

A Few Short Words...

by Pastor Phillip Short

“VACATION INSPIRATIONS”

We had a great vacation! My wife, daughter, and a couple of members from the extended family had a wonderful chance to house sit for my little sister down in Costa Rica. It is so beautiful there. The mountains join up with the sea. There are rivers swollen with rain. The jungles are flourishing and verdant. The wildlife is so exotic. Monkeys woke us up each morning. We surfed (or at least I tried to) every day. We even got to see the sea turtles come to the black sand beach to make their nests and lay their eggs.

I told people before I left that one of my goals was to wake up each morning, drink a pot of coffee, read some scripture, and get a quiet heart. By the grace of God, I did. He is very good!

I wanted to get caught up on some reading. To be perfectly honest, I brought a few works of fiction with me. But as I was packing, I reached for a book that I figured I would read if I managed to read through all of the others. I was glad that I brought the book along.

While on vacation, I managed to read: “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection” by John Wesley. As I read it, my heart sang. In this book, Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, wrote down his lifetime teachings, observations, and celebrations of Christian perfection. It is spelled out in a logical and concise way. I was reminded of the important emphasis that lives in our Wesleyan heritage. It behooves us to rediscover it ourselves.

What comes to mind when we think of “Christian perfection”? Some tend to think of it as being, well, perfect Christians. These must be the kind of people who never make mistakes. These people are goody two-shoes. They never lose their tempers, never get tempted, never jay walk, and never backslide. They make the rest of us feel guilty.— This is not what Wesley meant when he spoke, wrote, taught, or preached about Christian perfection. Others mistakenly equate legalism with Christian perfection; the idea that we become righteous by following the Biblical laws, rules and regulations. No one has ever been able to live up to the Biblical standards of legalism.

So what is Christian perfection? John Wesley believed that Christians could follow the example of Jesus and grow and learn to love as Jesus loved. As we dedicated ourselves, not to striving, but to loving the Lord our God with all of our hearts, minds, souls and strengths, we could eventually love as Jesus loved. Jesus loved perfectly. His grace and Spirit are available for us to do the same. Thus Christians could love as perfectly as Jesus loves. This is what Wesley meant by “Christian perfection.”

Wesley and the early Methodists were convinced that this love was highly motivational. When Christians experienced this love, they found that they wanted to requite it and adjust their lives and living to it. As a matter of fact, they found this love to be transformational. The love of Christ made them want to please Christ. The desire to please Christ led them to conform to Christ. As they grew closer to Christ, they found the desires met not by sin and its’ temporary “highs,” but by the pure love of Christ. They found that when they were “crucified with Christ,” sinful affections died. They found a much greater reward in the love of Jesus. They even came to recognize that sin problems were actually love problems. So they cried out to love Jesus all the more! And as they grew, seasoned, and matured, they found their hearts being transformed by Jesus and His love. Eventually, they reached a point where the only love that existed in their hearts was the love for Jesus.

What were the results of this? Righteousness and holiness. But even beyond these, resulted in more love! Please note the difference! Following rules was not the motivation! Love for Jesus was, and still is, the motivation. And righteousness, or proper standing before God, is the by-product of this perfect love. If you were to ask such a disciple if they were rule followers, they would have told you “no,” that they simply love Jesus and ask for grace to love them more.

Wesley was fond of asking Christians if they even intended to be made perfect in this life. He intended that they answer a full and enthusiastic “yes.” I guess he knew that they would not likely seek to be blessed of it if they did not thoroughly trust or expect to attain it. So with this in mind, how is it with your soul? How are you responding to the grace of Jesus Christ? Are you growing to love as Jesus loved? Even perfectly?