

Complete: Over All For You – Colossians 1:21-23

I read a novel recently that traced the intertwining stories of two families from before WW2 until the 1970's. One of the couples was in their early twenties at the beginning of WW2 but the guy missed the war because of a health issue that kept him from serving. They were very much aware of the war and felt its impact in things like rationing and when people in their small Ohio town would lose a loved one, but they were not directly impacted by a family member serving.

That changed for them when it came to the Vietnam War. Their only son was in his early twenties during Vietnam and rather than waiting to be drafted, he signed up to go and serve. There's a moment in the book when they feel the very personal reality of the war because their son is going to be there in the middle of it.

As human beings it's quite normal for us to be aware of an event like a war and not fully experience it without a personal or family connection to it. This is neither good nor bad; it's just the way it is.

I think a similar disconnect can often happen with biblical truth. It feels very far away, abstract, and distant. It's common to hear about God's sovereignty, about redemption, or about the future hope in heaven, and not get emotionally invested in it because it feels like it doesn't necessarily involve us.

To be honest with you, I can very easily see that disconnect happening for some of you with last week's passage in Colossians. The entire passage is high theology with words like firstborn, preeminence, and the fullness of God.

But Colossians 1:15-20 is not aloof or disconnected from your life today and Paul will not let you stand back from its truths. In our passage for this morning, he's going to sit you down right in front of the screen and carefully show you the real life impact the truths of verses 15-20 have had for you and continue to have.

Think of verses 21-23 as Paul handcuffing your life to the glory and preeminence of Jesus Christ. Last week I told you that in verses 15-20 there are all 3rd person pronouns. He and him and his. It's all looking to Christ, which is where we should look. But this week Paul now turns elsewhere. Look at the first two words of verse 21. One author said that verses 21-23 apply the high theology of verses 15-20.

This is where it gets personal. So, here's what we will see this morning. **4 Parts of Your Story of Redemption.**

1. Alienation (v. 21)

Every person in here this morning has a story. Your story is personal and unique, but there are certain themes that tie all of our stories together. We all start in this spot. Alienated. Look at verse 21.

Paul is talking to the Colossians, and he's moved from the supremacy of Christ over creation and the new creation to the personal impact these truths have had on the Colossians. Notice that the Colossians were once alienated. This used to be their situation. What does Paul mean by alienated? Well, we use that word "alien" in a variety of ways but certainly it means someone outside, estranged, separate or an outsider.

But separate from what and outside of what? Well, two answers to that question. First, you will see throughout Colossians that Paul uses the language of "in Him" to describe believers' position now. Look at 2:11-13 for several examples of this. If the blessings of salvation and forgiveness come "in" Christ, then to be alienated is to be outside of Christ or separate from Christ and to exist without those blessings.

Second, to understand what it means to be alienated we need to look at a couple of passages in Ephesians, another letter from Paul. Ephesians 2:12 and 4:18. Every human is born alienated from the life of God and cut off from the promises of Christ. Why? Continue in verse 21.

We are born into this world hostile in mind. To be hostile is to be an enemy or to have an enemy's mindset or disposition. All our thoughts and perspectives are through the lens of rebellion against God and hatred for God. This mindset leads us to do evil deeds. Our thinking corrupts our action and then our actions circle back around and further reinforce our hostile thinking.

This hostility puts us at enmity with God and as deserving of and receiving the wrath of God. Listen to Romans 1:18. This is part of everyone's story and this morning it's either your past or it's your present. Alienation is not something you

can fix on your own. You cannot remove God's wrath for your rebellion by your own efforts and goodness. You need to be rescued. You need to be moved from outside to inside and that means being reconciled.

2. Reconciliation (v. 22)

You were alienated but notice who brought about the reconciliation in the first part of verse 22. He has now. You were once but He has now. In reality, verses 21-23 are one long sentence and this is the main verb of the whole sentence. This is the key idea. He has reconciled you. What does it mean to be reconciled? Look back up to verse 20. It's to make peace. One author put it like this: *Reconciliation is peacemaking. It involves God's taking the initiative to make friends out of his enemies.* – Robert Peterson

How did Christ reconcile you or move you from outside to inside? How did He make peace between you and God? Look again at verse 22. "in his body of flesh by his death" and look back up to verse 20, "by the blood of His cross".

The one in whom the fullness of God dwelled became a human being with a fleshly body subject to suffering and death. He took on the burden of humanity and the consequences of the fall even though He did not sin. He willingly gave up that body of flesh to suffer and die when His blood was shed as a sacrifice.

