

To Present You... Before Him

Colossians 1:21-23

The Son of God is holy, and blameless and has never committed any evil.

He is full of light. In him not even the smallest speck of darkness can be found.

He is described as a fire, a blazing fire, a consuming fire.

That is why the thought of being presented to Him should both frighten and exhilarate you.

We are anything but “holy, and blameless and above reproach.” Our innocence and purity have been lost. They have been replaced with the scars of this fallen world.

I have never really enjoyed Shakespeare. That is to my shame. I recognize his brilliance and the beauty of his writing. I have always had difficulty digesting it for myself. But when I was in School we took a field trip to the play “Macbeth”. Macbeth, and his wife, had murdered the King of Scotland. And both of them suffer with a tremendous sense of guilt throughout the play. And at the end of the play, I still vividly remember Lady Macbeth wandering about her castle powerfully expressing her inability to ever be clean from their crime. Looking at her hands, she cried to herself:

Out, damned spot! Out, I say! . . . who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him. (5.1.25–28)

We have been corrupted... by the sins of others and by our own.

Our hearts tells us that we might be forgiven, but we could never truly be considered “holy, and blameless and above all reproach.”

But this is exactly what the Gospel hope involves: Your being presented to Jesus Christ “holy and blameless and above all reproach.”

Last week we focused on the person of the Son of God. In Him and through Him and to Him are all things...

We ended at v. 20.

Colossians 1:20 ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Here we see that Christ’s ministry of reconciliation becomes the focus. It is not so much His person, but His work of making peace “by the blood of the cross” that becomes the focus.

The mission of Jesus Christ is to bring peace between sinners and a holy God.

And that is where we pick up today.

Read Colossians 1:21-23.

Verse 21 begins with “and you”.

The contrast with what came before is startling.

The Son of God is...

... and you.

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

Our situation before being reconciled was truly awful. It is explained in three ways.

Our relationship to God, the attitude of our heart, and the record of our behavior were all terrible.

In the language of Paul, we were “alienated... hostile in mind... and doing evil deeds.”

1. Alienated = separated, a stranger to...

We were alienated from God.

This alienation was expressed vividly in God's casting Adam and Eve from the Garden.

That which is full of guilt and corruption cannot dwell with him who is holy and blameless.

The problem is that God is not only light, He is also the only source of life. For those who are alienated from God, they have no way to draw life from God.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 4:18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

Our guilt alienates us from God. And yet only our union with God as the source of life can give life to the deadness of our soul.

2. Hostile in mind

Mind is more than intellect, although it certainly includes it. Mind involves the whole inner disposition of the soul. It is that which drives our will.

It is the bent of your soul. It is the way that you think about things. It drives how you perceive the world and God.

And for every son of Adam, the attitude of the mind is one of hostility.

Hostility to God.

Very few people admit that deep within them is a hostility to God.

Within each of us is a desire to supplant God.

We want to make God our servant.

We want to be our own master. We do not want to submit to God.

God is an enemy to be conquered.

No person has the ability within himself to overcome their hostility to God.

But this is precisely what the Son of God has set out to do.

Overcoming the hostility of our mind to God is without a doubt the greatest miracle that God ever performs.

And it is only overcome by uniting us with Himself, the source of all life. In order to unite us to Himself, the cause of our alienation must be overcome.

3. Doing evil deeds

Our behavior is what most fills us with guilt and shame.

And the older we get, the more that our wrong actions plague us. We are like Lady Macbeth fearing that the blood stains will ever be truly washed away.

But it is important to see that our evil actions are the fruit of our “hostile mind” and being “alienated” from the life of God.

Without addressing the inner problem of our heart, and the separation that exists between us and God, we will never make any progress in changing our behavior.

We do not merely have a problem of doing wrong things.
We have a problem of being hostile in mind.
And we have a problem of being alienated from the life of God.

Without a fixing of the separation from the life of God, we could never experience a renewal of the mind, taming it to submit to God’s will.

And without a renewal of the mind/heart, there will never be a change of the behavior.

The good news is that even though we often underestimate the depth of our problem, Jesus does not.

He knew from the beginning what He was up against.

Remember, “In Him and through Him and to Him are all things...”

He is up for the task.

What has Christ, in and through and to all things, done?

