

I.N.I.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

August 14, 2011

Col. 1:21-28

In Christ Jesus, who is the Wisdom of God for us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Do you remember why Paul was writing to these Colossian Christians? They had the Good News proclaimed to them by Epaphras----the simple, clear message of salvation alone through Jesus' perfect life of obedient love and His perfect sacrifice on the cross as full payment for their sins. But now false teachers had come in who were leading them astray. They were denying the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, denying His deity, proclaiming a higher wisdom and knowledge that only a few of them had, they were exalting angels to the state of being worshiped and teaching an ascetic lifestyle which meant again being placed under the Old Testament ceremonial laws.

It is no wonder that after the introductory verses of his letter, which we studied last Sunday, Paul strikes hard at emphasizing the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the Divine Redeemer of mankind. Let's read the verses that come just prior to our text. Chapter 1:15-20. Paul is speaking of Jesus when he writes: **HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD, THE FIRSTBORN OVER ALL CREATION. FOR BY HIM ALL THINGS WERE CREATED THAT ARE IN HEAVEN AND THAT ARE ON EARTH, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE, WHETHER THRONES OR DOMINIONS OR PRINCIPALITIES OR POWERS. ALL THINGS WERE CREATED THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM. AND HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS, AND IN HIM ALL THINGS CONSIST. AND HE IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH, WHO IS THE BEGINNING, THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD, THAT IN ALL THINGS HE MAY HAVE THE PREEMINENCE. FOR IT PLEASSED THE FATHER THAT IN HIM ALL THE FULLNESS SHOULD DWELL, AND BY HIM TO RECONCILE ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF, BY HIM, WHETHER THINGS ON EARTH OR THINGS IN HEAVEN, HAVING MADE PEACE THROUGH THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS.**

In that last verse, verse 20 Paul sets the tone for this next section of his letter. **TO RECONCILE ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF, BY HIM, WHETHER THINGS ON EARTH OR THINGS IN HEAVEN, HAVING MADE PEACE THROUGH THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS.**

Paul wanted the Colossians to be personally aware of Christ's supremacy and sufficiency in the area of their salvation. They were reconciled to God the Father only through the shed blood of His Son. Why did they need this reconciliation? Paul tells us in the first verse of this morning's text. **AND YOU, WHO ONCE WERE ALIENATED AND ENEMIES IN YOUR MIND BY WICKED WORKS.**

Paul directs them to the seriousness of their former state. They were alienated, separated from God, shut out from God's mercy and love. They were strangers to His kingdom, enemies of God in their affections and desires. Their evil, sinful deeds and actions proved that to be true. **BUT** now, by a miracle of God's mercy, they have entered a new relationship with the Lord God---a relationship of reconciliation, atonement, of righteousness. A return to the kind of relationship God had intended in the Garden of Eden---perfect harmony and peace between God and man.

How did this come about? Paul tells us...**YET NOW HE HAS RECONCILED IN THE BODY OF HIS FLESH THROUGH DEATH, TO PRESENT YOU HOLY, AND BLAMELESS, AND IRREPROACHABLE IN HIS SIGHT**--can you believe what you have just heard and read? We sinners are holy, blameless and irreproachable in God's sight! All because Jesus came into this

world, took upon Himself the form of a human being and became our Substitute. In His physical body He bore the curse of all of our and all of mankind's sin and appeased, satisfied God's justice by being damned on the cross. His death made peace between us and God. Through His reconciliation and the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of these and all Christians we stand before God—

HOLY, sinless and separated from the world for Him;
BLAMELESS, without any spiritual blemishes; and
IRREPROACHABLE, free from accusation.

That relationship with God was theirs and would continue to be theirs **IF INDEED YOU CONTINUE IN THE FAITH, GROUNDED AND STEADFAST, AND ARE NOT MOVED AWAY FROM THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL WHICH YOU HEARD, WHICH WAS PREACHED TO EVERY CREATURE UNDER HEAVEN, OF WHICH I, PAUL, BECAME A MINISTER.** Remember the Colossians lived among heathen people, many who worshiped Caesar and many other false gods and who were steeped in immorality. Add to this now the danger of the false teachers who claimed to have a better gospel of philosophical wisdom and a legalistic keeping of ceremonial regulations and you can see why Paul was so concerned about their spiritual welfare.

