

Sermon Draft

Text: Colossians 1:1–14

Sermon: “God Qualifies”

The occasion for Paul’s Letter to the Colossians was false teaching in the Church at Colossae. He shows that its error lies in its inadequate view of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The false teachers in Colossae would not direct their hearers solely to Christ and his finished work of redemption as the basis of salvation. Instead, they directed their hearers to Christ *and* the works of the Law, insisting on circumcision, dietary restrictions, and observance of the Jewish festival calendar, among other things.

Paul countered with a high Christology, declaring that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, and that through Christ alone, Christians are already perfect (1:28) and reconciled to God (1:22).

Not only were the works of the Law unnecessary additions to Christ's work, but also they were totally ineffective in producing the good works that the Law requires (2:23). Only the risen Christ, who imparts spiritual life in Baptism (2:9–12), enables Christians to rise to newness of life and to do good works (3:1–17).

God qualifies the called, for our adequacy is from Him.

Visualize a young couple bringing their first baby home from the hospital. There is no instruction manual. There are no nurses around to change diapers or to monitor vital signs. As they carry the child through the front door and place her in her crib for the first time, the truth slowly sinks in that the care of this child ultimately depends on them and on no one else. Not surprisingly, the new parents begin to feel very inadequate.

They're not alone. Surveys show that fathers and mothers of infants through teens feel ill-equipped to deal with the pressures and challenges of parenting today. Discipline, premarital sex, drug use, discussing matters of faith—these are just a few topics that many parents would prefer to avoid, and often do.

Paul knew the feeling well. He struggled with his own adequacy as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and he constantly reminded his readers, and himself, that his calling was from God. V 1 of our text: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God*, and Timothy our brother."

The Colossian Christians struggled with feelings of inadequacy. Paul referred to them as "***saints and faithful brothers in Christ***" in v 2, but they were starting to doubt the sufficiency of Christ to make them holy and faithful.

False teachers were convincing the Colossians that Christ alone was insufficient to guarantee their salvation, and they began to rely on the works of the Law for assurance. Their faith was shifting from Jesus alone for salvation to Jesus and the works of the Law for salvation. They sought to supplement the ministry of Christ with the works of the Law.

That's what we instinctively do when we feel deficient—we try to make up the deficiency ourselves. We look to our own decisions, commitments, and efforts to bring about change. Paul, however, directs us not to ourselves and to our own works but to God, who alone is sufficient for all our needs.

Paul writes: ***“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.”***

But where did that faith and love come from? Not from us.

The answer comes in vs 5–6: ***“The hope laid up for you in heaven . . . [which] you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you.”*** Note that we didn’t store up this hope for ourselves in heaven—God did! We only heard of it through the Gospel—the Gospel that came to us. We didn’t come to it. It came to us!

In v 9, Paul prays that the Colossians would be ***“filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”*** The knowledge of his will is the correct understanding of the Gospel of Christ, who alone is sufficient to guarantee our heavenly inheritance and to stimulate good works today. Look at v 10: ***“So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”***

The Christian life is the result of God filling us with the correct understanding of his will in Christ. Jesus is the vine; we are the branches. It is the nature of the branch to produce fruit, as long as it remains in the vine. This is a stark contrast with the false teaching in Colossae, which is totally impotent to produce the good works that the Law demands (2:23).

“May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy”

(v 11). Endurance and patience refer not just to steadfastness in general but specifically to enduring patiently in the one true faith, even while this faith is being challenged by the false teachers.

“Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (v 12). Paul

began by thanking God for his work among the Colossians.

Now he prays that they themselves will thank God for his work among them—qualifying them to share in the heavenly inheritance. God alone qualifies us to enter heavenly life and to meet the challenges of daily life.

All of us feel inadequate at times. We feel inadequate in the presence of others. We see the success of others, we hear others being praised, and we feel deficient. We feel like failures. But what does Scripture say about the success of others? Success isn't their doing! It's God's! Success comes from God! If our neighbor appears adequate to us, it's only because his adequacy is from God. He has no boast except in God, who alone makes him adequate to the tasks he's been given by God.

The same is true for you. Paul writes, ***“Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent”***

(2 Corinthians 3:5–6). God himself has placed us in our various callings in life. God himself has called us to be parents, grandparents, teachers, etc. not because of any ability in us but because God has called us and qualified us to serve our neighbor in whatever capacity we find ourselves.

We are keenly aware of our own imperfections and failures. Even if no one else knows our secret sins, we know them, and that still, small voice of conscience within us accuses us daily and reminds us of our moral failures and the harm we have caused others.

Our instinct tells us that we need to do something to still the accusing voice within, and there are plenty of false teachers to echo that. Like the false teachers in Colossae, these people do not view Christ and his finished work as sufficient for your salvation. You still need to do something, however small, to guarantee your place in heaven.

Some false teachers advocate acts of penance. Other false teachers advocate other self-chosen works such as praying the sinner's prayer, making a personal decision for Christ, dedicating yourself to his service, making a "faith promise" to God, and so on. In the final analysis, our adequacy before God really comes down to what you do. **This is not the teaching of the apostles.**

God's formula is not Christ and the works of the Law for salvation. Rather, it is Christ alone. Verse 13–14 make this clear:

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Our adequacy before God and man is not the result of our works, but God's alone. He alone brought us out of darkness into light. He alone cleansed us of all our sins.

When our conscience accuses us, we need to listen to another voice—the voice of Christ releasing us from our sins and drowning out the voice within. We have forgiveness, not through the Law, not through self-chosen works, but in Christ alone and in his finished work for us.

To be in Christ is to be fully and completely qualified to share in the heavenly inheritance. God does not call the qualified. God qualifies the called, for our adequacy is from Him. He alone makes us adequate to share in the inheritance of the saints in light and adequate to be the parent or grandparent, the spouse or child, the employer or employee he has called us to be.

Amen