

INTRODUCTION

How many of you use a computer? Aren't computers wonderful? When we first starting using computers, we were told they would save us time and paper. Both of those are lies! Studies have shown young people now spend more time in front of a computer screen than in front of television. Television is boring, because it isn't interactive like a video game or computer screen. And although most of our files are electronic, computers have only multiplied the stacks of paper we print out.

But computer technology is pretty amazing, especially since there are more and more wireless networks. We actually have a secured wireless network in this building. The time may come in the future when you bring your own laptop or PDA to worship and I can send you all the scripture, pictures, and notes I'm using. You won't have to take a pencil and fill in blanks, if you want, you can just download the entire message onto your laptop or PDA.

We actually already have the technology in place. For instance, I have my laptop here and I'm connected to our wireless network. I can send images directly from my laptop so they appear on the big screens in real time. Watch this. Okay, ready. Here goes. Hmm wait a second. Let me try again...it seems to be a little slow today. Once more. Let me try this. Man! It was working great when I tried it earlier! Come on! Oh no! The screen's frozen. It says I have some kind of virus. Oops! Well, forget about it! We'll just stick with low tech today.

How many of you have ever been frustrated working on your computer? That's probably 100% of those of you who raised your hand before. A little later in this message I'm going to show you what to do when your computer starts acting crazy.

Today, I want to talk to you about something much more important than dealing with a computer virus. I want to share with you about what to do when you find your life is infected with a deadly mental and moral virus. All of us need to hear this, because we have all had some bad software installed in our souls.

The title of this message is, "I'm not what I used to be!" I got this title from a verse in a little poem by an unknown poet. The verse reads:

*I'm not what I HOPE to be.
I'm not what I WANT to be.
I'm not what I OUGHT to be.
But thank God, I'm not what I USED to be!"*

This is the idea Paul expressed when he wrote this letter to Christians 2,000 years ago.

Colossians 1:21-23. "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to

every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

These three verses summarize the doctrine of redemption. There are three words we will focus on to explain the wonderful process of reconciliation. First, the word "ONCE" describes what we used to be before Jesus saved us—alienated from God. Second, the word "NOW" describes the difference Jesus has made in our lives—our reconciliation. And finally, the word "IF" explains how we can find positive proof we have been redeemed.

1. OUR PAST: ALIENATION FROM GOD

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds." (vs. 21) Before each of us came to Christ, we weren't just neutral about God, we were considered enemies of God. There was a chasm separating us from God. On one side of the chasm was a Holy God, and we stood on the other side, totally isolated and alienated from the source of life.

Why are we alienated? Our evil behavior

Why are we alienated from God? Because of our evil thinking and behavior. We are all born with a sin problem. The reason we act evil is because our minds are evil. We are both mentally and morally bankrupt before God. How many of you have ever told a lie? Hold up your hand. Those of you who didn't hold up your hand are lying right now! How many lies does it take to make a liar? Just one. We aren't liars because we lie—we lie because we are liars. You can never become a Christian until you're willing to admit you are a sinner who is separated from God.

G.K. Chesterton was a prolific British author. He wrote more than 100 books, both fiction and non-fiction. He was nicknamed "the Colossal Genius," both for his brilliant mind and his large girth. He was a respected academic apologist for the Christian faith and C.S. Lewis later said Chesterton's writings most influenced him to become a Christian. He also had a dry sense of humor. The London *Times* once published a headline containing a single question: "What's wrong with the world?" G.K. Chesterton wrote this pithy response: "I am. Yours truly, G.K. Chesterton" I appreciate his honesty! Every problem in this world can be traced back to sin. There's no use denying it.

I'm not proud of this, but sometimes I find myself driving a little above the speed limit. I've confessed before that the last part of my body to be sanctified is my right foot, and I've asked the Lord to help me in this area. About a month ago, I was driving to preach a funeral service and was running a little late. I was heading west on Rieck Road between Old Bullard and Hollytree Drive. As I started down the hill, I didn't see the motorcycle policeman parked on a side street—but he saw me! By the time I glanced down at the speedometer, it was too late. He was behind me with his lights flashing. He caught me. The speed limit was 30 mph, and I was driving around 50. He did his job, and wrote me a ticket. Why? In a few days, I called the municipal court and found out I owed a \$191 fine. Ouch! I was guilty and the payment had to be made, so I wrote the check and mailed it to the city of Tyler. I had no excuse because I was guilty! The penalty had to be paid.

