

Read Co 1:21-23

Verse 21 “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. (Have you given any serious thought of yourself in this respect? What a terrible state to be in as a human being created in the image of God for relationship with Him.)

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 – “(Can you grasp the contrast here? We were this way toward God – *alienated, enemies, evil* and God was this way toward us – He gave His perfect Son’s life to make us *holy, without blemish, and free from accusation*. We didn’t do it for God; God did it for us – remarkable!) The extent and the depth of God’s love for us is unfathomable – Paul says it so profoundly in Eph 3:17&18, “...I pray that you (believers in Jesus Christ), being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how **wide** and **long** and **high** and **deep** is the love of Christ (*for us*), and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”)

Verse 23 “if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved 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.” (Because of God’s unrivaled love for us in Christ we can *continue on established and firm, not moved from the hope within us*.)

In these three verses Paul underscored three key considerations for the Colossian believers by describing:

1. Who they once were (1:21)
2. Who they now were (1:22,13)
3. How they were to live as a result (1:23)

There was no question about the identity of Paul’s audience in Colosse. They were genuine believers in Jesus Christ (1:2, 4-6, 8-14, 22). The context undeniably substantiates this (unless, of course, your hermeneutic is faulty).

As believers in Jesus Christ we have the mind of Christ. Think about that for a moment. Because of the fact that Jesus is within us we have the capacity to think His same thoughts. His words in the Bible reveal His thoughts.

From Paul’s description of the reconciliation of “all things” – the universe in general to God in v20 he shifts his focus to the Colossian believers specifically in v21 – “You” and he speaks first of who they once were and secondly of who they now were (v22).

First Paul addresses their **former condition** which consisted of five prominent characteristics:

1. They were, Gentiles and Jews alike, collectively and individually equally under the penalty and power of sin (Ro 3:9). Although their practice of sin varied, their position was the same: separate from Christ, without God and without hope (Eph 2:12).
2. They were alienated from God (‘estranged’, ‘cut off’, ‘separated’, literally - ‘transferred to another owner’ – the perfect tense of the Gr. word denotes a fixed state or condition). This was the case from the time of conception (Ps 51:5) to the time of conversion (Isa 59:2).
3. They were enemies of God – actively opposed to and willfully violating God’s moral principles (Ro 1:29-32).
4. They were at enmity with God in their minds – hostile in their thinking and decision-making (Ro 1:28; 2Co 4:4).
5. They were characterized by evil behavior – evil thinking produces evil living – their lives were stained with sin. Their problem was not ignorance, but willful love of sin. And it was from this darkness of sin that God had brought them into the marvelous light of the Savior’s undying love (Eph 5:8; Co 1:14).

Secondly Paul addressed their **present condition**. They had been “reconciled” to God by Christ’s physical body through His death (Eph 2:16). We could never do this on our own (Ro 5:6-10). The verb “reconciled” is in the aorist tense, which identifies an action that took place at point in time in the past the results of which continue on in the present – from their former state to their current state, from a position of *alienation* from God to a position of *acceptance* by God (remarkable).

There are past, present and future perspectives to God’s spiritual work in the lives of believers:

The past perspective looks back to the time the Colossian believers were saved by their faith in Christ. Paul chooses his words carefully here in describing the fact it was Jesus’ physical body that died on the cross, contrary to the false teachers’ claim that Jesus did not have a physical body. It was Jesus’ physical death that met the requirement for sin’s penalty and provided forgiveness for sin. Hebrews 9:22 reminds us that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

The only way God’s stated penalty for sin can be paid for is by the physical death of the one guilty of it which includes all of us (Ro 3:23, 5:12). If Christ did not have a real physical body this payment could not be made by Him on our behalf, it’s that simple. Death must take place either by each of us individually or by Jesus’ death on behalf of all of us.

