

Our Past. Our Present. Our Future (Colossians 1:21-23)

In our last study, we heard Paul describe the awesome nature of Christ as well as the differing roles and functions in which He serves. The apostle's point was for us to realize that if we are walking in accordance with Christ and His will, then we shouldn't get upset and discouraged by the opinions and teachings of others.

In Colossians 1:21-23, Paul focuses on the Christian; specifically, to the timeline of the Christian's spirituality. He starts with the phrase "although you were," speaking of a life before Christ (Co. 1:21). Then, Paul brings us to the present with the phrase "*yet He has now*," showing again what Christ has blessed His followers (Co. 1:22). Last, he points us to a future that has yet to be realized, with the phrase "*if you indeed continue*" (Co. 1:23). What Paul gives us here is a powerful, miniature three-point sermon that encourages us to reflect on what Christ has rescued us from, while challenging us to press on in the faith.

1. Our Past (Colossians 1:21)

Although our backgrounds and spiritual upbringings differ, we all have this one thing in common – sin. There was a time when each one of us found ourselves in a condemned state due to our personal rebellion against God's divine expectations. Paul mentions our spiritual pasts in three different descriptions.

1. **We were formerly alienated.** Paul frequently uses the word "*formerly*" to help the Christian understand that there is a marked difference between who we were and who we are to become. Paul will later discuss the sins that we are to put away, saying "*in them you also formerly walked, when you were living in them*" (Co. 3:7). The word for "*alienated*" is *appallotrio*, used here as well as in Paul's discussion in Ephesians of how the Gentiles were separated from God (Ep. 2:12; 4:18). This is a widely known Scriptural truth – we are separate from God with sin in our life (Is. 59:1-2).
2. **We were hostile in mind.** The word for "*mind*" speaks to the purpose or way of thinking one has. Before coming to Christ, many indulge themselves in all that is in the world (1 Jn. 1:16). Righteousness wasn't an interest of ours. And of course, if one thinks in such a rebellious way, the rebellious actions will soon follow.
3. **We were engaged in evil deeds.** Though "*engaged*" is inserted into the text, this is the idea Paul has when he uses the preposition "*in*." We were literally in those works of the flesh that separated us from God. Such evil deeds can be found in Colossians 3:5-9.

While Paul is painting a bleak picture of our spiritual past, it is only when we see our sins for what they were can we then fully appreciate and enjoy the salvation found in Christ.

2. Our Present (Colossians 1:22)

Thankfully Paul did not end with Colossians 1:21, so there is good news for the Christian. And it has to do with what our present circumstances are. Paul has already discussed how God has "*qualified*" the Christian, as well as having rescued us from the domain of darkness (Co. 1:12-13). He continues with more blessings for those in Christ.

1. **We are now reconciled.** This is the opposite of "*formerly alienated*" (Co. 1:21). What once separated us from God has been removed by the sacrifice of the Son of God. Those sins are now nailed to the cross so that we can be reunited with our Creator (Co. 2:14).
2. **We are now holy and blameless.** This pairing of "*holy and blameless*" is seen in other Pauline verses (Ep. 1:4; 5:27). We are not holy and blameless because of what we have done, but because Christ has sanctified and cleansed us (Ep. 5:26-27). The sins that made us dirty in God's sight have been washed away.
3. **We are now beyond reproach.** This is absolutely critical for these Colossian Christians to understand, because there are many who are condemning and criticizing their faith. But in Christ there is no condemnation; there is no legitimate spiritual complaint that can be charged towards those whom Christ has favored (Ro. 8:1).

3. Our Future (Colossians 1:23)

Paul starts this verse with the conditional word, “*if*.” Our pasts are condemned, but our present state is righteous – what lies ahead is entirely up to the Christian. These Colossians can become overwhelmed by the negativity of the outsiders, or they can strengthen their faith and push on into their relationship with Christ.

1. **We must be firmly established in our faith.** Later, Paul will say that the Christian should be firmly rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith (Co. 2:7). This reminds us of our Lord’s instruction from the Parable of the Sower, where in times of distress, the word of God will not be firmly rooted enough to keep the persecuted from falling away (Mt. 13:21). We must be strong.
2. **We must be steadfast.** This furthers Paul’s point on the need to be resolved and persevere. Paul mentioned how Christians are “*strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness*” (Co. 1:11). He tells the Corinthians to “*be steadfast, immovable*” (1 Co. 15:58). Followers of Christ must realize that their faith is not something that can be negotiated; we remain in Christ as wholeheartedly as we can.
3. **We must not be easily moved from our hope.** If we lose our hope, it is only a matter of time before we leave our Lord. And the Colossians are slowly losing their hope. They have let the opinions of others affect their faith (Co. 2:8, 16, 18). It is up to the Christian to listen and trust in the powerful assurances of God rather than the discouraging opinions of naysayers.

In these three verses, Paul wants us to appreciate what Christ has brought us out of, which was a life of sin and condemnation. But now, we must realize that such condemnation is in our past and no longer in our lives. However, this will only remain to be true if the Christian fights to be firmly rooted in his Christianity.