

Colossians: The Incomparable Christ – Exposition of Colossians VI

Colossians 1:13-23

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1. Paul has been writing to a congregation that has had some people come to it and say, 'Your belief in Christ is fine, your acceptance of the gospel is fine, but if you will add to your belief in Christ, in the gospel, this secret teaching, this extra ritual, your experience and knowledge of God will be deepened. What you believe about Christ is fine. There are just some other things that you don't know about in addition to Christ and to His gospel that will truly deepen your experience of God.' We've seen the last couple of weeks that one way the Apostle Paul undercuts that type of false teaching is to say, 'think about who Christ is. How can you add to him? What is there to add to Christ?' And in verses 13 through 20, we see the Apostle Paul give a cascade of truths about the person of Christ, specifically to convince us that we don't need to go anywhere else but Him for the fullness of the gospel.

Colossians 1:21-23

Father this is Your word, we praise you for it. We love Your word. Make us sensitive to it. Help us to respond to its authority and to see its direct applicability to every area of our lives. By the Holy Spirit apply it. Open us to sit under it. Make it a blessing to us. Make us a blessing to all the world, both as an encouragement to believers and as a witness to unbelievers through the word, and help us to understand this word for us. To Your praise and glory, we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

Paul, we have seen the last two weeks, has piled up descriptions of Jesus Christ. These Jews, proselytes, gentiles, some believers, some unbelievers, some there because they've already come to Christ. Others in the congregation, perhaps who are interested in the teaching of the gospel, but have not come to Christ yet. He sets before them who Christ is, because he says, 'If you understand who Christ is, you will never fall for a teaching which says you need Christ plus something else. 'It's O.K. to start with Christ and to believe in His gospel, but to really get deep into the faith, into the knowledge of God, you need something else; some ritual, some action, some belief, some experience of power, which

isn't received upon the first closing with Christ or coming to faith with Him, some extra thing. And the Apostle Paul says, 'If you really understand who Christ is, then you'll understand that as long as you are in relationship with Him, He is sufficient for everything you need in your salvation.'

And we reviewed some of the things that Paul said. Look at verse 13 where he says, 'who is this Christ? He's the Son of the father's love. He is the very manifestation of the love of God for the world. If you want to know how God loves the world, look at Jesus Christ. If you want to know how far God is willing to go to redeem His people, look at Jesus Christ.' But he doesn't stop there. Not only is He the Son of His love, he goes on to say in verse 14 that Christ is the Redeemer, "In Him we have redemption." He's the Redeemer. He's the one who brings us out from under the domain of darkness. Can't you hear this false teachers saying, 'O.K., you have Christ, but if you want to be freed from the dominion of darkness, and of demonic powers, then you need to have these extra things.' And the Apostle Paul says, 'He's the Redeemer. He's the one in whom we have redemption.'

And then he goes on in verse 15 to say that Christ is the very image of God. He's the image of the invisible God. He's the manifestation in the flesh. He's God in the flesh. You want to see God, look at Christ. Christ is God incarnate. He is divine. He is in the flesh. He is the image of the invisible God. He's also, Paul says, "the first-born of all creation," in verse 15. He is the one who has primacy. All of creation is under Him, because He is the first-born. In other words, He's the Inheritor, He's the one who is of priority, of primacy. But also, creation is for Him. Paul tells you that later on in verse 16, that it's been created by Him, but it's also been created for Him. He's the goal. He's the purpose of that creation. This is the Christ that we love and serve.

