

God is Not a Perfectionistic Parent

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 January 2013

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Colossians chapter 1. I'm going to begin reading it verse 3 and read through verse 14. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing.

Just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it. And understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant.

Who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf. And who also told us of your love in the spirit. For this reason since the day we heard about you.

We have not stopped praying for you. And asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will.

Through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord.

And may please him in every way. Bearing fruit in every good work. Growing in the knowledge of God. Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might.

[1:40] So that you may have great endurance and patience. And joyfully giving thanks to the Father. Who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness. And brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves. In whom we have redemption. The forgiveness of sins.

Is God a perfectionistic parent? Last year there was an article in the Wall Street Journal that created quite a splash.

It was entitled Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior. And Amy Chow, the author of this article, is what is called a tiger mom.

Have you heard of these? They're these very perfectionistic parents who relentlessly and aggressively pursue the excellence of their children.

[2:42] And to give you a feel of what she is talking about and what she's espousing. Let me read a few lines from this article. For example, if a child comes home with an A- on a test, a Western parent will most likely praise the child.

The Chinese mother will gasp in horror and ask what went wrong. If a Chinese child gets a B, which would never happen, there would be first a screaming, hair-tearing explosion.

Chinese parents demand perfect grades because they believe that their children can get them. If their child doesn't get them, the Chinese parent assumes it's because the child did not work hard enough.

That's why the solution to substandard performance is always to excoriate, punish, and shame the child. And maybe you're wondering, how can parents like this say that they love their children?

And their reply, of course I love you. If I didn't love you, I wouldn't be so terribly disappointed in how you turned out. So is God a perfectionistic parent?

[4:02] Is he like one of these parents? And I'm afraid that that's how many Christians view God. He's always disappointed with them. He's never happy with their performance.

And so dear brother, dear sister, is that how you see God? When he looks at your parenting, when he looks at your prayer life, when he looks at your efforts at obedience, all he sees are your failures. What you haven't done. What you didn't do right. And of course he loves you. If he didn't love you, he wouldn't be so disappointed in you. And brothers and sisters, if that is you, and I know that it can be all of us from time to time, but some Christians struggle with that more.

If that's you, tonight I want you to breathe in a big fresh breath of what the Bible teaches, of God's grace and his love. It's so hard to serve him when you feel this way.

It's so hard to even enjoy being a Christian when you're in the grips of this terrible misconception. And so tonight I want to ask the question, is God a perfectionistic parent?

[5 : 27] What does the Bible teach? But before I ask that question, I want to ask another question. And it's a question for you. It's a question for you to evaluate yourself and to look into your life.

And it's, is your God, is your God a perfectionistic parent? The God you live with, the God that you are trying to serve.

Are you in the grips of this terrible misconception? Maybe you know you already struggle with this. Maybe you're not sure. Maybe you don't know exactly what the problem might be.

But I created a test with five questions. Five questions to see if you believe your God is a perfectionistic parent.

And so it has five questions. And the first is this. Do you think God is good? Do you think God is good? Do you enjoy God?

[6 : 27] Is what I mean? I'm talking more than just what you would profess and what you would say. I'm talking about what you feel. Is your God good?

Christians with a perfectionistic father of a God have no problem thinking about God as being high and holy, lofty, exalted.

They have no problem thinking about him as perfect. But that perfection doesn't include his grace and his mercy, his goodness, his kindness, his patience, his generosity.

It seems to be only made exclusively of his holy justice. And God is holy and he is just.

But they don't see or they don't feel or they don't think about any of those other aspects of who God is. And the result is, is they don't feel any love for God.

[7 : 28] John Owen said it like this. They fix their thoughts only on his terrible majesty, severity and greatness.

And so their spirits are not endeared. When your God is high and holy, but you don't feel any of his grace and his mercy and his love, he's not someone you enjoy.

He's not someone that you really love. And so I ask, do you genuinely love him? Do you find joy in him? Do you like him? Is he beautiful and good?

Someone that is wonderful? Or is he just someone that you manage, try to manage, try to soothe so he doesn't get angry with you?

The second question, are you self-absorbed? This is a very different question, but it fits in. Are you self-absorbed? I read an interesting article while I was preparing the sermon, and it was talking about what happens to children of perfectionistic parents.

[8 : 36] When your parent is a perfectionist, what happens to you as a child? And it said this, perfectionism then is an endless report card. It keeps people completely self-absorbed, engaged in perpetual self-evaluation, reaping relentless frustration, doomed to anxiety and depression.

So, is that what your relationship with God is like? Where you're always thinking about your performance, always thinking about what you did or what you didn't do, what you failed to do, completely self-absorbed, always grading, always self-absorbed, always evaluating.

If so, then perhaps you think God is a perfectionistic father that can't ever be pleased. Third question.

Are you afraid to try new things? Are you afraid to try new things? And what I mean, in your Christian life, are you afraid to try new things? Are you afraid to branch out and try new forms of obedience and service and love?

So, maybe you don't have family worship because you don't think you'd be very good at it. Or, you don't ever go to anyone new in the congregation and talk with them about spiritual things because you're afraid that you'll say the wrong thing and you won't do a good job of it.

[10 : 05] What's behind so much of that fear so much of the time? Well, isn't it that we are afraid that we're going to mess up? That we're not going to be able to say or do the right thing.

And so, we don't want to try something new because it just might be one more reason for God to be angry with us. And so, it's better to stay in the safe little circle that I know So, are you afraid to try new things?

Fourth question. Are you a hypocrite? And what I mean by that is do you pretend to be better than what you are? Do you find it extraordinarily difficult to admit to others that you've made mistakes? That you make mistakes? That you struggle with things? Do you have a hard time admitting your failures? It's strange. The very things that we are so self-aware of of how often we've messed up and how sinful our lives are is the very thing that we can't admit to others.

And so, what do we do? We hide them. We cover them up. We pretend like they're not there even though we know they are. We act perfect even though we know that we aren't perfect.

[11:31] And then we avoid those situations where we can make mistakes like we asked in the last question because that would ruin that self-protective, self-righteous facade that I've created that I use to protect myself from failure.

That's the fourth question. Are you a hypocrite? Do you pretend to be better than what you are?

Fifth question. Are you harsh and demanding yourself?

Are you harsh and demanding yourself? One of the clearest signs that you think God is a perfectionistic, unpleasable Father, that He demands absolute perfection before He'll be pleased with you, is that you yourself are harsh and demanding.

You see, we do become like what we worship. Whether it's good or bad, but we do become like what we worship. And when we worship a God that is harsh and demanding and that requires perfection before He's going to be pleased with us, in turn, what we do is we expect that out of our friends, out of our spouses, out of our family, out of our children, out of the world around us.

Nothing less than being absolutely right or really, really, really, really close to being right will please us. And so we become harsh and we become demanding because that's what our God is like.

[13:07] So is your God, the God you're serving, a perfectionistic parent? I think those are x-ray questions for us to see what we think about God.

So how did the test go? If that's you, if I'm putting my finger on something, if I'm scratching where you're itching, then let me tell you that I know what that feels like.

I know how hard it is. I know that cycle of disappointment and trying to do heart better the next day and the constant sense of, but I could have done so much more.

That sense of nothing's ever finished and that's what nags on you and just the drudgery and the disappointment of life. Well, if that's you, then I think what you need is a good dose of scripture.

And not just scripture, but of spirit pressed home truth. I think we need more than just the words on the page and even me proclaiming them.

[14:22] We need the spirit of God to come and press the truth of God's word on our hearts to make it so that the truth becomes louder in our ears than our own misconceptions.

So, is God a perfectionistic parent? Does he require absolute perfection of his children before he is pleased with them? Well, what does the Bible teach?

