**False: You are Unable to Please God**

When God saved me in 2009 and I started walking with Christ on a regular basis, I held a misconception that my post-baptism life was going to be radically different (and, of course, in many ways it was). I lived within a misconception that one, in a sense, could lead a perfect, spotless life after they’ve been given this new, baptism-flushed slate. I remember hearing in many a sermon the following concept: “Can you not sin for five seconds? How about 10? One minute? Then it must be possible for a whole day.” I also remember being able to chart whole days, one after another, where I successfully didn’t sin - all the while, unbeknownst to me, underneath the surface lied all sorts of evils of the heart (Mt.15.19). I believed I could be perfect while on the inside I was filled with all manner of uncleanness.

Months and years went by and I grew disillusioned with the ideal that I could really lead a sinless life. I was all too aware of my utter lack of self-control. I finally was broken to the point where I finally understood passages like “There is no one righteous; no not one” (Ro.3.10) or “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Eccl.7.20). Now, the good news (no pun intended) is that this laid the foundation for my understanding of the gospel: namely, that if I did deserve salvation, it wouldn’t be grace and it wouldn’t depend on God’s mercy in Christ Jesus. But, rebelling against my earlier understanding of perfection, I grasped this realization of the universality of sin and bolted towards the other end of the spectrum teaching and declaring that we could never please God. Nothing in us is pleasing to him. “Don’t you know,” I would say, “that all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags to God, as Isaiah says?”

Listen to John Piper on this topic: *“Sometimes people are careless and speak disparagingly of all human righteousness, as if there we no such thing that please God. They often cite Isaiah 64.6 which says our righteousness is as filthy rags. It is true – gloriously true – that none of God’s people, before or after the cross, would be accepted by an immaculately holy God if the perfect righteousness of Christ were not imputed to us (Romans 5.19; 1 Corinthians 1.30; 2 Corinthians 5.21). But that does not mean that God does not produce in those “justified” people (before and after the cross) an experiential righteousness that is not “filthy rags.” In fact, he does; and this righteousness is precious to God and is required, not as the ground of our justification (which is the righteousness of Christ only), but as an evidence of our being truly justified children of God.”* (p.69, Hole in our Holiness)

If you’re in Christ Jesus, his Spirit is in you to produce works which are pleasing to God. Not to save you, but because you are saved you really can please him now. Consider the following list of Scriptures (from Kevin DeYoung) which point this out:

* Those who bear fruit in every good work and increase in the knowledge of God are fully pleasing to God (Col.1.10).
* Presenting your body as a living sacrifice pleases God (Ro.12.1).
* Looking out for your weaker brother pleases God (Ro.14.18).
* Obeying your parents pleases God (Col.3.20).
* Teaching the Word in truth pleases God (1Th.2.4).
* Praying for the governing authorities pleases God (1Ti.2.1-3).
* Supporting your family members pleases God (1Ti.5.4).
* Sharing with others pleases God (He.13.16).
* Keeping his commandments pleases God (1Jn.3.22).

So, I guess the balanced view is that: No, you can’t be perfect – but you can make progress. And you can start to please you God by taking his word seriously and, out of devotion to Him, out of gratitude for the gift of His Son, and by the empowering of His Holy Spirit, obeying him.