

*Reconciled And
Firm In Faith*

Colossians 1:21-23

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA
ONTARIO, CANADA

(This series on Colossians is drawn from pericope divisions, titles and summaries prepared by N.T. Wright, *Paul For Everyone – The Prison Letters*, London, Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002.)



Those of you who follow my blog will know that a couple of weeks ago I reflected on this painting. Particularly the figure on the right – John the Baptist, and his finger.

An extra long finger.
Extra long because artist Matthias Grunewald wants us to take special notice of where John is pointing.
Away from himself.
And towards Jesus.
It's all about Jesus.

And that is what we talked about two weeks go.
In the marvelous poem found in Colossians 1:15-20.

All about the supremacy of Christ.

That's the whole deal in vv.15-20.
Then we hit verse 21.
And another finger emerges.
This one in a different direction.

See if you can catch it.
Please join me in reading from God's Word.

COLOSSIANS 1:21-23, p.200 (NT)

Did you see the finger?
Right in the very first two words.
And you.....



It's meant, in the Greek, to come along with the same force as this iconic American military recruiting image.

Who remembers the caption that goes with it?
Uncle Sam wants you!!

Where the focus in the preceding verses was completely on Jesus Christ, now it turns.
You – me, each, personally and we all together – are drawn into the conversation now.

v.21 *And you...*

And Paul reminds the very small group of Christians in this smallish economically-depressed town that they are by no means second-class in the Heavenly Kingdom community.

They are not just a "happy accident" of Christ's work.

You know – that God was busy somewhere else, with some other task, but somehow there was fallout that the wind happened to carry and drop on them so that they caught it.

Nope.

The finger points right at these believers - They are the direct target.
That's the force of the Greek.

Which, by the way, applies not just to the Colossians.
It applies to us, equally so.

Today it is very in vogue to speak of the corporate and cosmic application of the gospel. That Christ came to take in the Cosmos. That there are great corporate elements to the gospel. We heard a bit of that

last Sunday night.

And I don't want to belittle that in any way.

The problem is that sometimes people begin to think about and focus on this, and start to forget that while all of that is true, there is also a **deeply personal** dimension to the gospel.

In fact, without that deeply personal dimension there can be no communal dimension. There are no wide applications of Christ's message unless it first settles deep in the very particular confines of each individual believer's heart.

And the **personal** work is very **intentional** work on the part of our Lord.

There are no after-thoughts in the Kingdom of God.

There are no tag alongs in the Body of Christ.

As much as it is a gospel that has a far reach, and a wide scope, it is ALSO a gospel with a singularly narrow focus and pointed direction – into my heart and life.

The finger of the gospel points right at me.

And it points right at you.

Not that it is always comfortable to have the finger pointed at you.

Because often someone is accusing you.

Which, actually, is the case here.

Notice the labels v.21 pastes on us, even while pointing at us.

You, wags the finger,

you were estranged.

you were hostile in mind

you were doing evil deeds.

To be estranged....

When family members are estranged, there is no connection.

They are as good as strangers.

They have nothing in common.

Nothing they can talk about.

Not comfortable around each other.

Even if they're in the same room they may as well be a million miles apart.

That is the state of the person apart from Jesus Christ.

Estranged from God.

A stranger.

Nothing in common.

Nothing to talk about.

Not comfortable in his presence.

A million miles apart – separated by the grand canyon of sin.

It is a chilling state in which to be.

Estranged from God.

That came up in our Profession of Faith class.

Know what it describes?

What is the eternal state of being estranged from God?

It is called Hell.

It is life in the absence of God.

It is the awful space of those who keep repeating that they want to have it their way, their way, their way, until God – as C.S.Lewis puts it – finally and reluctantly says, "OK, have it your way. And leaves. Forever."

What a COLOSSAL tragedy!

That is not how humanity was meant to be.

We were created to be in covenant relationship and service with God.

Since the Fall, though, we've all been pulled away from that. (NT Wright *TNTC, Colossians & Philemon*)

Everyone is estranged from God unless there is some reconciling work done.

The finger keeps wagging.

Because, you know, we might possibly be wanting to blame someone or something else for our estranged state.

Like we said this morning – not take responsibility for it, but paste the label on someone else's head. It is because of what THEY did, that we are.....

You are estranged, wags the finger.

And you are hostile.

hostile in mind.... the Greek word "*dianoia*" connotes the whole of thinking and mentality of people.

It takes in how people *view* life. And then how they *act* on that view.

Which is all wrapped up in what we commonly call "worldview."

Hostile in mind is the stubborn refusal to factor God into the equation of life.

You see that sometimes blatantly in the advent of some rather aggressive forms of atheism that are starting to emerge, with people like Richard Dawkins. Loud. Even obnoxious.

Prompting one secular liberal magazine to say, "Will the antagonistic atheists please shut up!"

OK – so they're hostile.

But me?

Hard to admit, isn't it?

Hard to admit that left to myself my world will tend more and more, to revolve around myself.

It wants what is best – for me.

It wants to follow the game plan prepared – by me.

It wants to preserve – me.

Dianoia - thinking and decision-making together – what we ruminate about, and what we decide to do.

Does it naturally gravitate to God?

Generally not, right?

Not without outside help, anyway.

Not without the prompting of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

So, yes – the finger is correct.

But, wait, it isn't done.

Verse 22 -

You..... *he has now reconciled....*

AND

You..... *he will present holy and blameless and irreproachable before Him....*

He has reconciled....

the way it is written is meant to imply decisive, completed action (aorist tense).

Jesus' death is the completing, sure and certain act.

No uncertainty.

No unfinished bits.

No maybe's.

And it happened through the physical death of Jesus' body.

