

ROMANS: PART 38
MAY 5, 1996

Hope For The Perfectionist In You
Romans -- Excursus

Are You A Perfectionist? A Short Test

1. This week I *drove* myself to reach a personal goal at the expense of another person(s).
2. I unravel when I fail to achieve my plans.
3. I am sometimes paralyzed by indecision, fearing the risk a choice would entail.
4. I try to control my surroundings to prevent unpredictable outcomes.
5. I often feel guilt over what a poor father/mother, wife/husband, child, friend, Christian I am.
6. I feel good about myself when I reach my personal goals.
7. My self worth is tied into what I do as a _____.
8. I become upset over being 5 minutes late to *anything* (even if there is a legitimate reason).
9. My vacation (or get-away) experience was ruined when things did not go according to plan.
10. I often do not *join-in* with my spouse/children/friends because I am critical of what they are doing (though it really is not a stated Biblical sin).
11. I think that:
 - ◆ We ought to have people over to our home more often.
 - ◆ I ought to keep my house as neat as my mother did (even with all these children).
 - ◆ Christians ought to make the *best* grades.
 - ◆ I ought to remember people's names that I have recently met.

Some Possible Causes:

1. **Culture:** Certain cultures tend toward perfectionism. E.G. German & Swiss trains. The US is no exception: perfect lawn, wardrobe, body. Automotive excellence. Soccer, piano, summer enrichment courses for children on the track toward perfection. First place in any form of competition is the only acceptable goal.
2. **Advertising:** The not-so-hidden message that the standard is perfection. It's attainable. Anything short of perfection is unacceptable.
3. **Personality:** An inherited temperament. E.G. Certain children at an early age display a neatness bordering on compulsion.
4. **Christian Culture:** Many Church's become a place where you must always appear to have life well in hand. In some Churches, this is deliberate, in others it is inadvertent. Some Churches give performance-oriented leadership, others simply give poor teaching.
5. **Home Life:** Some Perfectionistic tendencies are a result of relationships at home. Perfectionistic parents model perfectionism to their children. E.G.
 - ◆ They communicated: *This is how you cope with life.*
 - ◆ They lacked tolerance for mistakes (in themselves, others, & the child).
 - ◆ Sometimes the parent found it difficult to give affection, approval, or be open-hearted. The child may feel that his acceptance is based upon his performance. His loveless environment lead him to be insecure & uncertain. He responded by seeking to order everything in his life. Conversely, a child that emerges out of a chaotic home may have developed certain strategies to bring order into his confused world. The desire to control everything & everyone around himself became his number one priority. He reduced the risk of being caught unawares by any event which would present difficulty, conflict, or emotional turmoil.
6. **Doctrine:** God deserves nothing but the *best* (Mt 5:48). He wants us to be *excellent* (I Pet 2:12). This *is* a good thing. Great works are born out of high standards. It is right to seek to please God by doing all things well. But this can become an unhealthy perfectionism when:
 - ◆ I believe perfection is possible.
 - ◆ I set standards that are impossibly high.
 - ◆ My self-worth hinges on my performance in the pursuit of these goals.This simplistic rendering of Christian living fails to take into acct. all the Scripture's teaching on our relationship with God.

Analysis:

1. Living under the tyranny of these beliefs is an inevitable script for self-defeat. One can only experience a constant Hell of repeated failure & frustration. These attitudes often lead to decreased productivity, health problems, depression, and impaired relationships. Since perfectionists usually excel at self-analysis they can become aware of the drastic effects of their perfectionism, yet remain impotent to change things. Ironically, perfectionism looked good & liberating when you started, now it has taken over your life, locked you into prison, and thrown away the key.
2. God says that "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1). We sing:
*My chains fell off, my heart was free!
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee!
Amazing love! How can it be --
that Thou my God shouldst die for me?*

But perfectionistic beliefs steal away our freedom & joy. For some reason we *question* our acceptance. Underlining our patterns of life there is the fear of failure & rejection -- and a *longing* for acceptance & love.

3. The good news of Jesus Christ is just that -- good news. God's grace unlocks the prison door. Though instant release is possible, more likely change will come gradually. Sanctification is a *process*. Living out the Gospel of grace strains our humanity. It is hard to appropriate the profound truth that we are loved by God eternally & irrevocably on the basis of mercy alone. Our sinful propensities resist believing that such grace can apply to every day life. Even Martin Luther struggled to accept God's grace.

I have been preaching & cultivation it for almost 20 years, and still I feel the old clinging dirt of wanting to...contribute something to God so that He will have to give me His grace in exchange for my holiness. I still cannot get it into my that I must surrender myself completely to His sheer grace. Yet this is what I must do! It is an exceedingly bitter & hard thing for a person who has been mired in his own self-righteousness all his life to pull himself away from it and turn with all his heart to the One Mediator and rise up with faith alone.

Did you hear that? Grace is "exceedingly hard" to accept. It is hard to accept that no matter what the sin, we stand already forgiven, unconditionally accepted for eternity. It is hard to be confident of my heavenly Father's love. It is hard to serve Him, not trying to make Him love me, but precisely because He could never love me any more than He already does but at this very moment. It is all hard to accept, but it is worth accepting.

Hope For The Perfectionist In You.

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- 6.