

May 11, 2008

Colossians 1:21-23

Alright – good morning. It is good to be back with you today. Grab your Bibles and let's pick up where we left off in Colossians chapter 1 a couple of weeks ago. Colossians chapter 1 – we looked at verses 19 & 20 last time we were here. It's been a while since then and our text today very much builds on what Paul wrote there, so let me take a minute and refresh our situation. Look at verses 19 & 20. TEXT

We spent some time talking about what all it means, but the first thing we need to remember here is that Jesus is God. In Him alone all the divine powers and attributes dwell absolutely and wholly – in Jesus Christ alone. And the reason why God was pleased to have His fullness dwell in Jesus is that He was also pleased through Jesus to reconcile to Himself all things by making peace through His blood shed on the cross. There had to be peace because sin – our sin – all the way back to Adam & Eve has destroyed the harmony between Creator & Creation – everything is affected. Basically we are at war with God. And when Paul says God reconciled all things to Himself, we talked about how the word “reconcile” means to “change completely.” God through Jesus changed something completely. What was it? God didn't change. Man didn't change. What God in Jesus changed was the situation between God & Creation. In Jesus, God dealt judiciously with sin. What that means is shown by how He did it. He reconciled all things through Christ's blood shed on the cross. God as judge accepted the death of Jesus on the cross as the punishment – as the payment – that was due – that was the cost of sin. So you put all that together and what we see happening in verses 19-20 is what Paul wrote in Philippians 2:9-11. Remember? READ TEXT.

That there is coming a day when all creation will be remade & restored to the glory God intended and on that same day, every knee will bow in acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord. And in that sense – the war will be over – peace is restored by the victory of Jesus Christ over sin. On that day – it will be a forced peace – it will be undeniable – it will be too late. So we also saw a couple of weeks ago that that reconciliation that Jesus accomplished for all creation can be a personal reality in the present. On a personal level right now, reconciliation is a reorientation where Jesus is supreme in everything in me. It means that by faith I believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be. It means by faith I accept that his death on the cross is the only way for me to be at peace with the God who made me. It means by faith I make Jesus the center of my world – where my life more and more revolves around Him, His will, His glory. Remember all that? I hope so – because it leads to what is next. Let's move forward to verses 21-23. TEXT

Alright – there is so much in these verses, I hope we can cover it all today. Let's take a minute for some explanation of what Paul means and why he says it and then look to see what it means for us today. First of all – realize that **Paul is talking to BELIEVERS** here. He's moved from a focus on all of creation – how God has accomplished the future reconciliation of all things through the death of Jesus Christ – to a focus on those who have appropriated that reconciliation on a personal basis right now – those who have put their faith solely in those three things we just talked about. Now he says to them – once you were alienated from God.

Alienated to us probably means estranged, cut off, separated. But it actually has a stronger impact to it – it means **literally to be OWNED by another – which of course is what the Bible teaches about the condition of man OUTSIDE of Christ** – Paul says we are dead in sin, Jesus says we are children of our father the devil, Peter says we are slaves to whatever has mastered us – sin specifically.

But not only are we alienated from God, this is great, Paul says we are **enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. Read that as us being hostile in our disposition towards God by**

our own fault – you were alienated from God because you hated God. You say why did we hate God? Verse 21 says because of our evil behavior. Not only is this logical, it is straight out of Scripture. Turn to **John 3:19-20**. Just a few verses after the famous John 3:16, Jesus says:

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

See what happens? Men love darkness rather than light because of what? Because our deeds are evil. **You SIN. You love your sin. God rebukes you in your sin. You hate GOD.** You are alienated – cut off by your own evil behavior. **Romans 8:7** says the mind of sinful man is hostile to God. If this is true – if men are alienated from God because we are hostile – because we love our sin – then if you're going to reconcile them, you're going to have to do something about sin. That's the root of the problem – so reconciliation – changing the situation – reconciliation as a doctrine must deal with the sin of man.

And that's what God did. Listen to **2 Cor 5:21**

“God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

God dealt with sin and the place – the time – the how He did that was at the cross. In verse 20 Paul said, “through his blood, shed on the cross.” In verse 22, he hits it even harder: “But now He – God – has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death...” What I want you to get is that something real happened on the cross. Jesus died for a reason. It wasn't like God was just wondering, “hmm, how can I show man that I really love him? Oh I know – why don't I kill my Son.” No – something real happened on that cross. God was reconciling us to Himself. God was dealing with sin so the relationship between God and His creation could change.

