

Be Ye Perfect

What is perfection? What does God require of us? What is the sign of completeness in Christian character? If you have ever asked yourself these questions, you are not alone. In this newsletter, we will be discovering the exalted standard that God has called us to.

Our High Calling

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus laid out the principles of His kingdom. He held forth God Himself as the standard of character to be attained by His disciples:

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (*Matthew 5:48 KJV*)

Lest any of us should be blind to the standard laid forth, Jesus gave clear examples of what He meant.

For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. (*Luke 6:32-34 KJV*)

Do we return kindness to those who have been kind to us? Selfish sinners do too! Jesus said:

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (*Matthew 5:20 KJV*)

A legal religion is insufficient to bring the soul into harmony with God. The hard, rigid orthodoxy of the Pharisees, destitute of contrition, tenderness, or love, was only a stumbling block to sinners. They were like the salt that had lost its savor; for their influence had no power to preserve the world from corruption. The only true faith is that which “worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6) to purify the soul. It is as leaven that transforms the character. (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, pg. 53*)

The Pharisees taught the people to love their neighbors and hate their enemies.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. (*Matthew 5:43 KJV*)

They practiced a rigid, loveless religion. They thought themselves holy, but acted no differently than Gentiles or sinners. Are we guilty of the same?

God's Example

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (*Matthew 5:45 KJV*)

God is not a respecter of persons. He does not withhold His blessings from the unjust. The Bible tells us:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (*James 1:17 KJV*)

God loves sinners, which is good news since all have sinned. Sin has its own consequences. Its power is in destroying us with the good gifts God gives. Did God then withhold His blessings? No, He poured out all heaven in one gift—He gave us Jesus.

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son.” He gave Him not only to live among men, to bear their sins, and die their sacrifice. He gave Him to the fallen race. Christ was to identify Himself with the interests and needs of humanity. He who was one with God has linked Himself with the children of men by ties that are never to be broken. Jesus is “not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:11); He is our Sacrifice, our Advocate, our Brother, bearing our human form before the Father’s throne, and through eternal ages one with the race He has redeemed—the Son of man. And all this that man might be uplifted from the ruin and degradation of sin that he might reflect the love of God and share the joy of holiness. (*Steps to Christ, pg. 14*)

God paid the ultimate price, not for people who could benefit Him in any way—He paid the ultimate price to save His enemies. It is true that some use this good gift to destroy themselves, but the purpose of the gift was to awaken in our hearts the power of love through the Holy Spirit. Love is the power God uses to save us from our sins, for the love of Christ constrains us. Paul points the Romans to God’s great love for fallen man in these words:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet

peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (*Romans 5:6-8 KJV*)

To give your life to save your enemies—to live and die to bless those that hate you—this is the example God has left us. Today, He asks each of His professed children, “What do ye more than the publicans and sinners?”

Gracious Words

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (*Matthew 5:21-22 KJV*)

I thought I knew what this verse meant, but my understanding was small compared to the broad and beautiful explanation given by God’s prophet.

‘Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [vain fellow], shall be in danger of the council.’ In the gift of His Son for our redemption, God has shown how high a value He places upon every human soul, and He gives to no man liberty to speak contemptuously of another. We shall see faults and weaknesses in those about us, but God claims every soul as His property—His by creation, and doubly His as purchased by the precious blood of Christ. All were created in His image, and even the most degraded are to be treated with respect and tenderness. God will hold us accountable for even a word spoken in contempt of one soul for whom Christ laid down His life.

‘Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it’ ‘Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.’ 1 Corinthians 4:7; Romans 14:4.

‘Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.’ R.V. In the Old Testament the word ‘fool’ is used to designate an apostate, or one who has abandoned himself to wickedness. Jesus says that whoever shall condemn his brother as an apostate or a despiser of God shows that he himself is worthy of the same condemnation. (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, pg. 56-57*)

God has not given us the right to determine who is saved and who is lost, who is apostate and who is faithful. The Jews took it upon themselves to make

these distinctions, and they condemned God to death. To us the question comes, “Who art thou that judgest another’s servant?” We need to recognize the value of every soul, no matter how degraded, and guard our words carefully. Words of warning and words of encouragement must be spoken, but not words of condemnation. Christians slip, but this does not make them apostate or a despiser of God. The Bible says a just man falleth seven times, but he gets back up. Why spend your time condemning someone when you could spend your time helping them back up?

