

Articles and Sermons :: Christian Perfection - Wesley

Christian Perfection - Wesley - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/9/26 16:40

Thanks to Josh Parsley for finding this for me :-)

Christian Perfection

“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”

(Philippians 3:12)

Introduction

The teaching of Christian Perfection causes more offence among believers than any other doctrine. Why? Because many cannot tolerate the word ‘perfect.’ Those who teach it are considered to be the worst of heretics. Some warn us that it is best not to use such terminology, but does not Scripture make use of it? We cannot make room for the devil by modifying the words. In our text Paul indicates that he was not as perfect as he should be. Some who deny the idea of perfection use this as an excuse for their own ungodliness, forgetting that Paul adds, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded” (Philippians 3:15.)

In this sermon we will endeavour to find out in what sense a believer is not perfect, and in what sense he is perfect.

In what sense is a believer not perfect?

(1) Scripture and personal experience reveal that we are not perfect in knowledge. We may understand many wonderful truths, yet there are many areas where we verge on total ignorance. There are apparent mysteries both in the spiritual and natural world we will never fathom out. Do we fully comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity, or how Christ could empty Himself and take upon Himself human flesh? Are we able to interpret all the signs and the seasons? Do we know the exact moment of Christ’s return? We fail to understand the way God works, especially in our own generation. Without revelation we would find no answers for the many questions we have. In reality we are not perfect in knowledge.

(2) Christians are not perfect to the extent that they cannot make mistakes. Errors are the result of our limited capabilities. True, we do not err regarding the plain teaching of salvation and sanctification, but we all go astray on everyday matters. How often we have been mistaken about facts and have presented them in a false light? How many times have we misunderstood the intentions of others? Do not even the wisest of Christians disagree regarding the interpretation of some Bible text?

(3) Christians are not perfect with regards to personal infirmities or failures. We often lapse in the areas of morality, worldliness, evil speaking, and even taking God’s name in vain. By infirmities we also refer to physical problems such as slowness of understanding, muddled thoughts, and loss of memory. Do we not all have flaws in manners, speech, and personality?

(4) Every day we have to contend with many temptations. The devil constantly tries to fill our minds with his lies. The fact that we are tempted proves that we have not reached absolute perfection, for do we not give in to it? Except for our Lord Jesus Christ, because we are in the flesh, we are prone to lapses and find it easier to sin than obey God. Nevertheless, those who seek holiness are always moving to higher ground.

In what sense is a believer perfect?

We have to agree that there are several stages of growth in the spiritual life, just as there is in the natural. The apostle John writes to “little children,” “young men,” and “fathers” in the faith (1 John 2), indicating that this is true, however at no stage is ungodliness acceptable. If we are truly under grace then “sin shall not have dominion over” us (Romans 6:14.) Genuine Christians are free from outward sinful deeds “... He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:8-9.)

Some suggest that these verses teach that believers do not sin to the same extent as the unsaved, but what support is there anywhere in Scripture for such a view? Is this not the same as saying that Christians must sin? We agree that even the holiest of men, Abraham, Moses and David for instance, committed some terrible sins, but this does not mean that there is no victory over it. Also we ought not to measure the Christian life against the failures of men. John makes it abundantly clear that all who commit sin are of the devil (1 John 3:8), and that the child of God does not sin (1 John 3:9.) Does

this not speak of the need of Christian Perfection?

To answer the question, "In what sense is a believer perfect?" we submit the following:

(1) Believers have freedom from evil and sinful thoughts. Genuine Christians do not meditate on ways to carry out wickedness, to steal, murder, or lust. Evil intentions come from within an evil heart, but if it has been cleansed through Christ's blood the evil heart no longer exists. Whenever the devil seeks to implant evil thoughts in our minds we can use the spiritual weapons at our disposal to defeat them "... "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:11-12) "... "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5.)

(2) Believers have freedom from evil attitudes. The Lord Jesus Christ has called His followers to love their enemies, abusers, and persecutors. This means that they do not retaliate or seek revenge for the wrongs done against them; instead they have a forgiving spirit. Only a purified heart can contain such love as this.

(3) Believers have freedom from an evil nature. The apostle Paul states, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20.) Do not these words reveal that Christians have been delivered from both inward and outward sin? All true believers have had their hearts cleansed by faith, and seek to be pure and holy. They have a new inward nature that affects the outside. Instead of anger, bitterness and unforgiveness there is the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and self-control. If, as some say, we are only freed from sin at death, then does not this make death the saviour? Yes, we do allow sin into our lives, but through the Holy Spirit our consciences tell us that we must "confess our sins" so that the faithful and just Lord would "forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9.)

Conclusion

To suggest that Christ does not give us power over sin is to establish justification by works. But, sin no longer has dominion over the child of God (Romans 6:14.) We do not have to commit sin, have evil thoughts and wicked attitudes. God has created a new and clean heart within us (Ezekiel 36:25-36.

These are wonderful promises! But listen, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1.) Instead of looking back to the way we were, let us look forward to what we ought to be, to the provisions won for us through the blood of Christ "... "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Philippians 3:13.)

Re: Christian Perfection - Wesley - posted by heartablaze (), on: 2007/9/26 17:45

And also thanks to you for sharing it with us.

Quote:

hmmhmm wrote:

Do not these words reveal that Christians have been delivered from both inward and outward sin? All true believers have had their hearts cleansed by faith, and seek to be pure and holy.

These are wonderful promises! But listen, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1.) Instead of looking back to the way we were, let us look forward to what we ought to be, to the provisions won for us through the blood of Christ "... "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Philippians 3:13.)

That excerpt especially spoke to me. We are cleansed and should now run our race, not wanting to stumble, but knowing that our God is gracious and will help us up if we give him our hand. We should strive to perfection; our bodies have the Spirit indwelling which leads us to that. Praise God!

Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/9/27 3:37

Quote:

-----To suggest that Christ does not give us power over sin is to establish justification by works. But, sin no longer has dominion over the child of God (Romans 6:14.) We do not have to commit sin, have evil thoughts and wicked attitudes. God has created a new and clean heart within us (Ezekiel 36:25-36.

These are wonderful promises! But listen, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1.) Instead of looking back to the way we were, let us look forward to what we ought to be, to the provisions won for us through the blood of Christ... "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Philippians 3:13.)
