

## Colossians (Part 2) – A Division Destroyed

Kyle Worley – August 3, 2014

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Hey guys. My name is Kyle Worley, and I am the Connections minister at the Village Church, Dallas Campus. It's my joy to be here with you. I count it a privilege to get to worship with the brothers and sisters out here in Forth Worth. Know that you are dear to our hearts and that there is a mutual affection that binds us as campuses. It's so great to be with people we've prayed for and to get to see faces of people we've prayed for. Anyways, I'm just thrilled to be here.

I'd ask you to turn your Bible to Colossians, chapter 1, beginning in verse 21. If you don't have a Bible, there is a black pew Bible that should be right underneath your chair. We'd love for you to grab that one, and if you don't have a Bible at home or you don't have one you can access, then we would love for you to take this Bible home with you as our gift to you.

I want us to consider the kind of divided society we live in. We live in a culture that is divided. Some of our divisions are small and local and maybe a little silly. For example, maybe some of you are Aggies. There are always a few. Some of you are Longhorns, maybe. There we go. Maybe some of you think the Spurs are the best team in the NBA, but others of you know the Mavs are. Some of you think Uncle Julio's has the best fajitas, but others of you know Joe T's has the best fajitas in Fort Worth.

So some of our divisions are small and local and silly. Others of our divisions are larger and a little bit more meaningful. For example, political convictions. We throw around the terms *Republican*, *Democrat*, *liberal*, *conservative*. We use these terms in dialogue, but they're invested with a ton of meaning and sometimes a lot of conviction and passion.

Maybe you live next to neighbors who differ with you in their religious worldview. Maybe you have Muslim neighbors or Jewish neighbors or Buddhist neighbors or Mormon neighbors. These are divisions that are a little bit larger and a little bit more meaningful, and there's more investment in

them. But all of these divisions, the small and silly and the large and meaningful, pale in comparison with the great divide between a holy God and sinful man.

There is this division, and we are born into this world dwelling in the midst of this division, alienated from God, separated from him. This is who we all once were and maybe who some of us today might still remain. The great hope here is that God has sent a reconciler, one who will destroy the division, and his name is Christ. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. In him, all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell.

Last week, Mason was showing that Christ is who he says he is. I want us to see what Christ has done on behalf of his people. We're going to look at that in Colossians 1, verses 21-23. I'm sure that as we look at this, we will see that while we are born as strangers, Christ came to bring us home as children, and now the Christian life is lived as we continue in the faith, clinging to Christ, our great reconciler. Let's look in verse 21. I'm going to read the whole passage for us, and then we'll come back verse by verse. 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."**

When we look at verse 21, we begin to see that Paul tells us the bad news first. The bad news is that we are born as strangers into this world, alienated, separated from God, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. Paul is addressing a church, a church maybe like this one. He's addressing a group of Christians, and he reminds them of their past condition, their former identity. He's saying, "This is who you once were."

He makes an identity statement about them. He says that they were alienated. "*You* were alienated and separated from God." First and foremost, sin is our condition by nature apart from Christ our reconciler. Sin is first and foremost the fact that we are rebels. Not that we rebel, but that we are rebels, that we are broken and lost and separated from him. This is an identity statement.

Paul says this another way in Ephesians 2:1-3 when he says, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins. You were by nature children of wrath." These are identity statements. Apart from Christ, we

are separated from God, alienated from he who gives life, so we are dead in our sins, dead in our trespasses.

For the believer, this is who you once were. Maybe you still remember this sense of alienation, of separation from God. The seeds of that separation still linger in the corners of our hearts, yielding sin in our lives. But this is fundamentally an identity statement and, for the believer, it's who you once were. Paul begins his preaching of the gospel by reminding these people who they once were.

For some of you (and maybe for some in the midst of the church Paul is addressing), this might be who you still are. You've made your home in this condition, alienated, separated from God. You've learned to live devoid of his presence. You've learned to live a life detached from he who actually brings the satisfaction your soul is searching for.

I want us to identify what this life of alienation looks like. I think Paul gives three characteristics of those who live apart from Christ in verse 21. Look at the verse. "**And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds...**" These are three characteristics of those who live apart from Christ.

We are alienated, strangers to God, exiles from his presence. We are those who were in Adam when Adam sinned, so it's safe to say we were in Adam when they were driven from the presence of God in the garden. God created us to live in relationship with him. He created us to live in an order. There was a rhythm to it, which you may have heard Matt say before.

Those who were alienated and separated from God live in a world God created to function in this way, in communion with him, in relationship, in fellowship with him, yet they are out of step. Maybe you've been in a room where people are clapping to a song, and there's one guy in the corner trying to get it. He can't catch the beat. If you don't know that person, it might be you.

This sense of being alienated, separated from God, that there is a way things should be and we are born into this world not there, not belonging there. We were driven from the presence of God in the garden. There are three kind of poets of exile who I think really frame this well. The first one is an author by the name of J.R.R. Tolkien. He wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien has said all humanity is soaked with a sense of exile, this feeling of not belonging, this feeling of, "There is a place we should be, and we're not there." We're soaked with a sense of exile. We are alienated from God.

C.S. Lewis, kind of taking this idea in a more positive direction, basically says, very famously, "If I find in myself desires that nothing in this world can satisfy, then surely this means I was meant for another world." This feeling of not belonging where we are, but a feeling of longing for a place where we know we should be, this sense of incompleteness. We're searching for what is going to make us whole, what thing or person or trinket or job or success or accomplishment or dollar sign or trophy is going to make us feel whole again. This sense of longing, that we do belong somewhere.

The last one is from a Texas band called The Oh Hellos. They sing, "We were born in the shadow of the crimes of our fathers; blood was our inheritance." This feeling of not belonging, matched with this feeling of longing for a place we should be, all the while lived out apart from Christ with this marking, this sense that we were heirs of a shame and a guilt, this sense of being marked like Cain was. We identify with our sin and our guilt, and we wear a shame apart from Christ. We are alienated. We are separated.

But that's not the only thing. Paul goes on to say we were hostile in mind. It's easy for us to put this really firm line between our hearts and our heads, but what the Bible has in mind when it talks about hostility of mind is not some antithesis where we want to know God with our minds but our hearts just won't let us, or we want to know God with our hearts but our minds won't let us, but this deep-seated animosity, hostility, toward God.

Our hearts are bent, so that where love should grow, hostility toward God flourishes. We are so sick and broken we reject the one who comes to heal us. We're hostile toward him. We reject the reconciler, choosing to dwell in this division. The Bible doesn't give us a third space for neutrality. This rejection of the reconciler is not just saying, "Well, I don't believe God exists." The denial of God is an animosity pointing toward him, where we actively reject the pursuit of our reconciler.

It's not a neutral hatred. It's not just a disbelief because you can't check off a couple of boxes on your intellectual quiz for God. It is the active suppression of the truth that he knows you and wants you to be his own. Our hostility shows itself in a number of ways. When we talk about hostility toward God or hatred of God, maybe some of you believers would say, "It's hard for me to remember a time that I hated God."

Maybe for others of you who are maybe checking out this whole Christianity, this whole gospel thing, and you have questions, you would say, "Well, I don't hate God. Where is this hostility act

you're talking about? Because I don't see it in my life." Most often and most clearly, our hostility and hatred toward God plays itself out in the fact that we, apart from Christ, passionately love what he most hates and hate what he most passionately loves.

Apart from Christ, our hostility toward God shows itself in that we love what he hates and hate what he loves. Paul knows this, because he goes on to say our hostility of mind plays itself out in the doing of evil deeds. Look at verse 21. We were alienated, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. There's an order there. Our evil deeds didn't come before. It wasn't that we did evil deeds so now we're alienated. It's that out of our alienation, out of our hostility toward God, comes this life of evil deeds.

Our actions are sinful because our nature is sinful. You sin because you are a sinner. Broken things come out of you because you are fundamentally broken apart from Christ. Apart from Christ, no one stumbles into sin. They've made their home there, and Christ is coming to bridge this great divide. As it stands at this point in verse 21, had we remained who we once were, we would have been separated from God and his presence and life and eternity with him.

Look at your life. Weigh your life. Do you love that which God loves? Do you hate that which God hates? Because while you may not be attaching hostility toward God in terms of hatred toward his person, at least consciously, your life may be playing out that you have chosen to value those things God has said will be destruction. I think it's a fair question.

Paul goes on to say in verse 22... He doesn't leave us here. This is who we once were. Now Paul is going to tell us, "This is who you are because of Christ." **"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..."**

We're born as strangers, separated from God, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, but Christ doesn't leave his people there. He comes as this great reconciler and brings us home as children and presents us before the Father as holy and blameless. How does he do this? How does he bridge this gap? If we are the recipients of God's wrath against our sin, alienated, separated from him, by nature children of wrath, how does Christ bridge this division?

How does he create this union between God and us? How is the Father able to welcome the Prodigal Son back home when he returns? The grace and mercy of the Father expressed in the death of

Christ. It says he has now reconciled us in his body of flesh by his death. The way God can bring us home as children is because he has accomplished reconciliation.

So what is this reconciliation? What does it mean that Christ is our reconciler? Well, *reconciliation* is the removal of wrath and the restoration of fellowship between God and man. It's not just God shaking the divine Etch-a-Sketch and saying, "You can start over." It's not God just looking at the record of your sin and saying, "I'll forget and forgive." It's God's removal of his wrath against you that's based and merited by our sin.

It's the removal of that wrath and the welcoming in of you into the family of God. This is a great truth. Reconciliation, as the Bible talks about it, is not the idea of getting back with your ex. This is not a sweet text message and an Edible Arrangement sent to her door. Reconciliation here has in mind the Father adopting children into his family who have murdered his Son, welcoming them home, bringing them back in because of the death of Christ.

This is the kind of reconciliation where Christ can look at those who will chant for his crucifixion in Matthew 11 and say, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." He can look his accusers in their eyes and say, "There is rest for you," because of what Christ, our reconciler, has done.

Even if you just contrast our work in verse 21 with the work of Christ in verse 22, we see something very different. Our work is we are alienated, separated from God, hostile toward him, doing evil deeds. Christ, who is the perfect Son, the image of the invisible God, comes and reconciles and presents us holy and blameless. This is a story of the perfect Son coming to rescue spiritual orphans and bringing them home to the Father.

As we heard last week from Mason's sermon, as we heard in the Scripture reading today, Christ is who he says he is. In Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Jesus was fully God. That is a beautiful truth: God takes on flesh and comes among us to pursue his people. But Paul in verse 22 is also emphasizing his bodily nature. In verse 22, he says he has now reconciled us in his body of flesh, two words to emphasize the physical nature of Christ, that he came and took on flesh to pursue us.

It's like Paul is saying, "Yes, he is fully God, but he is also fully man." This must be, because apart from Christ being fully God and fully man, there is no reconciliation to God. Only the God-man, Jesus

Christ, could satisfy the eternal and holy justice of God the Father while at the same time welcoming men and women into the family. He must be the God-man, Jesus Christ. Only then is there reconciliation. There's no reconciliation to God apart from him. Only in him, by his body of flesh, through his death, can he accomplish this reconciliation.

John Calvin says we can only be fully and firmly joined with God when Christ has joined us with him. Christ comes among his people and says, "By faith, be in me. Be united to me." He carries us to the Father in him, in our union with Christ, and presents us as holy on account of his work. This is a great truth, because apart from this work of Jesus coming and reconciling us, of bringing us to the Father, there is no approach to God.

Hebrews 10 says this, that we have confidence to enter the holy places by the curtain, which is his flesh, which is torn on our account. We were reconciled, but we weren't just reconciled; we were reconciled with a purpose. Look in verse 22. "Christ has now reconciled us in his body of flesh, fully God, fully man, by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach."

