

# PERFECTIONISM: TRYING TO BE GOD

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Lucifer tried it once. *Once*. Many reading this right now try it every day. Subconsciously we wish to be perfect because it is painful to look at and admit our shortcomings and sins. Hidden beneath our every day thoughts that we '*should have done it better*' resides a **deadly lie**. This lie is at the heart of perfectionism.

"I must meet certain standards in order to be loved,  
in order to feel good about myself."

Doesn't look so harmful, does it? After all, *shouldn't* we try to meet certain standards? When we look closer we see that it says "We **must..**," not "*it would be good,*" or "*we should try to*" meet certain standards.

Secondly, this lie equates our **self worth** with our **performance!** This is a set up for failure and a terrible way to determine our self worth since no person can perform perfectly. Expecting perfection is like trying to be God; unobtainable and dangerous.

You may say "I can't be a perfectionist; my house/office is a mess!" Although perfectionist tend obsess about '*getting things just right*' and are compulsive in their attempts to do this, many have a messy house or office. They procrastinate cleaning and straightening until they think they have enough time to do it perfectly!

## **SELF WORTH = SELF WORSHIP?**

For too long Christians have equated self worth or believing that we have value with self worship; being selfish, self-centered and prideful. Incidentally, these are all products of perfectionism.

**Biblical Self worth**, not to confuse with self worship, is paramount to spiritual, emotional and interpersonal health. In the Bible God tells us countless times that we are of great value to Him, and this is *not* based on our performance but on unconditional love.

In our fallen world however, **self worth** is intimately tied to our **performance**. Our culture and often our families only show us love and make us feel important when we perform extremely well or perfectly. This programming *feels true* because our hearts are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV). While growing up the lie is repeatedly reinforced, piercing our hearts, where it becomes a stronghold.

### **The Performance Trap**

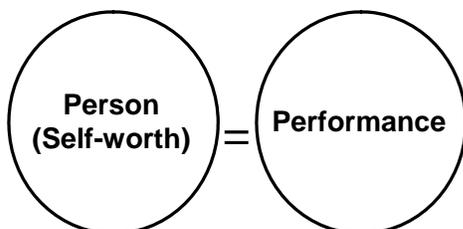


Figure 1

### **THE PERFORMANCE TRAP**

Unaware, we buy into this lie and become caught in the *performance trap* (see figure 1), which destroys our self worth. If you were to

place a mark in the performance circle for every sin you've committed since you were a child, the circle would be black! Having learned to equate this with our self worth, we learn to feel worthless, and become ineffective for Christ.

You may say, "Well, not me, I'm smarter than that. I know I'm valuable and lovable. That lie is not in *my* heart." After 15 years of experience as a Licensed Professional Counselor, I can assure you that we all have many lies imbedded in our belief system. Most of these lies or false beliefs are subconscious, below our surface of consciousness (see figure 2).

A long time friend, mentor and pastor Brother Sonny Simpson put it like this, "The

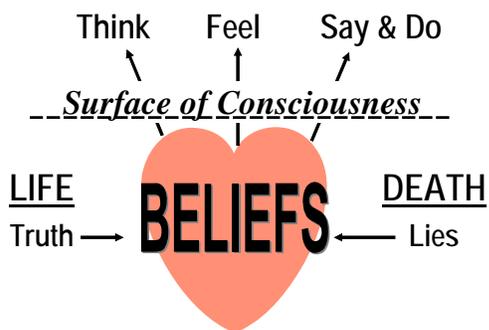


Figure 2

easiest person in the world to lie to is yourself." In addition, Proverbs 14:12 (NIV) tells us "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death," and "The purposes of the human heart are deep waters, but those who have insight draw them out." (Proverbs 20:5 TNIV).

Although many are subconscious, our beliefs powerfully drive our thoughts, feelings and what we say and do.

### **THE FEAR OF FAILURE**

The False Belief that our self worth equals our performance creates a constant **Fear of Failure** which fuels perfectionism, or leads to avoidance and giving up. I've found that this plays a major role in alcoholism, drug abuse, anxiety, anger outbursts, withdrawal and depression.

Most perfectionists tend to place their unrealistic standard on others and often become judgmental. Combined with the above problems it isn't difficult to see how this false belief leads to marital conflict, poor job performance and interpersonal problems as well.

### **DEATH**

Perfectionism leads to further destruction and death because the harder we try to be perfect, the more we must hide our own imperfections from ourselves. We do this by rationalizing, denying, minimizing and projecting blame onto others for our flaws and sins.

Thus we are no longer able to confess our sins to God, since we refuse to acknowledge that they exist. This leads to narcissism, hardens our hearts, blinds us spiritually and separates us from God (which is death). This is what happened to Satan.

### **GOD'S SOLUTION: JUSTIFICATION**

The healthy individual strives for excellence, not perfection. They seek to strike a balance between setting realistic standards and adjusting their level of effort with the importance of the task.

This is great, but it doesn't solve the deeper problem. We must take our thoughts captive (2 Corinthians 10:3-5), in order to recognize the lie and become more aware of how it affects our every day lives. Next, we must reject it and then replace it with **God's truth**, and then act on that truth. Another look at **figure 2** illustrates that believing God's truth brings life. We find this truth through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, by reading His word, and through the Holy Spirit. God's solution to the performance trap is found in a biblical doctrine called *Justification*, which declares us righteous through faith:

***“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2 NIV)***

***“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ dies for us.” (Romans 5:8 NIV)***

***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV)***

With practice we can learn to renew our minds with God's truth. When struggling with perfectionism we must constantly remind ourselves that because of Christ's redemption, we are deeply and unconditionally loved, completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God. His truth sets us free to become effective for Christ.



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