the helm of our lives, we have the strength to resist those temptations and to follow God. I Corinthians 10:13 reminds us that *'with every temptation, God makes a way for us to escape it'*. The trouble is we don't often want to escape it! Being tempted is not the same as sin, it's not a sin to be tempted, it is a sin to act on or give in to the temptation. So just know that if you are tempted doesn't mean that you are not perfect. Now to the last and biggest.

5. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT MEAN BEING SINLESS.

This is where it gets a bit dicey. There are many well-meaning (and some completely misguided) people who believe that when once a person accepts Jesus and is forgiven...they can never sin again. The apostle John even states as much in his epistle:

Those who have been born into God's family do not make a practice of sinning, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they are children of God. I John 3:9

Now, as much as I'd like to be able to stand here and deliver to you the news that once any person accepts Jesus, he/she never sins again...I can't. I know better, I know different...I know me! I'm not sure what John meant, but I believe when he said that we *can't keep on sinning* means something different than when we occasionally still sin, even after we have received Jesus.

I know that Christ's death, and resurrection have settled the consequences of our sinful nature, and our sinful acts, decisions, and behaviors. I know that once we are forgiven, the power of sin has been broken...it's not that we can't choose to sin; it's that we can choose not to sin! Does that make sense? Like the old black preacher I've quoted many times: "God didn't fix me up so I couldn't sin, just so I couldn't sin and enjoy it! Christian Perfection is not sinless perfection. We will likely sin after we've been saved, even after we've been perfected as we'll see now that we consider what it IS.

1. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IS A PERFECTION OF DEPENDENCE.

The fact that our legacy of perfection has not rendered us unable to sin, simply means that we must maintain a relationship of dependence, AFTER; we accept Jesus and his forgiveness. Part of the reason God didn't fix us up so we couldn't sin, is because He probably knows that in that state, we'd soon figure we were doing it on our own, and proudly leave Him behind, as we so often do. No, God knows the human nature, and has built into this relationship a desire, an ability, and an ever-present need for all His human creation to live in daily dependence upon Him. Being dependent upon God is not a sign of human weakness; it is a sign of Christian Perfection.

2. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IS A PERFECTION OF LOVE.

The heart of the matter for Jesus, when asked about the greatest commandment; was that we humans love God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and love our neighbor as our selves. He went so far as to say that if we were able to do that, we'd be completely, 'perfectly' fulfilling all the law.

John in the same book that creates some dissonance as noted earlier, now gives us more clarity:

*God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full **perfection** in us! 1 John 4:9-12*

John Wesley echoed both Jesus and John, defining Christian Perfection as *loving God with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength*. He went on to state: "This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love...every word and action springs from love...every desire is in subjection to the obedience of Christ. The human will is entirely subject to the will of God and all the affections are wholly fixed on God."

3. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IS A PERFECTION OF INTENTION.

We all know that our actions are not always pure, but our intentions can be. This was John Wesley's understanding of Christian Perfection; having intentions that were captive to the mind and heart of Jesus Christ; that before every thought was acted upon, it was first held up to the light of Jesus. Before any attitude was displayed, it was held under the microscope of God's love. Before any action was taken or delivered, it must first stand the test of blessing or cursing; knowing that God's best is always a blessing. Christian perfection is largely, maybe even ultimately a matter of intention. Our lives might still choose sin, but our intentions can be pure and holy.

There is a delicate balance between becoming proud of our Christian Perfection and worshiping at the altar of our own human helplessness. We must be careful not to allow whatever our Perfection might look like to become a badge of honor, and we must be careful not to dismiss whatever this perfection might look like, because we so easily and quickly claim: 'oh, I'm just human'! It's there, somewhere in the middle.

The human who is going on to perfection will increasingly grow a disdain with the world. The human being who is going on to perfection, will increasingly be more aware of how far we have yet to go, and less awareness of how far we have already come. The human being who is going on to perfection will increasingly evidence humility, that heightens the awareness of ones own sins, and minimizes the awareness of the sins of others. The human being who is going on to perfection will gain increasing deliverance from childishness. My friends, Perfection is part of our Human Legacy.

2010 Living Our Legacy: Our Human Legacy - “Perfected”

*Every priest goes to work at the altar each day, offers the same old sacrifices year in, year out, and never makes a dent in the sin problem. As a priest, Christ made a single sacrifice for sins, and that was it! Then he sat down right beside God and waited for his enemies to cave in. It was a **perfect** sacrifice by a **perfect** person to **perfect** some very **imperfect** people. By that single offering, he did everything that needed to be done for everyone who takes part in the purifying process. The Holy Spirit confirms this: This new plan I'm making with Israel isn't going to be written on paper, isn't going to be chiseled in stone; This time "I'm writing out the plan in them, carving it on the lining of their hearts." He concludes, I'll forever wipe the slate clean of their sins. Once sins are taken care of for good, there's no longer any need to offer sacrifices for them. Heb. 10:10-18*

*But you are to be **perfect**, even as your Father in heaven is **perfect**. Matt. 4:48*

Christian Perfection is not...

1. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT MEAN BEING PERFECT IN _____.
2. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT ELIMINATE MAKING _____.
3. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT OVERCOME _____.
4. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT MEAN BEING FREE FROM _____.
5. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION DOES NOT MEAN BEING _____.

Those who have been born into God's family do not make a practice of sinning, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they are children of God. 1 John 3:9

Christian Perfection is...

1. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IS A PERFECTION OF _____.
2. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IS A PERFECTION OF _____.

*God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full **perfection** in us! 1 John 4:9-12*

3. CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IS A PERFECTION OF _____..