

Colossians 1:19-23 Steve Harden 9/6/20

It is good to see you here on this Labor Day weekend. I'm glad you made it! You can be turning in your Bibles to Colossians 1. Charlie, thank you so much. As always, thank you. While you're turning to Colossians 1 let me just encourage you, if I may, to look seriously at your schedule and your ability to come on Sundays at 3:45. Just come a little bit early for Gospel in Life. I know this will be a great time for you just to come. We're going to do all the things that we need to do to make it safe for you, so please consider. 3:45 on Sunday afternoons this fall. Colossians 1:19-23.

¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

²¹And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³if 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." May God add a blessing to the reading of His word.

Over the last several weeks, we've seen that Paul is writing this letter to the church at Colossae to combat the false teachers who were misleading this church, teaching heresies, and we've also seen that his tactic was one that was pretty interesting. His tactic was to encourage these Colossians to think and to reason about what they knew to be true about Jesus. What do you know to be true about Jesus? This letter is a beautiful declaration about who Jesus is and what He has done, the person and work of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I'm reminded that the Christian life always begins with knowledge. It always begins with knowledge. No one is made right with a God about whom they know nothing. A man must learn about Him and His message to the world. That message is what we call the gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ. A person must have knowledge of the truth of the gospel. He must learn the bad news to understand the good news of the gospel.

I don't go into jewelry stores very often but when I do, I always am impressed by the way they display their merchandise. They're always on black velvet displays with lights shining down on the diamonds to make them sparkle and to show them in their best light. There's nothing different about the diamonds but having the black background and the light shining on them makes them sparkle. In much the same way, when we understand our condition before God without Christ, and then we see Christ brilliantly displayed, then our hearts can sing before Him. Knowledge, understanding is critical. The theme of our text this evening is this reconciliation between God and man and how this reconciliation is made. So we'll look at it in three ways in true preacher-ese I guess: the need for reconciliation, the agent of reconciliation and the results of reconciliation. That just sounds so preachy, doesn't it? That's the way it is. That's the way it's coming. The need, the agent, and the results.

First of all, the need, the need for reconciliation. Verses 20 and 21: “²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross,” Pay attention here, “²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.” This is that black velvet we talked about. The description Paul uses here to describe men without Jesus is pretty strong. He uses a threefold description: alienated, hostile in mind and doing evil deeds. The picture is bleak. You see, prior to God’s call to follow Christ, both inside and outside we are antagonistic toward Him. He makes it clear that a man without Jesus is not merely confused about God or apathetic about God, he hates God and a man without Jesus will go to all lengths either to deny His existence or His authority in their lives, one or both. So, let’s look at these three things.

We see our condition without God is alienated. I think the best description of this is found in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians 2:12: “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Did you hear the severity of what Paul writes? You are estranged, apart, separated, without hope. And then in 4:18 of Ephesians, he describes them as darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. Heart hardened leading to ignorance which leads to alienation from God. Totally separate. Totally apart from who God is, is man’s condition without God. Alienated.

But then we move on to our attitude toward God. First, the condition without God, now our attitude toward God. Our attitude toward Him is hostile in mind. Another translation might be hating in understanding. There are those who consider themselves spiritual people. You see them all over social media. They consider themselves spiritual people, even some would fly under the banner of Christianity and yet everything screams being hostile in attitude toward God. You see, they like the idea of God but they hate the God of the Bible. Instead of the God of the Bible, they want to make up gods of their own imagination. Gods that look a lot like them. A god that doesn’t really ask anything from them that they don’t want to do. A phrase that should heighten your awareness, is when somebody says, “You know, I like to think about God like this ___,” or “my god would not do such a thing.” Let those just be warning flags because they are the ones who have a ‘god’ and yet not the God of the Bible. Those who inwardly grind their teeth when God’s authoritative word speaks against and demands that they forego or denounce what they want to do. When God would dare exercise His authority as the God of the universe against their own wills. Most men’s problem with God is not knowledge but the willful defiance of what they do know, the desire to live according to my own terms, not wanting anyone, not even God to tell me what to do. It’s an authority issue.

