

Colossians 1:21–29: <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.

<sup>24</sup>Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup>of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup>the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup>To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup>Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup>For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

### With and Without Christ

#### INTRODUCTION

It's been another week in which we see what this world looks like without Christ. What a blessing it is to have the true knowledge of God and know His love in Christ Jesus.

The apostle Paul begins today's Epistle reading with a brief study of contrasts—what you were like with and without Christ. Without Christ, “you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds...” and with Christ, “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...”

What a contrast, right? Without Christ, you were alienated from God and an evildoer in God's sight; with Christ, you are reconciled to God, and holy and blameless in His sight. That's good news to the sinner's ear—and your motivation for telling your friends and family about Jesus—so that they too may know the love of the Savior who gave His all for them so they may be reconciled to God, holy and blameless in His sight, just like you.

BUT TODAY, IF YOU ARE TEMPTED TO TAKE FOR GRANTED GOD'S GRACE AND WHAT YOU ARE WITH CHRIST, LET'S THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WERE WITHOUT CHRIST.

I. Alienated or Reconciled.

I already mentioned that without Christ—without God's grace and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross—you were alienated from God and an evildoer in His sight. Without Christ, that was your status before God. What then was your destiny? Well, Jesus makes it quite clear throughout the New Testament: the destiny for the one who does evil because he is alienated from God is to face the wrath of God and His eternal judgment against sin. You see, the one who rejects Christ cannot be reconciled to God, for only the blood of Jesus atones for sin and restores your life with God. There is no forgiveness or life with God without Christ—and since there is no forgiveness, there is no life and no salvation.

But with Christ, you are no longer alienated from God by your sins. Jesus has won for you forgiveness—and in that forgiveness, you are reconciled to God—you are holy and blameless in His sight. This is the “good portion” that Mary longed to hear in our Gospel reading—her reconciliation in Christ was the good portion that couldn't be taken from her. This is what the Divine Service is all about—being in the presence of the One who reconciled you to God through His Body of Flesh by His on the cross. Here, Jesus comes to you in Word and Sacrament to give you God's love, forgiveness and hope—and there is nothing in the Christian's life more necessary than that!

II. Ignorant or wise

In our text, you'll find another contrast: With or without Christ you are rich. The contrast is, what you are rich in.

Without Christ, you were rich in ignorance and reproach. Without Christ, the ways of the world are appealing. The unregenerate mind revels in the sins of the flesh—in greed, sexual immorality, debauchery, licentiousness, gossip, hatred and murder. But the unregenerate mind is darkened by sin, and doesn't understand that such ways are the ways of death, for what is wise in the mind of the person without Christ is pure foolishness and depravity in the mind of God.

Paul writes in our text that God called him to be an apostle, “to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup>the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.<sup>27</sup>To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Through God's Word, the way of God in Christ has been revealed to you, that means with Christ you are no longer rich in reproach and ignorance, you are rich in wisdom and glory.

The apostle Paul writes in Romans, “For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). Being filled with the glory and wisdom that comes from Christ through His Holy Spirit, you see the world as it truly is—a place of sin and death—and you hate what you see. But you also hate the sin that you see in your own body—the sin that alienates you from God and brings reproach and death—and through the Holy Spirit, you repent. As baptized believers in Christ, you see that true wisdom is found in the ways of God. And in this repentance and faith, you are filled with God's glory and wisdom.

### III. Hated or loved.

Paul writes: “<sup>24</sup>Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church...” Without

Christ, Paul didn't suffer one bit—he was a respected Pharisee who made other people suffer. But with Christ, things changed for Paul—he suffered for His Lord and Savior. That's another important contrast: Without Christ, you had an easy, earthly life—you were a friend of the world and the world loved you—but you were at enmity with God. And though life may have seemed fun, it was full of hopelessness and fear of death.

As one who is reconciled to God, Jesus promises that the world will hate you, because in Christ you are alienated from the world. With Christ, you may face an earthly life of suffering and hatred by those who love the world, but what you have because you have life with Christ is the hope that no matter what happens to you in this earthly life, you have as your possession, now and forever, an eternal life of joy.

#### IV. Unstable or stable.

Have you noticed that during this election cycle, perhaps more so than at any other time that I can remember, people are counting on the next president to right all the wrongs in this nation? That's an enormous task and you will be disappointed. But that was what your life was like without Christ—unstable and shifting—putting all your hope in earthly princes and politicians, who always let you down.

But Paul writes in our text that Christ “has reconciled you 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...” By God's grace, Jesus has anchored you in Him—that anchor is the gift of faith, strengthened and preserved by His Word and Sacrament. That means that with Christ, your life in this world is stable and anchored, for your hope is now in the changeless Rock of your salvation—Christ Jesus. No matter who is president, or governor, or mayor, or supreme court

justice; no matter what kind of life you have—good health or poor, poverty or riches, filled with friends or friendless, your life lived in Christ is stable and steadfast, anchored firmly in His Word that endures forever.

V. Weak or strong; immature or mature.

I could go on and on—there are so many blessings for the life lived with Christ, but let me briefly mention one more. Paul writes: “<sup>28</sup>Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”

Without Christ, you were immature in your thinking about God and this world. And why was that? Because you didn’t have His Church, where the wisdom and knowledge and love and salvation of God are made known in this sin-darkened world.

Here is where God enlightens you through the Office of Holy Ministry. Here is where God teaches you the full counsel of His Word—where He imparts to you the wisdom from above. Here is where God rebukes you when you sin and forgives you when you repent. Here is where the love of God in Christ Jesus is proclaimed, so that with Christ in your heart, you may have hope and encouragement—and an enduring faith.

God has given you His Church—and it is here where you are truly with Christ—as He comes to you in Word and Sacrament. And through this ministry of Word and Sacrament, you are presented to God mature in Christ.

## Conclusion

As you leave today and face a world that’s quickly coming apart at the seams, know that you go with Christ. With Christ, you have true joy, true peace, true hope, true stability, true

wisdom—and true citizenship in heaven. All because Jesus “has reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

In His Name. Amen.