

**“What it Means to be Reformed”; Session # 54 – “Christian Perfection and John Wesley” (Part 5), Prepared for the Adult Sunday School Class  
on October 11th, 2015, by Pastor Paul Rendall.**

2nd Corinthians 3: 18 – “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The degrees of glory are not perfect in this case; they are partial until we die and our spirit is made perfect.

Hebrews 12: 22 and 23 – “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the assembly of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

**Remembering that Christ’s obedience is the only Perfect Obedience to God’s holy law, a Sincere Obedience in heart, word, and deed, to all of the moral commandments of God’s word, is what God is looking for from every Christian. This sincere obedience is rendered to God by the grace of Christ.**

**Romans 5: 17-19** – “For as by one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”

**John Owen says:** “The saints weigh their own righteousness in the balance, and find it wanting.... In particular: they daily weigh all their particular actions in the balance, and find them wanting, as to any such completeness as, upon their own account, to be accepted with God. “Oh!” says a saint, “if I had nothing to commend me unto God but this prayer, this duty, this conquest of a temptation, wherein I myself see so many failings, so much imperfection, could I appear with any boldness before him? Shall I, then, piece up a garment of righteousness out of my best duties? Ah! it is all as a defiled cloth,” Isaiah 64:6. These thoughts accompany them in all their duties, in their best and most choice performances: — “Lord, what am I in my best estate? How little suitableness unto thy holiness is in my best duties! O spare me, in reference to the best thing that ever I did in my life!” Nehemiah 13:22. When a man who lives upon convictions has got some enlargements in duties, some conquest over a sin or temptation, he hugs himself, like Micah when he had got a Levite to be his priest: now surely it shall be well with him, now God will bless him: his heart is now at ease; he has peace in what he has done. But he who has communion with Christ, when he is highest in duties of sanctification and holiness, is clearest in the apprehension of his own unprofitableness, and rejects every thought that might arise in his heart of setting his peace in them, or upon them. He says to his soul, “Do these things seem something to thee? Alas! thou hast to do with an infinitely righteous God, who looks through and through all that vanity, which thou art but little acquainted withal; and should he deal with thee according to thy best works, thou must perish.” - Vol. 2 of his Works, P. 188, Of Communion with the Son Jesus Christ.

**There are 2 specific errors taught by John Wesley, which I will tell you about today, that ought not to be received or believed.**

**a. Wesley believes that God is willing to give us complete holiness in this life:**

He says: “The command of God given by St. Peter; ‘Be ye holy, as he that hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation,’ implies a promise that we shall be thus holy, if we are not wanting to ourselves.” “Nothing can be wanting on God’s part: as He has called us to holiness, He is undoubtedly willing, as well as able, to work this holiness in us.” “For He cannot mock His helpless creatures, calling us to receive what he never intends to give.” “That He does call us thereto is undeniable; therefore, He will give it, if we are not disobedient to the heavenly calling.”

**b. Wesley believes that we can be completely delivered from sin in this life:**

He says: “But the great question is, whether there is any promise in Scripture, that we shall be saved from sin?” “Undoubtedly there is.” “Such is that promise, Psalm 130, verse 8: ‘He shall redeem Israel from all his sins’; exactly answerable to those words of the angel; ‘He shall save His people from their sins.’” “And surely ‘He is able to save unto the uttermost, them that come unto God through Him.’” “Such is the glorious promise given through the prophet Ezekiel in Chapter 36, verses 25-27: Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.” “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” “Such (to mention no more) is that pronounced by Zechariah, Luke 1: 73-75, ‘The oath which He swore to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, (and doubtless are all of our sins) to serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life.’” “The last part of this promise is peculiarly worthy of our observation.” “Lest any should say, ‘True, we shall be saved from our sins when we die’, that clause is remarkably added, as if on purpose to obviate this pretense – ‘All the days of our life.’” “With what modesty then can anyone affirm, ‘that none shall enjoy this liberty till death.’”

