

If Indeed You Continue In The Faith

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[0 : 0 0] and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the church, he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. Then in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for your word, and I thank you for the ways that you've inspired the apostle Paul to write to this church in Colossae. And I ask that you would use these words to encourage our hearts to bring love and worship for you, that we would be awestruck by the ways that you have sent Christ to reconcile enemies to yourself. Be with us as we hear your word, and your spirit attend its preaching. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. We're picking up our series in Colossians this week. Last time we were in August, we looked at verses 15 through 20, where Paul draws back again and again to this theme of the supremacy of Christ. Paul tells the church in Colossae that Christ is the head of creation, and that he's the head of the church. Really, he tells them Christ is supreme. Christ is head over everything. Christ is preeminent over everything. And this church in Colossae, led by Epaphras, had begun to flirt with heresy. Paul doesn't call out the heresy directly, like he does in Galatians, where it's clear the Judaizers were distorting the gospel. He doesn't call out the heresy directly, but he warns them in chapter 2, see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Whatever the heresy was, or whatever the false teaching was, Paul warns them of people teaching philosophies and empty deceit, or lies that are merely human philosophies or demonic heresy. Paul's approach to them is to give them solid biblical truth, to give them the right theology and a right understanding of who Christ is, what Christ accomplished, and why it matters to those who have faith in him. The heresy spreading in Colossae, like all heresies, was not according to Christ. And so Paul decides to write them this letter, giving them the according to Christ theology the philosophies were missing. We've seen Paul say,

Christ is supreme over creation and over the church, and in our passage today, he's going to make the case that Christ is supreme over our reconciliation to God. Christ is supreme over our reconciliation to God. Paul's not content with them only knowing that Christ is supreme. He wants more for the people in Colossae, just like he wants more for the people who read this letter 2,000 years later. Paul wants to strengthen the faith of those who have trusted in the supreme Christ. And he does this in a similar way that he did it when he wrote the book, the letter to the church in Ephesus. He writes it like a historical biography. He personalizes it, telling them what really happened, what happened behind the scenes, and what things were really like, and what things the parties involved are really like. These few verses are really like a biography of our life. They're a biography of all of mankind. And we'll look at this Christ-centered biography in three different points or three different stages. We'll look at our alienation from God. We'll look at our reconciliation to God. And finally, we'll look at our foundation, our alienation, reconciliation, and foundation. Starting with our alienation from God,

Paul has no reservations about telling this church what they were really like. He posed no punches when it comes to telling them the truth about who they really were before Christ. He lays it out clearly like he does in the book to Ephesians. We were enemies of God. Look at what he says. You

were alienated.

[5 : 02] You were hostile. You were doing evil deeds. He goes into even more detail in the book of Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 1 through 3, where he says, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once walked, following the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

And we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. Paul is brutally honest. By nature, you were children of wrath, following our own mind and flesh and desires, hating God and hating our neighbor. Not a very flattering biography so far. Paul says, if you really want to understand who Christ is and what he's done for you and why he's supreme, you need to start by understanding how messed up you really were, how fallen and deceived and rebellious you were. You were literally a dead man walking, dead in your trespasses and sins, walking in the desires and passions of your flesh, spiritually dead because of your sin. And you can thank your parents for that. And they can thank their parents and their parents all the way back to our first parents, Adam and Eve. That's really where our biography starts, in a garden. It starts in the garden, the garden of Eden.

A perfect garden created by God for man, with fellowship with God and a promise. A covenant, a promise of eternal life. Do this and live. Live forever in fellowship with the triune God.

Walk with God in person. Fellowship with him. Talk with him. Worship and glorify him unhindered. But that wasn't enough. Adam and Eve traded that in an instant. Listen to Genesis 2, 6 and 7, 1 to what Adam and Eve desired. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

[7 : 27] Then the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. Eve goes from seeing it as food, to seeing it as something that's visually appealing, to finally seeing it as something that's desired to make someone wise.

There's a connection here in this progression, between the desire to be wise apart from God, and the hostility in mind that Paul lists in our passage.

This desire for something leading to the committing of a sin. So you're desiring something, you want it, committing that sin, is really being hostile in mind to the things of God.

