

Colossians 1:21-23

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-1/colossians-121-23/>

Paul describes the cosmic path of reconciliation and encourages the Colossian believers to stay faithful to it.

Building on the previous section, Paul continues to talk about the power of Jesus to transform life. Beforehand, Paul talked about this in a general sense, here he begins to talk in a manner more personal to the believers in Colossae.

Paul mentions the state of the Colossians prior to coming to faith in Jesus, who is the majestic creator and sustainer of all things, saying: *And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind.* The beginning preposition *and* connects the general working of Christ in heaven and earth spoken of in the preceding verses directly to the Colossian believers. Prior to them coming to faith, they were *alienated and hostile* to the very One who created them.

Paul wants to acknowledge that the Colossian believers, like all of us, were separated from God prior to coming to faith. He wants to remind them of the journey they have been on—*formerly* is perhaps the most important word in this section. Before the power of Christ set in, the Colossians were *alienated and hostile in mind*. To be *alienated* is to be estranged, left out. Excluded from relationship and fellowship with God.

The term for *hostile in mind* is the Greek word “*echthros*,” which means “enemy” or “hated.” So, it suggests being an *enemy* in your own *mind*. In this case, being *hostile in mind* toward Christ, our creator and sustainer, is to be hostile against yourself. At odds with your own true self-interest. Being *alienated and hostile* toward Christ is to be in a state of misalignment with reality. This would inevitably lead to a great deal of internal pain and confusion.

Naturally, being estranged from what is good, which is Christ, leads to being *engaged in evil deeds*. How we perceive leads to how we act. Being *hostile in mind* towards Christ would cause us to perceive evil to be good, and self-destructive acts to be beneficial.

Paul is showing the Colossians how *evil* thought leads to *evil* behavior. Because if that is true, so is the inverse, that right thought leads to right behavior.

Right thought is made possible by the working of Jesus to create in us a new reality. Paul presents that new reality as *yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death*. Reconciliation is about taking the distortions of sin—the adoption of evil, perversion, and non-reality—and setting it to rights. Re-aligning with truth and re-establishing reality in place of falsity. Jesus’ *death* on the cross served as a way to *reconcile* each of us, bringing us into harmony with our creator. Jesus did this by sacrificing his *fleshly body*, putting to *death* his flesh in place of our own. He bore our sins, that we might be reconciled to God through His death.

Jesus stated that this new birth is available to all who have enough faith to look upon Him on the cross, hoping to be delivered from the venom of sin (John 3:14-15). Paul is explicit in this passage: Only through Jesus are these realities of reconciliation with God experienced.

He did this *in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach*. The death of Jesus allows us an avenue to be in relationship to God as His child, thus ending our estrangement. That is a gift, and the gift and calling of God is irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

Once we are born physically, we need to learn to walk. Once we learn to walk, we need to learn to walk in ways that prosper. It is the same for spiritual birth. We receive a new nature through Christ; that is a gift, just as physical birth is a gift. But we must learn to walk in that new nature, setting aside the old, sinful nature, in order to gain the full benefit of our new life in Christ. Only through the resurrection power of Jesus can we be born, and only through the resurrection power of Jesus can we walk in our new nature.

Being born is a gift of God, but learning to walk in His ways requires a choice—an active obedience. It is this obedience that allows Jesus to *present* believers *before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach*. We know this phrase refers to the rewards of life rather than our relationship with God as children, because Paul makes this statement conditional, stating *if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard*. If this referred to our new birth it would mean that Jesus's death was insufficient. It would mean we must believe in Jesus, and also *continue in the faith* in order to be reconciled to God, which would contradict what Paul has stated earlier in this chapter. We are reconciled to God solely through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

However, Paul consistently teaches that each believer will be presented before God, to receive rewards for deeds done while living (Romans 8:17b; 14:12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-17; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7-9; Ephesians 6:5-8; Philippians 2:5-10; Colossians 3:23).

In order to be presented before God as one who was faithful in this life, and gain the greatest rewards of life, we must *continue* living *in the faith firmly established and steadfast* in the truth of God's word. We are accepted unconditionally as children in God's family, but must walk in a manner that is *steadfast* in order to gain the rewards available to believers, and experience the greatest blessings available through a walk of obedience.

