

When I look at culture, when I look at the world, when I look at the church, it is like all of us are struggling to try to answer this particular question: What is off-kilter? What is wrong? Where have we gone awry?

This idea that something is wrong is really not a new question. It's a question that's been asked since Genesis 3. What is off with the world? Why does the world feel a dissonance? Our culture, in trying to wrestle with this question, almost doesn't have the right mechanisms or explanatory power to really get at what its root struggle is. You see this pop up in a litany of different ways. I'm going to kind of firehose you at the beginning with ways I see us wrestling with this question. You see it in philosophy, music, film, and in all these different categories.

So first, let's begin with Karl Marx. I bet you did not expect that! Karl Marx, the German-born philosopher, economist, and political theorist. He's riding on the heels of the industrial revolution; he's polarizing, anxiety-inducing. Many of you, when I said that name, maybe cringed a little. He's controversial, yet for Marx, he was able to identify the same problem that is beneath the surface.

For Marx, it was this concept of alienation. Now, he was viewing it purely through an economic and class struggle lens, and so the problem, according to Marx, was that we were alienated from the products that we produce. This distance that was created was separating us where we were becoming distant from the very value we hold. The value was placed somewhere else. This problem of alienation was part and parcel to all of Marx's writing.

This goes on further to another philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau, who, in his work, *The Social Contract*, writes about this concept of alienation. But for Rousseau, it wasn't an economic reality, it was a societal reality. Rousseau believed deeply in the individual. He's given shape to much of our modern world, so much so that the problem that we feel this alienation is because we've been alienated by social structures that are impinging on the individual. The individuals can't fully live to be themselves because of all of these constraints that society places on them.

For Marx, it was an economic alienation; for Rousseau, it's this societal alienation. And again, there are many other philosophers we could have gone to, but let me go to one of my all-time favorites, that of the iconic musician Bob Dylan. Consider his iconic song, "Like a Rolling Stone," from his album *Highway 61 Revisited*. Listen for the themes of alienation. "How does it feel to be on your own, with no direction home, like a complete unknown, like a rolling stone?" He's speaking in a few different terms here, but it's a commentary on both social revolution as well as love lost as he sings about this in "Miss Lonely." There's these themes

of alienation; he's sensing it. How does it feel to be on your own? He senses the unrest.

If Bob Dylan isn't your cup of tea, another one that you may or may not have but you may have seen her last night is the other icon, Taylor Swift. Or in my house, as I call her, Tay Tay! Consider her song [Exile](#) (click the link for lyrics). It's written with Justin Vernon of Bon Jovi. It's a ballad, a back-and-forth song that has, I would argue, undertones of a kind of theological language. It's about a relationship gone awry. Again, you'll notice these themes of alienation. It's her seeking a solution. The sense in which she feels distant.

Think of two films. Remember that 2019 dark portrayal in the movie *Joker*, featuring Joaquin Phoenix, directed by Todd Phillips? If you've seen it, I hesitate to call it beautiful. It's a hauntingly dark film in which Joaquin Phoenix's character, this Joker, is living in complete social isolation. And it ultimately drives his character mad into this violent insanity. In my perspective, it's a commentary, again, on social isolation, economic isolation, and emotional isolation. It's this individual lost in the mix of so much.

Maybe another more recent example is on TV. If you've watched the series *The Bear* on Hulu, it's a really beautiful series that just won a whole bunch of awards. It follows the story of a chef named Carmen Berzato. The chef is one of the best in the world, and he's grieving the loss of his brother. The whole thing is about him trying to hold his life together, yet he can't seem to avoid this idea of alienation. At the core of his problem is he's alienated himself from his grief, from his family, from all of his loved ones.

So the philosophy in Marx and Rousseau, music in Dylan and Swift, and film in *The Joker* and *The Bear* is all getting at this idea that what's beneath the surface, the problem that we're trying to solve, is this concept of alienation. Now, each of those examples may have a diminished, if not an outright wrong, view of its solution, but they actually identify the problem correctly.

If you're familiar with the biblical story, you'll know this theme of exile is a central one. In some ways, Genesis to the end of the scriptures deals with this concept of exile, or what I'm calling this morning, alienation. So, what do I mean by this idea of alienation? Let me give you one definition. This comes from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. It says "the concept of alienation identifies a distinct kind of psychological or social ill. One involving a problematic separation between a self and another that belong together." This is the core of alienation. Two things that are created to be together have been separated.

