

Be Perfect

Can men obey God?

Are God's commandments merely ideals, or are they realistic? Are they something God expects us all to aim for, but knows we will never actually attain – or are they something within our grasp? The world believes it is impossible to keep even the letter of the Ten Commandments, but we know it is not; so is it actually possible to “live by every word of God”? Or are we doomed to failure from the start? And if so, why did God command us to do what He knows is impossible?

If you criticize any Christian for any reason, they'll respond “well, NOBODY'S PERFECT!” And of course they're right... aren't they? I mean, surely the Bible says all have sinned and no one is perfect. But then... why did Jesus say:

Matthew 5:48 *Be ye therefore perfect, EVEN AS your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

In this verse, Jesus commanded us to “be perfect”; if you look up this verse in commentaries, they have a variety of convoluted explanations to dismiss this verse altogether; they'll tell you it really means “to become perfect”, at some distant point in the future. That since “obviously, we can't be perfect, therefore He must have meant something else!”

They start from a foregone conclusion – the assumption we cannot be perfect – and then proceed to rewrite any verse in the Bible that says otherwise. That's the origin of all false doctrines. But their arguments all fall through when you realize this verse is a “simile”, where Jesus compared one thing to another; like saying “this rock is **as heavy as** that rock”.

In this simile, the key part of the verse is “Be ... perfect, *EVEN AS* your Father ... is perfect”. So we are to be perfect *EVEN AS*, or *JUST LIKE*, God is perfect. So is God merely “becoming perfect”? Or is He *ALREADY* perfect? The command is for us to be perfect *IN THE SAME WAY* that He is perfect. **Now that's a pretty tall order, but it's our job to make our understanding fit the Bible – not the Bible fit our understanding.** What did He mean?

Did He ask the impossible? Was this just some unattainable goal we can never hope to satisfy? What exactly did He mean, and how can we obey His command? Ask Him yourself, in...

LESSON 29: BE PERFECT

What did God command Abraham? **Genesis 17:1**. Did Abraham pass these commands on to his children? **Genesis 18:19**. Did Job – one of Abraham's descendants – fail to live up to this ideal? **Job 1:1, 1:8, 2:3**. Was Noah perfect? **Genesis 6:9**.

When God personally says someone is perfect, it leaves little room for argument. Did God command Israel to be perfect? **Deuteronomy 18:13**. Did David know of perfect men? **Psalms 37:37**. What is the main attribute of a perfect person? **Proverbs 11:5**. Was God angry when people were not perfect? **Revelation 3:2**.

Clearly, perfection is part of the plan; not in the distant future, but right now – else Noah, Job, and David would not have been called “perfect”. Yet at the same time, there are Bible verses which speak of perfection only happening in the future...

When are just men made perfect? **Hebrews 12:22-23**. Was Paul perfect? **Philippians 3:12**. Yet three verses later, did he claim that some of them (including him self) were already perfect? **Verse 15**. This is a clear contradiction. Who will make us perfect? **1 Peter 5:10, Psalms 138:8**.

When was Jesus made perfect? **Hebrews 5:7-9**. How was He made perfect? **Hebrews 2:10**. Was He perfect when He was here as a man? **Matthew 19:17** (by saying He wasn't good, the implication is that He wasn't perfect). Yet again, four verses later, did Jesus tell the man how to be perfect *without waiting for the resurrection*? **Verse 21**.

So there are clear contradictions here; Jesus wasn't perfect, but expected us to be perfect (and told us how to be); Paul hadn't attained perfection, but he was perfect. Most of the world dismisses the “be perfect” verses and cling to the verses that support their conclusion “nobody's perfect!” **Both scriptures are true! Dismissing either one is abusive to scripture** – but as always, the explanation is quite simple. The answer can only be there are **two different definitions of perfection**.

What is a perfect man? **James 3:2**. Is there anyone who doesn't sin? **1 Kings 8:46**. If we claim not to sin, what does that mean? **1 John 1:8-10**. Yet what does John command us in the very next verse? **1 John 2:1**. Who *never* sins? **1 John 5:18**. Who merely *avoids* sins? (Same verse). Can someone who is born of God commit sin? **1 John 3:9**.

It is impossible for someone born of God – someone who has been resurrected as a spirit being in the family of God – to sin. Because God has placed His seed – His nature – permanently in their hearts and it becomes a fundamental part of their nature. This is the *perfect* definition of “perfect” – the ideal sense of the word. **All verses where Paul speaks of not yet attaining perfection and God perfecting us in the future refer to this type of perfection.**

But God knows full well that we do not have His seed so firmly anchored in our hearts that we *cannot* sin. So there is another definition of perfection for those of us who have not yet attained immortality – a definition for those of us merely *conceived* or *begotten* by God. We CAN sin... but we “*keep ourselves from sin*” (**1 John 5:18**).

For us, the definition is not a perfection of *works* – the ideal perfection. It's a perfection of... what? **1 Kings 8:61**. Whom does God search for – and whom does He help? **2 Chronicles 16:9**. In what way was Hezekiah perfect? **2 Kings 20:3**. Why is perfection of the heart important? **1 Chronicles 28:9**. Is it possible to obey God, yet not have a perfect heart? **2 Chronicles 25:2**. Once perfected, can something become un-perfect? **Ezekiel 28:15**.