Paul encourages them **CONTINUE IN THE FAITH.** Use all of the strength and spiritual energy the Holy Spirit has given you in Christ to remain **GROUNDED AND STEADFAST, NOT MOVED AWAY FROM THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL.** Make consistent use of God's Word and don't let any false teachings, no matter how appealing they may sound, lead you away.

The pseudo-gospel these false teachers were proclaiming was spread in and around Colosse. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ that the Apostle Paul proclaimed was a universal message. It was being carried by the apostle and other faithful preachers throughout the Roman world. Even today there are many who, like the false teachers at Colosse, belittle and minimize the Gospel or regard it as irrelevant for our modern age. Their logic may be alluring and their words enticing, especially to our sinful natures, to seek deeper meanings in the Scriptures, to trust in our own works, to follow our own feelings and emotions, to modernize and update the Bible and find new religious ideas and teachings for our modern age. But if we truly appreciate the unique greatness of our Savior and understand that it is only through the simple Gospel of His life, death and resurrection that we receive full and free forgiveness, everlasting life and salvation, a oneness with God and a standing of **HOLY** and **BLAMELESS** in His sight, then we will quickly reject any new and “better” way.

The Gospel is God's Wisdom. As our theme this morning declares.

GOD'S WISDOM MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

I: IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Following man's wisdom we are lost and separated from God, deserving of eternal death and damnation. Knowing and believing God's wisdom we are one with God, separated from the world for God, having been given the gift of eternal life.

Paul also says that God's Wisdom:

II: MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN WHAT WE DO WITH OUR LIVES.

Paul first uses his life as an example. We read in verse 24 **I NOW REJOICE IN MY SUFFERINGS FOR YOU, AND FILL UP IN MY FLESH WHAT IS LACKING IN THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST, FOR THE SAKE OF HIS BODY, WHICH IS THE CHURCH.** Remember from where Paul was writing this letter---from house imprisonment in Rome. He had been arrested for preaching Christ by the Roman government. He was not being tortured, beaten or starved, but he was not free to come and go as he pleased. He could not go on missionary journeys and visit other Christians in Rome as he wished. **BUT** instead of whining and complaining, he

rejoiced. He rejoiced because, as a servant of the Gospel, he was more than willing to endure hardship for the sake of the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's statement is somewhat perplexing. It almost sounds as if Paul, through his sufferings, is adding to the afflictions of Christ or somehow completing Christ's sacrifice. That's not what he is saying. Christ's sacrifice is complete. He declared **IT IS FINISHED!** His was a perfect ransom payment for all. Paul is speaking of the treatment believers can expect as followers of Jesus. When Jesus was here on earth, His enemies hated Him, rejected Him, falsely accused Him, mistreated Him and finally put Him to death. The enemies of Christ have now turned their hatred and animosity toward His followers. They want to add to Jesus' afflictions.

Therefore by suffering for the sake of the Gospel, Paul was undergoing hardship in Jesus' place. Paul had Pharisees following him and inciting riots as he preached from town to town. At one point there was a group of people who took an oath not to eat until they killed Paul. But instead of being discouraged by the beating that his opposition dished out, Paul rejoiced. He viewed his own suffering as a great honor given him by Christ. Christ had suffered on the cross to redeem the church, now Paul would suffer on the mission road to deliver that message of freedom to others.

Paul is saying "It now is my turn in bearing the sufferings and hardship for Christ's sake and for the sake of His body, all believers. Someday it will be your turn." Christ has honored us with part of His work too. Not the work of the cross, through which our sins stand forgiven, but the work of carrying that message with us as we live---the work of proclaiming peace and forgiveness to people who do not know Jesus and who are lost in self-righteousness and are slaves to sin and death.

