

I keep thinking I'll be able to take a larger section of text, but there is just too much in every few verses to rush through. Though we have hit some of these topics before, our congregation has changed over the years and we can't rush through some of these essential topics.

The church at Colossae was full of new believers. Epaphras had led them to a saving knowledge of Jesus. It appears from the letter that one in the congregation had decided that Jesus was just fine, but thought Epaphras didn't have the whole story. This individual knew a lot about Judaism and an up and coming idea that would become known as Gnosticism. He combined all three and tried to influence the new Christians at Colossae to follow his teachings.

Some individuals find their self-worth in being the one that others follow. (3John 9) Paul will address that individual's self-delusion later in the letter. (Colossians 2:18) But Paul wants to remind them how they became a body of believers in the first place. **Understanding the basics of who Jesus is and what He did for them was the strongest defense against false doctrine.** It is the same everywhere and in every age. It is much more difficult to distort the teaching of the Apostles when you understand what Jesus did for us. That is the foundation. The building may lean this way or that, but if the foundation is correct, all the rest can be properly repaired. (1Corinthians 3:11)

Paul reminded them how much their lives had changed. ²¹ *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,* They had been alienated from God. That is, they had no relationship with the one true God. Most of the people in that church had probably worshiped the gods of their city, guild, and family. When they would go to a town meeting they would throw some incense on an altar and bow to the city god. When they went to work they would offer some incense on the altar of the god of their particular trade, praying for success. In their homes, their hearth was the center of worship and they would have a particular god for their family.

All these Greek or Roman gods were thought to be capricious and uncaring. You just had to keep them happy by honoring them or there would be some kind of natural disaster or illness that would strike. They had no concept of any of these gods caring about them, and a loving god was almost unheard of. They paid their obligatory offerings just to keep them from getting angry. In an area prone to earthquakes and without the understanding of germs and viruses, the evidence of the gods' displeasure seemed to appear on a regular basis. That caused people to wonder just what they had done that angered the gods.

That is what the Apostle called alienation from the true God. Today we have a similar mindset. Those without knowledge of the love of God and the gospel of Jesus often think God is angry with them and caused some kind of disaster in their life. Sometimes they will respond with anger toward God. They ask, "What did I do to deserve this?"

Commented [Paul1]: 3 John 1:9 (NIV)
⁹ I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.

Commented [Paul2]: Colossians 2:18 (NIV)
¹⁸ Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

Commented [Paul3]: 1 Corinthians 3:11 (NIV)
¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Like the Greeks in Colossae, they thought they were paying sufficient reverence to keep an angry god off their back. That too is alienation from God, as the prophet wrote, "All our righteousness is as filthy rags!" (Isaiah 64:6-7)

Does anyone really believe some incense on an altar would be enough honor for the creator and sustainer of our life? Is it right to think of God as demanding our little acts of ritual worship or He'll whack us? That is alienation from God because it is thinking of God in a way that is contrary to His good and holy nature. Everyone is alienated from God before they meet God in Jesus because of sin but also because they have so many misconceptions in regards to who He is and what He expects.

We don't like the indictment and tend to think we are better than most. The sad story of the Titanic lifeboats tells us this alienation assessment is an absolutely accurate description of the heart of fallen man. Of the eighteen life boats that entered the water, most were a little over half full, only one went back to answer the cries of the 1600 people swimming in the frigid water. That boat went back one hour after Titanic sank, when the cries had dwindled to just 13 voices.

We were all hostile in our minds. That is because we have a fallen nature that we inherited from Adam. (1Corinthians 15:22) We all come into life falling for the lie in the Garden that you can be your own god. (Genesis 3:5) You can call your own shots and go your own way and do a good deed now and then to keep God off your back. That is the position of an adversary. It's as if God was the playground bully you have to give your lunch money to or you get beat up.

Many of the cults that I have looked into began with a believer who became angry with God because of a painful incident in their life. They decided to reshape God into an image they could handle, one that put them at the pinnacle of a new revelation that everyone else could follow while allowing them to indulge their carnal nature. That, too, is hostility of the mind. (Jeremiah 5:21-25)

I have to ask you, because it is all too common, **are you angry with God?** Is there something painful in your past that you blame on God? Never mind that we live in a fallen world, and people have freewill; God could have stopped it, right? And so a root of bitterness has developed in our heart. (Hebrews 12:15) That bitterness will keep you from your loving heavenly Father. He's ready to welcome you back. (Luke 15:20) The hostility in our mind is because we have distorted who He really is, a God who loves us with a greater love than we can comprehend.

