

Today's message falls under four headings:

- Were;
- Are;
- Will;
- If

Last week's message was **entirely** about Christ. He's:

- the image of the Invisible God;
- He's the creator and sustainer of everything;
- He's above everything;
- He's the head of the church;
- He's the first to receive a permanent resurrection body;
- He is supreme/preeminent
- He is over-&-above everything else...

Last week was completely about Christ... And now today, after telling us about the grandeur and supremacy and the greatness of Christ, Paul begins with the words ²¹ **And you...**

And wow, what a contrast. What about us??? Where do we fit in??? Well, we **were** His enemy!!!

Now, to some people, this is nothing like the gospel they've heard before.....

Most non-Christians are filled with a confidence – they have a confidence both for themselves and for their loved ones, of their own general goodness...

e.g.

*Without exception, whenever I've been asked to take a funeral for a non-Christian (and their family are not Christians) their family, **always**, are at pains to tell me how wonderful the person was... You see, most non-Christians are convinced that they're basically good people, and their family are basically good people.*

And so Granddaddy:

- wasn't a mass murderer;
- he didn't make a habit of kicking the cat; and
- he loved sport; and
- he loved a good joke; and
- he loved a beer; and
- he loved his grandkids;
- everybody liked him;

so, why wouldn't God welcome him with open arms...

But, what a cruel delusion it is, to live with that kind of false understanding of self-provided-righteousness...

And even many churches today will preach a version of the Gospel, which is devoid of any kind of offence....

It's a false Gospel that says, *God loves you, and He has a wonderful plan and purpose for your life, and if you just add belief in Jesus to your life, it's going to be so much better...* It's the sort of message that appeals a sense of self-importance, because it tells me that God cannot live without me.... Of course He can!

How full-of-ourselves are we, that we could ever have the notion that God couldn't live without me...

No person can ever be saved, until they come to the end of themselves, and understand that without Christ, I am utterly wretched... And every person who is a disciple of Jesus today, know that one time, we **were** something entirely different...

V²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

I had a yarn with a bloke a few weeks ago, and he quite openly shared with me, that he was 'estranged' from his brother... What does that mean??? It means that a relationship that is meant to be close and 'like a family (because they are)' – But they're 'estranged'... They can't even talk to one another. It's not just that they're a stranger that they don't know – they repel each other...

And that's what the word "alienated" means...

We **were** estranged from Christ. We **were** alienated. There **was** no workable relationship between us, whatsoever.

And yet many non-Christians:- they truly believe that God's job is to make their life go well because they're good people, but they're estranged from Him – there is no relationship....

When our youngest son Ben was on his way home from a Scripture Union camp, he lost the water out of his Rodeo and cooked it. (somewhere on the Great dividing range)... And he

rang RACQ to see what it would cost to get a tow. And they said, “We don’t know you. We have no relationship with you. We only cater for members.”... But then they told him, “If you want to join up right now, you don’t have to wait – we’ll send a truck straight for you.”

And we understand that, don’t we... We understand that RACQ will only come to give you a tow, if you’ve signed up – if you’re a member...

And yet, when it comes to God, **un**believers expect that God is there to serve them, and to make good things happen to them, even though they are estranged from God – they are alienated from God...

And not only that – Paul goes on to say, “you were also once **hostile in mind.**”

It’s about how we used to think – This is a conscious antagonism toward God – This is about how we used to mentally process things and how we used to approach life...

To be hostile toward God, is to shut Him out, and to put something else in His place (usually ourselves)

...

Now, when Paul wrote this letter, he was writing to a bunch of Christians, who used to be Pagans – they worshipped a plethora of gods (pantheon)... But when they heard the Gospel, they turned away from that multitude of gods; they turned away from their idols, to worship Christ and Christ alone...

And so you can understand how **they** did used to be hostile in their thinking toward God – they had their own beliefs. And that Christian God didn't even factor into their thinking. And if He did, they were hostile toward Him, because that Christian God, claimed to be the only real God, and to begin to worship Christ they would have to turn their backs on the gods that they had served their entire lives... No wonder they were hostile toward Christ... Exclusivity is offensive...

Now most people in our district, they're not pagans, are they... Well, maybe a few might be. Some do recognise other gods... But most are so caught up in themselves, that they don't even think about God. And when we ignore God, this itself, is open hostility toward Him...

Imagine:

- *if my wife came home from work, and I ignored her*
- *if she wants to engage in conversation, and I walk away and turn on the television;*
- *if I just decide, "I'm going to go out", and I don't even tell her where I'm going, or that I **am** going;*
- *imagine if I set about and prepare my own meal, and don't ask her to eat it with me;*
- *or worse still, if she prepared a meal for the 2 of us, and I walked away without sharing it...*

To ignore someone in that sort of way, is actually open hostility. And it's not something that just happens – it's a part of your thinking.

