

The Curse of Perfectionism

What can possibly be the problem with being a perfectionist, and are we not all supposed to do our very best on every occasion anyway?

The Bible tells us that we should do everything well – it never says ‘perfectly’. We are all instructed to work willingly at whatever we do (Colossians 3:23), and to work with enthusiasm at whatever we do (Ephesians 6:7), whether we are employed in ministry or any other work. We are also told that the elders employed by a church who do their work well should be respected and paid well. Note that doing anything ‘perfectly’ is never mentioned in any of these passages.

We all really need to face up to the reality that none of us are perfect, and hence nothing we do will ever be ‘perfect’. Even Paul said that he too was not able to do or not to do what his conscience told him (Romans 7:19).

One of the typical problems with perfectionism is self-condemnation. When we fail to meet our own impossible standards, we can fall into self-condemnation and depression. Our loving Father who created each of us accepts us just as we are and delights in us whenever we do our best, and reassures us that we are free from all condemnation. (Romans 8:1)

Another problem is becoming critical and judgemental of others and whatever they do. Everyone is different, and will see and do things somewhat differently, and so we all need to focus on the bigger picture, of getting the job done, rather than on the fine details of how it got done.

Furthermore, wasting one’s time and efforts on trivialities or anything that serves no real purpose is a trap — instigated by a spirit of perfectionism. Life is too short to waste the time we have been given on trivialities. An illustration may be someone re-arranging the chairs for a meeting into perfectly straight rows, after someone else has already set them out.

Anyone who is for instance a founder of a new ministry or a new business will take on staff to assist them as it grows and expands. The danger here is the risk of such a leader expecting everything to be done in the identical way they would have personally done it. This is just plain unrealistic, and counterproductive as leading others to become frustrated.

Members of a team (whether employees or fellow elders), if frequently faced with the situation where whatever they do is altered or re-done for no practical or discernible reason or benefit, soon stop feeling useful or appreciated, and their commitment and involvement will suffer. Everyone needs to feel that they, and their efforts, are valuable and appreciated.

A perfectionist spirit will always find fault and lead one to be concerned with meeting one’s own unrealistic expectations, rather than looking to complement and to thank others for their contributions.

As any ministry or business, the founder / leader will need to keep this principle very much in mind, for the benefit and advancement of the organisation and its objectives.

Scriptures - NLT

Colossians 3:23 *Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*

Ephesians 6:7 *Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*

1 Timothy 5:17 *Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching.*

Romans 7:19 *I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.*

Romans 8:1 *So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.*