

METICULOSITY, SCRUPULOSITY AND PERFECTIONISM

- I. Definitions.
- A. Meticulous: "1. Fearful, timid. *Obs.* 2. Over-careful about minute details, over-scrupulous."
 - B. Scrupulous: "Troubled with doubts or scruples of conscience: over-nice or meticulous in matters of right and wrong. Also (of things, actions, etc.), characterized by such scruples.
b. Prone to hesitate or doubt; distrustful; cautious or meticulous in acting, deciding, etc.....
4. Of actions, etc.: Rigidly directed by the dictates of conscience; characterized by a strict and minute regard for what is right. 5. Minutely exact or careful (in non-moral matters); strictly attentive to even the smallest details; characterized by punctilious exactness."
 - C. Perfectionism: "A system or doctrine of religious, moral, social, or political perfection; esp. the theory that moral perfection can be or has been attained by man; spec. (with capital P) the system of the Perfectionists of Oneida Creek, N.Y."
 - D. Perfect: (verb) "To bring to completion, to complete, finish, consummate; to carry through, accomplish."
 - E. Will-worship: "Worship according to one's own will or fancy, or imposed by human will, without divine authority."
- II. Christians have an absolute standard of perfection towards which they ought to be striving. **MAT 5:48; 1PE 1:15-16; PHIL 3:14.**
- A. Practical perfection is a process that requires ongoing intake and application of knowledge. **PRO 4:18; HEB 5:12-6:1.**
 - B. Scripture and ministerial offices facilitate this goal. **EPH 4:11-13; 2TI 3:16-17.**
 - C. Practical perfection is not going to be fully realized until the coming of Jesus Christ. We are going to fall short of the mark until resurrection day. **1JO 3:2.**
 - D. If we ever think that we have in this life finally achieved perfection, we only fool ourselves. **ROM 7:24-25; 1JO 1:8, 10.**
 - E. If we trust God to remember the weakness of our frame in the time of failure (**PSA 78:39; 103:14**), should we not ourselves take that into consideration?
- III. There is danger in an untempered approach to practical perfection. If you do not accept the fact that you are a (redeemed) sinner and are going to sin, your striving for righteousness can be your own destruction. **ECC 7:16.**
- A. Misdirected zeal for righteousness which focuses more on individual performance than on Christ breeds self-righteousness. **ROM 10:1-3.**
 - B. Self-righteousness lends itself to pride and superiority. **LUK 18:9-11.**
 - C. Someone who lives a high standard of perfection and righteousness may forget the source of his goodness. **JOB 33:8-12; 34:5, 36-35:1-2.**
- IV. There are four major areas where errant religious or moral perfectionism raises its head.
- A. The heresy of works salvation (whereby a person believes that his justification is owing to personal performance) lends itself to self-exaltation over others. **LUK 18:9-11.**
 - 1. God did not find anything more worthy of salvation in us than is in the vilest, most degenerate reprobate imaginable.
 - 2. The truly justified trust in an imputed righteousness. **PHIL 3:9; ROM 4:5-6.**
 - 3. The truly justified have one plea: Mercy! **LUK 18:13.**
 - B. By emphasizing less important requirements of God's laws to the disregard of weightier matters, men devise a standard of personal righteousness and perfection to which they can

attain.

1. This is simply "lowering the bar."
2. Pharisees specialize in this. **MAT 23:23-25.**
- C. Another error is inventing rules of worship or conduct for which there is no divine authority or which may countermand the laws of God. **MAR 7:1-8.**
 1. Consider those who marginalize the commands of God regarding the pure separation from pagan customs in worship or who functionally deny that we are under a New Testament in order to accommodate the keeping of "holy-days," and then censure others who don't follow suit. **COL 2:16-17.**
 2. Consider the error of "Christian" dietary laws. **1TI 4:3-5.**
- D. Another trap is taking an area of God-permitted liberty and censuring it altogether. This, like "C" above, is "will-worship." **COL 2:20-23.**
 1. A person or church sees that drunkenness is wrong so the drinking of wine is condemned---wine being a liberty God allows in moderation. **EPH 5:18.**
 2. Gluttony is wrong also. Should we therefore condemn eating?
 3. However, areas of liberty must be prudently and cautiously managed lest they destroy yourself or others. They should not be flaunted or made an occasion for the flesh. **ROM 14:21-22; GAL 5:13.**

V. What about being a "perfectionist" in a personal sense?

- A. This may or may not be a weakness, depending on circumstances.
 1. Who would you rather have performing delicate surgery on you: a haphazard doctor or a meticulous one? What type would be a better air-traffic controller?
 2. Who would you rather have batting to get a runner in to score: the perfectionist who will settle for nothing except a home-run or a "digger" who reliably gets base hits?
 3. Do you want a minister who categorizes all demanding scriptures as unnecessary nitpicking? How about one who loads you up with unreasonable expectations and laws? Neither would be a good choice.
- B. There are genetic, psychological and spiritual aspects to personal perfectionism.
 1. Individuals may be born with predispositions to particular personality traits.
 2. Parental, family or social environments can influence the psyche towards meticulousity.
 - a. Our culture upholds a false standard of perfection in the area of personal appearance.
 - b. This has bred a skyrocketing rate of perceived inadequacy, depression, self-loathing, self-abuse and hatred/envy of others.
 3. A lack of grace or an abundance of self-righteousness may contribute to this.
- C. The believer should not reject the importance of perfection and order.
 1. We are to strive to be perfect as God is perfect. **MAT 5:48.**
 2. God is a God of order.
 - a. His creation is carefully and exquisitely ordered. **ECC 1:5-7; GEN 8:22.**
 - b. His salvation is according to perfect order. **2SA 23:5.**
 - c. He sets a schedule and sticks to it. **GAL 4:4; 2TH 2:1-3.**
 - d. He requires specific order in our service. **1CO 11:1-2; 14:33, 40.**
 3. Believers are commanded to do things heartily, not haphazardly. **ECC 9:10; COL 3:23.**
 4. Life without order is the stuff of death and the grave. **JOB 10:21-22.**
 - a. It would be improper to excuse one's own lack of diligence by saying in the

- heart, "It's wrong to play God so I will not strive for order or excellence."
- b. The slothful will virtually always have a justification for not doing what they could or should do. **PRO 20:4; 22:13; MAT 25:24-26.**
- 5. Striving for order in all things, though, must be subject to the following:
 - a. Failure is not an option with God but a certainty with us and this world.
 - b. Majoring on minors is a certain path to frustration and anxiety for yourself and those around you.
 - c. God's mercy and Christ's perfection will compensate for our lack of it.
 - d. "Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, start all over again..."

VI. Consider some of the dynamics of personal perfectionism in the light of two Biblical examples.

- A. David's former counsellor, Ahithophel, was famous for his counsel. **2SA 16:20-23.**
 - 1. Ahithophel was so good at what he did that David appealed to God for help. **2SA 15:31.**
 - 2. Ahithophel's opinion of his own abilities was apparently so high that he could not bear the fact of his counsel being shelved in favor of another's. **2SA 17:14, 23.**
 - 3. Note that Ahithophel carefully put his house in order before he killed himself!
 - 4. Ahithophel's real problem was pride: a smug superiority that meant more to him than life itself.
 - 5. Sometimes the pursuit of excellence or a competitive spirit is actually nothing more than emulation.
 - a. Emulation: "The endeavour to equal or surpass others in any achievement or quality; also, the desire or ambition to equal or excel."
 - b. Emulation is a work of the flesh. **GAL 5:20.**
 - c. An inability to cope with failure indicates that emulation is the driving force, not "competitive spirit" or the pursuit of excellence.
- B. Martha was a great housekeeper. **LUK 10:38-42.**
 - 1. This account shows that personal order and diligence must take a backseat to higher priorities.
 - 2. What if a woman was so fastidious about her home and the preparation of meals, etc., that she had no patience with or time for her family? Or what if she opted out of spiritual duty to God for the sake of being the perfect hostess?
 - 3. "Better to bless than impress." Let the house be clean enough to be healthy, dirty enough to be happy.

VII. Pushing ourselves to be "perfect" may well be a kind of *fig leaf*---a way to cover up what we hate about ourselves: a deficiency, a weakness, a sin issue, a bad family or parental trait, etc.

- A. This fig leaf may be self-righteousness owing to a denial of one's own sinfulness or an underlying lack of trust in the work and blood of Christ and His mercy towards sinners. **ROM 10:3 c/w HEB 4:10-11; TIT 3:5.**
- B. This fig leaf may be something in which we specialize in order to compensate for what we perceive in ourselves to be a weakness or character flaw.
 - 1. "If I can't be beautiful, I'll be tough / smart / successful in business."
 - 2. "If I can't be smart, I'll be funny / beautiful / criminal."
 - 3. This form of compensational perfection is not necessarily wrong but by what standard are we measuring ourselves: ours, other's, or God's? **2CO 10:12.**
- C. This fig leaf may be a substitute for a sin issue we know we should be dealing with but we don't because of the difficulty involved in dealing with it.

1. Then we can point others to the fig leaf as evidence of our goodness.
2. Suppose a wife had a real problem with being submissive and rather than repent of that, attired herself with some kind of uniform that implied humility and played up the associated role to perfection?
3. This is the stuff of Pharisaism. **MAT 23:5.**

VIII. How do you react when you err or if someone corrects you? Does it crush you to find out that you are fallible? Are you offended that someone should actually question your conduct or decisions?

- A. If so, it may be because you have established an unrealistic attitude towards perfection.
- B. The proper thing to do if your heart is condemning you because of sin is to admit your inclination to sin, confess any error, forsake it, and remember for whom Jesus died: sinners! **1JO 1:9-2:2; 3:19-21; MAT 11:28-30.**

IX. We are to zealously strive towards perfection, true. This can only be validly accomplished by maintaining the humility and attitude necessary to accept Christ's corrections along the way. **PHIL 3:13-15.**

- A. "A man's just got to know his limitations."
(Dirty Harry Callahan; from movie: 'Magnum Force')
- B. Glorify God, for in Him are we made perfect!
2SA 22:31-33; PSA 18:32; 138:8; JOH 17:23; COL 2:10; HEB 10:14.

X. **Hebrews 13:20-21.** "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."