And as we answer this question, we need to be very careful that we don't confuse the righteousness that God requires for justification and the righteousness that he requires to please him as a father.

So, what is the righteousness that God requires if we are going to be just in his sight? If we're going to go to heaven? If we are going to be declared righteous in his sight?

Well, it's perfection. A plus. A hundred percent. Not ninety-nine. Not ninety-nine point five. Nothing less than perfection.

[15:27] Anything less than that is a failure. It's a F. It's either A plus or absolute failure as far as justification goes.

And we have no problem saying that. And we have no problem admitting and confessing and holding and believing and loving that because Jesus Christ obeyed a hundred percent of the time, didn't he?

A hundred percent of the time. He didn't get a ninety-eight or a ninety-nine or a ninety-nine point five. It was perfection. And the standard of God's righteousness for justification is perfection.

And that's what we have in Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord. We do. And that's why every sinner here needs Jesus. That's why every sinner here needs to believe in Jesus.

Because without his righteousness, we will not be justified. We cannot please God. We will not go to heaven. And we have to believe because it comes through faith, not through works, because we can't live up to that standard.

[16:38] That standard is impossible for us to live up to. Only Jesus did. And now that righteousness is offered to one and all for whoever to come and to accept him, to accept that righteousness.

And so the only way that we will be declared righteous in God's sight, in the matter of justification, is by believing in Jesus Christ.

It's through that perfect righteousness of Jesus' life that he lived, and then that death that he died in obedience to God.

Now, but Christian, so that we've established that, but Christian, do you think that that is what we must do now to please our Father?

Is that what the Bible teaches? That now in order to make God our Father pleased with us, we have to be perfect. Well, what does the Bible teach?

[17 : 44] We're going to look at a number of passages, and I want you to see that what I'm saying is not my words, this is what God says. So, the first passage is Proverbs chapter 15 verse 8.

Can you please turn there? Proverbs 15 8. We're going to be doing some churning tonight.

Proverbs 15 8. 15 The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

So, let me ask you, put on your thinking caps and let me ask you a question. Is this upright person that God is pleased with in Proverbs 15 8, is he a perfect person?

Did he have a moment of perfection when he prayed? Well, what do you think? I don't think so. He or she is a sincere person.

The wicked in the first part of the verse that are making these sacrifices, they're doing religious things, they aren't sincere. They're doing them for all the wrong reasons.

[19 : 12] They don't love God and he isn't pleased with them. But here is a sincere person, a righteous man, a righteous woman, who, yes, he or she has weakness, sin, selfishness, pride, maybe, even as they pray.

But despite their weakness and their sin, they want to please the Lord, they love the Lord, and in worship, that's the context of this verse, in worship, they pray.

And does it say that the Lord looks down and he sees their faults and he frowns at them? and he's disappointed in them? No, it says it delights him.

It brings him pleasure. So, brothers and sisters, you can bring pleasure to God when you pray. You can bring him joy when you talk to him.

Why would that bring him joy? joy? Well, very same reason that when your children talk to you, it brings you joy. You love them, and you love to talk with them, and you love to hear them, and could it just be that the God who is so much better than we are can find a light in his children, just like we do, and he loves you, and he loves talking to his children even when they're confused, and they're stuttering, and they're half-hearted.

[20 : 49] God delights in the prayers of his children. Let's look into the New Testament, turn to Romans chapter 8. Romans chapter 8, we're going to read 7 through 9, and then this passage is going to seem sort of like we're talking about, well, we're talking about people who don't please God, but there's an implication here, and it's a logical implication about who does please God.

Romans chapter 8, and verse 7, the sinful mind is hostile to God, it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Those controlled by the sinful nature, by the flesh, cannot please God. Verse 9, you, however, that's a contrast, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the spirit, if the spirit of God lives in you.

Sinful man, fleshly man, man dominated by the old man, dominated by who they are in Adam, so they're condemned, all they have is fleshly power, fleshly principles, sin reigns in them, fleshly man cannot please God.

