

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Remember What You Were" (Colossians 1:21-22)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 01/17/2010

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Introduction

In our last message, we finished our study of the glorious hymn to the Lord Jesus Christ that we find in Colossians chapter one, verses fifteen through twenty. Today we're moving on to verses 21 and 22.

If you've been following this series from the beginning, you know that I've reminded you several times that the overall theme of the book of Colossians is the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ – the fact that He has first place in everything. And perhaps if you've been taking notes, or you've downloaded the message transcripts from our website, you may recall that the first chapter of Colossians deals with the preeminence of Christ *declared*, chapter two deals with the preeminence of Christ *defended*, and the chapters three and four deal with the preeminence of Christ *demonstrated*.

So here in chapter one, we're moving toward the end of the Apostle Paul's great declaration of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Soon he's going to be moving into a defense of the preeminence of Christ against false teaching. But right now, Paul is still in the process of declaring the preeminence of Christ in a very powerful way.

And you also may recall that there are subdivisions within Paul's great declaration here in chapter one. Let me just mention them briefly as we begin today. First, in verses 1 through 14, we found that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Gospel. Second, in verses 15 through 17, we found that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Creation.

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And third, in verses 18 through 23, we found that Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Church. That is the section we are in right now. And fourthly, we're going to come to a final section, beginning in verse 24 and extending down through verse 29, where we will find that Paul declares that Jesus Christ is preeminent in genuine ministry.

As we begin, let me read the verses on which we're going to focus our attention today, Colossians 1:21 and 22 –

“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.”

Now, in these verses, Paul is continuing to tell the Colossian believers about the preeminence of Christ in the church. And here once again, he makes it very personal, just as he has at several other points in chapter one. He's reminding the Colossians believers about four things, and as we study this passage today, Paul is reminding us as well. He's saying, "If you are a Christian, if you're trusting in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, remember these four things:

First, Christian, remember what you once were: You were alienated from God, and you were an enemy of God.

Second, Christian, remember what you now are: You have been reconciled to God the Father, even though you are still living in a sinful world.

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Thirdly, Christian, remember what you will be: Christ is going to present you perfect and faultless and above reproach, on the Last Day.

And fourthly, Christian, remember how the change came about: Jesus Christ did it all, by taking on human flesh and dying for you.

Now today, I'm going to begin addressing each of these four points, and today we're going to focus on the first two. We're going to focus on what has happened to you, and what is presently true of you, if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. You once were an alien from God and the enemy of God. You are now reconciled to God, and you are now positionally holy and blameless before Him. And that came about because of the once-for-all death of the Lord Jesus Christ, God in human flesh.

And then in our next message we're going to focus on the future aspect of these verses. What is true for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ *positionally* today – the fact that we are, as verse 22 says, "holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight" – that is going to be true *in its culmination* when we are raised together in incorruptible bodies, and we are made like Christ for all eternity.

Jesus Christ will bring that reconciliation to its culmination by presenting you holy, blameless, and above reproach in God's sight before the throne of glory. And that will be your state for all eternity – free not only from the power of sin, and the guilt of sin, and the bondage of sin, but also from the very presence of sin, and from the very possibility of sin, forever and ever.

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Remember What You Once Were: Alienated and Enemies

So we begin with Paul's first reminder, in verse 21. Christian, remember what you once were: "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works." You were once alienated from God, and you were an enemy of God.

What does it mean to be alienated from God? The force of the original language tells us several things.

First, it tells us that you were alienated from God from the day you were born. You came *into* this world alienated from God. And that is because you came into this world bearing the sin nature that you inherited from your parents, which they inherited from their parents, and so on, and so on, all the way back to Adam. Adam's sin made us all sinners. We come into this world as sinners by nature.

Second, to be alienated from God means to be cut off from fellowship with God, to be excluded from any relationship with God. We have no share in the life of God. And that is what has happened to the entire human race because our first parents sinned.

Third, to be alienated from God places us in spiritual darkness. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 4:18 – that the unsaved have "their understanding darkened, alienated from the life of God," that is, without a share in the life of God.

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Fourth, this word in the original language does not speak merely of passive alienation, but it speaks of active hostility. It is an active word in the original language. Man in his fallen state is actively hostile toward God.

Fifth, the original language of this verse tells us that this state of alienation is a permanent state, unless something is done to change it.

And verse 21 says that in our natural, fallen state we are not only alienated from God, we are also the enemies of God. What does it mean to be an enemy of God? Well, Paul is very specific. He says, you were "enemies in your mind," verse 21. Once again, this speaks of an active enmity against God, an active hostility toward God. The mind is the seat, or the focal point, of this enmity against God.

This word also speaks of being enemies in our understanding of God. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God," – he does not accept them as true – "for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them," – the natural man alienated and at enmity with God is incapable of knowing and understand them – "because they are spiritually discerned." There needs to be a radical change in you, an essential change in you, in order for you to be able to understand God and His Word.

