

Let's get started and look at Colossians 1:15-23. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Now it's going to turn to you now, because we've been talking about nothing but Jesus and His deity so far. Jesus is not a good man, He is not a good teacher, He is not a rabbi and He is not a prophet. His teaching and Scripture are clear that He views Himself as God in the flesh and that the Old Testament points to Him and the New Testament points back towards Him and the gospels are a testimony to His deity. So you can't skate by with, "He's a good moral teacher who had some things that He said that would probably serve us well if we obeyed Him." Your problem with that is literally the entire Bible. So you can't call yourself a Christian and then land at this weird spot where you don't think He's God. If that's where you're landing, you're not a believer in Christ. If you're saying, "I'm a Christian," but you don't believe Jesus is God, you are not a Christian. You're not a Christian in any semblance of the historical or biblical definition of that word. You have created a new meaning. You're like a hip-hop artist. You'll take a word and make it mean whatever you want it to mean. There's nothing wrong with that, but that's what you're doing.

So let's get into you now after the great unpacking of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Verse 21, "And you, who once were alienated. . ." I want to stop there and explain why we're alienated. In the end we're alienated from God, and that ends up breaking off some relationships we have, sometimes with ourselves, sometimes with those closest to us and sometimes that alienates us from the whole world. The Bible is going to teach us that everything that is created was not created so that our enjoyment of creation would terminate on creation, but rather everything that exists exists to point beyond itself to something greater than itself, namely its Creator. Now the Bible teaches that you and I prefer creation to the Creator, therefore we get stuck in the cul-de-sac of stupidity most of our lives chasing things that do not satisfy us, have never satisfied us and never have any hope of satisfying us, but we continue to pursue them anyway. So although we've had gadgets, relationships and all these things that the world says, "This is what satisfies you," although we had those things, we've tasted them, at least the first fruits of those things, they didn't satisfy. So here's the lie. Here's the demonic, wicked, evil lie that most buy into. More of what we already possess that does not satisfy us is somehow going to bring us joy and happiness. That's the cul-de-sac of stupidity. "I have this, and it doesn't work. More of what doesn't work might work." I know it's funny, but it's sad in another because this is where a bulk of humanity is stuck, just driving around it over and over again. You can take anything that's been created and you can put it in this game and this is what happens. Men get it and it doesn't satisfy them, women get it and it doesn't satisfy them, so they begin to pretend that more of what doesn't work will somehow work. And this is what alienation means. We are alienated from God because, instead of running to Him, we just want His stuff and we think that His stuff will somehow fulfill us when the Scriptures clearly say that His stuff was given to you so that You might worship Him. So all those things are good things. None of those things are intrinsically evil. That's where I think historic Christendom began to err. They began to teach as though these things are evil instead of the fact that we don't see through the lenses that you should see that these things should create worship. Like food should create worship. Wine should create worship. Marriage should create worship. Children should create worship and sanctification all at the same time. All of that is bound up in pointing us to and moving us towards the God of the universe who alone satisfies.

Let's keep going. "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind. . ." So we're alienated, which means we're never satisfied because we're stuck in the cul-de-sac of stupidity. What ends up happening when we're alienated from God and continue to try to get from something from creation that creation cannot give us, we begin to grow hostile in mind. Simply put, that means someone has to be blamed for our frustration in being stuck in the cul-de-sac. And so we begin to build hostility in mind. So we look for someone to blame for our unhappiness. We begin to say, "That's my wife's fault. That's my job's fault. That's my children's fault." And we will begin to look for someone to blame for the frustration that's always birthed when you're stuck in the cul-de-sac.

Now look at what happens next. "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, . . ." I'll continue to unpack it. We're alienated, we're stuck in the cul-de-sac and we've bought into the lie that what we need is more of what we already possess that has not satisfied us. That leads us to a hostility of a blaming of those who are usually closest to us for our unhappiness and our lack of fulfillment, which then leads to evil deeds. This is how evil deeds show up on the radar. They don't just come out of nowhere. They come from alienation, a growing hostility of mind to blame, and that blame has us acting out, usually towards those closest to us.

I'll unpack a couple of scenarios. If in our view, the reason we don't walk in the fullness of life is because of our wife or because our husband, you will then act out your wife or husband. So maybe it's that she hasn't taken care of herself physically like you think she should, so you become hostile towards that. Maybe it's that she has these little nuances that she does that you just can't stand anymore. Maybe you thought they were cute when you were dating but you could train them out of her once you got married and it just fell apart very quickly for you. Or maybe he's just not as romantic as your friend's husband. Maybe he doesn't just give you the type of attention that other men give you when you dress like a 7th grade girl who hadn't been taught proper attire. So you get stuck in this little game and you end up being a junior high kid in a grown up body chasing a mythical creature. Because your wife or husband was never given to you so that they might complete you (thank you Jerry Maguire), but rather they were given to you so you would see your own imperfections and remember and know you need a Savior.

But maybe it's not your spouse you blame. Maybe it's your children. Maybe your children aren't the athletes you thought they should be. Maybe they aren't as smart as you think they could be. One of the things you see in the suburbs all the time is most of us don't want kids; we want grown up ten-year-olds who act like forty-year-olds who have already matured. So we will step away from our God-given responsibility to pour into and to point them towards a Savior by discipling, encouraging, loving and shaping them. And instead, we want Pujols or Aikman, and we really give away what God has asked us to do and we lash out at our children. What you reveal about yourself in that moment is that you hate you. You hate you, and you begin to project on your kids the lack of mercy that you have for you. This is a horrible game that you'll watch at almost every t-ball field and very baseball field in this community over the next couple of months. You watch a guy who is just screaming and freaking out because his eleven-year-old son missed a ball or because he struck out. All you need to think is, "They hate themselves" and pray for them. Because their self worth is wrapped up in how their eleven-year-old plays a game. How sad for the eleven-year-old, but it's even sadder still for the man who still wants glory from his son.

Maybe it's not your spouse, maybe it's not your children, maybe it's your parents. Maybe you're not happy because your parents were failures. And I don't want to take anything away from it. Maybe they were abusive, maybe they were wicked, maybe they weren't around or maybe you endured hell at a level that I can't unpack in detail here on the stage. That may very well be true. I don't want to take anything away from the weight of that, the hurt of that and the pain of that. But your response to that is not on your parents; it's on you. And some of you are walking in a great deal of bitterness because you don't want to let it go, because you want to hate them. Some of your parents have become believers. Some of your parents have apologized. And you don't want to forgive them, you don't want to let go, but you want to hold on to that

hate because for whatever reason it keeps you warm. So you go, "If my parent's were just this, if they would have just done this, if they wouldn't have done this, then I would not be stuck in the cul-de-sac of stupidity." No, you're choosing to turn left over and over again like a NASCAR driver. That's on you. That's not on your folks. I don't want to take away from their evil. They might have very well been evil, but you're the one who is deciding to work it out like you're working it out.

Maybe it's your work. Maybe you don't get the credit you deserve. Maybe you don't get the respect that you deserve at work. Maybe if they would just listen to you. Maybe everybody else in the office is a moron and you're the only one who sees everything as it is. If they would just listen to you, it would be a trillion dollar company, but as it is, they're laying people off. Okay, work was not given to us by God so that we might find our purpose at work. Your purpose is not going to be found at work. Most of you do menial tasks and in the end you're going to die and very few people from work are going to come to your funeral unless you die early. But if you retire and are gone for ten or fifteen years, nobody from work is probably coming to your funeral, and they will plug someone else into your place and they will forget about you as soon as you're gone. Now I know in your head you don't even think about that. You like to go there and pretend that that's not your reality. You like to pretend that when you leave, they're going to put your name on the building, but the fact that you work in a cube probably reveals that that's not true. The fact that you work in a work station, which is probably a closet somewhere in the office, reveals that's probably not the case. But you can continue to buy that lie if you want, but here's the truth and here's what Ecclesiastes tries to unpack over and over again. You're going to die, and within a generation, no one will care. Do you think about your grandparents in such a way that you got up today and went, "Thank God for my grandparents. I would not be here if it weren't for them. Thank God for their faith that lead to my parents' faith that lead to my faith. Thank God for the legacy that was left with it." You don't do that. So that's you in fifty year, forty years, twenty years, ten years. You're forgotten, you're gone and you're an occasional picture that someone comes across and goes, "Who's that?" "Oh, that's my grandfather." And that's how you're remembered. There will be no building named after you. Happy Easter.

I'll do one more. Another one is God. God is to blame for you being stuck in the cul-de-sac of stupidity. He hasn't done this or He hasn't done that, so you begin to blame God. So you'll avoid church until someone pesters the mess out of you and invites you to one, you will avoid deep community and you have formulated intellectual systems in your mind to deny His deity while being too much of a coward to question your own belief system with tenacity. So God gets put in the dock and you go, "We'll see if that's true," but you won't put what you believe that goes opposite of that in any sort of intellectual framework at all. In the end, you're a coward who goes, "I'm not going to believe in God. So here's why I'm not going to believe in God. Instead I'm going to believe in this." And you won't put "this," whatever it is, your own mind, secularism, humanism or whatever you want to put your faith in apart from God, you won't put that in the dock and judge it with the tenacity that you're judging God. I love you, but you're a coward, an intellectual coward. So alienation leads to hostility of mind that then leads to evil deeds. This is how it flows.

But thank God the text doesn't stop there. So let's look at verse 21. "And you, who once were 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." So He has reconciled you to God and removed that alienation that lead to hostility of mind that lead to evil deeds. You see, another problem that plagues Evangelicals is they're stuck over here in "evil deeds," and it's like mowing your lawn and mowing over the weeds. Your lawn looks good for just a couple of days before the weeds sprout back up. So you've got two days a week where you're like, "Man, the yard looks good. We've really taken good care of the yard this year." And then all the weeds pop back up. When you deal with simply evil deeds, all you're doing is mowing over the weeds. So you might have a day or two, a week or two that you look good, you're doing well and you get to say, "Hey, things are going well for me." But until you deal with alienation (which you cannot deal with), blame and frustration are always going to be benchmarks in your mental and spiritual life. So the Scriptures say that Christ in His flesh, by His death, reconciles you to God. So here's why this sentence is complex. In his flesh, in

the incarnation, God in the flesh comes and lives a perfect, spotless, blameless, above reproach life. He does not sin. There is no sin in Him. He comes in the flesh, lives a righteous life, dies on the cross and is resurrected. And then this is the gospel of the God of the universe. He takes Him who knew no sin and makes Him sin on the cross so that you and I might become His righteousness. So here's the great exchange. Christ gets your hostile mind and your evil deeds and pays for them in full, and you get His righteousness, His spotlessness and become above reproach before God. You don't get that by any act of your own, but by an act of God Almighty. That's the good news. The good news is not that if you clean yourself up, God will like you. It's not the balanced scales of, "Does my good outweigh my bad?" All that is the cul-de-sac of stupidity. Your hope and my hope is tied in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that our hostility and alienation are removed from us by Jesus Christ and we are now reconciled to God. So now the root is then solved, which should then lead to peace of mind that then should lead to good deeds. So now we've got it fixed from the root up and not from the branches down, which never works.