It's living in and carrying out the desires of your flesh. Our parents sold themselves into slavery. Not necessarily slavery to Satan, but slavery to sin.

Just like a child that's born to enslaved parents cannot be any freer than the parents themselves, you and I as descendants of Adam and Eve cannot be any freer.

[8 : 32] You and I as descendants of Adam and Eve are slaves of sin. While studying for this, I read a story about Lady Huntington, who was a countess who played a role in the 18th century revival in England.

She invited one of her upper class friends, a duchess, to hear George Whitfield preach. This is the response that she received. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth.

This is highly offensive and insulting, and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.

Maybe, and I hope not, maybe this is what your heart is telling you. Maybe your heart and your head are telling you this morning, or telling me this morning, or telling the Holy Spirit, do you know who I am?

Do you know who my parents are? Do you know how much good I've done? I'm not a slave to anybody. I'm not in anybody's control. Or the classic line of, I'd never kill anybody.

[9 : 42] God will see that one day, I'm a pretty good person. If so, then you're in good company with a group of Jews that Jesus interacted with in John 8. Listen to how Jesus answers a similar objection in John 8, verses 31 through 36.

Jesus said to the disciples who had believed him, If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth. The truth will set you free.

They answered him, We are offspring of Abraham, and you have never been a slave to anyone. How is it that you say, You will become free? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you,

Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

The slave does not remain in the house forever. The son remains forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. Jesus doesn't care about your high ranking and good breeding. He doesn't care if you're an English duchess, or if you can trace your lineage back to Abraham. He doesn't even care if you like his words or not. He loves mankind too much to keep this a secret.

[10:55] Everyone, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. Paul tells the church in Romans, Romans 6.16, Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either to sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.

It's this sin, our sin nature, our slavery to sin, that keeps us from God, that alienates us from God. This biography has not been very flattering so far.

We've seen the reality that all people, all descendants of Adam, are alienated from God. They're hostile in mind. They're dead in their sin. They're slaves to sin because our father Adam, not just Adam's sin, but our sin too.

God's holy, and God can't even look upon evil. He punishes evil and sin with death. Left alone, like Paul says, all humans are God-hating, rebellious people destined for hell.

We're naturally children of wrath. Something inside of us doesn't like to hear that. Something inside of us doesn't want to hear the depths of our depravity.

[12:18] We bristle when somebody points out a failure or a sin. Even when we see it ourselves, our gut reaction is to hide it, deny it, or excuse it.

We want to look righteous to others around us, even though we know deep down in our hearts we aren't. Or maybe sometimes we have a different reaction. Sometimes we can see our sin, but that's all we see.

We see our sin and it overwhelms us. We see our sin and it paralyzes us. I know because I've been there and I've talked to some of you who have been there. Maybe some of you are even there right now.

Maybe this talk of sin and offense against God is resulting in anxiety. Maybe you're thinking to yourself, I'm such a sinner.

You have no idea, no idea the depths of my sin and the lack of love that I feel towards God. Martin Lloyd-Jones made this comment when talking about the visibility that we have to our own sin.

[13:20] He says, you will never make yourself feel that you're a sinner because there's a mechanism in you as a result of sin that will always be defending you against every accusation. We are all on pretty good terms with ourselves.

We can always put up a good case for ourselves. Even if we try to make ourselves feel that we are sinners, we never will. There's only one way to know that we're sinners.

That's to have one dim, glimmering conception of God. Did you catch that last sentence? There's only one way to know that we're sinners.

That's to have some dim, glimmering conception of God. The only way people see sin in themselves is that they've seen God. If the Son has revealed the Father through the Spirit to them, the Spirit has applied God's law to them and they see their sin.

Brother or sister in Christ, if you're feeling weighed down with anxiousness of your sin, if you feel the weight and the ugliness of your sin, it's because you have seen that glimpse of God.

[14:31] The Spirit has worked in your heart. He's given you a new heart. Maybe you don't understand the Gospel fully. To be honest, none of us truly do. Maybe you need a fresh reminder of the love of Christ towards sinners and His heart to see the sin that afflicts you so much gone.

But, don't despair. Christ came to save this type of sinner. Christ came to save all types of sinners. To those beaten down with the weight of their sin, Martin Luther gives this advice.

When the devil throws your sin in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this, I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it?

For I know one who has suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and where He is, there I shall be also. Whether we're struggling seeing our sin or we're struggling with the weight of our sin, we need a rescuer.

We need a redeemer. We need one of those sons that can set us free so that we can be free indeed. We need someone that can reconcile this gulf between God and man.

[15 : 47] This gulf that was created by Adam and maintained by us. Our sin keeping us from God. And Paul happily points out this redeemer in verse 20 and 22.

As you look at our second point, our reconciliation to God. Verse 20 says, For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him, through Christ, to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

And you, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him.

There's a structure here in this verse, a chiasm, a chiastic structure that wraps what we just looked at. It wraps our alienation with God with the work of Christ.

Verse 20 says, God reconciled all things to Himself by the blood of Christ. Verse 22 says, God reconciled you, the sinner, in His physical body by His death. In the middle, you were alienated from God because of your sin.

[17 : 03] So Paul presents this alienation that we just looked at, but surrounds it before and after with the concept that Christ is the reconciler. That Christ's blood and His body are reconciled.

Reconcile us to Christ. It's a stark contrast. It says, God reconciles all things by the blood of Christ's cross. He reconciles even those sin-sick sons and daughters of Adam that are alienated because of their sin.

Even those people that are hostile to God doing whatever evil deeds can come in their mind. Even those people can be reconciled. We looked at the parallel passage in Ephesians 2 where Paul talks about our alienation and the fact that we're dead in our sins.

But Paul continues in Ephesians in chapter 2 verses 4 through 7. He says, But God, but God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved and raised us up with Him and seared us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

[18 : 24] The gulf and the alienation between God and man. Man had sinned and caused a separation, but God, but God intervened.

He intervened in the garden. He sought out the sinners and promised one that would reconcile what Adam had just transgressed. Adam hid in shame in the garden. He saw his sin and his reaction was to hide.

But God, God came and called him. God came and clothed them. He came and He cursed the ground and He cursed life and death and He cursed the snake with a promise that one day the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head.

Thousands of years later, another son would be in a garden. He would look at the weight of sin in front of Him. Not His sin, but the sin of all the people that He's ever loved and the wrath He would have to endure to secure and purchase His reconciliation.

He didn't hide. He called out to God. He prayed. He obeyed and submitted to the will of the Father. The author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 11, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

[19 : 50] God did this reconciliation through Christ. Through the cross, God made His enemies His family. Not out of obligation, not because He just was bored, because of His great love and mercy.

We were dead. We were unable to do anything. Our only hope was someone outside of ourselves bringing life to us. Paul says that God made us alive together with Christ because of His great love for us.

Let me read that again. God made us alive together with Christ because of His great love for us. Christian, God loves you.

He loved you while you were still His enemy and He loves you now. No more and no less. The reconciliation has already occurred. The payment's been made.

You've been transferred already from the domain of darkness to this kingdom of His beloved Son. This reconciliation secured by Christ required Him to take on flesh and become human.

[21 : 00] Verse 22 says, He is now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death. Verse 20 says that all things were reconciled through Him on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of His

cross.

We're reconciled in His physical body by the blood of the cross. We sang earlier, O come all ye faithful, which verse 2 says, God of God, light of light, lo, He abhors not the virgin's womb. Very God, begotten, not created. We celebrate this birth of Christ, the incarnation, when Christ has taken on flesh, never to give up a body again.

as part of this covenant of redemption that the Father made with the Son. The Son would get a people, a rebellious people that God loved, but would require Him humbling Himself, taking on the form of a human being, taking on physical flesh, living among sinners, encountering the sin He would soon die for, all the while remaining sinless.

He would take on flesh. He would be the Adam that Adam should have been. He will obey the Father in all things. He will live a holy, blameless, and above reproach life in all aspects.

[22 : 32] He will then be put to death according to the plan of God by sinful men. Paul says, the blood of the cross and His physical body were the means of our reconciliation.

Isaiah 53, 7 says, He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we're healed.

There's no reconciliation to God without a payment. The only way for God to be just and the justifier is for the sin to be paid for. The wrath of God against our sin to be satisfied and the debt finally settled.

The blood of Christ, His real, physical death was the payment. His resurrection was the receipt stamped, paid in full.

There's now peace where there was once alienation. After our service this afternoon, we're going to take the Lord's Supper and we'll celebrate the death of Christ for our sins.

[23 : 41] We'll celebrate the love of Christ and His reconciliation secured and paid for with His body and blood on the cross. His blood was shed and His body broken to remove the alienation, provide reconciliation, and it was done in order to present us holy, blameless, and above reproach.

Christ's work wasn't simply patching up a broken relationship or generic reconciliation. It was a restoration, an individual, personal relationship with God restored, but also the sin that caused it removed and forgotten.

In its place, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. But the phrasing here also borrows from Old Testament sacrifices. The Israelites were told to bring a sacrifice, a lamb, a goat, that was without spot or blemish.

Paul's pointing out the similarities of what Christ would present us as, spotless, blameless, blameless, without blemish. Christ is the priest who offered Himself.

Christ offered Himself as a spotless, sinless, blameless lamb of God for our sins. Under the law, a person would present a fine specimen of a lamb, take the sacrifice, and take a picture of death in their place.

[25 : 01] All the while, the person remains unchanged. They walk away no less or more righteous or justified, still a sinner, looking on the way back for another spotless lamb for next time.

But Christ, Christ takes the enemies of God, Christ, a truly spotless man, sacrifices Himself in their place. This time, this sacrifice has an effect.

The person is justified and is presented to God as a living sacrifice, holy, blameless, and above reproach. Christ's sacrifice is so sufficient, His reconciliation is so complete, He not only forgives us, but He makes us holy.

He turns the whole system on its head. The lamb presents the sinners, and He presents them as holy. In this world, in our fallen flesh, we don't feel holy.

We still see the sin that we battle every day. We still struggle against it. But one day, one day, when this flesh and heart shall fail, immortal life will cease, we shall possess within the veil a life of joy and peace.

[26 : 20] The goal of the reconciliation of Christ is that we're reconciled to God. It's that we're presented to Him, not as children of wrath anymore, but as children of the Heavenly Father.

Presented to Him as holy, blameless, and above reproach. One day, when our time on earth has ended, we'll be with Him, in person, sinless, holy, blameless, and above reproach.

But it's not magical. It's not simple as walking in an aisle or saying a prayer and then forgetting about it. Paul reminds us, like the author of Hebrews in chapters 5 and 6, that apostasy is a real thing.

We need to make sure that what our faith is in is the right thing, which leads us to our last element, our foundation. Our foundation. He says in verse 23, 22 to 23, He is now reconciling His body of flesh by His death in order to present you blameless, holy and blameless, and above reproach before Him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

We've seen our alienation and our enmity with God, and we've seen His reconciliation through Christ and the cross, and we're going to wrap up with Paul's admonition. I'm hesitant to call it a warning, although it is a type of warning.

[27 : 51] It's more of a statement than a warning, and I say that because when we think about a warning, we think about something that we can do to prevent something. Don't do this or this will happen.

As long as you do these things, this will be the result. That's not the structure of this passage. Paul's not saying that all the work that Christ accomplished on the cross only works if you can remain faithful.

He's saying, here's how those reconciled people persevere. Here is how the saints who have been bought and redeemed by Christ remain. Here's where their hope is in.

Here is the faith that they have. It's by remaining, persevering in the same faith that they heard and not abandoning it. For one reason, Paul says, these things have already occurred.

Paul says, we were alienated, but now we're reconciled. So Paul's not saying that this stuff will happen once you've done all your best work. The reconciliation has already occurred.

[28 : 52] The structure in the Greek also lends itself more towards a, if you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, like I know you will, or you could say it's more of a promise than a condition.

It's an ask or even an assumption. You might say, if you go into the store, can you pick up eggs? You could just as easily say, since I know you're already going to the store, can you get me eggs?

There's an assumed connection between faith and the hope in the gospel and all the things that Paul has already laid out. We don't earn them as part of our faith. They come as a package.

Paul wants to make sure, though, that our faith is stable and that our faith is in the right thing. To paraphrase, since those reconciled to God have been reconciled by the blood of Christ and have faith and have hope in the gospel, they should continue in it.

Continue in the faith that saved you. Continue in the hope of the gospel that you first believed. Paul says a similar phrase in chapter 2, verse 6 of Colossians. He says, Therefore, as you received Christ, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

[30 : 08] The concept is similar. In the same way that you received Christ, which is by faith, continue walking in the same way. Continue remaining by faith.

These passages have a structural and architectural foundational type phrasing. Paul says to continue stable and steadfast in the faith, not shifting. And then in chapter 2, he says to be rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith.

Paul's desire for this church is their spiritual maturity, to not be embracing philosophies and doctrines that are not according to Christ. He tells them here that Christians, those that are reconciled by the blood of Christ on the cross, should grow and mature, that they should grow and mature in the hope of the gospel.

He wants their foundation to be the gospel. He wants their faith and hope to be in the gospel. He wants them to live out of that hope as they received Christ in the gospel so they should continue walking in Christ.

It really ties back to verses 9 through 12 in the same chapter where Paul tells them what he's praying for. He says, And so from the day we have heard, we have not ceased to pray for you that you may be filled with knowledge of His will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance and the saints of light.

[31 : 50] Paul lists out all these things he's praying for this church. They'd be filled with the knowledge of His will. They would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. They would bear fruit in every good work.

They would increase in the knowledge of God and they would be strengthened with all power according to His glorious might. Then he stops. We're giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you, reconciled you, freed you to share in the inheritance and the saints of light.

Paul's making the distinction between our justification, the fact that we're declared righteous before God by the blood of Christ and the blood of the cross, and our sanctification, the process that we go through to be made more and more like Christ.

Both of these things are by faith and faith is the gift of God. They both go together and they're both a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who are justified and reconciled are then sanctified.

Chapter 13 of the London Baptist Confession, paragraph 1, says the following. Those who are united to Christ, effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also further sanctified really and personally through the same virtue by His word and spirit dwelling in them.

[33 : 19] The dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces their practice of all true holiness without which no one can see God.

New Christians need faith and the hope of the gospel and old Christians need faith and the hope of the gospel. We need it when our hearts tell us the sin we commit isn't that bad and we need it when all we can see is our sin.

We need it when we feel good about ourselves and when we feel shame and guilt. In application, what are you hoping in?

What is your foundation? What case will you make before the throne of God when He asks you why you should be in His presence? If the foundation and hope is in anything besides the shed blood of Christ for your sins in order to reconcile you to God you're like a foolish man building his house upon the sand.

Christ the rock and the cornerstone offers better. He offers in all expenses paid pardon and reconciliation for those who were once His enemies. Paul says the blood of Christ has brought us near.

[34 : 41] Ephesians 2.13 but now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near to the blood of Christ. Christ's reconciliation by His blood and physical body is our only foundation.

Christ reconciled all things making peace by the blood of His cross making children out of slaves and brothers out of enemies. Saints believers in Christ you can rejoice God loves you and has taken on flesh as a baby He lived a perfect life and died a perfect death and was raised with a glorified body so that you and I can be reconciled to God.

Grab onto that and don't let go of it. Don't let the weariness and the pain of living in a fallen world distract you from the fact that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

Christ was born for you Christ lived for you He died for you and now He lives forevermore seated at the right hand of God interceding for those He's reconciled.

He is seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for you. Sinners those of you in this room or those listening online hearing my voice that have never submitted to Christ those of you still trying to build your houses on sand still trying to convince yourselves and others around you that you have it all together that you don't need a Savior those of you who are still hostile in mind to God.

[36 : 34] There's a Savior that loves sinners and He longs to see their sin removed and their hearts reconciled to God. This Savior can reconcile the worst sinner because He's the best Savior.

He welcomes sinners and He turns them into friends. He says in Matthew 11 Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Let's pray. Lord, I thank You for the blood and body of Christ working to reconcile alienated sinful people that for some reason You loved.

Father, help us as we soon take the Lord's Supper as we sing and worship. Help us to worship and glorify You as people who have been loved by You, as people who have been accepted by You and people that You are growing to be more and more like Christ.

[37 : 53] Help us as we sing and praise You now in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.