

Turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1. We are going to continue the letter from Paul to the Church in Colossae. I keep reminding us that this is a letter, because I think that otherwise we forget that we are peering in on an actual letter, written by an actual man, to an actual church. Over the years many things have been added to help us to read and organize our Bibles, from chapters and verses, to heading, to cross references, and interesting little antidotes in boxes on the side. None of these things are bad, and often time they are very helpful, but we can all too often start to believe that they were part of the original text. In some cases they can obscure or confuse the reality of what is being said. Today is an example of that.

Today we are going to look at verses 21-23. If you look in your Bible, you will see that they are included with the verses that we read last week under a heading. That heading says either:

1. The preeminence of Christ
2. The Supremacy of the Son of God
3. The Incomparable Christ

Or something of that nature. The implication is that this section is here to proclaim specifically the person of Jesus. Last week we saw that the poem of Jesus Christ was very much for that purpose. In those six verses we saw a complete view of our Savior. We saw how He was fully sovereign in Creation, that He upholds the world, and that He alone worked toward reconciliation of all things. These verses stand alone as a bold declaration that He is over all and all we need.

But our text today has a different aim. And while your Bible combines these verses with the previous under a single heading, this section has a different purpose than the previous one. The poem of last week gave us the character and work of Christ, this section helps us to understand how His finished work is

applied to our lives. It gives us a personal understanding of the absolute truth. What we read last week told us THIS IS TRUE, and this week we get, THIS IS WHY THIS IS TRUE FOR YOU. Let's get to it, Colossians, chapter 1.21-23:

And you, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

We see the change in focus right off the bat, as Paul declares AND YOU. In other words these great claims about the overwhelming magnitude of God are not just to blind you in the glare of His overwhelming light. These truths are not just to say that God - who has little to nothing to do with you - sure is powerful and awesome. Instead, tying last to this one, the definition of Jesus defines who we are. So Jesus as the creator, sustainer, and redeemer is not just defining of Him. It is also to say that He created YOU, He is intricately involved in every part of YOUR life, and His grace is the one and only reason YOU are one of His people.

The Nature of Sin

Paul starts by describing what a life without Jesus looks like. Paul says: *alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.* The nature of the sinful life, then, is described as having 3 characteristics:

1. ALIENATED
2. HOSTILE IN MIND
3. DOING EVIL DEEDS

So first he says we are alienated. If you do a word study here, we see that the word translated alienated here means more than just separate. Because if we

look at our separation from God as nothing more than the way we were created, it allows us to be the victims of some unfair treatment. It's one of those excuses that we hear all the time, and most likely some of us have used: *I was born that way. It is just who I am. I can't help it.*

But to really understand what is going on in this relationship between us and God, the word estranged (which is used in some translations) fits better. See we were not simply created to be angry, fed up, bitter people. The sinful state of man was not part of the created order. Instead, God created us in relationship with Him to worship Him. But humanity decided that we were better off without Him. We decided that while relationship with God was good, something else was better. We see this in the action of Adam and Eve, and we see this continual rejection of God in each of our lives. We were created for relationship, but we have become estranged from God as the consequences for our sinful actions. So it isn't just that we ARE separate, but that we are separate because of OUR actions. We have gotten what we desire. We have sought fulfillment apart from God, and God allowed us to have it.

These desires of finding ourselves apart from God is what makes people hostile in mind. Hostility toward God is not something that most people would admit to. There are some hardened atheists who may raise their hand when asked if they were actually antagonistic toward God, but most people would simply claim indifference. Rather than thinking of themselves as angry, bitter and opposed to God, they would say they were apathetic. They don't hate God, they simply don't care about Him. They are just out to live their life.

But there is no category of neutral people in the Bible. There is no mention of people who are nice and easy going and generally good. There are two parties, those who honor God and those who honor themselves. And so there is no such thing as apathy toward God. Not worshipping Him means that you are His enemy. **Romans 1** gives us an idea of how this works. **V.21-23** say:

For although they knew God, they did not honor God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men and animals and creeping things.

So they know God, they know Him from living in the world that He created and experience His divine fingerprints of common grace within everything He has made (PSALM 19). Yet they do not give Him the honor that He deserves as creator. They give God's glory to something else. And their minds are polluted, they became hostile to God, and this hostility leads to evil deeds. Sinful actions result from a sinful heart. We sin, when we become futile in our thinking and exchange the glory of the immortal God for some earthly happiness, some momentary bliss.

And what we see here is that growing in hostility toward God works in the same circular way that growing in the knowledge of God does...just in the opposite direction. So we said that the knowledge of God leads to bearing fruit and good works, which leads us to a greater knowledge of God. Here we see that hostility of the mind leads us to evil deeds, which leads to more hostility. And as we said that the circle grows as you love and know God more and doing His will becomes easier, the circle of hostility grows to. The more you worship creation, the more easily you will give into the flesh, the more you will love other things more than you love God. Or as another pastor puts it:

Wrong thinking leads to vice, vice to further mental corruption, so that the mind, still not totally ignorant of God's standards, finds itself applauding evil.

So you decide that God is out holding out on you, and you decide that you are going to show Him by replacing Him with something he made, which I must say

is a very mature way for us to stick it to Him. And then we abuse that thing... these are the evil deeds. We drink too much alcohol, look at naked pictures of people that aren't our wives, we imagine how great it would be to live that other person's life. We act on our hostility. But this makes us feel even more like God is holding out on us. And so we get sucked into the spiral of death.

You don't just wake up one day and decide to be a suicide bomber. It happens because you have allowed your bitterness and anger to grow, you have fed it with lies. You have bought into the fact that that something else is so important that you are going to believe it, act on it, and eventually die for it. And this is how the Bible describes the life of every person (sans Jesus) who has ever lived.

