

Living Hope: Born Again for Holiness

Improving on Perfection

Did you know that there is only one job in this world where you are expected to start perfect and then improve from there? Sports Officials. Now, I'm laughing as I say this because I happen to be one. I am a youth baseball umpire for NW Bakersfield Baseball. I'm sure that to you this idea sounds funny because you are all good people and many of you are probably thinking, "nah there humans we can't expect perfection." I can however tell you that while our mind may tell us we need to extend to grace to people our actions say another thing. You and I both know that if little Johnny gets called out on strike 3 and its anything other than the perfect pitch I'm going to hear about it from his Dad, Mom, Step Dad, Step Mom, Grandma, Grandpa, Aunt, Uncle, Cousin and his sister who is volunteering in snack bar too. Even if it is in a "subconscious" way we expect people to be perfect. Have you ever thought, "What does it REALLY mean to be perfect?"

Perfect: Adjective; excellent or complete beyond practical or theoretical improvement.

Complete, beyond improvement, that's the standard we have come to expect from most people, even ourselves at times. **From a personal standpoint I am in constant pursuit of perfection, but just about every time I think I'm getting close, I am reminded why perfection is perfection.** Right as I think I'm figuring this preaching thing out, something happens and I find myself making mistakes I haven't made since speech class in high school. Right as I start to figure out what an appropriate strike zone is for the game I'm calling little Johnny's grandma lets me now that I need to schedule my next appointment with the optometrist. Perfection is an endless pursuit because no matter what someone is going to see things differently. **Yet, Despite life's constant reminders people seem to believe that perfection is attainable.**

Perfection: An Endless Pursuit

All of us are driven to a pursuit of perfection, and all of us are occasionally reminded why perfection is perfection. No matter how good we get at something we find ourselves making mistakes that have us asking, "Can I ever win?" You have changed our own oil for years but you messed up this time because you bought a filter that was one number off from the one we need. You have knitted scarves for little Johnny every year for Christmas, but this year you cannot finish because the last bundle of red yarn you bought is just a shade off the rest of the scarf. You promised your child there was no way you were missing the next recital, but low and behold you forget and double book yourself again. Everyday tasks we have done a million times have a way of showing us reality. **For all of us the pursuit of perfection is endless.** Even if you manage to obtain it in one area of your life (if you have, let's talk!) undoubtedly something else falls into a state of disrepair. We just cannot seem to get it right and ultimately we end letting ourselves down or worse yet, someone else.

Nobody wants to confront the idea that we are flawed, we all want to be perceived as perfect, even if it is a subconscious desire. We have a standard to uphold, a reputation to keep, and a

commitment to honor. We have to perfect, we have to be the best. In the arena of life, those things all sound great, they are things we should strive for and things that should define the level of integrity we approach life with. They also create an issue. The issue in front of many of us today is not confronting the idea that we are imperfect, if we are honest we know that. We have all failed multiple times in our life and we have all failed at things we should be perfect at. **The issue that we have to confront is answering why we know we aren't perfect, but still want people to believe we are.** Why do we keep placing this façade of "The Perfect Life" in front of other people? Why do we continuously believe that in order to be successful we have to be perfect? Why are we striving for something we know we cannot achieve?

This endless journey that we are on can become a double edged sword. If we are not careful, our pursuit of perfection quickly becomes hypocrisy. We will become the very thing we are trying to avoid. Even worse yet it will lead us away from the very thing we are searching for.

From Perfection to Holiness

Many, if not all of us, recognize that perfection is unattainable, an endless cycle. Yet, our worldview teaches us that perfection is essential. Where does this pressure come from? The reality is whether we identify as a Christian or not, the culture we live in has been shaped by the story of God and the Judeo-Christian values it teaches. Well at the center of that story is the idea of perfection as well as our inability to obtain it. **The story of God teaches us that perfection or "holiness" is unattainable apart from God. He is the very definition of the word.** It also teaches that things have been this way from the beginning. We were created in the image of a perfect holy God, but somewhere along the way we lost our focus and began to believe perfection was attainable through doing the right things at the right time.

The story of God also shows us that most of us drastically misunderstand the concept of holiness. For humans moral perfection is the aspect of holiness we gravitate towards because we can control it, we can make a conscious effort to do it. However, when we limit our concept of holiness to the idea of moral perfection we not only limit ourselves, we ultimately attach that limit God to as well. **Holiness is not simply moral perfection; it is also spiritual or ritual perfection. That's why when the Israelites would make a sacrifice they had to go through this whole long process and then sacrifice an animal at the God deemed to be ritually pure.** This was how the people of the Old Testament atoned for their sins.

Limiting our understanding of holiness simply to moral perfection also keeps us from seeing the true nature of God and why he is unique. Think about the sun for a moment. What does it do? The sun is a unique entity, at least in the solar system that comprises earth. It is also really powerful and acts as a source of life for this planet we live on. For the purpose of this illustration we can say that the sun is holy, but we also need to recognize something. The sun is dangerous. Get too close and it will burn you up, literally. That paradox provides with a direct representation of the holiness of God. If something impure gets too close the holiness of God becomes dangerous, it is that pure, that good. This is the reason we see people throughout scripture either dying immediately or cowering in the presence of

God. That is why it is so key that we understand the whole picture. **Apart from the influence and grace of God in our life, we have no hope of ever experiencing holiness in our life.**

1 Peter 1: 18 says that God ultimately and graciously paid a ransom for us. **The ransom God paid for us, The Blood of Christ, ultimately removes our spiritual infirmities and give us access to God. That relationship with God gives us the love, grace, and power we need to see our moral life transformed as we seek to know God.** Had God not paid it, no amount of moral control or action would save us, even if by some miracle we became morally pure, we would still be ritually unclean, imperfect, and void of access to a relationship with God. **Holiness is about our decision to journey with God and to see him begin to make us “better” as we grow closer to him.** Moral perfection is part of the journey, but it is not the whole story and we've have got to make sure that we understand that holiness is a purification process. **It's a process, not an overnight change.**

Think about the ten commandments for s second. Can you name all 10? For many of us those 10 things become defining points of what we could consider to be our morality. Yet, they are given in the context of two relationships: our relationship with God and our relationship with others. That's because holiness was never meant to be about proving how good we can be. It is meant to be a vessel that allows us to interact with God and reveal him to the world around us. It's a process we undergo throughout our life, not so that we can brag about how God we are, but so that people can experience how good God is. **Here is what I mean by that: Holiness when understood and pursued properly not only impacts our relationship with God, but our relationship with the people around us as well.** Its relational.

Attaining Holiness

You have been given a **gift** that makes holiness attainable, you just have to embrace it and understand it properly.

Holiness is about you **understanding** that you're not perfect morally or spiritually. Holiness is about you **embracing** Gods offer of grace and then letting him transform you spiritually and morally.

Holiness is not presenting yourselves in a way that makes you seem **superior** to the rest of the world. The truth is that is just **arrogance**.

Everything in our world today tells you that you need to be **perfect**, because perfection makes you desirable, it makes you superior.

God has never called you to live in a **perfect** life, He has called you to live a **holy** life.

Expressing Holiness

We all have a **responsibility** to help people understand how to live life the way we were intended to.

The church is called to be a **life transforming** movement that leads people into a holy life; a complete life full of life giving relationships with God and the people around them.

As a church, are we seeking to assist people in becoming the people **God** has **called** them to be?

Church we need to commit God's **mission**. We need to shed our own preferences and desires and be willing to do whatever it takes to see people's lives change all in the name Jesus. If we can do that, than we just might get a glimpse of what holiness really is.