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Text: Genesis 2: 7-9,15-17; 3:1-7

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Theme: Seek God's Perfection

How far would you willing to go to attain perfection? Perfect health? A perfect relationship? A perfect job? The desire to be perfect can be a powerful motivator that makes people do just about anything. Some might cheat and scheme to attain it. In the business world, someone may make dishonest deals in order to make the most profit. In politics, a candidate may lie about what he will do in order to be elected. In the sports world, teams and athletes may bend the rules to achieve records or championships. For the past few months, many people focused on the New England Patriots and their pursuit of the perfect season. Even if they had gone undefeated, in the minds of some people, it would have forever been tarnished by the cheating scandal from the beginning of the season. In the end, the Patriots fell short of perfection and were defeated in the biggest game of the year.

In our sinful world, sometimes sinners do prosper. However, before God, we have all fallen short of perfection. He has told us in his word that we need to be perfect if we want to inherit eternal life. Today we will be reminded on the proper way to seek God's perfection. Through the story of the fall into sin, we can see that God's perfection does not depend on us. Rather we must rely completely on Christ for that perfection.

Part 1: It does not depend on us.

When God created the world, he made everything perfect. On the sixth day of creation, God made man as the crown of his creation. Unlike when he created the animals, God created man in a special way. God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life. God made man in his image. This means that the first human beings were sinless and perfect. God took these perfect people and gave them a special place to live in the Garden of Eden. God showed his special relationship with the first two people by creating them in a special way, giving them a paradise to live in, and through a command he gave them.

God gave sinless man a way to show love for God. Every time man did not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he was showing faithful service and love for his God. By obeying God's command they showed that their will was in line with God's will. This command was the only command that God gave to man to obey. Looking back, it might seem like this one little command should have been easy to follow.

Then the devil came into the Garden and interfered with perfection. The devil, in the form of the serpent, showed his craftiness with temptations and tactics that he still uses to today. First, he questioned the word of God. When Eve stood up to that question, the devil showed why he is called the Father of lies. God had said that if they eat the fruit, they would surely die. The devil said, "You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good from evil." The devil held out that idea that if they are the fruit, they could be like God. The devil wanted them to think that God had withheld something from them. He made Adam and Eve think that they were less than perfect.

Eve resisted for a little while but in the end she gave into the temptation and fell into sin. Once Satan convinced her that God had withheld perfection from her, suddenly the fruit became much more appealing. She desired to be like God. Once she fell into sin, she knew good and evil, because she had experienced living in both ways. After she experienced living in sin, she felt great shame.

Even though Eve ate first, Adam also bears responsibility for the fall into sin. He did not show spiritual leadership in his household by standing up for God's command. Rather he just stood idly by. Adam was there the whole time. He never stopped Eve. After she ate the fruit, then Adam ate the fruit. After they had fallen into sin, they both felt the shame of their sin. Before sin they didn't even notice that they were naked. After the fall they felt shame and wanted to cover themselves.

Because of sin this world and the people who live in it are no longer perfect. The first two human beings were deceived into trying to reach for a perfection that they already had. Instead of attaining perfection, the whole creation was ruined. God tells us a little bit later in chapter three that some of the results of the fall included pain in childbirth for women, the ground was cursed, and work would now be stressful and painful. We can see some of these results of sin in all the natural disasters and catastrophes that we have in this world. We also notice the stress and pain that occurs in the workplace and at home.

Death is the biggest result of sin. After the fall, all creatures experience death. Even more significant than physical death is spiritual death. After the fall, all people are born in a sinful state. Paul reminds us in Romans 5:12, "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." The sinful heart is dead to God. Those who remain spiritually dead in this life will eventually experience eternal death in hell. Death shows how things are now imperfect.

Think about how the devil still tempts us to turn away from God in ways similar to that first temptation. The devil still questions the commands of God. He might come to us and ask, "Did God really say..." and we can insert any number

of things. “Did God really say that you always have to obey your parents, even if their rules don’t make sense?” “Did God really say that you always have to love your neighbor even if your neighbor insults you?” “Did God really say that you have to come to church? Couldn’t you be doing something better with your time?”