The hostility toward God exhibits itself in hostility to our fellow man. Just as love for God is expressed in love for our fellow man, so our hostility toward God translates into hostility toward others. When you see someone who is angry with others and speaks evil of others, you can be sure their relationship with God is hostile as well. (1John 2:10-11)

Commented [Paul4]: Isaiah 64:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

⁷ No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins.

Commented [Paul5]: 1 Corinthians 15:22 (ESV)

²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Commented [Paul6]: Genesis 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Commented [Paul7]: Jeremiah 5:21-25 (ESV)

²¹ "Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not.

²² Do you not fear me? declares the LORD. Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it.

²³ But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away.

²⁴ They do not say in their hearts, 'Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.'

²⁵ Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you.

Commented [Paul8]: Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

Commented [Paul9]: Luke 15:20 (ESV)

²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

Commented [Paul10]: 1 John 2:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

It goes without saying that if we are alienated from God and hostile in our minds, we will do evil deeds. It is the natural outcome of being our own god. Selfishness will express itself in all kinds of evil deeds: Theft – I deserve it; slander – I’m right and they are bad people; inappropriate sexual behavior – it’s all about my pleasure; lies – whatever I need to say to promote my image; and on and on. In some way or another, this is the life of every person before repentance, which is a change of mind. (Romans 1:28-31) We’d like to think we are more altruistic, until we imagine ourselves in one of those Titanic lifeboats.

Repentance is going from alienation and hostility toward God to a loving relationship with God. It’s a mind shift. It is forsaking your old way of viewing God, and seeing Him as He truly is, holy, righteous, loving, merciful and, perhaps most importantly, worthy of our love. How is it possible for a just God to overlook our past rebellion and welcome us into a relationship with His holy being?

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, Paul is reminding the Colossians what Jesus did for them. He gave Himself as a substitute to take the punishment they deserved. By becoming man and living a sinless life, He could die in the place of sinners. The just penalty for sin is death. Jesus volunteered to pay it for the Colossians, and for you and me. That is how we could be reconciled to a loving but just and holy God. (1Corinthian 6:11)

With our sin debt cancelled, Jesus can present us holy and blameless and above reproach before God. The past alienation and hostility of our minds are no more in the sight of God. Unlike the Greek gods that just wanted a little deference; the true God demands holiness. His demand comes not out of a capricious demand but out of His own perfect nature. Because He is good, He must judge all that is evil. (Psalm 97:10)

The language also points to presenting an unblemished sacrifice to God. Paul may be pointing to presenting us as living sacrifices holy, blameless, and acceptable to God. (Romans 12:1)

When we accept this loving act of reconciliation that God offers to everyone in Jesus, we find that we become a part of the new creation we talked about last week. (2Corinthians 5:17) Our hearts have new desires and the old loses its appeal. Instead of alienation there is relationship with our loving and holy God. Instead of hostility there is love and a desire to please Him in the way that we live. Our minds no longer interpret events from our selfish perspective but from a faith in our sovereign God. That is why our actions change. Instead of evil deeds of selfishness, we serve God in unselfish obedience. That is the transformation that takes place in the one that is born again.

Jesus presents us to God, holy, blameless and above reproach... *23 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,*

Commented [Paul11]: Romans 1:28-31 (ESV)

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,

³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Commented [Paul12]: 1 Corinthians 6:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Commented [Paul13]: Psalm 97:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

Commented [Paul14]: Romans 12:1 (ESV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Commented [Paul15]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Paul, became a minister. There is the big IF that we see throughout the New Testament. (John 15:10; Hebrews 3:6) There is a lot of controversy over the "ifs" in relationship to salvation. Honest and fruitful theologians have come down on both sides of the issue. Can you lose your salvation? Can you give back the gift? Does it matter what you do after you are saved? Are you eternally secure?

The passage clearly says that you will be presented blameless "if indeed you continue in the faith". The implication is obvious. You won't be presented blameless if you do not continue in the faith. How are we to reconcile this with other passages of Scripture? Must we come down on one side or the other? Whenever I see what appears to be a contradiction in Scripture, I know there must be something I do not understand.

Allow me to go at this from a slightly different approach. What if there was no "if"? Can we be reconciled to God, made holy in His sight, and then live as we please? Would it not be a temptation to the believer to revert to the old life and, in the words of Hebrews 10, trample on the son of God, treat as unholy the blood of the covenant, and insult the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:29) Before you get up and walk out and say, "Oh no! Pastor Paul is an Armenian!", hear me out. There's an "if" in this passage and many others. (2Peter 1:9-10) It's the Word of God. We ignore it to our own peril.