We will not reach a state in this life where our soul is so perfect that we will obey God no matter what temptation is thrown at us. As long as we have a heart in us that “*lusteth to envy*” (**James 4:5**), and is “*Deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*” (**Jeremiah 17:9**), we will be *able* to sin, and we *will sin*, given enough time and temptation.

That is why God says He will not allow any temptation we cannot resist (**1 Corinthians 10:13**). If He allowed greater temptations our carnal nature would override our better judgment, *and we would certainly sin*. **Because we are not ideally perfect, there are temptations we simply could not resist! So God doesn't permit us to face those.**

What did the OC require? **Galatians 5:3**. The Old Covenant required us to obey the whole law – a single infraction meant the death penalty. There is no provision in the law to account for the heart. In other words, worshipping idols brings the death penalty; it doesn't matter whether you do so out of love, fear, coercion, or weakness; sin is sin and requires death (**Hebrews 10:28**).

The NC is rather the opposite. If you spent years revering the cross (an idol), but your heart was in the right place, God can ignore the sin because your heart was perfect. You simply didn't know any better. This is why many of Judah's kings had a perfect heart yet didn't remove the high places of the pagan gods (**1 Kings 15:14** for example). They simply didn't understand those things were wrong, and so their heart was perfect – even though their obedience was not.

This leads us directly to grace. There was a lesson devoted to grace long ago, but it is such a fundamental concept that it bears closer scrutiny now. You'll find grace intertwined with every major doctrine because grace governs every interaction between God and Man. But before we can talk about grace, we need to take a brief side-trip to the origins of the universe.

This next segment is based on the distant past, even before the creation of the angels. Because of that, there are fewer scriptures to refer to, but we can infer a great deal from those scriptures. We already understand the plan of God quite well after all these studies, and we can use that and our knowledge of the law of God to fill in the blanks.

TWO SACRIFICES OF JESUS

Few people realize it, but Jesus made two sacrifices; the one of course, everyone is familiar with. The other no one has even imagined. Reading **John 1:1-2**, we see that in the beginning there were two spirit Beings – the Word (Jesus), and God (the Father). But from the wording here, it seems these Gods were equal in every sense.

In God's system, rank is a measure of righteousness. The most righteous are the most worthy of honor and power. Neither of these two Gods had ever sinned, or even been tainted by sin. So they can only have been equal. Separate and distinct beings of course, but independent and of equal authority.

They were alone, and they wanted to build a family, billions of people with whom to share the joys of a perfect universe. Unfortunately, there was a snag. In creating beings who can sin, it is inevitable that some of them will sin. In fact, given time, it is inevitable that ALL will sin eventually, however perfectly they are created (Satan, for instance). And at the moment of that sin, those beings must die – that is the law of **Romans 6:23**.

But this would ruin everything, for what's the point of creating a family, just to destroy them sooner or later as punishment for their inevitable sin? And so a way must be found to make the law allow imperfect beings to exist temporarily. This was the great challenge They faced.

In the perfection of the law, there can be no flexibility; if the wages of sin is death, a perfect Being must deliver those wages instantly, mercilessly, and inflexibly, regardless of trifles like motives or

pressure or temptation. The law is – MUST be, for the safety of the universe – inflexible. There can be no consideration for mitigating circumstances, no compromises, for a perfect being.

Imagine if God didn't insist gravity work EVERY time. Earth would fly into Jupiter without warning. God could say "Oops! But it didn't MEAN to crash into Jupiter and destroy all life on Earth!" – regardless of WHY He let the law of gravity be bent, no universe could survive long with that sort of a God running it.

Both Gods were perfect and both upheld this law rigidly, inflexibly; both in Themselves, and in any beings They created. When something in Their domain sinned, They HAD to execute judgment against it to maintain balance in the universe. If They didn't execute it – or even if They delayed it a little bit – then it would mean They bore the blame for that sin. Just as YOU bear the blame if you let your children steal things from each other and bite each other and don't stop them immediately. If it's in your power to stop it, then you must stop it as soon as you learn of it or YOU bear the blame for it (**Leviticus 19:17, Ezekiel 3:18, 1 Timothy 5:22**, etc).

A LAWGIVER AND A JUDGE

To allow carnal beings to live temporarily in sin, They divided the government of the universe into two parts; one Lawgiver, and one Judge. The Lawgiver gives laws; such as "the wages of sin is death". The job of the Judge is then to soften those laws based on mitigating circumstances. To maintain the purity of the system, the Lawgiver must always be rigidly perfect – if the law requires a death, a death it must have.

The Judge on the other hand, Who is subservient to the Lawgiver, has an extremely wide area of discretion to make His decision. The Judge can look at circumstances – and mitigate the JUDGMENT based on those circumstances. The law is still the law – if you sinned, you sinned, and that's all there is to it. But the PENALTY for that sin can be softened, changed, or paid for by proxy IF the Judge feels it is in the spirit of the law.

He cannot make the laws, because in order for the law to be perfect it cannot say "the wages of sin is death UNLESS you were tired, or hungry, or didn't mean to, or someone lied to you, or someone sinned against you first, or..." – that would be ridiculous, and no law at all. It is the Judge's job to make judgments *about* the law, but He is not qualified to write the laws themselves!

How many lawgivers are there? **James 4:12**. At present, we have two Gods, but only ONE Lawgiver. Not two! ONE! Who is the Judge? **2 Timothy 4:8**. Who is greater? **John 14:28**. Who will always be greater? **1 Corinthians 15:28**.

The judge and the lawgiver cannot be the same person; when one person combines the judicial and the legislative branches of government, he is called a dictator. So the Father is the Lawgiver, and Jesus is the Judge. Jesus is now inferior to the Father, and ALWAYS will be!

...And yet in the beginning, They were equal. **This means at some point, Jesus abdicated His position as co-equal God and took the office of "Lord" instead.** This is why Jesus is a God – He is one of the God species, just like the Father is – and yet He is almost always referred to exclusively as "Lord" in the Bible, because that is His office now. This one paragraph answers the question that has arguably confused more theologians in history than any other – "what is Jesus".

Let's summarize; in the beginning, God and Jesus were equally perfect, equally righteous, and both Lawgivers. But in order to build a family, One of them had to become a judge, and make the law more flexible, while the Other had to remain the inflexible ruler of the universe. And by creating beings who *could* sin – and then allowing them TO sin without punishing them immediately – Jesus had to provide a payment.

Nothing else would do. The law REQUIRED a payment. And if Jesus would not exact it from the people, He had to exact it from Himself. It was in this way that Jesus found a “loophole” in the law, and brought grace to us (**John 1:17**). Jesus promised to surrender His Godhood and become a man to die for our sins, before the world existed (**1 Peter 1:20, Revelation 13:8**). Think of it like a post-dated check drawn on His own sacrifice.

By allowing men to sin without immediately judging them, Jesus was no longer as ideally, perfectly righteous as He had been. He had become a “partaker” of our sins, by tolerating them. This meant Jesus was no longer as perfectly, ideally righteous as the Father – and therefore, no longer of equal rank.

Remember, Jesus was equal with the Father in the beginning. But when Jesus agreed to take on this job of Judge, it required Him to FOREVER abase Himself before the Father, who alone would remain perfectly inflexible with the law. Think about the enormity of that sacrifice!

The beauty of the solution was, since Jesus was independent of, and equal to, the Father, He didn't answer to Him. Therefore, what Jesus decided to do – give mortals grace – did not ultimately fall back on the Father and taint Him as well. Read **1 Corinthians 15:28** again; does it say Jesus is now subject to His Father? Does it? Or does it say that THEN – after the plan is all finished and death and hell are destroyed, ONLY THEN shall the son be subject to the Father?

I missed that shocking, yet obvious, conclusion for years while reading that verse, until one day I realized if Jesus is subject to the Father “then”, He must *not* be subject now! That means the Father is innocent of the sins Jesus permits us to commit and does not immediately judge us for; and that is why only Jesus had to die for our sins.

JESUS LEARNED OBEDIENCE

I have always enjoyed hassling people with **Hebrews 5:8-9**, asking them embarrassing questions like “Well, was He **disobedient** before? Was He UNperfect and then *became* perfect? What could this scripture mean?” I got an array of blank looks and shoe-staring responses; but in all seriousness, what did happen? Quite simply, Jesus had never known what it meant to be obedient before!

As a perfect coequal God being, Jesus had never known what it was to take orders from someone else. He was perfect. Sin was a thought that had never occurred to Him, and there was no reason to take orders from the Father or anyone else. But when He volunteered to be the judge, **He had to become obedient to His Father's rules**, and accept Him as Lawgiver.

Melchizedek was the embodiment of Christ and high priest of the Most High God before the time of Moses (**Genesis 14:18**). The name Melchizedek is a Hebrew name meaning “my King is the Righteous One”. The first act of the Lord God – Jesus – Melchizedek – after creating Man was to sacrifice animals to pay for the sins of Adam and Eve in **Genesis 3:21**.

When Jesus adopted the office of Melchizedek instead of His historical office as God, by His very name He acknowledged obedience to “the Righteous One”, the Lawgiver who had remained in heaven.

And after being obedient as an immortal High Priest, He then became a man, and in the ultimate obedience laid down His life according to His Father's will.

But if you were paying close attention, you'll notice that was at least TWO sacrifices! He died on the stake for the sins of mankind, yes. But before that, He had "died" as a God being! **Just by becoming a man in the first place, He had to forsake His immortal, divine nature, and become HUMAN!** When He entered the womb of Mary, He DIED as an immortal divine God to be born as a weak, frail man! And that was the FIRST sacrifice!

Why did He do that? What did that sacrifice of His Godhood provide for us? To answer, we must review a bit more about how grace works.

MORE GRACE REVIEW

Grace simply means the overlooking of sins of ignorance. Grace doesn't pay for sins, it doesn't forgive them, **it simply doesn't blame you for them** because you didn't know any better! Because "*where no law is, there is no transgression*" (**Romans 4:15**), and "*sin is not imputed when there is no law*" (**Romans 5:13**).

We know "*where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*" (**Romans 5:20**). So the more you *sin*, the more grace you receive. On the other hand, "*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*" (**James 4:6**). So the more *humble* you are, the more grace you receive. But wait a minute! How can you get more grace when you obey God, AND when you disobey God??

And **2 Peter 3:18** commands us to "*Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord*". Growing in knowing God brings you more grace. But if you know God better, you should be sinning less! And logically, where SIN *does not* abound, GRACE should *not* abound – based on **Romans 5:20**! How can we explain these contradictions? How can we get more grace for being good, AND more grace for being bad?

The only explanation is there are two graces which act differently – physical grace, and spiritual grace. Now if God were to execute proper judgment (as the Lawgiver would do it), the evil should receive no rain (**Deuteronomy 11:17**) and the righteous should; in fact, the evil should be killed on the spot. But He doesn't do that. Why? Because "*they know not what they do*" (**Luke 23:34**).

They're ignorant! So the JUDGE can ask the Father to overlook their sins of ignorance! Of course, that doesn't mean those evil people will be in the first resurrection! It only means they will get RAIN, and be able to LIVE a PHYSICAL life, with physical blessings and physical cursings, for a normal life span and DIE!

The graces act exactly the same, but have different purposes. Physical grace is given to all men, to allow them to live out their physical lives and hopefully learn something in this life before proceeding to the next one. And where sin abounds, THAT grace abounds more! (**Romans 5:20**). God also uses physical grace to work with people He is calling, people who have no faith. For "*the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance*" (**Romans 11:29**).

Spiritual grace comes ONLY by faith, and faith comes only by righteousness. You must obey God to receive more spiritual grace, and increase your faith to increase your grace. When you do, you GROW in grace as you GROW in knowledge of God! And THIS grace, wherein WE stand, has a much more

glorious purpose – this grace allows us to inherit not only the physical blessings of temporary physical life, but SPIRITUAL blessings of ETERNAL life!

THE FIRST SACRIFICE

Jesus sacrificed his Godhood as payment for the sins of all mankind. Not a permanent payment, mind you; just a temporary payment. His Godhood bought physical grace, to pay for everyone who has ever lived and sinned in ignorance (**2 Corinthians 5:15**).

This death bought rain for the wicked, and life for the ungodly. It bought a stay of execution, to allow you and me to make stupid mistakes for awhile before we were able to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and choose to avoid it voluntarily. Without it, we could not live. But it wasn't enough.

Jesus' life as a God was more valuable than the lives of everyone He had created, because the Creator is greater than all His creations put together (**Hebrews 3:3-4**). But that wasn't enough to buy ETERNAL lives for us. One immortal life was only enough to buy infinite *physical* lives, it wasn't enough to buy even one *spiritual* life! So what did He do? **2 Corinthians 8:9**.

To look at it differently, Jesus HAD to die as a God-being to pay for not judging us. He SHOULD have judged us, and He DIDN'T so He HAD to sacrifice His position to pay for it. And that bought us a stay of execution. But that was only the first sacrifice, which bought physical grace (**Hebrews 2:14**).

So He became a man. That would have bought plenty of physical grace for us. But it could only *overlook* our sins, *it could not forgive them!* Nor could it have allowed us to live a spiritual, eternal life. He had to actually die, in every possible sense of the word, to satisfy the Lawgiver's penalties and qualify Himself forever as a righteous judge (**Hebrews 2:9**). In that way, His death could apply to every man.

That was the plan. He bought the first grace before the world was, or else He'd have to kill Adam at the first sin – not to mention Lucifer. That's why He was Melchizedek, the servant of the Righteous ONE, the Lawgiver. But that wasn't enough. To be a righteous Judge, and REALLY UNDERSTAND what it was like to be in this physical body, and to be able to UNDERSTAND what we go through on a daily basis, He had to become one of us (**Hebrews 2:17**).

Remember, Jesus had never known obedience before. He had never had to subject His own will to the will of anyone else, for any reason. He learned that obedience through the things He suffered, starting as Melchizedek and ending as Jesus Christ. This changed Christ's character. It taught Him how difficult it was to be human and to obey an unseen God. It taught Him that in some circumstances there are mitigating factors that *should* soften judgment (**Hebrews 4:15**).

God the Father still does not know this, for He has never learned obedience, and never can. A Judge must understand what His subjects go through. A Lawgiver must remain objective, indifferent to the needs of the few, and focus instead on the needs of the universe. And that is why Jesus Christ will always remain subservient to His Father.

Jesus was once **equal** with the Father! He'd never been obedient to ANYONE in all of eternity! But He LEARNED obedience because now, suddenly, He had been put into a position as Judge and High Priest where He HAD to submit Himself to His Father who was, now, GREATER than He! This is why when the young man called Jesus "Good master", Jesus objected and said that only God deserved that title! (**Matthew 19:17**).

It was necessary that Jesus become tainted with our sins – by not immediately giving us the full penalty of the law – in order for us to live beyond our first impure thought. This cost Him His position as a coequal God, and was the first sacrifice to bring us physical grace.

In order to fulfill the plan and create immortal, incorruptibly righteous, holy, spirit beings, He had to go all the way and literally die for our sins – which bought us “*this grace, wherein WE stand*”. This is why John said “...*grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*” (John 1:17).

BACK TO PERFECTION

So you see, it is through that grace that we can be deemed perfect, even though we may be sinning. Under the physical grace, the best you can get under the OC, you are bound to keep the WHOLE law (Galatians 5:3). Failing in even one point brings the appropriate penalty without mercy.

As spirit beings, this would be no problem for us, for God’s seed will remain in us and we will not be able to sin. Perfection will be second nature to us (pun intended). But for us today, this is indeed unrealistic. What did David say about God’s commandment? Psalms 119:96. All perfection has an end – except God’s commandments. Fully understanding them will take... well, more time and understanding than David had. So if we can’t even *understand* the law completely, surely we cannot *obey* it in the perfect, ideal sense!

Yet equally surely, *God knows that!* So how did He provide for us to be perfect, while we are indubitably breaking the law? The answer is in the twin scriptures Romans 4:15 and Romans 5:13. Oh, and throw in 1 John 3:4, too. Where there is no law, there is no sin, for sin is the breaking of the law.

Therefore, where someone doesn’t understand the law, *it is not a sin to them!* Sin **does not count where the law is not understood!**

That’s slightly misleading, so let me clarify. Sin carries no *spiritual* penalty where there is no law. But sin still carries a penalty! Hitting your thumb with a hammer still hurts. Contrary to what Bugs Bunny taught us, if you jump off a high cliff the law of gravity will still kill you, even if you “never studied law”.

If you don’t know lying, stealing, and adultery are sins you will bear no *spiritual* penalty. But you will still pay a physical penalty, when your own sins find you out (Numbers 32:23), when your own sins correct you (Jeremiah 2:19), and when you fall into traps you set for others (Proverbs 28:10, 5:22, 6:32, 11:5, 26:27, Psalms 7:14-16 etc.).

So clearly, you pay a penalty for all sins, ignorant or otherwise, since sin comes with its own built-in penalty. But you escape the *spiritual* penalty, you evade divine retribution *if you are ignorant of the law*. Even so, even in this physical life, God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7-8).

Back to the point, if I say I have never sinned (1 John 1:10), that’s just silly. Of course I have! If I say I am not sinning *at this very moment* (1 John 1:8) that’s equally silly. Until I understand the WHOLE law, how can I be SURE I’m not overlooking some important sin? I might be the world’s worst sinner and not know it! So stating that I am not sinning right now would be “deceiving myself” and proof “the truth is not in me”.

But I KEEP MYSELF FROM SIN – I avoid it when I see it – and I am not presently committing any sins *of which I am aware!* Therefore, those sins of ignorance which I may or may not be committing *don't count! They are not "imputed", or counted against me!* For them, I have GRACE!

Is there any man who doesn't sin? **1 Kings 8:46**. But if we are not *aware* of those sins, do they count? **Romans 5:13**. Even though we all sin *can we still be perfect?* **James 3:2**.

FAITH AND PERFECTION

Like grace, faith was covered long ago in Lesson 4. It deserves a quick review to put it in the proper context with perfection. Understanding faith rests on two scriptures; **Hebrews 11:6** and **1 John 3:19-22**. Ironically, everyone who writes about faith quotes only the first half of **Hebrews 11:6** and ignores the important part! And practically no one ever quotes **1 John 3:19-22** in this context – or at all. Yet without these scriptures, you can't understand faith.

Faith rests on believing, not just one thing – that God will do something – but **THREE** separate things. He who comes to God must believe that He exists **AND** He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him – in other words, that God will take care of those who obey Him. But a third thing is implied there, *for what good does it do to believe that God rewards the righteous unless you believe that YOU are righteous?* And that's where **1 John** comes in.

You must come before God with a clear conscience to expect an answer. If your heart condemns you for your actions, God *might* answer you – because *"He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust"* (**Psalms 103:14**). But! If your heart does **NOT** condemn you – if your conscience is clear, then you can have **CONFIDENCE** towards God, you can **KNOW** that God will answer you!

Without believing **ALL THREE THINGS** – that God exists, that God rewards the righteous *and that you are righteous* – you do not have faith. And it is the *perfection* of these beliefs that brings you to being perfect in the eyes of God. Lesson 4 laid out the process of purifying your conscience in detail, so I won't go into that again here. If you have diligently done that, *then there is nothing God could condemn you for. Isn't that perfection of heart?*

Assuming you already believe that God exists and God is good, if you are certain there is nothing you are doing that God might frown upon **then you have perfect faith**, and Jesus said *"And ALL THINGS, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive"* (**Matthew 21:22**).

This is the promise to someone with perfect faith; and you can't have perfect faith without serving God with a perfect heart. That doesn't mean you are without sin – but **it means you are without sins of which you are aware!** God will gradually reveal more things to you, and to maintain your perfect faith you'll have to abandon those sins as well – and that's about all there is to being perfect.

BAD THOUGHTS

Invariably, when I mention these ideas to most people they throw up their hands and demand "are you telling me you can go even a **SINGLE DAY** without sinning? Without even **THINKING** a bad thought??"

But is that a part of the definition of perfection? Does a single impure thought disqualify you from perfection? Is a bad thought even a sin? That's worth some time to explore. Can you sin in your mind, without sinning with your body? **Matthew 5:22, 28**. So the answer is clearly "yes"; *but at what point*

does a thought become a sin? In the instant of its formation – or at some later date? That's the key question!

Read **James 1:14-15**. This explains in detail the process of temptation, lust, and sin. Look at the steps in order;

1. Temptation – an opportunity to sin.
2. Lust – a desire to pursue that opportunity.
3. When that thought “has conceived” (is pursued to the end) it *becomes sin*.
4. Sin, when it “grows up” causes death.

That's the process. But notice the first two steps *are not yet sin!* They are steps that may *LEAD* to sin, but **no sin exists until the third step!** Being tempted – say, a married woman flirting with you – this is not a sin because it's beyond your control – the temptation comes *to* you!

And desiring to follow that temptation – noticing the woman is attractive – this is **ALSO** not a sin! That desire is a part of all of us, a direct result of nature that “*lusteth to envy*” (**James 4:5**). It's not a sin!

But when you **PURSUE** that thought – when you permit yourself to fantasize about that married woman, *it then becomes adultery in your heart!* Because it means you **WOULD** sin, if you were given the chance! Whether you physically sin right then doesn't matter. The point is your heart wants to, and you didn't control it (**Proverbs 16:32**) – so when circumstances are right, you *will* commit adultery. It's just a matter of time. And it's also just a matter of time until you die for that sin, when it “brings forth death”.

The point is, every stray thought you have, every half-formed thought about stealing, **IS NOT A SIN!** Every time your eyes flit subconsciously to follow a pretty girl, **IT IS NOT SIN!** But if you **GIVE IN** to that thought, and **COVET** her, or commit adultery in your heart with her, **IT BECOMES A SIN!**

TEMPTED IN ALL POINTS

Above, James clearly stated “**EVERY MAN** is tempted...” in that way. Was Jesus? **Hebrews 4:15**. Did Jesus have human nature? **Hebrews 2:16**. Was He **IN EVERY WAY** like us? **Verse 17**. Did He ever sin? **Hebrews 4:15** again.

This means Jesus had this same temptation process of **James 1:14-15** to contend with **and yet He was “without sin”!** **Because He always stopped the process before it got to step 3!** *And more importantly, it means SO CAN WE!*

So how do we explain **James 1:13**? How could Jesus be tempted, when God cannot be tempted? Easily! **God does not have a human nature!** The *holy spirit* is God's nature. It doesn't desire to sin – it fully understands and hates all forms of sin. **But in addition to Jesus' holy spirit, He had ANOTHER spirit in Him when He was a man – the human spirit that all men have!** The spirit that is desperately wicked!

Do we all have our own human spirit? **Job 32:8**. Do we also, if we are Christ's, have Jesus' spirit in us? **Romans 8:9**. And through Jesus' spirit, do we have access to the Father's spirit? **Ephesians 2:18, John**

17:23. These spirits work together in our mind and at each turn we must choose whether to follow Jesus' spirit or our own.

In the same way, Jesus – to be Jesus – had to have His own holy spirit. Did the Father give Him *His* spirit as well? **John 3:34**. Did Jesus also have a human spirit? **Hebrews 2:16** again. [Note: using the word “spirit” for all of these things may turn out to be a slightly inaccurate term for what may be better termed “heart” or “soul”; but this is good enough for now, and a later lesson will clarify the differences].

When Jesus was a God, with only His own spirit and the spirit of the Father in Him, of course He was untemptable! There was no lustful human heart to make Him temptable! **But when He became a man, the whole point was to adopt a nature that WAS temptable, in order to show us that it could be overcome!**

God still cannot be tempted; nor, once again, can Jesus be tempted now for God's seed remains in Him and He “cannot sin”. But while Jesus was a man, *He was as frail as the rest of us – physically, emotionally, and morally*. The difference is, He overcame those frailties and we haven't – not yet. But He proved that we can.

WHAT ABOUT PAUL?

When defending their imperfection, people always turn to **Romans 7**, and say “what about Paul, who berated the thoroughly UNperfect nature of himself, calling himself a wretched man!”, and scornfully ask “are you so much better than PAUL??”

I didn't say I was; but let's look at what exactly Paul was berating before we just assume that it's OK for us to be imperfect. Most people only quote the last few verses in this chapter, but let's back up to the beginning to get the context.

In **verses 1-6**, he talks about how death frees a spouse from marriage, and death also frees a person from bondage to the law's penalty. This is speaking of baptism, among other things. Then in **verses 7-13**, he gives a quick practical example of how grace works; in **verse 9** he was alive without the law (he was ignorant, and not under a penalty of death). But then he learned the commandment and had to die.

To him this law turned out to be death (**verse 10**) – because sin *seemed good to him* and deceived him, and then that sin *brought forth death* (**verse 11**, just like **James 1:14-15** described). That isn't because the law is bad! It was so Paul *could learn to understand how sinful sin is!* (**verses 12-13**).

Why did he NEED to understand how sinful sin is? *Because he (his heart) is carnal!* (**verse 14**). And now we're getting into the area people abuse so badly. Now you see the context, the thoughts that led up to these verses! *He's explaining why he (and we) need grace!*

In **verses 15-20**, he talks about how his nature is evil; how the things that his nature desires are sinful. Surely we can all relate. Jesus said something very similar in **Mark 14:38** – though it was specifically directed at Peter, it seems like a general comment on all humans as well.

Then in **Romans 7:21-24**, Paul says he has TWO LAWS warring in his mind. This is the same two spirits you studied in the last few segments; each spirit lives by its own law; God's spirit lives by His laws, your spirit lives by your own law (your laws are shorter than God's; your first and only commandment is “me, me, me”).

These two spirits were at war in Paul's mind, and any reasonably introspective person whom God is working with can see the effects of these two laws in his own mind. Paul's mind (his better judgment) loved God's law, but that love wasn't enough to eradicate a baser nature which was selfish and would gladly sin to get its own way. That's why Paul needed delivered from his "body of death" by Jesus!

But that didn't mean Paul's baser nature was ruling his life! That's where everyone goes astray here! We all have nature that lusts to sin. But did that nature overtake Paul? **Verse 25.** His mind *still served the law of God!* That meant *His heart was perfect before God!* He couldn't destroy the other nature, the fleshly, selfish nature, that lusted to sin *just as Jesus couldn't destroy it – but he recognized that it needed to be destroyed!*

So did Paul walk after the flesh (obey his carnal nature) or walk after the spirit (obey God's spirit)? **Romans 8:1.** Was Paul free from sin (and therefore, perfect?) **Verse 2.** The rest of **chapter 8 (verses 3-9)** talk about how carnally minded people cannot please God *unless they change and become spiritually minded!* Did Paul keep his carnal nature in subjection? **1 Corinthians 9:27.**

That's what reading the context does – it resolves these difficult passages! The picture people paint from reading **verses 14-24** have people thinking Paul was a horrible person, that in weakness he might murder, rape and pillage because of that "wretched nature"; and their conclusion is that in spite of Paul's "imperfections" God still loved him anyway! **And that isn't what was happening at all!**

Paul was merely observing the first two steps of James' process of temptation and lust and recognizing that, although he controlled those impulses *it was a constant, daily battle!* No matter how much he fought, he couldn't *defeat it* – he could only keep it under control! Paul realized battling his carnal nature was like swatting mosquitoes – he might slap and kill this one, but ten more would take its place!

And that is the second definition of perfection! His mind served the law of God *and he kept his body in subjection!* As long as his conscience stayed clean and his heart was perfect with God **Paul could be perfect in spite of that nature!**

Like us, Paul's nature was selfish. That realization led him to say "*in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth NO GOOD THING*" (**Romans 7:18**). Notice he carefully limited his statement to his *flesh*, so as not to include the spirit of God which dwelt in him. Yet in spite of that nature, Paul could also say that with his mind he served the law of God; even though he may have caught himself sinning from time to time, when he became aware of it he stopped it and so he was perfect.

Not ideally perfect, for even Jesus couldn't claim that when He was here as a man, which is why He, too, needed grace – to cover his carnal nature (**Luke 2:40**). But He was perfect for all practical purposes. Even if, like Jesus, we commit no actual sins... as long as our heart *desires* to sin there is a *potential* for sin, and therefore we are not ideally perfect. But as long as we obey all we know and keep that selfish nature subjected to the law of God, we can still be perfect in God's eyes.

Roman 5:13 (*For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*)

Through grace, God "winks at" – ignores – our sins *as long as we are ignorant* (**Acts 17:30**). But He also says "*to him that KNOWETH to do good, and doeth it not, TO HIM IT IS SIN*" (**James 4:17**). God doesn't punish us for our sins until we are aware of them. But when we know to do good and THEN we don't do it – then "sin revives" and we must face the death penalty (**Romans 7:9**), or repent and let Jesus face it for us.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As I said in the opening lines of this lesson, the world believes no one can truly please God, that we are fated to sin, and nothing we can do will stop it. It was early apostate “church fathers” arguing this point that led to the de-humanizing of Jesus and the veneration of Mary.

As you should remember from Lesson 13, Jesus came to live as a man and to prove men can obey God. But the antichrist – Satan – denies that. Even now, they deny that Jesus truly was a man. The world’s religions believe Jesus was superhuman, beyond temptation, protected from the weaknesses and temptations we face, and that is why He was sinless.

They claim they do this to exalt Him – but really, they are debasing Him, saying the only reason He was able to be sinless was because He was *not* “*tempted in all points like as we are*”. You should also remember in **Job 4:12-19**, Eliphaz the Temanite related a devil-inspired dream, where Satan complained “*May a man be upright before God? or a man be clean before his Maker? Truly, he puts no faith in his servants, and he sees error in his angels; How much more those living in houses of earth...*” (**BBE**).