Paul speaks of this in Ephesians chapter four, beginning at verse seventeen:

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having

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their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But Paul tells the believers, it is not to be so with you:

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Becoming a Christian involves that kind of radical change. A God-wrought change. A change of mind that is brought about by God alone. "You hath He made alive," Paul says in Ephesians chapter two – "you who were dead in trespasses and sins."

In 1 Corinthians 2:12 Paul says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."

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And in 2 Corinthians 4:6 – "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

1 John 5:20 – "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

"Therefore," Peter says in 1 Peter 1:13-14, "gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance."

And Paul spoke of this earlier here in Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse nine: "For this reason we also, since the day we heard [of your faith in Christ, we], do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power."

Remember What You Once Manifested: Evil Works

That is the nature of the radical change. But before you had this understanding, before God through Christ dealt with the alienation, before God through Christ dealt with the enmity that is in the heart of every unbeliever, before that happened, Paul

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says, you manifested your alienation and enmity “by wicked works,” or more literally, “in your evil works.”

The hostility of the unbeliever toward God – that alienation, that enemy state of mind – naturally manifests itself in evil works, in evil deeds. And the force of the original language here is that these works are by nature evil. They are unavoidably evil. They are completely empty of any ability to please God. That is why Isaiah, in chapter 64, verse 6, says that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” in God’s sight. They are worthless before God. They earn us no merit or favor with God, because at their core, they are evil.

1 John 1:8-9 tells us that in order to come to Christ we must come confessing our sins. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [But] If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” And that word “confess” in the original literally means, “to say the same thing” – to say the same thing about our sin that God says about our sin, to see our evil the way God sees it.

And what is it that God says about our sin? Romans 3:22-23 – “For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 1:18 – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Isaiah 59, verse 2: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

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So Paul's first point, in Colossians 1:21-22, is this: Christian, remember what you once were. You were alienated from God, and you were an enemy of God, and that alienation and enemy state of mind manifested themselves in wicked works.

Remember What You Are Now: Reconciled to God

So now we come to Paul's second point in these verses: Christian, remember what you are now. You have been reconciled to God the Father, even though you are still living in a sinful world.

Paul makes a forceful transition in verse 21: "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, *yet now* He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death..."

"Yet now" Christ has reconciled you. Those two words in the original Greek are very emphatic. The idea is this: Once this was true of you – you were aliens, you were enemies, you were in bondage to wicked works. "Yet now" – everything has changed. For you, because you are in Christ, the old order of things is no longer in effect. Everything has changed. You have ceased to be an alien. You have ceased to be an enemy. You have ceased to be in bondage to wickedness. All because of the grace of God, through Jesus Christ. You were once this way, "yet now" everything has changed. It's a very decisive way of saying it in the original language. A complete and total change of status and standing in the sight of God.

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And the single Greek word that is translated in the three English words "He has reconciled" is a form of that very special word we looked at last time, in verse 20.

We saw last time that the work that Jesus Christ has done, the work that He alone could do, is the work of reconciliation. What does that mean? Well we saw that this word in the original language is a very interesting one. The force of this word for reconciliation in the original language is also highly emphatic. It means "to change something backward and upward into its original condition." "To change something backward and upward into its original condition."

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have been changed backward and upward into the original condition of man in relation to God before the Fall. Before they sinned, our first parents were not aliens from God. They weren't enemies of God. No, they walked and talked with God. They had fellowship with God. And they obeyed God. They were not in bondage to do wicked works.

What does it mean for man to be reconciled to God? What it means is this: Man has become the enemy of God through sin, warfare has broken out, and peace must be restored. Paul says that Christ has brought this reconciliation, this changing of man and the entire created order backward and upward into their original condition, in this way: "having made peace through the blood of His cross."

We saw last time that the shedding of blood was necessary to bring about peace. Christ has brought about peace once for all. And this peace is not a matter of mere feelings. It is a matter of objective fact.

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And the idea of the word here in the original language is that this peace, this reconciliation, is a complete, total, and final reconciliation. Nothing has been left out, there are no loose ends, there is nothing left to chance, and there is nothing left to be done. Your salvation is absolutely, one hundred percent complete in Christ.

So first, Paul says, Christian, remember what you once were: You were alienated from God, and you were an enemy of God. Second, Paul says, remember what you now are: You have been reconciled to God.

And then Paul says, Christian, remember how this great change came about. Jesus Christ did it all. Jesus did it by taking on human flesh, and dying for you. "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death."

Well in our next message, we're going to pick up at this point. We're going to complete our focus on the past and present aspects of these two verses, and then we're going to move on to the future aspect. What is going to be true about you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, for all eternity because of God's gift of reconciliation through Christ?

We're going to see that something indescribably glorious awaits you. Jesus Christ is going to bring this work of reconciliation to its culmination by presenting you holy, blameless, and above reproach in God's sight, and that is how you are going to live for all eternity. You are going to be free not only from the power of sin, the guilt

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of sin, and the bondage of sin – you are going to be free from the very presence of sin, and free from any possibility of sin, forever and forever.

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