

Easter Worship Series: Resurrection Love: The Great Privilege

Sermon Title: Perfecting, Not Perfect

John 15:9-17; I John 5:1-6

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We conclude our Easter Worship Series, Resurrection Love: The Great Privilege with looking at what being made perfect in love means.

Who among us is perfect? “Not I,” said the pastor. Have you ever know anyone who seems to be perfect in every way? Their clothes are always clean and pressed. Their hair is never messed up. They always got straight A’s in school and had lots of lots of friends. They seemed to be on the right career path. Their marriage is a match made in heaven. Their children are always well behaved and excel at every sport and activity. Their lawn and landscaping is immaculate. There are no dandelions or other weeds. Their home décor is impeccable and nothing is every out of place. Everything they do and say seems to be perfect. Many of us for whatever reason may display to the world this aura of perfection, but it really doesn’t exist. Each person has problems. Each marriage has it challenges. And each family has its issues. Why? Because we are not perfect people. We goof up. We make mistakes. We have set backs. We fight with each other. We sometimes don’t even speak to each other. We may even seek unhealthy ways to sooth our pain. In biblical terms, we sin. We do not love ourselves or others the way God loves us. So we do things that are harmful to ourselves and others. We say and do things that are anything but loving.

In both the Gospel of John and in the letters of John, love seems to be a recurring theme. In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ last talk with his disciples focuses on what love is. And the first letter of John reminds the original readers that in the light of those who left their church community that they are not to hate or seek revenge, but to love as Christ loved us. They are to lead holy lives as a response to God’s gift which is the relationship we can have with God because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This first letter of John became central to John Wesley’s thoughts on Christian perfection.

If we as humans are not perfect people, then what is Christian perfection? We could also ask, when we choose to follow Jesus, do we automatically become perfect people? Well, not exactly. This idea of Christian perfection comes from 1 John 4:12b, “If we love each other, God remains in us and God’s love is made perfect in us.” The first word in this sentence begins with a two letter word, “if.” The entire idea of Christian perfection rests on this two letter word that introduces a conditional clause. This two letter word, “if” states a condition that can change our lives, our outlook, our actions, our everything. We often say, “If only I would...If only you could...If we had...If you were.” If we love each other, what? God remains in us. Wait a minute! This seems backward. Shouldn’t it read, “If God remains in us then we will love each other?” No and here is why. God has already given us love. God sent Jesus as the Son of God to show us God’s love by loving us with his very life. God’s love is already in us. What then are we to do with this love, but love each other! So then when we love one each other, God will remain in us. When we don’t love one another, God’s love does not remain in us. God’s love cannot co-exist where there is hate or pain inflicted on another. Think of it this way. When we do something that hurts another, does love exist in us? No, if it did, we wouldn’t have done the deed that hurt another.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus talks about abiding in his love. He says that if we love, then we are abiding in him. This is similar to the verse in 1 John 4:12, “If we love each other, God remains in us.” Jesus chose the word, “abide,” which means to remain in him, to stay connected to him. Loving another will reflect the love we receive from God. We could think of this in terms of a light bulb. If Jesus is a bright light bulb to abide in his love is to stay plugged into the Jesus’ light bulb. Our light shines brightly sharing that light of love with others. But what happens when for whatever reason we unplug from the Light of

Jesus? Our lives become dark. A lot of things can creep into our lives. We can blame others for what is happening to us. We can blame the church, the pastor, our spouses, etc. When no one is to blame but us. We have disconnected ourselves. We have un-abided ourselves from Christ. When our lives become dark, being loving will not be part of our lives. How can we reconnect to that source of Love? Usually first by recognizing that we have become disconnected, becoming humble, and asking for forgiveness. The electricity of love is constantly flowing from Christ. All we have to do is submit ourselves to being reconnected.

This is a process. We may disconnect and reconnect over and over again. And it is ok with God. God's love for us never grows tired of reconnecting with us. And here is where the idea of being made perfect in love comes into play. Imagine that there is a light bulb that every time it is disconnected and then reconnected it shines brighter and brighter until it shines as bright as the Jesus' light bulb. Every time it reconnects it becomes more and more of what it was intended to be - a light for all to see.

Another image we could use of being made perfect in God's love is a surgeon who carves out cancerous tissue. When we disconnect from God, we sin. It can grow like a cancer. The grace of God becomes a surgeon helping to diagnosis the cancer, locate the cancer, and then carve it out of us. However, God as the surgeon does not leave us empty, but also does reconstructive surgery on us and creates us to be better than new. God fills that empty spot created by the carving out the cancer with the healthy tissue of God's love. God's grace continually remakes us back into the original image of God that was placed in us at creation. This image we recognize in the face of Jesus. He is the incarnate face of the Love of God. The process of being made perfect in love is the process of God making and remaking us to become more like that perfect image of love we know in Jesus. Do we ever reach this level of love? Are we ever completely made perfect in God's love? Some say, "Yes, we can be," while others say, "Not in this life."

Here is another way of thinking about being made perfect in God's love. Oswald Chambers in his devotional, "My Utmost for His Highest," talks about being made into wine. "God can never make us into wine if we object to the fingers God uses to crush us...If we are ever going to be made into wine, we will have to be crushed; you cannot drink grapes. Grapes become wine only when they have been squeezed. I wonder what kind of finger and thumb God has been using to squeeze you and you have been like a marble and escaped? You are not ripe yet, and if God had squeezed you, the wine would have been remarkably bitter. To be a sacramental personality means that the elements of the natural life are presented by God as they are broken providentially in God's service. We have to be adjusted into God before we can be broken bread in God's hands. Keep right with God and let God do what God likes, and you will find that God is producing the kind of bread and wine that will benefit God's other children."

The process of being made perfect in God's love is a process of staying connected, abiding in Jesus, but it is also a process of being recreated, retouched, remolded, broken, and squeezed back into the image of God that was placed in us at Creation for the sole purpose to reflect God's love and be that love for others. This process, too, is the power of God's Resurrection love made know to us through Jesus. And oh, what a privilege it is to both receive this love, be perfected by this love, and to share this love with everyone.

Reflection Questions: What images would you use to relate to the process of being perfected in God's love? How is God perfecting you to reflect that perfect image of God's love to the world? And how have you shown God's love to others this week?

Resources: "Christian Perfection" by John Wesley; *My Utmost For His Highest* by Oswald Chambers