It takes a specialized computer program to run the visuals during our singing time. These programs are called “Church Presentation Software” and there are a couple dozen out there currently. We use one called Media Shout. Another popular one is called Proclaim by Faithlife, the creators of the Logos Bible Software I use. Well Faithlife has just released the results of what songs, hymns, Christmas carols and Easter music have been sung the most in the last 3 years by the congregations that use their software. This is one of the top 3 hymns …

Amazing grace – how sweet the sound – that saved a wretch like me!
   I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.
   Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved;
   How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!
   Thru many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come;
   Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.

(By the way “How Great Thou Art” and “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow” were the only hymns sung more in churches who use Proclaim software. “Hark The Herald Angels Sing” was the most popular Christmas song; “Hosanna” & “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” were the most popular songs around Easter.)

So, how is it that Amazing Grace continues to speak to generation after generation of English speaking Christians? The first three verses were written back about the time the United States declared its independence from Britain by a slave trader turned pastor named John Newton. It was not considered one of his better poems. It is very simple with most of the words having just one syllable. The fourth verse is quoted in Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe. John Newton himself was not just a crude, coarse slave trader but from a young age was extremely hard headed and regularly chose to do the opposite of what he was told. This brought him into many life threatening situations where he would think about God for a short time but then just return to his obnoxious & vulgar ways. So when he was genuinely willing to repent & submit his life to Jesus, he wondered if God could forgive someone as persistently sinful as he was.

There is a reason that “Amazing Grace” is sung publicly about 10 million times every year – not including what people do in the quietness of their home or shower. Jesus Christ made forgiveness and redemption possible no matter what the sins. Any person can be delivered from despair through the mercy of God. To which we add our hearty “Amen” (what?) God’s grace gives us what we don’t deserve. God’s grace applies to us what we cannot earn. God’s grace makes us what we could never be. God’s grace is truly amazing! (By the way the title came from DL Moody’s hymnal & the words were applied to 20 other melodies BEFORE the one we sing.)

PROPOSITION: Although we have wronged God & others in our thoughts and actions, faithful believers are seen as completely holy in God sight, without blemish and free from accusation.
I. Before and after

A. Before: alienated from God enemies in our mind because of our actions Col 1:21
As we noted last week, before we turn our lives over to Jesus as our Savior and as our Lord, we are alienated from God – we do wrong things and we get upset with God or His ways in our minds. As v 21 says, READ. This may sound harsh to us but it is very true. It is the reason that John Newton wrote, “that saved a wretch like me”. The sad content of our daily news constantly affirms this truth.

B. Now: reconciled by Christ’s death on the cross Col 1:22a
“But now” – notice those next 2 small words as we come into v 22. “But now”, we have this huge contrast. READ v 22. There is this night & day level contrast here between what was (without Jesus) and now what is (with Jesus). As the ex-slave trader, John Newton put it, “I once was blind, but now I see, was lost but now am found.” This concept of reconciliation with God, that God initiates, is not just a universal theory; it is a personal truth. Those who were once far away from God have been brought close to him; those who used to be at war are at peace with him.

How does this happen? “by Christ’s physical body through death”. Jesus’ death allows God’s enemy to become God’s friend. The slate of sin has been wiped clean, and we look forward to the day we will stand before God holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation. This is a historic act, not just some wishful thinking. This happened at a point of time, Look back at v 20 and we see this same means of reconciliation described. READ v 19-20. We have been reconciled with God – we have been brought to peace with God, through Jesus the Christ’s “blood shed on the cross.” These two descriptions in v 20 & 22 are a picture of “the means” of our being reconciled. They are also reflected in the two pictures we focus on each time we partake in communion (or the Lord’s supper): Jesus’ body broken for us even though He was without sin – pictured in the non-leavened bread and Jesus’ blood shed for us pictured in the cup.

And this all starts with God’s initiative – God makes the first step – God is not hiding from us or making us prove ourselves worthy first!

- v 12 – God the Father is the One who qualifies us to share in the inheritance of His Holy people, even though we were the unholy ones.
- v 13a – He rescued us from our captivity to the powers of darkness (satan & the demonic) even though we were enemies in our minds to the true God & His ways.
- v 13b – God brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves – into Christ’s Kingdom even though we were alienated from Him
- v 14 – God is the One who redeems us and forgives our sins. He took the initiative, we didn’t somehow earn or repay a debit so we could be forgiven
“But then” — there is this monumental and major change which God initiates, God sacrifices for, pays for, and freely offers those of us who were formerly alienated enemies of God. God — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit — took the initiative & made the sacrifice so we can be redeemed, forgiven, reconciled, brought to peace. God does this reconciliation through an objective, loving, & sacrificial act in history which we can choose to respond to or not — we can accept or reject — we can surrender to or continue to go our own way. It would be foolish to base our standing with God by how much we do, how we currently feel, or what is happening to us? There is a great peace and solid rock God has given us to stand on through Jesus death on the cross to reconcile us. Negative problems and feelings storm around us and in us, BUT GOD offers us peace through Jesus in the midst of those storms!

II. Who we are now!

While the Bible paints the darkest possibilities for humans apart from Jesus Christ, it also give us the highest & noblest vision of humans seen anywhere when we are in Christ.

READ v 22. God’s purpose in reconciling us is not just that our past sins are forgiven or that we are not now His enemies, but so that Jesus can present us to the universe as completely holy in God’s sight, without any blemish and free from any accusation. God’s goal is to transform us for the future, not just eliminate past debts! We don’t have to try to bribe or maneuver God into accepting us. We aren’t making promises we can’t keep – like “God I’ll never sin again” or “I’m going to do everything you tell me to do in the future” – this is what God does. In fact, God is committed to this transformation in each of His spiritual children! In Jesus, not only are we freed from the penalties of our past thoughts & actions, not only do we have a right relationship with God now, but we will be totally transformed. That is actually what the Bible reserves the word “predestined” for – Romans 8:29 “For those God foreknew, He also predestined to (what has God predestined us to?) be conformed to the image of His Son.” While others hear the word “predestined” and worry about whether God will fairly give every person a chance – as followers of Jesus who study the Bible, we are overwhelmed by the fact God is committed to do the impossible in each of our lives – transform us to be like Jesus in our actions, thoughts and attitudes! Wow! God is working in our lives now so we can be presented to the Universe in the future as completely holy IN GOD’S SIGHT without any blemish and freed from any accusation. So who are we? Amazingly God sees us now as we will be in the future after His amazing, unbelievable, humanly impossible transformation.

A. Holy in God’s sight

Through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, God sees us now as holy. And God is committed to bring us through this broken world in a way that will actually transform our character so all our thoughts, attitudes and actions are right and good in God’s sight. To rightly follow Jesus when we don’t have the ability to always do & think rightly, we must first come to the recognition that we are “unholy” or sinners – opposed to God and His ways. But God doesn’t leave us there – “humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up”. Is your confidence in Jesus WHO has paid the penalty of your sin, is already providing a genuine relationship with the perfect
God and will transform you into a holy people by transforming our lives? This process was accomplished on the cross, is now in process, and will be completed after we die and are given our resurrected bodies. God does not make peace (Col. 1:20) so that we can continue to be rebels! He has reconciled us to Himself so that we may share His life and His holiness.

B. Without blemish
Those who have an NIV Bible open, let's read v 22 in the triumph it is. READ. God, through Jesus' death of the cross for our sins, now sees us as "without blemish" and will transform us so that is how we will be presented to the Universe in the future. To be "without blemish" is to not have any flaws, to have no imperfections, and to be totally blameless. Obviously God sees something in us that we've tried all our life to do, but haven't come close to succeeding. It is amazing that God looks at His children right now and sees no blemish in us because Jesus' righteousness has been credited to our account. And at the very same time, He doesn't leave us where we are, but uses the people and situations around us to transform us so we will be perfect. Right now I may feel like a screw-up or failure. But God sees me as blameless AND is working right now in my life so in the future I will actually be more than I can imagine!

C. Free from accusation
While "holy and blameless" were regularly used in the Old Testament to describe the type of sacrifice they were to bring to God, "free from accusation" was used in courtroom-like situations. It goes beyond "blameless" to say no one – NO ONE – can bring a credible charge against us. Not only will we be doing what is right and good but nothing we do can even be misunderstood – no one can bring an accusation that has even a hint of truth to it. Now that is the marvelous transformation God is working on in our lives – don't get out of the process. satan, the accuser of the brethren, cannot make a charge stick against those whom Christ has reconciled. Not only will we be actually transformed, but we will become unaccusable – free from any accusation or charges.

III. Our Challenge
Our challenge is to believe this – to receive this – to embrace this wonderful free gift of Jesus. It is important that we recognize what God is committed to doing in our lives! Christ's reconciliation makes believers holy, blameless, and beyond reproach before Him. God sees us now as we will be in heaven when we are glorified. The process of spiritual growth involves becoming in practice what God already sees us as. The most important thing in our Christian lives is not how we look in our own sight, or in the sight of others — but how we look in God's sight. God is telling us here that we already have a perfect standing in Jesus and God is working to transform us so it will be totally true in our character as well. Why do we seek that anywhere else? Whether in our performance, in how people view us, or in the excuses we come up with so we will look better in our own sight.
On the negative side, if this hasn’t happened to you personally, it has happened to some people you know well. A person is told they are no good, failures and they will never amount to anything. There is a piece of truth in that since we all sin and fall short of God’s glory. So while at first, we try to prove by our actions that we aren’t screw-ups who can’t do much right or bumbling clowns who always seem to say the wrong thing – we do things or say things which are not good, not right and foolish. Falling short of our own expectations over and over again, we start to believe our failings in a dysfunctional way. There is this hidden, depressive, self-pity I quoted at length on last week where we both know we are at fault, but simultaneously believe it’s not our fault. And we wrongly conclude this is who we will always be. If you & I are willing to truly repent of our wrongs & failings and take a step, no matter how small, towards God’s right ways – the death of Jesus reconciles us to the perfect God and unleashes God to transform us so one day in the future we will be publicly presented by God Himself as holy, without blemish and free from accusation. Grab hold of who you are in Christ and what He is doing & going to do in your life! Don’t deny the work that Jesus has done for you through physically dying on the cross! Don’t let feelings of self-pity, discouragement, depression or others’ criticism be your final conclusion!

But focus on who we are in Jesus as our emphasis has been today. On the positive side if this hasn’t happened to you, you probably have heard other people testify to it. This is where someone around us sees some positive in us that we do not see or really believe. They encourage us in that positive. We then start living up to those positive expectations and in the process we change. Back in the early 1980’s, a national leader of our EFCA Association came out to Vermont to visit Bill Wick and I. Having a later conversation about me, the wife said to Bill, “Oh, he’s that quiet distinguished man we met earlier.” “Quiet” and “distinguished” are two words you rarely hear people who know me, say of me – in fact, it didn’t take her long to take back the “quiet” designation! But “dignified” – she saw something in me that I could not see. So for the next decade, every time I saw that couple, I was the most dignified person you could imagine – way more than I am capable of. It was such a privilege to be genuinely thought of in this way that it provided a natural motivation for me to do even more. Jesus goes farther – He not only sees something special in us that we can not do on our own, but then He is going to work to make that happen. So right now God is not just training & empowering giftedness in your life, but He’s also developing some super special characteristics in you that are not natural. I am not only Neal, but I am a saint & a child of the King. You are not only your name, but in Jesus you are a saint & a child of the King. Jesus looks at us and sees us in a positive light that we can’t see in our self.

God has made you and I HOLY. It is not just if we lie less, deceive less, curse less, be greedy less, be selfish less, complain less, blame others less that we will be more holy or more righteous. God has declared us HOLY. Instead of just seeing something in us we can’t see, God genuinely knows He can & will develop that HOLINESS in us in both words and actions. Keep overcoming in the power of Jesus.