FROM ALIENATION TO RECONCILIATION

(Colossians 1:21-23)

INTRODUCTION

In 1492 two Irish families, the Butlers of Ormonde and the FitzGeralds of Kildare, were involved in a bitter feud. This disagreement centred around the position of Lord Deputy. Both families wanted one of their own to hold the position. In 1492 this tension broke into outright warfare and a small skirmish occurred between the two families just outside the city walls.

The Butlers, realising that the fighting was getting out of control, took refuge in the Chapter House of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral. The FitzGeralds followed them into the Cathedral and asked them to come out and make peace. The Butlers, afraid that if they did so they would be slaughtered, refused.

As a gesture of good faith the head of the Kildare family, Gerald FitzGerald, ordered that a hole be cut in the door. He then thrust his arm through the door and offered his hand in peace to those on the other side. Upon seeing that FitzGerald was willing to risk his arm by putting it through the door the Butlers reasoned that he was serious in his intention. They shook hands through the door, the Butlers emerged from the Chapter House and the two families made peace.

Today this door is known as the “Door of Reconciliation” and is on display in St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin, Ireland.

Our passage today focuses on reconciliation – reconciliation between God and man. God didn’t just offer his arm, He offered his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

After considering Christ’s majestic role in Creation and Redemption, Paul comes down to earth, so to speak, and becomes personal again with the Colossians as well as with us, speaking about what God has done for us in reconciling us to Himself and how we should respond.

Let’s think about why we need reconciliation, how it is accomplished, and how we should respond.
WHY WE NEED RECONCILIATION

This passage is clear on why we need reconciliation with God – we are hostile towards him and alienated from Him. Our sins have separated us from God.

Colossians 1:21 NIV  Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

Note that Paul is talking to the church, to the Christians. He is saying that they “once” were alienated from God and were enemies in their minds towards Him. This is speaking about us also. This describes our situation from birth.

We all are born ALIENATED from God and are hostile towards Him. To be alienated is to be cut off from the life of God. How did this happen?

The story is well known from the book of Genesis. God created man in His own image. God created man as a holy being like unto God. When God breathed into man the ‘breath of life’ he became a living soul. He had the life of God in him, so to speak. He was spiritually alive with a personal, intimate relationship with God. He knew God his Creator. But something happened. Man listened to Satan rather than to God and turned against God and rebelled against his ways. Thereby becoming a sinner, separated from the life of God or as Paul says elsewhere man became spiritually dead. We are all born spiritually dead.

But that is not all. We inherited Adam’s sinful nature and we are hostile in our minds towards God. That is, we refuse to heed the laws of God. We don’t want God to tell us how to live. This is seen in our behavior. We behave wickedly and have evil behavior.

Now because of God’s COMMON grace our behavior is not necessarily as bad as it could be. God restrains us through different means, like our civil laws, our upbringing by our parents, our desire to maintain a fairly good reputation, etc. But this doesn’t erase the evil behavior or being rebellious against God and the way He created us to live. In our hearts we are all for ourselves, not God. Our inborn propensity is towards our own pleasure, not God’s will.

Some of us may think that since Paul wrote these things to the pagan city of the Colossians, this was for them or for pagans, not for us. We are much too enlightened, too sophisticated, too educated to be that sinful. But don’t fool yourself. God says that there is none righteous, no not one.
We all need to be reconciled to God. We are all cut off from the life of God. We are all spiritually dead. We are all rebels against a holy God in our minds, our hearts, and our behavior. Something must happen to change the situation.

HOW DOES GOD RECONCILED US

How can we be reconciled? Can a leopard CHANGE his spots? (Jeremiah 13:23) Can a sinner change his ways? Verse 22 tells us what God has done for us:

Colossians 1:22 NIV But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--

God made the first move towards reconciliation. God has taken the initiative. He sent His Son to earth to be the atonement for your wicked behavior and your hostile mind against him.

As I said, “God didn’t just reach His arm through the door; He reach through the door with His whole body for you.” He came to earth in a human body so that He could experience what you experience, yet without sin, and to die in your place and thereby offer you reconciliation through faith in His Son.

Notice how verse 22 emphasizes the “physical body of Christ.” Why this or what is the significance of this? The physical Body of Christ was the sacrifice and offering God had prepared to give for our sins. Jesus’ literal bodily suffering and His real shed Blood is what makes ATONEMENT for you and what reconciles you to God. This is one reason in the Lord’s Supper we are taught to say of the bread, “This is my Body, which is broken for you.” We are always to remember that it is the actual Body and Blood of Jesus that reconciles us to God. In other words our reconciliation didn’t come cheap! It came by the precious Blood of Christ and His Broken Body.