Satan’s conclusion is that if HE, a brilliant and wise angel, could not obey God, **no puny human made of dirt can do better!** This dream set the theme for all the arguments from Job’s friends throughout the rest of the book (except Elihu, who spoke for God). Job’s contention was that he hadn’t sinned, and yet was being punished; their contention was that he **MUST** have sinned “because *nobody’s* perfect!”

This is stated even clearer later in **Job 15:14-16**; again Eliphaz is arguing based on this dream which Satan gave him, “*What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?*” saying men cannot obey God, so Job *must* have been sinning!

But there is an interesting addition in this passage, specifically stating *someone born of woman cannot be clean*. Now we know Jesus was born of a woman, and **WAS** without sin; but antichrist **STILL** doesn’t believe that! And so in the beginnings of the Catholic Church, they argued Jesus **COULDN’T** be sinless if He was a man; the doctrine of antichrist. So they made him **MORE** than a man – they said that He was literally a God while on Earth, with no human nature at all.

But even that wasn’t good enough; because **Jesus was born of a mortal woman**. They had to go a step further and **say MARY was immaculately conceived**. Most Protestants, seeing a Catholic Church called “the church of the immaculate conception”, assume it refers to Jesus’ conception; but the Catholic dogma is that **MARY** was conceived immaculately, without original sin. In other words, she did not have this carnal nature.

(To be clear, that doesn’t mean they believe Mary was also a virgin birth; they say Mary had literal parents; just that when she was born, she wasn’t tainted with the original sin of Adam. Of course, there is no such thing as “original sin” – children are not to blame for the sins of their parents, **Deuteronomy 24:16**).

The point is that Satan’s churches believe that **EVEN GOD** couldn’t have obeyed God’s laws, *if He was born to a human mother*; so in order for Jesus to obey God, He had to be born to an immaculately-conceived, sinless, super-human mother. Because no human can obey God.

Catholic theologians hint, but never quite state, that Mary may have been an incarnation of “God the Holy Spirit” – the third arm of the trinity. That’s why the Catholic symbol for both Mary and the Holy

Spirit is a dove – because Satan figures only by being an omniscient God-on-Earth, AND the Son of two Gods could Jesus have managed to obey God. So what hope could Satan have had? And if he failed, what hope do WE have? Or so he reasons.

All of this can be seen in Satan’s complaint in **Job 15:15-16**: *“Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?”*

“Saints” is better translated as “holy ones”, i.e., angels. So the angels, and even the HEAVENS are not good enough for God! How much more vile are humans? What hope do THEY have of pleasing God? Any time you hear this argument spouted from a pulpit *you know who the ultimate author of that idea was!*

An excellent case in point; after all that has been said in this lesson, if you present anything you’ve learned here to a preacher who knows their Bible well, they will quote **Isaiah 64:6** at you, and tell you your righteousness is just “filthy rags” to God. But is that what God meant? Did He mean to *discourage* righteousness by that statement? Context! **Always get the context!** Read **verses 4-7**.

They weren’t righteous – they had sinned! And there were NONE that called on God! None who *“stirred himself to take hold on God”!* So why did God say their righteousness was “filthy rags” to Him? Well, turn back to **Isaiah 1:2-16**; notice how God disowns *THEIR* feast days! *THEIR* new moons! They were not GOD’S days anymore, but *theirs!*

Now turn to **Romans 10:1-3**. This wasn’t God’s righteousness that was filthy rags, *it was THEIR righteousness, which THEY INVENTED that was filthy rags!* Just as the righteousness of the Pharisees was in Jesus’ day (**Mark 7:7-9, Matthew 23:27**), and in most modern Churches (**2 Timothy 3:5**). **They have a form of Godliness – they sort of appear as God’s people – but they deny the POWER of God – they deny faith, and true righteousness!** They pay lip service to God (**Mark 7:6**), but in reality they serve the devil’s ends.

This is what ministers are doing when they tell you that you can’t obey God. They’ll call you Pharisaical for trying. If you try to get them to obey God with all their heart – in other words, to obey God perfectly – they’ll call you judgmental, unforgiving, harsh, unloving, sounding brass, antichrist; they’ll say you’re denying the sacrifice of Christ, seeking to be saved by the Old Covenant, an accuser of the brethren; and many other arguments that will be answered in the next three lessons.

All of these arguments are rooted in the same thesis; “you vile piece of dirt, how dare you try to obey God (even worse, try to get ME to do it) when even *LUCIFER* failed!” Once you learn to recognize that, the arguments get to be a lot simpler to understand – at the core, every false doctrine springs from the doctrine of Antichrist – that no one can obey God.

But Jesus proved men CAN obey God, and it is not only possible to obey God perfectly, it is required. That doesn’t mean we never sin – for we are not yet born of God. But it means we keep ourselves from sin, as a begotten child of God should. And for now, that’s perfect enough.

2 Corinthians 7:1 *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

NOTES

This work is completely non-denominational and is meant to fulfill Christ's great commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (**Mark 16:15**). **This publication is not to be sold**; "*freely ye have received, freely give*" (**Matthew 10:8**).

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