It is impossible for you as an unconverted sinner to please God. That's what this verse is saying. Can you please God in the least?

[22 : 27] No. You're hostile to God. You will not, and you cannot submit to God's law, and so you desperately need Jesus.

you desperately need a new power at work in your heart. You need the very Spirit of God to come into your life. But Christians, praise the Lord, the Spirit of God has come into your life.

And so you don't fit into those first verses 7 and 8 anymore. You fit into verse 9. You, however, are controlled not by the flesh, but by the Spirit.

And so if those who are controlled by the flesh can't please God, those who are controlled by the Spirit, the implication is they can. You can please God.

He isn't a perfectionistic Father. Remember what Paul has just been talking about in Romans 7. How he struggles with sin, and we all know that our two feet are planted right there in Romans 7

where we don't do the things that we want to do, and we're sinful.

[23 : 37] And he's just coming right out of that chapter. And here he's saying, but you are controlled by the Spirit, and you can please God. So he's not talking about perfection in order to please God.

It's those who live by the Spirit. That's the implication of these verses. But our next passage makes it plain and clear. That's a logical argument.

The next passage is just a plain assertion. Turn to Romans 14. Romans 14. And verses 16 through 18.

We'll just read verse 17 here. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. So here we move past just logic and it's just assertion.

[24 : 47] Those who serve Christ in the Holy Spirit, righteously, joyfully, they please God. They please God.

God. Now is that perfection? No. 1 John 1 8. If we claim to be without sin, what are we?

We deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Christians of all people know and can confess and admit that they are sinners. And so this verse is not talking about perfection.

Of course we aren't perfect and Paul isn't saying that. The righteousness here in Romans 14 that pleases God is not perfection, but it is nevertheless a righteous life.

It's a life that's under the power of the Holy Spirit. It's peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. That kind of life pleases him. So God is not impossible to please.

[25 : 46] And even more than that, he's poured out his spirit on us so that we can please him. So that we can please him. Next turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

1 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 32 and 33. Paul's talking about singleness and marriage in this passage and he's arguing and he's giving us a very strong argument why you should stay single if you are single.

This is what he's arguing for and he's talking to single people. And this is what he says in verses 32. I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs, how he can please the Lord.

But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world, how he can please his wife. Now, do you see how it would turn this whole argument on its head and completely inside out and backwards if normal, ordinary Christians, struggling Christians, but they're growing, they earnestly want to please God with all their failures and weaknesses if they couldn't please God.

It would make this argument nonsense because what would the point of staying single be if really it gives you no advantage to pleasing the Lord?

[27 : 31] Because God can't be pleased anyways, no matter how, unless you're perfect, unless you're absolutely good all the time. Well, a perfectionistic father would make total nonsense out of what Paul is saying here.

Or, think about this passage in a different way, and I found this to be helpful. There's two people being pleased in this passage. One is the Lord, and the second is a wife, right?

Now, you wives, you wives, can you be pleased? Can your husband please you? You say, yes, of course.

Do they need to be absolutely perfect before they please you? You say, no, of course not. And I asked my wife this, I said, honey, can I please you? And she said, yeah. And I said, well, even though I mess up a lot and I don't do the right things?

And she's like, yes, of course. And I'm like, why? And she said, because I love you. So, her love for me allows me to please her despite, you know, my failures.

[28 : 40] And my selfishness. And my sin. And brothers and sisters, God loves us.

And his love for us allows us to please him despite our imperfections. I'm not saying he excuses them or covers them or anything like that.

I'm not saying that he doesn't want us to be perfect. perfect. I'm not saying he's not working for that. But I am saying that in his love now, even in our imperfections, we can please him.

I think the same logic that Jesus used when he was talking about fathers and giving and giving good gifts. He said, you fathers, you know how to give good gifts to your children. And if you're evil and you know how to do that, how much more your father in heaven who's perfect?

