

“You Are Not Perfect, You Are Forgiven”

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.” Jesus says, “to those who have been given much, much more will be demanded.”

I will be honest that these words give me concern on a daily basis. They shouldn't, but they do. It is such a balancing act. We strive to always do and say everything right and be “the perfect man” of whom James speaks. I have news for you: your pastor is far from the perfect man.

These words, that “we who teach will be judged with greater strictness,” are words that Satan loves to twist and hold against us. I have stood numerous times at the altar, speaking the Words of Institution and have Satan whispering in my ear, “You are such a hypocrite. How dare you think you are worthy to be here.”

If you ever see me distracted during that portion of the service, it is just me saying, “Get behind me Satan. I am a forgiven child of God. He has made me faithful. He has declared me righteous.”

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. Just so you know, the reason we are inducting them this week is because your less than perfect pastor completely forgot about doing it the first week of Sunday School. 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 a friend, you are a teacher. If you are the head of a household or hold any position of authority, you are a teacher.

You are not a perfect teacher, 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.

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? 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. How many do you know in your life who do not know how to deal with Satan whispering in their ear? How do you deal with that?

How many do you know who think they would be such hypocrites to come and worship before the Lord? How often have you thought that? How many do you know who are not here because they believe they are not worthy to be here? 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 don't belong here may know the joy of being forgiven in Christ. Amen.