In verses 15 through 17, he goes on to explain that because He is the first-born of creation, He's the Lord of creation. Because He is prime, because He is supreme over creation, He is also the Lord of creation. His supremacy over creation is discussed in verses 15 through 17. And then Paul doesn't stop there, he goes on to say, and by the way, He's supreme in the Church as well. He's not only the Lord of creation, He's the Lord of the Church. He is the head over His body, the Church. He goes on to say in verse 19, "that in Him the fullness dwells." Apparently some of these teachers were saying, 'O.K., you have Christ that's fine, but if you want the fullness you have to follow this. You have to this. You have to believe this. And Paul comes back and he says, 'He is the fullness. The fullness is in Him. You don't need to look elsewhere to find the fullness. You want full gospel? You want full Christianity? You want the whole thing? It's in Him. You don't look somewhere else other than Him. You start with Him. You continue with Him. You end with Him. All the fullness is in Him. You want to participate in the fullness? You don't look elsewhere from Him, because it's the Father's pleasure for the fullness to dwell in Him.'

And then finally, we saw that Paul says that 'He is the Reconciler' in verse 20. Christ is the One who has reconciled us to God. He is the agent of reconciliation which the Father has appointed. We were alienated from the Father, and the Son is the one who has reconciled us. So again, you can hear these teachers saying to these people, 'Well, this is good, but if you want to be reconciled to God in the midst of all those heavenly powers up there, then you need these extra teachings.' And here Paul is saying, 'Look, He has reconciled. That's his job. All of these things are in Christ.' What's Paul doing that for? Because Paul wants to drive home one grand point that he never wants us to forget: Christ is the sole and sufficient Savior of His people. He is the only and he is the effective Savior of His people. He is the sole and sufficient Savior of His people.

And in the passage before us today, verses 21 through 23, he's going to drive that truth home again and apply it in four different ways. And I'd like to point to some of those things to you briefly this morning. Notice four great truths that Paul is going to drive home to stress that Christ is a sole and sufficient Savior. He is the sole and sufficient Savior of His people.

I. All people, apart from Christ, are out of fellowship with God, hostile to Him, and unable to please Him

In verse 21, we learn that all people apart from Christ are out of fellowship with God. In verse 22, secondly, we learn that all people in Christ are fully reconciled to God. In the second half of verse 22, we learn that God purposes to perfect all His people. And the fourth great truth we learn is that Christians are to strive towards the hope of the gospel. We learned that in verse 23. Let's look at these verses together this morning and see these four great truths set forth. Notice what Paul is doing. In verse 21, he tells us what we were apart from Christ. In verse 22, in the first half of the verse, he tells you where you now stand in Christ. What is Your standing in Christ? Are you lacking something? In the second half of verse 22, he goes on to tell you what God plans to make of you in Christ. And in verse 23, he tells you what your responsibility is in sanctification, in light of these glorious things that God has done and promised, and in light of the sole and sufficient Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let's look at these words today. First let me draw Your attention to verse 21 where we read: "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds." There in verse 21, the Apostle Paul tells you the state of people who are not believing and trusting in Christ. It says, you want to know what you're like if you're not believing and trusting in Christ? This is what you're like. Paul says, 'all people apart from Christ, are out of fellowship with God. They are hostile to God, and they are unable to please God.' Paul says all three of those things to these folks in Colossae. Now you may quickly say, 'Oh yeah, but these people were Gentiles. They had never heard the Jewish law.' And Paul is not just saying, 'Boy you Gentiles in Colossae really live wicked lives, and now

since you have become Christians, you are doing better.' Paul is saying much more than that. It is true that he is pointing out what they were, because he wants to show them just how sufficient Christ has been as a Savior, because He's brought about a change in their life, but when Paul says to this congregation that before they were in Christ, they were alienated from God, that they were hostile to God, that they are engaged in works of wickedness; that can be said of every human being who does not trust in Christ. Now that's a radical statement, but it's Paul's statement. Apart from Christ, we are out of fellowship with God. We are hostile to Him. We are unable to please Him.

