

OUR RESPONSE TO THE RECONCILING WORK OF CHRIST

Is the Bible always easy to understand? *It's not*, is it? How do we know? Because we've *all wrestled with* understanding it at times—and the *Bible itself says* it is sometimes difficult to understand!

Where in the Bible does it say that? II Peter 3:15b-16a "...even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; ¹⁶ As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; **in which are some things hard to be understood...**"

So if Peter—an apostle and someone God used to write Scripture—is *led by God* to write that what *Paul wrote* (under God's direction) is sometimes *difficult to understand*, we need to count on the fact that it is—at times—*going to be* difficult to understand! *Why* do I bring all this up? *Four* reasons:

- 1) First, if things are difficult to understand, that means we need to be *willing to put in the work* to understand it—and *ask for God's help* in understanding it!
- 2) Second, don't *shy away* from the things that are difficult to understand! God doesn't tell us to *skip* the hard parts! But He does tell us that "*All* Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable..."
- 3) Third, don't be *discouraged* if some things are hard to be understood because *God said they would be*—and *God doesn't lie*!
- 4) But the main reason I brought it up is this: I think the book of Colossians—at times—falls into the category of "some things hard to be understood!" Sometimes it is hard to understand how it *all fits together*—and sometimes it feels like we are drinking water from a fire hose! But I'm convinced that the work required to "unearth the nuggets" is *more than worth* the effort. In other words, the prize is indeed worth the chase!

With that as a rather strange intro, please take your Bibles and turn to Colossians 1. I want to review again—briefly—what we've looked at so far. Why do I do that? Because God through Paul doesn't just "spew out" a bunch of words! There *is a flow to* what is being said and *logic in the arguments* that he makes!

After Paul's greeting in verses 1-2, Paul offers *thanksgiving to God* in verses 3-8. *Why?* Because of God's work—in them—through *His Word*!

--In vs 9-12, Paul prays for them to *know* the will of God...in order *to do* the will of God...so their life will be *pleasing to God*. After telling them what a life pleasing to God *looks like*, Paul again *thanks God* for the blessings that we have through the work of *His Son*.

--In vs 14, Paul leaves off praising *the Father*—and begins to direct his praise to *the Son*!

--In vs 15-17, Paul praises Christ for being the preeminent One *over Creation*. But—as mentioned last week—what Christ had *originally made perfect* has been *marred* by sin and the consequences of sin. Our *current creation* is under a curse and in *need of restoration*. And that restoration will someday occur because Christ is *not just* the Creator—He is also the "*Re-Creator*"...the Reconciler...the Restorer and "Fixer"!

Why does God through Paul tell us all these things about Christ? One obvious reason is so we have the *right view* of Christ. But having the right view of Christ is not the *end goal*! Having the right view of Christ is more than having sound doctrine—and more than having the right answers when playing "Bible Trivia!"

There is a *response required* to the work that Christ did! And Paul uses the response *of the Colossians* to teach us what *our response* should be. Before he does that, though, he reminds them *of their past*. We see both those things—the reminder of their past and their present responsibility—in verses 21-23. Please follow along as I read these verses.

First, Paul reminds them of... **1. Their past alienation**

We see that in vs 21; notice what it says: "**And you, that were sometime alienated...**"

Before we get to the word *alienated*, I want us to look at the word *sometime*. It does not say "*sometimes*"—as in sometimes you are alienated from God—and sometimes *you aren't*!

"Sometime" means formerly...once...at one time in the past. It was the state they were *in before*.

It belonged to ***their past***—not their present—condition. ***What*** was that past condition?

“And you, that were ***once alienated...***” We touched on the idea of being ***alienated*** a little bit last week. To be ***alienated*** from God means to be ***estranged*** from Him. It means to be considered an ***alien...a foreigner...an outsider...and a stranger***, someone who is ***shut out from*** having a relationship with God.

