

PRESENTING EVERYONE PERFECT COLOSSIANS 1:28

As I was reading the book of Esther the other day I came across something that astonished me. When the king of Persia was looking for a wife, a woman who would sit on the throne as queen, and Esther (because of her extraordinary beauty) was chosen to be a candidate, she couldn't just rely on her natural beauty and charm to win the king's favor. Before she could even be introduced to the king she was assigned seven personal attendants and was then required to undergo twelve months of beauty treatments. It was only after twelve months of beauty treatments, administered by seven personal attendants that she was permitted to see the king's face. It was only after this intensive time of preparation that she was considered "worthy enough" to impress the king and perhaps be chosen to be his queen.

That's hard for me (and most guys) to imagine. It took me all of fifteen minutes to get ready for *my* wedding. I took a shower, combed my hair, put on the clothes that I had rented for the occasion, and drove to the church.

Twelve months of beauty treatments? Performed by seven full time attendants? I mean, I've heard about spas, and I know about facials and manicures and pedicures. But when my wife went to a spa one time it took no more than four hours to do all that stuff. I can understand maybe *two* full days of beauty treatments. But what do you do on day three? On day forty-three? On day 343?

I don't know the answers to those questions. But I do know that these seven personal attendants did *something* on all 365 days for Esther, because the man in charge, Hegai, had a vision. Hegai, who was the king's steward, wanted to present the future queen to the king as *perfect*. Because given the king's status and the king's position, he was worthy of nothing less than perfection.

The Apostle Paul had a similar vision for the Bride of Christ—the Church. At the end of Colossians 1, after describing the glory and power and sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, after describing what this magnificent King of the Universe did for us when He came to this earth in the form of a man and died on a cross to make us holy and presentable to God, Paul declared that his own personal assignment from the King was to prepare us, His bride, to see Him in person, face to face. He said in **verses 28-29**, ²⁸ *We proclaim [Jesus], 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.*

Just prior to making this statement Paul told the Colossians that he had been commissioned by God to be a servant of the church—not just the church at Colossae, but the *whole* church, the redeemed people of God throughout the known world at that time. His specific assignment as a servant of the church was to present the word of God in its fullness (v. 25), particularly demonstrating how God's revelation of Himself and His will has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ (v. 27). This teaching was not merely to *inform* them about what God was now doing in the world, or to answer all their theological questions. This instruction was given in order to *transform* their lives.

Going back to the metaphor of a bride being prepared to see the groom (who happens to be the king), Paul's teaching was the beauty treatments that were needed to make the bride acceptable and presentable. His instruction was the beauty treatments that removed

all the blemishes and blotches and calluses and wrinkles and imperfections. Because Paul had a vision for the church—the bride of Christ.

He understood that a day was coming when the bride would literally stand in the presence of the King and see his face for the first time. He understood that he was the one, like Hegai in the book of Esther, who would present to the King each person who had been entrusted to his care. And so Paul said, “I work very hard to ensure that every person I am going to present to King Jesus on that day is *perfect*. Without any blemishes or blotches or any other imperfections. Because He is worthy of nothing less than absolute perfection.”

The word translated “perfect” in verse 28 describes someone who is not lacking anything, but is complete or whole. Again, using the metaphor of a wedding, it would be as though Paul were saying, “I am laboring with all the energy that God Himself gives me to make King Jesus’ bride as lovely, as appealing, and as impressive to Him as she can possibly be. My work on this earth is to give this bride as many beauty treatments as I can until we arrive together in the King’s presence and I present her to Him.”

Of course, we’re not talking about physical beauty. We’re talking about inner beauty—a beautiful character. A lovely bearing—behavior, mannerisms, and conduct that corresponds to Jesus’ character. Paul said to the Galatians, “I’m like a mother going through labor pains, until Christ is formed in you!” (Galatians 4:19). In other words, I exert a lot of energy and expend a lot of effort and endure a lot of pain so that you will be conformed to the image of Jesus.

And I’m convinced the reason Paul worked so hard at this is because he knew that he was, in some way and to some degree, responsible for the progress of each individual that God had entrusted to his care—which happened to be individuals from at least a dozen local churches. His job was getting these people ready to see Jesus, and he knew that if they were not ready, that at least some of the blame fell on him.