The future perspective of God’s spiritual work in our lives looks ahead to the ultimate goal of God the Father in reconciling all believers to Himself, which is to present them in Christ Jesus in heaven for all eternity. The verb “present” means ‘to stand beside’ and in view here is that future day when all believers will stand beside each other in the righteousness of Jesus Christ before the presence of Almighty God. This will take place at the rapture when the entire body of Christ – the true Church will be presented to God in heaven by Christ (Eph 5:25-27; 1 Th 4:13-18). Our salvation as believers will be complete when we are presented to God by Christ as holy, without blemish, and free from accusation. Believers in Jesus Christ today are saints. We are holy, blameless (or ‘without blemish’ – pictures animals that were without flaw and worthy to be presented to God as an offering), and above reproach by position but not in practice (Not by our personal conduct as believers but in our position as a believer in Christ – We have His righteousness and standing before God – 2 Co 5:21; 1 Jn 4:17). We are responsible before God to live holy, blameless and above reproach lives but none of us can do this perfectly. Our salvation will not be complete until we are in heaven in our glorified bodies, at which time, we will no longer have a sin nature. Heaven is our possession right now by inheritance and one day will be our home for eternity by privilege and experience.

The present perspective to God’s spiritual work in our lives involves doctrinal integrity. Continuing in the faith is a necessary prerequisite and evidence of the fact that we have been reconciled to God. Our doctrinal beliefs are to be consistent with the Word of God and we are to stand firm in them.

Verse 23 begins with the conditional particle “If” which seems to imply that believers, since that is whom Paul is addressing in this letter, can lose their salvation if they fail to live the way a child of God is to be living. Those who take the position that Paul is referring here to merely professing believers who never really personally accepted Jesus as their Savior in the first place and therefore were not genuine believers, cannot support this view from the context.

That Paul is speaking to genuine believers in Jesus is unquestionable as I pointed out earlier in this message. That this is indeed the case is not only true from the preceding context but from the immediate context as well. In the Gr. NT there are four classes of conditional sentences. Ray Summers in his Essentials of New Testament Greek offers the following explanation of these conditions (pp. 108-10):

1. First class condition *affirms* the reality of the condition – the condition is assumed to be true and the ‘if’ is best translated ‘since’.
2. Second class condition is *contrary to fact* condition – the condition stated is not true, it’s simply not the case.
3. Third class condition is the *probable future* condition – it’s not taking place now but probably will in the future.
4. Fourth class condition is the *possible future* condition – it’s possible that this could happen but it’s not likely.

The “if” in v23 is a first class condition affirming the reality of the condition and is best translated ‘since’. Because the people Paul was addressing were genuine believers in Jesus Christ Paul was confident they would continue in their faith just as they had been. They believed the Gospel when Epaphras shared it with them. Epaphras reported to Paul in vv4-8 that their faith in Christ Jesus was evident by their love for all the saints and that they had been growing and bearing spiritual fruit ever since the day they heard the Gospel as a sure sign of their love in the Spirit.

They were not only continuing in their faith, they were “established and firm” in their faith and had “not moved from the hope held out in the Gospel” they had heard and believed, the text says in v23. Paul in Ga 1:6-9 stressed the importance of the Gospel of Christ and the need to remain steadfast in it, accepting no other gospel but this.

The faith referred to here was their faith in the body of Biblical truth essential to the doctrine of salvation. The issue here was doctrinal accuracy. That’s why Paul in the first two chapters of this letter was presenting doctrinal truth. You can’t live the truth without knowledge of the truth – you have to know it to do it. You can know it and not do it but you can’t do it if you don’t know it.

Although the doctrinal convictions of the Colossian believers were being challenged by false teachers, they had remained steadfast in their faith and Paul was affirming and encouraging them in this.

If your faith is in the wrong object it doesn’t matter how sincere, pure, or commendable it is. Faith in anything other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not saving faith and offers no certainty of heaven.

The point Paul was making in the remainder of v23 was this: The Gospel that was preached to the Colossians was the same Gospel that was preached to all classes of people in all countries of the world. This was the Gospel that Paul was a servant of (1 Ti 1:11-12).

If you were looking for a prescription for emotional stability, these verses offer it. We have four basic needs that establish emotional stability:

1. The need to be loved – Christ’s death on the cross is the most radical expression of the divine love of God for us that demonstrates in no uncertain terms that God loves us and will not let us go (Ro 8:35-39).
2. The need to be forgiven – Christ’s death on the cross breaks through the barrier of sin that separates us from God and welds us to Him in the inseparable bond of unconditional love (Jn 3:16).
3. The need for security – Christ’s death on the cross wraps us in the unbreakable grip of God’s love that embraces us for eternity (Jn 10:28).
4. The need for hope – Christ’s death on the cross gives us a confident hope for the future that cannot be destroyed by any circumstance in life because it rests in a Person whose love cannot fail to hold us no matter how hard we try to break away (He 11:1).

Permit me to paraphrase these verses in summary fashion:

We were estranged from and enemies of God in our thinking which was evidenced by our sinful behavior. But God has brought us into a right relationship with Himself through Christ’s physical death and we are holy in His sight, defect free and not guilty of the death penalty for sin.

Given our right relationship with God through belief in Jesus Christ we will undoubtedly continue in this relationship with God on the firmly established ground of our salvation, resting securely in the hope of our eternal home in heaven.

This incredible message of God’s remarkable grace that we heard and responded to by faith is the same message that has been proclaimed to every single creature on earth, and Paul was proclaiming this same message.

In just two verses we find the dramatic life-changing difference Jesus can make in a person’s life when that person chooses to believe what God has said in the Bible. From alienated, enemies, and evil to holy, without blemish, and free from accusation. Why would you be compelled to do anything about something you didn’t realize was a problem? It’s

typically only when you realize you have a problem needing to be dealt with that you consider what you need to do about it.

What's the opposite of "enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior?" How about, "Allies in your minds because of your good behavior?"

The greatest battleground is in the mind. Wars are won or lost in the war rooms of our minds where the battle plans are drawn up. That's why in Co 3:2 when Paul gets into the area of practical Christian living that he starts where it all starts in the mind – the mind set on the flesh does what the flesh desires but the mind set on the Spirit does what the Spirit desires (Ro 8:5).

Illustration: ("Love of God", 750 Engaging Illustrations p. 434)

In his book *Enjoying God*, Lloyd Ogilvie writes: "My formative years ingrained the *quid pro quo* (one thing in return for another) into my attitude toward myself: *do and you'll receive; perform and you'll be loved*. When I got good grades, achieved, and was a success, I felt acceptance from my parents. My dad taught me to fish and hunt and worked hard to provide for us, but I rarely heard him say, 'Lloyd, I love you.' He tried to show it in actions, and sometimes I caught a twinkle of affirmation in his eyes. But I still felt empty. When I became a Christian, I immediately became so involved in discipleship activities that I did not experience the profound healing of the grace I talked about theoretically I'll never forget as long as I live the first time I really experienced healing grace. I was a postgraduate student at the University of Edinburgh. Because of financial pressures I had to accordion my studies into a shorter than usual period. Carrying a double load of classes was very demanding, and I was exhausted by the constant feeling of never quite measuring up. No matter how good my grades were, I thought they could be better. Sadly, I was not living the very truths I was studying. Although I could have told you that the Greek words for 'grace' and 'joy' are *charis* and *chara*, I was not experiencing them. My beloved professor, Dr. James Stewart, that slightly built dynamo of a saint, saw into my soul with x-ray vision. One day in the corridor of New College he stopped me. He looked me in the eye intensely. Then he smiled warmly, took my coat lapels in his hands, drew me down to within a few inches from his face, and said, "Dear boy, you are loved now!" God loves us *now*, not when we get better. God loves us *now*, as we are."

"... God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Ro 5:8).

Benediction: "To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24, 25).