

# COLOSSIANS BIBLE STUDY

Colossians 1:21-23

Lesson #8

## Introduction & Review

Last week we finished the section of verses, 15-20, that we titled “The preeminence of Christ” in the master plan of God. In those verses we were reminded that a reconciliation between God and humanity is at the center of our existence. Unlike the popular concept that we all come before God at the final judgement as basically good people, who might have done a couple of bad things in our lives, but aren’t really bad persons in our hearts, we’re just misunderstood.

The misunderstanding is that we all think of ourselves as basically good people. We come to this conclusion by comparing ourselves to other people. And this is logical, if you don’t know anything about God, and His standards of righteousness, then you establish your own. Or, maybe you do know about His standard, but don’t think He’ll hold us to it because nobody can possibly live up to it. This is a grave mistake, to think that God won’t hold everyone up to His declared standard. God doesn’t compromise His word, or His character. Jesus declared, at one point in His very famous sermon on the mountain, that we are required to be perfect, even as He is perfect. (Mat 5:48)

There won’t be one inhabitant in the kingdom of heaven who doesn’t completely and entirely fulfill this requirement of perfect righteousness. But everybody knows that nobody can meet this requirement, if the standard is based on the laws of God. We know that all have fallen short of that level of glory and righteousness, so our only logical conclusion is either there won’t be anybody who is saved, or, God will just sort of declare a general amnesty. This seems to be the most popular. The hope that our sins and transgressions won’t be held against us because that would condemn everybody. Therefore, our loving God will surely overlook these minor transgressions for the overall good of keeping all His children from perishing in Hell. The standard will be reduced to some level that will accommodate the masses of people who are just small or medium sinners, and only those who are really serious sinners will be condemned. The rest will receive this general amnesty of God.

After all, we’ve seen this type of amnesty in our own country. The IRS not too long ago declared a general amnesty for certain tax violations if those who did them would confess and make restitution. And the INS not too long ago declared a general amnesty for illegal aliens, and allowed them all to stay in this country, even if they came here illegally. An amnesty is a setting aside of the requirements set forth in the law. It’s declared by those in authority for the sake of convenience, or some other perceived offsetting benefit to the country. Either the sheer volume of perpetrators is too great to handle, or there’s some other compelling reason not to enforce the law and just let everything slide. This is the hope of all those who don’t know God and His uncompromising standards of righteousness. That He will just let all their little sins be forgotten for the sake of convenience. Because, after all, most of us aren’t really all that bad, are we? This seems to be perfectly logical, and it allows us to hope for the best in the future, without making any changes in the present.

But, this isn’t even close to what the Bible teaches. Jeremiah writes that in the eyes of God our hearts are evil above all things and desperately wicked. So much so that we can’t even know the depths of our own depravity. (Jer 17:9) Paul, in Romans 3 recalls an Old Testament scripture that says that there is none righteous, none who seek after God, not even one. He describes all humanity as having turned away from God and seeking only our own pleasure. Listen to God’s assessment of unredeemed mankind taken directly from the words of holy scriptures:

*There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, together they have become useless; there is no one who does good, there is not even one. 13 Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues. Vipers’ venom is under their lips. 14 Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and wretchedness are in their paths, 17 and the path of peace they have not known. 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

Romans 3:10-18 (HCSB)

Humanity thinks of itself as being basically okay. We compare ourselves to ourselves, and in the final analysis every one seems to kind of average out. But from these verses just quoted, we can see that this isn't how God evaluates humanity. He has a standard to which He holds all humans, and unlike the countries that declare amnesty when it suits their own purposes, God has only one standard and He has no intention of ever compromising it. To do so would be to destroy the whole predetermined plan for an eternal kingdom of righteousness. This doesn't serve God's need, it contradicts it, so any hope of general amnesty just isn't realistic. Furthermore, a declaration of amnesty would dishonor His own beloved Son, who paid a very dear price to purchase the redemption of His beloved. This isn't something that God will ever consider doing.

