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Notes of a Sermon preached by Mr. J. H. Gosden

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at "Ebenezer" chapel, Richmond

on 12th. July, 1951

Text: Colossians 1.21-23

"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister".

This is part of a long sentence which continues to the end of the chapter and, of course, one does not expect to be able to expound even this part of so profound a word, but as the Lord may help us let us first of all look at what these Colossians were. They were sometime alienated and enemies in their minds by wicked works, but there had been a change wrought in them by God the Holy Ghost and that is of supreme importance to consider for this is true of us all that as we are born, and as we live naturally, we are alienated from God, we go astray from His as naturally as we breathe. The total depravity of human nature is a doctrine that today is very largely disbelieved but I believe where the Holy Spirit works He will show to a person the solemn truth of the universality of his own departure, it covers the whole of our nature, we are alienated from God by wicked works. It does not mean that all natural people live corrupt, unclean, wicked lives outwardly. Many worldlings, it is sad to have to say it, put to shame many who profess the truth of God. By nature no man seeks after God, no man has a real reverence for God's name. Whether it be said verbally or only in act and thought it is the language of human nature, 'We will not have this Man to reign over us'. It may not be apparent to us so much at the beginning as later in experience. Some of you young people may think some older people exaggerate when they express what is felt of the departure of their own hearts. I said to the friends yesterday, what I will repeat, I have discoveries today in my own heart of things which I never suspected forty years ago. The capability of sin and the dreadful enmity against God which belongs to my human nature is a trouble and it is a solemn truth, "alienated

and enemies". There is a distinction in a sense between aliens and enemies; we may be alienated without being enemies but here the two things are brought before us, alienation and enmity against God and goodness.

Now if you are born again there will be in your heart at times a painful recognition of this, that you were once entirely under the dominion of sin and yet were not conscious of it because, though an enemy of God and alienated from Him you were dead and the dead know not anything. Dead - as Paul says to the Ephesians - in trespasses and sins. Very solemn it is when men are born into this world and go on in that way, dead, aliens and enemies until that work is wrought in them, that the Holy Spirit alone can accomplish. "And you, that were sometime"; the whole of the time of our life from our birth until that particular moment when the Holy Spirit entered the heart, renewed the will and turned the feet to Zion's hill. O if we are not alienated now, if we are not enemies now, what a mercy! But some of you may say, 'I have that in me, that hatred, that enmity, that carnality, that worldliness that make me greatly fear I am entirely out of the secret of real religion. Well, I know well what you feel, it is a shameful thing and a surprising thing when we are made to know what is within; but the point is this, have you fallen under the conviction, has it been made a trouble to you that you should have a carnal mind that will never be anything else but enmity against God, never be reconciled? I do not believe that our fallen nature will ever be different from what it is. It is a painful prospect and will be a real trouble to one who would be entirely submissive to God and conformed to Him, but he that declares he is without sin makes God a liar and he that says he has done no sin is a liar - so says the Holy Ghost by John. Each one here who is not now really alienated and an enemy to God by wicked works has been the subject of a change, not a renovation of our old nature but the implantation of a new nature. In every child of God when grace is received it does not make him different in nature but it does subdue the motions of nature. The Spirit lusteth against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit and these two are contrary the one to the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. There is a sacred boldness which I believe none but those who are the subjects of divine grace can understand. The living God can accept nothing but what is perfect. It is very solemn when God sets before a man his secret sins in

the light of His countenance; he no longer feels he compares fairly favourably with his fellow mortals. No, he is brought down to a sense of ruin and helplessness and self despair; but he does want God, he does want, not God to be changed, but to be changed himself and to come inside that word in the earlier part of this chapter, to be made "meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light". You who were sometime alienated and enemies, you fought, fought against God, fought against His will, fought against His dealings with you, deliberately lived only to rebel against Him. O what a solemn state to be in and how painful when there is a consciousness of it!

