

Colossians 1 v 21 & 22

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Date: 15 June 2014

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 0 0] gives us good context. So, we'll read from verse 21. 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 wholly in his sight without blemish and free from accusation. If you continue in your faith established and firm not moved 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. Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory. We proclaim him admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me. So we're here in Colossians 1 and if you'd like to have that page open then that will be a help to you as we consider these verses particularly verses 21 through to 23. So just a few verses together but packed with all sorts of treats for us. Now there's a story that goes true or not we're not sure that Arthur Conan Doyle the creator of the Sherlock Holmes stories decided as a practical joke he would send a telegram to 12 of his friends and on the telegram it would simply have these words all is revealed flee at once. Though it was a practical joke and he had nothing really on any of those men by the next day four of them had left the country. Whether true or not the reality is of course is that we all have skeletons in our cupboards. We all have those past sins of which we're ashamed. Those transgressions, those misdemeanors, those things that we really would not like everybody to know about.

We'd be most upset if it became public knowledge that we had done those things or said those things or thought those things things. And we just consider them just too terrible. But the truth is that whatever our past sins, whatever our past transgressions, whatever our shame over those things, nothing that we have done can come close to what Paul accuses us of in his word here in his letter to the Christians at Colossus. Look at what he says in verse 21 concerning them and concerning every Christian today. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies. Now we can cope with being told that we were alienated from God before we became Christians. But to be told that we were alienated because we were enemies of God is a bit more hard to swallow. To be sure, before we were Christians and like many people in the world today, there is that sense of alienation from God. There is little sense that God is with us or near us or for us.

Occasionally, perhaps, some people and perhaps before we were Christians, we had an experience in our lives, a heightened sense of joy. Something had gone really well or we'd had a wonderful occasion or celebration, a wedding or something like that. And there was a sense in which we thought, wow, isn't God good to us?

[4 : 36] There's that lovely, well not lovely necessarily, but there's that line at the very end of *Pride and Prejudice* where the mother of the daughters turns to her husband, Mrs. Bennett, and she says, oh, Mr. Bennett, three daughters married within a year. Hasn't God been good to us?

Now, if you know the story of Mrs. Bennett, she wasn't a very good Christian character. But that's how some people feel. There's that sense. But most of the time, of course, generally, apart from those occasional rare times, God is noticeable by his absence.

Even the psalmist had people saying to him, where is your God? And perhaps sometimes people have said that to us. Perhaps we felt that ourselves. Where is God in this situation? Where is God?

And most people, of course, yes, feel alienated from God. He's barely spared a thought in their lives. They go day by day and there's very little concern for him or his will. That's understandable to have that sense of alienation. But I don't think any of us then or any of the people today who feel alienated from God would say, well, I know the reason that we're alienated. It's because we are enemies of God. That would be the last thing that they would say or even cross their minds.

To be an enemy demands a certain amount of hate and anger, at least. It requires sort of meaningful opposition to someone, a decision to oppose them. And even in those worst moments when people are angry, if I can put it that way, with God or resentful of things in their lives or going in a particularly unhappy period, few people would say that they were opposed to God and at enmity with God, at the very least because of fear that something worse may happen to them.

[6 : 33] But though we may not think of ourselves as being enemies of God, that's certainly how God feels about us. Paul, in another one of his letters, this time to the Ephesian Christians, writes this.

Again, speaking to Christians, he reminds them of this truth. All of us also lived among them. That's everybody in the world. At one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. Objects of wrath. Objects of God's anger. See, God doesn't take a dim view of sin. He takes it personally. Sin is against his person. It's not a slight thing. He doesn't count law-breaking and his commandments and rebellion against him as of no consequence. He doesn't just sort of look down on the world and say, oh, well, if they want to be like that, hard cheese to them. He takes it very personally. He takes all such actions and attitudes as being against him. And it is indeed our attitudes and our actions that make us God's enemies. Look at what Paul writes. You were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. And what that sentence means, you were enemies in your minds proven by your evil behavior. In other words, you decided whether you did so in a very conscious and clear way to say I'm God's enemy, which is unlikely, but you decided that God was not for you and you were not for God. And the evidence of that is the way that you've lived your life.

One of the realities that the Lord Jesus made very clear when he talked about God's word and law was that sin is not simply a matter of doing something wrong. That's how many people consider sin. Sin is just when you do something bad or something evil or something wrong. Jesus made it very clear that sin was a matter of the heart, of the mind, of the inward person. When he talked about the law of God, he spoke about it in this way. Here's just one example from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5.

