

No Room For Error, Phil.3

Liar Liar #6

◆Have you ever heard the voices? The shoulda-coulda-woulda voices. “You should’a worked longer.. You could’a done better... If you would’a tried it a different way, maybe...” These are the voices of no-room-for-error lie. They sing harmony the chorus of “You Must Be Perfect”. The verse goes, “Don’t make a mistake or else. There’s no room for erroooooor.”

◆**1. The lie we often believe is that we will only be truly accepted when we have achieved perfection and are error free.** That we are only really loved when we are impressive, and productive. That if people really knew us, they would never like us. That God certainly can’t like us until we make up for all our flaws and evils with some great spirituality that’s not likely to happen any time soon. Satan loves this lie because it is the opposite of grace. Yet, even well-meaning students of the Bible can swallow this one easily enough. Doesn’t Matthew 5:48 say “Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”? Doesn’t Paul say...

◆*“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21, NIV.*

◆Never mind that just before that, verse 18 says we are not under law. I don’t have time to understand that, I’ve got too many laws to keep!

◆My point is that we often believe this lie even though our theology teaches salvation and God’s love are unearned gifts. I mean, we talk about

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God's love and grace for our sins, but how many of us would actually admit to a sin, practice confession, or are even willing to show another human being our flaws? How many of us have ever told another Christ-follower our addictions? How many life groups talk openly about their sins to one another? Are you kidding. There's no room for error! For all the grace we talk about, why do people continue to think that they would never fit in the church community because they aren't good enough?

◆If you fit any of the thoughts I've just expressed, maybe you are believing this lie that really, you must be perfect, error is unacceptable.

◆A. Psychologists call the no-room-for-error lie perfectionism. Writes Dr. David Seamands,

◆“Perfectionism is the *most* disturbing emotional problem among evangelical Christians. It walks into my office more than any other single Christian hang-up.” What is perfectionism? It's a constant and all-pervading feeling of never quite measuring up, never quite being or doing enough to please -yourself, others, and God. Perfectionism includes a lot of self-belittling, and self-contempt, along with a super sensitivity to the opinions, approval, and disapproval of others.

◆B. How do you know if you are a perfectionist?

◆Perfectionists experience what one psychologist calls the tyranny of the “oughts.” I ought to do better. I ought to work harder.

Perfectionist types are never quite happy with themselves. If they hit a single they wonder why they didn't hit a double. If they lose 5lbs, they're disappointed they didn't lose 8lbs. They always expect more and can't relax with the status quo. They experience an

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overabundance of anxiety and guilt along with their imperfection, which will *always* be imperfection by the nature of their constant expectation for perfection. Perfectionist feel guilty almost *before* they haven't done everything right! They believe the hellish voices in their heads that tell them, "If it feels good it's probably wrong." They can easily slip into legalism too. In their desire to do it right they can easily overemphasize the do's and don'ts, rules and regulations. They can easily tighten their halos, and walk rigidly through life, and do all the right things down at First Church of the Iceberg. On top of that, the perfectionist will develop anger deep down in his/her heart. He resents the demands even though he places them on himself. He may even resent God, or at least his idea of a god whose demands are like his own. However, the christian perfectionist will probably not *show* his/her anger, because that is considered a terrible sin, less than perfect, you know. More likely he will deny it and instead experience sweeping mood changes that make no sense to him at all. Listen to Dr. Joseph Cook, professor of anthropology and missionary to Thailand describe his own experience of a breakdown that devastated his ability to do ministry at all.

◆"God's demands of me were so high, and his opinion of me was so low, there was no way for me to live except under his frown... All day long he nagged me: "Why don't you pray more? Why don't you witness more? When will you ever learn self-discipline? How can you allow yourself to indulge in such wicked thoughts? Do this. Don't do that. Yield, confess, work

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harder.” ...God was always using his love against me. He’d show me his nail-pierced hands, and then he would look at me glaringly and say, “Well, why aren’t you a better Christian? Get busy and live the way you ought to.”” (Seamands, p.83)

◆C. This is a part of the lie, from the Father of Lies, the devil. He whispers to our spirits that God is an angry, condemning God, and guess what? People everywhere BELIEVE him! People who believe the no-room-for-error lie often see God as a stern, vindictive judge, instead of a welcoming father.

◆There was a thief that had just broken into a residence when he heard a voice speak out of the dark, “Jesus is watching you!” He stopped short and waited in the silence. Took another step and he heard it again! “Jesus is watching you.” He started to sweat and cast the beam of his flashlight around the room. No one was there.

◆[Isn’t that how many us often think of God. He’s bored up there in heaven, you know. Sitting there all day, wringing his hands that some puny people down on earth are breaking more of his commands today. He’s watching, watching, watching and soon, the piper - will - be - paid!! Jesus is watching you.]

◆We’ll you’ll be glad to know that our thief discovered a parrot in a hanging kitchen cage. With the light shining in its eyes it spoke again, “Jesus is watching you.” Ha! what was he so worried about? Turning to go down the hall his light landed upon a huge, black, doberman pincher crouching in the doorway. That’s when he heard the parrot say, “Sic him, Jesus!”

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◆ Please listen to me. That was not God talking in the dark. It was not God talking to Dr. Cook. That is not how God watches his human creations.

That is not the Jesus who said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10, NIV.

◆ *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16, 17, NIV.*

◆ The Holy Spirit uses conviction. The devil uses guilt. When you feel yourself being herded along by guilt and shame, it is not God who is being your shepherd at that moment. It’s what satan did to Adam and Eve; plant the seed of doubt that you are acceptable as *just* a human. Don’t you want to be “like God”?