We see the same truth in ***Ephesians 4:18*** “Having the understanding darkened, ***being alienated from the life of God*** through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:”

Let’s think through what Paul is saying in this vs. Notice again the phrase “being alienated from ***the life of God...***” We can ***have life***—here on earth—***without having a relationship with God!*** We can get up...and go to work (or school)...and come home from work (or school) ...and raise a family—and even regularly ***come to church***—but ***still be an alien—a stranger***—when it comes to having a life where we ***personally know*** God!

How can that be? Because their understanding is darkened—their thinking is clouded and “in the dark”—because of the “blindness of their heart.” Sobering, isn’t it? A person can be brilliant ***intellectually***—but ***spiritually blind!***

--They understand—and will agree with you—that ***they have sinned.***

--And they understand—and will agree with you—that no matter how hard they try, ***they still sin!***

--But they ***refuse to believe*** what God in the Bible says about Himself and sin! They ***refuse to believe:***

--That God is holy and ***will not let sin*** into heaven...

--And that God is perfectly just and ***absolutely must judge sin***

--And that judgment for sin results in ***eternal separation from God*** in a place called hell!

And that’s why—back to Col 1:21—Paul says they were ***not just*** “aliens”—strangers—when it came to having a relationship with God—they were also ***His enemies!*** The word for “enemy” is much stronger than ***disliking the team*** you are playing against in a sporting event! It means to have a ***deep-seated hatred***; an irreconcilable ***hostility*** toward someone.

Again, let’s not miss what Paul is saying. Notice again what it says at the beginning of the verse: “***And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies...***” Paul ***didn’t break them up*** into two categories of people. He didn’t say ***all of you*** were ***alienated*** from God—but ***only some of you*** were enemies. He wrote “And you”—meaning ***every one*** of you Colossian believers—***before you were saved***—were not only ***alienated*** from God—you were also an ***enemy of God!***

And the same is true of us! If we are ***not reconciled*** to God, we aren’t ***just estranged*** from Him—we are also ***His enemy!*** Many have the erroneous belief that to be ***an enemy of God***, you have ***to do certain things***, like kill babies...or burn down churches...or persecute and murder Christians to qualify as God’s enemy.

I’ve given you this quote from ***C.S. Lewis*** before, but it’s been a while so here it is again: “Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: ***he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.***”

What about you? I fear there are some among us—and that listen on-line—who ***agree that they are sinful...*** but they refuse to “lay down their arms!” They refuse to ***trust in Christ*** for forgiveness—and will not give up trying to ***save themselves.*** And if ***fighting God*** about the way to get into ***His heaven*** doesn’t make you an ***enemy of God***, I don’t know what does!

Don’t stay in that state! And don’t ever let what may come off as ***my lack of urgency*** stop you from ***seeing the urgency!*** “Behold, ***now*** is the accepted time; behold, ***now*** is the day of salvation!”

That’s what the Colossians were—past tense. Next let’s notice... ***2. Their present reconciliation***

We see that in the end of vs 21 where it says: “yet now hath He reconciled”

First let’s consider... ***A. The meaning of reconciliation***

My guess is that you can already tell from the context—and what we talked about last week—that ***being reconciled*** here in vs 21 has to do with going from a state of ***being a stranger and enemy of God*** to now having ***peace*** with Him. ***Ryrie:*** “...a change of relationship from hostility to harmony and peace between two parties.”

(*Basic Theology*, pg 336). Thayer's Greek Lexicon in Biblehub defines it as being "received by God into His favor based on His forgiveness of their sins." **II Corinthians 5:19** carries a similar thought: "To wit [namely], that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not **imputing** their trespasses unto them..." Although **not the exact same Greek** word as here in vs 20 and 21, it has the same root and meaning.

B. The means of their reconciliation

How was it that the Colossians had been restored in a right relationship with God? How did they go from a **state of alienation and being enemies** of God to **being forgiven** by Him? How—as referred to in vs 13—were they **delivered from Satan's** kingdom and **transferred into Christ's** kingdom?

We know the answer, don't we? Verse 14 says we have **redemption**—the forgiveness of sins—through Christ's **blood**—an obvious reference to His death. Here in vs 22, we also have a reference to Christ's death—"In the body of His flesh through death..."—but the emphasis is on Christ's **body** instead of His blood.