According to verse 20 this was to reconcile "all things" and here in verse 22 that reconciliation is specifically to you. Verse 20 doesn't mean that every single person will be reconciled to God. But it does indicate the scope of Christ's reconciliation is multifaceted. One author put it like this:

"The cross, therefore, is multidirectional. Taking into account all of Scripture's teaching, the cross is directed toward God himself (in propitiation); toward our enemies, including demons, to defeat them; toward men and women to redeem them; and toward the whole creation to deliver it from 'its bondage to decay' and to bring it into 'the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21)." – Robert Peterson

The cross accomplished all of this and included in this reconciliation is your redemption and the making of peace with God. This is either a part of your story

or you are still alienated. There comes a moment in time when this reconciliation takes place. You may not always know it precisely, but peace was made by Christ and applied to you the moment you were moved from darkness to light.

Now, this reconciliation is fantastic by itself, but it has an even bigger purpose to it that is a part of your story as well.

3. Presentation (v. 22)

Look at the rest of verse 22. God wants something for you. He wants you to be presented before him holy, blameless, and beyond reproach. The words holy and blameless have roots in the OT sacrificial system. You would choose a spotless lamb and one without blemish or blameless as a sacrifice. The goal of reconciliation is to bring this about in your life.

The phrase “beyond reproach” has its roots in the legal system. Think of a person to whom accusations won’t stick. There’s nothing he or she can be held liable for. God wants you to ultimately stand before Him clothed in holiness, blameless and beyond reproach. This presentation happens in the future at the judgment. And that may seem intimidating, but here’s the reality of this presentation and about the holiness that God has in store for you.

These three, holy, blameless, and beyond reproach have already been accomplished by Christ on the cross. You have them today and you wait for them in the future. Think of this a little like when a President is elected and there are still a few months until the inauguration. The status is there but the reality is not official quite yet.

A Presidential inauguration is a splendid presentation of the authority and importance of the office of the President. God has reconciled you to Himself to present you holy and blameless before Him. You and I will be trophies showcasing the power and glory of the work of Christ. When we are presented, it will direct attention back to the one who rescued us and redeemed us.

If this is true, then what do we do in the meantime? If our status is holiness, but our reality is not quite there yet, what part of our story bridges the gap?

4. Continuation (v. 23)

Look at verse 23. Notice that first word “if” in verse 23. Paul doesn’t use this word because he’s unsure whether the Colossians will continue. But He does use this word to motivate them to keep going. He’s confident that if they are truly reconciled and have new life, they will continue.

There’s a careful balance in Scripture of absolute confidence that God will keep those who are truly His, and the very real human responsibility to follow Christ in our lives and grow our faith. Perhaps no passage captures this better than Philippians 2:12-13.

If you are reconciled to God a major part of your story is to continue in the faith. This is really the heart of the letter. Keep going. Don’t get turned off the course. What does this look like? Continue in verse 23. Two positives and one negative. Stable and steadfast. Both indicated a building of some sort. Build your faith on Christ and build it in a way that is solid and will last.

And negatively, don’t get moved away or dissuaded from the hope of the gospel. The Colossians were tempted to trust in something other than Christ. The major central argument of the letter is that they can’t look elsewhere for sufficiency and completeness. Listen to 2:8. That’s exactly what Paul is saying here. Don’t shift from the hope of the gospel. Do you remember this language? It’s how Paul began in 1:3-5.

Paul wants them to continue to believe in the same message that He had proclaimed to them and elsewhere. Don’t get distracted, confused, or turned around. Keep trusting the same simple message and let that message saturate your heart and life.

This is the work God does in you because of who Christ is and what He’s done. Jesus is over all both creation and new creation and He’s over all for you. The personal impact of the gospel cannot be overstated. Have you experienced it and are you continually experiencing it? Let’s pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 3/22/26

- What books have you been reading lately?
- Do you ever feel the disconnect between biblical truth and life? In what areas and what ways?
- How can you tell that Paul has moved from high theology in verses 15-20 to personal application in verses 21-23?
- Describe what it means to be alienated in verse 21.
- Why does Paul focus on the cross when he talks about reconciliation?
- Why does Paul focus on Christ's "body of flesh" when speaking of reconciliation?
- We mentioned that the cross is multidirectional in how it brings about reconciliation. What are some of these directions?
- When does the presentation of verse 22 take place?
- Does God consider us holy, blameless, and beyond reproach right now?

- Does verse 23 indicate that a Christian can lose his or her salvation by failing to continue in the faith? Explain and defend your answer.
- What are some ways we can shift away from the hope of the gospel?