In order to gain the greatest rewards available from this life, we must avoid being *moved away from the hope of the gospel*. *Hope* infers something that is future. Once we are born again, we are fully accepted by God due to Christ's death on the cross. But we also have a future *hope* that we will be delivered from the presence of sin, through being resurrected into a new body. The *hope of the gospel* also includes believing that God will reward those who resist the temptations of this world and suffer alongside Christ (Colossians 3:23).

God has made it possible for us to walk in the light. Walking in the light brings the greatest of rewards from God, but also brings rejection and loss from the world. Most anyone would choose light over darkness, but it takes a renewed perspective to discern what is truly light.

The acts of Jesus make it possible to walk in the light, but intimacy with God is still a choice. We are always accepted by God because of what Jesus did, but in order to walk in fellowship with God we must *continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast*. We cannot fully participate in His Kingdom without choosing to do so. To participate, we must *continue in the faith*.

We must continue to trust in God. A trust which was *firmly established* through the work of Epaphras and the early commitments of the Colossian believers (Colossians 1:3-8). Paul is reminding them of their first love, so to speak. In Revelation, Jesus reminded the church at Ephesus to return to their first love in order to gain the fullest reward available for faithfulness, the reward available to those who “overcome” (Revelation 2:1-7). Jesus stated that He overcame, and invites His children in the faith to overcome even as He overcame, and gain the great reward that He gained (Revelation 3:21).

The word for *firmly established* in the phrase where Paul encourages the Colossians to *continue in the faith* means “to lay a foundation” or “grounded.” Paul partners this with the Greek word “hedraios,” translated *steadfast*, which means “settled” or “sitting/sedimentary.” So, their faith is grounded (*firmly established*) and settled (*steadfast*). It is not going anywhere. The way to live a life that pleases God, a life He will greatly reward, is to live according to the truth of God’s word continuously and without wavering, no matter the obstacles that might be encountered.

So, again, the blessing of relationship with God—the treasured reconciliation made possible by Jesus—is ours unconditionally because of Jesus, but is only experienced when we are unwavering, continually making the choice to remain faithful. Paul adds, *and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard*. Paul is orienting them. He is saying, in effect, you have been put on the right path, continue on it. Stay the course. Keep your hope. Continue to believe that Jesus will make it worthwhile. Don’t let the world beat you down.

The hope of the gospel, that we are to steadfastly cling to, *was proclaimed in all creation under heaven*. Here, Paul reestablishes the connection between Jesus’ work in each individual life and the greater working of His Kingdom. All of God’s workmanship, all that He created, which Paul has said is every single thing in existence, is trumpeting the gospel. It is all bearing witness, *proclaiming* the supremacy of Christ. Paul says something similar to this in his letter to the Romans, where he asserts that everyone has heard the gospel, because all of nature, all God created, continually speaks of God (Romans 10:18). This verse in Romans quotes Psalm 19, which begins:

The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
(Psalm 19:1-2)

“All of creation tells of God, and makes His attributes known.”
(Romans 1:20)

A final connection is made, speaking of the gospel of Christ—*and of which* (the gospel), *I, Paul was made a minister*. The word for *minister* here, “*diakonos*,” is the same used to describe Epaphras in verse 7. It means “errand-bringer” or “someone who serves on behalf of another.” Paul is telling the Colossians this: I am not asking you to do, think, or perceive anything short of what I myself am doing. We are united in our calling. We all have the same opportunity to serve Christ, and gain the great benefits promised for our obedience.

Each day we must choose to walk in the darkness of our old nature or the light of our new nature in Christ. We must choose *the hope of the gospel* or the path of *alienation* and a *hostile mind* that leads to death. In the case of believers who choose the path of *alienation* and a *hostile mind*, they are choosing to walk in the wrath of God from which they have been delivered.

As Paul teaches in his letter to the Romans, God’s wrath is poured out by giving people over to their fleshly desires (Romans 1:24-28). When we choose the flesh, we are alienated from the Spirit, and will produce the fruits of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-26). When we walk in the flesh, we experience the death of fellowship with God and others, the rewards of living faithfully, with peace, with wisdom, and many other amazing benefits that come with living in a manner that is *steadfast* in the truth of the good news of Christ.

Biblical Text

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—²³ if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.