

AM Colossians 1:21-23 And you

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[0 : 00] to read first from 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verses 11 through to the end.

It's on page 1163 of the Church Bibles. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 11.

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.

3 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 11.

1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 12.

[1 : 52] 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 12.

That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And now we turn over to Colossians. Just a very short passage. Colossians 1, 21 to 23.

[3 : 22] Whenever I've been preaching here recently, I've been going through the book of Colossians. And this is the short passage we've reached, which we will look at a little later in the service.

Colossians 1 verse 21 on page 1184 of the Church Bible. Colossians 1 verse 22.

Colossians 1 verse 22.

Page 1184 on the Church Bibles. And those three verses that we read, 21 to 23, beginning with the words, And you, which I've taken as the title for this sermon.

And you. Christianity is a very personal religion.

[5 : 20] It's founded, of course, upon great universal truths. But those truths must be translated into personal experience.

So, for example, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

Christ is the Savior of the world. The Gospel is preached to the whole world. But that love needs to be known personally.

The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. Again, Jesus is Lord over all the earth.

King of kings and Lord of lords. But what a difference it makes to be able to say with Thomas, my Lord, my Lord, and my God.

[6 : 25] The Bible is full of personal pronouns. The Lord is my rock, my shepherd, my saviour, and so on.

Well, here in these verses, Paul is personalizing the great doctrine of reconciliation.

He's just said in verse 20, that it pleased God through Christ to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Now he personalizes it. And you, he has reconciled.

And he reminds them of their experience of reconciliation. How God had brought them out of the darkness of separation and sin and into the light of fellowship with God.

[7 : 39] For these Colossians, this was a fairly recent experience. It was only a few years ago, at most, that they'd been converted.

And it would be fresh in their minds. And it would be precious. And it was all the more precious because they were Gentiles.

There is, I think, an element of surprise in this verse. And you, even you Gentiles, are being saved.

This is the former Pharisee speaking, remember. And within Judaism, it was a common belief that salvation was not only from the Jews, but for the Jews.

But you Gentiles, you're being saved as well. How amazing is that? Of course, it's nothing surprising to us today.

[8 : 41] We're used to the idea of salvation being for the whole world. But in New Testament times, this was something new and wonderful. The truth is that there's something wonderful about every conversion.

For anyone to be saved is a miracle of grace. We could say with surprise and delight to any Christian, And you, you of all people, God has saved you.

Even more to the point, we could say of ourselves, And me. God has saved me. Who am I that for my sake, my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

Some of you may remember a few years ago, The Me Too movement. In which prominent women admitted that, sadly, They too had been abused by powerful men.

Well, here is a much happier version of that. Christians can say, regarding salvation, Me too. But what does it mean to be reconciled to God?

[10 : 12] I want us to consider these verses under four headings. What we were. What Christ has done for us. What is required of us. And the ministry of reconciliation.

First, what we were. In verse 21. And you, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, Doing evil deeds.

That's the verse I mentioned to the children earlier. It's not a welcome verse, is it? Telling us what we're really like.

The mirror of the word showing us our sin. You were once alienated and hostile in mind, Doing evil deeds.

This is the state we were all in once. Before we trusted in Christ. And it goes back to the fall.

[11 : 16] When Adam sinned, he was banished from the garden of Eden. Banished from the presence of God. And all mankind with him.

Successive generations have remained, Separated from God. But far from longing to be reconciled with God. They've become hostile towards God.

And hardened in their sin. These Colossians being recent converts, They would remember the alienation all too vividly.

They would remember with bitterness, The sinful lives that they used to lead. And some of us too, perhaps, Can remember the dark days, Before we came to Christ.

But for some, perhaps, This is not quite so easy to grasp. For the unconverted, obviously, It is hard to accept.

[12 : 32] They can't believe that things are really this bad. God, perhaps, seems distant to them. So distant, perhaps, That they may even doubt his existence.

But they don't see that as a problem. And although they would admit that they're not perfect, They don't see themselves as hostile, Doing evil deeds.

It's only when the Spirit comes, And convicts us of sin, That we realize, Just how bad things really are. Then we realize, That we are a million miles from God.