Why the emphasis on Christ's "**body of His flesh**?" Possibly because the false teachers downplayed the significance of Christ taking on an **actual human body** and suffering an **actual physical death**. The false teachers were so enamored **with the invisible world and angels** that some commentators suggest they may have taught that angels had a **part in our salvation!**

Paul is "shooting a hole" in those beliefs by emphasizing reconciliation with God can only happen **because Christ bore the punishment** of our sins by having a physical body—and dying in our place!

C. The certainty of their reconciliation

Look again at the end of vs 21 "yet now hath He reconciled"

It doesn't say "might"—as in **maybe**—and it doesn't say "will"—as in the **future!** It is something God had already done! They had **already passed** from a state of being enemies with God—to now being the children of God! It is something that **they knew had happened**—and it is something **we can know**, too!

What about **you**? Do **you know** you have been reconciled to God? **Do you know** you have been forgiven—and that you are His child? We **can** know—and God **wants** us to know! **I John 5:12-13** "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that **ye may know that ye have eternal life....**"

3. Their future presentation

What is the goal...and purpose...and result of Christ's death on our behalf? Middle of verse 22: "to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight..." **David Pao** points out that Paul uses the verb "to present" in **two** different ways. Sometimes he uses it to point to "one's **present status** before God (Rom 6:16,19; 12:1) or one's standing before Him **during the time of the final** judgment (Rom 14:10; II Cor 4:14)." (*Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Colossians & Philemon*, pg 108, emphasis mine).

How is Paul using it here? Is he referring to our **present position** before God—or the way we will be **presented to God** when we stand before Him? To which I reply...**yes; probably both!**

Currently—right now—our position is counted as being "seated with Christ in heavenly places" The Bible says in Ephesians 2:6. Turn the page to **Colossians 3:3**: "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." God looks on you **and sees Christ** because God counts you as being **in Christ**. And Christ is certainly "holy and unblameable and unreprieveable!"

And in **the future**—what we currently are **in position**—will become ours **in possession!** We ourselves will be presented—to God—**sin-free** and free of **our sin nature!**

Jude 24 "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to **present you faultless** before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,"

Can we truly comprehend what it means to be **presented faultless—to God—in all His glory** and holiness? It's no wonder that Robert Murray McChesney included this stanza in his poem "I am Debtor":

*When I stand before the throne Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see Thee as Thou art, Love Thee with unsinning heart,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—Not till then, how much I owe.*

Lastly—in vs 23—we see... **4. Their expected continuation**

In light of us being reconciled to God—and being His children now instead of His enemy—what is **our responsibility**? Can we live “any old way we please” because our **current position**—and future possession—is that of being “holy and unblameable and unreprouvable?” Not at all! According to vs 23, we have two responsibilities. Before we look at them, though, we need to look at the words “**If ye continue**” in the beginning of vs 23.

Is Paul saying that in order for you to be presented “holy and unblameable and unreprouvable” that you **have to continue** in the faith—and if **you fail to continue** in the faith, you won’t be presented to God in this way? **Not exactly!** My apologies for getting a little technical, but in the Greek this is a **first-class conditional** statement. Simply put, that means “the assumption of truth for the sake of argument” (*Greek Grammar, Beyond the Basics*, Wallace, pg 690). Incorporating that meaning here, it would read something like: “If, as I presume you will...” (Ellicott; Biblehub) or “If ye continue in the faith (which you will assuredly do)” (John Phillips; preceptaustin.org).

So what was Paul **confident** that they would do? What was the **responsibility** they had—in light of them being reconciled to God—that he expected them to carry out?

A. Continue in the faith, grounded and settled

The Colossians—and us—are to **continue in**—meaning to remain and persevere—in **the faith**. Although “faith” could refer to their **personal faith** and trust in Christ, it doesn’t say “**your** faith”—it says, “**the** faith.”

And “**the** faith” often refers to the **body of truth**—the whole scope of doctrine—that they had been taught. I believe that is what is being referred to here based on how much doctrine Paul has already given them so far in this letter—and that the entirety of God’s revealed truth would keep them from being swayed by false teachers.