◆ **2.** There are several truths with which to fight this lie and surprisingly they are caught in that simple phrase **“to err is human, to forgive is divine.”**

◆ **A.** The truth is I am unable to be perfect or righteous, but I am able to repent. What does Paul say in our text?

◆ “though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” Philippians 3:4-7, NIV.

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◆But Paul knows his legalistic morality doesn't get him to God.

◆“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it,” Philippians 3:12, 13, NIV.

◆The Heidelberg Catechism #81 asks, “Who are to come to the Lord’s table?” That is, how do you have to *be* to come to God, to take the sacrament of communion in the Christian church? One common assumption is, well, you had better have been on your best behavior that week! You had better not have done any grievous sins that anyone can tell anyway. Many think that the Bible’s injunction to “examine” yourself before coming to the table means to see if you’ve been upright enough. That’s heresy, people. Heresy!

◆The Catechism’s answer is “Those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins.” A few lines later it adds that the “unrepentant” eat and drink judgement on themselves if they come to the table. To repent is in part to *mind* it that you sin. To be bothered and desire forgiveness. If you don’t *mind* it, that’s what will keep you from the forgiveness of God. Same goes for other functions of spirituality. People think that to be an elder or deacon means you gotta have arrived in the moral aptitude thing. Well certainly we need our leaders to be good examples but if being a church leader means you must have no error, sins even, well... no one here will be a leader. God does not require perfection or even high achievement for

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you to come home to him. He requires the desiring heart. Which leads me to...

◆B. The truth is God is a forgiving God who does not offer his affection based on my perfection, but on his love.

◆The second piece of a repentant person is the faith or trust that Jesus has paid your way. Jesus has been perfectly obedient *for you!*
Heidelberg Catechism #60:

◆*“God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need do is accept this gift of God with a believing heart.*

◆In verse 9 Paul says that in truth he does “not [have] a righteousness of my own that comes from law, but that which is through faith in Christ –the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

◆C. The truth is I am unable to be perfect, but I can progress. You catch this in Paul’s letter too, don’t you?

◆v12 “but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

◆v13-14 “straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.”

◆16-17 “let us live up to what we have already attained. Join with others in following my example...”

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◆ So the true believer *cares* that she is sinful. The true child of God *trusts* that Jesus paid her bill. And the true believer *wants* to live like the goodness God always intended. This is what the Heidelberg means when it says, “Who are to come to the Lord’s table? ...those who are displeased with themselves... who trust their sins are pardoned... and who also desire more and more...to lead a better life.”

◆ Do you realize the freedom that can be yours in the Gospel message of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? You are free from having to be good enough. You were freely loved by God before you even wanted to be perfect. You are free to pursue progress without pressure as a moral and spiritual being knowing that that is where God’s taking you anyway! To err is what humans do; to forgive, well that’s what God does. Do you care? That’s a great start. Now ask him for it.

◆ **Conclusion:** Grace is the cure for the perfectionism lie. The grace of God. So what might we do to help our minds actually learn to live and *feel* this grace? What can we do to kill off perfectionism and internalize the truth we’ve been reflecting on? Here are a few simple ideas:

◆ 1) On a very deep level, some will not break the chain of perfectionism without the inner healing of the past. We learn it from the pressures, the expectations, the demands and abuses we grew up with from parents, family, teachers and preachers. This level takes time (it took me about 3 years) and is helped by a wise counselor. The voices that you hear of guilt and shame are not

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God's. They are voices of mom or dad, or brother or sister that continue in our heads.

◆2) On a simpler level, there are some other things we can do to fight perfectionism: Dr. Thurman suggests

- ◆Spill something on purpose and don't clean it up.

- ◆Eat with your fingers.

- ◆Tilt all the paintings in your home.

- ◆Go out in public without your make-up.

- ◆Put your underwear in the sock drawer. (I personally like socks of each color to have their own row, so I can find them in the dark without looking. And I like all the heels to point the same direction. But sometimes I just throw my socks in the drawer without looking at all. Sandi thinks I'm being lazy or sloppy... when in reality it's a mental health exercise!)

- ◆In other words, intentionally stop trying to be perfect about everything. Chances are your anxiety level will fall as you become a bit easier on yourself.

- ◆And learn to see God as the loving father that he is. A loving parent is pleased with it's infants progress learning to walk. He delights in your progress as we delight in seeing our toddlers try faltering steps. God is not your olympic judge. He is your Dad. So don't be so hard on yourself as you proceed. 100 yard dashes will come later, when you're ready. But they won't make God love you more than he does right now.

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My son, My son, why are you striving
You can't add one thing to what's been done for you
I did it all while I was dying
Rest in your faith, my peace will come to you

For when I hear the praises start
I want to rain upon you
Blessings that will fill your heart
I see no stain upon you
Because you are my child and you know me
To Me you're only holy
Nothing that you've done remains
Only what you do for Me

My child, My child, why are you weeping
You will not have to wait forever
That day and that hour is in My keeping
The day I'll bring you into Heaven

For when I hear the praises start
My child, I want to rain upon you
Blessing that will fill your heart
I see no stain upon you
Because you are My child and you know me
To me you're only holy

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Nothing that you've done remains

Only what you do in Me

My precious bride, the day is nearing

When I'll take you in My arms and hold you

I know there are so many things that you've been hearing

But you just hold on to what I have told you

For when I hear the praises start

My bride, I want to rain upon you

Blessings that will fill your heart

I see no stain upon you

Because you are My child, and you know Me

To me you're only holy

Nothing that you've done will remain

Only what you do for me