But also, there's another, Very different group of people, Who might find this doctrine, Hard to grasp in experience.

And I'm speaking now, Of those who have been blessed, With a Christian upbringing. Who might sometimes say, But I've always believed.

[13 : 49] Being a child, In a Christian family, Is a tremendous blessing. And it's possible, That you may have come to faith, So early in life, That you can't actually, Remember a time, When you were in darkness.

And yet the Bible teaches you, That you were. Think about David, In the Old Testament.

David was, Already a believer, When he was a shepherd boy. So he came to faith, Very young in life. But he could still say later, I was brought forth, In iniquity.

He recognized, That although he'd come to faith, When he was just a child, Yet he had been born, A sinner. We all are.

Only some can remember it. And others, Can't. But even in Christian families, Children don't, Always come to faith, Early in their lives.

[15 : 11] And sometimes, They might go on, For years and years, Never really, Knowing, The relationship, That their parents, Have had with God.

They may be, Outwardly restrained, From the worst, Of evil works. They may be, Very religious. And they may continue, To go to church, Even into adult years.

And yet they know, If they're honest, That God is still distant. That nothing has really, Changed within them.

They may not be, In the gross darkness, That some, Children outside, Of Christian families, Are in. But the truth is, They are in darkness. Still. Even within, A Christian family. Such people, May find it hard, To grasp, This idea, That they were in darkness.

[16 : 20] And yet we must believe, What the word teaches us. That we are, Born in sin. Whether we come, From a Christian family, Or from outside.

Our need is the same. We still, Need to be saved. We still need, To be reconciled, With God. Praise God, If that happens, Very young.

But it must happen, At some stage, In your life. Now in human relationships, There are sometimes, Quarrels, That are, Never resolved.

A famous example, In the life of David again. David and Absalom. David had a dysfunctional family, If ever there was one.

He had several wives, And the children of different wives, Didn't always get on with each other. One of them, Amnon, Actually, Raped, His half sister, Tamar.

[17 : 24] And her brother, Absalom, Killed him. And David then, Banished, Absalom. And that quarrel, Was never resolved. Absalom, Rebelled against David, And he was killed in battle, With David weeping, Helplessly, Over him.

There isn't always, A happy ending. There's another, Less dramatic example, Played out before us, In our own royal family.

Prince Harry, Has upset the king, And relationships between them, Are cool, To say the least. Will they ever be reconciled? We must pray for them. Over 28 years in the ministry, I saw many tragic examples, Of broken relationships, And many of them, Remained unresolved.

Just occasionally, There was a glorious reconciliation. I remember once, Being in a cafe, With a member of our church, And his long lost brother, Came up, Who hadn't spoken to him, For years.

[18 : 43] And there was a, Rapturous reconciliation. And they embraced each other. That was a very beautiful moment, For those two men, Being reconciled.

For the Christian, As we look back, It was a very beautiful moment, When we were reconciled, With God. And it was all, The work, Of Christ himself.

Let's look now, At what Christ has done, To reconcile us. Verse 22, He has now reconciled, In the body of flesh, By his death, In order to present you, Holy and blameless, And above reproach, Before him.

Paul speaks of this also, In 2 Corinthians 5, Which we read, All this is from God, Who through Christ, Reconciled us to himself, And gave us the ministry, Of reconciliation, That is, In Christ, God was reconciling, The world to himself, Not counting, Their trespasses, Against him.

Let's be clear about this, The rift between us, And God, Was entirely, Our fault. And the reconciliation, Is entirely, His doing.

[20 : 18] He has reconciled us, To himself, Not the other way around. We haven't gone to God, With our proposed terms, Of reconciliation. We had neither the desire, Nor the ability to do so.

But he has come to us, With a perfect plan. Indeed, He has done more than that. He has already done, Everything that was necessary, To bring about, That reconciliation.

But, It came, At a price. What was necessary, Was nothing less, Than the death, Of Christ.

The son of God, Had to become man, And offer himself, As the perfect sacrifice, For our sins, Upon the cross. Nothing less, Than that would do.

Our sin, Couldn't just be forgotten, It couldn't just be swept, Under the carpet. Justice must be done. Right at the beginning, God had pronounced, The death sentence, Upon Adam.