Now, wives, if your love for your husband allows them to please you despite their imperfections, how much more will God's perfect love allow us to please him despite our imperfections?
[29:46] See, God's love doesn't make him perfectionistic and exacting and harsh and demanding, but it makes him ready to be pleased, eager to be pleased, willing to overlook things, patient and kind.

And so he judges us not by the absolute righteous standard of the law now that we've been justified, but now he's evaluating us by the love of his own heart.
And he measures our activities by that love. And we get an example of that in Philippians chapter 4. Look at Philippians chapter 4 verse 18.

Philippians 4:18. And it says this, I've received full payment and even more.

I'm amply supplied. And now that I've received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, they are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

[31:01] So the Philippian church had blessed Paul. They had generously given to him. And now I want to ask, do you think they were absolutely perfect in that? there wasn't a hint of pride.

There wasn't a hint of reluctance. There wasn't a hint of self-righteousness in it. I really doubt that they were 100% from top to the bottom absolutely sinless in this matter of giving.

And yet, their offering was pleasing to the Lord. it was a fragrant offering. See, God didn't judge them based on the righteous standard of the law, which is you mess up once and you break it completely and it's worthless.

He didn't evaluate them by the standard of justification because Jesus had met that standard for them. They had been justified. Now God judges the Philippians by the love of his heart.

And in love he was pleased with them. And in love he overlooked their sins for Jesus sake and accepted their offering for Jesus sake because he loved them.

[32:17] They did a good thing and he was genuinely delighted with what they had done. So it's like when our children draw us a picture and it's definitely no Rembrandt.

You know, they're stick figures and the heads are way too big and maybe they're at that age when the arms and legs are still coming out of the head. You know, it takes a while for the arms to get attached to a body.

But do we say this is all wrong? Don't you know anything about anatomy? Don't you know anything about color? What's wrong with you? No, you say thank you. Of course it's not perfect.

But in love they tried to please us and because their motives were right and good, we don't nitpick, we don't complain, we don't ridicule, we're not disappointed. Do we want them to be better drawers someday?

Yeah, we'd really hope they don't stay that way. But now we take it for what it is and we rejoice in it. Or think of it a different way. Your children get together.

[33:23] I'm looking forward to this day when my children get together and do what I'm about to describe. they get together and they decide to really clean up the garage. You know?

I really don't want them doing that right now because the garage would be a fiasco. They get together and they work really hard at it and they clean it up the best they can.

And then they're all excited and they say, come and see what we've done. And they drag you in there and they're all smiles and the garage is pretty much cleaned up. But then there's a few cans of paint out of place.

But otherwise it's pretty good. Do you look at those cans of paint? Do you start to fester on those cans of paint? You say, I can't believe they did that. I can't believe they left those cans of paint down.

No, you don't say that. You hardly pay attention to the cans of paint because in love, you look at the totality of what they've done and you see the failures.

[34:27] you say, you did a great job. Thank you. I'm proud of you. I love you. We're pleased with less than perfection because we love them.

And if that's the way that we act towards our children, how much more your Father in heaven? Now, we could look at a lot of other passages.

Let me just read a few. Colossians 1:10. And we pray this in order that you might live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way. That's the passage that we read. Paul wasn't praying for an impossibility.

He really was praying that every aspect of their life, they would please the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4.1. We instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are doing.

Do you think the Thessalonians were perfect? Well, Paul has things to tell them later. But, as they lived according to Paul's instruction, consistently, sincerely, they wanted to obey, they took his word and they put it into practice, it pleased God.

[35 : 44] Colossians 3.20. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Children, obeying your parents, cleaning up your bedroom, pleases the Lord.

So, brothers and sisters, is your God a perfectionistic parent? He's not. He's not a tiger dad. He doesn't shame us and abuse us with our failures.

He isn't always disappointed in us. He isn't impossible to please, because in love, he's ready to accept our services and in love, he's ready to help us to do those things.