In the same way, I am guilty before God. He has set His moral limits and rules, and I have

broken them. But when it comes to paying the penalty, I don't have enough to pay that fine. It's more than I have or could ever obtain. God's requirement for sin is a sinless atonement. And as we'll see in this next point, Jesus Christ is the ONLY one who could pay that penalty for sin.

2. OUR PRESENT: RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

"But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." (verse 22) I like the word, "now." It describes our current standing before God. In reconciling us with God, Jesus fixed our sin problem. Actually, there was nothing wrong with my computer before. I just wanted you to be able to relate to the frustration we all experience using this time-saving tool! If your computer ever starts acting funny, there is a neat way to fix most of the problems. Windows XP has a system tool I have used several times when my computer starts running slow or starts doing crazy things. It's called "System Restore." Sometimes you may download or install programs that make your computer perform slowly, or you have inadvertently downloaded a harmful virus. System Restore can fix your problem. It's pretty easy to use. You just click on start, go to all programs, then click on accessories, click on system tools and you'll find System Restore.

System Restore allows you to literally go back in time and reset your computer to an earlier date when it was running smoothly. You can choose a date up to two months in the past, before the time when harmful applications affected your performance. You just click on that date and any new applications, damaging software, or spyware that might have been installed or downloaded since then are removed. And the amazing thing is you don't lose any of the files or emails you received after your System Restore point.

Whenever I use System Restore, it reminds me of salvation. Have you ever wished you could go back in time and undo something bad you did? We all do! If I could go back to that day on Reick Road I assure you I would have driven the speed limit (as I have every day since). There are places and times we all wish we could go back to and undo what we did or unsay what we said. But we can't. We can't unscramble the eggs. We can't put the toothpaste back into the tube. We can't really go back in time. But the good news is Jesus Christ isn't bound by time. And when He died on the cross, He was enacting a cosmic System Restore for all our sins.

Before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, their mental and moral systems were running smoothly without a problem. But when they sinned, they were infected by a deadly virus that has been passed down to every person since then. It is worst than the most sinister computer virus you can imagine—every one of us has been infected. Our mental and moral systems are malfunctioning. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." On the cross, Jesus spanned time and space to undo the damage of what was done. System Restore is such a powerful tool, that when a hacker creates a damaging virus, often the first command embedded in the virus is to turn off your System Restore—but you can always activate it yourself. In the same way, Satan will do everything within his evil power to implant the idea that you can't be forgiven and restored to wholeness. But greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world! And Jesus' *has* reconciled us to God.

How are we reconciled? By the death of Jesus

I've been telling you about the heretics who infiltrated the church in Colosse. They were called Gnostics and they taught the "Christ" was totally separate from the physical person of Jesus. They taught "the Christ" was entrapped in the body of Jesus, and by death, "the Christ" was set free. That's the message contained in the recently revealed book of Judas. But Paul refutes this heresy by making it very clear it was through the death of Christ's physical body that our redemption was secured. The Apostle Peter wrote the same thing: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." (1 Peter 2:24)

A few weeks ago when I was in Destin, Florida, I was invited by some friends to play in the Bobby Bowden benefit golf tournament to raise funds for scholarships for FSU. One of the celebrities there was former pro quarterback Joe Theismann. When most sports fans think of Joe Theismann, they remember a Monday Night Football game in 1985 when he was sacked by Lawrence Taylor and his leg snapped at a grotesque angle. That scene was replayed dozens of times that night, and hundreds of times since. Most football fans my age have seen it many times.