The example that comes to my mind immediately is the Jewish authorities in Jesus’ day. What do you know to be true about those Pharisees and Sadducees? The Sanhedrin? What do you know to be true? Well, they were very religious! They lived according to their terms and their interpretations of God’s word. They felt like they had given their lives in spiritual devotion. These guys were well versed, better versed in the Old Testament than probably any one of us. They were exacting in their obedience in the areas that they wanted to obey. Yet, the telltale sign was when presented with the God of the universe, they hated Him and they killed Him. Jesus dared say, “I am your authority” and they hated Him for it. Hostility of mind is that internal disposition that shakes its fist at God and says, “Not Thy will, but mine be done.”

Our condition? Alienated from God. Our attitude is hostility to God and our actions before God is simply doing evil deeds. Our actions are simply outward expressions of what is

going on, on the inside. What is inside, comes out. I've found what Jonathan Edwards said helpful when he describes this separation from God and summarizes the tension between God and men in five points. And I just want to read these points without comment. He writes:

“- By nature, we have a low esteem of God. We count Him unworthy of our love or fear.

- We prefer to keep a distance from God. We have no natural inclination to seek His presence in prayer.
- Our wills are opposed to the law of God. We are not loyal subjects of His sovereign rule.
- We are enemies against God in our affections. Our souls have a seed of malice against God. We are quick to blaspheme and to rage against Him.
- We are enemies in practice. We walk in a way that is contrary to Him.”

Paul writes we are alienated, hostile in mind, and doers of evil. Theologians over the years have called it depravity.

But let's move on, let's move to the agent of reconciliation. Let's look at verse 20: “and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” Through the death of Jesus, all things are reconciled. Now we're not going to talk about it tonight, just due to time, but this 'all things,' the verb tense of this shows that it is *all* things not just human beings. All things will be reconciled in all of creation. But tonight, we're focusing on humankind. The question comes to mind, if you're thinking about this, how does Jesus' death bring about the reconciliation with men who are alienated, hostile in mind, and doers of evil deeds? How does Jesus' death bring about that reconciliation? Think! Reason! We need knowledge! Why did God have to send His Son? Having sent Him, why did He have to die? Why didn't God just bake cookies and save the world? Why not? Why couldn't He just do that? What is this whole dying on a cross thing? What difference does that make? How does that reconcile God and man and how does Jesus' death 2,000 years ago on a bloody cross do anything for me 2,000 years later? How do these things work? If I would ask you this and come down and give you the mic, what would you say? Do you have an answer? We need to! We need to have an answer!

The answer is a theological term called penal substitution. Here's what it's about. If God is holy and righteous and good, and if He is the ultimate judge of the universe, He must judge sin wherever He finds it. He must condemn the sinner who commits it. Every sin that has ever been committed, for all of history, must be paid for or God is not just, holy, and righteous. Every sin. So how does God forgive me, a sinner, and at the same time remain holy? That's the dilemma. How can He remain a righteous judge and yet forgive me, a sinner? The answer is simple but given a thousand lifetimes we will not get to the extent of its beauty. Every sin that has ever been committed will be on one of two places. It will either be borne on the shoulders of the sinner, or on Jesus' shoulders. Every sin that has ever been committed in all of history will be paid for, either on mine or on Jesus' shoulders. Either way, sin is punished, and God's justice remains intact. For those of us who have faith that Jesus' death was enough to satisfy God's justice, and that my sin is transferred onto Jesus' shoulders, if I believe that and put my faith and trust in His death alone, I no longer bear the weight of my sin.

We cannot overlook this aspect of the cross. God is just and yet still forgives sinners. If you remove penal substitution from what happened on that day, there is no explanation to why a death 2,000 years ago makes any difference at all. You see, the most important thing that is at stake here is the character and reputation of God, Himself. Is God just? Is God righteous? Is He virtuous? Does He have integrity and truth? My friend, God will not forfeit His righteousness for

any reason, even His love. His righteousness never takes a back seat to His love. He is righteous and He is love and the only way these two things come together is on the cross of Jesus Christ. At the same time, He is the just and the justifier.

So we see the need for reconciliation, we see the agent of reconciliation, but now, what about the results of reconciliation? Look at verses 22 and 23: “²² 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, ²³ 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.” Oh, my friends, I want you to understand that you are holy, blameless and above reproach. I don’t know about you, but it sure doesn’t feel that way sometimes. Ever. It doesn’t feel that way, but I’m telling you tonight it is true if you are a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. You see, to understand how we can be holy, blameless and righteous is to understand the difference between our position and our experience. There are two very different things. In that day, when we stand before God and God asks us, what do we have to say for ourselves? There is one answer and one alone that we can give and enter into His heaven. When He asks us, what do we have to say for ourselves, we will say: “I am as righteous as your Son, Jesus Christ.” Now that sounds arrogant, doesn’t it? That sounds delusional! Doesn’t it? But my friend, that is the only answer that will allow us to enter into His kingdom.

The theological term is imputed righteousness. Now, when we became followers of Jesus, two very specific things happened. We spoke earlier in this message about how our sin was laid upon Jesus so that He bore the penalty of our sins. Theologians say that our sin was imputed to Jesus. It was given to Him as if He had committed those sins and He paid the penalty as if those sins were His own. That’s penal substitution. That’s only one half of the equation. The other half of the equation is that at the very same time His righteousness was given to me. His righteousness was imputed to me, given to me, as if His righteousness was my own. As Jesus bore my guilt before God, so I will bear His righteousness before God. I will stand before God on that day, in the righteousness of Jesus Christ because it has been given to me, it has been imputed to me as if it were my own. And it is only the righteousness of Jesus that will be satisfactory on that day. That is my position. I stand in the righteousness of Jesus. That’s position.

Now what about experience? Well, verse 23: “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel,” the way translators translated this it sounds like, “Well if you can just hold on until you die, then you’ll be in.” But that’s not what Paul is saying. Paul is assuming that we continue in the faith. He is saying that faith that is present will have present results. Now, think about the corollary that we’ve been talking about. You see, the nature of true conversion is that when you are reconciled to God the effect of that reconciliation shows up in your actions. We talked earlier about the man without Christ who was what? Alienated? Hostile in mind and doers of evil deeds? Now he says, you who are now righteous, you who have experienced this reconciliation, this coming together so you are no longer enemies of God, you are no longer alienated but you are one of the family. You are not hostile in mind, but you are united in Christ. You are righteous in Him. Therefore, your deeds will show that. What is in the inside will come out on the outside. The evidence of all this that is true is that you are different than you were before. The power that raised Jesus from the dead raises His followers to new life. “All things have passed away, behold, all things have become new.” We are new creatures in Christ. Old thinking patterns have been replaced. Old behaviors have become new. Old opinions, old personality traits, old attitudes are beginning to fade away

because Jesus died for us. He has begun a good work. He has begun accomplishing the purpose of transforming us into the image of His Son, transforming us into the image of Jesus.

Now look, we are accepted without any regard to our works, period. Our works are nothing before God but filthy rags. We are accepted in Jesus without regard to our works, but those who are declared righteous will begin to show these good works in their life because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. You can't tell me that the Holy Spirit is within somebody and it never shows. We are accepted because of the presence of Jesus Christ and we will become more and more like Him until the day He calls us home. Theologians call it the perseverance or preservation of the saints. Once we are His own, we will be transformed into His image.

I know this is a lot tonight, but please understand that knowledge and understanding of what has truly occurred in salvation will reap really great benefits for you. Matthew 11:29, Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." Jesus, Himself, will teach you these things. To accept the yoke of being a disciple of Jesus means being committed to a lifetime of learning about Jesus and from Jesus. I'm not talking about a stale, lifeless, egg headed approach to Christianity, but a vibrant one that emphasizes loving the Lord with all your heart as well as with all your mind. Do you want to have a greater sense of His presence in your life? Who doesn't? Do you want to have a deeper, richer walk with Him? In the words of R. C. Sproul, "Burning hearts are not nourished by empty heads." The truth of God is the fuel that creates the fire in the heart. Knowledge precedes intimacy. It is impossible to grow in Christlikeness if you don't know anything about Jesus, if you don't know what He's like and what He's done on your behalf and why it matters. I pray that the Holy Spirit may give you a hunger to know Him and in knowing Him you may be overwhelmed with the heart of Jesus, let's pray.

Father, help us to understand what has occurred in us and for us and through us. May we ponder together the righteousness of God and the forgiveness of sin, how God can be at the same time just and the justifier. Give us an understanding of Your great love for us, who would give us Your own righteousness as if it were our own. And I pray, Father, that You would continue to transform us into the image of Your Son as You have promised. We have so far to go. Make us like Jesus, I pray. In His name, Amen.