Now let us look at the other Scriptures that the Calvinists would quote in response. Jesus said that the one that believes in Him has eternal life. (John 6:47) It's not eternal if you can lose it! He said no man can pluck the believer from His hand. (John 10:28) He said that when we believe we have passed from death to life. (John 5:24) How could you possibly nullify the work of Jesus in a heart? Does He not promise to finish the work He began in us? (Philippians 1:6)

What if we did not have these assurances? Every time we stumbled we would be wondering if we had lost our salvation. Every Sunday we would be at the altar hoping God would somehow take us back. (Hebrews 6:4-6) Would we not be saying that the blood of Jesus had failed to cover all our sins? Would we not be saying that Jesus' work on the cross was insufficient to save us?

And so you see the quandary. There must somehow be both, both are in Scripture if we will just read it as written and not twist the text; and yet they seem like a contradiction. First let me say that I do not believe they are a contradiction. I do believe an honest interpretation makes it sound like they are.

The most balanced approach I've ever heard came from a professor and pastor. He said, "If you are worried about losing your salvation, if you think somehow you are too weak or Satan is too cunning, then you better be a Calvinist!" Do you see what he was saying? Trust your great Shepherd. Don't fear. Yes, you may be weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves you!

Commented [Paul16]: John 15:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Commented [Paul17]: Hebrews 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Commented [Paul18]: Hebrews 10:29 (ESV)

²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

Commented [Paul19]: 2 Peter 1:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Commented [Paul20]: John 6:47 (ESV)

⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

Commented [Paul21]: John 10:28 (ESV)

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Commented [Paul22]: John 5:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Commented [Paul23]: Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Commented [Paul24]: Hebrews 6:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,

⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,

⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

But, he went on to add, "If you think that since you are secure in Christ, you can go out and live in a way that will please your flesh, ignoring God and selfishly indulging in every pleasure you might desire, because after all, you have a ticket to heaven, then you better believe you can lose your salvation!"

Well, that is good practical advice, but I'm not sure it is faithful to the authors' intent when they wrote these passages we are considering. One other solution comes in the suggestion from the Calvinist perspective, that if the person lives the life of the unredeemed, they never were redeemed. I'm not sure that is faithful to the text either.

Can we leave it as a mystery? The Trinity is a mystery to me. I can define it and illustrate it but I can't really comprehend it. Are we eternally secure or must we persevere in our faith? Yes! The Bible declares both are true. Rather than taking sides, can we take the practical approach of the professor? Can we leave it as a mystery and say we better persevere if we are genuine followers of Jesus? Let's move beyond the "if" and look at the rest of the verse.

²³ 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. We're exhorted to continue in the faith, and to remain stable and steadfast, to continue to cling to the hope of the good news that we first heard.

Does that describe your life in the faith? It should? If we are waffling around, tossed like a ship in storm, we are looking at two different sources. (James 1:6) We cannot serve two masters. (Matthew 6:24) God expects us to be all out committed to Him, because He is to us. If He didn't withhold His Son, is there any good thing He would withhold from us? (Romans 8:32) So why would we be anything less than stable and steadfast?

Paul ends the verse by saying that this gospel has been proclaimed in all creation, or we could translate it "to every creature". He may have been referring to Mark 16:15, Jesus' Great Commission to take the news of what He has done for us to the world. Paul says he became minister of this gospel. Minister is a really nice term for the Greek word that most commonly meant one who runs errands or waits on tables. Paul says he is so sold out to his conviction that he lives his life as an errand boy running here and there to spread this good news.

That is why he is writing the Colossians. The good news was getting corrupted and complicated by someone who wanted to be a leader. The good news was simple. Jesus paid their debt and made them holy before God. Don't let go of that. Cling to the hope

Commented [Paul25]: James 1:6 (ESV)
⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

Commented [Paul26]: Matthew 6:24 (ESV)
²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Commented [Paul27]: Romans 8:32 (ESV)
³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Commented [Paul28]: Mark 16:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

if offers. Don't waiver. Let it transform your life. Let it change the way you think. Remember how far you've come... and keep going forward!

Our response to the wonder of being reconciled to God should be a life that is dedicated to the One who paid our debt. In gratitude for being made holy and blameless and above reproach before God, we should live a life that is holy, blameless, and above reproach by cooperating with the Holy Spirit within us. Every day should be a walk with God no longer in alienation, but in loving relationship. I hope that is a description of the transformation that has taken place in your life since you were reconciled to God.

Questions

- 1 What's the best defense against the false teaching?
- 2 Describe being alienated and hostile in mind.
- 3 What are the results of that condition?
- 4 How were we reconciled?
- 5 What is the result?
- 6 What's the big IF?
- 7 What are some verses that seem to indicate we can't lose salvation?
- 8 What are some that sound like we can?
- 9 What was the professor's suggestion?
- 10 What does minister mean? Are you one?