

Q13: Can anyone keep the law of God perfectly?

Since the fall, no mere human has been able to keep the law of God perfectly, but consistently breaks it in thought, word, and deed.

Romans 3:10-12

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Commentary

As a traveller, in his way meeting with a violent storm of thunder and rain, immediately turns out of his way to some house or tree for his shelter; but yet this causeth him not to give over his journey; so soon as the storm is over he returns to his way and progress again. So it is with men in bondage to sin: the law meets with them in a storm of thunder and lightning from heaven, terrifies and hinders them in their way; this turns them for a season out of their course; they will run to prayer or amendment of life, for some shelter from the storm of wrath which is feared coming upon their consciences. But is their course stopped? are their principles altered? Not at all; so soon as the storm is over...they return to their former course, in the service of sin again.

Never let us reckon that our work in contending against sin, in crucifying, mortifying, and subduing of it, is at an end. The place of its habitation is unsearchable; and when we may think that we have thoroughly won the field, there is still some reserve remaining that we saw not, that we knew not of. Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory; and many have been spiritually wounded after great successes against this enemy.... There is no way for us to pursue sin in its unsearchable habitation but by being endless in our pursuit.

John Owen (1616–1683). An English Puritan theologian, Owen went to Oxford University at 12 years of age, gained his MA at 19, and became a pastor at 21. Years later he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University. He preached to parliament the day after the execution of King Charles I, fulfilling the task without directly mentioning that event. He wrote numerous and voluminous works including historical treatises on religion and several studies on the Holy Spirit.

From "The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers" in *The Works of John Owen*, edited by Thomas Russell, Volume XIII (London: Richard Baynes, 1826), 200–201, 26

Further Reading

“Original Sin” in *Concise Theology*, by J. I. Packer.

Prayer

O thou whose name is Emmanuel, our Lord and Sovereign: grace is poured into thy lips, and to thee belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against thee. We, who are no more worthy to be called thy servants, beseech thee to do away our transgressions. We confess that thou mightest cast us away for them, but do it not for thy name's sake. Our wisdom is gone, our power is gone, nor have we what we may call our own but sin, shame, and confusion of face for sin. Take pity upon us, O Lord, take pity upon us.

John Bunyan (1628–1688). Known as the tinker of Elstow, Bunyan underwent a dramatic conversion experience and became a leading Puritan preacher. As his popularity grew, Bunyan increasingly became a target for slander and libel and was eventually imprisoned. It was during his time in prison that he commenced his best known work *The Pilgrim's Progress*, first printed in 1678.

From *The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers*, by Dorothy M. Stewart (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 49.

Adapted by Timothy Keller and Sam Shammas from the Reformation catechisms

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Q14: Did God create us unable to keep his law?

No, but because of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, all of creation is fallen; we are all born in sin and guilt, corrupt in our nature and unable to keep God's law.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

Commentary

I believe, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, with all their numerous inhabitants. Last of all, and nobly conspicuous amongst the amazingly diversified productions of his almighty power and infinite skill...he created man, and constituted him lord of this...world. Male and female created he them, after his own image and in his own likeness: upright, innocent, and holy; capable of serving and glorifying their bountiful Creator.... I believe, that man did not long continue in these holy and happy circumstances; but, being left to the freedom of his own will, he transgressed the law which his Maker and Sovereign had given him; in consequence of which he fell into a state of guilt, depravity, and ruin. And as he was not only the natural but federal head and representative of his unborn posterity, he sinning, all his offspring sinned in him and fell with him, the guilt of his first sin being imputed, and a corrupt nature derived, to all who descend from him by natural generation. Hence it is that all men are by nature the children of wrath; averse to all that is spiritually good, and prone to evil; dead in sin, under the curse of the righteous law.... From which state of complicated misery there is no deliverance but by Jesus Christ, the second Adam.

Abraham Booth (1734–1806). An English Baptist minister, Booth served as pastor of Prescot Street Church in Whitechapel, London for 35 years as well as founding what is now Regents Park College for ministerial training in Oxford. He is most known for his work *The Reign of Grace*.

From "Confession of Faith" in *Works of Abraham Booth: Late Pastor of the Baptist Church, Volume 1* (London: Button, 1813), xxxi–xxxii.

Further Reading

"The Fall" and "Inability" in *Concise Theology*, by J. I. Packer.

Prayer

OUR Father, when we read Thy description of human nature we are sure it is true, for Thou hast seen man ever since his fall, and Thou hast been grieved at heart concerning him.... It has become a wonder to us that Thou shouldst look upon man at all; the most hateful object in creation must be a man, because he slew Thy Son, because he has multiplied rebellions against a just and holy law. And yet truly there is no sight that gives Thee more pleasure than man, for Jesus was a man; and the brightness of His glory covers all our shame; and the pureness and perfectness of His obedience shine like the sun in the midst of the thick darkness. For His sake Thou art well pleased, and Thou dost dwell with us.... And now, Lord, during the few days that remain to us here below, be it all our business to cry, "Behold the Lamb!" Oh! teach our hearts to be always conscious of Thy love; and then our lips, that they may set out as best they can by Thy divine help the matchless story of the Cross.... Lord, forgive us our sins; Lord, sanctify our persons; Lord, guide us in difficulty; Lord, supply our needs. The Lord teach us; the Lord perfect us; the Lord comfort us; the Lord make us meet for the appearing of His Son from heaven!

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892). An English Baptist preacher, Spurgeon became pastor of London's New Park Street Church (later Metropolitan Tabernacle) at 20 years of age. He frequently preached to more than 10,000 people with no electronic amplification. Spurgeon was a prolific writer and his printed works are voluminous—by the time of his death he had preached nearly 3,600 sermons and published 49 volumes of commentaries, sayings, hymns, and devotions.

From "Prayer VII: Let All the People Praise Thee" in *Prayers from Metropolitan Pulpit: C. H. Spurgeon's Prayers* (New York, Revell, 1906), 43–47.

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