And then Paul tells us why. He already told us why on the universal level – in verse 19-20 God reconciled all things to himself to make peace – to establish the end of the war – to exalt Jesus as God over all things. But here we see why God offers that reconciliation on a personal level in the present for us as individuals. Why did Christ die? Why does God reconcile us? Look at what Paul writes: to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

Wow. I mean if you are a believer this morning, you have just got to latch onto the hope that is in this verse. **God sent Christ to die for you to establish this NEW RELATIONSHIP with Him so that when you stand before Him, you will stand before Him holy, without blemish, and free from accusation.**

Holy again has to do with being set apart. It means to be SEPARATE from sin. It has to do with our relationship with Him – that because of our faith union with Jesus Christ, **when God looks at us, He sees the righteousness of JESUS.** Again from **2 Corinthians 5:21** – He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Without blemish is a direct reference to the Old Testament when a sacrificial animal was brought to the priest to be offered to God it had to be without blemish – no imperfections – no deformity – no unwholesomeness. Brought into this situation, it **refers to our CHARACTER – ourselves – basically that we are blameless** – whole – perfect in our character.

Free from accusation goes beyond without blemish – beyond our own character to the fact that **no one can bring a CHARGE against us. It has to do with our relationship to others** in light of the fact that Satan is called the accuser of the brothers – that he is forever before God bringing accusations against us but this reconciliation means when we stand before God, none of those charges will stick against those whom Christ has reconciled.

So we have our relationship to God, our relationship with our own character, and our relationship to others – holy, without blemish, free from accusation. The reason that reconciliation is offered on a

personal basis by the physical body of Christ through death is that we might have this position – this condition before God when we stand before Him. But Paul doesn't stop there. Keep reading. He says this will be true if – **if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.** This is huge don't miss this. **He's not saying that we will be reconciled to God** when we stand before Him **IF we continue in the faith day to day right now but rather that if we are reconciled to God, we WILL continue in the faith day to day.** We have talked about this time after time and we will continue to hammer it home.

Jesus in the parable of the soils deals with this. You know how it goes – some of the seed being thrown by the farmer falls upon rocky soil and it spring up and grows but it has no root and ends up dying and when Jesus explains this in **Luke 8:13** he says these are people who hear the truth – hear the gospel – hear about his offer of reconciliation to God and respond with joy and excitement and seem to grow for a time but when it gets hard – when it becomes challenging – when they are tested, they bail – they fall away and in doing so show they were never saved – were never reconciled in the first place.

In **John 8:31** the Bible says: "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."

John in talking about apostates – those who had claimed to be Christians but abandoned the truth – in **1 Jn 2:19** "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."

And this is not an "us" problem – like someone else's bailing is because of something we as believers did. It happened to Jesus as well. In **John 6:66** after a very difficult to accept teaching, John explains that many of the so-called disciples who had been following Jesus turned away and no longer followed him. By so doing, they gave evidence that they had never truly been His disciples in the first place.

People there is this dominant idea out there that being a Christian is nothing more than praying a prayer so you have a home in heaven when you die. And because of that there will be so many people who think they are saved who are going to be shocked when they stand before God. Because reconciliation means – listen – **the evidence of reconciliation is that you are becoming day by day BECAUSE of Christ what you will be on the last day IN Christ.** To make it real simple using the same terminology, continuing in the faith practically is you and me becoming more holy – set apart from sin, more blemish free – perfected in our character, more free from accusation – innocent with regards to others – day by day because we continue in our faith – the faith remember that says Jesus is who He says He is, that He is my peace with God, that my life is centered on Him.

And then in verse 23 Paul says – that is the gospel you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. That first part is a purposeful hyperbole to show that this is the gospel for everyone – it is universal – it is the only answer for all – and therefore the scope of our mission is all – everywhere – everyone. And then Paul's admission that that task is his life. And we thank God for using Paul that through him we have – for example – this very letter of Colossians.

Now let me real quick point out just three principles that I believe God wants each of us to apply – to take home out of this incredible statement today.