How were they to continue in the doctrine they had been taught? By being grounded and settled on it! --“**Grounded**” carries the idea of being firmly established and **laid upon a foundation**. Jesus used the same word in Mt 7:25 where He said the house of the wise man did not fall because it was “founded upon a rock.” --“**Settled**” carries the idea of firm...steady...solidly based...not moving.

The house we bought in Lake Mills in 2001 had some serious settling issues. The entire basement—if you can call it that—was pretty much above ground. One part of it was a basement; the other part was a 2 car garage. The **garage floor** had a few cracks in it—but nothing too terrible. The actual basement floor, however, had one corner that was a **good six inches lower** than it was supposed to be!

We fixed the floor...and rearranged some interior walls...and did the sheet-rocking and mudding and taping and painting. In fact, Andrew did most of the painting—and it looked incredible—**for a few years!**

But then, we began to notice some **cracks** in the paint near the ceiling—and the once-hidden sheetrock tape began to be visible. Why? Did Andrew use **bad paint**—or was he a bad **painter**?

The problem was not the **paint**—or the **painter**! The problem was that the house we thought was **done** settling **wasn’t done** settling! Why? Because it had a **faulty** foundation!

What about the foundation of **your** faith? What is **your** source for what **you** believe? It needs to be the unchanging and unmoving Word of God! We need to be grounded and settled upon that which is settled! **Psalm 119:89** “**For ever**, O LORD, thy word is **settled** in heaven.”

And let’s not forget that Jesus Himself said His words can be counted on **more than the ground** you are standing on! **Mt 24:35** “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but **my words shall not pass away.**”

Responsibility 1? Continue in the faith—the whole body of doctrine—firmly established and not moving.

B. Not moved away from the hope of the gospel

What is the “**hope** of the gospel?” We talked about the word “hope” a couple of months ago when we looked at verse 5. “Hope” in vs 5 is a **noun**—not a verb. In other words, it does not refer to something they **hoped** would happen but **might**—or **might not**—happen. Instead, it is a **noun** meaning “expectation.” So verse 5 carries the idea of an “expectation” laid up for them in heaven.

The same is true here in vs 23—the “expectation” of the gospel. What is the **expectation** of the gospel?

What is the **expectation** that we look forward to that comes out of the message of the gospel?

Not sonship because we have **that now!**

And **not forgiveness** because we have **that now, too!**

What blessings of the gospel **don't** we have **now**—that we will have **in the future?**

A guy by the name of **J.J. Black** (Biblehub.com) put it like this: “with Him”—and “like Him.”

That sums it up wonderfully, doesn't it? We will be **with Christ**—forever—some day in the future!

And we will be **like Christ**—forever—some day in the future!

Christ **is** our expectation—and Christ is **also the reason** we can have Him as our expectation! So don't be moved away from Christ!

What does God expect from those of us who have trusted Christ? What does God expect from us who are no longer His enemies and are now His children?

First, God expects us to continue in—to remain committed to—**the faith**; meaning the entirety of God's Word. We are to be **grounded** on it—we are to have it as our foundation—and stand firmly on it.

Second, God does not want us to be moved away from our **future expectation**. What is it that we are looking forward to? We will be **with Christ**—and we will be **like Christ**—because of what He did!

--So don't be lured away from God's Word—thinking you need new “revelations” from God!

--And don't be lured away from Christ—thinking you need more than Him to be saved or to have a God-honoring life!

Ephesians 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath **blessed us with all spiritual blessings** in heavenly places **in Christ:**”

What is it that God would have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First, have you been reconciled to God? Have you passed from the state of being estranged from Him—or are you still His enemy?

--Everyone of us is—at this very moment—is either an enemy of God or a child of God!

And you certainly are an enemy of God if you refuse to submit to His way to get into His heaven. If that's you, “lay down your arms.” Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

2. Second, if you are a child of God, we have a responsibility. What is it?

--Continue in the faith; remain grounded and settled on God's Word as your source for what to believe.

--And don't be moved away from your hope—your future expectation—of being **with Christ**—and **like Christ**. **It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus!**