



God's Job is Perfection; Our Job is Progress

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



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 5:42**; ESV).

Do these verses frighten you at all? They do me. Why? 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. In fact, it's impossible to be good enough because good enough equals perfection and I'll never be there. 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 yet? Should we even bother being Christians if we know we won't be that great 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 can be very troubling for Christians of all maturity levels. I want to assure you of one principle. God's job is perfection; our job is progress.

Discussion:

I. Jesus has already perfected us.

- A. Of course, we all recognize the problem. We have sinned. We have fallen from God's glory (**Romans 3:23**). We have fallen from God's perfection. In reality, even if we chose today to stop sinning and always did everything we were supposed to, 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 law could give life. Something else was needed. Sacrifice was God's answer to provide the grace needed to be perfect. But the sacrifice under the Old Law didn't work to perfect anyone either (**Hebrews 10:1**).
- C. So, here we are...imperfect, flawed, sinful. Yet, we are to be perfect. What do we do? Some seem to answer this by throwing rules at us. Follow this rule and that rule and the other rule. If you make sure to live by all the rules of the New Law, you'll be perfect and go to heaven. 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 us somewhere. They led us to Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. That sacrifice has accomplished one amazing thing. According to **Hebrews 10:14**, it perfected us. Did you see that? By His single offering, He perfected us. Notice **Hebrews 12:23**; 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. We are actually 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. This does not mean we can dispense with God's will, live profligate lives, turning our back on God and stand before Him as perfected children. **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 no-

tice 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, which leads us to our next point.

II. God is perfecting us.

- A. While in one sense, Jesus' sacrifice has already perfected us, in another sense, God is actively working to perfect us. He is working to help us overcome our sins and imperfections. He set us free from sin by the death of Jesus and is actively working in our lives to perfect us.
- B. **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. This is not a wait-and-see-who-makes-the-cut. This is something already set in stone. If you love God, He has already decreed that you will be conformed to the image of His Son. He is doing that.
- C. Consider some other passages that demonstrate God's work in confirming, establishing, saving, and perfecting us.
 1. **Romans 15:25**: "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**: "But 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).
- D. Read and reread these passages. These passages are powerfully comforting. We are not on our own in this trek to perfection. Not only has Jesus already perfected us through His sacrifice, but God, the Father, is perfecting us through His Son. That means we don't need to spend today worrying about whether we are perfect or not. God is working on that. Our job is not perfection; God's job is perfection.
- E. What then is our job? Do we have a job? Does this mean we can sit on Christ's work, do nothing, act how we want, live how we want and expect eternal salvation? I'm sure some of you fear that is what I'm saying. In fact, 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 don't have to do anything. That leads to our third 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 that God's work on our behalf meant we should or could sit back, take it easy, and just 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 perfecting us, that is when we should give up and quit working ourselves. If He wasn't working, we could never get anywhere. But He is working, that is why we should work.
- B. What work should we be doing? **II Peter 1:5-10** shows us the kind of work we need to be doing. We need to work on our faith, our virtue, our knowledge, our self-control, our steadfastness, our godliness, our brotherly affection, and our love. We should establish those and grow in them. Notice what Peter says in **II Peter 1:8**. He does not say, "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, then you are fruitful and effective. If you are practicing and growing in these, then **II Peter 1:10** says you are making your calling and election sure and you will not fall.
- C. Think about what that means. If my job is progress, I lack something today. If I'm to increase in faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, etc. then today I lack some faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, etc. I don't have it all. I'm not perfect in it. But I work to progress in it. Why? Because God is working in me to perfect me. He will conform me to the image of His Son, as long as I love Him and progress in His Son.

D. This brings home our major principle: Our job is progress; God's job is perfection. Don't let your fears about good enough or perfection keep you out of Christ. Don't let them cause you to abandon Christ. We don't come here because we're perfect. We come 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? What happens if when we die, we've been growing in Christ and His will but there is still something we have wrong or some lack of virtue we're still struggling with? 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 done. He hadn't grown all he needed to grow. He wasn't perfect. What would happen to him if he had died in that not perfect situation? He actually tells us back in **Philippians 1:21-23**. For imperfect Paul, death was gain. Death meant going to be 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 demonstrated he was still pressing on to make it his own. He was doing His job. He was progressing. God, therefore, was doing His job. God was perfecting.

Conclusion:

Do **Matthew 19:21**; **James 1:4**; and **Matthew 5:42** 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 able and willing to do His. I'm not going to lose sleep over it anymore. 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.