First of all – back in verse 21 Paul said that we were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. We looked at how Jesus said that men love darkness when their deeds are evil and don't want to come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. That principle continues even after we are saved – even after we are reconciled to God. **The Christian life is a process of**

becoming in PRACTICE what we are in position before God because of Jesus. It takes time and effort on our part. Which again is why Paul says “if you continue in your faith.” Which means there are going to be times when we don’t like the truth. When you read God’s Word – when you hear someone explaining what God has said – there will be times when you don’t like it. Not because it isn’t true – not because what you are hearing is wrong – but because it is shining a light onto a part of your life or your mind or your emotions that you don’t want drug into the light. So **when you find yourself REJECTING something from God’s Word – when you find yourself tuning out – turning off what someone is saying – realize that you probably have a habit in your life that you don’t want God to JUDGE.** And no matter how you try and argue or ignore or rationalize, when the truth is there it boils down to the fact that we love our sin more than we love Jesus. And when we love our sin, we don’t want anyone – especially God – to know about it. And we don’t want to have to face the light. Recognize the symptoms of this principle. And when you see it in you – run towards the light.

Secondly I want to take you back to this “if you continue” statement. I want you to really get your brain around the fact that this is true. There is no such thing as a lifelong backslidden believer. Salvation – faith in Jesus – either changes your life from that point on or it isn’t salvation – and it isn’t Jesus. But I also want you to understand that when Paul says this here in Colossians, it is not a threat. It is not a scare tactic. It isn’t even a test. It is worded as an encouragement. The Greek in which it is written indicates not some uncertain prospect but a necessary condition AND an almost certain assumption. In other words, Paul is at the same time insistent and confident – they must continue in their faith and he is sure that they will. Everybody struggles. Every Christian is in process and makes bad calls. But understand that **Jesus does not FAIL. If you have put your faith in Him,** you will end up holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from accusation. And **He will accomplish verse 22 in PARTNERSHIP with you day by day.** Praise God for His grace!

Thirdly – and this is really where I want you to listen this morning. After explaining where they were (they were enemies in their minds because of their evil behavior) – what God has done to change things (he has reconciled them by Christ’s physical body through death) – and now where they are headed (to be presented holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation); after explaining the gospel – Paul says that now he is a servant of that truth. And yes we are so thankful for Paul and how God used him. But I want you to understand that what he is talking about is an integral part of what reconciliation is all about.

Let me show you what I mean, turn to **2 Corinthians 5** again. We looked at verse 21 earlier a couple of times, but I want you to go back with me to verse 17 through 21. TEXT

Folks look at me – it is not just Paul who is a servant of this truth – it isn’t just missionaries – it isn’t just pastors and preachers and vocational church workers – it is every single person who by faith is reconciled to God. **God gives you not only the message of reconciliation** (so you can be saved) – **but the MINISTRY of reconciliation** (so others can be saved). It is through you that anyone else can hear and respond to this truth.

You say “yeah Brett we know – we have to live different – you tell us that every week.” People it is so much more. Listen – the people in your life – do they know you go to church or do they know you are a Christian?

Do they know you are a good person or do they know that you love Jesus?

Do they know you are a nice, down to earth guy or do they know that you have the only answer for what is going to kill them and send them to hell?

Being different is not enough. If you’re watching American Idol, maybe you’re like me and this really came home to you this season. Brooke White – one of the contestants that got voted off about two weeks ago – this whole season has been a beacon of hope and love and kindness and humility. If

you watch the whole season you saw here interviews about how she doesn't do R movies, doesn't drink, had her first kiss when she got married. You see her care for the other contestants and actually hurt when she gets to stay on and they get voted off. You see her choose songs with lyrics that aren't questionable. You see her wear her cross every week around her neck. And maybe you're like me – you assumed she knew Jesus – you assumed she must be a Christian – she's got to know Jesus. And then you read an article that came out last week that says Brooke White is a mormon. All that stuff does not matter because unless she puts all her faith in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross alone as what can reconcile her to the God who made her Brooke White is going to hell.

Folks **Christians don't have the market cornered on outward MORALITY. But we are the only ones who can offer the TRUTH – Christ crucified so we can be reconciled so we can be holy in God's sight.**

That's what we are ambassadors about. We take this reconciliation by name to them. We have got to be **missional** in our lives – that doesn't mean you pack up and go to Africa or China – though it might – it means that **you see every person in your life as someone who is at war with God and going to hell unless you SHOW AND TELL them what it is to be at peace with God through the blood of Jesus Christ.**

Life in Christ means we share the truth that defines our lives one step at a time – every chance we get – because we say with Paul – this gospel that we've heard, to it I, Brett, I, Scott, I, Nicole, I your name, have become a servant. How can they hear if someone doesn't tell them?