

Studies in Colossians: Lesson 3

Chapter 1:21-29

Verses 21-23

- As Paul has just spent the previous set of verses describing Christ's complete ability to save, he makes personal application to the brethren at Colossae;
 - The idea of being alienated would have had some special meaning to these brethren as they were Gentiles as they had not been in a covenant relationship with God;
 - But there is no reason for us to limit it to that as being alienated describes all those who had yet to respond to Christ, whether Jew or Gentile:
 - **But vs 21** carries an important reminder for the brethren there as Paul brings to mind what they were like before Christ; and what they would be like without Him:
 - **Hostile in Mind:** is something Paul deals with in Ephesians: in chapter 2:3 he speaks of those who indulged in the desires of their mind and it was their nature to pursue wrath, and again in 4:18 he speaks about those who were "*darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;*"
 - **Evil Deeds:** they spent their timing pursuing works of the flesh, not the fruit of the spirit;
 - Perhaps among those were listening to those false teachings with an appearance of wisdom; there were some who had begun to get an inflated view of themselves; possibly imagining that they really brought something to the table in their relationship with God;
 - For those who sought to minimize the importance of Christ's sacrifice, it should have been a sobering reminder of what they would have been without it;
- **In Verse 22 Paul states that all of that is in the past;** Because of Christ sacrifice they were now in a position where they could be presented as holy and blameless;
 - There may be something in the language as he talks about us being holy, blameless and without blemish that the sacrifice of Christ has made it possible for us to be acceptable sacrifices;

- **But there is something worth pointing out in the contrast of these two verses:**
 - One is the past, and one is the present:
 - When we describe God's people, or when we pray for God's people, often times in our desire to emphasize the role of the Lord in our Salvation, we will talk about ourselves as being very lowly, and unworthy, and we may even use words like wretched or sinful:
 - Let me be clear; we will never be able to do anything of our own power to make us worthy of what God has done for us; but Christ *has* made us worthy;
 - God's people are **not** described as being unworthy and sinful after they have been covered by the sacrifice of Jesus;
 - Any language that we use that includes were like wretched, and unworthy, or sinful should be relegated to discussing what we were like before the powerful sacrifice of Jesus:
 - If we want to speak about God's people in the way that scripture does, it will be using descriptions like holy, blameless, without reproach;
 - **This is not boasting:** it isn't being prideful; Its being thankful; we are only acknowledging the power of Christ to take people who were *once hostile in mind, and make them holy*.
 - **If there is ever a time when we cannot accurately describe ourselves with words like that,** it is because we have not followed what Paul states in verse 23:
 - We can lay claim to this only if we continue in the faith;
 - The brethren at Colossae were in danger of leaving the true Gospel; the same Gospel that had been preached everywhere, and shifting away toward empty philosophies;
 - **Paul states if they did this they would no longer be holy and blameless:**
 - Just as a brief aside; It is almost impossible to read through any letter written by Paul and not trip over a warning about the consequences of falling away; There is no need to go into detail, other than to simply

remind ourselves of the overwhelming evidence presented in scripture about the ability to make the sacrifice of Jesus lose its worth:

Verses 24-29

- vs 24: Remember that the broader context of Paul's message is convincing these brethren not to leave the Gospel that he had preached to them:
 - One tactic that Paul used with the Galatian brethren was to remind them of the great personal sacrifices that he had undergone for the sake of teaching them about Christ; He making a similar argument here
 - **While Paul had not** met these brethren personally, they were Gentile brethren: And Paul was made minister of a special stewardship that involved bringing the gospel to the gentiles;
 - This was a mission that Paul knew from the very beginning, when the Lord first gave him the task, that it would involve a great deal of suffering; And true to what the Lord said, Paul had plenty of material to talk about when it came to suffering;
 - And so while there may not have been a specific instance where Paul was persecuted for preaching in their city, every instance where he was suffered for his devotion in bringing the Gospel to the gentiles, he had suffered for the brethren there;
 - His endless efforts had made it possible for men like Epaphras to go and preach to them:
 - **In spite of just how much Paul actually did suffer, he was happy to do it; it brought him joy**
- One reason given is that he "filled up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions"
 - This is a difficult phrase: We should start off by acknowledging that Paul is surely not arguing against himself; if his point is to show that Christ's sacrifice is lacking nothing, it would not be stating that Jesus didn't suffer enough here on Earth;
 - Rather I'd suggest that what Paul is speaking about is suffering in Christ's stead; The enemies of Jesus still hated Him and everything about Him; If they had the opportunity to crucify and scourge Him again, many of them would have taken the chance to do so;

- But Jesus was no longer there for them to abuse; and so they took it out on His followers;
 - Jesus was very clear that they would suffer in His place after He left, often speaking about the hatred they had toward Him being transferred to His people;
 - When Jesus confronted Saul in Acts 9, He asked Saul why are you persecuting *me*?
- **Paul rejoiced in suffering** because it gave him the honor of revealing a mystery that had been hidden for ages: what Peter would describe as “what angels longed to look into”
 - And that great mystery was that God’s salvation was to be made available to all men everywhere: that even the Gentiles would have Christ dwell in them and receive hope of glory.
 - In chapter two Paul will speak about doctrines that have the appearance of Wisdom; we’ve mentioned before that those who taught some of these doctrines advertised them as being for those who were spiritually elite— **Paul’s preaching was done with true wisdom, and was for all men everywhere**
 - And finally as the chapter closes, Paul speaks about the enthusiasm that he went about this task:
 - There are two things that strike me as Paul speaks about his ministry:
 - **First, Paul joyfully suffered** for preaching the Gospel; While it certainly was not the final proof in the matter, a willingness to suffer was often one point of evidence that Paul would offer that his message and ministry were true;
 - It stood in contrast to the false teachers who were only out for personal gain or to harm others; if things were difficult or there was a chance of persecution, they were long gone!
 - Are Christians still willing to add authenticity to their message through suffering? I’m not suggesting that we go around looking for belligerent people so that we can suffer physical abuse; But suffering for the message involves being out in the world preaching it, it means taking a stand on moral issues and making unpopular choices;
 - There are a great many people in the denominational world who are willing to take a stand and suffering for preaching their message: Is this something that we are willing to do too?

- **Second, the enthusiasm of Paul cannot help but impress:** All of these verses, but especially verse 29:
 - I love the picture that Paul had been given a difficult task; a ministry that he knew from the start would bring suffering, and very often went unappreciated by those he worked for; and yet he throws himself into the work with every ounce of effort and energy that God supplies him with;
 - If we were to describe our efforts in bringing the Gospel to those around us; would it be described this way?
 - If we cannot, we need to reassess our appreciation for the mystery that has been revealed; we need to remind ourselves of how we were before being reconciled to Christ, and that it is still the condition of so many around us:

That concludes chapter 1:

- So far Paul has expressed his great thanksgiving for the brethren there
- He began to argue for the completeness of Christ's sacrifice
- And in our text tonight made personal application, first to the brethren there about where they would be without it, and also to himself, as he spoke about the great lengths he had gone to in order to preach that sacrifice among the Gentiles
- Next time, Paul will begin a much more detailed attack on the false doctrines that were being taught among the brethren there: