



“Be Perfect Part 2” (Colossians 1:15–29)(11.22.20)

Colossians 1:27–28 (NIV84)

Explain why starting here.

²⁷ To them [the saints] God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

Colossians 1:15–29 (NIV84)

¹⁵ He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death **to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation**— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, **so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.** ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Be Perfect Part 2”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:



The life of most Christians is spent in the foothills of faith. They are content with drinking the milk as babes of belief. They are satisfied with adding Jesus to the lives that they have carved out in the cliffs of this secular world.

They have not seen the Transfigured Jesus – the image of our invisible God. They have a sense that there is a glorious mountaintop out there somewhere, but it is not for them. They cannot see past the foothills. Even at the top of the foothills, the trees, the obstacles in this life, block their view, block their experience of the potential heights of faith. Jesus' throne is higher than

the Himalayas, but they only hear a faint echo of the Good News in the canyons of our culture.

This Jesus holds first place: He is preeminent. Not only was everything that was made, made by Jesus, but all creation is held together by His power. He has ultimate authority over the material world and the spiritual world. Jesus is the Head of the Church and we are the body of Christ. We our His instruments and our prayers, in faith, can move mountains.

Paul tells us that Jesus holds supremacy in all things. I want you to fully appreciate that truth. Supremacy – the position of being first: ascendant; dominant; having dominion; masterdom; sovereign; developed to the utmost and not exceeded by any other degree, quality, or intensity; incomparable; surpassing; towering; transcendent, ultimate, unequalable; unmatchable; crowning; final; absolute; and perfect. That is our Jesus – supreme.



If that doesn't hit home with you, let me put it another way. Imagine Christians living all around the Mediterranean Sea. It seems to be a full life, with all the expected ups and downs. There are the storms of life and the beautiful sun blessed beaches. There is human strife and ugliness; but also, there is kindness and generosity. There seems to be everything you could experience in this world in their Mediterranean Life. One encyclopedia describes the Mediterranean Region as the center of World History.

BUT, what if those Christians would navigate through the Strait of Gibraltar? Gibraltar means an impregnable stronghold. When the Christian advances through this

strait, a whole new world opens up to them. It was always there. It was always available to them.

Unfortunately, they were never shown the map, never taught of this realm. Maybe they were and they didn't believe. Maybe they were just oblivious. Maybe they were not willing to leave that old life behind. Maybe they were not willing to do what it takes to explore that reality.

BODY:

Reverend Maxie Dunnam in his commentary on this scripture shared a personal story:

"I remember well when the first glow of this glory began to dawn in my soul. I was a pastor in one of the fastest-growing congregations in Mississippi. I was a "success" in every way ecclesiastical success is measured. I had just graduated from seminary and this was my first full-time appointment. It was the Cinderella church of the conference.

I was the organizing pastor of the congregation, and to see a congregation develop "from scratch" is a unique joy. The membership expanded rapidly; we built beautiful buildings, raised lots of money, and did many exciting things. I was the "envy" of my colleagues, but in my heart of hearts I grew weary.

There was an inexplorable emptiness. **Lives were not being vividly transformed.** There was a fellowship in the church—but it was not too distinct from the country club. We were highly programmed and the organization hummed efficiently.

Then the racial crisis in Mississippi in the early 1960s shattered our surface fellowship and set friend against friend. I was in the throes of despair, completely exhausted, bereft of power other than my own driving commitment for social justice, which power was also activated by my desire for “professional success.” At that point I received an invitation to which I responded, and which changed my life.

A dear friend, Tom Carruth, invited me to a Christian Ashram (that is a religious retreat) led by E. Stanley Jones. In my desperate search for deeper meaning in my ministry, for energy to struggle through the racial upheaval with integrity of preaching and action, for something more vital than my own lagging, almost non-existent spiritual life, I had gathered a few people into a prayer-study group, and a member of that group introduced us to Stanley Jones’s then-new book, *In Christ*.

We were just getting into the book when the invitation came to attend the Ashram. The word itself sounded strange and unattractive, but I had read enough of Jones to know he had something I desperately needed. I went to the Ashram and that was the beginning of ***new life*** for me, a life consciously in Christ. It was not that I was not Christian. I had been following Christ to the best of my ability. By faith, I had received the gift of Jesus’ death and Resurrection *for me*. I knew myself forgiven and accepted by God. **But here was something I had missed—myself the dwelling place of Christ, the Spirit-stream of the living Lord flowing in me.**

I remember vividly the experience at an altar at the close of that Ashram. Brother Stanley asked probingly as Jesus had asked two thousand years before, “Do you want to be whole?” The only possibility for wholeness, he affirmed, was the indwelling Christ. I responded longingly and with certainty, *yes—yes!* I yielded myself more completely than ever before to Christ, inviting Him to live His life in me; and I made a new commitment to ministry—a ministry in which I would allow Christ to minister through me.

I have not always lived up to that commitment, but it has been the shaping power of my life. I have discovered that praying is not what it once was—going to Him and struggling to discover His guidance. Rather, prayer is recognizing and cultivating an awareness of His indwelling Presence, and seeking to give expression to His Presence in my life and work.

This does not mean I have not struggled or that spiritual formation and growth have been consistent and smooth. It does not mean that there has not been suffering, doubt-wrestling, dark nights of the soul, failure in relationship and ministry. All of these, to excruciating depths and degrees, have been my lot. But I can trace a pattern.

When I have been intentional in cultivating the awareness of the indwelling Christ, yielded and responsive to that Presence, I have known wholeness of life, a vibrancy of spirit and joy, and my ministry has been marked by an obvious spiritual quality that genuinely blessed others. When I have been slack in that intentional effort at staying alive to His aliveness in me, then my joy diminishes, my confidence deteriorates, what accomplishments I experience seem ponderous and hard-gained, and I discover that no matter how noble my purposes, I am often without power or my power has soon departed.

