

*Colossians 1:21-23***PREFACE**

The Christian life is a delicate balance between rejoicing in what we *are*, but at the same time remembering what we *were*. The equilibrium can be lost if we lean too far in either direction.

If we spend our days wallowing in guilt and regret over what we used to be, we are effectively denying the work of Christ's atoning sacrifice in our life. Repeatedly replaying our sins, constantly wracked with guilt, we live as if we had never been redeemed, missing the joy of Christ entirely. But if we spend our days oblivious to what we used to be, forgetting it entirely, we effectively diminish the importance of Christ in our life. In the way of flesh, if we forget the *need* for Christ's atoning sacrifice, we are on our way to forgetting what He did for us, and our joy is not in Him, but in ourselves. Put succinctly, *when we forget what we once were, thus pretending we have always been what we are, we forget that what we are is not of our doing.*

In our passage this morning the apostle Paul continues his theme that Christ Jesus is all in all—that everything is indeed His doing. In this week's passage Paul describes a healthy Christian life, one in which there is a balanced blend of both: one in which the believer's joy is based not just on the pleasure of the sanctified now, but gratitude for the atonement of the past. And in that *Christ* is exalted, not ourselves.

RECONCILED

The topic is still reconciliation—our reconciliation to Father God “through the blood of [Christ's] cross.” Last week we looked at vs19-20.

Read Colossians 1:19-20.

In vs21-22 Paul presents the healthy balance of the Christian life—remembering what we once were, balanced with an acceptance of what we are now.

Read Colossians 1:21-22.

In the previous paragraph Paul's voice was third-person, impersonal. He was speaking universally and, regarding reconciliation, emphasized the restoration of “all things” to an ultimate state of unconditional surrender to the authority of Christ—that is, in the future end-times.

Now, in the paragraph before us, Paul get's personal. Note the pronouns:
And although *you* were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled *you* in His fleshly body through death, in order to present *you* before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

Now Paul is describing *them*—the Colossians—and, by extension, every individual believer. Now the reconciliation of which he speaks is *both* future and present.

Verse 21 represents one of the biggest stumbling blocks for unbelievers to come to Christ.

...you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds

Walk up to your average unbeliever on the street and ask them, "Are you hostile and engaged in evil deeds?" "Of course not," they will answer. "I'm a good person." There's the rub. It requires the convicting Holy Spirit to make us realize that this is true in every person.

Definitions (background)

alienated = *apēllotriōmenous* = from <G575> (apo) and a derivative of <G245> (allotrios); **to estrange away**, i.e. (passive and figurative) **to be non-participant** :- alienate, be alien.

They are "alienated"—not "aliens," as if that were their original condition, but "alienated," as having become so. (Maclaren)

hostile = *echthros* = from a primary **echtho** (to hate); **hateful** (passive *odious*, or active *hostile*); usually as a noun, an *adversary* (especially *Satan*) :- enemy, foe.

in mind = *tēi dianoīai* = from <G1223> (dia) and <G3563> (nous); **deep thought**, properly the faculty (*mind* or its *disposition*), by implication its exercise :- **imagination**, **mind**, **understanding**.

evil = *ponērois* = from a derivative of <G4192> (ponos); **hurtful, i.e. evil** (properly **in effect or influence**, and thus differing from <G2556> (kakos), which refers rather to *essential* character, as well as from <G4550> (sapos), which indicates *degeneracy* from original virtue); figurative *calamitous*; also (passive) *ill*, i.e. **diseased**; but especially (morally) *culpable*, i.e. **derelict, vicious, facinorous**; neuter (singular) *mischief, malice*, or (plural) *guilt*; masculine (singular) the *devil*, or (plural) *sinners* :- bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). See also <G4191> (ponerotos); [translated elsewhere in the NASB "malignant."](#)

deeds, works = *ergois* = from a primary (but obsolete) **ergo** (to work); *toil* (as an effort or occupation); by implication an *act* :- deed, doing, labour, work.

We cannot truly appreciate the nearness of Christ until we understand how far away from him we once were. We cannot truly appreciate the redemption we have in Christ until we understand our need for it.

