

Is Glorification Perfectionism?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 July 2010

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] The Christian is concerned.

And that was the question, Liffordley, and I guess I am kind of reading between the lines, the person asking the question was really talking about perfectionism.

And so I've kind of gone that route and then added to the question, and when does it take place, because that's crucial. And the reason is because my answer to the question is glorification, perfection.

As far as Christian is concerned, the answer to the question is yes and no. It's yes and no. It's both of those things, or both answers. And so, you know, you might be asking, well, wait, I don't understand.

Which is it? Is it yes, is perfection, or glorification, perfection, or perfectionism? Are those the same thing? And I say yes, they are.

[1:16] When does it take place? Well, that's the crucial issue, when it takes place. And that's what we're going to be considering, really, tonight. And to do that, we need to ultimately define, in some sense, though it's not an easy thing to define, define glorification.

It's easier to define or to determine just when it takes place. It's much harder to define just really what it is. And I could spend a lot of time just delving into the doctrine of glorification and what it accomplishes.

But I'm not going to do that. I'm going to spend the time really focusing on what I think is the real intent of the question about perfectionism. I may be totally wrong.

And if you ask the question, you may come up to me afterward and say, that's not what I asked you. But anyway, you're going to get what I prepared. And maybe it will be worthwhile.

Let's start with what it is not, what perfectionism is not, or what glorification is not. And I am putting those two together, though they're not the same thing necessarily.

[2:36] That is, the doctrine of glorification and the so-called doctrine of perfectionism are really not the same thing. But, talking about perfectionism, it is not, or glorification is not what some have called entire sanctification.

Sanctification. I guess in a sense, you're going to think I'm speaking at both sides of the mouth, and I do that. That is when I'm not busy swapping feet in my mouth.

But, you know, entire sanctification, that does take place eventually.

It just doesn't appear in this life, and we'll get to that. But anyway, there's the term, the recognizable term for the doctrine of perfectionism. It is usually called entire sanctification, the holiness church, and some others, and I'll name some of the denominations that hold to it in some shape or form. Wesley called it perfect love. I don't know if that's the blank I have next, or perfectionism. We've already talked about perfectionism, but Wesley preferred the term perfect love.

[3:58] And I would have to say that my conclusion has been, just as I've studied the doctrine, that really you can lay the entire doctrine of perfectionism or entire sanctification, and what it has evolved into even in our day, you can lay all that at John Wesley's feet.

It was his doctrine. Prior to John Wesley, there was no doctrine such as entire sanctification, and that is in the sense of something like that happening in this life.

But I'm jumping ahead because I do need to define it. And, of course, the idea is that we can reach a place of perfection, spiritual perfection, or holiness in this life.

That's basically the idea. And I'll define it a little bit further as we go along. And I might just, you know, lay out here the logical thinking of those who hold to this doctrine.

And really, let me boil it down. It's kind of this kind of thinking. Can I... Is it possible to go one minute without committing a sin? Okay.

[5:15] Okay. It's a rhetorical question. It's time for repentance.

Now, this is the kind of the progress of thinking. If I can go a minute. So a person says, yeah, I think I could. I could go a minute. One minute without sinning.

And so if you come to that conclusion, then logically you would ask, well, could I go 30 minutes without committing a sin? Well, if I can go a minute, then conceivably I could go 30 minutes.

How about half a day? Can I keep from committing any sin, any known sin to me? And there's where it gets a little dicey. Can I do that for half a day?

And maybe this person says, yes, I think I can. Well... Yeah. Exactly. See, we don't even need...

[6:16] We don't need this study tonight. Let's just pray. No, no, follow me here. How about an entire day? Well, maybe. And so then logic tells me that if it's possible to spend a sinless day...

Now, you've not really defined how I could do that. I mean, you know, and Wesley went into great lengths to try to describe what this would be like and how it might happen.

