

## **Sinless Perfection: Why I don't believe or teach it** (Scriptures NKJV, some emphasis added)

It is a problem when we quote Jesus' words today "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48), or "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11), and folks respond with "*you're teaching sinless perfection*"! Quoting Peter's exhortation to be holy in all conduct (1 Peter 1:15-16), as he echoes God's words to Abraham is often met with faithless doubt: "*impossible! You're a sinless perfectionist!*" Share John's words of practicing righteousness instead of sin in 1 John 2:29-3:10, or Paul's "awake to righteousness and do not sin" (1 Cor 15:34), and you'll hear: "*You think you're perfect? We can't be sinless, Sinless perfectionism can't save you!*"

Here are some definitions I've read or heard in conversation of the term "sinless perfection":

- Said persons believe **they've never sinned**, being perfect before God their **entire lives**<sup>i</sup>
- Said persons believe in **separate body or flesh from soul** claiming: "that wasn't me who sinned, **it was my flesh/body**"
- Said persons believe it was "**the devil inside them**" who sinned, **not themselves**
- Said persons believe **sin is impossible for them** since conversion, or since being born of God
- Said persons believe they are not sinning, yet have **deceived themselves by a seared conscience**
- Said persons believe because they are born again, **God has seen the future, and they will never sin again, guaranteed**
- Said persons believe God does not account any sin to them, making them perfect because they **keep a certain specific set of doctrinal denominational written or spoken rules**
- Said persons believe God does not account any sin to them, making them perfect because they are a **certain race, ethnicity, or background**
- Said persons believe God does not account any sin to them, making them perfect because they **believe the right set of doctrines**
- Said persons believe God does not account any sin to them, making them perfect, because **God cannot or does not see them while sinning, but sees only Jesus' perfectly sinless life when looking at them**

Can you see how wrong and confusing all this is? It's why I don't believe, teach, or preach "sinless perfection". Most people hold one or two of these, and the last two are perhaps the most common in mainstream professing Christianity today. I had a conversation with a non-denominational professing Christian with Calvinistic views, who accused me of teaching "sinless perfection", but by the end of discussions, proclaimed himself "sinless" based upon last bullet above.

It can also be dangerous to use the term in writing or conversation, yet not define it. I've encountered some who claim "*God does not expect sinless perfection*" but say He wants us to hate sin like God does. That's it? I just have to hate sin? Since he didn't define the term, hearers are led to come up with their own definition, and many often come up with this one: "*I can't obey Jesus, so God expects me to be sinful and imperfect the rest of my life while I hate the sin I keep committing*". Do we urge others, yet not change our own behavior (Matt 7:5)?

A short devotional quoted Psalm 119:11 "Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you" following it up with "*the bible doesn't teach sinless perfection*", again, not bothering to define it. Many readers conclude "*What a relief! I thought this verse was telling me to not sin.*"

"*But Matt, you have to define it then.*" No I don't, because it's not my term. I really don't believe any of the bullets above to be true, so if you really want a definition of the term from me, it's one or all of those above, and I reject it.<sup>ii</sup> If you claim to be a Christian, and believe and preach the above definitions, you're in serious danger, and endangering others.

Yet if you claim no human being is ever capable of faithfully keeping Gods commands (in the continuous tense), why did He command Abram to be blameless (Gen 17:1)?<sup>iii</sup> Wasn't God's human Son, Jesus the Messiah, obedient to God? Yes. Do you think he had some free pass as Messiah, or some Greek philosophical

dual-nature which made it easy or guaranteed for him? Nope. You've already sinned and blown it in the past? Me too. If we walk in the light, we are cleansed from past/old sins previously committed (1 Jn 1:7, Rom 3:25, 2 Pet 1:9), so let's be diligent to take heed, and walk **worthy**.

If you believe you cannot walk worthy of God who calls you into His own Kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12), what excuse are you using? Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness, keeping such commandments without spot, blameless (see note) until Messiah's appearing (1 Tim 6:11-14). Don't say "*Oh, well I'll wait to be blameless after his appearing.*" If you are looking for the new heavens and new earth, in which righteousness dwells, looking forward to these things in the future Kingdom of God, be diligent to be found by him in peace, without spot and blameless (2 Pet 3:13-14)! Are you waiting for his return or coming, and life in the age to come to be consistently obedient?

Sin is possible for any human being, even Christians until we die, and many professing Christians have sinned since conversion. The moment a Christian chooses to be led by the flesh over the Spirit (Rom 8:13-14), committing sin instead of obedience to Messiah, such a person is then presently a child "of the devil" and "not of God" (1 John 3:8, 10), a slave to the sin they've obeyed (John 8:34, Rom 6:16), thus **forfeiting** their current salvation before God (trading birthright to satisfy flesh with a bowl of stew – Gen 25:32, Heb 12:16-17), and future place in the Kingdom of God, **unless** they confess, repent, and forsake the sin (Prov 28:13, 1 John 1:9, 2:1). It doesn't mean you were never a Christian, nor does it mean you have no hope of repentance and reconciliation. You need to be turned back (see James 5:19-20).

If this is you, get up! Even if you sinned last week or even yesterday, repent, confess, forsake it, and sin no more! Don't wallow in it with the excuses above. Don't excuse your lack of persistent obedience or unfaithfulness with some stupid dismissive "sinless perfection" cliché either. Jesus gave the Lord's Prayer for disciples, which includes prayers of forgiveness for those of us who have sinned. If you were unfaithful last week, be faithful this week and next week. Keep going! Press into the Kingdom, fighting violent spiritual battles by force (Matt 11:12)! You can sow to the flesh and reap destruction, or sow to the spirit and reap life in the age to come (Gal 6:8). Whether you think you **cannot stop** your sin with God and Messiah's help, or you think you **can stop** your sin with their help, you are correct (see Proverbs 23:7).

There is no magic fairy dust sprinkled upon us to guarantee obedience in this life, or life in the age to come. It is through **patient continuance in doing good**, seeking glory, honor, and immortality, from which we expect life in the age to come (Rom 2:7). He will not deny himself (his very own spoken words and promises of the gospel of the Kingdom), by granting us life in the age to come if we are faithless (2 Tim 2:11-13). If we expect to **reign** with him, we must **endure**, if we expect to **live** with him, we must have **died** with him, and if we do not wish him to deny us, then let us not deny him, neither in our hearts, words, nor actions.

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<sup>i</sup> This one is of course true for Jesus, and theoretically possible for others, but unlikely, and it is the rarest definition – I've encountered very few who define the term in this way

<sup>ii</sup> Again, with the possible exception of the first bullet in some extremely rare cases.

<sup>iii</sup> Blameless in Hebrew (*tamiym*), or Greek (*amemptos*, *amometos*, or *anipleptos*) means without blemish, spot, blame, or rebuke; faultless, irreproachable, and inculpable. Context implies any past sins committed by a person are confessed, forsaken, repented of, such a person is forgiven by God, believes in and follows the gospel of the kingdom (Mk 1:15, Acts 2:38), currently and consistently keeping self from iniquity (Ps 18:23) dead to and free from sin (Rom 6:11, 18), walking in the light (1Jn1:7), diligent in keeping God and Christ's commands (2 Pet 3:13-14, 1Jn2:3), abiding in their love (Jn 15:10).