22 he has now reconciled

Reconciliation primarily has to do with our “alienation”.

The separation that existed between us and God has been replaced by peace and harmony.

Rather than being separated from the life of God, we are once again restored to that life.

Rather than living under the curse and wrath of God, we live under the favor and blessing of God.

Reconciliation is the fixing of our alienation from God.

Instead of God looking upon us with hostility, God now looks upon us with favor.

We are once again in a harmonious relationship with the One who is holy and blameless.

This occurs in a moment. It is not a gradual process. One moment we are alienated from God. The next moment we are transferred into the Kingdom of Light of which Christ is Head and Ruler.

We have the right to address God as Father, knowing that His love for us is greater and more perfect than even the best of human fathers.

How is it that this reconciliation has occurred?

What is the ground and means of our reconciliation?

Paul tells us: We are reconciled ...

in his body of flesh
by (through) his death,

“in” his body of flesh

The phrase “his body of flesh” is only found here in the NT. I believe Paul is distinguishing Christ’s human body of flesh and the body of the Church of which He is the head.

^{ESV} **Colossians 1:18** 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.

It was in Jesus’ human body that reconciliation was accomplished. Without a human body of flesh, Jesus could not have died, for it is impossible for God to die.

This is why Jesus taught emphatically that if one was to be saved, they must eat of his flesh and drink of his blood. The eating and drinking are not to be taken literally. But Jesus wanted to make sure that their faith in him embraced his physical death on the cross. There were many other reasons to believe in Jesus. But only by believing in his physical death on the cross could they ever be reconciled.

We spent a lot of time last week developing the truth that all things are “in him... and through him... and to him...”

Paul uses the same threefold explanation when it comes to our reconciliation.

Reconciliation begins “in his body of flesh”.

Anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ can rightly be said to be “in him.” We are united to His work of reconciliation.

All that belongs to Christ, also belongs to us.

Reconciliation begins in him, but it is also accomplished “through him”.

The creation finds its origin in the Son of God.

The creation is brought into existence through the Son of God.

The same is true of our reconciliation.

It finds its origin in the body of his flesh.

And it was accomplished through his death.

Through faith alone you are brought into union with Christ.

You are now in Him and the reconciliation that He accomplished now becomes yours.

You are included with Christ in His hanging on the cross, in His being placed in the tomb, in his rising up from the grave. Just as if it were your body doing those things.

You are in His body.

You are reconciled to God by/through His death.

Faith, and faith alone, in Christ alone – namely his death – is the means of our reconciliation.

Even our faith is not the ground of our reconciliation to God. There is nothing in the action of believing that makes God happy with us. It is not the earnestness of belief that reconciles. It is not the sincerity of faith that reconciles.

It is the death of Christ alone that reconciles and is that in which our faith rests.

Faith itself is a fruit of the work of the death of Christ. How could a person whose bent is one of hostility to God, trust in God?

God must remove the hostility if we are ever to embrace Christ.

Repentance and faith are like the first breaths of a newborn baby.

The death of Christ removes the hostility of God such that the life of God may once again be poured into us.

We must be careful to not focus so much on our actions in repentance and faith that we make reconciliation “through us.”

The reformers spoke extensively on this. Faith and repentance are the instrumental means of our reconciliation, but only the death of Christ is the causal means of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is “in Him and through Him... and to Him.”

It is here that we find the sweetness of reconciliation. Without this all would be meaningless.

Paul lays out for us the purpose of reconciliation.

in order **to** present you
holy
and
blameless
and
above reproach
before him,

Reconciliation may have been accomplished through the shameful work of Jesus hanging on the cross. But that is not the end purpose of reconciliation.

Jesus does not reconcile us to keep us hidden in some dark room.

Nor does He put us on display in our current pitiful condition. As we gather today, we are full of blemishes. Our past has not been above reproach.

In ourselves, we are anything but “holy”.

I know that you often look around at others in the congregation and think to yourself that they are these things. And so, you do not feel like you belong. Strangely enough, many of the same people that you feel this way about, also have these same feelings.

We all wonder how it can possibly be that we will one day be presented before Jesus “holy, blameless, and above reproach.” But it will be so.