And though I would say to you right now that even Wesley admitted he never did reach the point. I mean, even though this is his doctrine. I mean, arguably, but I think there are many who would argue that the doctrine of perfectionism is John Wesley's.

It's his. And yet he admitted he'd never done it. Never reached that point. But the logic just says then, you know, if I could then... Maybe I could spend a month, you know, without sinning.

And so we'd just carry out the logic all the way to the fullest extent. And I could then conceivably come to a place where I stopped sinning.

[7:25] Now, obviously, if you know anything about the doctrine of perfectionism, and maybe some of you in your background come out of the Wesleyan Church or the Methodist Church.

I don't know. Or maybe some of the offshoots of Wesleyanism over the years. And you would say that is a gross oversimplification. And it is.

Certainly it is. And I would also have to admit to you that those who believe in perfectionism or the doctrine of entire sanctification would say that's not what we believe at all. By the way, I would just tell you, maybe inform you of some of the denominations and organizations that hold to this theology.

Wesleyan Church, Methodist Church, the Church of God, Missionary Alliance Church, Nazarene Church of Nazarene, the Salvation Army holds to that.

All the holiness churches, Pentecostalism, and so forth. And that's just to name a few. Now, what do they believe? Let me give you, and I think I may have printed this for you so that you didn't have to write it down.

[8:39] All of these definitions or kind of the whole definition comes from John Wesley. These are quotes from him. And so perfectionism is this.

A personal, definitive work of God. Did I print that out for you? All right. A personal and definitive work, a definite work of God's sanctifying grace by which the war within oneself might cease.

I know you read this for yourself, but sometimes it's better for the speaker to read it and you read it along and we kind of slow our minds down and kind of soak in the words here and the meanings behind them.

Basically, it's that war between the spirit and the flesh. The old man, new man, which is also a doctrine in and of itself.

But anyway, to go on. And the heart be fully released from rebellion into wholehearted love for God and others.

[9:43] That's why Wesley called it perfect love. He really preferred that term. To come to a place where you so perfectly love God that you cease to do anything that would dishonor Him and anything that would reveal a lack of love for Him.

John Wesley put it this way, a total death to sin and an entire renewal in the image of God. And his belief was that this was attainable and even promised in Scripture in this life.

Though, he never did get there. And I don't really know if I've ever read anybody who claimed to have reached that point. So I don't know if it's just theory, you know, doctrinal theory.

I don't know. But that's what it is. And it does sound good, does it? I mean, think about it. Maybe there's a part of us that would like to believe that and wish that it could be true, you know, that at some point in my life, God might bring me to a place spiritually where my sin nature is eradicated. Wouldn't that be great? If that could happen. And, you know, whereas John Wesley says, and this is another quote from him, a place where all inward sin is taken away.

[11:17] That's basically the belief. And I guess there's part of me that, just like I would love to embrace the theology that there is no such thing as hell.

I would love to believe that. But it's just not true, is it? And the Nazarene church, I'll just tell you basically what they say.

They believe that we can be made free from original sin, free in the sense that it no longer has any influence in my life, that it could reach that point.

or that my carnal nature, even my carnal mind, can be destroyed and expelled from me is the idea. Now, their biblical support, or what they claim to be the support from the Bible, they say that Paul was speaking of that, speaking of men and women who had reached that point, a place of perfection, in Philippians 3, verse 15.

[12:35] And where Paul wrote, therefore let us as many as are... Now, here's where the problem is because in my translation it says mature.

You have King James that says perfect. Now the word, the Greek word, can be and sometimes is translated perfect. It's not a mistranslation. It is a misunderstanding of the intent of the word in its context.

And the New King James and other translations, probably most others, are using the word mature. But those who hold to the doctrine believe that Paul's talking about men and women who've reached a place of perfection.

As many as you... It's like he's singling out a certain few who have become perfect. But obviously, the word perfect here in the King James is indeed speaking about maturity.

Spiritual maturity. Not morally and sinlessly perfect. That's not the idea there. Some also point to some biblical characters in the Bible as they're described in Scripture.