But that is not all of us today. Paul says you *who were once*, meaning there is a way to get out of that circle. There is a way past all of this.

The Nature of Reconciliation

he has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him

He has reconciled us in His body of flesh by His death. What we see here is that Jesus acted as the sacrifice for sins. The sacrificial system was instituted by God in the OT. The sin offering or atonement sacrifice was made to appease the wrath of God toward sin. The people were required to bring forward an animal to die as the result of their sin. Blood had to be shed to pay the debt. So sin does more than just mess up relationship with God and put us into a spiral of death, it is also an offense that requires a punishment. To sin against God doesn't just make Him mad, it is a crime. The punishment for this felony is death (the wages of sin is death).

Our separation from God is relational, but it is also judicial. As the Judge of all things, He cannot simply allow our misdeeds to go unpunished. They must be

dealt with. We are the offenders, and God is the offended. We acted against Him, and now have a debt that can only be paid by death. Someone needs to pay it, either us, through receiving the wrath of God, eternally separated from Him, or ...some other way, that really as the one in control only He can devise.

So He does. And so the Judge comes down to be the justifier. Jesus comes in a body of flesh, to die. His blood was shed to pay our debt. The cross acts as the only possible connection between a Holy God and human sin.

This wasn't simply so that we could get some fringe benefit. It was so that we could presented Holy and Blamless and above reproach before Him. What is interesting here is the phrase BEFORE HIM. Too often our concern is how we look in the presence of other sinful men, Christian or not, and yet we are assured that in God's eyes, through Jesus, we are pure. I so often think of my salvation in the ways laid out above, we are saved, spared, and forgiven. But how beautiful is it to realize that we are also presented beautiful before our Lord. If you are His this means that all of your junk, the crap that you fret about and stress over will be gone. All the sin that brings you shame and guilt here on earth...GONE.

We look back to what Jesus reconciled fully at the cross (judicial), we exist in relationship with Jesus in the present (relational) and we look forward to being in His presence for eternity (eternal). This is what we receive in Jesus Christ.

BUT there is a caveat. There is a condition. Paul tells us:

if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

This is troubling as most of us are pretty sure that once you are saved you can't lose your faith. RIGHT? I mean, if that is true, why does Paul say this?

Paul is reminding us that not only can people not be saved apart from Jesus, but we can't even be sure of who is really His and who isn't. There are plenty of people who claim the name of Jesus Christ who are not His. From God's point of view, no one is ever lost, but from the human standpoint, people seem to be coming and going all the time. The test that Paul gives us for faith is perseverance. Continuing in the faith is the identifier for those who belong to God. What we see in the life of a true Christian is that they remain rooted.

Jesus refers to those who do not persevere in the parable of the Sower. In it, we are told of the seeds that fall of rocky soil. And in His explanation, He tells them:

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful

So there are two things that are addressed here as pulling people away: lack of root and a focus on the things of this world. These are the same thing that Paul is talking about here. This can be somewhat terrifying as it forces us to wonder, will I continue? Honestly, will I persevere? Am I one of His? This is not the right question to ask. The better question is, how can I continue?

What we see here in the words that Paul uses stable and steadfast, or established and firm, have a construction quality to it. He is not talking about holding on for dear life, but building a foundation that can not be shaken, that will not shift. What shall we use to build this foundation? How can we create a structure which will help us not to falter as Satan and his workers use the care and concerns of this world in an attempt to move us from the place of faith?

Remember how you were saved

There is a reason that it feels like Paul, and I, just keep repeating the facts of the gospel. We must begin with Jesus, of whom it is said *the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone*. We must never forget the gospel. It's judicial, relational, and eternal consequences. Knowing what Jesus has done, what He is doing, and what He will fulfill in His return gives us the hope to continue. A foundation built on anything other than Him is a foundation that will not make it through the storms of life.

Remember what you once were

The weapon that Satan uses to entice us away from Jesus is our trust and belief in the things of this world. He promises, just as He did to Jesus in the desert, to give us so much, knowing that it will not satisfy. We sometimes forget how helpless we were without Jesus. Like the Israelites in the desert wishing they were back in Egypt, it really was great back there getting beaten. We forget. And we look longingly back at the things we have left behind, believing that though they didn't fulfill you then and haven't fulfilled anyone else, that somehow you found the loophole. And remember, that circle of death will get you. People don't decide to just sleep with someone who isn't their wife. It's a path, and it begins by stepping away from the place of faith.

Remember that God has placed you here

This might seem like a strange thing to say in light of what we are talking about. But to remember that Jesus has placed you here is to acknowledge that you are right where He wants you. He has placed you in a job, city, and family to do His work. Other places might seem better or more important. Other jobs might seem more missional. Be content in His place. Love your family, do your job well, tell everyone you know about what Jesus has done to reconcile you, and come to church to encourage and support others and to be encouraged and supported.

When we are discontent in what God has given us, we become discontent with God. We become hostile in mind, and we get sucked back into the vortex.

If you have never stepped out of the spiral of hostility into the place of faith, I am just going to ask you: what are you waiting for? You are alienated, hostile, and evil...and yet Jesus welcomes you.

For those of you living in the place of faith, I pray that you live every moment of every day in the recognition of the new life that you have received from Christ. Remember what you have been saved from. Remembering where you are going to. Remembering that His grace was sufficient for everything that you have done, and everything you will ever do.

And as we come together to celebrate in Communion the fact that *Jesus reconciled in His body of flesh by His death*, I urge you to take a few moments to ask Him:

What part of my old life am I still holding on to?