And in our culture, our very thinking is hostile toward God:

Don't you tell me how to live my life – I'll live it however I please...

And the hostility that **begins** in our mind, invariably, spills over into our actions.

²¹ And you, who once were:

- alienated; and
- hostile in mind;
- doing evil deeds,

BTW, the Greek word that's used here, doesn't mean "bad" – it's a more brutal word, that means exactly what it's translated to "evil"...

Let's get away from this rubbish psychological illusion that we're basically all good people – we were born good, but bad things have happened to us, which makes us do bad things...

Let's get away from that nonsense... The Scriptures are 100% consistent in this. We were:

- evil;
- rotten to the core;
- alienated from God;
- hostile toward Him in our thinking;
- doing evil deeds, because we were evil...

But the thing is, when a person is evil, they don't realise how evil they are. And we want to want to laugh it off as:

- "a bit of fun";

- “boys being boys”;
- “girls being girls”;
- “young fellas” (as if it excuses a multitude of sins)
- A bit of a larrikinism;

It's nothing of the kind. Before we were saved, we were so rotten to the core, we saw it as ‘a bit of fun’ (because our minds were so disconnected from God), but in God’s eyes, we were utterly evil... Can an evil person do good things? Of course they can. But that doesn’t stop them from being evil...

It’s only when we begin to understand, how rotten to the core we were, that we’ll ever understand why we need a saviour.

And so you might have come here today, not thinking that you fit in, feeling, “Those Christians, they’re the good people – they’re not like me...” Let me tell you, you’re in good company. Every Christian here, knows what we once were, and that’s why we never look down our noses at anyone. We’re no better than anyone else... And that’s why we needed a Saviour, and it’s Christ who makes all the difference.

Last week we read: V¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

- Why did Jesus need to die?
To reconcile us to Himself.

- Why did we need to be reconciled?
Because we **were** alienated/estranged from Him.
- How do we know we were alienated/estranged from Him? What did that look like?
He wasn't central to our thoughts. Our minds were hostile to Him.
- **And** our actions (by God's standards) were evil.

But He has reconciled us to Himself. How? He made peace between us, **by the blood of His cross**

We were so estranged from God, there was **nothing** that we could do to fix the relationship. God was the only one who could do that.

V²² he has now reconciled [us / we who were evil] in his body of flesh by his death

In our headings, we've moved from "Were" to "Are"

We **were** estranged. **Now** we **are** reconciled.. Remember, he's talking to Christians – He's talking to people who have put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – who have repented of sin, and surrendered their lives completely to Him...

When Jesus died for us on the cross, this was to reconcile us to Him... ... Now, this is an amazing thing...

We were:

- estranged from Him
- hostile toward Him
- hostile even in our thinking;
- We didn't live by His commands – we did evil...

- We were Godless...

But Christ died **for** the Godless. Christ died for His enemies, and that's what we were.

Wow!! It's not because God couldn't live without me. It's because God is a God of grace and love & mercy, that He would reconcile with those who are hostile toward Him... We don't deserve it. And that's what Grace is.

At this point, we couldn't help but want to worship Him, could we... Praise God

But, **why** would God do that? What's His purpose? So, let's move to "Will"

in order to present you (this is what He **will** do) holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

God's purpose, is to present us (We don't present ourselves) – to present us **holy and blameless and above reproach before him...**

How could we (who are evil), ever become holy and blameless before a perfectly holy God???

We take on the nature of His Son. That's why Jesus was crucified. Jesus was executed, to pay the penalty that our sins deserved...

Have you ever had something that was so filthy, that it wasn't any good any more – it just had to be thrown away??? I could tell you some disgusting stories about hankies, but you'd probably all vomit.

How about I tell you about our deep fryer: After a couple of decades of home-made chips, no matter how we try to clean it, the way its constructed means there's parts we can't get at, such that now, it just drips goo... It's gotten to the stage, the best thing for it, is to throw it away. It can't be cleaned.

But the blood of Jesus is so powerful, we don't just get cleaned up a bit – we become a new creation. The old self is put to death, and we are born again: new and sinless. And that's how He will present us as **holy and blameless and above reproach before him.**

This is how the relationship is restored. He throws the old Michael away, and He creates a new one... That's what it means to be born again.

And I want to say to you today, “If you do not yet have a ‘born-again’ relationship with Christ, I urge you, to repent of sin, and to surrender your life completely to Jesus. He will make you holy/blameless/above reproach before Him. This is how we who were estranged, become the children of God.

But what’s that look like, for the rest of our earthly lives???

You see, the thing is, many people make a commitment to Jesus, at the beckon of an evangelist, (& this is a good thing BTW)... But they hear the message about “How to **become** a Christian”, but they don’t know how to “**Be** a Christian”...

And I suspect this is why Jesus **didn’t** give the command, “Go into the world and make converts”. He said “Go into the world and make disciples, teaching them to do what I’ve commanded...”

Once I become a Christian, what then???

Some folk are of the opinion, “I’ve said the sinners prayer/ been baptised – she’s all good...”

But here, Paul tells us how to **be** a Christian – how to **live** as a Christian....

V23 is what’s known as a conditional sentence. And some people are not very good at recognising a conditional sentence, but they’re not that hard.

How do we recognise a conditional sentence? It begins with the word “if”...

If you happen to be a computer programmer, or if you're skilled at working with spreadsheets, you know very well what the word “if” means. If this condition is met, do this/perform this calculation.

But even if you don't know anything about computers, parents understand it:

“If you behave, you can go to the party”.

A farmer understands it: “If it rains, we can plant the crop. If it doesn't, we can't.”

We all understand what a conditional sentence is. And this is a conditional sentence... Yes, it's guaranteed, but only **if**:

in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ **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.

There are many people in this world, who at some stage, have made a commitment to Christ,, but they didn't continue in the faith...

In the parable of the Sower, Some of the crop springs up, but it's in rocky soil, and when the sun comes up and beats down, the crop shrivels and dies. And Jesus said, that's like people who receive the Gospel with great joy, but persecutions and hardships come along, and they fall away.

Did they continue in the faith? No they didn't – they fell away... They were quite open to following Jesus while there was no cost to it, but as soon as they were persecuted for being a disciple of Jesus, they fell away...

But then there was the crop that got growing, but thorns grew up amongst it, and choked it so it didn't bear any fruit. And Jesus said, that's like people who hear the word, but the cares of the world and lure of riches enter in, and chokes the word, so they bear no fruit...

And you can see this. We all know people who at some time, were walking in faith in Christ,, but not any more...

And yes, we are guaranteed to be presented holy and blameless and above reproach **if** we continue in the faith...
What does that look like???

stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard

There's nothing half-hearted about this – being **stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard**

The condition of being blameless before God, is to continue in the faith. In Christian circles, there's a term (sometimes used) called "Perseverance of the saints". Do I believe in the perseverance of the saints? Absolutely. We are **commanded** to persevere... We are commanded to not fall away. And with God's help, we can keep that commandment.

Now, as we continue studying this letter, we're going to see that Paul's concern is that they don't get distracted away from the true Gospel, to a new false gospel. And that's what this language is hinting at here – being **stable and steadfast**, **not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard...**

The language here, is about foundations.

Do you remember what Jesus taught us about the foundation of the Gospel? He told us the story of the wise man who built his house upon the rock, and the foolish man who built his house on the sand. And to be wise, is to hear the word of God, and to do the word of God...

The foolish man hears the word of God, but doesn't do it...

Paul became a servant to the Gospel.

When he began this letter, he described himself as an Apostle. Now he's describing himself as a servant. As an apostle, his

job – His calling from God, was to make the true Gospel known. That’s why we now call it “the apostolic Gospel”...

There are many perversions of the Gospel around today (as there has been throughout the millennia),,, But the **true** Gospel, is what Jesus taught, and the Apostles confirmed. This is the Gospel that we now have recorded in our Bibles; And this is the Gospel in which we stand steadfast; This is the hope onto which we hold.

This is the “if”... By continuing in the faith, being, **stable and steadfast**, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard... And by being steadfast, means we hear it; do it; live it... And as we continue in faith, we have every confidence that we will continue to be blameless before God...

Yes, there will be times that we sin. But by holding fast to the Gospel that the apostles taught, we know that when we repent – when we turn away from our sin, we are forgiven, because the blood of Jesus Christ makes us blameless.

Praise the Lord.

Let’s pray:

Lord, it’s a sobering message,
to look back and remember what we once were...

We were estranged/alienated from You.

And yet, it was while we had our backs turned to you,
that You died for us.

We praise You,
that it is by Your blood,
that You reconciled us to Yourself.

Lord, let us never forget this.

And Lord,
we remember the conditional "if".

And Lord, we confess, that there are times when we
have not been:

- stable
- steadfast
- never shifting from the hope of the Gospel.
- We have been like the foolish man
when we've heard Your word, but not done it

God, forgive us.

And Lord,
by Your Holy Spirit,
help us to continue in the faith,
standing firm in the true Gospel,
to the glory of God,
Amen.

