

– **SO FAR in Colossians**

- **Great statement of gratitude. Believers love for each other. Their maturity, how gospel is growing, spreading through them, how they understand God's grace**
 - **PRAYER- one of Paul's great pastoral prayers. Prays for them to be filled with knowledge, wisdom through the spirit, that they would bear fruit, grow in their faith, be strengthened, and have hearts of gratitude.**
 - **THEN, V15-20... INCREDIBLE statement of the lordship, identity, divinity, and person of Christ. We spent two weeks on this.... JESUS IS GOD, and GOD IS LIKE JESUS.**
- **NOW, not to sound flippant at all, but...**

† **Jesus is God, and God is like Jesus. Okay, so what?**

- **If IN CHRIST we see the full, complete, present reality of God... because Jesus IS God, he is the creator of the universe, and in him all things hold together... IF THIS IS TRUE, what is the significance OF THIS TRUTH to you. To me. To each person who is part- by God's grace- of the community of faith?**
- **THIS is where passage goes next. In V15-20, not a single reference to people. It is all about Jesus. NOW, in v21-23, we see word YOU/YOUR EIGHT times.**
- **This passage is like a magnifying glass.... Takes power of the sun- the majesty and divinity of Jesus, and focuses in into the reality of life as we know it.**
- **The TRUTH of who we were, who we are, and who we are becoming.**

Colossians 1:21-23 *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

† **Who we were**

Colossians 1:21 *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*

- **Brings up questions. Does this sound like every unbeliever you know? Enemies of God in our minds- how we think. KEY, God isn't looking at us as the enemy here. Rather, this is picture of a person looking at God as the enemy... "enmity" against God- open and conscious rebellion. EVIL BEHAVIOR.**
- **Really need to think about this. On one hand, this can lead to perspective that all people are just desperately evil, in the way we think about evil. Some people are, and the human condition is a giant spectrum... but REALITY is that there are many, many people who do not look in faith to Christ, who do not regarding scripture as authoritative in their lives, who are GOOD, KIND, MORAL, and compassionate people.**
- **It's easy to hear Paul's language and develop a very negative, condemning attitude about the world around us, AND ourselves. Idea that we are all desperate sinners who happen to be forgiven.**
- **This is NOT the message of the NT, as we will see as we move deeper into Colossians.**

- **SO, one thing we need to do is look at this in context of Paul's original writing. Nature of 1st century world in central Asia Minor. Simply put, it was brutal. Roman empire, no value of life, less value of life of women, slavery, open idol worship, sexual exploitation was part of religious system, and common/normal in society.**
- **In his letter to Titus, Paul describes first century life as a time when people “were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”**
- **Tragically, it's not hard to see this today. But it doesn't describe everyone.**
- **HOWEVER, must be careful not to miss importance of what Paul is saying here.**
- **'Alienated from God'- this is the core reality of the human condition. Scripture teaches that apart from Christ we are spiritually dead. Separated from God. In EPH 2 “As for you, you were dead in your sins”.**
- **Separated from God, focus of our mind is SELF. We look to own wisdom, own strength and resources to deal with life- and a mind centered on self is not looking to God, nor is it influenced by God.**
- **NT calls this way of living “The Flesh”. Galatians 5...**

Galatians 5:17 *For the **flesh** desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the **flesh**. They are in conflict with each other,*

- **Depending upon how we were raised, our natural bents, and our circumstances, our flesh can look really good. The flesh can look extremely moral, even very religious. But it's still life apart from God, it is still prideful, and it still desires its own control.**
- **This leads to the dynamic Paul identifies here. When our minds are turned away from God and his goodness, we have no fetter to govern our behavior other than our own predispositions. The word “MIND” here isn't just WHAT we think, but the WAY we think- how we process and understand. When we behave in a way that is counter to God, this leads to rationalization and self-justification, further damaging whatever moral compass we may have.**
- **NT WRIGHT puts it this way “Wrong thinking leads to vice, and vice to further wrong thinking, so that the mind, even though it is still not ignorant of inherent God given moral goodness- ultimately finds itself applauding evil”**
- **You see, every person may not be a ‘desperate sinner’... but apart from Christ, we are BROKEN. There is part of us designed to be alive that is dead. Some manage that brokenness better than others, but it is a fatal flaw in how we think that can lead to profound corruption in how we live. And this corruption- SIN- hurts us. It hurts those around us. This is why God cares so much about delivering us from sin- not because sin offends God on some abstract level- but because it leads to pain and suffering, and God LOVES HIS CREATION.**
- **We will talk more about this in chapter 3- but for now, Paul says THIS IS WHO YOU WERE. But no longer**