[21 : 27] Either we must die, Forever. Or else, Someone else, Must die, In our place. Christ has come, As that perfect substitute, To die, In our place.

Peter says the same, 1 Peter 2, 24, He himself, Bore our sins, In his body, On the tree. Chapter 3, Verse 18, Christ suffered, Once for sins, The righteous, For the unrighteous, That he might, Bring us to God.

That's what, Reconciliation is, Isn't it? Bringing us, To God. And as a result, He can now present us, Holy, And blameless, And above reproach, Before him.

He can do that now, God sees us, Even now, Perfect, In Christ. For all our practical, In perfections, He has clothed us, With the pure white robe, Of Christ's righteousness.

All our sins, Have been washed away, In the blood, Of the lamb. And consequently, Even now, Our relationship, With God, Is fully restored, And we can enjoy, Fellowship with him.

[22 : 52] But in the context, Paul, Has more in mind, Than that. He has in mind, The day of judgment. That's why he goes on, To speak of the hope, Of the gospel.

He's looking ahead, To the great climax, Of history. On that great day, When all mankind, Are brought, Before the throne, When the books, Are opened, And judgment, Is pronounced, Upon the whole world, Our names, Will be found written, In the lamb's book, Of life.

And not one sin, Will be held, Against us. Because Christ, Has taken them, All away, On the cross. Then, He will present us, Faultless, Before his throne.

He will present his church, As the perfect bride. That we will enjoy, Perfect fellowship with him, Forever. All this, Is accomplished, By Christ, Alone.

But what does God, Require from us? Those of us, Who know our doctrine, Might expect him to say, At this point, Simply, If you believe.

[24 : 18] That's the standard, Evangelical answer. And it's the right answer. Paul says elsewhere, By grace you are saved, Through faith.

But writing here, To Christians, Who have believed, He says rather more, Than that. In verse 23, God will present you, Holy and blameless, If indeed, You continue, In the faith, Stable and steadfast, Not shifting, Not shifting, From the hope, Of the gospel, That you heard.

Now Paul is not, Adding to faith here, He's not adding, Some extra condition, That we weren't told about, When we first believed.

Rather like the small print, When you take up a free offer, And it turns out, Not to be free. He isn't adding, Anything. He is simply, Qualifying, What true faith is.

True faith, Is a lasting, Faith. It certainly, Begins, With simple faith. You can't continue, Something that you haven't begun.

[25 : 33] For all of us, The Christian life, Began, By simply accepting, The free offer, Of salvation.

Faith has been described, As the open hand, That receives, The free gift of God. The price has been paid, We simply accept it. I recently went into, Waterstones, To buy a book, And it was, Unexpectedly, Expensive.

And then I remembered, That someone had, Kindly given me, A book token. The price was paid. All I had to do, Was hand over the book token.

And the book was mine. Well, Reconciliation with God, Is very, Very expensive. We can't afford it. But Christ has already, Paid the price. And it is yours. Again, We were recently invited, To apply for a refund, On a rail ticket, Because our journey, Had been delayed.

[26 : 48] It was a complicated process. But at the end, We simply pressed, Claim refund. And the money, Was mysteriously, In our account.

Likewise with salvation, Salvation is laid up for you. And you are invited, To claim it for yourself. But that first step, Is not the last step.

It's the beginning, It's the beginning of a journey. And we must continue, That journey, To the end. It's not that our salvation, Is in doubt until the end.

He has, Now reconciled you. Paul says, Past tense. It's done. Continuing, Simply proves, That your faith, Is genuine.

We can break it down, Into four thoughts here. We are to continue, We are to continue, In the faith. We are to continue, Stable and steadfast, And we are to continue, In hope.

[27 : 57] First, We are to continue, That's a theme, Throughout scripture. Think about Abraham, Wasn't enough for him, To leave Ur, He must continue, All the way, To Canaan.

Jesus himself, Says in John 8, If you continue, In my word, You shall be my disciples, Indeed. Matthew 10, 22, He who endures, To the end, Shall be saved.