**Our Response:**

In these last two paragraphs we find Wesley contending for what he believes is true; that “we shall be holy if we are not wanting to ourselves”. God will not command His creature to give Him love and obedience and then mock “his helpless creature” by “calling him to receive that which He never intends to give”. What Wesley is refusing to acknowledge, I believe, is the truth that redeemed humanity have been commanded to pursue holiness (Hebrews 12: 14) in the context of repeated and continual weakness and failure; in terms of their not perfectly living up to God’s expectations which He commands of them in His word. And we are called to mortify (put to death) the deeds of the body, our members which are on the earth; we are to put them off.” We do not do these things every once in a while in living the Christian life. The truth is, that even as Christians, we still have the flesh, even though we do not walk according to the flesh. If you live according to the flesh, you will die. But the person who has the Spirit and is led by the Spirit and walks in the Spirit is living the Christian life as God intends. He does not have to go by his own evaluation of himself in relation to experiencing the perfection that Wesley is describing; that is, to see yourself as having attained to perfection at a certain level of obedience, or attaining to an experience where the Christian Himself determines that he has reached it. I do not believe that John Wesley understood the nature of sin or the high standard of perfect righteousness and holiness that we are called to as Christians.

**The imperfections that exist in the believer's life and obedience do not mean that our service to God is not accepted or acceptable to Him.** It is accepted, with the imperfections attendant to it, because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us and to our works.

2nd Corinthians 3: 18 – “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The degrees of glory are not perfect in this case; they are partial until we die and our spirit is made perfect.

Hebrews 12: 22 and 23 – “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the assembly of the firstborn who are registered in heave, to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

Luke 17: 7-10 – “And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, "Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, "Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. 10 So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'”

**A.W. Pink says:** “A readiness of disposition is what God regards, and that disposition is judged by Him according to the resources which are at its command. Our Father estimates what we render unto Him — by the purity of our intentions. Little is regarded as much — when love prompts it. If the heart is really in it, the offering is well pleasing to Him whether it is but “two young pigeons” (Luke 2:24), or tens of thousands of oxen and sheep (1 Kings 8:63).

“The Covenant of Grace insists not so much upon the measure and degree of our obedience, as on the quality and nature of every degree — that it is sincere and upright” — Ezekiel Hopkins (1634-1690). In contrast with legal obedience — evangelical obedience consists of honest aims and genuine efforts, striving to live holily, and to walk closely with God — that is according to the rules He has prescribed in His Word, and, according to the gracious condescension — is received and rewarded by God for Christ's sake. That holy purposes and sincere resolutions are accepted by God — though they are not really accomplished — is clear from what is recorded of Abraham: namely, that “he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar” (Jam 2:21), for he never actually “offered up” Isaac, except in intention and willingness. Upon which Thomas Manton said: “God counts that to be done which is about to be done, and takes notice of what is in the heart — though it is not brought to practice and realization. Yet not idle purposes when men hope to do tomorrow, what should and can be done today.” “We labor, that, whether present [at home in the body] or absent, we may be accepted of him” (2 Corinthians 5:9) — must be our grand and constant endeavor.

Another example to the point is the case of David, who desired and planned to provide a more suitable dwelling-place for JEHOVAH in Israel's midst. As Solomon, at a later date, declared: “But the LORD said to David my father, ‘Forasmuch as it was in your heart to build a house for my name — you did well in that it was in your heart’” (2 Chronicles 6:8). God graciously accepted the will for the deed, and credited His servant with the same. So it is with evangelical obedience: that which is truly sincere and is prompted by love unto God, though very imperfect — He graciously accepts as perfect. When He appeared before Abraham, the father of all those who believe, He declared, “I am the Almighty [all-sufficient] God; walk before me, and be perfect” (Gen 17:1) — which, in the margin, is accurately and helpfully rendered,

“upright or sincere”, for absolute perfection is in this life impossible. Legal obedience was approved by justice; evangelical obedience is acceptable unto mercy. The former was according to the unabated rigor of the Law, which owned nothing short of a conformity without defect or intermission. Whereas the latter is received by God through Christ, according to the milder dispensation of the Gospel (Gal 3:8).” – Taken from his article on Evangelical Obedience, November, 1949.