You see this in all these different areas, and yet we come this morning to the Apostle Paul, who maybe is the most brilliant of all those named,

in which he identifies at the core of this particular text—I would argue the very gospel he preaches over and over—is the very problem that we are struggling as a humanity to solve.

Look at the text. *“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior” (Col. 1:21)*. What I want to suggest this morning is that this problem of alienation is as pervasive. We see it pop up in all of these different areas of culture. But what I want to also suggest is while culture’s wrestling to try to figure out how to answer it, we can look to the Apostle Paul, who says there’s a story, a kind of gospel, a good news that we can understand about this separation.

Paul here is offering the solution. He’s saying the root, that alienation you feel, it’s not from an economy. It’s not from society. It’s not from a lost relationship or an idea. It’s none of that. He says you were once alienated from God. I would argue Paul makes a very compelling case that this alienation from God is, in fact, the root cause of all of these different symptoms. Whether it’s a growing mental health crisis, young people who are struggling to make sense of life, whether it’s substance abuse that’s rising, all of these different symptoms we see in a culture that’s trying to make sense of the very alienation that Paul is speaking of. I want to make the point simple because the text is dense. And so the point this morning, if you were to walk away with anything, is: Our alienation is turned into reconciliation through Jesus. Paul begins in verse 15.

**The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him” (vs. 15-16).**

Paul begins this section with this beautiful line, *“The son is the image of the invisible God.”* This idea, this concept is he’s establishing Christ as the greatest, clearest manifestation of God. Meaning, if you want to know what God is like, look no further than Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God. So, if we understand who Jesus is, we begin to understand the very character and nature of God because this is the manifestation. It is one of those three in the Godhead, the Trinity, in which is coming into flesh, not being created. Jesus existed from the beginning of time, but rather, it is God entering into the story. This is why Jesus is so central to us. If we’re to understand who God is, we must understand Jesus. And Paul says he is the image of the invisible God.

Then he says the firstborn over all creation. Now, again, this doesn’t mean that he was the first thing created. Jesus was not created; he always was. He simply appeared that Christmas morning in the flesh. But he existed, pre-existed, before all of creation with the Godhead. So, this concept of firstborn is not about created order. It’s about the rightful heir to all of creation. If you were the firstborn in the first century, that meant you had the right to all that the family had. So when Paul says that he’s the firstborn over all creation, he’s proclaiming exactly what we just sang, “All hail, King Jesus.” Jesus is king over all creation right now, in this moment. It is his creation.

But notice later, in verse 18, Paul uses this firstborn language again. *“And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”* Jesus is the firstborn over all creation, and Jesus is the firstborn over the dead. He is King Jesus, not just over the living but over the dead as well. He’s the firstborn of creation as it is in its broken state now and the new creation that came after the resurrection of Jesus and of all things. Jesus is the firstborn, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over the living and the dead, over all of creation.

Paul is painting a magisterial picture of Jesus. It’s this beautifully wide and broad image that, for Paul, is central that we understand. If Jesus is who Paul says he is, then a separation and alienation from this God would, of course, have devastating circumstances because Jesus is, in fact, preeminent above all of creation. So, distance from that would lead us to pain and hurt and death and alienation.

He goes on in verse 16. *“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”* There’s this comprehensive view that Paul is painting that thrones, rulers, authorities, powers, everything is subject to the very headship and preeminence of Jesus. It is all of that subjected to the rule of him. He says that it was in him, it was through him, and it was to him that all of creation falls. All of the creative powers and the systems are being sustained by Jesus. All of it finds its meaning; it finds its purpose and finds its worth in Jesus.

*“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy” (vs. 17-18).* This idea of before all things—don’t think chronologically here. He means that he stands at the fountainhead of all of it. He is the leader of all things. He’s before all things. Everything is held together by him. It is a view that God is the one who’s pulsing blood through our veins, sustaining creation itself. God is holding all things together. Remember that little song you sang when you were a kid? “He’s got the whole world in his hands.” It’s a beautiful image of this. He has the whole world in his hands. Sustaining it. Holding it. Allowing it to continue on in this vein.

He’s the head of all things. He’s the head of the body. He’s the head of the church. He’s the beginning, the firstborn among the dead, so that everything may find its supremacy in him. Scott McKnight, a New Testament commentator I read often says this,

**His status is superior because temporally he is before all things, [meaning within the timeline he’s before all things,] hierarchically [meaning like the order of leadership] he’s above all things, and ontologically [meaning the very existence] he sustains all things. McKnight**

It’s hard to put into words the image that Paul is painting here of the centrality of Jesus. He’s above all things, he’s before all things, and he sustains all things. As I mentioned, think about this for a moment. You can take this, and you can believe this, or you cannot believe it. That’s

actually somewhat okay with me. You can take these ideas and hold them, but I want you to suspend whatever else, maybe disbelief, you have and just think of the logic of Paul here.

Let's assume Paul's claims are true, which I believe are absolutely true. But just suspend any disbelief and hold these as true. If Jesus is before all things, if he sustains all things, if he's the firstborn of the living and the dead, if he's the image of the invisible God, it's this meta universal claim about the person and character of Jesus is true, and you found yourself in a rebellion, or a dissonance, or a disconnect from that God who is in all things, sustains all things, and is before all things, what is the result that you would feel? Alienation.

You would feel that. It would be like bringing a hockey stick to a football game. It wouldn't make sense. It's not the order in which things happen. Of course, you would feel that alienation. Now, get inside that logic because this is the claim that the gospel makes. I believe it's picking up on the same problem as Marx and Rousseau and Dylan and Swift and all those that feel that alienation. For the non-believer, the one who doesn't understand the gospel yet or hasn't come to accept its reality, they're just taking other factors in life and thinking that they sense the same problem, but maybe it's another relationship that will solve it. Maybe it's this job that will bring reconciliation. Maybe it's if this relationship was fixed. Maybe it's just class struggle. If I just rose to this tax bracket, that would solve it.

You see, all of these attempts to solve the alienation, they happen so deep below the surface. Often in us, they just come out of us because we don't recognize the reality of what Paul is saying. But notice that this is the same question.

The Christian story is just saying that we see these kinds of evidence, these points of facts in reality, and we are making this story statement. But don't think that Marx and Rousseau and Dylan and Swift and you and I aren't also attempting the same thing. This is really just an invitation to look and ask what story you are living from.

I would make the argument, as I will later, that there's beauty and there's forgiveness and there's grace, and there's the real true source of your alienation. The reconciliation you long for isn't found in those; it's found in Jesus. Enter into that logic. Say, if Paul is right, if in fact that is true, then of course my reconciliation is found in nothing else other than Jesus. Because he's above all things, he sustains all things; he's in all things. Of course, I would need to be reconciled with that because to go against that, Jesus would be going against the grain of the universe. So, of course, if that happens, you'll get a few splinters. Of course, it'll hurt; of course, it will cut deep.

Paul says this is the story at hand. *"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (vs. 19-20)*. Paul's tipping his hand here. He's saying this is the solution. What he's going to say in the next verse is you were alienated; you sensed this difference. But Paul says that God chose Jesus to reconcile all things, which, by the way, the Greek word there is all

things created or otherwise, heaven and on earth, all of creation finds its reconciliation through the very being that is sustaining all of creation.

It's actually quite logical. If Jesus sustains all of creation, then we must be reconciled back to that, both human and the created natural order. Think of Romans 8 here, this text in which it says that all of creation, not just humanity, but all of creation is groaning for the world to be reconciled back to him.

This is, in some ways, part of that source. Sin's fallout has rippling effects across nature itself, across humanity, and through all of us. But the story is that Jesus is in the process of reconciling all things. Things in heaven, things on earth. All of it is being reconciled. But how? Through Jesus, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

We'll get to that in a second and what Paul is unpacking there. But I just want to read verse 21. This is our verse that we've anchored all this in because this is the very crux of the gospel. Once you were alienated from God, we're enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. Right now, Paul is saying this source of alienation is that we were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. And so because of that, we feel that separation and alienation in which we need Jesus' death on the cross.

Paul says two things about our alienation. He says, first, it is in our minds. Think of this as more than just thoughts or things, facts, or information in your head. It has more to do with dispositions or rationalities. It's the idea in which we've allowed our minds to be co-opted by these different stories. Remember, think back to when we started this *Renewing the Mind* series. We live from the mental maps in which we make sense of reality. And that's why we keep going back. That's why Dylan was searching for something. That's why Taylor Swift is searching for reconciliation, whatever it is. There's a mental map, an image of what the good life is, and we are trying to reconcile our felt experience with what we are most longing for.

What Paul's saying here in Romans, as well as in Colossians, is that we live from those mental maps. So what would it look like as a disciple when we begin to bring our mental maps in line with Jesus, and we begin to understand reality because Jesus deals in reality? Everything else is actually un-reality. Jesus is bringing our minds into alignment with the very reality that we experience. So therefore, when that comes together, we are no longer enemies in our minds, but our life reconciles with reality. Then, we find not dissonance but harmony as we begin to recognize the ways in which we must repent and come back to Jesus to make sense of life. He says your enemies in your minds.

He also says your evil behavior. This is the outworking, not just of our thoughts, but it's the dispositions, the loves, the longings of our hearts that are bent away from the things of God. They manifest in behaviors that reap death. Hold onto Paul's logic because if they are counter to the very thing sustaining all of creation, of course, that would be a bumpy road. That wouldn't make sense because it's not in alignment with the very created nature of the world.

He says these dispositions, these postures that set us against God, bring about evil. They bring about what Paul would say later is, death. The wages of sin is death. It's a sense in which we, when we rebel against the very thing sustaining all of creation, what it brings about is death, brings about pain, brings about brokenness, disease, hardship, all of these sorts of things manifest in a life that's set against God.

Now, let's return back to verse 20. *"...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."* Let's return to this because I want us to see Paul's logic yet again. It's that if now Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the manifestation of God in the flesh, Jesus is the perfect embodiment of what it means to be both God and human. So, in his humanness, Jesus takes on our condition of brokenness. But the difference is where you and I perpetuate alienation, Jesus lives a perfect life and doesn't want to be separated from the life of God. But rather he takes that perfect life, goes to the cross, sacrifices and makes payment for our guilt, that separation and it's in his death, he's putting to death all that causes that alienation from God.

It's in that resurrection moment that breath took place, all of the created order was different because Jesus had taken on the extent of the powers of death and extinguished them. So if death cannot find its power over Jesus, when we are invited into relationship, Christ in you, the hope of glory, you are invited not into the frailness that's broken in your life but into the perfection of Jesus' life. And therefore, because of the work of Jesus, nothing that we have done, we are reconciled to him because we are in Christ, not in this brokenness. You see the beauty of Paul's logic here. Jesus takes on our life, lives it in the way that we were intended to be in reconciliation with God, goes to death for our sake, and we find our life in him.

This is the work of discipleship, learning over and over. How do I live in union with Christ? How do I live in such a way where the mental maps that have veered me away from the things of God actually bring me into greater communion with God? This is what is going on beneath the surface. This is what God is inviting us into, a life in which that alienation we feel is reconciled through Jesus, not because of what we've done, but because of what he has done.

Paul says this is the source. This is the struggle, the problem. And it's because of this that you can, through the work of Jesus, have reconciliation with God. Look at verse 22. *"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—"* That's what I just described. We now are presented before God not as we are in our brokenness but as Jesus is in his perfection. We're brought and presented before God. *"...if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move 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" (v. 23).*

He says this is the good news that there is a solution to the alienation that we all feel. It's different from what the world may offer. It's in the

work and death of Jesus. And he says this gospel has been proclaimed and continues to be proclaimed throughout all of creation. It's the very thing that Paul is a servant to. So you and I, as Christians, with me as a pastor, I am a servant to this gospel, trying to steward the story well in a way that connects you with the beauty and the hope of salvation in Jesus. This is that gospel.

We have to consider how we come into this gospel. If it isn't what we do but rather the work of Jesus, it has to do something more with this idea of yielding to this presence. If Jesus is who Paul says he is, sustaining all things before all things, then it has much more to do with me just pulling back from leading my own life. And it's this constant yielding to the presence of God and recognizing I am not the Lord of my life; Jesus is, and I yield to it.

Our act is much more passive, yet it's intentional. It isn't the thing that sustains or brings about the reconciliation, but it's rather yielding to the presence and the reality of God in such a way that God becomes preeminent in my life. We come over and over again in surrender, laying down the illusion of control, which that's all it is, by the way. It's an illusion of control. And you've got to catch this because, in our world, the gospel preached to us from our culture is that you have control over everything in your life. That is an illusion. You do not have control over everything in your life. You may have responsibility for how you react and engage in the world, of course. But don't believe the myth that you have control over your destiny. It's just an illusion. We yield to the presence and the power of Jesus in a lifelong pursuit, an act of trust.