[13:53] Job, for one. But... And Noah. Job and Noah. Because of, you know, what is described in Scripture about their lives.

And we can't go into all of that. But let's just take Job, for example. Job, in Job 42, verse 6, said this of himself. He said, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

That doesn't sound like a person who has reached the place where the sin nature has been eradicated. Job despised himself. What about Noah? Well, you know, it does say in Genesis 6-9 that Noah was a just man.

And perfect... This is the King James. Perfect in his generation. Was he perfect? No. No, he certainly was.

No, he was not. Because in Genesis 9, it tells us about his drunkenness. It is. All right. And, you know, it's just very clear. We're not trying to make something out of Scripture.

[15:02] They also cite 1 John 3-9. And 5-18. I put those two together. But in 1 John 3-9.

And these are, for many, troubling passages, primarily because of how they come across in English. And now God, you know, is not the God of confusion.

And He does preserve His Word. But we do need to be studiers of God's Word. Even to the studying of the original languages. And so...

But anyway, you look at the verse, whoever has been born of God does not sin. That's the New King James translation. Does not sin. Now, other translations bring out...

What would we call it? Huh? Well, yeah.

[16:05] Now, they're going to... I was thinking of something else. They bring out the context and the meaning of the Word in its grammatical form.

And so they are interpreting to some extent. And so some will say practice sin. Or you have pattern in the ESV. And so, well, let's just take the whole verse because it's really not the noun.

That first word, sin, is a noun. The next one is a verb. For His seed remains in Him and He cannot sin because He has been born of God. So, what's He talking about?

On the surface, on the face of it, and certainly from those who hold to perfectionism, they are saying, well, this is talking about the fact that we can reach a place where we don't say anymore. But the problem is the form of the verb there. It's... And this is not going to mean anything to most people who have not studied the language, but it's in the present tense.

[17:09] And so it's talking about ongoing, continuous action. So that's why some of the translations have brought that out into the English. Practice sin.

Are there other words that appear in... I don't know what other translations we might have in here. But the idea is a pattern of sin, like Jonathan said.

Ongoing, pattern, habitual. We could use other words like that where he's saying that it is impossible for someone who's been born again to continue in a lifestyle of sin. Not that it proves that they had something and lost it, but it is proof they didn't have it to begin with. Because you're not going to be practicing sin. Now, we're all going to sin. It's not talking about just sinning, because we all do, and every day, and every minute. But we're talking about a lifestyle of sinfulness, unchecked, unabated, unconvicted of. [18:26] It's a pattern of sin. That's what he's talking about there, and also in 1 John 5.18. It's the same idea there, where he says, we know that whoever is born of God does not sin, or does not keep on sinning.

But he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. So, we just need to consider there in those passages that the word sin is really sinning. Present tense. Born again a believer does not keep on sinning a pattern of sin. He does not live in sin. Maybe that would be the better way to conceptualize the idea behind the language here. Does not live in sin. Okay? 1 Thessalonians 5.23 is another one. Let's see. I thought I had that one. Where is it? There it is. 1 Thessalonians 5.23 says, Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [19:52] And that's one of the primary texts where we get this idea of entire sanctification. And the take on that verse from those who hold this doctrine is that we're talking about something that can happen now.

But, you know, this is a prayer, for one thing, in the letter. And I think Paul obviously expects his prayer to be answered or he wouldn't be praying it. And it is a prayer for total sanctification. There's no debate about that. It's very clear from the text. That's what it's about. But Paul here, if you notice, doesn't make any mention here about when that's going to happen. He doesn't talk about when. He's not giving a specific time. In a sense, although in a sense I think he is, also the word whole or entire or complete is a compound word which means complete or to the end, at the end, to this end, complete sanctification.

So Paul's prayer is that his readers would be whole in such a way as to reach the goal. In fact, that's another word that the word could be translated goal.