Jesus speaking, He talks about hate and other things as well. And he talks about the commandments that God has given us.

That's why the Ten Commandments are impossible to keep. God never gave the Ten Commandments expecting us to be able to keep them. They are his standards. They are saying this is what I desire of you, but I know that you can never do it.

[9 : 36] That's the whole point of the law. The law is, yes, to be a safeguard, but it's especially to point us to the fact that we need a savior. We need somebody who can forgive us our sins and who can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We cannot keep God's Ten Commandments because even if we were to try to do the practical ones, we could never do them because they are to be spiritually understood.

As Jesus makes clear here, it's not just the act of adultery, it's the thought of adultery. And so the reality is this. The reality that Paul makes very plain to us here, each one of us has sinned.

We've sinned in our thinking, we've sinned in our behavior, we have set ourselves up against God saying, I will do what I want to do. And in doing so, we have made God our enemies and made ourselves enemies of God.

God. So let me assure you of this, because this is where the devil can really get at us when we're Christians. He can keep on pointing back to us the things that we did in the past before we were Christians. He can keep on pointing back to us and say, well, come on, look at that. Can you really think that God would ever forgive that or ever forget what you did when you said that or acted in that way? Don't you see? In one sense, what you can say to the devil is this, look, I was God's enemy.

Anything else that I did is not worth my comparison with that. I was in opposition to him. I was one whose life was full in thought and action of sin. I acknowledge that. But, and this is where we come to the buts. I was chatting to somebody the other day about it. And I think it was, I think it might be Moira. We're talking about how David Lloyd, David Lloyd George, not David Lloyd George, Dr.

[11 : 36] Martin Lloyd-Jones, slight, slight differently people, had a series of sermons on the buts of God. And here's a wonderful but, isn't it? Verse 21. If we just read verse 21, well, it would be desperately despairing, wouldn't it? Once you're enemies of God in your mind and in your evil behavior. Oh, woe is me. But, but, but. God is the God of but. He's the God who changes and transforms the situation. He's the God who turns things around. In one sense, if I could say this, whatever you were, whatever you have done, whatever sins are in your past, whatever skeletons are in your closet, whatever things that you are ashamed of and would hate for everybody to know, let me say this to you, but that was then, this is now. That was then, this is now. Things have totally changed. But he has reconciled you. Where there was war, there is now peace. Where there was hostility, there is now love.

Where there was alienation, there is now a reconciliation. The whole thing has changed. And if you're a Christian this evening, everything in your relationship with God is changed. An incredible turnaround has taken place. We thought about this this morning and, and Martin helpfully reminded us of this truth in, in Corinthians. If anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come. Think of Paul. Think of his past. He, he often mentions it, doesn't he? He mentions the fact that he was a, he was a blasphemer. He was a, he was a persecutor of the church. He was somebody who is a violent man. But, he says, I was shown mercy. Dear friends, whatever our past, whatever we've done, wherever we've come from, we can, in one sense, say back to the devil, but God has reconciled me. Whatever I was, I'm not now. This is the wonder of the gospel.

This is the power of the gospel. But how did it happen? How could it be that this incredible and marvelous change took place? How could it be that people who are God's enemies are no longer his enemies? How could it be that those who were, they were in rebellion and rejection of God are now his children? Well, we're told how. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.

The peace that was won was not won apart from great cost. Terrible loss of life.

The loss of the life of the one in whom dwells the fullness of God. For you and I to have peace with God, there had to be a price that was paid.

[14 : 45] For you and I to be reconciled to God, no longer alienated or enemies, there had to be a sacrifice. 1914, 2014, thinking about the horrendous, horrendous cost of life and sacrifice of the great war. Here we have again a horrendous cost and sacrifice. But notice here, Paul makes it very clear. He was reconciled to you by Christ's physical body through death.

A physical sacrifice was necessary. A human body like our own had to pay the price of sin. Jesus had to bear the punishment for the sins that we have done in our body by our sins being paid for in his body. Peter, as he writes to the believers, his first letter, 1 Peter chapter 2, makes this incredible truth plain to us. He says this, 1 Peter 2, 24, he himself, speaking of Christ, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Now it's very right for us that we highlight the spiritual suffering of Christ. It's right for us when we think about that incredible cry of the Lord Jesus from the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That we center in on the fact that his very soul suffered alienation and separation from God, that he tasted hell itself, which is ultimately the very anger of God against evil. It's right that we do that. But it is also important that we do not downplay the very real physical suffering of the Lord Jesus on the cross and the importance of that physical suffering for our salvation. That is as much a part and a necessary part of the sacrifice for sin as the spiritual. That's why Paul makes it clear that he suffered in the body. He has reconciled to you by Christ's physical body. We must keep those two together. It's an unfortunate habit that can be, particularly upon certain sections of the church, only to think about the physical or even the emotional, if I can put it that way, or how awful were the nails and the blood and all the gore, if I can put it that way. Mel Gibson's The Passion of Christ was very much like that. I didn't watch the film and I wouldn't recommend that you did either. But sometimes as evangelical Christians we can be more siding just with the spiritual because in one sense to counterbalance the physical. Now we must keep the two together because in the Bible that's exactly what we find.