This is our glory. Can we grasp it?—that at our invitation, responding to our response of faith, Christ enters our lives, becomes a part of our beings, indwells us.”

The other day, I posted a one minute video on social media. Keystone Fellowship was the church and the preacher was Mark White. The central point is that “What you believe determines how you behave.” He starts with an illustration of a man who waters a plant for two years before he realizes it is fake.

White said that he meets with people all the time who are watering fake plants in their lives. They need to identify the lie in their life. People behave in such a way for so long that they allow their behavior to determine what they believe.”

I say to you, "We need to be deliberate in aligning our beliefs with what Paul teaches us about perfection in Christ. Then we need to synchronize our actions with those beliefs."

Paul couples the proclamation of Jesus with warning and teaching with all wisdom. One preacher defines wisdom as the right use of knowledge. How do Christians proclaim Jesus? First, we must have the knowledge that our Bibles teach about Jesus. Second, we must have the intimacy of relationship. This intimacy is developed through devotions, prayer time, and worship. This intimacy grows in our living out our faith.

In our New Testament reading yesterday, we read the account of Stephen in the Book of Acts. He taught and gave witness to Jesus as he ministered in his community. People said that Stephen had the face of an angel. That is how we can proclaim Jesus – by allowing Him to shine through us as we minister to others.

Do not be discouraged when in your striving to be perfect you stumble or roadblocks are constructed in your journey. Renew and refresh yourself in the knowledge that the glorious riches of Christ are in you. This is head knowledge and heart knowledge. Jesus is our hope of glory. For that which he calls us to be, sufficient grace from God will be supplied when we pray in His name.

I was inspired to use today's scripture by Reverend Andrew Murray's Day 17 devotion in his book *Be Perfect*.

"Perfect in Christ: in our inquiry into the teaching of the Word as to perfection, we have here a new word opening up to us the hope, giving us the assurance, of what we have seen to be our duty. It links all that we have seen of God's call and claim, with all that we know of Christ in His grace and power. Perfect in Christ: here is the open gateway into the perfect life. He to whom it is given to see fully what it means, finds through it an abundant entrance into the life of Christian perfection.

There are three aspects in which we need to look at the truth of our being perfect in Christ. There is, first, our perfection in Christ, as it is prepared for us in Him, our Head. As the second Adam, Christ came and wrought out a new nature for all the members of His body. This nature is His own life, perfected through suffering and obedience. In thus being perfected Himself, He perfected forever them that are sanctified. His perfection, His perfect life, is ours. **And that not only judicially, or by imputation, but as an actual spiritual reality**, in virtue of our real and living union with Him.

Paul says in the same Epistle, "You are complete, made full in Him"; all that you are to be is already fulfilled, and so you are fulfilled in Him: circumcised in Him, buried with Him, raised with Him, quickened together with Him. All Christ's members are in Him, fulfilled in Him.

Then there is our perfection in Christ, as imparted to us by the Holy Spirit in uniting us to Him. The life which is implanted in us at the new birth, planted into the midst of a mass of sin and flesh, is a perfect life. As the seed contains in itself the whole life of the tree, so the seed of God within us is the perfect life of Christ, with its power to grow, and fill our life, and bring forth fruit to perfection.

And then there is also our perfection in Christ, as wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, appropriated by us in the obedience of faith, and made manifest in our life and conduct. As our faith grasps and feeds upon the truth in the two former aspects, and yields itself to God to have that perfect life master and pervade the whole of our daily life in its ordinary actions; perfect in Christ will become each moment a present practical reality and experience.

All that the Word has taught of the perfect heart, and the perfect way, of being perfect as the Father, and perfect as the Master, shines with new meaning and with the light of a new life. Christ, the living Christ, is our Perfection; He, Himself, lives each day and hour to impart it. The measureless love of Jesus, and the power of the endless life in which His life works, become the measure of our expectation.

In the life in which we now live in the flesh, with its daily duties in relationship with men and money, with care and temptation, we are to give the proof that Perfect in Christ is no mere ideal, but in the power of Almighty God, simple and literal truth. It is in the last of these three aspects that Paul has used

the expression in our text. He speaks of admonishing every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, that he may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

It is to the perfection in daily life and walk that the admonishing and teaching have reference. In principle, Christians were perfect in Christ: in practice they were to become perfect. The aim of the Gospel Ministry among believers was to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, to teach men how they might put on the Lord Jesus, have His life cover them and have His life in them.

What a task! What a hopeless task to the minister, as he looks upon the state of the Church! **What a task of infinite hopefulness.** The aim is high, but the power is Divine. Let the minister, in full purpose of heart, make Paul's aim his own: to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.



CONCLUSION:

Today, I call on you to not be satisfied with living in the foothills of your faith. Look to the heights of the Himalayas. Do not be content with the confines and comforts of the Mediterranean Life. Look to break through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic Ocean and a whole new world that awaits you.

Remember Maxie Dunnam had a theology degree. He preached and conducted Bible studies. By all normal standards, he was a highly successful pastor. And yet, he still needed to take hold of the truth of Christ in him. That truth is there for you.

Do not continue to water a fake plant. If your faith is not growing, it is dead. A true faith will produce fruit. You are a saint, a follower of Christ. What a glorious mystery it is that we are in Christ and Christ is in us. Because of Jesus, we are presented before our Heavenly Father as holy, without blemish, and free from accusation.

We are working out our salvation with fear and trembling as God works in us. Paul tells us, "To this end I labor, struggling with all Jesus' energy, which so powerfully works in me." May we be of like mind.

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.