[21:11] They would reach the goal. So Paul's looking, see, in this passage at the whole of the believer's life, the whole thing in its entirety with the ultimate end in their lives or the goal being glorification or perfection occurring at the end, at the coming of Christ.

Alright? So I think that's what he's talking about there. Let me give you just a couple more real quickly. It's going to have to be real quickly. I don't want to have to leave two loose ends on some of these things.

Alright. The other one, and we can dismiss this one pretty quickly because, but in, there are passages where believers are commanded to be perfect in the Bible and so there are those who point to that and say, you can't be commanded to be perfect if it's not possible to be perfect and Matthew 5.48 is an example of that and Colossians 1.28 is another one.

Hebrews 6.1 You can jot those down. Matthew 5.48, I'll read that one. And it's familiar, therefore you shall be perfect just as your Father in Heaven is perfect.

But the problem is you need to get this in its context and to do that we need to back up to verse 43. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven, for it makes His Son rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

[22:56] For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

Therefore, you shall be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. Now, you put it in the whole scheme of things, the whole context. The point is to be full grown.

That's the idea. Spiritually mature, mature in your love for your enemies because that's the context. And God is your example. That's why He says be perfect as God is perfect.

No one could argue that we could ever be as perfect as God. And so that's not the point here. It is to conduct your life in a godly manner as God is the example. To love your enemies in that context.

Alright, now, there are some clear passages in the Bible that support the belief that there is no such thing as moral perfection in this life.

[24 : 04] And there are a number of them, but I did give you just two. And 1 John 1, verse 8, where the teaching, the Bible teaches that no one is free from sin.

This is just very clear in Scripture. No one is. And the Bible is very dogmatic at this point. John is being very dogmatic in verse 8, chapter 1, 1 John, if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Now, there are those who object and say, well, it's talking about past sin. Sin is the past. No one would ever say that, that I had no sin in the past. But I can say I don't have any sin in the present. Well, the problem with that is that the word is in the present tense.

And so, literally, it should be translated, it could be translated, we have no sin at the present time. If you say you have no sin in your life at the present time, then you deceive yourself and the truth is not in you.

And so, it's just very clear that the Bible teaches that no one is free from sin, not anyone, and no one can reach that point. Here. And then verse 9, which is the very next word that comes, or verse that comes after that.

[25 : 22] Obviously, 9 comes after 8. And, I went to seminary to learn that. And, where it says if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And so, there is the requirement in Scripture to confess our sin and to pray for forgiveness. forgiveness. And, it's an ongoing command where to do that.

So, you and I are not going to reach glorification or experience glorification or in terms of purification or perfection, not going to reach that in this life.

And, so, what is glorification or more importantly when does it happen or is it going to happen? And, to do that I want to just very quickly run through and I may have put that on there for you.

I think I did. Just considering where glorification fits in the, you know, the whole process. God's work of salvation and, or order of salvation.

[26 : 34] No, it's not an order in that one, two, three, some of these things happen simultaneously. Some are perceptible and are experiential. Most are not, but some are.

And, so all these are going on and begins, not really begins with regeneration, but that, I think, is the first crucial thing to consider in God's work of salvation. Or, born again.

We're born again. Born from above. Regeneration. Regeneration is the act of the Holy Spirit whereby he brings a person into a vital union with Christ, Jesus Christ, or a living union where we once were dead in sin, trespasses and sin, just like the Bible says, the Holy Spirit through regeneration makes us to become spiritually alive.

And, Ephesians chapter 2 verses 4 and 5 is the text for that and you can look that up yourself. Then comes conversion. And conversion is the outward, and I gave this to you, but I'm going to read it to you.

Conversion is the outward, visible evidence of regeneration. Not sometimes, always is. Alright?

Conversion is the conscious act, whereas regeneration is unconscious.

[27 : 55] That is, you don't feel that. You don't know that. That's God's deep inner work. But conversion is conscious. And a conscious act of a regenerate person in which he or she turns to God in repentance and faith.

