

Jesus suffered and died...

Introduction

Colossians 1:21-23

I was saddened by a conversation I had with a person the other month. We were in the same coffee shop; I with my Bible and she with her friend. Her questions of me related to religion. I soon realized she did not know Jesus Christ. She assured me, however, that she was at peace with God. Therefore, I asked her this question. “Though you may feel that you are at peace with God, how do you know that He is at peace with you”? She was troubled by the question. But I think she followed the reason for it. As we continued talking, it became apparent that her assurance was based upon speculation. She could only guess that God was happy with her; that He was her friend. Her conclusion sobered me.

I showed her a passage that talks about separation from God. I asked her if I could show her in the Bible how she could be reconciled with her God. She rejected my offer and then bid me good-bye.

Tonight I desire to show us another reason why Jesus suffered and died; a reason the lady in the coffee shop rejected, a reason I pray all of us will gladly embrace.

Please open your Bibles to Colossians chapter one. We will read vv.15-23 and then center on the last three verses.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, invisible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

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.

Tonight we continue our series titled “Jesus suffered and died”. Last week we saw that *Jesus suffered and died to satisfy the justice of God*. This was observed from Romans 3:21-26. From

that passage we concluded that God was calling us to turn from the deceitful promises of sin and call upon Jesus to save us from the guilt and punishment and bondage of sin. We were urged by the beauty of God's righteousness to start banking our hope on all that God is for us in Jesus.

For the next two weeks we want to make clear two more basic reasons for Jesus' death on the cross. Mel Gibson in his movie made clear how Jesus suffered and died. We want to make clear why Jesus suffered and died.

In our text for tonight (Col.1:21-23) we see what it means to be separated from God and how reconciliation takes place.

And you

Two of the most hope-fostering words in the Bible begin our passage for tonight. The opening words, "and you", set in motion this paragraph to indicate the goal in Christ's reconciling work. Christ's magnificent work on the cross is not to be viewed from afar; on the vast scale of vv.15-20. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is not to be seen in general terms merely. Rather, Christ's suffering and death had its sights set on a particular people.

The opening two words "And you" indicate application. Paul, having sung over the general effects of the Cross in vv.15-20, now desires to apply personally Christ's work of redemption to specific people in a city in Phrygia on the bank of the river Lycus. The city's name was Colossae.

As I preach this application of reconciliation, I ask God to make it fall appealingly upon each of us. May you see yourself as a beneficiary of what God did in crucifying His Son and "turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God..." (1Thess.1:9,10).

To enjoy the benefits of all that God has for us through the death of His Son, we first need to look at a sobering truth.

Past standing in sin

(V.21)

Paul begins with the Colossians' past condition "You were once..." Verse 21 says,

"And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds".

He starts his application of reconciliation by drawing their attention to their corruption.

Alienated

Paul talks on their past condition by taking up the topic of “estrangement”. Due to sin, separation from God is what every person faces. There is a vast rift between God and people. No person, the Bible says, begins his or her life close to God. By nature, we all are sinful and separated from our holy Creator (cf. Eph.2:1-2). The Bible says it this way.

Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear...you were...separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (cf. Isa.58:2; Eph.2:12)

Terrifying would it be to hear God say to me when I die, “I never knew you. You were in the world without me. I had my face hidden from you and did not hear one of your prayers”.

The teaching of reconciliation brings into focus the problem of separation. We must discern what alienation is. What does it mean to be separated from God? How do people function when they are apart from God?

Hostile in mind

We notice the meaning of separation from God by noticing the following descriptions. First Paul talks about “hostile in mind”. Look down at your Bibles to v.21. Paul exposes the result of alienation from God in two phrases. The first phrase is “hostile in mind”.

Because the Colossians (and we) were separated from God due to sin, they did not serve God. Rather they preferred other things. They did not love God with all their hearts. They did not treasure him above everything else. They did not follow Him faithfully. They did not trust Him. They were hostile in mind. Their thoughts were antagonistic to God’s agenda. They thought only of themselves. They scheduled their own lives. They pondered how to make life work apart from God and His Word. With reference to their thinking, they were opponents to God’s plan and purpose for their lives. Enemies of God they were!

This hostility can look blatant. It also can appear benign. Some examples of this are:

- ? When an employee thinks it is preposterous to submit to his unreasonable employer.
- ? When a “sweet” elderly couple says they do not need corporate worship nor biblical fellowship but stays at home with TV religion
- ? When a teenager scoffs at her parental counsel

- ? When it seems absurd to suffer without retaliation for doing what is right
- ? When relief from pain is preferred over obedience to God's Word
- ? When self-sufficiency instead of child-like trust looks more efficient
- ? When a best friend's praise is sweeter than God's praise
- ? When obeying God is burdensome

"Hostile in mind", in other words, imagines that God wants me to carry out some plan that is desirable for Him but not necessarily to my liking. It thinks that He wants something but apart from (ob)using me He cannot obtain it.