After asking His Son to pay such a very dear and high price for the redemption of his church; for God to then turn around and declare amnesty for some would be an un-thinkable affront to His own beloved Son. You see, it's because of this very dilemma that we have just discussed, regarding the inability of any human to meet God's requirements for righteousness, that's the very reason that God had to send a substitute into the world, to do on our behalf, what man could not do for himself. But the truth is that almost no unregenerate humans think of themselves as condemned sinners in the eyes of God. Rather, all consider Him to be happy, and themselves to be basically good people. Few, if any, would declare that they're perfect, but all believe that God will overlook their minor imperfections and accept them as they are into his eternal kingdom. Because of this, very few people actually feel like they're in grave danger, like they're condemned criminals, worthy of punishment in the eyes of God. Unless one first understands their position in the eyes of God, they cannot, and will not be willing to acknowledge the grave danger that they're in.

And it's this precise understanding that's at the very foundation of the gospel. Unless one begins from this starting point, they cannot grasp the desperate need, and the value of the offer that's being presented in the gospel. A person who doesn't perceive themselves as being in danger sees little value in a rescuer. But, one who is in grave and immediate peril, perhaps a life and death situation, can see and understand.

Every gospel presentation must begin from this starting point. We are desperately and gravely in trouble. We are at odds with our God. We are alienated from Him because of this hostility that we harbor in our minds, and the evil deeds that we do in defiance of His commands and warnings. We show little or no fear whatsoever of blatantly disobeying Him. For this, He is justly angry, even furious with our behaviors, and our attitude, and He's willing and ready to make us pay for our transgressions. (Rom 9:22-24; Heb 10:30) Unless we understand and believe that this as our condition, we won't be looking for a rescuer. The Bible makes it clear that this is a man's condition in the eyes of God. We are in grave danger of falling under the wrath of Almighty God. And only a rescuer outside of ourselves can save us from this inevitable fate. This was the message of warning that Jesus proclaimed, and it was the reason that He was put to death.

It's popular today to hear preachers, and would be evangelists, give emotionally stirring sermons on how we have a God sized hole in our hearts, and we need Jesus to fill that hole so we can be happy and fulfilled. Or, we hear that we need Him to come into our lives to heal our struggling marriages and family relationships. I've even heard it preached that we need Jesus in our lives to solve our credit card debts, and get our finances back in order. Incidentally, five people "came forward" at that sermon and received Jesus as their credit card savior. I can't help but wonder just how well that worked out for them. Is it any wonder that the world is ignorant of the danger, when even the church doesn't understand **what the gospel is** and **why its proclaimed**. Its become a miraculous, heavenly cure all, for the many diverse ills of modern society, even in the perception of the churches. It's the latest wonder drug, designed for the happiness of humanity.

A convicted murderer, kneeling before the executioner, doesn't need help with his marriage, or his credit card debt, or his self esteem. He needs help with his just and eminent judgement for his crimes, for which he's about to loose his head. He doesn't need to hear how much Jesus loves him, and what a wonderful plan He has for his life. The executioner has raised his giant sword and is about to bring it down on his neck and sever his head. He's had his day in court, and been found guilty. No appeals or amnesty are available. So what can be offered to this guilty criminal about to suffer his just fate? Only one thing remains. A substitute - to take his punishment for him. To step up to the chopping block and say, "I'll take his penalty in his place" the full and total force of it. This, my friends, is our condition, and this is the **content of the gospel**, according to Jesus. He didn't die on a cross to fulfill our life, to save our marriage, to bolster our self-esteem, or to solve our financial problems; He came to die Himself for our sins, our wilful disobedience to God's commands. Which brings us now to our scripture verses for this lesson:

### **Reconciled By Jesus Christ**

*21 And you were once alienated and hostile in mind because of your evil actions. 22 But now He has reconciled you by His physical body through His death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before Him— 23 if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith, and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard. [This gospel] has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a minister of it.*

Col 1:21-23 (HCSB)

#### **Verse 21:**

*21 And you were once alienated and hostile in mind because of your evil actions.*

After six marvelous verses regarding the preeminence of Jesus Christ, Paul now turns his attention to the condition of mankind. We can see from the previous verses that all that Christ is, and all that He's done, involves humanity. The preeminence of Christ is altogether about his position and relationship over all creation, including angels, and humans, and all tangible matter. For Christ to be the head of the body, the church, there has to be a body, a church. But, the condition of humanity is altogether fallen, altogether under the condemnation of God, and is rendered useless to Jesus in its existing condition. This portion of mankind, that's been given to Him by His Father, must be rescued from their fallen condition to be valuable to Christ, and fit for His eternal kingdom. And this work of rescuing, sanctifying, and transforming falls entirely on the shoulders of Jesus Christ alone.

All humanity has been alienated from God and is hostile in mind because of our love for evil. The heart of man has been damaged, our love is for the things which are evil in the eyes of God. We don't appreciate, we don't love and desire those things which are righteous and holy to Him. And because of this we've alienated ourselves from our God.

Do you remember how you yourself felt before you were redeemed, when someone spoke to you about God's commandments? Perhaps you were just indifferent, but most likely you were annoyed, and didn't want to hear it. If they continued to press the issue, you likely became hostile and angry at that person for harping on the topic. We truly don't want to hear what God has to say about morality and integrity, because it's always opposed to how we ourselves feel. We will not take it to heart and pursue it because its opposed to what we think and what we want. Our hearts and minds are indeed hostile to God. He's our cosmic kill joy, who forbids everything that we value the most, and demands what we ourselves can't stand. How could we be close to Him, when we're absolutely the opposite of Him in every aspect of our desires and affections?

We read in Romans chapter three that there is no fear of God in our eyes. We've managed to convince ourselves that God's okay with this situation of hostility to His commands, and fearless disobedience right before His eyes. That He'll just overlook it and accept status quo. But the scriptures say otherwise. God has been openly and repeatedly disobeyed, dishonored, disrespected, and insulted; and for this He is rightly offended, and there will be consequences. Like the example earlier, we've had our day in court and been found guilty. (Rom 3:23; 6:23) The sentence of death has been handed down, and there's no appeals or amnesty. Unless there's someone who will step forward and take our punishment in our place, then we're goners. If we harbor any hope of salvation from this plight that we're in, then there must be a reconciliation for our sins, and that reconciliation demands punishment, not amnesty. Which brings us to the next verse:

#### **Verse 22:**

*22 But now He has reconciled you by His physical body through His death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before Him*

The greatest news in the universe, the greatest news of all time, is that God Himself has provided a means of rescue. A substitute who will step in and take our punishment that we deserve. He has provided His own Son to redeem and to save that which was lost. God, by His own mercy and love for His chosen children, has provided a means of reconciliation, a means of atonement for the sins of His elect. And furthermore, He's done all of this in a particular predetermined manner, through a particular predetermined person; and that person is His Son Jesus. Who has accomplished this great work through incarnation into a human body, in which He performed all this work of redemption.

To redeem those who live in human flesh, God sent His Son in human flesh, to do what man couldn't do. To live a perfect sinless life. To overcome sin in the flesh, so that He might redeem a remnant of humanity.

Since it was human flesh that sinned against God, it had to be human flesh that paid the penalty for sinning against God. Hence the need for Jesus Christ to come in the flesh, in the likeness of man, so that he might justify man in the flesh. God himself created human flesh, that human flesh willfully sinned against God, therefore, God pronounced sentence against human flesh. God told Adam and Eve that in the day that they disobeyed, by eating the fruit of the tree that He had forbidden, that they would surely die. By God's declaration, human flesh would have to pay the penalty of death for human sin. And this was the work of Jesus Christ. Who came in human flesh, to pay the penalty that human flesh owed for its sinning against the command of God.

But that's not all there is. This verse tells us that we are hostile in mind because of our evil actions. You see even though we've been reconciled to God for our sinful actions, nevertheless there's a hostility in our mind that alienates us from our God. This condition must be addressed, or there is no permanent solution. There must be an accompanying transformation, or the reconciliation hasn't produced any fruit. Simply avoiding punishment for our sins doesn't make us one bit closer to our God, nor resolve the hostility that we harbor to His commands.

I wonder if you remember in our earlier teaching, where we were discussing verse 20 where it says that the Lord had made peace through the blood of Jesus' cross, and He had reconciled all things to Himself; whether things on earth or things in heaven. We discussed just what all those things might specifically include. At that time we said that it included everything whatsoever necessary to accomplish its purpose. Here we see one specific element of that reconciliation. You see, on earth there is also hostility. Even though God in heaven is reconciled, nevertheless men on earth are still hostile in their minds toward God and His commandments. Unless the sinful and deceitful heart of man can be reconciled to the commands of God, we have no lasting solution. It's this innate hostility of man in the depths of his heart toward the commandments of God, and his natural love for those things which are evil, that alienate man from God, and make us guilty before Him. Reconciliation must deal with this, or it hasn't accomplished a lasting peace between God and man.

And it's this very situation that was being revealed by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel when they spoke of a new covenant; one that would not only address man's sin, but would address man's evil heart and hostile mind also. These prophets spoke of a new covenant that included a new heart and a new mind, that were no longer hostile to God. A new heart and a new mind that were in conformity with the heart and mind of God. This new covenant deals not only with reconciliation for sins, but with the root problem of man's hostility to God in his very innermost makeup. Which is brought about by man's inherent love and desire for that which is evil in the sight of God.

We can see from these verses that it's the predetermined plan of God that this reconciliation would include not only forgiving us of sins, but also a total transformation of heart and mind. This reconciliation, by God's own design, not only saves his elect from death, but much more, it leaves them holy, faultless, and blameless before Him. How can this be we might ask? How can those who needed a substitute for their crimes, now be seen as holy, faultless, and blameless before God? The answer lies in the example that we made about the substitute. In the eyes of God, Christ not only takes our punishment for sin upon Himself, but much more, He imputes to us His perfect righteousness through substitution.

Jesus spent one tragic and horrible day of his life providing for the atonement of man's sins. But He spent over 30 years of his life in establishing the perfect righteousness that man would require to enter into God's eternal kingdom. Christ did at least two distinct works, one took a single day, the other took every moment, of every day, of His entire life.

A very well respected preacher and teacher who has a television program, and whom I very much respect, repeatedly says that God has provided for man a pardon. But the truth is, this isn't really accurate. God doesn't pardon sinners. God has not provided a pardon, He has provided a substitute. A pardon suggests that while there was a crime, the punishment has nevertheless been suspended. There is a very real difference. If God offered pardons, there would have been no need for Jesus to die on the cross. No, we don't receive a pardon, we receive a surrogate, a substitute, who fully and totally bears the penalty for our sins. There are no cosmic pardons handed out by God. Every sin ever committed by any living being must, and will be paid, either by the ones themselves, or by their substitute. Not one sin will ever be pardoned in the sense that God will simply overlook it.

Yes, we are told that our sins will be forgiven us, but it's vital for every believer to understand that this forgiveness received by us rests entirely on the work of Jesus Christ. Only those who are in Christ Jesus will know this forgiveness. This is a **purchased and paid for forgiveness**, not amnesty, not a pardon, and not a free pass. Oh yes, for us the cost of our every sin was paid by another, **but there was a cost, and there was a payment**. It's imperative that those who know and trust in Jesus Christ also know that God has not provided for them a general amnesty, just because He loves them, but rather He has provided a substitute for them, just because He loves them. For those who are not in Christ, every deed they ever perform, every sin they ever commit, will be held to their account at the great White Throne judgment of God. Which brings us now to the next verse, verse 23: **(No sins ever overlooked, all sins paid for by someone, books must balance)**

#### **Verse 23a:**

***23 if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith, and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard. [This gospel] has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a minister of it.***

Verse 23 begins with a very little word that we so often tend to ignore. The word if. "If" is a conditional word, it means that one thing that happens is contingent upon something else that happens. It generally implies that if the first condition does not happen, then the second condition will not happen either. This is how we generally use the little word if. And this is precisely how this word is being used in this verse. We've just been told that Christ has reconciled us to God, and now we are holy and blameless in God's sight. However, all of this is contingent upon something. So then, what's it contingent upon? The verse says that it's contingent upon our not being shifted away from the hope of the gospel that we've heard.

Obviously this opens up questions. Does it mean that we can lose our reconciliation and our standing before God if we ourselves fail to do something? To those who are unfamiliar with Scripture this will be the logical conclusion. But to those who understand Scripture, we know that the perseverance in the faith is afforded to us by the power of God as Peter tells us in his epistle. No, this verse isn't telling us that we need to do something to keep our standing before God. What it's telling us is that those who are genuinely in the faith, will remain steadfast and grounded in that faith, by the power of God, and can never be moved away. So, those who fade away with time will find that this reconciliation was never really theirs in the first place. Unfortunately, there are many who fall into this category. (Mat 7:13-14)

This verse is telling us that any, and all, who are ever shifted away from their initial profession of faith, never had genuine God-given saving faith in the first place. Rather they were, like the parable of the seed and the soils, only temporary. And time and circumstances proved they were never genuine to begin with. Furthermore, this verse serves as assurance to those who are truly redeemed that their standing cannot be lost. The apostle Peter gives us this assurance; he says that we're kept by the power of God through faith, for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the end time. (1Pet 1:5) Make no mistake, saving faith involves our willing participation as a response, but it is a unilateral, monergistic gift of God, and it's kept by God for eternity. It's our resultant and corresponding actions, our behaviors, our affections, and our ongoing demonstrations, that serves as authentication that our faith is truly a perfect and lasting gift from God.

It's by this steadfast, and firmly grounded faith, that others may decide what they think of us. But much more, it's by this steadfastness of faith that doesn't shift away, that we ourselves may know that we are truly children of God.

#### **Verse 23b:**

***[This gospel] has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a minister of it.***

Now we come to the last portion of verse 23 which says, that this gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven. Just how are we to interpret this declaration? Are we being told that the whole earth has now finally heard this proclamation? Obviously, that can't be the proper interpretation, because the entire populated world had not yet heard this message preached. That's what Paul and the other Apostles were in the process of doing, and even goes on to this very day.

So what is being said here? Simply, Paul is telling everyone that this reconciliation afforded by Jesus Christ has been announced to the entire world. It's been proclaimed to all humanity. What was once only available to a small group of people, the Jews, has now been proclaimed to the entire population of the planet.

Paul's preparing to unfold a mystery of cosmic proportions that had been hidden, up to then, from all the past generations. He's going to explain it in further detail in verses 24-29, and we'll be getting there very shortly. But for now, a brief preview:

Whosoever will, let them come is the declaration of the gospel. (Rev 22:17) It's no longer about Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free, wealthy or poor, but the kingdom of God has been made open and available to all who hear the call of the Spirit, and thirst for righteousness of heart and life.

In the same chapter of Revelation, just before this call to the thirsty, is a sobering statement:

*10 And he said\* to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11 "Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy."*

*12 "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. 13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*

*14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.*

*16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."*

*17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.*

Rev 22:10-17 (NASB)

*(Comment here on the Spirit and the bride saying "come", and just who are the thirsty)*

### **Conclusion:**

To God the Father, Jesus his Son is everything. It's through his Son Jesus that God created the entire universe, and all that it contains. The things that are visible, and the things that are invisible, whether on earth or in the endless heavens, all things were created by Him, and for Him; **and He is before all things.**

By His own purpose and design He created mankind in His own image, to serve a predetermined purpose. The fall of man, and man's redemption from that fall, were all part of the predetermined plan of God. It was fully part of God's predetermined plan that his Son Jesus would purchase the reconciliation and redemption of mankind with His own life's blood, so that He would come to have first place in everything. So that all mankind would come to know and understand that **our only standing before God** is entirely based on our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Apart from Him we can do absolutely nothing of merit in the eyes of God. The final end result of all things is that this human creature will have come to know and understand the position that Jesus holds in the heart of God; and the position that He holds in the heart of redeemed mankind. Through all of this, mankind will have been made into a suitable eternal companion and worshiper of Jesus Christ the Son, and Almighty God the Father. This is the plan of God. Make no mistake, it's all coming together just as planned; and, it's right on schedule. Come quickly Lord Jesus. Amen.

Robert Andrews  
Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami  
09/26/08