

Call to Obedience #325
PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
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In Search of Ministerial Standards.

The Minister and His Mission: The Call to Perfection (Part 4)

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When we begin any endeavor, perfection is the standard. Though few achieve it, the person who doesn't try to attain perfection is branded as defective in character, ambition and industry. What carpenter shop, machine shop, or medical laboratory would want to hire a man who scoffs at perfection? Any community of people that does not seek perfection will lose its competitive edge and eventually begin to disintegrate. The concept of perfection comes out of the very nature of God. He implanted it in creation, and into the nature of the first man created in His own image. But when Adam sinned, his soul was changed and that flaw was passed on to all mankind. So, from Adam on, mankind has only sought perfection in the natural realm and has abandoned its search for and belief in moral perfection. Men think moral perfection is both unnecessary and a human impossibility.

Again, God is perfect in character, in spirit, and in all of His faculties, actions, reactions, thoughts, and intentions. God's first verbal contact with man set the standard of perfection. In Genesis 2:16 and 17, God tells man, you can eat of every tree but one. If you eat the fruit from that one forbidden tree, you will die. God's relationship with man begins with a zero tolerance for sin (not with a soft, all-inclusive love as modern theologians suggest). Friend, do you have a zero tolerance for sin? Have a look at your life to see whether you are in tune with God.

Now when we begin to talk about perfection here, we mean total obedience on our part. Jesus' part is His blood doing its cleansing work (1 John 1:7). That is how the God/man saga began, and you can draw a line through the Bible from Genesis to the end of the Revelation and find this: God demanding perfect obedience of man. It cannot be over-emphasized that God is not satisfied with our just being "saved," **He wants every one of us to go on to perfection** (Heb. 6:1). Obedience is the basis by which man is and will be judged, and is or will be blessed or cursed (Deu. 30:15-20.) So perfection is not only the standard by which humans measure things, but it is also the standard by which God measures all things. Perfection is also the ultimate standard by which our eternal destiny will be determined. Hence we have these words at the end of the Bible, "*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life*" (Rev. 22:14). Eating of the tree of life is coupled with obedience – with keeping His commandments.

The Greek text here in Revelation 22:14 also allows this translation: *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life”* (NIV). Don't worry about a contradiction here. God certainly would not contradict what He said in all the previous chapters of the Bible; namely that obedience is an essential part of our salvation. So the NIV translation also calls for obedience, for human involvement. In this context, Jesus supplies His precious blood as the detergent, but the saints have to do their own laundry. This teaching is reinforced by Revelation 7:14, *“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* Understand that when we start out as babes in Christ, Jesus does the washing. He does our laundry. Revelation 1:5 says He washed us from our sins. Babes cannot wash themselves; neither can they do their own laundry. But as we come out of the baby stage, it is our responsibility to keep ourselves pure. This is also mentioned by Peter saying, *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth”* (1 Pet. 1:22). Please also see 1 Tim. 5:22 and 1 John 3:3. Are you getting this? The idea that "I have nothing to do to get to heaven" is of the devil. Yet, to God be all the glory, for ultimately it is His working *“in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”* (Phi. 2:13).

The fact that perfect obedience is attainable is obvious. **God never asks anyone to do anything unless He provides the grace (power) for it to be done.** So Adam and Eve were capable of perfect obedience. After the Fall, even outside the garden, man had the grace to be perfect in his generation. Noah was just and perfect in obedience and he *“walked with God”* (Gen. 6:9). The Bible ascribes perfection to Job (Job 1:1). God reiterated that demand for perfect obedience to Abraham in Genesis 17:1: *“I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.”* God did not start the Jewish nation or the history of man without the foundation of perfection, ordering human hearts to be perfect.

God opened His heart to Moses in that deep agonizing cry of His soul, *“O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever”* (Deu. 5:29)! Jesus, the Son of God, said, *“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”* (Mat. 5:48). The apostle Paul is in line with the Old Testament and Jesus when he says, the ultimate mission of every minister; whether apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher is to perfect *“the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (Eph. 4:12). In Colossians 1:28, Paul challenges all clergy *“that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”* Then with a master stroke on the subject, Paul says that **the whole Bible is a call to perfection.** He says, *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God...that the man of God may be perfect...”* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Total obedience to Christ brings the Christian to everything: witnessing, sanctification, the Spirit-filled life, the Kingdom of God, unbroken fellowship with his Lord and heaven. **Again the primary mission of the minister is to bring people to perfection.** Yet, preacher, in all this don't forget to preach mercy! Do not drive people to despair. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...”* (1 John 1:9).

This begs the question: which people in our churches will want to be perfected? The carnal will not, the spiritual will. You can see that the minister who is true to his divine mission will face the same conflict as Jesus did on earth. Jesus was rejected by most people, because He "asked too much." He said that unless you forsake all, you cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33). Here again is zero tolerance. All faithful ministers will face this conflict unless they lower their standards and ask less than God asks. To avoid losing their churches and pulpits, most ministers will choose to avoid conflict. They, unlike Paul, refuse to give the call to perfection. They refuse to deal with carnality, immorality and worldliness in church members. Sin then abounds in their churches and grace is abused.

The way to life is narrow! Beware of false prophets in sheep's clothing (Mat. 7:14-15). Jesus ties love to obedience: *"If you love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). To have His presence will require obedience (John 14:23). The most rapid way to fill a church building is to lower standards and become more "contemporary." When Paul said, *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world"* (Rom. 12:2 NIV), he warned against exactly that. *"Be not conformed to this world"* means you should not line up with the contemporary values, music, styles, or the methods of this world. Don't let the spirit of this world get into your hearts and churches. Paul said, "Be transformed:" get your values and standards from heaven. Remember Jesus' words: *"My Kingdom is not of this world"* (John 18:36). When people come into a church they should immediately sense that they are in a different world; that it is a heavenly world of holiness, love, and joy abounding.

There is an Esau spirit in many of our churches. Esau sold his birthright for a pot of lentils, for the lust of the flesh. We need the Jacob spirit that wants God at any cost, even at the cost of getting crippled. Do not be fooled! Jesus said, *"Be ye therefore perfect..."* Paul said that the ministry was for the perfecting of the saints. God wants perfection. We need to teach people to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength. When we do this, we will not willfully sin any more. Anything less than this fervent love will lead to lukewarmness, and cause believers to fall short of reaching the heavenly shore (Rev 2:5). The disobedient will be cast into the lake of fire. All those who lose their first love, who are lukewarm, will be spat out of Jesus' mouth (Rev. 3:16). Preacher, are you teaching this? Every Christian should know Revelation 3:16 as well as John 3:16. When a person is born-again, he should come face to face with Revelation 3:16 immediately. If not, he will likely become careless. Finally, note this, perfection in obedience is only the platform on which perfection in Christ becomes possible.

So preacher, be faithful in your mission. Don't compromise. And you will be able to say someday, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day..."* (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

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