Let's unpack those three things that he says. What does it mean to be out of fellowship with God? What does it mean to be alienated, to be estranged? Those are the words that Paul uses. It means to not be in a living relationship of blessing with the only Being in the universe who is able to bring blessing. If we are alienated from God, we are apart from hope of being blessed. If we are not in relationship to Jesus Christ, we will not receive blessing from God. My friends, that contradicts so much teaching today in religious circles, which say, 'Oh, God is going to bless everyone. God is going to give everyone salvation. God is going to pour blessings out on everyone.' We have this view of God as a grandfatherly figure in the sky, distributing gifts to everyone without distinction, and here is Paul saying, 'Oh no, apart from Christ there are no ultimate blessings.' Why? Because we are alienated from God. We are His enemies.

But Paul doesn't stop there. He goes on in that second word to say that we are hostile in mind to Him. What's Paul saying by that? He means, look, you're self centered. Apart from Christ you are turned in on yourself. You are turned in upon yourself. You are self centered. You are self preoccupied. Your prime concern in all of reality is you advancing your agendas, your desires, your goals, because you've turned your back on God. And a person in a state of self-centeredness is incapable of submitting to the rule of God in their lives. We're incapable of having God's outlook on life. His outlook is, he says, 'I am first. I am first in everything.' You are to love Your neighbor. You are not to be so caught up in yourself that you fail to love your neighbor. And you are to give of yourself to your neighbor. You're not to be turned in on yourself, constantly self preoccupied, so that you are not loving Me and you are not loving your neighbor. The Apostle Paul says that until we are in Christ, we are hostile in mind. We are resistant to that type of thinking. We're resistant to God.

And you may think to yourself today, if you're not in Christ, 'But I'm not hostile to God. I don't hate God. I'm not at enmity with Him. I may be a little apathetic. I mean, what's O.K. for you, preacher, is fine, but I don't have to accept it myself.' The Apostle Paul says that if that's your posture, you're hostile to God, because He won't accept indifference. He wants the knee to be bowed. He wants you to understand that He is Lord. He wants you to acknowledge that, and not only with your lip, but in your experience.

The Apostle Paul says, 'we are estranged, we are hostile in mind,' and he goes on to say that in light of that, 'we do wicked works.' Now this is another hard thing, because we look around at people who don't profess faith in Christ, and we see them do things that seem very good. But the Apostle Paul characterizes all the actions of those who do not believe in Christ as wicked works. Why, because the things they are doing in and of themselves are bad? Not necessarily. But apart from Christ, you cannot do things for the right motives, for the right reasons, for the right goal, and with a right interest in serving your neighbor, and serving God. We are intrinsically self centered. We are naturally disobedient to the law of God, and the Apostle Paul says, this is the state of a person apart from Christ. Alienated from God Hostile to Him in their minds, and actually doing wicked works.

It is so vital that we recognize that my friends. Human beings are not standing in a neutral relationship to God. There are only two relationships in which human beings stand to God: Either alienated from Him or reconciled to Him. Those are the only two relationships that we stand. We do not say that as Christians to congratulate ourselves and to say to those who are not Christians, 'Oh look at you. You haven't arrived, I have.' We say that because we love nonChristians and we want them to have the fullness of the blessings of God. When I stand up and say, "If you're apart from Christ, you are not in a relationship of blessing with God," I'm not bragging, because I would be in a relationship of curse had God not saved me from the pit. I am saying to you, my dear friend, come to Christ because you will not taste the blessing of God apart from him. That's what Paul is saying to these Colossians. There is no blessing outside of Christ. There's only blessing inside of Christ. He is the sole Savior. Remember that, Paul is saying. Remember what you were. You have seen your lives change. That is evidence that He is the sole and the sufficient Savior. And that's the first great truth that Paul teaches.

II. All people, in Christ, are fully reconciled to God

What's the second thing that he drives home? We see it in verse 22. All people, Paul stresses, all people in Christ are fully reconciled to God. Not partially reconciled. Not mostly reconciled. But fully reconciled to God. If you are in Christ, you have been, past tense, reconciled to God. Paul says, note the words, "He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death." His death. What's Paul pointing to? Paul is saying that the cost of God reconciling you was born by Christ. He bore the cost of your being brought out of alienation and into the family of God. An awful cost. And He is pointing out that this blood reconciliation, at the cost of the price of the death of the Son of God's love, provided full reconciliation. Notice how he says it, "you have been reconciled." He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death.

