

## **SERMON FOR THE 6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 7-21-19 Our Redeemer**

**Colossians 1:21-28 “We are not Perfect!” “Be Holy and Perfect!”**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“You are not perfect.” On these four words, billions of advertising dollars are spent each year. Around the world, companies are making fortunes by telling imperfect people how to remedy their imperfect lives.

- If you have imperfect breath, mouthwash companies will help you become kissable.
- If you have an imperfect smile, toothpaste manufacturers will make your teeth whiter than white.
- If you smell less than perfect, the right deodorant or perfume will make sure others can stand downwind from you.
- If your hair is less than perfect, the right shampoo will give it the shine, the bounce, the gloss, the glimmer you so desperately need.
- If your image is less than perfect, then the right car, the right suit, the right fitness center will turn you into the super-model or super-hunk that you want to be.

Of course, after you have the right car, deodorant, mouthwash, toothpaste, and clothes, your reflection in the mirror points out: “You are still NOT the fairest in the land.”

You are not perfect. I am not perfect. Scripture reminds us that none of us, not even “the best” of us, is perfect.

- Noah followed the Lord and built an ark, but he also imbibed a little too freely (Gen. 9:20).
- Abraham was a great patriarch, but he was not above telling a lie or two to save himself (Gen. 12:11-18).
- God used Moses to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt, but Moses didn’t always resist the temptation to change God’s orders (Num. 20:12).
- David was a mighty warrior and God’s selected monarch, but that did not stop him from abusing his power (2 Sam. 12:10-13).

The Bible is filled with magnificent stories of God’s heroes of faith. But these people were heroes not because they were perfect: they were heroes because God’s grace gave them strength and perseverance.

You see, my friends, none of us is perfect. The Bible doesn't pull any punches when it says there is not a single person who has not sinned. In our Epistle lesson for today, Paul reminds the Colossian church that because of their wicked actions, they, like the rest of humanity, were once alienated from God. They were, by nature separated from God and unable to live up to his righteous demands and expectations.

The same is true of us. On our own we are powerless to do what God demands. Perhaps it shows most clearly in the little things of life—in our homes, in our routines, in our choices, and relationships.

I often wonder what would happen if Jesus unexpectedly came to our house. Would we go to the door immediately or would we have to change some things before letting him in?

- Would we quickly hide some magazines and pull out a freshly dusted Bible?
- Could we continue our dinner table conversation without change? Would we struggle for words as we pray before and after a meal?
- Would we look at each other and wonder what brought *Jesus* here?
- Would we secretly hope he would leave so we could get back to normal?
- Could we introduce him to our closest friends?
- Could we take him to the movie we had selected for that night?

The sad truth is that even though we would treat Jesus with honor, feeding him our best, and offering him use of the good towels, we might feel just a bit uncomfortable. The bad news shines out all too apparent: we are unable, by nature, to live up to God's perfection, or his expectations.

The worse news is that we can't do anything about our imperfections. We can pick up our houses, but we can't clean up our hearts. We can curb what we say, but we can't stop what we think. On a spiritual level, since the fall into sin, each one of us is broken. No matter what we do, how long we work at it, or how hard we struggle, we can't repair our relationship with God (Rom. 5:12). We are not perfect and we are helpless to change that ourselves.

There are voices in the world around us who object to that statement. The secular humanists want us to believe that the world is improving and we are successfully climbing the stair way to perfection.

- Abortions, drive-by shootings, religious persecution, corruption and prejudice tell us they are wrong.
- Educators tell us, "Learning will endow a new, golden age." Yet today's children are often more bored, discouraged, and depressed than previous generations. Education alone cannot change us.
- Some social theorists want us to think that a great society can be attained by throwing money at our problems or letting Uncle Sam take care of us. But we can see that that hasn't worked either. We are not perfect. We can't change on our own. That is the message of Scripture

But thank God, Scripture also says that the journey of our life does not have to lead to eternal fire and destruction. We do not have to stay alienated from God. Although our sinful nature condemns us, God's Son saves us.

- When Adam & Eve were devastated by the knowledge of what they had done, God gave them hope that he would crush the devil (Gen. 3:15).
- When Abraham was without hope of having home or family, God promised a son, a country, and a descendant who would be a blessing to all (Gen. 12:2-4).
- Even though David was a murderer and an adulterer, God did not leave him without hope, but gave the promise that one of his descendants would establish a kingdom that would last forever.

Yes, my friends, THANK GOD that in Jesus we have hope! God's promise is not just for patriarchs and kings, but for you and me also. Paul here tells us that God has, by the blood of the cross, reconciled all creation to himself.

- We were exiled from our home, but at the foot of the cross, we found a new habitation.
- We were without family, but by God's great grace, we have been adopted into his household.
- Because of Jesus, we who were poor are now rich.
- Because Jesus was stripped of his clothes and crucified, we now have a robe of righteousness!
- Because Jesus died and rose, we now will live forever!
- Because Jesus took our sin, we are now forgiven and clean before God!

The cross is God's Good News, which sets us free forever from condemnation and tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Yes, because of the cross, we are holy and perfect in our heavenly Father's sight.

We Christians, are called to live as God's holy and perfect children, not because we have to earn God's favor, not because your pastor stands in this pulpit and says so, but simply because that is who we are; that is what God has made us to be and to do.

Years ago, a wealthy Christian was living in Nairobi, Kenya. As was the custom, she employed a young African as a domestic servant. After three months of faithful service, he asked the lady to give him a letter of reference, addressed to a Muslim business man who also lived in that town. Naturally, having spent time training the man, she was somewhat reluctant to see him leave. The lady offered the young man an increase in wages. At that, he smiled and told her that he was not leaving for more money, but that he was on a quest to decide whether he would become a Christian or a Muslim.

He had worked for her to see how Christians acted. Now he wanted to work for a follower of Islam to observe how he lived. From their examples he would make a choice. The lady was stunned. Then she became embarrassed as she remembered the many mistakes and errors this man had seen her commit over the last few months. Her journey had hardly been holy and perfect.

How would you feel in her situation? How has your journey been? What do people observe in you? Have you lived as someone made perfect by Jesus? Of course, you might reply, "I haven't encountered that situation." Don't believe it. Don't underestimate the number of people who see how you live. A Christian's life is made up of a multitude of small things. It is the little things, not the great things, that bear witness to Jesus. It is little words—not eloquent speeches or sermons—and little actions—not mighty miracles—that make up the lives of God's children.

On our own, the challenge is overwhelming. Only through Christ, through His mercy and strength, are we able to live as his holy people. We have been made perfect by the blood of the Lamb, and the Son of God lives in us so that we may live as his redeemed people. He sends us into the world—into circulation—as his saints. May God give us his grace as we journey and live to his glory. **Amen.**