In love, he's put out things for us to do. And when we walk in those good works that he's planned for us, it pleases him and he takes delight in what we do. He's not impossible to please.

love, now as we end, I want to ask one final question and that is, so what? What should you do? What should you do? I hope this has been just some clearing of the air for some of you, to just remember who your God is, what kind of father he is.

[36 : 59] And I know I haven't said everything about what could be said and things like that, but so what? Now let's take it to that level. First, take heart.

Take heart. I imagine some of you have been laboring under this, it's a terrible misconception and it's terrible because of what it does to us. It's so hard, isn't it, to want to keep living the Christian life if you can't please God.

And so it is terrible what it does to us. And so if that's you, take heart. That isn't your God. Again and again we've seen, I think I gave eight passages of how God can be pleased.

And so you need to take a deep breath in that. Your God is not this tiger dad that's always nitpicking and wanting to get you to just do the exact right thing or he's really upset with you.

That's not the God of Scripture. That's not the God that has saved you. That is not the God who loves you. Does the Bible teach God that is demanding and harsh and condemning?

[38 : 10] No, he's full of love for his children. Jesus Christ has brought us into his family and because of that we have his fatherly love.

Now secondly, this should excite you to want to please God more. It should excite you to want to please him more.

When you don't think God can ever be pleased, you know what happens, you decide that it's not worth doing and you stop trying to please him anyway because it won't make any difference.

He'll never be happy anyway so what's the point? But if God can be pleased, he's ready to be pleased, his love has positioned him in our relationships so that he is ready to be delighted in us because we are his children, then living to please him isn't a fruitless exercise.

It's not just something that you waste your time on doing the impossible. It's possible to make him smile and it's possible to please him more than you are now.

[39 : 20] Paul prayed so that the Colossians would please the Lord in every way. Every way. So every part of your life is an opportunity to please the Lord, to make him smile, to delight him, every way.

So you can please God in your family life. You can please God in your marriage. You can please God in your personal life. You don't need to please him to justify yourself because you are justified if you're a Christian, if you've become united to Christ, if you put your faith in him, you are justified. And so now you can wake up and say, thank you, God. Thank you. Thank you that everything that I needed to have done has been done for me.

That my sins have been forgiven. That the punishment that I deserved has already been paid.

Thank you. Now how can I serve you today?

How can I please you today? So what area of your life can you work on? What area of your life can you please God more?

[40 : 45] Think about it and then work at it because your labor in the Lord is not in vain. You're going to reap his smiling face.

you're going to reap his delight and his joy in you. And that's a wonderful thing. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do pray that you would please by the Spirit's power press these things upon our hearts and make them loud and clear for us.

forgive us for our harsh and small and evil thoughts of you. So much of the time we have thought that you are a God like we are.

Pray that you would please teach us the greatness of your love, teach us the greatness of your goodness, that we could see your justice and your holiness and all that you are in all of your purity as something beautiful and good.

Lord, we are so glad that you are a righteous God, that you are a just God. That is a part of your beauty and we worship you for it. We thank you that now we have nothing to fear from that justice because Jesus the just has lived and died for us and we have his righteousness and so now we can stand before you and we can bear the scrutiny of your holiness because of what Jesus has done for us and thank you that you have changed our relationship we were once outsiders we were slaves we had no part in the family and you brought us in and you made us your children and so I pray that that grace would move us to want to please you to want to obey you to be careful as we read your word to obey your law it's a beautiful thing that you've given to us you've given us this word as a light to our path as a menu for us to choose all the ways that you are pleased

[43:03] I pray that you would please then help us to embrace these things saying no to our self and saying yes to you that we would truly live to please you because you are such a good God such a wonderful and kind God so gracious so merciful!

so we just ask that you would enlighten the eyes of our hearts that we might know you better know you as you are take away the clouds of our misconception and the fog of our evil thoughts and let us see you as you are and become like you pray this in Jesus name Amen Thank you.