At the golf tournament Joe Theismann spoke to our group after Jerry Pate gave a golf clinic. He asked, "How many of you have seen the replay of my leg being broken?" Every hand shot up. He was wearing golf shorts, and he pointed to his leg and said, "How does it look now?" Actually it looked pretty good. I couldn't even tell which leg had been broken. Then he said with a wry grin, "You know, it's funny that when people talk to me today, they seldom mention that I threw 160 touchdowns, played in two Pro Bowls, and won Superbowl XVII. The one thing people remember and talk about is the injury that ended my career." He went on to say he used to grimace with pain every time he saw the replay, but now, whenever he sees it, it doesn't bother him. He said he refuses to let his life and career be defined by a broken leg.

When I heard that, I thought about how the Bible describes Satan as "the accuser of the brothers." (Revelation 12:10) Satan tries to replay all of our sins and mistakes over and over—like that scene of Joe's leg getting broken on Monday Night Football. Satan tries to set up a wicked video loop in your mind to play constantly. He constantly tries to dredge up memories of our past sins and says, "You're no good. You're a dirty rotten sinner."

In contrast to that, the Bible says when Jesus reconciled us with God our sinful status is changed. We are no longer defined by our mistakes. We are now seen in a new light. In verse 22 it says that we become "holy" in God's sight, "without blemish" and "free from accusation." When we try to stand before God in our own righteousness, we are unholy, blemished, and we stand accused. The Bible says even our good deeds are like filthy rags in God's sight. But when Jesus presents us to God we are clothed in His righteousness.

I love the words written by Edward Mote, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." The last stanza says, "When He shall come with trumpet sound; oh, may I then in Him be found; Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne."

3. OUR PROOF: CONTINUATION IN GOD

"IF you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel." (verse 23) How do you *know* without a shadow of a doubt you are saved? It's all in the word "if." You can be certain you have been reconciled to God IF you continue in your faith. Salvation is not depending on our good works. If you continue to seek and serve God, you don't *earn* salvation, what you are doing is *proving* your salvation.

I recall visiting a man in Alabama who attended a Billy Graham Crusade at Legion Field in Birmingham in the early 1970s. He heard the saving message of Jesus and when Dr. Graham gave the invitation, he walked forward and filled out a card, repeated a prayer, and received some literature. But since that day, until he talked to me, he had never attended church, been baptized, or even had a hunger to pray and read God's Word. Yet, he told me that based upon hearing Billy Graham, and walking forward he thought he was going to heaven.

Only God knows for sure. But, from what I know in the Bible, I doubt he was genuinely converted. You don't go to church and read the Bible to go to heaven, but when you become a Child of God, you will want to continue in the faith. Our church roll has thousands of names of people who seldom if ever demonstrate any hunger for God. But many of them believe they will go to heaven, because they filled out a card, got dunked, and have their name written on a church roll. But they are sadly deceived. I believe they are the kinds of people Jesus described in Matthew 7 when He said, "On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, in your name I cast out demons, I did many wonderful works, I was baptized, my name was on the church roll at Green Acres!'" Then Jesus will say to them, "Depart from me, you who work iniquity, I never knew you." One of my seminary professors used to describe this idea in a sentence containing six words that all start with the letter "f." "The faith that fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first."

What are we to do? Hold onto hope!

So based upon what Jesus has done for us, what are we to do? Hold onto hope! We can hold onto hope, because Jesus is our hope and He has a firm grip on us. If you say that you have hope, and then you let go, you never had hope in the first place. Don't quit! Keep on trusting! Keep on serving! Keep on seeking the Lord! The very fact you *continue* to seek and serve the Lord is proof of your true conversion.

The Bible compares the Christian life to running a race. Hebrews 12:1 says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." This race is not a competition between us, so we're not trying to outrun each other. Whenever I think about that, I'm reminded of the funny story of the two rednecks who were out in the woods hunting squirrels. They are shocked to come up on a mean old bear. They empty their little rifles in the bear, which only makes him madder and so the bear starts chasing the two of them. The two rednecks turn and run and the bear is gaining on them. In order to run faster, one of the boys starts kicking off his hunting boots. The other one says, "Why are you doing that? You know you can't outrun that bear!" The first redneck says, "I don't have to outrun that bear. I just have to outrun YOU!" But in the Christian life, we aren't trying to outrun each other, we're all trying to

finish the race. That's why it's important for us to *continue*. The only way to know for sure your salvation is real is when you finish the race for Jesus. There are a lot of people who start out for Jesus, but their commitment is not genuine, so when the race gets tough, they drop out.