There are some, Sadly, Whose faith, Is like the morning mist, Lasts for a while, Then fades away. Jesus speaks, Of the seed, In the stony ground, Springs up quickly, And then wilts, In the sun. True faith, Lasts. True faith, Continues, To the end. Secondly, We are to continue, In the faith.

In other words, The faith, That we have been taught. The faith, Once for all, Delivered, To the saints. Faith is not, Just a vague, Hoping for the best.

[29 : 09] But a firm, Trust in Christ, As he is presented, To us in the gospel. In all that he is, All that he has done, And all that he promised.

There is a body, Of doctrine, To which, We must hold firm. Third, We are to continue, Stable and steadfast.

That's not to say, That we never have doubts, That we never have, The occasional wobble, But we must make it, Our aim, To keep going, Steadfastly forwards.

And if we do fall, Rise up again quickly, And press on. Fourth, We are to continue, In hope.

The best is yet to come. Paul has already spoken, Back in verse 5, Of the hope, Laid up for you, In heaven. He has just spoken, Of Christ presenting us, Holy and blameless, At the last day.

[30 : 11] We look forward to that. It was said of Abraham, That he looked for a city, That had foundations. His eye, Was on the future.

A runner, Who keeps his eye, On the finishing line, Will run faster, Normally, Than one who's looking, At the ground, Or looking around, At the stadium. These Colossians, Must keep going, And so must we.

Finally, Paul reminds them, Of the ministry, Of reconciliation, Given to him, To spread the gospel. Verse 23, This is the gospel, Which has been proclaimed, In all creation, Under heaven, And of which I, Paul, Became a minister.

Spoke of this also, In 2 Corinthians, God has entrusted to us, The ministry, Of reconciliation. We are ambassadors, For Christ.

Might seem a bit, Of an exaggeration, To say that the gospel, Had already been proclaimed, To all creation, Under heaven. But Paul, And his fellow apostles, Had preached the gospel, Throughout the Roman world.

[31 : 30] That was Christ's command, Mark 16, Go into all the world, And proclaim the gospel, To the whole creation. That is what Paul, Had been doing.

The gospel, After all, Is a worldwide gospel, So the whole world, Must hear. God was in Christ, Reconciling the world, To himself.

So the world, Needs to know, About reconciliation. And that work, Continues of course, To this day. To every nation, And every generation.

As we draw to a close, Let me ask you, Where do you stand, In all this? The gospel has been preached, In all the world.

It's been preached here, In Scotland. It's been preached to you. Have you believed, That gospel? Could Paul say to you, And you, He has reconciled.

[32 : 42] Could you say, And me? It's of the utmost importance, That you can say that. To remain, Alienated from God, Forever, Is an unbearable thought.

Trust in Christ, And come in, From the darkness. Let there be no doubt, In your mind about this.

Whatever age you are, And whatever background, You come from, God is ready, To welcome you. Come in from the dark, And come into, And come into, Into the kingdom.

And if you are already reconciled, Like these Colossians, Continue, Steadfast, In the faith. I read, I read, Yesterday, Of a Spanish, Athlete, Who was, So sure, That she was going to win, Her race, That she had taken, A Spanish flag, From the crowd, And she was, Celebrating victory, As she ran down, The finishing straight.

And then a Ukrainian, Athlete, Overtook her. There's a wonderful picture, Of the moment of recognition, When she glances over her shoulder, And realizes, She's lost the race.

[34 : 16] A moment of horror, Comes over her face. Don't let there be, A moment of horror, In your life. When you come into, The final straight of your life, And realize, That you're not going to win, The prize.

Continue, Steadfast, To the very end. And look for others, To come to faith. God is full of surprises, In this.

If you'd said to Paul, 20 years earlier, That one day, Pagans in Colossae, Would believe in Christ, He would have laughed. No way.

But they did. We may look at, Unconverted members of our family, And wonder, How could they ever be saved?

But God can save them. We may look at Dumfries, And think, There's no hope for these people. But there is.

[35 : 22] We may look at the Muslim world, Whether in Iran, Or elsewhere, And wonder, How can they be saved? But they can. God has a worldwide vision.

And so must we. May there be many, In our days, Of whom we can say, And you, You too, Have been saved.

Amen. Amen. Amen.