Just as the left was offended by George Bush when he said after 9/11, "If you're not with us you are with the terrorists," the fallen world is offended by God who says, *If you are not in Me, you are against Me; if you are not in the righteousness of My Son, you have no righteousness of your own, and are thus evil.*

The world rejects God's standards, which are absolute. The standards of this fallen world are a tapestry of grays—soft, mushy, ever-changing grays—while the standards of God are clearly and distinctly black and white. If you are not His, you have been alienated from Him, you actively hate Him, and that inner hate blossoms into outward evil. Here is how Paul describes it to Titus.

Read Titus 1:15-16.

The standard for “good” is not man’s good, but God’s. And by that standard, the best of man is little more than a cesspool. As Wayne Grudem points out, this does not mean that unbelievers are never kind to a neighbor, do not love their children, never accomplish any “good” things in their life. It means that they remain spiritually bankrupt. **Positionally** they are as far from God as an ax murderer. Until we apprehend this we cannot appreciate the remarkable contrast between v21 and v22.

v22

Read v22.

Sidebar: I could find no one willing to explain to me why the KJVs include “yet now He has reconciled” at the end of v21, instead of placing it at the beginning of v22 as in all other translations. It does not affect the meaning or order, just placement.

Now we have the other side—and the second half of the sentence is dependent on the first: If the first is not true, then there is no need for the second. But if the first *is* true, the second is not just necessary, but a mind-blowing declaration of the depth of God’s solution to man’s sin. The abysmal depth of the unbeliever’s depravity is matched—and exceeded—by the crowning heights of the believer’s righteousness in Christ.

Here we have evidence for the generous, overwhelming love of God. His answer to our confession is not grudging, cautious, doubting. No, He hears our confession and opens the floodgates of His love. In Christ we are not just forgiven, we are

reconciled

apokatallasso = to reconcile fully, or be restored fully to man’s earlier relationship with God [this is the effective opposite of “alienated” in v21]

If God stopped here in His response it would be sufficiently generous, sufficiently forgiving. We were alienated, but now He has restored the relationship once lost in The Garden. But no, our heavenly Father continues, declaring us

holy

hagios = from **hagos** (an *awful* thing) [compare <G53> (hagnos), <H2282> (chag)]; **sacred** (physical **pure, moral blameless** or **religious, ceremony consecrated**) :- (most) holy (one, thing), **saint**.

blameless

amomous = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G3470> (momos); **unblemished** (literal or figurative) :- **without blame** (blemish, fault, spot), **faultless**, unblameable. [hearkens back to the required ceremonial purity of the sacrificial animals]

Read 1 Peter 1:18-19. (in NIV)

beyond reproach

anenkletos (an-eng’-klay-tos) = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and a derivative of <G1458> (egkaleo); **unaccused**, i.e. (by implication) **irreproachable** :- **blameless**; **not to be called to account**.

Let's back up a moment and bring out some other aspects of this verse.

He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death,

Just as with the apparent redundancy in v19—"all the fullness"—the apparent redundancy of "fleshly body" (*somati tes sarkos*—lit., "body of flesh") should be a red flag for us. Of course the body is flesh; why say both?

Again we have to return to the Gnostic belief that all flesh is evil. For this reason they placed no value on the work of Christ in a physical body, believing instead that reconciliation would be accomplished only by spiritual (angelic, *aeons*) beings. (Vaughan) So, arguing against that Gnostic position, Paul emphasizes that Jesus Christ, in a very real, tangible, fleshy body accomplished the necessary reconciliation for man.

Douglas J. Moo suggests another reason Paul may have employed the redundant term here: to emphasize the true, bodily suffering of the Lord in His payment for our reconciliation.

in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach

Some say this picture of perfection describes the believer only in his glorified state, not on earth. But I side with those who say it describes the believer both then and now.

In contrast to the picture in v21 of the unbeliever—even though by earthly standards "good"—being *positionally* evil in God's eyes, v22 gives us a picture of the believer being *positionally* holy and beyond reproach in God's eyes. Right now God looks at us and sees not our mistakes, our sin, but the blood of His Son, as in v20:
to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross

But this can also refer to that great day when we are literally—no longer positionally but now *actually*—presented to Him "holy and blameless and beyond reproach." Here is an illustration of this mystery.