We were reconciled so that we might be presented before God. Christ offers up his body as this perfect sacrifice so that we may be offered up as living sacrifices to God. The word that's used here for *present* is a word... The meaning of this word has to do with a formal presentation. There is a formal presentation of the church before God. When we see this passage in light of Paul's image of Christ and the church in Ephesians 5, a picture comes to mind for me.

I went out and bought a ring because my heart was set on this girl. I bought this ring, and I proposed to her. She said, "Yes," and I was blown away. Why would this beauty associate herself with me? So we came before an altar, and there was an officiant there, and we had invited all of our friends and family. I came up there, and I watched her walk down the aisle in stunning white. I came before that officiant and said, "This is my wife." He laid his hands on us and blessed our union.

In a similar way, Christ is coming before the Father and saying, "These are your people. Accept them in me. Embrace them in me. Welcome them in. Bless this union." The union is not blessed because we are so beautiful in and of ourselves, because we come before our Bridegroom tattered in sin and shame, and he clothes us in the righteousness of Christ. He places that wedding gown on us and brings us before the Father, and God the Father officiates that union. He celebrates that union.

Then he throws a wedding supper of the Lamb where we can celebrate that eternal union between God and his people. We are presented before God as holy and blameless. This presentation of us as holy may be a little bit confusing for us, because we look at the practical outworking of our lives, maybe some of the day-to-day rhythms, and we say, "Kyle, it seems that I'm lacking the kind of holiness this is talking about."

I want to draw your attention to two realities. The first is what we're going to call the *positional holiness* the Christian is given. When Christ comes and reconciles us, we are brought into union with Christ. This is why Paul can use throughout all of his letters this phrase *in Christ*, that we are in him, seated with him. Anytime you see that, Paul is emphasizing the union of the believer to Jesus, the union of you to Christ Jesus, that you are in him, that what can be said of Christ can be said of you.

So foundationally, the believer is brought into this holiness that may not be working itself out practically as we want it to be just yet, but positionally we were brought in. We are underneath the covering of Christ's holiness and righteousness. He exchanged our sinfulness for his holiness and righteousness. He gave it to us, and now we live in this holiness and righteousness. Positionally, we are there.

But practically, this is still being worked out in our sanctification, being refashioned into the image of Christ Jesus. See, those who have experienced the grace of God in salvation desire to be made more and more like him. Let me give you an example of this. I am my father's son. His blood courses through my veins. I am Joe Worley's son. If I never said things like he said them, did things like he did them, or look like he looks, I am my father's son.

Because I am my father's son, in ways I am both aware of and unaware of, I say things like he says them. I do things like he does them. I have begun to take on some of the physical appearance of my father. Some of these things I saw in him and wanted to imitate so I pursued them. I said, "I want to be like that," so I pursued them. Others of them are areas I'm unaware of, and people in my life speak in and say, "Man, you're just like your dad in this area." I am looking more and more like Joe Worley's son every day, but from day one, I *was* his son. No more, no less today.

For the believer, when you are united to Christ by faith, when you repent, when you sense the weight of your alienation and separation from God and you cling to Christ by faith, you are brought into union with the Savior, and what can be said of Christ can be said of you. But daily, this will be working out in your life as you are sanctified, refashioned into the image of him you have been

united to, looking more and more like our Savior, more and more like Christ practically. This work of sanctification, being refashioned into the image of Christ.

Not only are we presented holy and blameless before God, but Paul also says we are above reproach before him. Do you realize how meaningful this is? We are above reproach before an eternally holy and righteous God. Do you know what that means? We're blameless. There is no one who can level a charge, like Paul says. "No one can level a charge against God's elect. It is God alone who justifies."

Nobody can say of you, "Christian, I know who you once were. All this Jesus talk is silly." It's disingenuous. The Enemy cannot bring your old sin and shame in to discredit you, because Christ has said, "They are mine. What can be said of me can now be said of them." It's going to be practically playing out in your life as you conform more and more to him.

