

Perfectionism by Beverly Littau

Perfectionism is one of the issues that many people struggle with. Those who have these struggles may find themselves feeling depressed, anxious, fearful, resentful, confused, and exhausted.

What happens when we grow up with those expectations in childhood—usually put on us by parents, is that when we become adults we put those unhealthy demands on ourselves, “taking up where our parents left off.”

Of course, the world we live in pushes us to be more perfect. Our bodies, our education, our job, our home, our car, and everything we do and own must be perfect or we must work to make them perfect.

If you are reading this pamphlet, then you or someone you know may be struggling with perfectionism. The quest to be perfect has difficult consequences not only for those who strive for it, but also for those who love them.

From a spiritual perspective, Jesus paid for our sins on the cross and for those who believe in Him, we are gifted with His righteousness. We are called to aim for perfection in the sense that we are to be obedient to Him and always push forward to become more like Him and more mature in our Christian walk.

God says that, through Him, we are perfect. Our job is to accept that perfection He gifts us with and then to try to do the best we can—with His help—to honor Him with our obedience. We do fail, of course, but we must always repent of our sins and then get up and try again—always with HIS strength and not our own. We must not ever accept our sinful behavior and attitudes with a shrug of our shoulders and say, “I’m only human.”

The kind of perfectionism that I want to address here is the kind that comes through in other areas of our lives. The perfection that we aim for is often a human standard that the world demands. It causes us to be discontent and uneasy with our status. It puts our focus on ourselves and not on the God whom we serve.

The big problem with perfection is that *it is a myth*. Perfection cannot be achieved and then sustained over a long period of time. The figure skater that earns a perfect score on her performance today, will not achieve that each time. She may fall down, she may do a “double toe landing” or her jumps may lack height because she’s tired. The perfect score of today becomes the lower score of tomorrow.

The other problem with perfection is that people have very different standards. In other words, what you deem perfect, another person will find fault with. That is why it is so important to try to please only God in what we do each day. All He asks of us is that we do the very best we can and rely on HIS power so that HE gets the glory from the end result.

It is a good thing to aim for excellence. We are told to do our best (Colossians 3:23) and do it for the Lord’s glory. The problem with perfectionism is that it is often rooted in pride. Ezekiel 28:2 says, “Your heart is proud and you have said I am a god.” When we have prideful perfectionism in our hearts, are we needing the admiration of others or wanting to be better than those around us? Are we making ourselves into a god? When our goal of perfection becomes “about us” then it is probably a clue that our motivations for “doing our best” are not Godly ones.

Another problem with perfection is that it becomes like an addiction. Just as the heroin addict needs more and more of his drug to attain the high, the perfection addict sets higher and higher goals for himself. If you attain perfection today in your latest project or feat, tomorrow it may not seem good enough and you will set an even higher standard for yourself. It is like trying to climb an escalator—constantly climbing but never quite getting there. Every time you take a step, another one appears. It is exhausting!

Jesus came to give us hope and rest and abundant life. He said that “His yoke is easy and His burden is light.” The burden that we carry when we strive for perfection is not one that was put on us by Jesus. So is there any hope for the perfectionist? God says there is!

Giving up a pattern of perfectionism may take time, because it has become a habit, but basically it involves learning to see things the way God does. Start with these steps:

- Ask for forgiveness for the pride of perfectionism.
- Determine to walk in God’s righteousness and not your own.
- Ask God to help you see what His expectations are.
- Search the scripture to discover God’s standards.
- Get some accountability.

Perfectionism is a trap. We must learn to live with God’s goals for us in mind, and work towards those in HIS strength and power instead of our own. We must live to meet God’s standards instead of the ones that we impose on ourselves. Remember, the focus is on HIM, not YOU! Seek to do His will and obey what HE says to do.

Bible Verses to Consider

Galatians 5:1 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.”

Galatians 1:10 “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

Philippians 3:12 “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of what Christ Jesus took hold of for me.”

Colossians 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather on Christ.”

II Corinthians 13:11 “Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace.”

John 8:32 “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Galatians 3:3 “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

Colossians 3:23 “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.”

II Corinthians 12:9 “God said, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

I Timothy 6:6 “But godliness with contentment is great gain.”