

Lesson 5 – Colossians 1:19-23

Randy Thompson
Valley Bible Church
www.valleybible.net

Review / Introduction

The apostle Paul is writing a letter to the church at Colossae – a church he does not know and one that is facing heretical attacks on the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. This heresy combined ideas from various religions and philosophies with the truth of Christianity. Its elements included a need for a special knowledge available only to a select few, a denial of the deity and saving work of Jesus, the worship of angels, asceticism, and keeping Jewish ceremonial laws.

Paul continued the attack against the false Colossian teachers which he began in his prayer by directly attacking the Colossian heresy that denied the deity of Christ (1:15-18). Jesus is God incarnate. He is the “image of the invisible God”. He is the preeminent one over all creation. He is the Creator of the physical as well as the immaterial universe. He is eternal. He holds the universe together by His omnipotent power. He is the origin and source of the body, the church. Finally, He is the preeminent one who is the first One resurrected with a glorified body. He is first; He is supreme; He is preeminent.

Christ’s preeminence is seen in both His person and His work. Paul continues refuting the Colossian heresy by presenting the supremacy of the person and work of Christ.

The Supremacy of the Christ’s Work (1:19-23)

1. Summary statement of the supremacy of Christ’s person (1:19)

¹⁹For it was the *Father’s* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (ESV)

“For” introduces the reason why the Son is supreme in creation and the church. First, His permanence, His supremacy is because He is fully divine. The Spirit through Paul summarized this thought in verse 19. The totality of divinity, divine attributes, permanently belong to Christ.

According to several commentators, “fullness” referred to sub-divine parts of the Gnostic thought of god who had parts of the divine powers and attributes. To the contrary, all the divine attributes dwell in Christ. He is fully divine. Only He is 100% God and 100% man.

“Dwell” means literally to settle down in a place so to take up permanent abode or residence. This contradicts errant teaching that Christ only temporarily possessed divine attributes and power (e.g., the teachings of Christian Science).

There is a translation/interpretive challenge in this verse relating to the subject of the verbs “pleased” and “reconcile” since the subject can either be an implied “God” or “all the fullness”. This can be seen in the difference between the NASB and ESV and in the NASB’s italics of “Father”. The better understanding seems to be the NASB where “God” or “Father” is the subject of the verbs “pleased” and “reconcile” leaving us a very literal translation of: “because *God* was pleased *for* all the fullness to dwell in Him and by Him *God* reconciled all things to Himself”.

This parallels other Pauline thought such as 2 Cor 5:18-19.

¹⁸Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18-19)

❖ **Do you bow moment-by-moment before the amazing, preeminent Christ?**

Christ is preeminent because of His deity and because of His saving work.

2. The supremacy of Christ's saving work (1:20-23)

a. Reconciliation (1:20)

²⁰and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

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

The difference between the NASB and ESV here is accounted for by a minor textual variant with the NASB including the second "through Him" and the ESV omitting it. The evidence suggests that the NASB is more correct.

God was pleased to reconcile us to Himself through Christ. Interestingly, it does not say that people reconciled to God, but God to people. "Reconcile" means to exchange hostility for friendship. Here in Colossians 1:20 and 22 and Ephesians 2:16 it is the word for reconcile with a prefix added to indicated "fully". It pictures the total, complete, and full restoration of the relationship. It is used sparingly in the NT.

¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been **reconciled**, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom 5:10 without the emphasizing prefix)

¹⁰..., that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹(but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be **reconciled** to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. (1 Cor 7:10-11 without the emphasizing prefix)

¹⁸Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹namely, that God was in Christ **reconciling** the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of **reconciliation**. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God. (2 Cor 5:18-20 without the emphasizing prefix)

¹⁵by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶and might **reconcile** them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (Eph 2:15-16)

²⁰and through Him to **reconcile** all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven. ²¹And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, ²²yet He has now **reconciled** you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach (Col 1:20-22)

“Having made peace” describes how the reconciling occurred. This peace was a one-time event that is completed. The peace does not have to continue being sought. The peace, the cessation of hostilities or the removing of relationship barrier, was brought about “through blood of His cross”. Jesus’ sacrifice for sin is what brought reconciliation to believers.

❖ **How do you approach your salvation, are you always asking for peace again?**

“All things” include things whether on earth or in heaven. However, the interpretation here is limited by what is permitted to be identified as we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. We know from other passages that not everyone is saved (reconciled) nor are the fallen angels reconciled. So “all” is all that is permitted to be identified as all from Scripture itself.

❖ **How is your gratitude for your reconciliation evident?**

In order to understand the greatness of Christ’s sacrifice, we need to see the depths of our sin.

b. Total depravity (1:21)

²¹And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds,

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

“Alienated” means to alienate entirely or be estranged; to make unfriendly, hostile, or indifferent where attachment formerly existed. The tense (perfect) and voice (passive) indicates that something happened in the past to cause the alienation and that condition then persisted since “were” is in the present tense. All people are in a continual state of separation, alienation and estrangement from God because of the sin nature inherited from Adam. The only other use of this word is by Paul in Ephesians.

¹²*remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, **excluded** (alienated in ESV) from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:13)

¹⁷So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸being darkened in their understanding, **excluded** (alienated in ESV) from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; ¹⁹and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. (Eph 4:17-19)

“Hostile” means to be hateful, hostile toward, at enmity, or an adversary of someone. “Mind” refers to the intellect, moral understanding or the way of thinking. The unredeemed is hateful in their understanding of God’s moral standards and hostile towards the truth of Scripture.

⁶For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ⁷because **the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God**; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 8:6-8)

“Engaged in evil deeds” is the avenue through which hostility of mind is demonstrated. Alienation is seen in hostility of mind; hostility of mind is seen in evil works. Ultimately, we do evil and are hostile in mind because we are in a state of loving sin.

¹⁹This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and **men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.** ²⁰For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (John 3:19-20)

These three descriptions paint a desperate picture for each person’s position before an all holy God. The Scriptures clearly speak of the condition of man as being in a fallen – sinful state. Each person has inherited the sin nature from Adam (Rom 5:12). The sin nature is the corruption of our whole nature and is that which inclines us to sin. The result of the sin nature is “total depravity” – where the corruption of sin extends to every aspect of our being (Rom 1:18-3:20) including intellect (2 Cor 4:4), conscience (1 Tim 4:2), will (Rom 1:28), and heart (Eph 4:18). The idea of total depravity is not that man displays as much evil as he possibly could, nor that he cannot do any good, or even feign a love for God, but that his entire nature is affected, tainted, by sin. As such he is totally incapable of moving on his own toward God. The Scriptures are clear:

All are sinful:

²³for **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**, (Rom 3:23)

The unregenerate man’s heart is wicked:

⁵Then the LORD saw that the **wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.** (Gen 6:5)

⁹“The **heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick**; Who can understand it? (Jer 17:9)

The unregenerate man is dead in his sins:

¹And **you were dead in your trespasses and sins**, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. (Eph 2:1-3)

The unregenerate man will not come to Christ of his own volition:

⁴⁴"**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

⁶⁵And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that **no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.**" (John 6:65)

The unregenerate man is a slave to sin:

³³Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.** (John 8:33 see also Romans 6:16-23)

We are (were) evil, we are (were) in a disparate state, we are (were) lost in our sin.

❖ **Do you fully understand the depths that the corruption of sin extends in your life? How grateful does that make you for reconciliation? How dependent does that make you for sanctification?**

c. Saved to be different (1:22)

²²yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach

²²he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, (ESV)

While we were each in alienation with God, at enmity with God, dead in your trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1), Christ died for you (Rom 5:8). Paul goes back to the idea of reconciliation, to exchange hostility for friendship. Again, Paul is addressing the Colossian Gnostic heresy but noting that Christ was fully God yet also here fully man. God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3).

God did not save you from sin to remain the way you were. You were saved for a purpose. God is at work in you to move you to something different than what you were. He is at work in you to move you from alienation to "holy and blameless and beyond reproach".

"Holy" means separated from sin and set apart unto God in character as well as condition. "Blameless" is literally without spot or blemish. It was used literally of the absence of defects in sacrificial animals. Figuratively, it means morally blameless, unblemished by sin. "Beyond reproach" goes beyond blameless to convey the idea of being unaccusable, that no one can bring a charge against you.

Perfectly "holy and blameless and beyond reproach" is the end goal of our discipleship of Christ. This is God's purpose for each of us as "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph 1:4). Each of us who has bowed before Christ as Lord and Savior is on the path to toward this goal which will be realized in glory.

❖ **Are you striving to be holy and blameless and beyond reproach?**

But how do you know if you are really on the path? How do you know if God is really at work in you? If you “continue in the faith”.

d. Perseverance (1:23)

²³if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

²³if 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. (ESV)

The sad truth presented in Scripture is that not everyone who professes to be a Christian is saved from their sin. Profession does not equal true reconciliation.