But the text isn't done with us. In fact, it's about to turn mean on us again. It doesn't really turn mean on us; it will either bring a great deal of comfort or a great deal of fear. So let's start back in verse 21. "And you, who once were 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." Now this will either be very comforting or it will create what I'll call the good kind of fear. This says you are reconciled if you are stable, which is a word strength, which simply means if you find your strength not in your wealth, your health, not in the environment in which you can control things, but rather you find your strength in Him and Him alone. What's actually in your heart will soon be revealed. You're going to get sick, and you're going to have dark moments, dark years, dark months and dark weeks. It's a human absolute. It's going to happen to you. So when life presses you like that, you're going to reveal where you find strength. Either you find strength in your ability to have enough money to pay for whatever you want to pay for or to be healthy and control your environment through weight lifting and spinach or stretching out your hamstrings and riding your bike or doing yoga and breathing correctly. You're either looking for your strength there or you're going to find it in God. Now I'm not saying that these things are intrinsically evil; I'm telling you that they're in the cul-de-sac. So if you use them for something they weren't created for, they're going to betray you. For example, I was probably in the best shape of my life Thanksgiving morning. I just came back from staff retreat where we had our big flag football tournament. My team got to the finals again and lost. My team is historically the Buffalo Bills of the flag tournament. We just keep getting there and losing. I was coming off being in the best shape of my life when I got up one morning, poured a cup of coffee, had a seizure and then week later found out I have malignant brain cancer. Pilates, weight lifting, good nutrition, although they're good and wise and I think you should pursue them, betrayed me. Because those things were to point outside of themselves, not to themselves.

So are you stable and find your strength in God? Are you steadfast? Where's your security? Where are you putting your security? Some of you are religiously exhausted and some of you left the church a long time ago because you were religiously exhausted because despite the fact that the gospels say Christ saves you, for some reason you thought you saved you. So you continually busied yourself with a thousand different religious activities, all probably hiding secret sin. So you were busying yourself with religious activity, all the while having secret sin at home, when you were by yourself all alone, you had a way of acting, a way of thinking that was inconsistent with what you would do at church. So instead of finding your security in the gospel, you began to find your security in your ability to master external Christianity, which is the cul-de-sac of stupidity on steroids. It's the equivalent of hide-n-go-seek with three year old. It's not difficult to find my son when he hides. He simply lays on the floor and closes his eyes. It's not complex. So when you get into this lie, when you play a little game as though God doesn't see you in front of your computer, God doesn't see you flirting with someone who's not your spouse, God doesn't see you when you're out on the weekends and no one else is around, if you're pretending that, that is an absurd and silly thing.

And this is what He's saying here. "If you continue stable, if you continue steadfast and if you don't waver and shift from the hope of the gospel. . ." So you are reconciled if you don't shift back into a works-based mentality, if you don't shift back in a, "I can save myself," if you don't shift back into a, "I don't need Jesus to save me." A there are a lot of people who believe, "Oh, I was bad because there were these behaviors, and now I don't do those behavior anymore, so God and I are good." Well who paid for that? Who took care of that? "It doesn't need to be taken care of." If God's holy, it needs to be taken care of. Because if God just lets it go, He's unjust. He's a wicked God if He looks at your sin and goes, "Meh, I don't care." He makes light of His own name, He makes light of His own holiness and He makes light of His own power if he does that. No judge in America could get away with that. "Yeah, you've committed crimes before, but as long as you promise you won't do anymore in the future, you're free to go." This would be a shift away from the gospel and into some false hope. This gets off of the path of sanctification and puts you back in the cul-de-sac.

Now I want to make something very, very clear here and then I want to hopefully create a bit of good fear. This text is not teaching that you can lose your salvation. Salvation belongs to God. So if God saves you, He can't lose you. You cannot lose your salvation. The Bible is unbelievably clear about this. And some people like to go to Hebrews 6 and talk about that. We did Hebrews 6 here. If you want to know why I don't think that teaches what some people say it teaches, simply download the sermon on Hebrews 6 in the archives. That text is in no way teaching that you can lose your salvation. The Bible does not teach that you can lose your salvation. You're not going to be able to slip through the hands of God. The question then is not, "Can you lose your salvation?" but rather, "Were you ever truly converted by the gospel of Jesus Christ?" Because some of you think you're Christians because you were confirmed when you were eleven, and some of you think you're Christians because were baptized after RA camp in 1972. This text is saying that it there's never been any change, if there's never been any transformation, if you're not stable, if you're not finding your strength in Him, if you're shifting, I'm not saying you're not believes, but I'm saying there is enough evidence for you to have some concern. There is enough evidence for you to have some doubt. I'm sorry. I told you I didn't want to pander to you and wanted to be real honest with you. There is enough evidence to question whether or not you're truly converted and truly know the Lord. To say, "I know the magnificent God of the universe" but to be unmoved by that is absurd. So if you're a someone who rarely comes to church, if you're someone who comes to church every Sunday but there is not in you a love for God, a desire to seek Him and be obedient to Him, if there is not in you an understanding that God saved you and you don't save you, so that works are held in check, then I'm telling you be afraid because the Bible tells you to be afraid and concerned. Hebrews is clear that you should be anxious if you have not entered His rest. And you're not a believer just because you're a Texan. I just want to throw that in. just because you were born in this state doesn't make you a believer, just because your parents were believers doesn't make you believers and just because you were baptized when you were a kid does not make you a believer. There has to be a heart change or it's not there. And since it's a heart change and not an external action change, you're completely dependent on Go to save you. You cannot save yourself. You can control your external actions, but you can't change your roots and alienation would remain. So you need Him.