"Hostile in mind" envisions that we naturally have the capacity to enjoy a fulfilled life by taking matters into our own hands. It looks at life through the lens of self-contained, self-reliance. It does not submit to the Bible. It does not desire God's agenda. It has its own plan. It ponders how to achieve this plan. It does all this for the development and defense of self.

This is what we are outside of Christ. We enjoy thinking about how to advance our personal agendas. We like to think about ourselves. We like to consider how to promote our position. We are central to our affections. Life is about me. So we see alienation from God transmits a train of thought that is hostile to God.

Doing evil deeds

Not only is separation from God spelled out in terms of enemies of God in thought but also Paul goes on to talk about "doing evil deeds". The kind of thinking that is hostile to God gives visible expression. Verse 21 calls it "doing evil deeds". Deeds are evil to the degree that they do not come from a desire for God. They may be reprehensible as witnessed by much of TV. But they do not necessarily need to be vulgar in appearance. The Bible says, "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom.14:23). One who is separated from God due to sin cannot please God regardless of the helpful accomplishment of their service. Acts done without any trust in God's grace or any love for His glory are an abomination to God (1Sam. 15:22-23).

Therefore, from v.21 no less than three truths can be observed.

1. *Doing evil deeds proceed from thoughts hostile to God.*
 - a. The root of evil deeds is a mind hostile to God's agenda To change behavior without changing the thoughts is mere behavioral modification. No amount of changed conduct apart from addressing the central problem will make peace with God.

2. *Thoughts hostile to God show alienation from God.*

- a. The indication of hostile thoughts is the problem of separation from God. To work on changing thoughts without looking at the central problem of alienation is mere cognitive therapy. No amount of changed thought apart from addressing the central problem will make peace with God.

3. *Alienation from God is the central problem.*

- a. Wrong thoughts and wavering wants indicate a rupture. We ought not to have any peace that God is at peace with us when we are alienated from God due to our sin. The central concern is from God's perspective. Sin separates whether we feel like it separates or not. To address thoughts and deeds, we must attend to the fundamental problem. And the fundamental problem is: ALIENATION

The consequences of alienation from God are dreadful. This is why I was saddened by my conversation with a person in the coffee shop whose feelings told her everything was OK. Though she felt as though God was at peace with her; that He was her friend, she failed to understand the truth of her sin and the resulting separation from Him. She failed to recognize the central problem in her life. God's wrath remains on her. Each and every day, God's just anger over her rebellious unbelief is this lady's plight. Her New Age thinking about god gave her a false assurance. It gave her a subjective peace without an objective peace. She felt that she was at peace with God without giving thought whether God was at peace with her. She was faced with the question I present to you tonight: Do you have fictional or factual peace? Do you just "feel" like you are OK with God? Or do you see and embrace the objective, God-doing reality of peace-making? What is this God-doing peace-making? Where do we look to see what God has done for my plight of alienation?

There is but one hope. We do not invent it. We cannot create it. It comes from the outside. It comes only from God. God accomplished what no person could accomplish. Paul paints a grim picture in verse 21 to set the reader up for his turning point. God acted mightily on their behalf. What did God accomplish? Look with me at v.22.

Present standing in Christ

(Vv.22-23)

Our author recalls this dilemma in v.21 not mainly to draw attention to their misery. Paul desires to draw attention to God's mercy. And we see clearly God's mercy as we look at the reconciling death of his Son. Paul picks up this topic in vv.22-23; the topic he really wants to talk about.

Reconciled to God by Jesus' death

The reconciliation of enemies to God could only occur through Christ's suffering and death. "In his body of flesh by his death" Jesus made foes into friends. When we read about the awful brutality of Jesus' crucifixion; when we notice the

ripping of his flesh and hanging on the cross we are witnessing God's payment for our sin. We are noticing how God was bringing over rivals of His authority. Crucifixion was described by the Roman orator Cicero as the "most cruel and frightful sentence". The Christ's "body of flesh" was subjected to torturous distress for the cause we read about in v.22

Verses 21-22 underscore no less than two truths.

1. *That the solution to the human problem could only be achieved through God's intervention.* Nothing in the Bible comes close to teaching that we can reconcile ourselves to God. The rift is vast. No resolutions or good deeds can bridge over to the holy God of the universe. We need his intervention. We must have God invade our alienation.
2. *That this intervention is only through the death of His Son.* The death of Christ is the single basis by which we are reconciled. The suffering and death of Jesus on the cross paid the penalty of sin. Official pardon for our betrayal and treachery was purchased by the death of Jesus.

To present you blameless before Him

God's intervention by Christ's death to bring about reconciliation had a particular end in view. We can observe this in the latter part of v.22.

It was "to present [them] holy and blameless and above reproach before him". This language has judicial overtones. The phrase "present you above reproach before Him" points to the effects the reconciliation of God had for them. The purpose of God's work of reconciling the readers through Christ's death was that they should be irreproachable as they finally stand before the judgment seat of God (cf. Rom.14:10; Jude 24). In order to bring His people into His presence on the Final Day without eternal punishment Jesus Christ suffered and died. Reconciliation means God is at peace with His people and His people are above reproach on the Day of Judgment.

If you continue in the Faith

Paul rounds out his teaching on reconciliation accomplished and applied by way of warning. Many a reader of this text have balked at the face value of verse 23. It says, "if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard..." As Paul teaches that Jesus suffered and died to reconcile God's enemies to Himself Paul recognizes an opportunity for counseling. He labors at this point to make plain that what Jesus accomplished and applied is for all who come to and continue in the faith.

Stable and steadfast

He describes the continuance in the faith first by expressing it in the positive. What does continue in the faith look like? He says, "stable and steadfast". This harkens to the foundation and structure of a building. Paul is saying what Jesus said in Matt.7:24ff. When the winds of trial and temptation blow

against the house, the house will stand...if it is built on the Rock. It must not collapse under the weight of hardship. Stable and steadfast are ways of illustrating what God-reconciled people look like.

Not shifting

Paul also describes this perseverance in the negative. He says, “not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard”. The verb “shifting” is used in several places in the O.T. For example, in Deut.32:30 this verb is translated “put to flight”. Paul is calling the Christian community in Colossae not to run away from the fixed hope the gospel offers; the granite foundation of the glorious reality of being reconciled to God through the death of His son. Moreover, this reconciliation affects the Final Day of judgment. We will stand holy and blameless and above reproach before the Great I AM provided we do not shift from the hope.

Jesus suffered and died to procure faith for His people so that they will respond to this type of warning. Who would want to lose out on standing above reproach on the Final Day of judgment reconciled to the one, true, holy God? Not a believer in Jesus Christ.

To help understand how biblical warning function, Peter Obrien, in his commentary on Colossians, was helpful. “If it is true that the saints will persevere to the end, then it is equally true that the saints must persevere to the end. And one of the means which the apostle uses to insure that his readers...do not fall into a state of false security is to stir them up with warnings such as this”. This passage ought to “stir us up “ to recognize that there is no other hope for us but the gospel. There is no other way to be a friend of the King except through His reconciliation brought about by His Son’s death.

How to know and enjoy peace with God

Recognize the Plight

In the last thirty minutes we been made aware that we all have a plight. This plight is that we all are alienated from God; separated from Him due our sin. We heard from this paragraph that there is nothing we can do to bridge this rift. We cannot merely change our behavior in hopes that we will have peace with God. God must do something for us. We cannot do for ourselves what we need for ourselves. We need to be at peace with God. And we are enemies of God.

Realize the Price

As we listened to Paul in this text, we heard that God actually did what we could not do for ourselves. He accomplished and applied reconciliation. This

sufficient work came at a high price for God. His Son, Jesus Christ, was crucified in order to pay for reconciliation. To know and enjoy peace with God we must realize the price His paid for us.

Relish the Prize

This reconciliation is utterly stupendous. Those reconciled to God through the death of His son are holy and blameless and above reproach on the Day of the Great Judge. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and know that when we die we will not be condemned for our sin. The sin is paid for. Jesus died to reconcile us to God. The prize is not merely that we will make it through the Judgment Day. The prize is that we are reconciled to God. He is not wrathful. He is satisfied (in the payment of His son's death). To know and enjoy peace with God means that we receive the reconciliation by exulting, rejoicing, relishing in the prize; namely delighting in God through Jesus Christ.

Run the Path

Paul closes his thought by way of warning. This warning is real. It is meant not to create doubt. Rather it is meant to create stability and steadfastness when tempted to run away. The effects this warning has on the reconciled are stirring and stimulating. We, therefore, are to respond to this message with hope-filled energy to run the path before us. His grace has bought us. His grace has created peace for us. His grace produces perseverance in us. Run with confidence the path before us. Run the path by responding to the warning.