

# Gospel Gratitude

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Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the book of Colossians...

-use ESV, there are Bibles in the chair in front of you

-lots of other faithful translations (NASB, NIV, CSB, NKJV, etc.)

Review: Jesus is Supreme over all and Sufficient for all that we need

Last week, we saw how Jesus is Supreme over all things. He is the pre-eminent one. All things were made through Him and for Him. Paul has been talking in these universal and grand cosmic terms. Jesus is reconciling all things – everything from subatomic particles to creatures at the bottom of the ocean to the vast reaches of outer space. He is working out a renewal of the entire creation through the blood of His cross. And now, Paul moves the emphasis from the cosmic and grand to the personal and intimate relationship God has with his readers.

And that's where we'll pick up this morning with verses 21-23. It's only three verses that we'll walk through together, but I want to get a running start, so let's read beginning back in verse 15...

**Read Colossians 1:21-23**

Let's pray...

## Intro

Have you ever been described as something that you don't think is right? Someone misrepresents you or something about you or what you've done?

I think most, if not all of us have had that experience. That's really the opposite of what marketers and advertisers are trying to do. They want to sell you a product or a service, and they want you to see why you need it.

Sometimes, my wife and I will be watching a show or something on TV, and there will be an ad or a commercial that just doesn't seem appealing at all to us. And she'll say, "I must not be the target market for that particular thing..."

Some of you may remember infomercials or paid programming on TV. They were these long commercials aimed at selling a product. Have you ever bought something from one of those TV ads or infomercials?

Years ago, my Dad bought a Flowbee® – a device that you attach to your vacuum and it sucks your hair and cuts it off at a certain length, and bam, cleanup happens right away. (show picture) He cut his own hair with one of those for decades. I don't know exactly how it happened, but he may have seen the commercial for it, and thought to himself – you know, I have that problem. I would like an easier way to cut my own hair without paying a barber.



But there are other times when you may see one of those 'before' sections of a commercial and you just don't resonate with it. It just doesn't seem to describe you or a problem that you have.

Someone online put together a compilation of some of those 'before' sections of infomercials. See you resonate with what they're trying to sell...

(show video)

Anyone feel like they struggle with putting on socks or walking to your couch like that? The problem is that we don't see our need for the product they're selling...

My fear is that we would look at a passage like this one in Colossians and feel like it doesn't describe us. We think to ourselves, "We must not be the target market."

Look again at what Paul says in verse 21,

**Colossians 1:21**

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

Paul says his readers were alienated, that is separated and estranged from God. And they were hostile in mind, opposed to God in their thinking. And they were doing evil deeds. Does that describe your past? Doing evil deeds? It sounds like something a supervillain would do in a comic book movie...evil deeds, muahahaha...

The problem is that these words and phrases really do describe all of us before we came to trust in Christ. And they still describe what is happening in the world today and in much of our culture around us. The problem is that we don't see our need for the gospel.

People are born alienated from God. I've been studying this idea of the *image of God* for my schoolwork – this idea that we have been created in the image of God. As we saw last week – Jesus is the image of God. And people have been created *in* the image of God, according to that pattern, so to speak, that is Jesus.

And I've come to understand that it's a big concept, but one of the things it means is that every person has been made in the image of God and has a relationship with God. But for most people, that relationship is one of alienation. Every person alive has a vertical relationship with his or her Creator. But if you have not trusted in Christ for yourself – that relationship is one of hostility and estrangement.

We see this right from the beginning of the biblical story. Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God's good commands for them. And they were exiled, estranged, and alienated from paradise and the presence of God. And since that time, people have been trying to come back to God on their own terms.

So when people look to other things besides God to give them meaning and worth or significance in life – they are doing that because they are really searching for God. People try to use work or money or power or entertainment or food and drink or substances and drugs to give them what only God can provide.

There's a quotation that goes, "Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is really searching for God." It's sometimes attributed to C.S. Lewis or G.K. Chesterton, but really it's a paraphrase from an author named Bruce Marshall.

We might amend it today to say something like,  
"Every person who opens their social media looking for validation or approval is really looking for God."

Or “Every person who uses apps to order people or images of people to use selfishly like a person would use an app to order a pizza – that person is really looking for what only God can provide.”

That’s what it means to be alienated from God – our fellowship with our Creator was broken and we know it deep down.

And what’s more, Paul says his readers were hostile in mind and doing evil deeds. And the same is true for us before Christ. We weren’t just distant from God – we were opposed to Him. We didn’t want God to tell us what to do. We didn’t want to be held accountable for our thoughts and actions. It’s been said that an atheist is a person who says, “there is no God, and I hate him!” We don’t want to believe that we have a Creator to whom we will be accountable.

And so before Christ, our thinking was opposed to God and everything God stands for. That doesn’t mean that we were as bad as we could possibly be – but it does mean that we were fundamentally at odds with God and His Law.

If you get in a car accident, you might have an adjuster look at your car and declare that it’s totaled. It doesn’t mean it’s as bad as it could possibly be – it does mean that it’s not worth fixing. The cost to repair is greater than what it’s worth. If we looked at our own lives, we would say – we’re totaled. Sin had caused us to be alienated from God and opposed to Him in our hearts and minds.

And our hostile thinking led us to doing evil deeds. Again, don’t think that only refers to big, clearly evil things like trying to take over the world or kill half the life of the universe.

Evil deeds includes – lying to that friend who asked you a question. It includes treating your spouse with contempt because they offended you in some way. It includes grumbling and complaining at your workplace and gossiping about others behind their backs. It includes stealing and intentionally failing to pay back what you’ve borrowed. It includes driving recklessly in anger when a person cuts you off in traffic. These are the kinds of things that our hostile thinking leads us to – evil deeds.

This is how sin works – the desires of our hearts lead us to evil actions. That’s the story of every person alive. We are all described by Paul’s words here. We are the target market. We are the goofy one in the ‘before’ video.

We are all alienated from God, hostile in mind, and doing evil deeds. That is why we need the gospel. We need Jesus to save us.

So with our time remaining, I want us to answer three questions from our text this morning. 1 – what has the gospel done? 2 – what will the gospel do? And 3 – what should we do with the gospel?

## **What has the gospel done?**

First, we need to remind ourselves what we mean when we say gospel.

Remember – we were totaled, not worth fixing. But God loved us anyway. He doesn’t think we’re totaled! He chose us when we were dead in our trespasses and sins. He sent His Son to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus as the God-Man, was born of a virgin and lived a life of complete righteousness, fully obedient to the Father. But though He was without sin, he was executed by the Romans at the insistence of the crowds. He was crucified so that sinners like you and me could be forgiven of our sins. And He rose from the grave three days later. He sat down at the right hand of the Father and will one day come again to judge the living and the dead.

And because of this Christ-event – all that He did, described as the gospel – because of this, we can be saved from our sins by faith when we turn from our sins and put our trust in Him.

There are various pictures given by the biblical authors to describe this change that the gospel brings. Becoming a Christian is sometimes spoken of in terms of...

**Justification** – being legally declared righteous

**Regeneration** – being brought from death to life

**Redemption** – being bought out of slavery to sin

**Propitiation** – being freed from the wrath we deserve through the satisfactory payment

**Salvation** / Rescue – being delivered from the penalty our sins have incurred

**Adoption** – being placed into the family of God

All these different pictures of the gospel can be helpful because they highlight different ways that the gospel saves us, different aspects of our salvation. So if you are preaching the gospel to your soul on a regular basis, and I hope you are, then you can use these different pictures to remind yourself of the multi-faceted glory of your salvation.

There are many pictures of the gospel, but the one that Paul wants his readers to see here is that of **reconciliation** – being put back into right relationship with God.

Look at verse 22... **Colossians 1:22**

he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death,

Through the gospel, we have been made right with God. We were alienated and estranged from Him, but now, through Christ, we have been brought back to God.

Jesus doesn't just deliver us from the penalty of our sin – He brings us back to God. That's a big deal. That's why heaven will be so glorious! We will be in fellowship with our Creator, restored to the way things were intended to be.

This gospel of reconciliation is what gives the Colossians hope. And it's the same gospel that we believe today. It's the same gospel that saves wherever it is proclaimed. That's Paul's point at the end of verse 23, look there...

**Colossians 1:23**

...the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

He says the gospel has been proclaimed in all creation. And we might read that and go, "Really? All creation?" some translations have, 'to every creature.' But Paul's point is not that every individual creature has heard the name of Jesus. His point is that this gospel of reconciliation is the same one that has been preached all over the place.

It's good news that goes out wherever Christ is proclaimed – that He is reconciling all things to Himself and that sinners can be made right with God through the blood of His Cross.

The same gospel that saved Paul on the road to Damascus is the same one that saved the believers at Colossae.

It's the same one that saved the apostle Peter,  
the same one that saved the church fathers in North Africa,  
the same one that saved the men and women who were persecuted under Rome  
in the early centuries of the church,  
the same one that traveled to India and China,  
the same one that was recovered and preached during the Reformation in  
Germany and France,  
the same one that traveled across the ocean to America,  
the same one that was believed by Pastor Chase fifty years ago when this church  
was planted.