Jesus already had warned His apostles in John 15:18-21 **IF THE WORLD HATES YOU, YOU KNOW THAT IT HATED ME BEFORE IT HATED YOU. IF YOU WERE OF THE WORLD, THE WORLD WOULD LOVE ITS OWN. YET BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT OF THE WORLD, BUT I CHOSE YOU OUT OF THE WORLD, THEREFORE THE WORLD HATES YOU. REMEMBER THE WORD THAT I SAID TO YOU, "A SERVANT IS NOT GREATER THAN HIS MASTER." IF THEY PERSECUTED ME, THEY WILL PERSECUTE YOU. IF THEY KEPT MY WORD, THEY WILL KEEP YOURS ALSO. BUT ALL THESE THINGS THEY WILL DO TO YOU FOR MY NAME'S SAKE, BECAUSE THEY DO NOT KNOW HIM WHO SENT ME.**

Do you remember what the disciples did after they were arrested and beaten in Jerusalem? They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's sake. In His divine wisdom the Lord allows much suffering to come on certain believers for the Gospel's sake. Other believers may not be called on to suffer much at all. Believers should not be surprised when they are called on to endure this. Fellowship with Jesus and partnership with Him in the Gospel also means sharing in His sufferings and afflictions.

Paul could also rejoice because the afflictions were directed toward him, but it benefitted the Church. By enduring hardship for Christ, Paul was deflecting some of the enemies' hatred toward others in the Church. By rejoicing in suffering for Christ, Paul also was encouraging believers everywhere to follow his example and to stand firm and to rejoice even in afflictions.

How do we respond to afflictions? Are we an example of firm, steadfast reliance and do we express joy even in the face of sufferings for Christ's sake. Or do we more often than not, cry out **WOE IS ME!** and **WHY ME?**

In Paul's day it was customary that certain servants of wealthy masters were appointed as stewards, or managers, and placed in charge of their master's entire estate. These servants had the right and duty to dispense the master's wealth as necessary for the benefit of those in the household. The Apostle Paul had been so commissioned by God, as a minister (servant/slave), as His steward or

manager to dispense God's spiritual blessings through the preaching of the Gospel, especially to the Gentiles. Paul calls this Gospel the **MYSTERY WHICH HAS BEEN HIDDEN FROM AGES AND FROM GENERATIONS, BUT NOW HAS BEEN REVEALED TO HIS SAINTS.**

The word "**mystery**" does not have to do with secrets or ceremonies known only to a select few, an exclusive group, as the false teachers possibly had used the term. "**Mystery**" here means "something that was hidden and is revealed by God." The great truths of God's limitless love for mankind, of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection are all a mystery to sinful human beings. In their natural, spiritually dead state, they do not and cannot know or discover this "**mystery.**"

Paul says, **TO THEM (HIS SAINTS) GOD WILLED TO MAKE KNOWN WHAT ARE THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF THIS MYSTERY AMONG THE GENTILES; WHICH IS CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY.** In the Old Testament this "**mystery**" was partially revealed so that the Jewish people knew that salvation was theirs by faith in the coming Messiah, the Lamb of God. But how that Messiah would carry out all of His work in the saving of mankind was not fully revealed until He came in the flesh. In the New Testament age that "**mystery**" has been fully revealed by God through His Son and has been told to us in His Word. We now have been called to continue to reveal that "**mystery,**" that hidden salvation to the rest of the world, so that they too can rejoice in the blessings of Christ living in them and have the assurance, the guarantee of everlasting glory.

The Colossian Christians had everything they needed for spiritual and eternal life. They had Christ in them through the Gospel and that gave to them the sure guarantee of eternal glory.

Paul concludes, **HIM WE PREACH, WARNING EVERY MAN AND TEACHING EVERY MAN IN ALL WISDOM, THAT WE MAY PRESENT EVERY MAN PERFECT IN CHRIST JESUS.** This was more than just Paul's calling, it was His life. He preached Christ and Him crucified. This he did by warning against false teachers, warning against humanistic teachings of man's earning salvation by his own works. This he also did by teaching the wisdom of God, the Good News that Christ is our all, our **WAY**, our **TRUTH**, and our **LIFE**. He did this so that **WE MAY PRESENT EVERY MAN PERFECT IN CHRIST JESUS.**

Literally that means "fulfilled in Christ, complete in Christ." This fulfillment, completeness, perfection will not come about until Judgment Day. That is why we daily have to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior and in Christian living in Christ. Through the Spirit's work in the Word we will mature in our spiritual life as we are instructed in His Word.

The goal for every believer in Christ is to stand before our Savior on that last day, covered with His shed blood and clothed in His robe of righteousness that He earned for us. How much Paul labored and yearned for that for these Colossian Christians! How much every pastor labors and yearns for that for the people he serves! How much we should labor and yearn for that for ourselves, for our children and for each other!

Amen.