

Col.1:21-23 (WCF 11:2, 4) "Former Aliens"

For the Children: I knew a man who escaped from enemy soldiers by wading through an icy river, carrying his wife and little daughter on his back. Imagine if afterwards, the wife or daughter had congratulated themselves for crossing the river – as if they had done it in their own strength. We do not walk to heaven in our strength, alongside Christ or a few steps behind Him. He carries us on His back – in the strength of what He did for us on earth – His death and resurrection. However, if we don't believe that or trust Him, we remain His enemies. Those who remain God's enemies cannot enter heaven. Faith is necessary to join us to the Lord Jesus; but only He provides the basis for our salvation. Questions: How does the text describe the unbeliever? What is "reconciliation"? What would you say to someone who claimed that since we are now God's friends, we don't need to worry about good works or obeying His Word?

Introduction:

First Point: The Past of Those Reconciled

- 1) Former Enemies: The members of the Colossian church were formerly alienated from God – "outsiders" with regards to His Kingdom; His enemies in mind (doctrine) and deeds (life).
- 2) An Undeserved Change: "Yet" – despite their hostility and lack of deserving it, God reconciled them through Christ. The word means that they were changed completely from enemies to friends. The tense implies that this was once-for-all. By implication, the change results in godly doctrine and life, on the part of those who become close to God as members of His Kingdom. This is God's doing, not man's.

Second Point: The Ground of Reconciliation

- 1) The Work of Christ: V.22 tells us that this reconciliation was "in" Christ's fleshly body and "through" His death – to which His resurrection is also obviously connected. This is the ground or basis of our justification, our reconciliation, our preservation – in short, our salvation.
- 2) God's Initiative Again: In terms of the ground of our salvation, there is nothing here of any contribution by the sinner. It is all of Christ, just as it is God who reconciles.
- 3) Two Colossian Problems: The apostle is stressing this point to help the Colossians to resist the temptation to turn back to paganism, with its immorality; and to resist the pressure from false teachers to see salvation as partly grounded in Christ and partly in our keeping of (man-made) regulations.

Third Point: The Purpose of Reconciliation

- 1) In Order to Present You: The apostle does not want to give the idea that now we are reconciled, holy living is irrelevant. For the purpose of reconciliation is that we should be presented to God at the end, in Christ, holy and blameless and un-chargeable over our sins.
- 2) In Christ's Merits: Again, we can only be presented as holy and blameless because Christ has paid the penalty for our sins and imputed His righteousness to us. It is not because of our deeds in themselves. However, if we are not joined to Christ by faith, we could not be presented in this way.

Fourth Point: The Condition of Reconciliation

- 1) If You Continue in the Faith: Faith (as part of conversion and as something in which we continue) is put forward as a condition for being presented in Christ at the end – "if indeed you continue in the faith." We cannot be presented at the end if we have not been firmly grounded and established and settled in Christ. The language implies an ongoing effect, rather than being shifted away from Him.
- 2) The Ongoing Effect: The ongoing effect of being in Christ, by faith, is that we not only persevere in the faith; we also grow in sanctification, by the work of His Word and Spirit. Therefore, faith is never alone (which is to say, dead), but is always accompanied by other saving graces and works of gratitude (WCF.11:2).
- 3) Different Kinds of Conditionality: The idea of faith as a "condition" should not make us think that man gains merit by his faith. The condition is that God must give us the gift of faith, so that we benefit from Christ, the ground of our salvation. That faith teaches us that we contribute no initiative or merit. We come empty-handed to God, enabled to "receive and rest" on Christ for the merit. Consider Gen.32.

Conclusion: