Before And After

Joe Slater

"Before-and-After" pictures can be great. Just look how much weight I lost! Did I actually have to wear those baggy sweatpants?

Paul painted a verbal before-and-after picture of the Christians at Colosse and, by extension, of every Christian everywhere at any time. He began by describing their (and our) condition before conversion to Christ: *"alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works"* (Colossians 1:21a). An alien is a stranger, a foreigner, someone who is not a member of the family or a citizen of the nation. The verb "alienated" denotes estrangement from a previous relationship. You see, we were not born sinful, as Calvinism teaches. Rather, when we reached a state of accountability, we chose to sin *("wicked works"),* thereby alienating ourselves from God.

That disastrous course of action made us enemies of God in our minds. "Enemies" denotes not mere opposition, but also hostility and hatred. The mind geared toward the flesh finds the will of God repulsive.

The "after" picture stands in stark contrast to the "before" picture. Now we are *"holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight"* (v. 22). Quite a change from being alienated, enemies, and wicked, wouldn't you say? God cleansed us from sin and set us apart for His service, so we are no longer outsiders to Him. Certainly our attitude has changed from hostility and hatred to love and devotion. He sees us as blameless and above reproach, not because we never sin, but because those sins are forgiven through the death of Jesus. In short, *"He has reconciled (us) in the body of His flesh through death"* (vv. 21b-22a). To reconcile is to restore a friendly relationship between parties that have been at odds with each other. We separated ourselves from God through sin; He reconciled us to Himself through Jesus.

Our fellowship with God will remain *"if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel"* (v. 23a). Tragically, *"some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons"* (1 Timothy 4:1). Let us determine not to be *"tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine"* (Ephesians 4:14). Our hope is in Christ through His gospel. Since that is how we were reconciled to God, we would be foolish indeed to depart from it!

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Collecting Dust

The Bible is a book beloved,

At least we say it's so;

It rests in honor on the shelf

With other books, you know.

And yet its pages, seldom read,

Are given little thrust;

We claim to love this Book of Books,

But it keeps collecting dust!

--Dalton Key (Tulsa, OK) via Facebook

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Everyone wants to be part of a sound congregation; just make sure it isn't sound asleep!

BUILDING A ROAD FOR THE LORD

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me" (Malachi 3:1).

John the Baptist was that messenger. His job was to make a way for the Lord, and he did his job well.

Highway building is destructive before it is constructive. It requires blasting and demolition. The wrecking crew precedes the construction workers. John, like Elijah of old, was a troubler of Israel; he disturbed the peace.

Perhaps we could use an upheaval in our world today. This might wake us up. *"It is high time to awake out of sleep"* (Romans 13:11).

When a highway is put through a town, some residents have to move, some are irritated and complain. You cannot put a highway through a community without a commotion.

How can we expect to clear a way for the Lord when we sit in church on Sunday morning with "Do Not Disturb" written all over our faces? The word of God is called a hammer, a fire, and a sword. You simply cannot use these three things without disturbing somebody!

What would our country do with John the Baptist today? Here was one preacher who did not use an anesthetic! He dug right in and removed the trouble – the sin in the lives of the people.

--Bobby Key (Miami, OK) via Old Paths

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If your mind goes blank, be sure to turn off the volume!