What's Paul's point? Christ has completely reconciled you and nothing need to

be added to that for you to stand right before God. What stands you before God? What makes you right before God? Christ, Him crucified, and your having appropriated the benefits of Christ by faith, that stands you before God reconciled. The hymn writer put it this way: "In heaven," he said, "we will be more happy, but not more secure." More happy, but not more secure. You see what he's saying? When you are reconciled to God as you have embraced Christ by faith in your present experience, because God has reached out to you in love and grace and drawn you to Himself. He has finished His hostility with you and He has finished your alienation from Him. You are now in fellowship with Him, saving fellowship, and you cannot be more reconciled than you are now. You may be one day more holy than you are now. You may one day be more happy than you are now. But you will never be more reconciled than you are now. In glory, we will be perfect. In glory we will be without tears, but we are no more secure in glory than we are now, because of the perfection of the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. Look what Paul is saying: 'Colossians, somebody telling you that you need Christ plus something else? You're reconciled in him. What are you looking someplace else for? He has reconciled you. He's put an end to enmity between you and God. You don't need to look anyplace else.'

III. God purposes to perfect all His people

Thirdly, notice what he says in the second half of that verse. God purposes to perfect all His people. This is another great point we learn. You see, Paul says it's not just that Christ has reconciled us and saved us from the punishment that we deserve, it's that God is working His plan in us to make us perfect. If you hear those false teachers saying, 'Oh this Christianity stuff that you learned so far, this gospel stuff you learned so far, it's good, but we've got some stuff that will really make your life sweet.' The Apostle Paul is saying, 'God's plan for you is for you to be perfect. You need nothing that you don't find in Christ.' Got a better alternative than that? The Apostle Paul says 'in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach,' that's why God has reconciled us, to present us to Himself, holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

Let's unpack those three words. What does Paul mean when he says, 'I am telling you that God is going to present you before Himself holy?' He means cleansed from sin. He means separated from the world to God for His service. You are wholly His. You are holy, cleansed from sin. What does he mean, when he says you're 'blameless' or 'faultless'? He means you are without any blemish whatsoever. No imperfection remains. What does he mean when he says you're blameless or beyond reproach? He means that there is absolutely nothing that anybody could find in your character which was less than perfection. Now the Apostle Paul says, that's what you get when you're reconciled with God through Christ, because that is what God is working towards. One day He will present you to Himself, holy, blameless, and irreproachable. Top that. He stresses that God is doing this. Why? Because God wants to present us to Himself.

What is that pointing to? It's pointing out the fact that God's ultimate purpose for us is fellowship with Him. We see it in *The Shorter Catechism*. We say that, "Man's chief end is to glorify and enjoy God." We are made for eternal fellowship and relationship with the living God. But God is holy and He cannot fellowship with sin and darkness. So our holiness is not a little addendum, a little afterthought that He tacks on to the end of our salvation. Our holiness, this holiness that He is working in us, is because He wants to fellowship with us eternally, and one day he is going to present us before Himself spotless and we will inaugurate at that point an eternity of fellowship. A time, if I may speak in that term, a time that will not end. That's what it is created for. The Apostle Paul says, 'and you're looking somewhere, you're looking at Christ plus something else? This is what God has planned for you in Christ and you're thinking about looking at Christ plus something else?'

IV. Consequently, Christians must strive toward the hope of the gospel and rely on Christ.

Fourthly he says this, 'what's your response going to be?' How do we respond to that understanding that Christ is our sole and sufficient Savior? He says this, 'Christians must strive towards the hope of the gospel and rely on Christ.' Look at his words in verse 23, "if indeed you continue in the faith, firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel." Paul is saying, 'we as Christians must strive toward the hope of the gospel. We don't turn away to another hope. We stay with the hope that the gospel is set before us. That hope that one day we will stand before Him faultless with exceeding glory and great joy. That's our hope. We stay with that hope. We don't find some other hope outside of Christ. We don't find some ritual outside of Christ. We don't find some teaching outside of Christ, something outside of Christ at all, we stay with that hope and we rely on Christ.'

How does Paul mean that we continue in the faith? Look again at the three words that he uses. How do we continue in the faith? Firmly established, steadfast and not moved away from the gospel. What does he mean by that? What does Paul mean by that, 'we are to be firmly established as we continue in the faith?' He means that you should be stable. What does he mean by being stable? He means that you should be established or well founded in the truth. Stay with the word of the gospel. Don't let someone else say, 'I've got something in addition to the gospel. I've got something in addition to the word of God that will take you deeper in the knowledge of God.' There are commercials put on by a particular group today, which advertise for you another testament of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hear the word of the Apostle Paul, 'stay with the gospel. Reject those who say Christ plus something else.'

He goes on to say, 'we are to be steadfast.' What does he mean by steadfast? Is

he just repeating himself? Stable. Steadfast. Established. Steadfast. No. Steadfast is to remain loyal to the truth which you first heard. He said stay with that truth. Be loyal to that truth. Don't waiver from that truth.

And finally, do not be moved. Don't shift. Don't be dissuaded from the hope that I've set before you. Paul piles up three reasons why they shouldn't be dissuaded from the hope that they have had presented to them. First of all, because they have already heard of it. Second of all, because the whole world is being preached this hope and many are coming to this hope. Thirdly, because he himself is a minister of that hope. He says for all those reasons, don't you give up on that hope. Don't let someone come in with a message which tickles your ear and lead you away from that hope. Stay with the hope.

What does it all mean for us? We too have this temptation, my friends. There are people who still peddle the teaching, that it's Christ plus something else. 'Oh, it's O.K. for you to be a Christian, but if you really want to live the fullness of the experience of the Christian life, you need to have the second blessing, or you need to have this definitive experience of the Holy Spirit which allows you to do miraculous things that you have never been able to do before, and that will really take you in the depths of Christian experience. The Apostle Paul is saying, 'if you have Christ, you have all the blessings that go with Christ. So do not look for Christ plus something else. Don't change the focus of Your original hope. Don't add to Christ, because to supplement Christ is to supplant Christ. To add to Christ is to take away from His sufficiency. To suggest that there is something outside of Christ that we need is to mock His glorious, all sufficiency and the very provision of the Father who loves us.'

For those who are looking for assurance this day as they come, Paul is reminding them, don't look somewhere else for reassurance. Don't even look at your own good works. Look to Christ for your assurance. Your good works provide a beautiful evidence or mark of your being in Christ, but ultimately Christ is the ground of your assurance. He is solely sufficient. Rest in Him. That's why Calvin calls Him "the mirror of God's election." Look into the face of Christ. Rest on Him for your assurance of salvation. And if you come apart from Christ this day, Paul is most assuredly saying to you that all the blessings that you could ever desire are found in Christ.

But if you are apart from Him, if you do not love Him, if you have not had faith in Him, if you are not walking in relationship with Him, you are not a party to the blessings which He will bring to all His people. Now what do you do about that? You flee to Christ. You cast your cares, your burdens on Him. You rest or you trust in Him to save you from your sin which will assuredly condemn you, and to give you the blessings of which you are now bereft. And I promise you, on the authority of the Christ who is solely sufficient, that He will not cast you out. Come to him. Let's pray.

Lord the word is much bigger than we are. It's so much more glorious than we can take in. We can't do justice to it when we speak. We grasp at it, like trying to catch light. It's meant for our edification, its meant for Your glory. Glorify Yourself in Your word and in our hearts, and we give You all the praise and all the glory, for we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

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