✠ Who we are

Colossians 1:22a *But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death...*

- **BUT NOW-** we are **RECONCILED** to God. We are no longer alienated, separated from Him. We are **REDEEMED**. We are **JUSTIFIED**. We have been ransomed by Christ's death and resurrection. We were dead, but **IN CHRIST** we have been made alive.
- The way Paul refers to the cross is interesting. "Christ's physical body through death"... This is more than just saying "Christ died for you." Basically, Paul is pointing to the entire incarnation of Christ. Christ came to live among us as a person, a limited physical body, just like us.
- What Paul says in a few words here he amplified in...

Philippians 2:6-8 *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

- This great act- what Christ accomplished through the cross- is what we call "The **ATONEMENT**". The concept that through the cross, **EVERY BARRIER** between us and God has been removed- **IN CHRIST**, we have been made **COMPLETELY** right with God.
- And now Paul proclaims something **ESSENTIALLY IMPORTANT!** Having been made right with God, having been brought from death to life... this will **BRING ABOUT TRANSFORMATION IN WHO WE ARE, and HOW WE LIVE.**
- So Paul described who we **WERE**. Who we **ARE**. Now, the inevitable result of who we **ARE** is...

✠ What we are becoming

Colossians 1:22b *But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death... to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation*

- Let's think of what these words mean- profound.
- **HOLY.** Set apart to God. In Christ, God is creating a people to be the presence of his nature and character in the midst of his greater creation. In Christ, we are **HIS**, we are Christ's ambassadors, even more, we are to be God's living presence in this world, His representatives of his Grace, Goodness, and Love.
- In **Titus 2** Paul puts it this way...

Titus 2:14 *Jesus Christ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

- **WITHOUT BLEMISH. BLAMELESS (nasb). FREE FROM ACCUSATION. NOTHING** in how we live, our actions, choices, words... that would violate our new nature in Christ.
- Even though people may make accusation against us, those accusations will fall away, unless the accusation is that we are people who are loving, patient, kind, hopeful, joyful, faithful, servant hearted, generous, and good.
- Again in **TITUS**... the image of living so that "those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us."
- There is a word for this. **FREEDOM. PEACE OF MIND. INTEGRITY OF HEART.** Mark Twain "If you never lie, you don't have to remember anything"...
- **BUT HERE'S THE DEAL.** We **DO** lie! Right now, we aren't without blemish- plenty of things in our lives that violate the nature and character of Christ.

- **But there doesn't have to be! In fact, Paul's whole emphasis is that the inevitable result of reconciliation to God is taking on the nature and character of God. Which means to become like Christ, one step at a time. HEBREWS....**

Hebrews 10:11-14 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (sanctified)

- **One moment at a time, increasingly becoming who we already are.**
- **THIS WILL HAPPEN.... Here Paul throws down...**

† A significant **if...**

Colossians 1:23a if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

- **What does this mean?**
- **FIRST- can't get around it- this is a contingent statement. NASB... "If indeed" There is something that won't happen if something else doesn't happen. SO, what does the IF refer back to?**
- **First, what it does not. Some would take the contingency to be referring to our salvation itself. To mean that IF at any point we are not established and firm in our faith, this will cause us to no longer be reconciled. That before God we would be NOT be free from accusation, and this accusation of some degree of failure on our part would condemn us before God. AGAINST THIS stands the overwhelming testimony of the New Testament. This is the version of the gospel where the pressure is ON, where God's love and mercy is contingent on our moral performance. This is not good news, and it is not the gospel.**
- **So what does it mean- two things to consider.**
- **FIRST- God desires- it is his purpose- that we are HOLY, BLAMELESS, and FREE FROM ACCUSATION in our lives NOW. This isn't just something we will be in heaven when we die- this is a work God is doing NOW. AND IF... IF... we waver in our faith, if we give way to discouragement, we lose hear, and we turn away, we will NOT EXPERIENCE this transformation. We will not live in the GOOD of Christ's nature in our lives NOW.**
- **THIS IS TRAGIC, BECAUSE THIS LIFE MATTERS.**
- **This doesn't mean we don't have doubts. Doesn't mean we don't have real questions we wrestle with. This is a picture of saying to God- "I'm reclaiming control- I'm going back to my wisdom, my strength, where I'm the center of my life, and you have no say"**
- **SECOND OBSERVATION HERE: A person may claim to be a disciple of Christ, but if there is no fruit, if the predominant and consistent expression of this person's life is centered on self, prideful, no authentic expression of the nature of Christ, Christ is an accessory, not their source.... Christ is great, but Jesus isn't ENOUGH... There is good reason to question the authenticity of their faith.**
- **In contrast, Paul paints a picture of a believer who is:**

† Established and firm

- *Architectural image. Foundation- content of our faith, the hope of the Gospel.... And the structure itself- how we live out our faith- strong, solid, that even if battered by the storms of life, will not collapse.*
- *This is a picture of a believer holding firm to Christ, choosing to trust, choosing to continually look to God, receive hope and peace from God, even in face of life's challenges, temptations, and very real questions.*
- *Remember, in the context of Colossians, these believers were being tempted by a false Gospel that essentially said "Jesus isn't enough. You need to do more- you need to add religious layers that are centered on YOU rather than on Christ..." Paul isn't talking about people wrestling with questions in the very real struggles of life... this was a temptation of pride, elitism, and self-righteousness.*
- *In response Paul says NO! Stand firm! Look to Christ, for HE is sufficient. HE is your life. His grace, his nature, his presence... HE is enough. HE is your hope.*
- *And then Paul turns to the anchor of our faith. The ingredient that more than anything else will lead us to be established and firm in our faith, with lives that increasingly are set apart to God, blameless, and above reproach... it is the HOPE OF THE GOSPEL.*
- *When it comes down to it, God calls us to be people who are...*

† Holding to hope

Colossians 1:23a *if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.*

- *This is the hope that in our broken state God-in-Christ came to us, became one of us, suffered death at our hands for us, defeated the power death held over us, so that In Him we may live.*
- *But what does that mean?*
- *One thing it means is the hope that we are not alone. The hope that we no longer have to perform for acceptance. The hope that the pressure is off. The hope that we are free to love.*
- *The promise that even though this life can be so unfair, so unjust, we may have many questions, we may fail, we may even cry out in protest to God that life hurts, that this all just doesn't make sense... but when it comes down to it, we hold on to hope.*
- *In my FT essay I told story of mom and child we met at our hotel this week... Mom filled with hope because her child had been declared free from Leukemia.*
- *QUESTIONS! Will this little boy know a life free from cancer? Will this mother's promise be realized? I truly hope so, but I don't know. I could quote scripture that speaks of an eternally greater hope than the physical health of her child, and I believe it. But this doesn't remove the anguish of watching your child suffer.*
- *We wish there were easier answers. I had hoped by now I wouldn't have so many questions. But after almost twenty years immersed in scripture I'm starting to learn that our greatest hope isn't answers.*

- *Answers are good! It is good to wrestle with truth... but our great hope is not in our answers. Our greatest hope is Jesus. Our greatest hope is the transforming power of the Grace, goodness, presence, and love of God.*
- *PAUL SAYS... this Gospel- this HOPE... this is the GOSPEL YOU HAVE HEARD.*
- *Quick thought here:*

✠ The gospel we heard

23b... *This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*