

# The Perfection of Believers in This Life

by James Arminius

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*James Arminius explores the possibility of perfection in believers, emphasizing the necessity of grace and rejecting Pelagian views.*

**Scripture:** John 15:5, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:8, Titus 2:11, 1 John 1:8

**Topics:** "Christian Perfection", "Justification By Faith"

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## Description

James Arminius addresses the topic of the perfection of believers in this life, clarifying that he does not believe in the possibility of believers perfectly keeping God's precepts without the grace of Christ. He references St. Augustine's views on the subject, highlighting Augustine's belief that it is possible for a man to live in this world without sin through the grace of Christ and free will. Arminius distances himself from the Pelagian doctrine, emphasizing the need for the grace of Christ for believers to live without sin, contrary to the belief that man can fulfill the law of God by his own strength. Despite facing rumors and accusations of holding destructive sentiments and heresies, Arminius stands firm in his beliefs and seeks to clarify his position on the Divinity of the Son of God and the justification of man before God.

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## Transcript

### VII. THE PERFECTION OF BELIEVERS IN THIS LIFE

Beside those doctrines on which I have treated, there is now much discussion among us respecting the perfection of believers, or regenerated persons, in this life; and it is reported, that I entertain sentiments on this subject, which are very improper, and nearly allied to those of the Pelagians, viz: "that it is possible for the regenerate in this life perfectly to keep God's precepts." To this I reply, though these might have been my sentiments yet I ought not on this account to be considered a Pelagian, either partly or entirely, provided I had only added that "they could do this by the grace of Christ, and by no means without it." But while I never asserted, that a believer could perfectly keep the precepts of Christ in this life, I never denied it, but always left it as a matter which has still to be decided. For I have contented myself with those sentiments which St. Augustine has expressed on this subject, whose words have frequently quoted in the University, and have usually subjoined, that I had no addition to make to them.

Augustine says, "four questions may claim our attention on this topic. The first is, was there ever yet a man without sin, one who from the beginning of life to its termination never committed sin? The second, has there ever been, is there now, or can there possibly be, an individual who does not sin, that is, who has attained to such a state of perfection in this life as not to commit sin, but perfectly to fulfill the law of

God? The third, is it possible for a man in this life to exist without sin? The fourth, if it be possible for a man to be without sin, why has such an individual never yet been found?" St. Augustine says, that such a person as is described in the first question never yet lived, or will hereafter be brought into existence, with the exception of Jesus Christ. He does not think, that any man has attained to such perfection in this life as is portrayed in the second question. With regard to the third, he thinks it possible for a man to be without sin, by means of the grace of Christ and free-will. In answer to the fourth, man does not do what it is possible for him by the grace of Christ to perform, either because that which is good escapes his observation, or because in it he places no part of his delight." From this quotation it is apparent, that St. Augustine, one of the most strenuous adversaries of the Pelagian doctrine, retained this sentiment, that "it is possible for a man to live in this world without sin."

Beside this, the same Christian father says, "let Pelagius confess, that it is possible for man to be without sin, in no other way than by the grace of Christ, and we will be at peace with each other." The opinion of Pelagius appeared to St. Augustine to be this -- "that man could fulfill the law of God by his own proffer strength and ability; but with still "greater facility by means of the grace of Christ." I have already most abundantly stated the great distance at which I stand from such a sentiment; in addition to which I now declare, that I account this sentiment of Pelagius to be heretical, and diametrically opposed to these words of Christ, "Without me ye can do nothing:" (John xv, 5.) It is likewise very destructive, and inflicts a most grievous wound on the glory of Christ.

I cannot see that anything is contained in all I have hitherto produced respecting my sentiments, on account of which any person ought to be "afraid of appearing in the presence of God," and from which it might be feared that any mischievous consequences can possibly arise. Yet because every day brings me fresh information about reports concerning me, "that I carry in my breast destructive sentiments and heresies," I cannot possibly conceive to what points those charges can relate, except perhaps they draw some such pretext from my opinion concerning the Divinity of the Son of God, and the justification of man before God. Indeed, I have lately learnt, that there has been much public conversation, and many rumors have been circulated, respecting my opinion on both these points of doctrine, particularly since the last conference [between Gomarus and myself] before the Counselors of the Supreme Court. This is one reason why I think, that I shall not be acting unadvisedly if I disclose to your mightinesses the real state of the whole matter.

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