I know of a man with very specific struggles that are easily visible to others. A pastor told him that he was lost until he overcame his sin. He told him he knew he was lost because it was clear that he loved his sins more than Jesus. Essentially, he told him he was an apostate and despiser of God. This was not the conclusion of Paul in Romans 14:4. He wrote: “Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.” He also told us the position we should occupy toward those who are being chastised by God for correction.

For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees. (*Hebrews 12:10-12 KJV*)

Our words should encourage and uplift sinners. Point them to a compassionate Savior who was tempted yet overcame on their behalf. Speak of the victories God has given you. Lead them to look to Christ and live, to look to the victory He is giving them. Remember that you are a sinner too! Ellen White writes:

Christ rejoiced that He could do more for His followers than they could ask or think. He spoke with assurance, knowing that an almighty decree had been given before the world was made. He knew that truth, armed with the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit, would conquer in the contest with evil; and that the bloodstained banner would wave triumphantly over His followers. He knew that the life of His trusting disciples would be like His, a series of uninterrupted victories, not seen to be such here, but recognized as such in the great hereafter. (*Desire of Ages, pg. 679*)

These uninterrupted victories that God’s prophet speaks about are described in another quote:

He says, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” John 15:5. Remember this. If you have made mistakes, you certainly gain a victory if you see these mistakes and regard them as beacons

of warning. Thus you turn defeat into victory, disappointing the enemy and honoring your Redeemer. (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pg. 332)

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Here are the words of a woman who met Christ and beheld His character. Words designed to lift up and encourage the sinner, words of grace. These words do not sustain a sinner in his course, but give him hope that God will accept him again despite his mistakes. God views our mistakes as victories if we learn from them, so why are we condemning others' mistakes and not encouraging them to learn so they can be victorious? It is true that some need strong rebukes, such as those uttered by Christ. The Bible tells us some are to be saved with fear and others with love. Using the wrong approach can serve to harden people in their sins. My friend needed encouragement, but he received condemnation. This didn't draw him closer to Jesus; it has pushed him away. Careless words, not softened by the grace of Christ, are seeds of death.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (*John 3:17 KJV*)

Condemnation is soon to come—those who refuse the work of God will be condemned for refusing the gift of salvation, and they will bear the wages of their sins. There is a close of probation where every man's destiny is decided. Until that day, no man, woman, or child is beyond repentance. If they are, you or I will never know. Imagine what it would have been like if some of the children of Israel in Egypt went around condemning each other for being slaves. How often this scene is acted out today by men and women that are in bondage to a faultfinding spirit. Instead of treating sinners as unclean, we must treat them as brothers who need encouragement and warning, not condemnation.

It's Impossible... Unless

Mankind is wholly incapable of loving their enemies or speaking gracious words. We cannot live to bless the world unless self is crucified and Christ dwells in us. Perfection of character is not attained through effort alone, but by a living faith. We must have Jesus in our hearts. He must live out His life in us, else we are not perfect. But how do we invite Christ into our daily lives? Begin each morning with prayer, asking Jesus to fill your heart with His love. Set aside time to read His Word and surrender your plans and desires to Him. Practice thankfulness to God throughout the day, and when faced with difficult people, pause to ask Him for patience and grace. Make it your habit to daily confess your shortcomings to God and to seek His help in overcoming them. As you intentionally include God in your thoughts, words, and actions, He will fill your heart with love and shape your character—you will bring Him glory.

Love is the basis of godliness. Whatever the profession, no man has pure love to God unless he has unselfish love for his brother. But we can never come into possession of this spirit by trying to love others. What is needed is the love of Christ in the heart. When self is merged in Christ, love springs forth spontaneously. The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within—when the sunshine of heaven fills the heart and is revealed in the countenance. (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pg. 384)

Complete Christian character is attained when the desire to bless others pours out of our hearts, like a river of living water. These blessings are not merely spiritual; they include temporal ones as well. We are to seek to bless even our enemies. Christ healed and blessed men and women. He mingled with them and sought their temporal good, then He bid them to follow Him.

In all humans there exists a desire to repay kindness. When blessed, we show our gratitude by blessing back. (Of course, unthankfulness is one of the markers of the times we live in, specifically among the people of God. This is powerful evidence that we are living in the last days!) God is "kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." Some may not seem to respond to love, others will take time to respond, and some will respond immediately. Don't become weary in well doing, for nobody is beyond the influence of love. Blessing your enemies will have a power that is impossible to wholly resist:

Paul carried with him the atmosphere of heaven. All who associated with him felt the influence of his union with Christ. The fact that his own life exemplified the truth he proclaimed, gave convincing power to his preaching. Here lies the power of truth. The unstudied, unconscious influence of a holy life is the most convincing sermon that can be given in favor of Christianity. Argument, even when unanswerable, may provoke only opposition; but a godly example has a power that it is impossible wholly to resist. (*Acts of the Apostles*, pg. 510)

The more we make Christ a daily companion, the closer we will be drawn to heaven, and the more love we will be able to show others. This is how we are perfected and fitted for heaven: self-sacrificing love.

To His faithful followers Christ has been a daily companion and familiar friend. They have lived in close contact, in constant communion with God. Upon them the glory of the Lord has risen. In them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ has been reflected. Now they rejoice in the undimmed rays of the brightness and glory of the King in His majesty. They are prepared for the communion

4 of heaven; for they have heaven in their hearts.
(*Christ's Object Lessons*, pg. 420)

It is past time for us to allow Christ to abide in our hearts. My brothers and sisters, quench not the spirit of love with a faultfinding and accusing spirit. If we want heaven in our hearts, we will have to have a greater death to self than we have experienced so far. This will require willingness, complete surrender to God, and a firm faith in God's promises. Take courage, for God has promised to finish the good work He has begun in each of us. If you truly seek Him, He will provide the strength, grace, and victory you need, and He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Time For A Change

"A new commandment I give unto you," Christ said, "That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." John 13:34. What a wonderful statement; but, oh, how poorly practiced! In the church of God today brotherly love is sadly lacking. Many who profess to love the Saviour do not love one another. Unbelievers are watching to see if the faith of professed Christians is exerting a sanctifying influence upon their lives; and they are quick to discern the defects in character, the inconsistencies in action. Let Christians not make it possible for the enemy to point to them and say, Behold how these people, standing under the banner of Christ, hate one another. Christians are all members of one family, all children of the same heavenly Father, with the same blessed hope of immortality. Very close and tender should be the tie that binds them together. (*Acts of the Apostles*, pg. 550)

One look at YouTube is enough to see how much Seventh-day Adventists hate each other. It's displayed to the world, monetized, and some Seventh-day Adventists even make a living off of it. When will we learn to love each other? When will we learn not to treasure up wrath for the day of wrath?

Jesus never suppressed one word of the truth; but he uttered it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in his intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in his voice as he uttered his scathing rebukes. He wept over Jerusalem, the city he loved, that refused to receive him, the way, the truth, and the life. They

had rejected him, the Saviour; but he regarded them with pitying tenderness, and sorrow so deep that it broke his heart. His life was one of self-denial and thoughtful care for others. He never made truth cruel, but manifested a wonderful tenderness for humanity. Every soul was precious in his eyes. He always bore himself with divine dignity; yet he bowed with the tenderest compassion and regard to every member of the family of God. He saw in all, fallen souls whom it was his mission to save. (*Gospel Workers 1892*, pg. 391)

It is always humiliating to have one's errors pointed out. None should make the experience more bitter by needless censure. No one was ever reclaimed by reproach; but many have thus been repelled and have been led to steel their hearts against conviction. A tender spirit, a gentle, winning deportment, may save the erring and hide a multitude of sins.

The apostle Paul found it necessary to reprove wrong, but how carefully he sought to show that he was a friend to the erring! How anxiously he explained to them the reason of his action! He made them understand that it cost him pain to give them pain. He showed his confidence and sympathy toward the ones who were struggling to overcome. (*Ministry of Healing*, pg. 166.)

The chapter "Saved By Hope" in the Ministry of Healing more fully and eloquently expresses the change that must be manifested in the people of God. This change begins with you and me. We don't need to hate or condemn those who are struggling to overcome. We can be quick to hear, slow to speak, and our words can be "words in season to him that is weary." We can, by the grace of God and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, live a life that glorifies God. We can love our enemies and do good to those who use us and hurt us. We can, because with God, all things are possible. We can take this opportunity to learn from our past mistakes, from our coldness of heart. My brother or sister, if you have been guilty of hating your enemies and living a cold, formal, Pharisaical life, will you consent today to let Christ do for you what you cannot do for yourself?

For a finished work

Jonathan Taylor

More Food for the Little Flock —

Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35