very real physical suffering. You see our sins are very real and physical sins. They're not just ideas in the ether. They're not just sort of vague notions as some people would have us to think. Sin is real. It's not an illusion of a religious person. They are real physical sins and therefore there's a real physical sacrifice. Now the wonderful thing is this that we read, now he has reconciled us by Christ's physical body through death. That's why again it's so vital dear friends that when somebody becomes a Christian that they acknowledge their sin and they acknowledge that Christ died for their sin.

That's why it's impossible for somebody to be a Christian simply by saying, I believe in Jesus or I'm following Jesus or I want to do what Jesus wants me to do. Now those things are all part of it but it must begin with a recognition that we have sinned and that Christ died for our sin and faith must be in the cross. We can't get away from the cross. We can't remove it.

[18 : 59] It's a bloody mess, the cross, isn't it? Paul says elsewhere, the cross is a stumbling block to Jews, foolishness to Greeks and to the people of our day and generation. Again, if we could have Christianity without the cross, that would be great but you can't have it because if there is no sacrifice for sin then there is no forgiveness for sin. But Christ has accomplished by his death on the cross. What? Reconciliation to God. Now that has two senses to it. There is first of all the legal sense, if I can put it that way. If you can imagine that God is the judge as he truly is and as he looks upon us and he says you deserve and your punishment and sentence is everlasting death for your sin. But Jesus Christ has taken it all for you, therefore you're acquitted.

You're forgiven, you're set free, you're pardoned. There's a legal sense to that and that's very important, that's necessary, that the law of God has been fulfilled so that Christ has taken our punishment and we are acquitted. But there's another sense to it as well and that is how our whole demeanor is changed towards God. You see, it's interesting, isn't it, that Paul speaks about, he doesn't just speak about the fact that we're alienated from God and that we were under God's judgment, which he could have said, couldn't he? We're alienated from God, under God's judgment. He speaks about we were alienated from God and we're enemies of God. Now enemy has a sense of relationship, isn't it? There's something very personal in that. It's not just a legal thing, you know, it's something personal. And so there is important that Christ not only dealt with our sin in the sense of quitting us and pardoning us, but that also changed our relationship with the Lord God. And again, this is why being a Christian is something very personal. It's something that we must engage in personally and individually rather than just be a corporate belief or a general sense of belief. Now we have been changed in our relationship with God in how he views us, notice, and how we view him. Now, verse 22, he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight. So it's how God looks on us now, how he sees us, and retrospectively, in that sense, how we see him. Once we were viewed by God as wicked lawbreakers, but now we are viewed by him as innocent in his sight. And that affects our lives in three ways. And so I want to look at these three descriptions of our present standing with God and how that affects us in our lives in day to day. So first of all, we have been declared to be holy in his sight. This word holy has been coming up, hasn't it, through Colossians. Remember, we looked at it right at the start when Paul describes the believers there in Colossus as being holy, or as we recognize it, it's the word saints. And he speaks about them again, doesn't he, the saints, love for the saints in verse 3 and 4, and about being brought into the inheritance of the saints in verse 13. Nothing to do with the Roman Catholic teaching on saints. Nothing to do with special men or women being elevated above other Christians. Nothing like that. Every Christian is a saint. Every Christian is holy, because every Christian belongs to God.

And that's the sense of holiness, isn't it? We think about the holy things in the temple, they were set apart for God. They belong to God. They were his possession. They were for his use. And so that sense here that in God's sight we are holy means that we are accepted by God.

That God counts us as being his possession. That we belong to him. And that when he looks on us, he says, this is mine. Before, he looked at us and said, you're nothing to do with me, because you're an enemy. But now you're mine. And we thought about this this morning, about being the children of God. But also has this sense of us bearing the image of God. He is holy.

Scripture commands and says, be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy. We're to bear something of his likeness. And that means that in our present lives, it's not just that God looks at us and says, yes, you're acceptable to me. But it means that our lives are to be lived out with this sense of seeking after holiness. We want our lives to be set apart for God. We want the decisions we make to be decisions concerning his will. What does he want? How is it that we can show ourselves to be his people?

[24 : 01] In 1 Peter, in chapter 1, this is what Peter writes to believers there. He says, but just as he who called you is holy, so be holy, notice, in all you do. For it is written, be holy because I am holy.

Be holy in all you do. Remember, we thought about this concept again, that in the Christian life, there is not the sacred and the secular. There is not the things that we do that are holy, in other words, going to church, reading a Bible, praying, being nice people, and the secular going to work, doing our job, etc., etc. For the Christian, we are to be holy in all we do. So everything is all in the pot. Your life and mine and everything we do is to be done holy, to be done to please God, to be done to serve God, to be done to show that we belong to him, to be done unto God. That's what gives motive and purpose and meaning to our lives. Everything that you and I do in our lives, from the simplest tasks to the most of I can put away religious things that we do, everything is to be done unto the Lord. Everything is to be done to please him. Everything is done to serve him and honor him. And we find that when that becomes the attitude of our hearts, then it makes life purposeful.

Your job, dear friends, tomorrow when you go to work Monday morning, your job is not simply to earn your wage and come home again, or to fulfill the duties that your boss gives to you. When you go to work tomorrow, you're serving the Lord. You're serving him. Everything that you do matters to him.

And everything that you do, he wants to be done to please him. So we're holy in his sight. And fleshing that out in one sense, living that out is seen in this next thing, without blemish.

That again has this sense of being complete. We get this phrase without blemish when we look at the Old Testament sacrifices, the goats and the sheep and the bulls. Those that had to be presented to God couldn't be diseased. They couldn't be sort of with scabby bits on them. Okay, they couldn't be sort of limping or blind in one eye, all those sort of things. They had to be the best of the best for God to accept them. They couldn't just be, well, I've got to bring a sacrifice to God. I look over my sheep. Well, that's a bit of a scabby one. He's got about a month to live. I'll take that one to sacrifice it. No, it's giving to God the best. And so when God looks on us, he sees us as being complete. In one sense, wholesome, not lacking anything that God desires. So to be without blemish means that our lives are lives where we seek to avoid those things that would contaminate us. Those things, those ungodly influences in our lives that would sort of spoil and pollute our thinking and our spirit. Paul encourages the Christians in Philippi to set their minds upon, think upon those things which will build up and strengthen them spiritually. He says this,

[27 : 15] Philippians chapter 4 and verse 8. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. I'm sure you have the same experience with me, that you can be watching something on TV and it pollutes your soul. You think, I shouldn't have watched that. I wish I hadn't listened to that. It grieves you, doesn't it? And you know it affects you. It puts into your mind those things that shouldn't be there or into your heart, attitudes that shouldn't be there. And so without blemish means that there's a sense again in which we're filtering our lives. We're reading things that will encourage and stir up and stimulate and strengthen us in our Christian walk. We're trying to avoid, whenever we can, those things which will pollute and blemish us in that way. So that as we live for Christ, we might live for him in a way which is wholesome and complete. And then we also see here free from accusation. So in his sight we are without blemish.

In his sight we are holy. In his sight we're free from accusation. That's true. But again, we're recognizing that these things have an effect upon how we live. They're not just cerebral. They're not just intellectual things. Free from accusation is very similar to that word we get, justified, justified, declared not guilty, but with no one to accuse us. Paul has to bring that out again and again in his letter to the Romans in chapter 5. He says, therefore, having been justified by faith.

Lovely way to understand the word justified. Just as if I'd never sinned. Just as if I'd never sinned. That's what it means. It doesn't mean we haven't sinned, but it's just as if we'd never sinned. In God's sight, those sins that we've been thinking about, those things in the past, the Bible tells us he chooses to remember no more. He separates us from them. We saw that in that Psalm 103, as far as the east is from the west. And again, Romans chapter 8, verse 1 is a wonderful one. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The devil cannot bring an accusation to you, dear friends, because there's no condemnation. Whatever the past, whatever's happened. Now, it may well be that you haven't made peace with your past. It may well be that, in fact, these things we're talking about and thinking about, I don't know, as I'm preaching, this is coming to my mind. Perhaps there's things and you think, I feel so bad. Let me assure you this, two things. One is that God does not say, you are so bad. He has taken, he has dealt with, he has removed that sin, it's finished, it's gone. If you go to him and say, Lord, about this sin, please forgive my flippancy. He'll say, what sin? I've chosen to remember it no more. Now, the problem then is, you've got to accept that that's true. And as God has forgiven you, you've got to forgive yourself. You've got to forgive yourself and say, thank you, Lord, that you have forgiven me. And perhaps you need to say, I don't know, I'm throwing that out to you. Perhaps you need to say to yourself, I forgive myself for that.

It was wrong. I don't condone that sin. I don't say it was okay. But I forgive myself for what happened in the past. And I thank you, Lord, that you accept me. But in the meantime, in the ongoing life, then free from accusation means it's important that we continue to confess our sins. It's important that we don't allow the devil, as it were, opportunity to have something to accuse us of. You see, the Bible speaks of him in Revelation 12 as the accuser of the brethren, the accuser of Christians, who accuses them day and night before God. But often he sits on our shoulder and accuses us. But if you can say, well, no, Satan, I know that I failed, and I know that I failed, but I know that Jesus has died for me, and I've confessed my sin, and I've said sorry, and I know that he's promised to forgive me. He's got no leg to stand on. So it's important to keep short accounts with God. Now, the wonderful truth is this.

That's how God views us now, holy, without blemish, and free from accusation. And he's working in us to bring that reality more and more into our lives, so that just as he sees us in that way, that's how we're becoming more like that as well, practically, until that day when we shall indeed be in his presence, and we shall be free of all sin and all iniquity, when we shall be perfect. Paul looks forward to that wonderful day when he writes to the Ephesians. He says this, Christ gave himself for the church, sorry, loved the church and gave himself up for a what? To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church. That's the future.

[32 : 40] That's what we're looking forward to. When the Lord Jesus comes again, our holy and heavenly bridegroom, we the church will be his spotless, radiant bride. Men as well. We shall be beautiful.

We shall be spotless. We shall be sinless. We shall be perfect. We shall have not a hair out of place. And that's what it's going to be like. That's why Paul says here at the end of the chapter, we'll come to it another day, but he says, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

That's his goal. That's his desire. But what does he mean here in verse 23? If you continue in your faith, established and firm. Well, I think we've run out of time, unfortunately, because it's now 20 to 8, so I'll have to stop. Yeah, I will. We'll come back to that next week. That's our goal then, dear friends. That's the end. But God.

We'll think about these other verses in the week's head. Let's just briefly bow our heads in prayer before we sing our final hymn. Oh, Lord, we're so grateful that you didn't leave us as we were. That you didn't look on us and just say, well, you got into that mess. I'm going to leave you in that mess. Thank you that you purposed and chose to rescue us and to save us. And at great cost, you sent your son, that he might suffer in our place, that he might do for us what we could not do for ourselves, that he might pay the price and reconcile us. And Father, we're so grateful that you drew us to yourself and that you've forgiven us. And Lord, where there are perhaps in some of our lives, sins in the past, which they seem to haunt us, deal with us. Lord, help us. Help us to accept that forgiveness that you bring. Help us, oh Lord, to rejoice in it. Help us to be free, as it were, perhaps from those hooks and claws and shadows of past sins. Help us, oh Lord, to accept and acknowledge that you're full and free pardoned, that today, tonight, when you look on us, you see us as holy, without blemish, without accusation. Help us, Lord, we pray, as we live for you, to live those lives that honour you day by day. Amen. Now, the hymn that I've prepared for us to sing is going to be with the new tune, 296.

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[35 : 56] Before the throne of God above, I have the strong and perfect me, the great I'm raised to His love, Whoever lets him please for Thee.

I've heard that the Ap Thanksgiving is going to be with the common hit. I've heard that the games that I give Hphones above, Him ■■■■, the Shed. I've heard that the Dead Paul and Thursday day. My name is written on his cross. I know that while inária he stands, their tongue can give me the incarnate part, their tongue Your tongue can give me this depart Your tongue can give me this depart When Satan tempts me to despair And tells me of good little dream Of what I look and see in them Who made an end of all I say It has a sin that a snake had died My sinful soul is bound and free Our doubt and justice satisfied To look on him and pardon me

To look on him and pardon me Behold in their risen land My perfect Father's righteousness The great and change of whom I am The King of glory and of grace On earth himself I cannot die My soul is purchased by his blood My life is with Christ on mine With Christ my Saviour and I know My God with Christ my Saviour and I know Amen Now may God himself the God of peace Sanctify you through and through May your whole spirit, soul and body

Be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ The one who calls you is faithful And he will do it now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all Amen