I'm not sure if you remember back to the beginning of our series. We said that Paul was writing, in part, to combat a series of heretical ideas floating on the edges of the Colossian church. One element seems to be that the physical death of a real flesh & blood body of Jesus was not really important. It was the spiritual

notion that death and resurrection represented – that is what mattered.

Which, by the way, has remained a problem to this day.

There are some around who continue to advocate that view. In fact, some like to even behave as if it is some forward-thinking new idea that they are putting out there.

That we don't get all caught up in the physical side of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is the *idea* of new birth, the *idea* and *metaphor* of resurrection that count.

Ah.....

.....no!

The language of verse 22 is actually very dense and difficult Greek to decipher.

It gets simplified and smoothed over in the English.

The original brings together terms that are condemning of the body and that are morally neutral. There is the condemned and the good together.

The *fleshly*

and

the *body*.

And they come together in the body of Jesus.

Jesus, in his very physical and pure body, takes up and carries all our sin and guilt.

He physically, really, takes it up our stain and shame.

There is, in him and in his death on the cross, an “explosive meeting between the Holy God and human sin.” [NT Wright, TNTC *Colossians & Philemon*]

And in the mystery of how that happens we become

holy

blameless

irreproachable

before him (that is – God).

Hey - doesn't that sound an awful lot like OT sacrifice language?

You know - I wonder if Paul was making an allusion on purpose?

Gentile readers wouldn't get it, but the Jewish ones would

And for those of us who are blessed to not only have this letter, but the whole New Testament, that draws our mind to 1 Peter 1:19, which speaks of our salvation through "a lamb without blemish or spot."

And it brings to mind the wonderful exclamation of Rom 8:31-34:

31 What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32 Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, freely give us all things?

33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

34 Who is the one who will condemn? Christ is the one who died (and more than that, he was raised), who is at the right hand of God, and who also is interceding for us.

No charge.

No condemnation.

Without Christ we are aliens from God, enemies

- what a *frightening* prospect!!

With Christ we are holy, pure, guilt-less.... welcome

- what a *marvelous* prospect!!

- one on which we dare to build our lives, take risks, and live a bold lifestyle of reconciliation ("...of which I, Paul, have become a servant...")

Don't ever, ever lose sight of this.

Recognize that it can easily happen!

As I was preparing for this series early in February, I picked up one rather recent commentary on Colossians, a re-mixed targum the authors call it. A post-modern response to the Epistle.

I read it, and re-read it, and while it says many very good things, something kept niggling at me. Couldn't figure it out.

Till finally I caught it – this commentary talks much about reconciliation with the world, with creation, with humanity – a reconciliation modeled and initiated by Jesus.

And it provides some powerful challenges to the Church to live out her reconciliation.

All that was powerful, and inspirational.

HOWEVER – there is nary a word in the commentary of praising, thankful reflection on the direct connection that we now have with God; on the new, reconciled state of our relationship with Lord. Nothing about our place in the family of God. Nothing about the death of Jesus making us holy, cleansing us, and removing all grounds for the devil bringing any charge against us.

Brothers and sisters - without that core, all we are left with is a hollow shell.

The cross has two beams – the horizontal and the vertical.

Which is an icon of the gospel – there are both horizontal and vertical implications.

The cross of this particular commentary was merely a horizontal beam.

And that is no cross.

Last week our pre-confession class considered Revelation 21:6-8:

6 He also said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the one who is thirsty I will give water free of charge from the spring of the water of life.

7 The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

8 But to the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death."

Two groups of people

Overcomers.

And outsiders.

The ones who inherit the New Creation, children of God, are the ones who held on.

They continued securely established and steadfast in the faith....

What does that mean?

Verse 22: You are holy and blameless and irreproachable....

Verse 23:**provided** that you continue....

Continue in Jesus.

Keep focused on Jesus.

Don't go wandering off, seduced by some other form of spirituality.

Who is the second group of people in Revelation 21?

Actually, they look remarkably like you and me.

They look remarkably like we would look if we were not covered by the purifying power of the cross of Jesus!

Step even one inch away from the cross, and WE become the second group in Revelation – the outsiders.

Here is Colossians 1:23 the Greek for *continue* has the sense of staying in a particular place. And the place is really a person – the person of Jesus.

He is the place in the Cosmos where holiness and blamelessness and purity are alone to be found.

He is **the** way.

He is **the** truth.

He is **the** life.

The ONLY.
There is no "Plan B" for salvation.
No alternative route to eternal life.

And as we remain, as we continue in his presence we can **THEN** reach out
To every corner of the Cosmos.
To every creature.

For the Jesus who points his finger at us and reconciles us, will bring it **ALL** back to the Father at the
consumation of the New Creation.

As we are reconciled into the family of God, through Christ, so it is that we can live and work and serve and
play and be.

Apart from that all we have is our best attempt at moralistic or religious living.

Nice, but in the eternal scheme of things, coming up short. And, finally, to be left outside of the New
Creation.

But, standing in Jesus Christ, we can serve and work and take risks for the Kingdom with confidence.

With the sort of confidence that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:58

So then, dear brothers and sisters, be firm. Do not be moved! Always be outstanding in the
work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Oh yes - One more quick thought -

Something I'm wondering about.... it's back in verse 22, for a second.

I wonder – if we are living in the holy, cleansed, guiltless state before God, if that is how HE views us..... how
do we view ourselves? And – how do we view each other?

We can so easily be **so** hard

on ourselves

on each other (guilt, grudges, get even, get lost)

Seems that is the source of so many church splits.

And it neutralizes some of the power of divine grace when we think this way.

So – if we see each other in Jesus,

can we practice seeing each other as holy, and blameless and irreproachable?