**THE PERFECT CHURCH JCC 6/22/14**

Someone has said, if you ever find a perfect church, don’t go there, don’t attend there, don’t join that church, because as soon as you do, it won’t be perfect any more. Of course, we know that the church is made up of you and me and millions of other believers, and this building is called the church because it is the place we are able to gather together and worship the King. But really we are the Church – the Family of God, His children.

I found a satirical (sarcastic) description of the ‘perfect church’, and I thought I would share it with you.

It begins, ‘I am looking for an ideal church, **where the facilities** are always accessible, centrally located and highly visible, where there is lots of close parking, the facility is always clean (and not by me) there is a large women’s restroom, there are large, spacious well-equipped class rooms, a large kitchen and fellow-ship hall, the landscaping is well-groomed (again not by me) and the sanctuary is multipurpose but obviously a place of worship. Food and drinks can be eaten everywhere, coffee is always on, but everything is always taken care of and kept nice and neat. There are fresh flowers every meeting. If it is not like this, I will not attend, or I will complain until it reaches my standard. I am looking for the perfect church!

I am looking for the ideal church where **the schedule** is always filled during the week in case I have free time to attend or be involved, but there is never any pressure to be involved – it is just always there when I need it. Classes are available for every age, but I am never asked to teach. They care about my busy life but still offer and unending menu of activities. Sunday services are not too short, but not too long. They never start late and always get out at least five minutes early. If it were not like this, I wouldn’t go – I’m looking for the perfect church.

I am looking for the perfect church where **the music** is modern, yet traditional; energetic yet reverent; spirit-driven yet dignified; doctrinally deep yet not lyrically stuffy; completely geared towards the youth, yet appealing to the elderly; inclusive of lots of instruments yet not too showy; excellent in performance yet not perform-ish; there is lots of time given during the service for those who like to get lost in worship, but not too much time given for those who love to feast upon the Word of God. If the music does not fit these criteria, I won’t go. I am interested in finding the perfect church.

I am looking for the perfect church where **the members** are always friendly, always smile, always do the right things, always help, serve and volunteer for the things the church needs. They always reach out to me even when I don’t express my needs – they just know what I need and are always there to provide it – and they should be! After all, they are members of the ideal and perfect church! They give, they serve, they never have bad attitudes and are always Christ-like in the way they treat me. And if they are not like this, I won’t go there. I am looking for the perfect church.

I am looking for the perfect church where **the visitors** are welcome. The church I am looking for accepts everyone just as they are, but has unwavering values about what is right and what is wrong. In addition to all this, the church must be well funded (not by me) have everything is needs to minister to everyone who comes in, with whatever their needs might be, not matter how big or small, and meets all of my expectations – whatever I need from the church – but never asks the members to financially contribute to support what it does. After all, the ideal church is never just about money. And if they did start asking me for money, I wouldn’t go. I am looking for the perfect church.

And now finally, about **the Pastor**. I am looking for the perfect church where the pastor is always friendly, understanding, humorous, always available, relevant, likeable, caring and hospitable. His sermons are interesting, easy to understand, completely Biblical, enjoyable to listen to and never too long or too short – always convicting me of other peoples sins, but always accepting of me and my ‘weaknesses’. You can drop by his office any time for a visit – short or long – and he always has time for me and always gets everything done no matter how many people demand his attention – no matter what the need is, no matter how big the church becomes and not matter what is happening in his own family. He is just that good – and if he weren’t I would not go there. I am looking for the perfect church! **A final word** – I am still looking for the perfect church! I have been to quite a few, but the churches around here are far from ideal. Every pastor has finally disappointed me. The music is either okay for my kids but not for me, or okay for me but not for my kids. Some have nice facilities but they have mortgages. Most of the churches don’t have the activities we want and do not do them the way we think they should. Most of the people in the churches around here are not very nice. We have yet to find a truly friendly church. Most of them are either too dead or too crazy for our taste. They are too small, too big, too busy. too simple, too spiritual or not spiritual enough. It is frustrating and hard work in finding the ideal, perfect church, but I am sure that someday I will find one. I just don’t think it would be pleasing to the LORD if I looked for and attended anything other than the perfect church! Taken from Ken Burchard, a four-square pastor in central California.

This is meant to be funny, but it does make some interesting points. Notice that most of our concerns re: finding the perfect church, revolve around the physical world, not the spiritual. Now, what does the Bible say about the ‘Perfect Church’?

**Ephesians 4:1-3 ‘I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love. Endeavoring to keep the unity of** **the Spirit in the bond of peace.**’ Even though Paul was in jail, he still maintains that his real captor is Jesus. Has Jesus and His love captured you? Paul is saying that each of us has the responsibility **to pursue and maintain** **unity** within the body of believers. God has chosen us as Christ’s representatives here on earth – Christians – meaning ‘Christ’s one’. We must be humble, gentle, patient, understanding and peaceful in our attitudes and actions towards our brothers and sisters. Can others see Christ in you? How well are you doing as His representative?

**Colossians 3:12-14 ‘Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.’**

God’s Word is telling us that the perfect church can be a reality – it is just that our definition of what a perfect church is that is the problem. Our definition of a perfect church usually centers on programs and people that don’t measure up to our high ideal. In reality, we should be looking at ourselves and how or what it will take on our part to make the church perfect. We play the blame game, looking to pass off our responsibilities to others. Paul tells us clearly what the perfect church looks like, and **since we will never find the perfect church, let’s spend our time making the perfect church!** When the body meets together, it should be a place where everyone is loved and accepted – a welcoming and loving community of believers. It should be a place where no one stands or struggles alone. This is possible only where the love of God reigns supreme – it is His love that will hold us together, that will bind us together in fellowship in spite of the struggles of everyday life. It is His love in operation in each of our individual lives that will check and stop the selfish, hard words which separate us and stop the maturing of good fellowship. Perfect harmony is the full expression of love in our Christian community, free from harsh, bitter words and angry feelings; free from the effects and defects of immorality; free from dishonesty and free from talking wrongly about one another. I love the words of an old song we used to sing, ‘You can talk about me all you please, ‘cause I’ll talk about you down on my knees.’

**1) To have the perfect church,** we must display loving conduct as we relate to each other. **Vs. 13 ‘Forgiving one another’** – the key to forgiving others is remembering how much your heavenly Father forgave you, and forgives you daily! As you realize how great and infinite God’s loving forgiveness is, this will help you love and forgive others. As you determine to live this way day by day, your path will grow brighter and brighter until the coming of the Lord. To bear with one another means to make allowances for each other’s faults – be patient, put up with one another. Pray for each other. This is the best way to preserve and maintain good friendships. The words and actions of others may seem immature and tiresome, but be prepared and determined to endure all possible difficulty in cutting others some slack – don’t judge, condemn and write people off. God has not given up on you, so who are you to give up on others? Show mercy and in your time of need, you will receive mercy. What you sow you will reap. You show respect and support for your brother and sister as you move in love and forgiveness. You are valuing them more than your hurt and more than their faults, and the weaker, wavering member is kept safe in the flock.

**2) The perfect church is the example of loving character.** ‘Put on love’ – it is a matter of choice, a matter of our will. Choose to put off the old man and his evil nature and bad characteristics, and choose to be dressed head to toe in Jesus special clothes of humility, gentleness and patience. This list is close to the list of good character traits found in Philippians known as the fruit of the Spirit. These fruit do not come naturally or easily, and like physical fruit they cannot be forced - they grow and develop with the process of time. A loving Christian community shows mercy and concern for one another; show sensitivity and compassion for one another. Our kindness towards each other should extend benefits to each other’s needs – courtesy and kindness are seldom found in the world, and should be the trademarks of our faith. We need to be people of humility, having a modest view of ourselves. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less, and others and their needs more. Less stubbornness, less pride and less arrogance. You are not more important than everyone else. We need to show a gentle attitude and behavior to our brothers and sisters in the Lord – not rudeness and harshness. We need to be the defenders of the defenseless and those who are without rights; those who are oppressed and exploited. Our gentle spirit will tame the untamed and traumatized that are amongst us. We need to show patience for each other. We are all under construction and at different stages of development in the Lord. Patience is the emotional calm exhibited in the midst of the storm – in the face of provocation or misfortune – without complaint or irritation. It is longsuffering that endures wrong and puts up with the exasperating conduct of others rather than getting angry or getting even with others.

To live out such character traits requires real strength. It is not weakness as some may perceive. Without such attitudes towards others, no group or church will grow in love and become the ‘perfect church.’ We must truly care for each other and be willing to bury our own personal and selfish interests.

**Special note:** None of these character traits are really fully exhibited at our Sunday morning worship services where we all seem to be so loving, warm and friendly. It is relationships outside of our Sunday services that these loving traits are exemplified. To be the perfect church, all week long we must be constantly investing in building loving relationships with each other.

**What will produce this extreme loving character make over? One thing – the love of God, the love from God, and the love of His Word, His ways and His will.**

**3) The perfect church will be a reflection of the love of God.** Loving character will flow from our relationship with God. **The first part of verse 12 – ‘Since God** **chose you to be the holy people whom He loves….’** This is the foundation of a loving church. Paul is saying, ‘Since you have received Jesus, God’s gift to you – since Jesus has died for you and removed your problem of sin – since you have been set free from your sin to live a new life in Christ – since your old nature of sin has been replaced with Christ’s nature of love – now it is time to be that new creature Christ is trying to form in you.’ It requires your participation. The love of God at work in each of us will produce the unselfish, sacrificial, compassionate love we so desire to extend to those around us. So the perfect church is the place where the perfect love of God is in action, refining our interpersonal relationships and preparing us for the perfection of heaven. The only way to forgive others is to bathe in the soothing, healing bath of God’s forgiveness for you. A loving relationship with others will be the natural outflow of your love for God.

So the perfect church is found right where you are – it is created by you and me as we live in the love of God. The church is a spiritual hospital and we are all involved in the struggle to get better. A locational change is not the solution – face yourself and your issues where you are; love God and love others with His love.

 **1Corinthians 13:4-7 Life Application Bible ‘Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone, you will be loyal to him, no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him.’**