As Eugene Peterson would say in one of my all-time favorite lines: "It's a long obedience in the same direction." It's swerves. It doesn't make sense. We often go two steps backward, one step forward, and all of that. But it's a long obedience to the reality of Jesus in the world. And it's just in the same direction, moving more and more toward God.

Where do you find yourself in this? When I say this concept of a long obedience in the same direction, where do you find yourself in that? One of the gifts of my job is I get to attend and often perform memorial services. And this weekend, on Friday, we got to have a memorial service in this room for a beautiful saint who'd been a part of this church for many, many years—Barbara McCollum. I was inspired by that service because I sat as child after child, grandchild after grandchild, and came and took this stage and spoke about her long obedience in the same direction, a woman with deep and rich conviction that was such an inspiring example for me of what it would look like, what is possible within the life, a soul who grows in the direction of maturity of Christ.

Church, that's the invitation. Jesus is sustaining all things. It will be hard; it will be bumpy to unroot, to uproot those mental maps in our heads. That's a violent, difficult process to stop believing these lies and step into the reality of Jesus above all things, before all things, sustaining all things. That is a hard, tenuous path, but it's possible. It's possible. It's hard, but it's also the very source of reconciliation for that alienation you feel.

Listen to these last closing verses about how Paul is laboring for his church because he desires so much for these people in Colossae to understand this gospel. *"Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (v. 24)*. There's a whole lot of mystery in this text. I want you to notice that Paul considers this suffering. By the way, he's writing from prison, so he understands suffering. He's a man who suffered much. If you're familiar with his story, it says, *"I rejoice in my sufferings."*

And then he has this kind of cryptic line. He says, *"I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions."* Now, again, full disclosure: I don't know exactly what Paul means here. I don't know what it means for him to say that there's something lacking in Christ's afflictions, so I'm not going to try to explain that. It's just one of those mysteries of the text. Maybe a cop-out, too, but I don't know. But what I do recognize in Paul is the connection between faithfulness to Jesus and suffering.

The reality is that suffering is part and parcel of pastoral ministry. I believe that one of the roles of a pastor is that we do suffer, not in the same way that Christ did, but we absorb the pains and the hurts that take place in this world, and we absorb them, and we allow the cycle of brokenness to stop. But it isn't just pastors. I believe it's also the call of the Christian that we will suffer much because Jesus never skirts that reality. Never forget that we follow a rabbi who, living the life that was intended, the humanity that was intended in a broken world, resulted in suffering and crucifixion.

We should not be surprised when suffering comes our way. We live in a broken world where alienation causes us and others to do all sorts of different things that perpetuate brokenness and violence and all of that. And to live in reality in a world of unreality will be bumpy, and it will cause pain, and it will cause hurt. So, church, may we not frown upon that or even necessarily constantly seek to avoid it. But my hope is that we recognize that suffering is part and parcel to what it means to follow Jesus.

One of the reasons we struggle with this is that one of the stories of the gospel that are swirling in our culture is the idea that your comfort and convenience are paramount above all. I'm not against comfort and convenience; I actually don't think they're wrong there. They're morally neutral, but I just want us to say that that is not the highest value of what it means to follow Jesus. At times, it will be difficult; it will be painful. This world will put the human condition through a painful cycle.

Jesus never promises anything different, but what he does promise is that he walks with you in those things. You are not alienated in your pain and your hurt but rather Jesus, the very rabbi we follow; we are trying to grow in Christ's likeness and find union in him. He walked the road of suffering and of death, and so, of course, those steps may have to be taken in our lives as well. Paul says I fill up in my body the suffering. Somehow, mysteriously, what Paul suffers is connecting him with the sufferings of Christ. Starting in the last half of verse 24, he says,

**for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave**

**me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." vv. 24b-27**

He says after all of those things, after all the alienation you feel, the sufferings you endure, Christ would dwell among us. Among you. Among me. It is this deep, rich thought that God is actually present here. That is the hope of glory. When you feel the pain of alienation, you will be tempted to search for all the tools that were created, whether it was from a childhood that was wounded and difficult and traumatic, or your body had created responses to help cope with the pain of when you were young. Some of those things were good and healthy then, but we have to let those go and work through those pains and those traumas to come before Jesus and say, "Jesus, you, in fact, are our hope of glory." Others are addictions we've pulled along the way to help numb the ache and the pain of that alienation and those things that we run to that we hope will help heal it.

The reality is it will not satisfy. It will either perpetuate brokenness or simply numb you to the real pain that's beneath the surface. Paul is saying this mystery has been revealed to us. It is Christ in you. Christ in us, the hope of glory. You have on invitation the welcome open arms of the God of the universe who is ready to receive you with all of your brokenness, your pain, and your flaws, and he's waiting to just wrap his forgiving arms around you and say, "I will bring the reconciliation your heart longs for. I will welcome you back."

He goes on and says, *"He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end, I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me" (vs. 28-29)*. I love this section because you see the heart of Paul, a pastor to a church, saying, "I so desperately, I strenuously pour my life out to present you as fully mature in Christ."

That has been the backbone of this church since its inception, that we would make and mature more followers of Christ. Our hope, my hope as a leader and as a pastor, is that you all would grow in maturity in Christ. Not only because I believe it is what your heart most desires for, but it's how you find the healing to all that brokenness we carry with us. May you be presented fully mature to Christ.

To close, I want to offer three steps. As I mentioned, the first step to come into this reality is the idea of yielding. Yielding, recognizing that we are not the masters of our own destiny but rather we yield to the very presence and lordship of Jesus, is a way in which we are removing ourselves from the driver's seat and allowing Jesus to take that role. We assume the role of authority and assume that we are the arbiter of right and wrong. But to yield to the presence of Jesus is to let go of the illusion of control, to think that you have control over your life, but to recognize that Jesus is the one sustaining all things. And so the first step in all of this is that we yield.

We yield to the Spirit of God through a perpetual life of surrendering to the presence and the Spirit's power. It is a lifetime of continually coming before God and recognizing in the quiet, in the slowing down, and knowing that I am not in control, "Lord, I yield to your presence."

But yielding isn't enough. We go to the second step, which is to confess. In our yielding, what happens is what is exposed within us in all of the ways we've sought to remedy that alienation in other places. Some of that is stuff that happens to us, the pain and the sin that we absorb, but much of it is also the sins and the failures that we commit. And so we come before God, and we confess, not because God is angry and demands our confession, but rather because we recognize and confess in the presence of a holy God that we are broken. We have made mistakes. We have sinned and sought salvation outside of him. We confess these things, and in that confession, we move towards the forgiveness of God.

Because if there's been an offense in a relationship, there has to be a naming of what was wrong. But this is the second part of confession we often forget and actually the most beautiful part. In a world that says, you do you, do whatever you desire and feel, but yet we have this problem of alienation, confession allows us the ability to actually name what is wrong. Confession is actually the beautiful ability to say, you know what, this is a problem, and you name the problem, and then you're actually able to do something with it.

Part of our culture is floundering around because they don't have the mechanisms to be able to say this is wrong because what's right for you is right for you, what's right for me is right for me. That is a terribly hopeless world to live in simply because we can't name something and say this is a problem. And if you can't name it, you can't move towards healing it. So, confessing is the second step. We yield, we confess, but even confession is not the end of the road. The end of the road is repentance.

Confession is different from repentance because confession is naming the reality of sin, but repentance is actually changing and organizing our life around the reality that was brokenness. So repentance is the actual life change that we embark on. I've named this a problem, and now I repent from it, which means I turn from it. I try to live in a different direction. I try to live more with the grain of Jesus, who's before all things, is in all things, and sustains all things. We yield, confess, and then we repent. In church, this process of yielding, confessing, repenting, yielding, confessing, repenting, it's a pretty good summary of the life of the disciple.

Over and over, day after day, we come before God, and we yield to his presence. We confess the ways that we've gone a different direction, and we say, Lord, would you help me repent from these things and walk a different way? Jesus says, my grace is sufficient. I have never walked

this journey of yielding, confessing, repenting, and found an angry God who would demand more.

But a gospel of economics will say that you can yield to its power, you can confess that you didn't work hard enough to earn that, and you can even try to change your ways, but it will always demand that you earn more. It will always say, that's great, but go work harder. But the gospel of Jesus Christ will say that you can yield, you can confess, and you can repent, and what you find is forgiveness and grace, welcoming you home, inviting you to live again into the reality of God's grace. This is the gospel, the mysterious gift, Christ in you, the hope of glory.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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