

Perfecting Holiness

Introduction. What if I presented a list of types of people to you that included fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, and revilers? Would these be the kind of people you would say could perfect holiness? These were the sins of the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

The expression “perfecting holiness” in 2 Corinthians 7:1 provides a challenge to all Christians, but the Corinthians to whom the expression was originally written must have seen it as a special challenge.

That they had reached any degree of holiness seems remarkable, but the Holy Spirit through Paul prods them on to even greater levels of holiness. There is assurance in these words that no matter how deeply one has fallen into sin he can reach a level of continual holiness that can be described as mature, complete, and perfect.

The one who has perfected holiness has a beautiful character. He reflects the beauty of Jesus in his life. He is the kind of person who makes others purer, cleaner, and spiritually refreshed for just having been with him. He has reached a high level of holiness in his life, but he is still in the process of perfecting holiness, for he sees this as a lifetime endeavor. Every Christian must have this as his goal. It is important, therefore, to understand how one’s holiness is perfected.

I. What God Does In Perfecting Holiness

- A. If holiness is to be perfected, it must result from God’s working within the Christian (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13). As a piece of pottery is the workmanship of a potter, and a beautiful painting is the workmanship of an artist, so the Christian who is perfecting holiness is the workmanship of God.
- B. In bringing a Christian to perfected holiness, God uses instruments, just as the potter or artist uses instruments. We will briefly examine five of them:
 1. He uses His word (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Deuteronomy 10:13). God works through His word. The Christian may not always understand how some particular command is for his good, but he complies with whatever God tells him to do with full faith and trust that by his doing so he can bring his holiness to a state of maturity and perfection through the power of God.
 2. He uses His chastening (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-3, 12). God is able to use financial setbacks, hurts, disappoints, and all types of trials to chasten a Christian. Strong Christians have not gained their strength by having everything go their way, but by facing trials and overcoming them through the help of God.
 3. He uses His protective restraints (1 Corinthians 10:13; Revelation 12:10-11). God places restraints on Satan in his power to tempt the Christian.
 4. He uses His people (Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 27:33-36). A Christian is encouraged by his fellow Christians to go on to perfection. Consider, stir up, and exhorting are key words. One should not become angry when someone encourages him to be more faithful. One could hardly reach a high level of holiness without the aid of his brothers and sisters in Christ.

5. He uses His promises (2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Ephesians 2:19-22). These promises provide strong incentive for the child of God to perfect holiness in his life.

II. What Man Does In Perfecting Holiness

- A. The Christian also has a responsibility in the perfecting process. We are God's workmanship, but we must give our lives to applying the instructions: perfecting our morals, perfecting our disposition, perfecting our reverence for God, perfecting our knowledge and understanding, perfecting our worship, perfecting every aspect of service to Him. When we have done this, however, we are not our own product; we are the workmanship of God.
- B. What we do in perfecting holiness is found within the context in which the expression is found (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). We will briefly examine five of them:
 1. We rid ourselves of complacency (Haggai 1:2-11; Revelation 2:20-24). Complacency is the foremost hindrance to perfecting anything. The Christian who is content with his progress in the faith will never reach toward perfecting holiness, but will regress. He who does not advance, falls behind.
 2. We separate ourselves from the world and every false way (1 John 2:15; Psalm 119:104, 128). The Christian must not allow himself to become aligned with anything that would bring him into fellowship with lawlessness, communion with darkness, accord with Belial, partnership with unbelief, or agreement with idolatry if he truly wants to perfect holiness in his life (cp. Psalm 24:3-4).
 3. We cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (Romans 1:28-31; Galatians 5:19-21). Filthiness of the flesh would include sins such as adultery, fornication, drunkenness, and homosexuality. Filthiness of the spirit would include sins such as hate, malice, ill will, and evil speaking.
 4. We work continuously on perfecting holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:1; Hebrews 12:14). "Perfecting," in the original language, is indicative of continuous action. Whether one has been a Christian for one year or 60 years, he must be perfecting holiness in his life. Herein lies a failure with many Christians. They are caught up in material ventures. They are so busy perfecting their careers, perfecting their appearance, perfecting their golf swing, perfecting their houses and lawns, or perfecting the impression that they make on others that they have little time for perfecting holiness.
 5. We do this work in the fear of God (Hebrews 12:28; 1 Peter 2:17). We recognize God's absolute sovereignty and power, humbly submit to His will, and place ourselves in His hand as clay in the potter's hand.

Conclusion. Holiness in the absolute can only be gained through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, not just the cleansing that takes place at baptism, but what continues as one repents and turns to Him for forgiveness (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The question is not so much what others are doing, but what I am doing. This is a personal matter (2 Corinthians 13:5; Romans 14:11-12). Get motivated to free yourself of the hindrances and press on to higher ground, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.