

Title: *What God Wants From Us*

Text: Colossians 1:21-23

Paul has been writing so that the Colossians might understand the true nature of who Jesus Christ is and what he came to do.

Paul tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, the first-born from among the dead, and the one in whom all the fullness of God dwells. He is King.

Shirley Guthrie writes:

He is not like a king who preserves his majesty and honor by shutting himself up in the splendor of the palace, safely isolated from the misery of the poor peasants and the threat of his enemies outside the fortress. His majesty is the majesty of a love so great that he leaves the palace and his royal trappings to live among his subjects as one of them, sharing their condition even at the risk of vulnerability to the attack of his enemies. If we want to find this king, we will find him among the weak and lowly, his genuine majesty both revealed and hidden in his choosing to share their vulnerability, suffering, and guilt and powerlessness.

What is always striking to me is the beauty of the person and the character and the nature of Jesus Christ. It is amazing how many people will say, "I like Jesus, I just don't like either the church (as an institution) or his followers." Maybe they've known a Christian who was pushy, or judgmental or self-righteous and they said, "If that's Christianity, I'm not interested."

Those of us who can move beyond the imperfections of those who call themselves Christ-followers and the failures of the institutional church and look only at Jesus come to the understanding of who he is and we realize there is no other viable option in life than to follow him.

No one else is able to say with any credibility, "I am the way, follow me." No one else is able to say with any credibility, "I am the light of the world. Walk with me and you'll never walk in darkness." Jesus is the only one who can say with any credibility, "I am the bread of life. I can satisfy every need your soul ever has."

Ravi Zacharias says, "Faith is confidence in the person of Jesus Christ and in his power, so that even when his power does not serve my end, my confidence in him remains because of who he is."

Most kingdoms do anything they can to protect their king. This is the unspoken premise of the game of chess, for example. When the king falls, the kingdom is lost. Therefore, the king must be protected at all costs. Another notable example comes from the Allied invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill desperately wanted to join the expeditionary forces and watch the invasion from the bridge of a battleship in the English Channel. U.S. General Dwight David Eisenhower was desperate to stop him, for fear

that the Prime Minister might be killed in battle. When it became apparent that Churchill would not be dissuaded, Eisenhower appealed to a higher authority: King George VI. The king went and told Churchill that if it was the Prime Minister's duty to witness the invasion, he could only conclude that it was also his own duty as king to join him on the battleship. At this point Churchill reluctantly agreed to back down, for he knew that he could never expose the King of England to such danger.

King Jesus did exactly the opposite. With royal courage he surrendered his body to be crucified. On the cross he offered a king's ransom: his life for the life of his people. He would die for all the wrong things that we had ever done and would do, completely atoning for all our sins. The crown of thorns that was meant to make a mockery of his royal claims actually proclaimed his kingly dignity, even in death.

Because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Paul reminds the Colossians, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior." That word which the NIV translates as alienation speaks of isolation, loneliness and a deep sense of not belonging.

It's that awful feeling of being really, truly, totally alone in the universe. Knowing that things are not as they ought to be and having a mind that is so riddled and racked by sin that we can't even think straight to get back on the right track. There is a past for every single one of us. That past is that we were conceived in sin. Sin has manifested itself in such a way that it just twists our mind and we can't even think straight.

That thought shows up in a lot of places in the New Testament. In Ephesians 2, Paul says: As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

It's interesting that Paul says, we were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. That word enemy is striking. It's used in several ways in the New Testament. There is a frequent reference to God's enemies and the enemies of Christ being placed under his feet.

When it comes to us, though, God doesn't do that. Instead, in Romans, he says, "<sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

Notice, though, we were enemies in our minds, because of our evil behavior. It is true that sin creates enmity between us and God, but that never stopped God from loving us. That never stopped God from wanting us to be reconciled to him. Verses 19 and 20 say, "For God was

pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” That is the amazing thing about the gospel of Jesus Christ that none of us should ever be able to get over. How unlovable we are and the depths that God would go to show us his love.

It is through Jesus Christ that we have been reconciled. Verse 22 says, “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 –<sup>23</sup> if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.” There’s a lot in this verse to unpack.

First of all, it is God who has reconciled us. It’s not like we were equal partners in this relationship. I’ve always taught and practiced that if I do something to offend someone, the onus is on me to go and to apologize. We often behave as if the burden is on the offending party to do what they need to do to make a relationship right when there has been an offense. I insult you, I hurt your feelings, I treat you like you don’t matter, it’s up to me to apologize and do what I need to do to make the relationship right. In human relationships, that makes a lot of sense. It can be taken the wrong way if you go to someone and say, “I was really offended by what you said, but I forgive you.” It takes a lot of tact and skill to be able to have that conversation and achieve the desired result.