That is a huge burden. Paul told the Corinthians that it was a burden he carried with him night and day. But it is a burden that every pastor—every shepherd of God’s flock must bear. For the author of Hebrews said that the spiritual leaders of a church—the elders—will have to give an account to God one day for the people in their flock. And I believe that day is the same day Paul was talking about in Colossians 1 when he described *presenting* church members to the Lord. “Lord I present Eutychus to you. And Lord, here is Lydia. And here is Onesimus. And here is Euodias and Onesiphorous.”

And I will do the same on that day. I am responsible to the Lord for you, and I must give an account to the Lord for you on that day. Pastor Brad will do the same. Mark Idol, because he is already an elder, will do the same. Andrew Stucky will do the same. Tom Aman will do the same.

As elders our assignment from the Lord is to get you ready to see Jesus on the day that we will be ushered into His presence for the very first time, and our sincere hope is that we can present you perfect in Christ.

This is a huge responsibility—I’m not sure there is any bigger or greater responsibility in the whole world. But it is a responsibility that becomes more difficult and more challenging as our church grows in numbers. Because there is a tendency, as we grow in numbers, for our ministry to become less personal to at least some of those who attend our church. We, as leaders, may not personally know everyone. We may not know where each person stands in relationship to the Lord. We may not know whether a person is growing and maturing in their faith and whether or not he/she is being progressively conformed to the image of Christ.

The bigger our congregation gets the more likely it is that some people will fall through the cracks in terms of receiving adequate pastoral care. Those of us who have been entrusted with your spiritual care might not know the condition of your spiritual health, simply because we haven't been able to get close enough to even take your spiritual pulse. We might not be aware if you are under spiritual attack, or if you are struggling with your faith, or if you are stuck in a spiritual rut and are not making progress.

That concerns me. Sometimes it keeps me awake at night. Because it is God's intention that you become complete or whole in Christ—that Christ be progressively formed in you, and that you be ready to see Jesus when you are presented to Him on that day. And if you call EBC your church, I and the other elders are responsible, to some degree, for your spiritual development (your spiritual beautification), and we will be held accountable for you when we see the Lord.

There is only one way I know that we can deal with these challenges? We as spiritual leaders need to be thoughtful and intentional and proactive about providing you with adequate spiritual care. We need to keep raising up spiritual leaders within our church—men and women who are called and equipped to be shepherds in this flock. We need to allocate our resources so that these shepherds can be mobilized to effectively and proactively and personally take care of you.

We have a program called ELLS (Equipping Leaders for a Lifetime of Service) in which we spend two years training and equipping men and women to be spiritual leaders in our church. In the last twenty years we've taught eight classes for men (with an average of 12 in each class) and two classes for women (with an average of 13 in each). Out of those classes have emerged quite a number of our spiritual leaders. Eight of our nine current elders have been trained in ELLS. Our associate pastor Brad Dettwyler was trained in ELLS, and our Assistant Pastor candidate Mark Idol was trained in ELLS.

God has also been gracious in bringing to our church some men and women who have been called and gifted by God (and who have also been formally trained) to intensively shepherd the flock through counseling and discipleship. Tom and Karen Avinelis and Dr. David Ortega have been volunteering a tremendous amount of time and energy to this ministry, and very soon we will begin a two year training program to raise up a team of lay-counselors in our church who can provide effective and adequate pastoral care.

All of this to say that as we grow in numbers we are going to work very hard to stay engaged with you in a meaningful and personal way. That's going to require more full-time staff who have the same vision and the same passion as Paul—individuals who proclaim Jesus, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that they might present you perfect in Christ. Individuals who are able to spend the time and energy that is necessary to prepare each one of you to see Jesus.

That's what it's all about.

Presenting Everyone Perfect Colossians 1:28

Main Idea: Since pastors/elders will one day present every person in their church to the Lord, they must work hard to make sure each person is ready to see Him

Introduction

Esther's twelve months of beauty treatments

The steward's vision

Paul's Specific Assignment from the Lord

A Servant of the Church (vv.25-27)

He taught the Word of God in its fullness

He connected the dots to reveal Christ

His teaching was "beauty treatments"

A Presenter on the Day of the Lord (vv. 28-29)

To present the Bride as "perfect"

The meaning of "perfect"

The reason for "perfection"

The EBC Elder's Specific Assignment from the Lord

Preparing each person at EBC to meet Jesus

Presenting each person at EBC to Jesus as "perfect"

The Challenges of Numerical Growth

The tendency to be less personal

The tendency for some to fall through the cracks

Being Intentional about Providing Pastoral Care