We are like Hester Prynne of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*. She had committed adultery early in life and was forced to live her life with the Letter “A” plastered on her chest, forever marking her based upon her past sin.

But when we are presented to Jesus Christ, we will no longer be marked by the stains of our past.

All of the body of Christ will be presented together to Him as a beautiful and pure and spotless bride.

Often brides will wear white on their wedding day.
But if you are on your second or third marriage it is typical to wear some other color.
To wear white is sometimes thought of as presumptuous.

But when it comes to our being presented to Christ, even the woman at the well, who had six husbands, will be dressed in gleaming white as she stands before Christ.

Holy = bearing the same “set apart” character as Jesus Christ.

Now, we make the distinction between being declared holy and being holy in essence.

On that day, both will be true of all those who have been reconciled by Christ.

Blameless evokes another wonderful image.
It means “unblemished”, or “without fault”.

Think of a brand new car without a scratch on it.
When I was given my truck by my father in law, it was pretty close to “unblemished.”
Clark told me that it was a nice truck and that I should be careful to take care of it.
Well, if you look at it today, you can see that it is far from “unblemished” now.

We are like my truck. As we go through this life, we commit sins that create marks upon us. We have spiritual scars. And we are far from unblemished.

But on that day, through our reconciliation, we will be presented to Jesus “unblemished”.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Notice that it is the entire church who will be presented to Jesus. All who are in him, not just the super-saints.

The third image is also wonderful to consider.

The Church will be presented to Christ as “above reproach”. What this means that no one will be able to bring any charge against us, as if to say that we don’t belong.

I do not know about you, but I have plenty of charges that might be brought up against me.

We often kid in our house because Ginny does not speak, that we better be careful because who knows what she will say when Jesus gives her a tongue to speak at the resurrection.

But when every hidden thought, or word or action is brought into the light, there will be cause to reproach every one of us.

What will make us “above reproach” on that day?

It will be the declaration of our justification by Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:33-34 ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Since we know that this is our future, we ought to strive to live holy and blameless lives now that are above reproach. How could we do any less having been reconciled to God through the death of Christ.

But I am not counting on my present progress to be sufficient for that day.

I am counting on the grace of God glorifying me, along with the rest of the Church.

This is the point of reconciliation.

Jesus wanted a “holy and blameless” bride to present to himself.

Do you really believe that He will fail to finish the job that He has begun in us?

Not if you understand that “in him and through him and to him are all things.”

This is the reconciliation that is found in Jesus Christ.
There is no other reconciliation like it.

Paul exalts Christ so as to increase the Colossians confidence that Christ alone truly is sufficient. They do not need to add to Christ. They must continue to place all their hopes in Christ.

²³ if indeed you continue in the faith,

This is the application. “Continue in the faith”

There are two ways to take Paul’s encouragement. Both are related and both are true.

1. Continue believing.

Faith is not something that you do once.

Saving faith continues on.

We are called to continue trusting in Christ alone throughout our entire lives.

Our salvation, humanly speaking, depends upon it. Those who continue believing in Christ alone will be presented to Christ “holy and blameless”. And those who quit believing will not.

2. Remain in the faith

The Faith is a body of doctrine concerning Jesus Christ and His work of redemption.

While the action of faith is vital, that faith must be placed in an objectively truth person and work.

No one gets to make up the content of their faith.

That has been passed down to us through the Apostles and is now written down for us on the pages of the NT.

The faith is the proclamation of the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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.

The objective truth of Jesus Christ is stable and steadfast.
Therefore our confidence in Jesus Christ should also be stable and steadfast.

There are many peripheral doctrines of which sincere believers may disagree. But these fundamental doctrines concerning our reconciliation in Jesus Christ must be agreed upon by all.

There is only one gospel.

It is proclaimed throughout the world.
There are not multiple gospels.

Paul had been called to be a servant of this gospel.
Every biblical preacher is also a minister of this gospel.

Many are leaving Christ for other forms of spirituality.
Many outside of the Church have no interest in Christ.
You may be tempted to let go of Christ, or to add other forms of spirituality to Christ.

There is no one else through whom you can be reconciled to God.

If you desire to be presented to Christ, “holy and blameless” on that Final Judgment Day, keep believing in Christ alone.

^{ESV} **Jude 1:24** Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,