Now don’t overlook the phrase “to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.” Christ’s death and atonement for us not only reconciles us to God, brings us back into a peaceful relationship with God, but it is the basis for which God declares us righteous, holy, and free of accusation before Him. This is the doctrine of justification by faith, which rediscovery started the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century with Martin Luther. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us as we stand before God. We are “holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.”
My \textbf{HOPE} is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. This hope of the Gospel is mine through the grace of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, and received by faith. Through Christ we can be presented to God holy, without blemish and free from accusation because we have been declared righteous by faith in Christ.

What a great salvation we have in Christ Jesus! We are reconciled to a holy God and have a perfect standing before Him, only in Christ.

\textbf{SAVING FAITH IS A PERSEVERING FAITH}

When we come to verse 23 we are told how to respond to this great truth of reconciliation and justification by faith. We come to the truth of what is called “the perseverance of the saints” or “persevering faith.” Read verse 23:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Colossians 1:23 NIV} if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.
\end{quote}

Some see a problem with the word “if” in this sentence -- \textit{“if you continue in your faith.”} Is Paul saying that salvation is dependent on our ability to continue to the end? No, not exactly. We know from many other Scriptures that the true believer has assurance of eternal salvation. His continuing to the end is based on God’s ability to keep him.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{John 5:24 KJV} Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{John 10:27-29 NIV} My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (28) I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. (29) My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Romans 8:32-34 NIV} He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (33) Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. (34) Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who
died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Many other verses teach us that our salvation is secure in Christ and that we will make it to the end. But why does Paul mention continuing in the faith is required?

One reason is that we are to understand that saving faith is a persevering faith. A characteristic of SAVING faith is that it will continue holding forth unto the end. A faith that doesn’t continue to the end is not genuine saving faith.

Another reason for this warning is that it is because we need to realize that when God saves us it is not just that we can get a fire insurance policy from hell, but it is for a PURPOSE. That purpose includes doing the things God saved us to do. It is the good works that the Bible speaks of. Ephesians 2 couldn’t be clearer when it says:

**Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- (9) not by works, so that no one can boast. (10) For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We are saved for good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do! If we are not seeking out those good works and seeking to do them, we ought to question whether God has made us a new creature in Christ. There are many who think they are saved, who may not be saved. As the old song goes, “Everyone talking about heaven, ain’t going there.” We are to make our election and calling sure as Peter tells us.

**We are to continue in the faith, until we become established and be firm in it and then we will not to be MOVED from the hope of the Gospel.**

It seems that many are easily moved from the hope of the Gospel to some earthly hope. Many seem to make a decision for Christ in their youth, but where are they today? Many make a commit to follow Christ by joining a local body to encourage, grow, and serve Him. But where are they today? Why is it that most churches have anywhere from a third to a half of their membership on the inactive role. Inactive Christian are those who have dropped out of the life of the church. They don’t attend church or are not involved in any ministry of the church. They are not involved in any fellowship study, etc. This is a sign that they have been
moved from the hope they once had. The book of Hebrews addresses this problem head on in 10:24-25:

Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV  And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, (25) not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

CONCLUSION

But God has something better for us. He has brought us from alienation to reconciliation. He has brought us from a life separated from God and one which is hostile towards God’s ways to a life of intimate fellowship with Him through Jesus’ reconciling atonement on the Cross. This is the message God has for us from this passage of Scriptures this morning. He has reconciled us to Himself and we are to continue growing more and more firm in our faith, not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel.

Where do you see yourself this morning? Are you still alienated from the life of God? Is the propensity of your behavior towards God’s will or towards your own pleasure? Has there been a transition in your life from alienation to reconciliation? God is holding out His arm to you. God is holding out Christ to you. Take his arm by putting your faith in Jesus. Trust Jesus and you will be reconciled. You say that you have put your faith in Jesus but sometimes you are tempted not to continue your involvement with the life of God or with the people of God? Repent and trust God. Hold firm your hope in Jesus until the end.

Put your faith in God who promises to get you to the end. This is His promise. Philippians 1:6:

Philippians 1:6 NIV  being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Go from alienation to reconciliation this morning.

Amen? Amen!