We don't stand before God saying, "God, I did this and this and this." We stand before God saying, "Only because of Christ," beating our chests like the man next to the Pharisee. "Only because of Christ do we live." God the Father, because we're blameless, because we're above reproach, because we're holy, because of Christ, welcomes us home, not as servants, but as sons. Christ takes spiritual terrorists, those who have assaulted the kingdom, and says, "Come back into the family," and makes them citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

That's a glorious reality. If you've ever felt the weight, or maybe if you feel the weight today, of your alienation and separation from God, loving the things God hates and hating the things he loves, let me tell you something. There is rest for you in the reconciler, Christ Jesus. He has bridged the great divide on your behalf. There is no wrath of God against you any longer. We can be welcomed home like the prodigals we are.

Paul doesn't stop here. He has laid the foundation, and now he's going to admonish us. He's going to challenge us. We were alienated. We were born as strangers. We were brought home as children, and now we continue in the faith, clinging to Christ. Look at what it says in verse 22. I'll read verse 22, and then we'll look at verse 23.

**"...he [Christ] 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."**

Having preached the gospel, that God takes those who are spiritual orphans and makes them sons and daughters, that he has reconciled us, that he has brought us home as children, Paul now commends them to live continuing in the faith, clinging to Christ, not shifting from the hope of the gospel. Paul understands that the gospel that saves you sustains and sanctifies you.

We don't get in by way of the gospel and then stay in by way of our works. We continually are nourished by the gospel. Paul says, "Look to Christ and continue in the faith. Set your eyes on Christ and continue in the faith." There's going to be this presentation of holy and blameless, and as we continue in the faith, we are going to be sanctified, made to look like children of God in the image of Christ.

Look at verse 23. He says, "**...if indeed you continue in the faith...not shifting from the hope of the gospel...**" This truth that you never outgrow the gospel. God's grace is the foundation of your salvation and the motivation of your obedience. It's the motivation of you coming again and again to Christ who is your reconciler and just laying your hands on him and seizing him by faith, trusting in him.

The question arises in reading this passage, and it's a common question. It says in verse 23, "If indeed you continue in the faith." Some of you may be saying, "But what about those who *don't* continue in the faith? What if *I* don't continue in the faith?" For some of you, there may have been seasons, even recently, where you have struggled with the assurance of your salvation. There has been a sense when your guilt and sin were dragged back into your life that you looked at it and said, "Well, maybe I don't know the reconciler. Maybe I don't know Christ."

As we look at this passage, Paul's words can best be understood to say, "At any rate, if you stand firm in the faith, and I'm sure you will..." There's a confidence Paul has as he commends them to continue in the faith. Why? Because he has told them what they cannot shift from. "Not shifting from the hope of the gospel." It is their commitment and resolution to cling to Christ their reconciler from the beginning to the end of their Christian life.

That's why Paul can be confident. Not because *their* faith is so strong, but because the *Savior* is so strong. Not because *they* are so steadfast, but because the *Savior* is steadfast. As they cling to Christ, they constantly keep coming back to the reality of their utter dependency on Jesus. They were separated from him, and they've been reconciled to him because of Christ.

It's in this passage in particular where I sense Jesus' words to have faith like a child. I can almost hear them resonating in this text. There is an utter dependency the believer has on Christ Jesus. The Christian life is not one of greater and greater *independence* but one of greater and greater *dependence* on Christ their reconciler who has bridged the great divide.

As an aside, Sinclair Ferguson has said the Christian should never expect high degrees of assurance with low degrees of obedience. As you have been brought into union with Christ, practically this is being worked out in your life. As you pursue Christ in obedience and worship and mission, as the holiness you've been given begins to flesh itself out in your life, as the family characteristics of the Godhead begin to be embodied in the body of Christ through men and women, brothers and sisters, saints in the church...

