

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.

Colossians 1:21-23 ESV

Last time we saw how Christ reconciled us to the Father through His death on the cross, and today we get a deeper insight into this astonishing event and our responsibilities as believers.

When we read, ***“and you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind,”*** we should consider the intended audience of this letter. The Colossian church was primarily made up of Gentile believers. This helps explain two important details about their understanding: until the New Testament period it was (mistakenly) believed Gentiles were excluded from the promises of God, and every human is sinner (which is true). So in both ways they were ***alienated*** from the Father. Strong’s dictionary defines this as *“to be shut out from one’s fellowship and intimacy.”* We also see that they were ***hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,*** which basically means they previously hated the things of God and were intentionally against His will. And to personalize it, the same applies to each one of us.

But through the cross, Christ ***“has now reconciled [you] in his body of flesh by his death.”*** Again we see an incredible promise of hope, that as Jew or Gentile, and universally as sinners, Christ has made us in good standing with the Father through His blood-sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. This should be the cornerstone of all thanksgiving that pours out from a believer’s heart on continuous basis, as there is truly nothing we could ever do to obtain this on our own.

Now, as a redeemed and reconciled child of God, Christ will ***“present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him [the Father].”*** As a sinful man, this is often hard for me to comprehend. Each day I say, think, and do things that reveal how broken and stubborn my flesh is. It’s hard to grasp how I will one day stand before the Father, who ***dwells in unapproachable light*** (1 Tim 6:16), and be presented by Christ as ***blameless and above reproach***. It seems the stains of my sin are so deep that they will be imbedded in me forever. But here we see the opposite. Indeed, it is true that only ***“the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin,”*** (1 John 1:7).

But there is a stipulation we must keep in mind. Paul says this promise applies ***“if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.”*** I believe this is where our free will has its place in salvation.

It is true that we are predestined by God before the foundation of the world (cf: Rom. 8:28-29, Eph. 1:11), but we must also do our part through obedience. It is impossible for someone who claims to have faith in Christ to go on willfully sinning without remorse. The apostle John warns, **“no one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God,”** (1 John 3:9 - also see Romans 6:1 and Hebrews 10:26). If we feel nothing when we commit acts of rebellion against God and His Christ, this is a DEFCON 1 warning signal that our salvation is not genuine.

Instead, we are to continue ***stable and steadfast in the hope of the gospel***, surrendering ourselves to the will of God, resisting sin, trusting in Christ alone to save us, and striving to ***live in a manner worthy*** of our salvation (cf: Eph 4:1).

It’s not easy, and we will fall often, but it is our obligation as believers not to trust in our own works to be saved, or to continue serving our flesh, when our Great and Mighty Lord has paid such a high price to make us holy, clean, and presentable to our Heavenly Father.

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