"By wicked works" It can be truly said of our life from our birth onward that we lived under the power of wicked works because in our best things we did not aim at the glory of God. There was idolatry, covetousness, pride, anger, hypocrisy, all the evils that more or less reigned in us and over us. "Yet now hath He reconciled". Reconciliation to God can only be effected by God Himself, no power can suffice to do this. It takes a mighty power to change an enemy into a friend and to overcome that native enmity by planting in the heart a new man. "If any man be in Christ", Paul said to the Corinthians, he is a new creature", or a new creation a work of the Spirit renewing the soul, illuminating the understanding and reconciling the heart to God, to His Word, to His will, to His ways and therefore making the sinner know, feel and acknowledge that he is wrong. I believe true religion generally begins by a man being brought to realise he is wrong. Natural religion generally begins by people suddenly finding out that they have some sort of goodness. How did yours begin? If it began by the Holy Ghost it must have begun by some solemn conviction of your state as a sinner before a sin-hating and holy God. "When He (the Spirit of truth) is come He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment" (John 14.8) O what a solemn thing it is to be distant from God through wicked works; but my friends, if you are there feelingly, if the Lord has shown you where you are, found you out, and moreover if He has given you a real anxious longing desire to be near Him, to be reconciled to Him, to find peace with Him; then there is a work begun in your heart that the Lord Himself will never forgo, never abandon, never deny, but complete. O the deep feeling of need, of helplessness, of desire, of fear, of shame, that is felt in a sinner when the Lord first comes to him and awakens him

to his state! Now that is the beginning of reconciliation, experimentally, those deep desires which He creates, that longing to be found in peace with God, to have that distance taken away and the evils and corruptions that rise up within destroyed, to be at peace with God. Have you these desires? Has the Lord made you feel what I quoted,

"Less than Thyself will not suffice
My comfort to restore;
More than thyself I cannot crave,
And thou canst give no more."

Has He given you that desire? Well, if He has the desire will not satisfy you but it will sometimes consume you and you will feel you break in your spirit for the longing desire you have for Himself and after a sense of His love and an assurance that all is remedied between you and God.

"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your minds". Why, I believe sometimes a person may have such violent enmity rise up in his heart against God that he could pull God from His throne. I know that in my own heart. That is the principle that reigns in those who are in their natural state; but to know it and to tremble on account of it and to pray to God to kill that enmity is another matter. "Yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death". Here is a great mystery, the reconciling work with respect to God on behalf of the church of God was effected by the death of Christ; the experience of that reconciliation is by the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul. You find the same truth expressed in Corinthians 2.19, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;". Paul winds up that chapter with that remarkable, pithy declaration of the doctrine of substitution, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". When God laid upon His dear Son, by divine imputation, under His covenant of grace, the sins of His sinful people, and by His infinite justice dealt with those sins in His beloved Son who bore the curse due to those sins in His holy, harmless, undefiled body as their Surety, it was there that reconciliation was effected. Reconciliation is not merely a change in the sinner's heart but it is a removal legally out of the way of every quarrel between the person and God. No change in us could do that; only the work of Christ could take away the curse. Some people look upon a notion of Christ as being some token of salvation but something vastly

more than that is required and that is the work of Christ for His people. O what a work it was to reconcile poor sinners to God, when the Lord Jesus, as it is said in a later part of this epistle, should nail to His cross the enmity and the handwriting of ordinances which was against the church. He nailed it to His cross. He bore in His own body on the tree all the sins, all the innumerable sins of His innumerable people and put them away effectually and eternally by His precious sacrifice. This work can never be undone. O how blessed is that truth expressed by the Saviour on the cross, "It is finished". We have nothing to pay and apart from the payment Christ made could never be reconciled to God experimentally, a discharge through faith in Jesus Christ. Confession alone would not do it if Christ had not died. Let us never in the slightest degree seek to minimise the work wrought outside the sinner by the Saviour, for although the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul is essential for salvation yet there could be no work of the Holy Spirit in the soul if it were not for the work, outside the sinner, of the Son of God incarnate, Christ the Mediator, Surety and Substitute.

"And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of His flesh through death"; this brings in of necessity the possession by the Son of God of a body of flesh, a human nature; the assumption by Him of our nature is one of the greatest mysteries that has ever been known. O what a mystery it is! It may seem profound but it comes very near to us; He is not ashamed to call His people brethren. He partook of the flesh and blood of the brethren and what for? For two purposes. One was the great chief purpose, the redemption of His people, and the second was to set an example that they might walk in His steps. The first is the chief. O what a work it was that He, who is God, should become man in order to remove sin, to pay the debt and to make an honourable way back to God for those who are ruined and condemned and must be eternally lost. He is faithful. Reconciliation was an extensive work for Christ who spent His life and suffered His death, all for this reconciliation with God. He could not change, could not sully His holiness, could not reduce His standard; He would save His people. Christ restored to human nature its glory when the Son of God assumed our nature. There was an innocent Man, O the innocence of Christ, the perfection of His humanity! Yet notwithstanding that perfection there was no visage marred like His visage. The reconciling work was in the

whole of His human nature, soul and body. It was "through death", a death that has no parallel, that death that took away sin. It was a vicarious death, a substitutionary death. The Lord Jesus died a voluntary death in the discharge of the service He undertook for His people in things pertaining to God. Does He attract you? Does His work attract you? Or do you say these are far off and distant things in which we are not particularly concerned. If you are not concerned in them eternal woe belongs to you. I feel the chief concern of every quickened sinner is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings and be made conformable to His death and to the resurrection of the dead. If Christ is not attractive to us then we are dead; and if He never is attractive to us and we can be satisfied with our so-called religion that religion will sink when we die.

"Yet now hath he reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." This reconciliation was complete legally when Christ died. Nothing less than that was intended by the Lord Jesus when He said, "It is finished". The responsibility for the sins of His people which He assumed in the covenant was then ended because those sins were put away by that sacrifice and the proof of it was when Christ rose again from the dead. He did not lie under the power of death; death could not hold Him. There is a great deal of truth in that statement. He could not be held of death. Why? Because that for which He died was taken away by His death and so He rose from the dead the third day, according to the Scriptures, and He lives. O sometimes in your very heart you may feel a thrill, if I may so express it, in the fact that Christ lives. I believe David did when he broke out in that word, "The Lord liveth and blessed be my Rock and exalted be the God of my salvation." You may not be able to use the personal pronoun, you may be afraid to claim Him as your Rock and the God of your salvation but you will be able to say as a convicted sinner, There is all my hope; if I have an interest in Him all will be well, and that is what you will seek after.

He ascended on high. What to do? To carry on His people's cause there. He left this world for the glory of His Father's throne; He presents before His Father the names of His people, those whom He reconciled by His life and death; He presents them before God; He represents them there. O what a representation Christ is of His church to God in heaven! He represents God to His people by

His Spirit, He represents His people to God by His presence at the right hand of His Father. "To present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight". How can this possibly be? Here is a sinful, polluted creature, ignorant, full of sin, weak, dark; how can he be before God holy and unblameable and unreprieveable? By the presentation of him before the Father by His dear Son. This presentation is two-fold. First of all He presents His people in heaven now; He represents them there, represents them there as their intercessor and when they pray, when they are constrained to confess their sins and to plead for mercy, as did the publican; they have a Friend in court, a great High Priest in heaven. O what a word is that in the Hebrews, "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them". Now that comes close to personal experience. The doctrine I have stated is very substantial but our experience sometimes seems wrapped up in our feelings. You will never make a religion of your feelings if you are taught by the Spirit but, on the other hand, there will be feeling in your religion, the feeling sometimes of hatred to sin, a feeling of desire, and sometimes of love to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now prayer is the Christian's native air, real prayer is a sign of a living soul. The apostle, addresses the Corinthian church as being "called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord". If you are a real praying soul and a convicted sinner calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus, coming to the Father, seeking the shelter of that name and the blood and righteousness of Christ for mercy, you have the love of God in your soul. But what you will want in prayer will be access and acceptance. You feel deeply your unfitness to approach the great and holy God. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "No man cometh to the Father but by Me"; there is no other way and O what a way it is! There is a risen Christ, a condescending, faithful, High Priest, a glorified Man in heaven to represent the feeblest, weakest, the unworthiest praying man before the Father; "To present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight". This presentation before God of sinners means the merit of Christ is attributed to the sinner, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. The transfer was made at the cross, but the experience of that transfer is in answer to prayer when you get a smile from God, when you understand a little of what that hymn means,

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"'Tis He instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God"

You will just get an inkling of this. He presents you in the merits of Christ at whose hands Jehovah received a full obedience and at whose hands the law was completely honoured by His precious death. Christ is in heaven; He accomplished this work. May the Lord bring us into a gracious acquaintance with Him and with the Father through Him, so that peace with God and peace of conscience may flow into our souls. Amen

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