

“You are not Perfect, You are Complete in Christ”

James 3:1-12

James says, “Not many of you should become teachers.” But Paul says, “Those who are apt to teach should teach.” But James reminds all who take the responsibility of authority that “we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” As Jesus says, “to those who have been given much, much more will be demanded.”

I will be honest that those words give me reason to pause on a daily basis. It is such a balancing act. We strive to always do and say everything right and be “the perfect man” of whom James speaks. The thing is, James doesn’t really speak about “the perfect man.” He speaks of the “complete man.” This the “telos” word, in the Greek: “To be complete.” This is akin to what Jesus said on the cross: tetelestai – “It is finished.”

James is not trying to tell you how to be perfect. Eliminate that word. Bad translation. You are not perfect. Your pastor is far from the perfect man. We are complete in Christ. You do not have to be perfect to be in Christ’s church. He has done everything for you. So, even in light of what James says, do not be afraid to take on positions of leadership. Yes, you will be judged with a greater strictness. But you do not have to be perfect. You are a forgiven child of God.

As we induct our Sunday School teachers into their offices, I will say to them, “While holiness of life and obedience to Christ are expected of all members of the congregation, it is especially important that you show yourselves, by word and example, to be faithful to Him in service and Christian devotion.”

The criteria for our Sunday School staff is not that all positions are to be filled with “perfect” people. Like me, and like you, they are not perfect and their duties are similar to that of all Christians: be faithful to Him in service and Christian devotion. Be faithful, and know that He has declared you righteous in His sight.

James is specifically addressing those who had official positions within the church, but do not think that just because you are not being inducted into an office today that this does not apply to you. If you are a father or a mother, you are a teacher. If you are the head of a household or hold any position of authority, you are a teacher. Even as a friend, you have the opportunity to be a teacher, although, in his letter, James is talking about those who hold specific offices and have recognized authority

Regardless, as a teacher, you are not a perfect teacher. However, you are made complete in Christ, and you are forgiven. You stumble in what you say and in what you do, you are forgiven. You are not a perfect husband, wife, father, mother, or friend. You are forgiven. I am not a perfect pastor; I am not a perfect husband; I am not a perfect father; I am not a perfect friend. I am a forgiven child of God. He has made me faithful. He has declared me righteous. He has called me His son. I thank God daily that He judges me only according to the works of His only-begotten Son, that I am made complete in Christ.

You are a forgiven child of God. He has washed you clean. He has made you faithful and has filled you with His Holy Spirit. He has declared you righteous – not because you have not stumbled. He judges you according to what Christ has done. It was His death that paid for your stumbling into sin. It is His rising from the tomb that brings us life.

So, if all of my failures are covered, why should I stick my neck out and teach someone else. Why not just sit cozy in my faith, wrapped up in the grace

of my Baptism? Why not just sit and be silent and enjoy what I have? We hear Isaiah say, “The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.”

We take on the task of teaching the Word because there are weary souls desperately in need of the comfort of the Gospel. Jesus says, “Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” How many do you know in your life who do not know how to deal with weight of the world on their shoulders? Satan whispering in their ear?

How many do you know who think they would be such hypocrites to come and worship before the Lord? How often have you heard that or at times thought that yourself? How many do you know who are not here because they believe they are not worthy to be here? Or how many do you know who have no idea what a crushing weight sin is upon them? Who comes to mind? You have the opportunity to be a teacher.

Don't worry about being the perfect teacher, you are forgiven. Isaiah implies that even one Word of Scripture is enough to sustain the weary. The message is simple: You are a forgiven child of God. He is the One who has washed you clean. He is the One who makes you faithful. He is the One who fills you with His Holy Spirit. He is the One who declares you righteous – not because you have not stumbled. He judges you according to what Christ has done. There is but one perfect man – it is Christ the Lord. It was His death that paid for your stumbling into sin. It is His rising from the tomb that brings you life.

Teach these words, that others who think that they do not belong here may come and know the joy we have – the joy of being forgiven and made complete in Christ. Amen.