You have a horrible, life-threatening disease. The doctor administers an injection of a life-saving serum. The next day, even the following week you feel just as bad as before, suffering the same debilitating symptoms of the disease. You call the doctor and complain that nothing has changed. He assures you that everything is proceeding just fine; the serum just takes a long time to do its work. He says, "The serum is working. You are healed and will not die. But it will take a long time before the symptoms are gone for good."

Sidebar: Although we can get lost in all the indistinct pronouns in vs21-22 (He, His, Him), unsure which member of the Godhead is doing what, I think this is a beautiful and encouraging picture of the Lord Jesus presenting each believer to the Father as one reconciled, holy, blameless, beyond reproach. That is, before the throne of God the Father we are presented by our sponsor, our Advocate: Jesus—the one who shed His blood to make it possible. ["Father, this is David. He is Mine."]

v23

Verse 23 presents us with a potentially unnerving “if.”

Read Colossians 1:22-23.

Sidebar: The jury is split on whether it should be “*the* faith” (KJVs, NASB, ESV) or “*your* faith” (NIV)—a difference, but a minor one that we will not address today.

There are several interesting things going on in this verse, but I believe the one most critical—the one we must be sure to understand correctly before we leave today—is the “if.”

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard,

Douglas Moo says that this ties back to the word “present” in v22. That is, *we will be presented before the Father holy, blameless, and beyond reproach if we continue in the faith.* On the surface that sounds very much like the possibility we can lose our faith—that we can be a true believer, but if we don’t tough it out to the end we can lose that faith we began with.

For help with the “if” I went no further than one of Pastor Jeremy’s earlier sermons. On February 7, 2010 he pinch-hitted for Pastor Gary, who had been ill the previous week. He spoke on *The Nature of Saving Faith*, and much of that message was spent defining “the perseverance of saving faith.” The thrust of his point can be summarized in this statement he made:

It is not you *become* a Christian if you make it to the end; you *are* a Christian if you make it to the end.

F. F. Bruce puts it this way:

If the gospel teaches the final perseverance of the saints, it teaches at the same time that the saints are those who finally persevere—in Christ. Continuance is the test of reality.

No less than the apostle Paul, the writer to the Hebrews, and Jesus Himself make this point. Jesus mentioned it in the parable of the sower.

Read Matthew 13:5-6.

The Lord Himself supplies the commentary on this.

Read Matthew 13:20-21.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul adds some specifics to what he wrote to the Colossians.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.

Note the verb. Paul does not say in v2, “by which also you *will be* saved, if you hold fast,” but “by which also you *are* saved, if you hold fast.” It says the same thing if we turn it around. *If you hold fast [this means that] you are saved.* Implied, If you do not hold fast, you believed in vain.

The one who truly belongs to Christ *will be* "firmly established," "steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel."

firmly established

firmly established^{nasb}, **grounded**^{kjvs}, **established**^{niv}, **stable**^{esv} = *themelios* (them-el-ee-ah'-oh) = from <G2310> (themelios); **to lay a basis for**, i.e. (literal) **erect**, or (figurative) **consolidate** :- (lay the) found (-ation), ground, settle; [laying the foundation of a building; used to describe our foundation on the rock in Matthew 7]

True faith that perseveres is built upon the firm, immovable foundation of the gospel. The "immovable" part comes from the next word.

steadfast

steadfast^{nasb,nkjv,esv}, **settled**^{kjv}, **firm**^{niv} = *hedraios* = from a derivative of **hezomai** (to sit); **sedentary**, i.e. (by implication) **immovable** :- settled, steadfast.

This word could be used in the sense of a building, but probably a better way to understand it in this context is in the sense of *unwavering*. James doesn't use this word, but he gives us the idea with what he writes in his first chapter.

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8)

not moved away from

Paul includes this, telling the Colossians, *Please do not let those heretical teachers around you move you away from the **truth** of the gospel, the **hope** you have in the gospel. Stand firm on God's word in Christ!*

Here is the picture of the balanced, healthy Christian life established on the firm foundation of God's word in Christ.

NO ABF NEXT WEEK (Easter)