The devil wants us to think that God’s way to perfection is too easy. He wants us to think that we still need to do something. Has he ever convinced you that your way is better than God’s way? He tries to get us to think that God is withholding something from us with all those commands. The devil wants us to think that it is fun or exciting to live a life of sin and that we can attain perfection apart from God’s plan to make up for it. He has convinced many people that all the commands of the Bible are preventing them from living life to its fullest. Other people he has convinced that they have to keep all the laws of the Bible so that they can live perfectly and save themselves.

What a terrible thing it would be if this story had ended at verse 7. What if God had left us in our sinful condition? Think about the guilt that you feel after realizing your sinfulness. Think about how sad it would be if we had no hope of ever regaining that perfection that was lost in the fall. We would have nothing to look forward to, we would be completely lost. Fortunately God did not leave us in our condition. God showed us that our perfection is a gift from our sinless Savior. Shortly after the fall into sin, God told Adam and Eve that their salvation would come through the Messiah.

Part 2: We rely completely on Christ.

In Genesis 3:15, God gave the first promise about the Savior. He said, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” The last phrase, “You will strike his heel,” refers to the pain that the devil inflicted on Jesus. He tried to defeat the Christ. Throughout Jesus’ ministry the devil was working against him. He was pushing the Pharisees along in their plot to kill Jesus. However the devil forgot that the Christ had to suffer and die for the sins of the World. God used the devil to carry out his purpose. Through the sinful actions of the Jewish leaders, God brought about our salvation.

Jesus attained perfection and crushed the serpent’s head. The devil had taken away our perfection when he led Adam and Eve into sin, Jesus restored that perfection. Jesus “crushed the head” of Satan when he delivered us from the power of the devil.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus showed us how he was perfect by overcoming temptations. These temptations are just like the temptations that we face - temptations to not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Jesus overcame the first temptation by trusting in his Heavenly Father to take care of him rather than looking to his own power. Jesus overcame the temptation to jump from the temple because he trusted in all of God’s Word, not just one passage about God’s angels coming to protect him. He knew that it was wrong to put God to the test. Jesus overcame the last temptations easily. He would never trust in the devil. He trusted in God and served him only.

We face similar temptations. We sometimes trust in ourselves rather than God. We sometimes test God, or place our trust in someone or something else other than our God. Jesus was perfect for us by overcoming those temptations. He showed us that we live through God’s Word. He declared that we should not put our God to the test. And he displayed that we worship the Lord our God and serve him only. Jesus never gave into temptations. He earned our forgiveness and eternal life with his perfect life.

It is important that we always remember that our perfection has been given to us as a free gift from God. We never have to earn that perfection. There is nothing we could do. We could never earn it, and because of Christ we will never have to. We need a daily reminder of what our God has done for us, through the gospel message.

That wonderful gospel leads us to live a life which reflects our perfection. The perfection that Christ has given to us affects every part of our lives. Even if our health fails us, we take comfort in the fact that our souls are perfectly healthy because our sin has been removed. Our relationships with others have problems but our relationship with our Heavenly Father has been made perfect, we are his children. Our jobs can have stress and pain but these things are only temporary, when we reach our heavenly home, we will live in perfection. In this life, as we wait for Christ to give us eternal perfection, we are strengthened by the Spirit to show Christ’s perfection in every aspect of our lives. We imitate Christ’s perfect patience, humility, and love as we work and live in this imperfect world.

Conclusion

God’s perfection is not something that we have to earn. It is definitely not something that we can obtain through dishonest means. Even though the dishonest business person, lying politician, or cheating athlete may be exalted in this life, we should never think that lifestyle is worthy of imitation. Sinners may at times be considered “perfect” in the eyes of the world, but they will never be considered perfect before God through their own actions. God’s perfection is being completely sinless. Not even Adam and Eve, who were created sinless, could remain sinless. Jesus had to be perfect in our place so that he could save us. This perfection does not depend on us. We are certain that our perfection is full and complete in Christ.