So if this true about you and you don't know what to do, if right now you're going, "Man, maybe I'm not a believer," if the light came on for the first time, just let me plead with you here. We don't give long altar calls. We won't give one here today. You repeating a prayer after me sounds a little bit more like witchcraft than it does Christianity. It's like an incantation. "Say these words after me and God will do for you." So here's what I want you to do. If this is you and you don't know, plug in, begin to do life in the Christian community, begin to walk with other believers, identify those who love Him, who you see loving Him, who live that marked different life, who are stable, who are steadfast, who have not wavered in their hope of the gospel and just get around them. Maybe that means on Wednesday night you come to prayer meeting at the Village for the first time and just watch the people of God pray and pray with us. Maybe that means you join a home group. Maybe it means that your little step is that you just start attending church on a regular basis so you can get some clarity. Maybe you go home today and read the book of John. Maybe you pray simply while you're seated, "I know I'm not a believer. Save me." Maybe God is doing a saving work in your heart today. How awesome would

that be on Easter? Last Easter we had a young woman at the church who had just been doing as I'm talking about and praying and hanging out but wasn't a believer. She knew there was a God but wasn't sure who He was. And as we were leaving, she caught Josh Patterson and just said, "Man, I felt God stirring in me and moving in my heart, but I didn't want to get saved on Easter. How cliché is that? I don't want to go out like this. I'll wait till next week." But when God draws, He draws, and she asked the Lord to reign in her life that morning and we baptized her a few weeks later. So maybe that's you this year. Maybe you've been hanging out with us for a while. Maybe this is the first time you've come here and have never heard the gospel articulated like this. Man, this is the God of the universe. He does desire to reconcile you from alienation. And from there, everything starts to fall into order. But if you miss that and try to get everything in order, it's the cul-de-sac where you're looping around trying to get more of what you already have that's not working. And for the record, some of your relationships are all banged up because you're alienated from God and putting more pressure on those relationships than there is supposed to be on there. You're wanting your husband to save you, you're wanting your wife to save you, you're wanting your children to save you when they can't bear the weight of that. They don't possess the tools to do that. That's found in Christ and Christ alone. So this is my hope for you. If it's not at this church, I pray that it's at a church that preaches the gospel to you. You can go to all sorts of different styles. I know stylistically we're not going to be for everyone. I love you very much. I pray that you'll hear. And even that act of hearing is on the Lord and not on me or not on you, so that no man would boast. So my prayer all week has been that He would draw you to Himself

Let me pray for us. "Father, I thank You for these men and women. I thank You for the opportunity to hear that You reconcile us to You in Jesus Christ from our alienation and from that reconciliation our mind changes, and from that mind change our actions change. But we are desperately and wholly in need of You. So we thank You and love You. I pray that we think on this and wrestle with this. If we are believers, I pray that we be reminded of how good and gracious you've been to us despite us. The great exchange of our hostility of mind and evil deeds for Your holiness and blamelessness is hard to even fathom. So I pray You just let it settle in our hearts real deeply. We love You. If we're not believers, we just confess right now that maybe we want to learn more about You or maybe we want to know You altogether. Help us. We are doomed without You. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

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