

Introduction...

I want us to think for a few minutes about the divisions that we experience in our lives, our families, our culture and our world. When I mention division I'm talking about the differences that divide us from other people. Some of those divisions are simple ones, like which college football team you root for (Aggies, Longhorns, Red Raiders, Bears, or Horned Frogs). Some of those divisions are more personal, like your convictions on education (homeschool, private school, public school). Some of those divisions are more serious, like political philosophy, ethical positions or theological heritage.

Then some of our divisions rise to the point of being eternally serious, such as our religious beliefs and worldviews. You probably have neighbors and friends who don't practice any faith, some who are atheists, some who are Christian but from a different denominational heritage, then others who are Muslim, Mormon, or Jewish.

These are all very real divisions that we deal with on a regular basis. Some of these cause us more stress than others. And yet, all of them pale in comparison to the division that matters the most, which is the division between a holy God and sinful man.

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at Jesus. We have seen this glorious picture of His eternality, His authority, His power, and His preeminence. Jesus' glory fills the entire stage of Colossians 1 and what it does is to cast this huge shadow upon us.

Jesus beauty and glory is staggering but the thing that stands out for us is just how unlike Jesus we are. He is holy and we are not. He is totally righteous and we are totally corrupted by sin; **and this helps us to see the division that exists between God and man.**

Transition...

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus talks about the division between Heaven and Earth as being this great immovable chasm. Because God is holy and we are sinful there is an unbridgeable space between us and it is the greatest division that we will ever experience; but Jesus Christ has come to destroy this division.

Listen to Paul talk about it...

Col 1:21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² 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, ²³ 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.

Sermon Focus...

My purpose in preaching this morning is to show how Jesus has destroyed the division that exists between God and followers of Christ. In order to fully grasp what Christ has done we are going to look at our past, our present and our future and then we will finish things up with the encouragement to stay grounded in the faith.

Let's look first at our past...

I. What Once Was (V. 21)**The Contrast of Once and Now (Vv. 21-22)**

Col 1:21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled...

In this new section of Colossians, we see Paul put into use one of his favorite literary devices when he **contrasts** what we “once” were and what we are “now.” This should be one of our favorite literary devices as well. But that depends on how well we know our sin and how much we long for forgiveness.

And it depends on whether or not you have turned from your sin to trust in Christ. **For many of us here this morning we can say that this is a description of what we once were, but for some I want you to understand that this is a description of what you still are.**

As we come to understand our spiritual condition according to the Bible we are confronted with the fact that we are not just separated from God but we are sinners who deserve God’s wrath. As a culture we tend to avoid talking about the wrath of God, but if you read your Bible faithfully you can’t avoid it. God’s wrath is an extension of His justice and since we have rebelled and broken God’s law we deserve His just wrath.

Now, I believe that when we have a right understanding of **our** sin it is going to cause us to long for forgiveness, to long for salvation, to long to be made right with God. We are going to long for our status to change. **Like the prodigal son when he finally recognized how desperate and dreadful he was, he wanted nothing more than to be reunited with his father, even if only as a servant.**

When we see just how broken our lives are we want the kind of change that only the gospel can bring. So the question we need to ask is, “How desperate is our situation? Just how broken are we?”

Here in Colossians, God’s Word tells us that our identity apart from Christ is that we are **alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. Let’s break this down a little bit.**

To be **alienated** from someone means to be separated or isolated from them. We were separated from God when He exiled us from the Garden and now we are strangers to Him. Apart from Christ we have no fellowship with God, no relationship with God, no communion with God.

One NT parallel is **Ephesians 4:18** where it talks about being alienated/separated *from the life of God* because of our sinful ignorance. As unbelievers, we were not only separated from relationship with God but were separated from the very **life of God**.

We thought we were wise and we were confident that we had something to offer the world, but we were living like pagans in a pagan world with nothing to look forward to but death and judgment. In our minds there was **hostility** toward God.

This doesn’t necessarily mean that you were angry with God, like many atheists are today, but rather it means that the things that you think of as good are actually the opposite of what God declares to be good. One of the clearest ways that our hostility toward God can be seen is that we, apart from Christ, love what God most hates and we hate what God most loves.

When we were separated from God the things of God were cold, dull and boring to us. But the passions of the flesh were exciting and we put all our energy into them.

We were enemies of God in our hearts, minds and behavior. Another NT passage that parallels what we see here in **Colossians 1** is what we read in **Romans 1:21-32**.

Rom 1:21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God...

Our **hearts** were corrupted by sin. Our **minds** were bent toward sinful ideas and our **lives** followed along. This is the spiritual status of everyone apart from faith in Christ.

You might say, but wait aren't there good people who do good things who aren't Christians? Well first of all that depends on how you define the term good. Within the scope of God's common grace there are people who do good things. They care for their families, help others, perform services that strengthen and stabilize society; but every single one of those acts falls short of the type of good that would change one's status with God.

The law of God makes two things abundantly clear to us: **1. We aren't as sinful as we could be** and **2. We are far more sinful than we care to admit.** And the bottom line is that even though we aren't as sinful as we could be, we are still sinful and that sin separates us from God and demands divine justice. The wages of sin is death...and that's the bad news. But that is not where Paul ends.

II. What Now Is (Vv. 22)

V. 22 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

I can think of no greater comfort to someone who has come to understand the weight of their sin than for them to hear that because of what Christ has done they are now reconciled to God. The separation was our fault. The judgment was what we deserved. But Jesus kept the law perfectly and then gave His life in order to save us from sin.

And now, by faith in what Christ has done I am reunited to God. **The sin that I committed** in my youth is no longer held against me. **That lifestyle that you once** followed is no longer admissible in God's law court. **The past memories that haunt you** are paid for, washed away, forgiven.

Apart from Christ we were enemies of God but now by faith in Christ we are children of God, invited to sit at our Father's knee, to pull up a seat at His table, and to enjoy the closest fellowship we can imagine.

Do you think I'm over stating this? Should we really think of ourselves as that close to God simply because we trust in Jesus? Look back up at the beginning of verse 21 and notice how Paul begins this section with the two words, **"And You."**

And You... just so we stay connected to the surrounding context of this passage we need to understand that Paul views "us" as a subset of "all things." You can and should follow the progression that started with Christ being supreme over **all creation**, then moved to Christ being supreme over **all authorities**, last week we saw that Christ is supreme over **redemption** and here we see that Christ is supreme over **us**.

The focus of God's redemptive work is not simply to restore creation to its former glory and it's not just to bring peace into the animal kingdom. The culmination of all that God has done through Jesus is that we are now brought into intimate fellowship with our God, whom we call Abba.

I think this is one of Paul's favorite things to teach. He wants us to relive our conversion and be moved to deep emotion and worship because we grasp again what it means to be saved. **We were lost but now we're found, we were blind but now we see, amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.**

For all those who believe, Christ has fully reconciled us to God. By His death on the cross, Jesus bridged the gap between heaven and earth, He spanned the chasm between us and God. He has transformed our status, which means that we are no longer separated, hostile strangers, but are now newly adopted sons and daughters, who love and worship our redeemer God.

God shows us our past sins, He covers them to reconcile us in the present and He also promises to work in us in the future.

III. What is to Come (V. 22)

V. 22...in order to **present** you holy and blameless and above reproach before him

Here Paul tells us the ultimate end of our reconciliation. Christ's ultimate goal is to not only bring us back into fellowship with the Father but to **present** us to God. This word carries the idea of a formal presentation, like a wedding, when we will be led down the aisle to stand before God. And when we get there this is what we will be; holy, blameless and above reproach.

Let's look into what these words mean and think about how this is going to be accomplished.

Holy (hagios) carries the meaning of being separated from sin and set apart to God. We see this same language in **Ephesians 1:4...**

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Now are we singularly responsible for making ourselves holy before God? Not according to the text here. This verse indicates that Christ is the one ultimately responsible to present us holy before God. He works this holiness in us both practically, through our grace-wrought obedience and positionally, through His own imputed righteousness.

Here is what I mean, we will not stand before God on our own and present ourselves as Holy but rather when Christ presents us He will cover us with His own holiness. His holiness is imputed to us, credited to our account, so that on the day we stand before God, God will not see our righteous deeds but will see the perfect righteousness of Jesus in us.

Christ will bring us to God and when He does we will stand before Him in the perfect holiness of Jesus. God's purpose was to create a holy people and when the day comes that we are called to stand before God, Jesus will put upon us the robe of His holiness and present us to His Father.

Blameless means without blemish which reminds us of temple sacrifices. The lamb of the sacrifice had to be without blemish otherwise God would not accept it. When we stand before the Judge at the end of the world we too will be presented as spotless, blameless, with defect or blemish.

Above Reproach which means free from accusation. No charge will stand up to the scrutiny of our redemption. Christ's work is absolutely perfect. It lacks nothing and accomplishes full atonement, full acquittal, full justification before God's judgment seat.

On the day when we are called to stand before God, our purification from sin will be complete. In fact, according to the NT God sees us now as we will be then.

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he **foreknew** he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those whom he **predestined** he also **called**, and those whom he **called** he also **justified**, and those whom he **justified** he also **glorified**.

Foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified...all in the past tense. In God's eyes our salvation is complete. Christ has given us everything we need to stand before God and to be welcomed by Him into everlasting joy.

This is amazing! From hostile enemy exiles to humble loving children; this is what Jesus has done for us. This is the hope of the gospel; this is the power of Christ's cross. All our sin cleansed away, all our separation removed, all of our future secure. Why would anyone turn away from this?

That's Paul's concern. His concern is that through false teaching or a lack in our understanding of the gospel that we might abandon this faith. So here in verse 23 he urges us to make sure that we remain firmly planted in our trust in Christ.

IV. Stay Grounded in the Faith (Vv. 23)

²³ 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.

Christ calls us to persevere in the faith. To remain faithful till the end, not shifting from the hope of salvation and eternal life that we heard in the gospel. He has called us to His side and given us every reason to trust Him, and here in this verse He is saying to us, "Keep trusting Me. Keep following Me. I will not abandon you, I will not let you down, so don't stop trusting in Me."

When you are in a relationship with someone, especially a marriage relationship, there are ups and downs. There are days, weeks, months when things are great and there is joy and intimacy in the relationship; but there are also seasons when things get difficult. You are still married but you don't feel the same security and confidence that you feel at those other times. And when this occurs it is often because we have stopped doing the little things.

We don't say I love you. We don't hug in the kitchen as much. We don't flirt anymore. We don't serve each other. We don't sit and talk the way we used to **and unless something changes the heart begins to wander. What has happened is that, in a sense, we have lost our first love.** We have let things get in the way of our love for our spouse. We have let things get in the way of serving our spouse, flirting with our spouse, and making them feel secure in our love and in our relationship.

There are few things more painful than a lack of security in our relationships. But when that happens we have to ask how did it get this way and often times we will find that we simply stopped doing the little things. We didn't stop being married, but we stopped being faithful to love our spouse the way we should. We stopped doing the things that fostered joy, intimacy and security.

So what does this have to do with Colossians 1? Paul is urging us to keep doing the little things so that we don't look up one day and realize that our hope has shifted. He is urging us to stay

grounded in Christ and stay faithful to love Him, to trust Him, to submit to Him, to learn from Him, to grow in Him.

As Christians, we have put all of our hope in Christ to save us, we don't hedge our bets with other remedies. We build our house upon the rock of Jesus Christ and we don't seek any other foundation. We stay grounded, we stay faithful.

This doesn't mean that we never struggle, or never have doubts. But when doubts come or when sin gets the better of us we don't run from Christ, we run to Him. Friends, the gospel is powerful enough to save us and it is powerful enough to sanctify us. The grace of God is the foundation of our salvation and it is the motivation for why we remain faithful.

When we stumble in sin we have to remember the gospel and cling to Christ once again. One of the marks of true saving faith is perseverance in believing and that is what we are being called to here in Colossians 1. To persevere in faith and faithfulness (obedience) to Christ and His grace.

Grace doesn't lead us to ignore sin or to continue sinning, it motivates us to love God and to pursue a life of faith and obedience. Our active faith in Christ and active obedience to Christ are spiritual fruits that bear witness to our salvation. They are not the cause of our salvation but they are indications that we have been born again.

John 15:8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Conclusion...

So in this passage, Paul wants us to learn 4 things. He wants us to understand the state of our souls before we came to Christ. He wants us to understand that because we now trust in Christ we have been united to God. He wants us to know that our future is incredibly bright because Jesus will present us to the Father and will supply everything we need on that day. He also wants us to stay faithful, to stay grounded in the gospel and not lose or abandon our love for Jesus.

One of the ways that we stay grounded in our faith is that we sing the praises of the One who saved us. So as I close in prayer let's prepare our hearts to worship Christ and fix the hope of our hearts on Him again.