And then, next comes justification. And what is that? Well, justification is the act of God by which He credits to your account righteousness, imputes righteousness, or imputes it.

These two things are happening. In perfect satisfaction, that is, God's wrath and His holiness have been abated, have been satisfied by Christ. That's what happens in justification.

And it has to, or we cannot be justified because there is God's reputation at stake here. His holiness. And His perfect holiness must be satisfied because of our sins.

So in justification, that takes place. And not only that, but the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us so that all our sins are forgiven. All of them.

[29 : 06] And we are considered perfectly righteous in the sight of God. As if we had never sinned, by the way. I'm talking about a position before God.

I'm not talking about a practical experience of your life. We continue to sin. But we are, in God's view, as righteous as His Son Jesus is righteous and He sees us as though we had never sinned.

Not only that, but as though we had always perfectly obeyed Him. And that's a glorious truth. Hallelujah. Yes. Because we are in Christ.

And so when God looks at us as a holy God, He sees Jesus because we're in Him. Now when He looked at the cross, He saw Don Coleman there.

And His wrath was poured out. But when He sees me now, He sees Jesus because I'm in Him. That's glorious truth. That's justification and it's much bigger than that, more than that, but we don't have time to go into that doctrine.

[30 : 10] Then comes sanctification. Now sanctification is the progressive work. It's a progressive work of the Holy Spirit. It is a work of God. It begins at regeneration and conversion but it involves our responsible participation.

We participate in God's work of sanctification. We're working out our salvation with fear and trembling as the Bible says. And we will, you know, we must do that.

We must be involved in that. But it's this ongoing progressive work by which He delivers or is delivering us. It's an ongoing process from the corruption of sin, pollution of sin.

And He's renewing our entire nature according to the image of His Son Jesus and where we're enabled and, you know, we are enabled to use what God has given us and for His glory and, you know, to be able to think and will and love in a way that glorifies God is something we could not do prior to regeneration.

We had no ability. We were dead and could not please God, could not honor Him, could not choose Him, could not love Him apart from His work and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to Him.

[31 : 37] And then we might mention perseverance. I don't know if I put that on there. It's not so much a step as, again, an ongoing work of God. Sanctification, we might think of it, is the progressive work with our participation, our responsible participation where perseverance is a persistent work.

The persistent work of God, I think, is a good way to remember that. It is totally accomplished by God. It's really, in that sense, not the perseverance of the saints as it is the perseverance of the Lord in our lives.

And so, perseverance means those who have true faith can never lose, they can neither lose that faith totally nor finally. I was sharing with a guy last night about eternal security.

James was with me and I remembered something Avery Rogers said. Years ago, about this, about perseverance, he said, the faith that fizzles before the finish had a flaw from the first.

So, maybe you can remember that. Now, all that I've mentioned here are works of God's amazing grace. They are. And they all occur in a sense simultaneously.

[32 : 55] some are completed the moment they occur, like regeneration, conversion, justification. Those are events that take place. Some are ongoing.

Sanctification. Perseverance. And then there's one more and that's what started our conversation, glorification. And glorification is just simply the culmination of salvation.

It's just the end of it. The ultimate goal of it. And what is that ultimate end and goal of it? The final, blessed, abiding state of the believer.

Where? In heaven. It's the ultimate and complete salvation which will be realized only, only in heaven.

It's kind of the third tense of salvation. I am saved. That's regeneration. I am being saved. That's sanctification.

[33 : 55] I will be saved. That's glorification. And if we had time I would have you turn to Romans 8.30 but we don't. And so you can just look at it yourself.

And see how all of these things in the mind of God are already done. They're done for us even though we have not realized the glorification. but He has glorified us and in God's mind the work of salvation is complete.

It's done. That's why we're secure because God's done it all. We've not experienced the ultimate of our salvation yet but in God's mind it's done.

It's done. He's done for us to to to to to to to to to