In our relationship with God, though. There is no question we are the guilty party. We have offended him. We have gone our own way and done our own thing and there is no mistaking that we have sinned and stand guilty as charged. Under the law of God, in the sacrificial system, there had to be some basis for offering forgiveness. That was there had to be a lamb, spotless and without blemish who would be offered up as the sacrifice for sins.

Paul goes to great lengths to make sure that we understand that it was through the physical body of Christ that we have been reconciled. There are different thoughts as to how to understand Paul’s emphasis on the body – that Christ reconciled us in his flesh. Maybe it’s so we’ll understand that this was a flesh and blood Christ, not some spiritual emanation that reconciles us to God. Maybe it’s because we sin against God in our flesh and it is the flesh that must be dealt with first. Maybe it’s because he wanted to refute thoroughly all of the Gnostic tendencies which said that Jesus didn’t have a physical body.

It is the blood of Jesus which cleanses us from all sin. I John 1:7,8 says, “<sup>6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

We are reconciled through Christ’s physical body, through death in order that God may present us as holy and blameless in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. It is through death that Jesus paid the ultimate price. In this phrase here, we have the ultimate goal of our salvation. So many of us have the idea that as long as I’m avoiding hell and getting into Heaven that’s all that really matters. That’s how it is that some people can get the idea that

because I walked an aisle way back when, even though the Bible doesn't say anything about walking an aisle, and made some sort of profession, even though I haven't really lived by it, somehow I'm okay with God.

This Jesus Christ, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity who was fully God and fully human, took on our flesh and lived among us, died the death that we should have died, but that was not all. Because of that, we have the hope of eternal life in heaven with him and there is no greater promise than that. It's not just to take you to heaven as you are. It is to make you holy in his sight.

Holy means set apart for God, usable, like him in character and in words and in actions. The Christian life isn't about just going into a holding pattern. Again in Ephesians, Paul writes, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."

Notice what Paul says God wants for us. To present us holy, without blemish and free from accusation. You see there's so much more than just knowing that you're not going to hell. Holiness is the state of being set apart for his service. There's that moral component to it that. I don't want for there to be anything in my conduct or my character that would prevent me from being usable by God. Live a holy life. Don't allow things into my life that grieve the Holy Spirit. Don't consciously go into sin knowing that he's already shed his blood because of my sin. It is also to be set apart for something. We can talk about being set apart from something. We Baptists are good at that. A lot of people identify Baptists by the things that we don't do. We don't drink, we don't dance all those kinds of things. Wouldn't it be great if we were known for what we do? We tell people how their empty life can be filled up through Jesus Christ. We encourage the discouraged. We feed the hungry. That is the kind of holy life that we are to be set apart for.

Just as Jesus is the lamb of God who was without spot or blemish who is able to be the sacrifice for our sin, and who is able to make us free from accusation. <sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> 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? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

But there is a condition to all of this, and it's one that makes us Baptist, eternal security types squirm a little bit. Paul says, "If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope of the gospel." If I were in more of a teaching than a preaching situation, we could get some good discussion going about this. Is Paul saying, "If we don't continue in our faith, we're not saved – either we've lost our salvation or we never were really saved in the first place?" There are passages that make us squirm because they hold our feet to the fire to say to us,

“If you’re a Christian, you’re going to live like a Christian.” The Bible talks in other places about there no longer being any sacrifice for sin. John says, “<sup>17</sup> The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. <sup>18</sup> Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”

Bible Scholar David Garland writes, “If believers are to be holy, without blemish, and free from accusation in the future, they must remain steadfast in the faith in the present. They cannot take their new status for granted, be nonchalant about its responsibilities, or be fooled in to thinking that other avenues to God exist.”

In his best-selling book *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian in Manhattan, shares the story of a woman in his congregation who was learning how the grace extended to us through Christ’s work on the cross can actually be more challenging than religion. He writes:

Some years ago I met with a woman who began coming to church at Redeemer and had never before heard a distinction drawn between the gospel and religion [i.e. the distinction between grace and what is often a works-based righteousness]. She had always heard that God accepts us only if we are good enough. She said that the new message was scary. I asked why it was scary and she replied: *If I was saved by my good works then there would be a limit to what God could ask of me or put me through. I would be like a taxpayer with “rights”—I would have done my duty and now I would deserve a certain quality of life. But if I am a sinner saved by grace—then there’s nothing he cannot ask of me.”*

She understood the dynamic of grace and gratitude. If when you have lost all fear of punishment you also lose all incentive to live a good, unselfish life, then the only incentive you ever had to live a decent life was fear. This woman could see immediately that the wonderful-beyond-belief teaching of salvation by sheer grace had an edge to it. She knew that if she was a sinner saved by grace, she was (if anything) more subject to the sovereign Lordship of God. She knew that if Jesus really had done all this for her, she would not be her own. She would joyfully, gratefully belong to Jesus, who provided all this for her at infinite cost to himself.

Paul says to us. I’ve become a servant to this gospel. Won’t you come and join me on this journey?

Preached at Salem Avenue. October 16, 2011 a.m.