It is this same gospel of reconciliation with God that has been proclaimed in all creation  
– that is the gospel that Paul serves and proclaims.

So let me just pause here and ask you – have you been reconciled to God? Is this the  
good news that you are trusting to make you right with the God who made you?

There are lots of other religions out there, lots of other world views, lots of other ways  
that people are hoping will do for them what only Jesus can do. It is only through the  
blood of Jesus's cross that we can be made right with God – restored to fellowship with  
Him. Jesus is supreme over all the other ways the world proposes to save us.

And what's even more amazing is that Jesus has done all that we need to be restored to  
God. He is sufficient. All that we must do is simply trust Him alone, put our faith in Him.  
That looks something like saying this in your heart – I want to follow you Jesus. I confess  
that I have sinned against you. I've been opposed to you in my thinking and my actions,  
and now I want to follow you. Will you forgive me of my sins and receive me as your  
child?

Has there been a time in your life where you have done something like that? Everyone's  
story is a bit different, but has there been a time where you would say – I know that I've  
been reconciled to God?

For those of us in the room who have trusted in Christ and been made right with God, notice that Paul emphasizes the certainty of this reconciliation. He says that God has “now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death.” This is a current reality – Jesus has now done this. He has done it through his body of flesh by his death.

Jesus was truly God and through the miracle of the incarnation, he now has a body of flesh like yours and mine. Why does Paul say it that way? Why does he emphasize the body and flesh of Christ?

It likely has to do with what Mike was explaining last week. There was this influence of an early form of Gnosticism and those who were teaching that physical matter, things like bodies and material, earthly stuff – those things are evil. And so Paul wants to remind his readers that matter is not evil and Jesus has a physical body. And it is through the death of the body of Jesus that we have been reconciled to God. Jesus had a real body, Jesus has a real body, Jesus will forever have a real body.

And so through the death and resurrection of Jesus and His body of flesh, we have hope that our bodies will be resurrected as well. We will be delivered from these sin-cursed bodies which get sick and injured and groan as part of fallen creation. And we will live forever in glorified bodies – physical bodies unstained by sin.

And that’s possible because of what Jesus did in His physical body on the Cross. That’s what the gospel has done – Jesus has reconciled us to God in His body by His death.

## **What will the gospel do?**

What then, will the gospel do? What do we have to look forward to?

### **Colossians 1:22**

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,

You see the purpose clause there? Jesus has reconciled you *in order* to present you...

The reason Jesus has restored us to fellowship with God is so that one day when we stand before Him, we will be holy and blameless and above reproach.



We see here in this verse an example of the already-not yet tension in the New Testament. We are already reconciled – that is a reality now. It's already true. But it's not yet fully realized. There is a 'not yet' aspect of our salvation that awaits the return of Christ to be fully experienced.

We have been made holy. We are saints. Paul said that about his readers back in verse two when he addressed this letter to the saints at Colossae. We are holy in Christ. But one day, we will be fully holy. Saved to sin no more. What is true of our position before God will become true of our experience.

In other words, it will make our status match our reality. Right now, we have been reconciled to God – that's our status. But on that day, we will see Jesus and enjoy fellowship with God in our resurrected and glorified bodies – that will be our reality.

The gospel is the total package – it takes us from alienation from God to an eternity with God in glory. We've talked about the before picture – this is the after. What will we be like in glory? Paul mentions three things here...

### **Holy**

We will be holy. What that means is no more sin. What that means is no more regret. No more guilt and shame. No more hiding and wondering if you'll be found out. No more worry and anxiety. We will be holy.

### **Righteous**

And we will be righteous. What that means is that we will do what is right. We will be wise and know what to do. We will not be tossed to and fro by indecision and doubt. We will be righteous.

### **Above Reproach**

And that third one is interesting – we will be above reproach. No longer will there be any accusations against us that will stick. No one will be able to say – “You're not good enough.” Or “If people really knew you, they'd reject you.” The reproach of others and the evil one will fall right off of us. We'll be above reproach.

What a day, glorious day, that will be.

And this is what it means for Christ to reconcile us in his body by his death, so that we will be fully sanctified one day as we stand before the Father. This is what Jesus has done for sinners. It's his doing, not ours. He gets the glory, not us.

Years ago, John F. Kennedy turned a phrase that stuck with many because it was so memorable and striking in how it was worded. He said, 'ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.'

And that's a great – if the point is to rouse up a people to do what you want, in that case, serve the country.

But the gospel is exactly the opposite. The gospel says, Ask not what you must do for God, but what has God done for you?

What has God done for you? You personally? What is true about your life because of Christ? What difference has He made? And what will we say a million years from now, when we stand before the throne?

We will say, all glory be to Christ. He has reconciled us to God and presented us holy and blameless and above reproach before Him. Why would Jesus go after totaled sinners like us? There are a thousand reasons, but near at the top of that list is the glory of God. Jesus saves so that His glorious grace would be seen and exalted as supreme. We will forever be a testament to his power and grace when we stand before the throne in heaven.

## **What should we do with the gospel?**

So that's what the gospel has done and what it will do. But what then, should we do with the gospel?

Let me back up to verse 22 to get the flow of thought...

### **Colossians 1:22-23**

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, 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.

Maybe you got caught on the phrasing at the beginning of verse 23.

Paul says, this is what the gospel has done and what it will do, “if.” If – there’s a condition here. These things are true...if.

Notice a few things – he does not say, these things are true for you if you continue on in good works. No, they were not saved by good works, and they will not persevere by doing good works. Their salvation was not and will never be dependent on their goodness or lack of sin.

No, he warns that they should continue in the faith. They should not shift away from the hope of the gospel. Because if they do, then this reconciliation and promise of being presented as holy and blameless and above reproach will not be true for them.

So there’s a tension here – do you feel it? If you drill down deep enough with any doctrinal position, you’ll eventually find that there are tensions that we must navigate.

So how do we resolve this tension?

People have tried different things. Some simply say that if at any point in a person’s life, he or she makes a profession of faith, then they are certainly saved. It doesn’t matter if their life didn’t change, doesn’t matter what they believe now, none of that matters – the only thing that matters is praying a prayer at some point to profess faith.

This position seems to emphasize grace, but in the end, it undermines it. It cheapens grace by teaching that the gospel doesn’t really change people, that the Spirit doesn’t really convict, and that grace can be simply put on and removed at will. This position has a hard time with verses like Colossians 1:23 and several others like it.

Others argue that people can lose their salvation. These people say that a person may be truly saved but then lose it through sin or denying the faith. But this runs counter to a host of NT passages that speak to the security of the believer. Jesus said that no one can pluck his people out of his hand. Christians have eternal life – not just life until we sin too much. I don’t find this position persuasive either.

A third option, and I think the best one, is that faith that saves will continue on believing. Those who are truly saved will persevere in believing. Christ will hold us fast. And he will keep us believing to the end, even using passages and warnings like this one.

Paul intends for his words to urge his readers to continue on in their belief of the gospel. In fact, his wording here likely indicates that he is confident of their continued faith. He's saying, "you will be reconciled if, and I'm sure you will, you continue in the faith."

I know that doesn't relieve all of the tension we may feel here. And I know that for many of you, this isn't just a theological question. It's a reality when your kids or your family members or your friends walk away from the faith or deconstruct and turn away from what they once confessed to be true.

To you, I would say that our hope remains in the saving power of Jesus. He has the power to save alienated and hostile sinners – and He can save your loved ones. Our God is mighty to save.

But we are not helpful if we give false assurances of salvation because one time a person made a profession and since then they have shifted away from the hope of the gospel.

So why does Paul write this here? Why does he say – "if indeed you continue in the faith"? It's not just theological point that he wants to make. He wants to press us to persevere in the gospel. Don't give up. Hold on. Persevere.

I know it is a heavy thought to consider, but there are some in this room who a year from now may not be walking in faith. There are some who last year or over the last few years were in this room and who are now, not continuing in the faith.

You may be able to think of names of people who have walked away. So what are we to do? Paul says, continue in the gospel. Don't shift away from it and try to move on from it. Don't put your hope in other things!

Don't put your faith in apologetics. I know a man who got really into defending the Christian faith, as though he could answer every objection and had a response for every

question. He had essentially removed faith from his Christianity. There wasn't a real relationship with Christ there. And eventually, he wrestled with some questions that drove him away from the gospel. And he no longer believes.

Don't put your faith in church leaders or the church to always do what is right. Many people have stories of being mistreated or abused by the church. Or people followed and trusted pastors or ministry leaders only to be let down when they were caught in scandal and sin.

The gospel is our hope. Jesus is the only one who will never let you down. So why does Paul write this? What does he want us to do?  
I can't say it better than Journey said it years ago. Don't stop believin'!

We must continue on in believing the gospel – stable and steadfast. Those are words used to describe a solid building. That's what our hope in the gospel is. It is a sure foundation. It is our only hope.

We were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. But Christ has reconciled us to God in his physical body, through his atoning death. Why? So that we would be presented before the Father as holy and blameless and above reproach if we continue believing this gospel, not shifting from it. It is the same gospel that is reconciling people all over the world and the only hope we have.

Let's pray...