



Introduction:

“Jesus said to him, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor...’” (**Matthew 19:21**, ESV).

“And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (**James 1:4**, ESV).

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (**Matthew 5:48**; ESV).

Do these verses frighten you at all? They do me. Why? We long for victory, but victory means perfection. Perfection seems to be a pretty high standard. I'm not perfect today. I have a hard time seeing that I'll ever be perfect. When I look at these verses, it is easy to get discouraged. I'll never measure up. I'll never be good enough. I'll never win. In fact, it's impossible to be good enough because good enough equals perfection. Do you feel perfect today? Do you see yourself attaining perfection in the near future? What happens if we die and we haven't gotten to perfection? Should we even bother being Christians if we know we'll fail at it? These are the kinds of questions that go running through our minds, especially when we've been involved in discussions with Christians who say things like, “Boy, if we even miss it on one thing, it could be detrimental to our souls.” Or when we've consistently heard that others must be lost even though they are Christians but they don't have a particular doctrine correct or they don't agree with the “normal Christian view” on some issue.

This is troubling for Christians of all maturity levels. One principle helps. God's job is perfection; our job is progress.

Discussion:

I. Jesus has already perfected us.

- A. We see the problem. We have sinned and fallen from God's glory, from perfection (**Romans 3:23**). Even if we stopped sinning today and always obeyed, it wouldn't remove the stains of imperfection spilt all over us.
- B. When God let us attempt to fix the problem by giving us a law through which we might attain perfection, it didn't work (**Hebrews 7:11-19**). **Galatians 3:21** says the Law could not give life. In fact, the point of that verse is no mere law could give life. Something else was needed. Sacrifice was God's answer to provide the grace needed to be perfect. But the sacrifices under the Old Law didn't work to perfect anyone either (**Hebrews 10:1**).
- C. So, what can we sinners do? Some answer this by throwing rules at us. If you make sure to live by all the rules of the New Law, you'll be perfect and have the victory. Do we really think **Galatians 3:21** meant the Old Law couldn't perfect us, but a new law could? Don't misunderstand. There is a New Law and it is important (**I Corinthians 9:21**), but is the New Law intended to perfect us by our power to keep it? If a man were drowning, would you throw more water at him? In like manner, when a man is drowning in sin, which is lawlessness (**I John 3:4**), would God throw more laws at Him? No. God had a different plan.
- D. The Law and the sacrifices led to Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. That sacrifice has accomplished one amazing thing. According to **Hebrews 10:14**, it perfected us. By His single offering, He perfected us. God says when we've come into Christ's church, we have come into the assembly of the firstborn, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect (**Hebrews 12:23**). We are already perfected. According to **Acts 2:38-41, 47**, we are added to the church's number when we are saved through penitent baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. At that moment, we were perfected.
- E. This does not mean we are perfected no matter how we live, dispensing with God's will, living profligate lives, turning our back on God. **Romans 6:1-4** demonstrates that. In fact, look again at **Hebrews 10:14**, Jesus' sacrifice perfected those who are being sanctified, that is, who are being set apart. “Perfected” is past tense, but “being sanctified” is in the present progressive. That is, the sanctification is a presently ongoing process. There is an “already, but not yet” sense to our perfection. Also the sanctification is passive. That is, it is being done to the spirits in the church; it is not something they are doing. So, in one sense, we are already perfect because we are in Christ's sacrifice and in His church. In another, we are being perfected, but again, that is not our work, it is God's.

II. God is perfecting us.

- A. In one sense, Jesus' sacrifice has perfected us; in another, God is working to perfect us. He is working to help us overcome sin and imperfection. **Romans 8:28-30** says God predestined that those who love Him will be conformed to the image of His Son. This is not a guessing game or a wait-and-see-who-makes-the-cut. This is set in stone. If you abide in God's love, He has already decreed you will be conformed to the image of His Son. He is doing that.

- B. Consider some other passages that demonstrate God’s work in confirming, establishing, saving, and perfecting us.
1. **Romans 16:25**: “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...” (ESV).
 2. **Ephesians 3:16-17**: “...that according to the riches of [God’s] glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...” (ESV).
 3. **I Thessalonians 5:23**: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (ESV).
 4. **II Thessalonians 3:3**: “The Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one” (ESV).
 5. **I Peter 5:10**: “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (ESV).
 6. **Jude 24-25**: “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (ESV).
- C. Read and reread these powerfully comforting passages. Not only has Jesus already perfected us through His sacrifice, the Father, is perfecting us through His Son. We don’t need to worry about perfection. Perfection is God’s job. What then is our job? Does this mean we can sit on Christ’s work, do nothing, act how we want, and expect eternal salvation? I think the reason we don’t preach this point about God’s job being perfection more is because we are afraid people will take it to mean they can rebel against God with impunity. This leads to our next point.

III. Our job is progress in Christ.

- A. I don’t know how you will take the message that Jesus has already perfected us and that God is perfecting us. But I do know how Paul took it. In **Philippians 2:12-13**, Paul said, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (ESV). Paul did not think God’s work on our behalf meant we could sit back, take it easy, and ride the rapids of God’s work. He saw God’s work in perfecting us as the very reason we should be working out our salvation with fear and trembling. If God weren’t working, our work would be pointless. But because God is perfecting, our work matters.
- B. **II Peter 1:5-10** shows us the kind of work we need to be doing, working on faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. Peter does not say in **II Peter 1:8**, “If these qualities are yours in perfection, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful...” Rather, he says, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing...” If you are growing in Christ, you are fruitful and effective and **II Peter 1:10** says you are making your calling and election sure. You will not fall.
- C. Our job is progress; God’s job is perfection. Don’t let your fears about perfection cause you to abandon Christ. We’re not here because we’re perfect. We’re here because we aren’t, but God is working on us.

IV. Though imperfect, we are still heaven-bound.

- A. I’d like to add a little icing to this cake. In one sense, we are already perfected by Christ’s sacrifice. In another sense, God is perfecting us. Our job is progress; God’s job is perfection. We need to grow because we lack some aspects to be completely conformed to Jesus. What happens if we die like that? Again, let’s look at Paul’s life.
- B. In **Philippians 3:12**, Paul says, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own” (ESV). Paul was doing everything in his power to know Christ so he might attain the resurrection. But even at this point, he made sure we understood that he wasn’t perfect. What would happen if he had died in that imperfect state? He tells us in **Philippians 1:21-23**. For imperfect Paul, death was gain. Death meant being with Christ. That is what it means for us. We’re not perfect today. But we are in Christ. We are growing and progressing in Christ. If we died today, not being good enough wouldn’t keep us out of eternal life with God. God is good enough to perfect us through Christ and conform us to His image. We don’t have to live in fear of that one mistake that might keep us out of heaven.
- C. Does this mean we can just sit on our laurels thinking that no matter what happens in the future we’ll go to heaven? No. Remember Paul in **Philippians 3:12**, he didn’t simply revel in his lack of perfection; he was pressing on to make it his own. He was progressing. God, therefore, was doing His job. God was perfecting.

Conclusion:

Do **Matthew 19:21**; **James 1:4**; and **Matthew 5:48** still frighten me? No. I do have to be perfect like God. But God is working on that. My job is progress. I’ll do my job and I can trust God that He is doing His. But this only works for those in Christ. If you let your fears about not being perfect keep you out of Christ, then you really have reason to fear. You aren’t perfect and the only one who can make you perfect is not working on you. Why not enter Jesus today? Let God work on you, be perfected now and grow to perfection through God’s work and grace as you progress in Christ.