As that happens, there is a sanctification that is happening there. There's a nearness to Christ, and there is a deep assurance that Christ our great reconciler will be faithful to complete the work he started in us. Paul says continue in the faith, not shifting from...what? Our own ability? No. Our good works? No. Our confidence? Even the certainty of our faith? No, not shifting from the hope of the gospel, that hope that says what Christ alone is entitled to he has given freely to all of those who will repent and place their faith in him. The glorious truth.

Our continuing in the faith is a sign that our profession of faith was genuine. It's a holding fast to him whom we've seized. It's clinging to our Savior, clinging to the Healer. It means clinging to Christ by a few things. These are some ways this clinging to Christ, this continuing in the faith, should be playing out in your life.

The first one is a delighting in Christ, the feeding on the gospel. That we are surprised by grace again and again, that we do not grow numb to the fact we were separated and he has made us sons by the work of Christ, sons and daughters of the King. Feeding on the gospel, obeying his commands, loving what he loves and hating what he hates. Remember that our hatred toward God is most clearly and most often manifest in the fact we love that which he hates and hate that which he loves.

Part of the way this is redefined in the Christian life as we continue in the faith is that we begin to obey his commands out of delight, to enjoy his grace, not to earn it, and we delight in his Word. We

love to fellowship with God in prayer and in his Word, to speak with him, to listen to him, to listen to what he has said.

We are overjoyed to fellowship with the believers. As our God has this Trinitarian fellowship with himself, we love to be in community. We want to be around other believers, encouraging and being encouraged, challenging and being challenged. We live with open hands when it comes to our time, energy, resources, and affections. We're open-handed because the great divide has been bridged. Everything is his.

Like Romans 8 says, if he has given us his Son, how will he not graciously with him give us all things? Nothing belongs to us. We know that, because we were separated from God. We were dead. He has given us life. It's all to him. It's all of grace. It means practicing reconciliation. I found it so interesting when meditating on this passage that Paul ends verse 23 by saying, "This gospel, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister."

It seems odd to me to note his ministerial status at the end of this meditation on the gospel. The more I've thought on this and reflected on that, I think Paul is drawing our attention to this reality, which he also hits on in 2 Corinthians 4, that those who have been reconciled have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Those who have been reconciled to God have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation.

Now we go out to the aliens and to the strangers, to those we once were among, and we say, "We know the reconciler. We know him who has bridged this great divide. We know the hope of the gospel, and we bring that to bear on our neighborhoods and on our cities, the life of those we're in community with in our church." We constantly are those who have been reconciled, and we point to the great reconciler.

As we cling to Christ, we practice this childlike dependency on him, as we continue in the faith, not shifting from the hope of the gospel. Colossians 1:21-23. We are born as strangers, separated from God. We're brought home as children by the work of Christ. Now, Christian, you are clinging to Christ by faith, continuing in the faith, not shifting from the hope of the gospel, always preaching the message of Christ as the great reconciler who has bridged the great divide on your behalf.

See, God's purpose is to create a holy people in Christ. There are three elements to this. There's the past, the present, and the future. He *has* done this in Christ, he *is* doing this by refashioning us,

remaking us into the image of Christ now, and this he *will* do when he presents us fully and finally before God the Father, holy and blameless and above reproach.

So for those of you who may still sense your alienation... As we've been teaching, as we've been reading the Word, there's a sense of your separation from God. Maybe you have found it easy and natural in your life to love that which God hates and hate that which he loves. You sense that separation.

Let me tell you, as Paul tells the church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "I implore you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God," to be reconciled to God by the work of Christ, clinging to him by faith, repenting and placing your faith in Christ. For the believer, it's because of the work of Christ as our great reconciler that we can sing a song like "In Christ Alone," that we can say:

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath.  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from His hand.

We stand today in the power of Christ because of his work on our behalf as the great reconciler.  
Let's pray.

God, we thank you that you did not leave your people in silence, that you spoke. We thank you that you have not left your people in sin, that you've sent a Savior. Christ, we thank you for the work of reconciliation. We thank you that you take those who are born as strangers, separated from God, hostile toward you, and you make them sons and daughters by your body of flesh in your death. Lord, we love you. We thank you for this and pray all of these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.