²²Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’

²³And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ (Matt 7:22-23)

Paul addresses this here and makes the point that true salvation results in perseverance. Those truly reconciled must truly persevere. “If indeed” here is not conditional, but is an assumption that an acceptance of the gospel results in “continuing”. It could be translated “Assuming that you continue...”.

The doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints” is sometimes called “eternal security” or “once saved, always saved”. A true believer cannot lose their salvation for the Scriptures declare that nothing can separate the believer from Christ (Rom 8:28-39). All true believers once saved are kept by God’s power and are always saved (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor 1:4-8; Eph 4:30; Heb 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet 1:5; Jude 24). This is God’s work that keeps Christians faithful, causing them to persevere in the faith despite trials, tribulations, and temptations.

The unfortunate phrase in Christendom, is “once saved, always saved”. It is true as far as it goes, but can be misconstrued or misunderstood. The better phrase is, “once saved, always persevere” or “once saved, always continue”.

“Continue” means to abide in, continue in, persevere, persist (in), to stay at or with, to remain. It is the present tense which indicates something that should happen continually or be a habitual practice or lifestyle. A true believer, one who has exercised the gift of true saving faith, will continue; they will persist; they will persevere; they will remain.

The next phrases describe what it means to “continue”. “Firmly established” means to place on a firm, secure foundation. The perfect tense speaks of an action completed in past time having present results and here conveys the idea of the permanence of this “establishment”. It is used by Jesus to describe His words or Him Himself.

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been **founded** on the rock. (Matt 7:24-25)

“Steadfast” and means settled, steady, painting the picture of firmly seated in a chair, settled in mind and purpose. It describes believers as firmly or solidly in place.

“Moved away” means literally to move from one place to another and so to be shifted, stirred to a place elsewhere, removed with the negative “not”. Here the verb means “not continuously being moved or shifted from the...”. The antonym of the verb is found in 1 Corinthians 15:58 where believers are commanded to be steadfast and “immovable”.

“Hope” is the absolute certainty of future good, the joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation. Of the 54 times it is used in the NT, 48 uses were by Paul in Acts and his epistles (if you take Hebrews as being a recording of Paul’s teachings to struggling Jewish believers). Paul had previously given thanks for the Colossians since he had heard of God’s work in their lives “because of the hope laid up for them in heaven” (Col 1:5).

The hope of the gospel is not just the joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation, but the joyful expectation of God’s work in the believer’s life now to conform them to the image of Christ. In addition, this hope has a stabilizing effect on the believer’s life as it is an anchor for the soul (Heb 6:19).

¹⁹**This hope we have as an anchor of the soul**, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, (Heb 6:19)

It is not what happened years ago when you said a “sinner’s prayer” that provides confidence that you have been truly reconciled; it is what is happening now that gives that confidence. Are you “continuing”? Are you “firmly established” and “steadfast”? Have you “moved away from the hope of the gospel”?

❖ **Do you have the security of your salvation? Is it evident by continuing, being firmly established, steadfast, and not being moved away from the hope of the gospel?**

Paul states that this gospel had been “proclaimed in all creation under heaven”. Even though Paul was writing from Rome, the center of the civilized world, that did not equate to “all creation under heaven”. This must be hyperbole, exaggeration to make a point. The gospel has gone to all, the false Gnostic teaching was only for the elite.

Paul was made a “minister” or servant of the gospel. The same as you and I. We will examine that more next time.

Conclusion

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is addressing the Colossian heresy that denies the deity and saving work of Christ. Paul presents Christ as preeminent in both His person and His work. Christ has reconciled you and I when we were alienated, hostile in mind, and engaged in evil deeds. He has saved us for the purpose to changes us into worshipers of the true God being holy, blameless, and above reproach. That work is demonstrated by us continuing in the faith, being firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel.

Additional Study

1. Spend some time praying and thanking God for His amazing work of reconciliation; thank Jesus for His sacrifice for you; thank the Spirit for convicting you of your sin and progressively sanctifying you.
2. Review the Scriptures on “total depravity” in the study. Do you view yourself as being evil, completely and utterly sinful? Or do you think, I’m not that bad? If you think you are “not that bad”, to whom are you comparing yourself – God or other people?
3. As you look at your current holiness, blameless-ness, and beyond reproach-ness and look back on your Christian walk, do you see a movement toward Christ-likeness? If not, what might be the causes?
4. Read the following verses. Think about your assurance of salvation and how confident you are that you are truly saved. If you don’t have firm confidence, then what might be the causes? (Isa 32:17; John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor 1:4-8; Eph 4:30; Heb 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet 1:5; Jude 24)