**Listen to Thomas Brooks on this Sincere Obedience** – “In the covenant of works, God required perfect obedience in our own persons; but in the covenant of grace God will be content if there be but uprightness in us, if there be but sincere desires to obey, if there be faithful endeavors to obey, if there be a hearty willingness to obey. Well, saith God, though I stood upon perfect obedience in the covenant of works, 2 Cor. viii.12 ; yet now I will be satisfied with the will for the deed; if there be but uprightness of heart; though that be attended with many weaknesses and infirmities, yet I will be satisfied and contented with that. God, under the covenant of grace, will for Christ’s sake accept of less than he requires in the covenant of works. He requires perfection of degrees, but he will accept of perfection of parts; he requires us to live without sin, but he will accept of our sincere endeavors to do it. Though a believer, in his own person, cannot perform all that God commands, yet Jesus Christ, as his surety and in his stead, hath fulfilled the law for him. So that Christ’s perfect righteousness is a complete cover for a believer’s imperfect righteousness. Hence the believer flies from the covenant of works to the covenant of grace; from his own unrighteousness to the righteousness of Christ. If we consider the law in a high and rigid notion, so no believer can fulfil it; but if we consider the law in a soft and mild notion, so every believer does fulfil it: Acts xiii. 22, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will” ; Ταῦτα τὰ θελήματα, “All my wills”, to note the universality and sincerity of his obedience. David had many slips and falls, he often transgressed the royal law ; but being sincere in the main bent and frame of his heart, and in the course of his life, God looked upon his sincere obedience as perfect obedience. A sincere Christian’s obedience is an entire obedience to all the commands of God, though not in respect of practice, which is impossible, but in disposition and affection. A sincere obedience is a universal obedience. It is universal in respect of the subject, the whole man; it is universal in respect of the object, the whole law ; and it is universal in respect of duration, the whole life ; he who obeys sincerely obeys universally. There is no man that serves God truly that doth not endeavor to serve God fully: sincerity turns upon the hinges of universality; he who obeys sincerely endeavours to obey thoroughly, Num. xiv. 24. A sincere Christian does not only love the law, and like the law, and approve of the law, and delight in the law, and consent to the law, that it is holy, just, and good, but he obeys it in part, Horn. vii. 12, 16, 22 ; which, though it be but in part, yet he being sincere therein, pressing towards the mark, and desiring and endeavoring to arrive at what is perfect, Phil. iii. 13, 14, God accepts of such a soul, and is as well pleased with such a soul, as if he had perfectly fulfilled the law. Where the heart is sincerely resolved to obey, there it does obey. A heart to obey, is our obeying; a heart to do, is our doing; a heart to believe, is our believing; a heart to repent, is our repenting; a heart to wait, is our waiting; a heart to suffer, is our suffering; a heart to pray, is our praying; a heart to hear, is our hearing; a heart to give, feed, clothe, visit, is our giving, feeding, clothing, visiting; a heart to walk circumspectly, is our walking circumspectly; a heart to work righteousness, is our working righteousness; a heart to shew mercy, is our shewing mercy; a heart to sympathize with others, is our sympathizing with others. He that sincerely desires and resolves to keep the commandments of God, he does keep the commandments of God, and he that truly desires and resolves to walk in the statutes of God, he does walk in the statutes of God. In God’s account and God’s acceptance, every believer, every sincere Christian, is as wise, holy, humble, heavenly, spiritual, watchful, faithful, fruitful, useful,

thankful, joyful, &c., as he desires to be, as he resolves to be, and as he endeavours to be; and this is the glory of the new covenant, and the happiness that we gain by dear Jesus.” Taken from the 5th Volume of Thomas Brooks Works, P. 327-329