

***Ezekiel 33:11 (Opening)***

*<sup>11</sup> Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?*

Have you ever felt totally alone; isolated from everything? I have to admit, sometimes it's a good feeling, but sometimes you realize that you need to be around people; you need to feel accepted, included.

My nature is to be introverted. That doesn't mean I can't be outgoing and interact with people, it just means it takes more out of me to do it. I feel more energized when I'm by myself than when I'm with people. But I know I need to be with people, especially with God's family, to survive in this world. I need the encouragement of my brothers and sisters to get through the week.

Think back to when you didn't have that encouragement; back to when you were outside the family; when you weren't a Christian. I know for me I tried everything I could to fit in with the people around me.

The people of Colossae were like that. They were surrounded by people who did things their own way. For centuries, the people of Phrygia worshiped Cybele, the mother and fertility goddess, and Bacchus, the god of wine and "parties". They did what seemed right in their eyes, and God left them to their own devices, because they weren't from His chosen people.

God sent his son, Christ, and He was sacrificed once, for ALL (including all the gentiles), to remove the guilt of all our sins; both all of us, and all of our sins.

As we continue our study of Paul's letter to the church in Colossae, let's take a look at our scripture we're focusing on today. Colossians 1:21-23. It's only three verses, but those three verses are packed full of significance for those in Colossae, and for us today.

Before we read the scripture, I want to point a few things out. I've been trying to learn as much as I can about Ancient Greek so I can better understand the New Testament scripture in the language it was written in. Ancient Greek is a difficult language, not just because the letters are different than the ones we use, (they're all Greek to me!) but also

because there's no punctuation to mark the end of sentences. Sentences are determined by the structure of the contents, and from what I've learned so far, Ancient Greek had a very strict sentence structure.

That being said, the verses we're going to be looking at today in some of our translations end up being multiple sentences, just so they make sense in English. However, the three verses we're looking at today are one single sentence in Greek. It's all tied together in one complete thought. So, after we read the scripture for today, we'll take it apart and talk about each section, but we'll also talk about the entire thought of the passage.

I'll be reading from the English Standard Version, which keeps this section all in one run-on sentence.

If you remember last week, we just finished reading the Hymn to Christ in verses 15-20. This continues along with the thoughts about all things being reconciled to Christ by His blood on the cross.

### ***Colossians 1:21-23***

*<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> 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.*

Paul is talking to the Colossians and the other readers of his letter (remember, they were supposed to share this letter at the very least with the church in Laodicea) that they were separated from God, but God made a way for them to be acceptable to Him. He tells the church in Ephesus almost the same thing in Ephesians 2:1-3 and verse 12.

## ***Ephesians 2:1-3, 12***

*<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

...

*<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*

Both of these scriptures describe the gentile non-Christians as being alienated. But what does it mean to be alienated? The Merriam Webster dictionary says alienate means “to make unfriendly, hostile, or indifferent especially where attachment formerly existed.” But if they weren’t Christians, how could there have been an attachment to God? Well, there may not have been an attachment from man to God, but God has an attachment to all mankind; God loves us all, saved and unsaved. He doesn’t want any of us humans to be separated from Him, like it says in 1 Peter 3:9

### ***1 Peter 3:9***

*<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

So, we see that God loves all of us, saved and unsaved, but we’ve separated ourselves from Him, alienated ourselves. How did we do this? Our minds, our decision making processes in our earthly human nature, caused us to do evil things. We decided what was best for us to

do, and went on our merry way doing whatever we pleased, and whatever pleased us. But this didn't please God. He loves us, but wants what's best for us. He made rules for us to live by, not because He's some big mean judge in the sky that's out to ruin our lives and make it difficult for us to be happy, but because, since He made us, He knows what's best for us.

By our actions, we made ourselves enemies with God. I'll tell you what, I wouldn't want God to be my enemy. He's a LOT bigger than I am. But think about this: God sent His son to die for His enemies. Crazy, right? Look at Romans 5:7, 8.

***Romans 5:7, 8***

*<sup>7</sup>For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—<sup>8</sup>but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Christ died to reconcile us back to God. God made us, but we went our own way, and the sacrifice of Christ caused the reconciliation or the "restoration of peaceful or amicable relations between two individuals who were previously in conflict with one another", as the dictionary says. We broke the relationship; we sinned and caused ourselves to be enemies with God. But He sent an atoning sacrifice for us. The sacrifice of Christ was our atonement. Atonement is satisfaction, reparation, or expiation given for an injury or wrong. In other words, it's the payment of the debt.

I remember singing a song during Children's Church back when Marie and I did that.

"He paid a debt He did not owe;  
I owed a debt I could not pay;  
I needed someone to wash my sins away.  
And, now, I sing a brand new song,

‘Amazing Grace.’

Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.”

Not only did He pay the debt, but Paul emphasizes here in verse 22 of Colossians chapter 1 that Christ had a physical body, something that was actually argued (and still is by some people). Jesus was real, a real man, and was God as well; a confusing idea to a lot of people. But He was killed on a cross. Why? Paul says in the last half of verse 22 “in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him”.

So we have three concepts going on here: atonement, redemption, and reconciliation. Atonement is what Jesus was a sacrifice for, redemption is what we received because of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, and reconciliation is the end result, we are now reconciled with God, He has received us back. If you’re a student of English, alienation, spoken of in the first part of verse 21, is the antonym (or opposite) of reconciliation, spoken of in the first part of verse 22.

Verse 23 starts with the word “if”. In English, that makes us think of a possibility of failure. “If” has been said to be the biggest little word. But the way Paul writes this part of this huge sentence in Greek is the word “if” isn’t really a possibility of failure. The way it’s written, it is more describing an outcome caused by an action, not a possibility of failure. It’s almost like a computer program; a decision is made based on a specified condition. Maybe a better translation would be “When you stay faithful, well grounded in the Gospel, you will be presented holy, blameless, and above reproach.”

The last part of verse 23 has caused some controversy over the years, putting into question when this letter was written, and if it was in fact written by Paul. It speaks of the Gospel “which has been proclaimed to all creation” in some translations. However, a better understanding of the Greek would be “which has been proclaimed in everything

created”, meaning God’s creation actually shows us who God is and what He does for us.

Like I said last week, Friday night at sundown until yesterday at sundown was the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. That was the day set aside for the High Priest to enter into the holiest place in the Temple, where the Arc of the Covenant sat, to make an atoning sacrifice for the sins of all of Israel. Before he could do that, he had to purify himself, first by washing, then putting on special linen clothing, and then by making a sacrifice for his sins. The High Priest would sacrifice a bull for his sins. The blood from that sacrifice was then sprinkled on all the utensils in the holiest place, including the Arc.

After that, the High Priest would take two goats, and “cast lots” to select one for God, and one for the people. Casting lots was a method of selecting using random chance; either with a black and white stone in a bag and making the selection based on the order they fall out of the bag; or maybe some sort of dice or something. Anyway, the goat that was selected for God was sacrificed and its blood was also sprinkled on the utensils in the holiest place for payment for Israel’s sins. The goat that was selected for the people was prayed over and all the sins of Israel for the past year were put on that goat symbolically, and then that goat was taken out of the camp (or out of the city, once the temple was built) and led to a high place and pushed off a cliff so the sins wouldn’t come back. That’s where we get the term scapegoat, by the way.

The point is that as Christians, we have already had our atoning sacrifice performed, by a perfect High Priest who didn’t need to sacrifice for His own sins. Jesus is our High Priest, and didn’t sacrifice a goat for our sins every year, but sacrificed Himself, once, for all time, for our sins. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, and His blood is the atoning sacrifice in the real holiest place, in the presence of God in heaven, not in a copy of that place here on earth. I’d quote scripture to support

what I'm saying here, but I'd probably end up reading the entire book of Hebrews!

Paul tells the Colossians that, even though they were the bad guys, God provided a sacrifice to allow them to be reconciled back to Him. That sacrifice, Christ, hides their sins; past, present, and future; and makes them (and us) holy, blameless, and above reproach when we are judged by Him, given the fact that we stay faithful to the Gospel.

We're going to make mistakes. We're going to stray away from the path set out for us in His word. But that's what the sacrifice is for. Like Paul says in Romans 6:1, 2a:

***Romans 6:1, 2a***

*<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means!*

We will continue to sin, but it's a matter of intension. His grace covers our sin, and even though we continue to sin, and sometimes we sin in really bad ways by man's accounting, those sins are covered as long as we are trying to follow God's word.

God's grace covers our sins, if we accept His atoning sacrifice, and continue to walk with Him.

## **Hebrews 10:1-10 (Closing)**

<sup>1</sup> For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. <sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? <sup>3</sup> But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

<sup>5</sup> Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

*“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;  
<sup>6</sup> in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.  
<sup>7</sup> Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”*

<sup>8</sup> When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

## ***Questions***

1. In Matthew 8:23-35 we find the parable of the unforgiving servant. What parallels do you see between that parable and Colossians 1:21-23?
2. In Luke 15:11-32 we find the parable of the “lost son” or “prodigal son”. What parallels do you see between that parable and Colossians 1:21-23?
3. Romans 6:1 says we shouldn’t be in sin so grace will increase. Can God “run out” of grace, and if not, why shouldn’t we just live the way we want to?