

Question: I grew up in a very legalistic, demanding home and church where perfection was the expectation. I have never been able to live up to that standard. As a result, I struggle with a sense of guilt and constant fear of failure. What would Jesus do?

Jesus Christ came into this world in order that we might be blessed by the good news of “the incomparable riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 2:7). It is the story of forgiveness and hope available to all who believe in Jesus. However, far too many of those who have claimed faith in Jesus continue to live in the hopelessness of impossible human rules and expectations. Our relationship with God does not depend on our ability to know, understand or perform all of the right things by our own power. Such demands will always program a person for guilt and failure in life.

Our relationship with the heavenly father depends on the greatness of his love and kindness. Paul, an apostle of Jesus, declared: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). He further explained that we were not made right with God by our own goodness because without him we remained “dead in our trespasses and sins.” He taught that this is a condition where one is alive to all the wrong things like “the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient . . . gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.” As a result of this way of life, we became the objects of “the wrath of God.” Although we were alive to sin, we were dead to God.

But then through faith in Jesus, God made us “alive with Christ” when he “raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” Once we were made alive with Christ, we were enabled to obey and serve the Lord and our fellow humans in ways we never imagined possible. We became “God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

The only perfection God now demands is the perfection of Jesus Christ. When we place our faith in Christ, our lives are hidden in him so that God no longer sees our imperfections but the perfection Christ gives us. Living by faith in Christ, we can find an inner peace that overcomes the fear of failure and gives us

confidence to take risks necessary to learn, to grow and to serve God and one another more fully than we ever imagined. We are children of the King. We know our father is not looking for an excuse to disinherit us. On the contrary, he is always ready to forgive us, heal us and help us overcome our failures and continue to grow into the likeness of Jesus. There is nothing we can do that will make God love us any more than he already does, and there is nothing we can do to make him love us any less. This is the good news of the “incomparable riches of God’s grace” (Read Ephesians 2:1-10).

When the good news of Jesus Christ is presented as a series of legalistic commands and rules, it can program one for defeat and loss of faith altogether. Victorious Christian lives are born out of a faith in Jesus and the saving grace of God. There is where one finds the freedom and power to trust and obey God and live victoriously until we see Jesus returning to receive his people forever.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: universitychurchmurray.com] 2015/11/20