On August 3, 1992 in the Barcelona Summer Olympics, there was a British runner named Derek Redmond competing in the 400 meter dash. In one of the semi-final heats, Derek took off with the other runners, but at about 100 yards into the race, he tore his right hamstring muscle and fell to the track in agony. But in an amazing display of courage, Derek rose and began to limp toward the finish line. Medics rushed toward him, but he waved them away. Then a heavysset man ran down from the stands and ran onto the track. It was Derek's dad. At first his Derek didn't recognize him, and pushed him away. Then when he recognized him as his dad, he fell into his arms crying and said, "I have to finish! I must finish the race!" As his dad took him into his arms he said, "Well, we've started everything together. We'll finish it together." And with few dry eyes in the stands and among the television audience, the two of them struggled together across the finish line to thunderous applause.

What a wonderful illustration of a father's love for his child. God our Father is willing to do the same thing. If you have fallen and failed, God sees you in all of your brokenness and pain. He comes to help you. At first, you may not recognize Him, and you try to push Him away. But God is there. He has promised to carry you through the tough experiences of your life. God says, "...you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you." (Isaiah 46:3-4)

CONCLUSION

This message has been about learning about our alienation from God; our reconciliation with God; and our continuation in God. But Christianity is more than about just *knowing* the truth; it is *living* the truth. So, based upon what we've learned about salvation, we should each be asking ourselves: What should I do?

That question can be answered in three different ways, because there are at least three different kinds of people here today. For some of you, your goal should be to (1) Start the race! You have never truly admitted you're an enemy of God, and trusted Jesus to reconcile you with your Creator. In other words, you're heading in the wrong direction; you're in the wrong race. In Matthew 7 Jesus said there is a wide track that leads to hell and many people are running on it. They don't know they're headed toward hell. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." If you aren't a follower of Jesus Christ, you can turn your back on your sins and turn to Jesus. You can get on the right track. You can start the race that will take you to heaven.

For others of you, your goal should be to (2) Get back in the race! Somewhere back in your past you started the race—you trusted Jesus for salvation, but you got sidetracked. If you never resume the race, that's a sign you've been disqualified, because you never really started correctly. Genuine salvation is present IF you continue! So, perhaps you're here today and you have been sidetracked for weeks, or even years. But there is a yearning, and a burning in your heart to get

back on track. Come on, get up off the track. Get back in the race. For some of you that may mean you've got to let go of something that has slowed you down. It may mean you need to find a church and get involved. It may mean you need to be baptized, or to start reading your Bible, and praying daily. But as long as the Holy Spirit is still dealing with you, it's not too late. Get back in the race!

Finally, there are some of you here who've been in the race for years. You've been running steadily and surely. You know the Lord and love the Lord. You've learned the Christian life is not a 100 yard dash: It is a super marathon. Your goal should be to (3) Sprint toward the finish line! I've run some fun runs and 5Ks through the years and I've found there are always volunteers at the finish line cheering me on...so I always added a burst of speed. The Christian life isn't about competition—who finishes first—it's about finishing strong. The finish line is not heaven; it's Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." He was at the starting line—and He is the finish line.

So, child of God, you may not be *what* you ought to be, and you're certainly not what you're *going* to be, but Praise God, you aren't what you *used* to be!

OUTLINE

1. OUR PAST: ALIENATION FROM GOD

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds." *Colossians 1:21*

Why? Our evil behavior

2. OUR PRESENT: RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

"But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." *Colossians 1:22*

How? The death of Jesus

3. OUR PROOF: CONTINUATION IN GOD

"IF you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel." *Colossians 1:23*

What? Hold onto hope!



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes