

Sermon or Lesson: Colossians 1:23 (NIV based)

[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Be Established And Firm In The Gospel And The Faith

READ: Colossians 1:23, with vv.21-22 for context

BACKGROUND:

- - Jesus is Jehovah God Himself, in fullness and in physical bodily form, which qualifies Him to "redeem" or buy "the forgiveness of sins" for humans through His suffering and death on the cross. (vv.19,14)
 - - Jesus has comprehensive supremacy "in everything", which includes: supremacy over all of creation, including how it was formed and how it is sustained; supremacy over all that exists in both the visible physical realm and the invisible spiritual realm; supremacy over all of the kinds and levels of authority that exist; supremacy over life, death, and resurrection from the dead; supremacy over the church; and supremacy over the way or means through which humans can be reconciled to God. (vv.15-20)
 - - Through that torturous physical death of Christ, God has provided a way for humans to be reconciled to Him, even though we humans are born automatically alienated from Him and officially are an enemy of His. (vv.21-22)
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v.23 - READ

[Lesson Question: Study, discuss, evaluate, and then formulate the logistics of this mandate to "continue in your faith, established and firm".]

SECTION POINT: God instructs that we believers are to consistently live in accordance to this new reconciled standing before Him.

"if you continue in your faith, established and firm,"

- - Prior to being officially and individually reconciled to God, all of us humans are alienated from God, judicially and relationally separated from God and regarded by God as His enemies. (v.21)
- - But at the moment of genuine faith in Christ for actual salvation, true believers are outright granted a new status, a new standing before God - in a technical, legal, and judicial sense.
- - In response to receiving this priceless undeserved reconciled standing before God, He expects and instructs that we believers are to consistently live in accordance to this new standing before Him, which will concretely show our gratitude and bring honor to God for granting us this reconciliation to Himself. (vv.10,12)
- - Thereby, we believers are no longer to be "enemies in [our] minds", but instead to be friends, associates, adoptees, and even "servants" of God. (vv.21,23; John 15:14-15; Ephesians 1:5)

- - Our passive or active hostility or resistance towards the things of God are to be replaced with open active embracing and willing submission to the things of God. (cf. Mark 12:30)
- - This new agreeable, cooperative, and collaborative attitude towards the things of God is to be "continuous" - "persevering to stay within" throughout the remainder of our lives on this earth. (Colossians 1:23, from Strong's #1961)

- - The guidelines or parameters we are to stay within and "continue in" are those of the "faith" - the instructions, the teachings, the doctrines, and the commands that are given in the Scriptures.
- - Deviating from the guidelines that God has established for us in the Scriptures is not acceptable to God.
- - Deviating from the guidelines also demonstrates that to some degree we desire to return to our former status of being "enemies in our minds". (v.21)

- - We are to be "established and firm" "in [our] faith" - in a practical sense, constructing and establishing a "foundation" for our faith, and then remaining within that foundation, "firm", "steadfast, and immovable". (Strong's #2311, #1476)
- - Establishing this kind of "foundation" for our faith certainly then requires our time, our devotion, our consistency, our openness to change, and our teachability to hear, learn, receive, adopt, and apply all teaching from the Scriptures.
- - And, therefore, establishing this kind of "foundation" for our faith is a matter of our will - either to cooperate and collaborate with God, or instead to proceed by our own will.

- - It is important to note here that the security of our official reconciliation or salvation is not conditional upon our consistency of staying "established and firm" in the faith, because we are "now" reconciled through Christ's death and thereby presented to God as "holy in his sight", which He accepted and thereby granted us eternal membership into His kingdom. (vv.22,12,13)
- - However, the success and the quality of our implementation of living a life "established and firm" in the faith will be judged and rewarded accordingly on Judgment Day. (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)
- - So the intent, meaning, and emphasis of this phrase "if you continue..." is on expeditiously achieving and then consistently maintaining spiritual maturity, and it does not imply nor pertain to any condition under which believers can lose their salvation and their eternal reconciled status with God. (cf. Colossians 1:28)

[Lesson Question: Study, discuss, identify, and then cite the dynamics being presented in this verse regarding the "gospel".]

SECTION POINT: God instructs that we believers are to stay firmly grounded in the doctrines that comprise the "gospel" message, which He desires that every person hears and likewise responds to in faith.

"not moved from the hope held out in the gospel."

- - From our current perspective of being in this world, the salvation of us believers is essentially based on "hope" - we live by faith. (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- - If we are truly a believer, we take God at His word and trust Him to do what He says He will do and has done - that is the definition of "believer" - 'one who believes God'.
- - We have "hope", "anticipation, expectation, and confidence" that God has indeed reconciled us to Himself through faith in the sacrificial death of Christ, and we are to securely maintain that "hope" and faith without being "moved away" from it. (Colossians 1:23, Strong's #1680, #3334)
- - Paul and Timothy are writing to the Colossian believers because the teaching of false doctrines among the Colossians presented a significant threat to them staying "established and firm" in the faith. (v.2:8)
- - The teaching of false doctrines was posing a significant threat of enticing them "away from" the "hope" and "faith" that God has indeed reconciled them to Himself, as declared in the "gospel" message that was "proclaimed" to them. (Strong's #0575; v.2:4)
- - The doctrines that comprise the "gospel" message have been established by God, and they are not to be modified, altered, or misrepresented.

"This is the gospel that you heard"

- - The mandate here is that believers have a duty to remain faithful to hold the gospel - the doctrines that comprise the "good news" message from which they became reconciled to God. (Strong's #2098)
- - Believers are to have a basic understanding of the gospel, how God has reconciled them to Himself, and then they are to stand firm in this understanding for the remainder of their life.
- - Those people who are truly reconciled hold this hope and they readily know what their reconciliation and salvation are based on.
- - Thereby, those who are true believers naturally possess knowledge about their salvation, which compels and propels them to become "established and firm" in their faith.

"and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

- - God desires and ordains that the "gospel" is to be "proclaimed" to every person in all of creation.
- - Moreover, God even empowers, installs, and sends forth specific persons to specifically go and proclaim the "gospel", who are commonly known as 'evangelists' - "servants" of the "gospel", like Paul is.
- - An example of a servant of God proclaiming the gospel is contained within this chapter 1, that the Colossians "heard" the "gospel", which had "come to [them]" from Epaphras, a "fellow servant" and "faithful minister of Christ". (vv.23,4-7)

-- The functions of being a "servant" of the "gospel" include:

- - - - to tell the gospel to other people and explain it; (v.23)
- - - - to proclaim the gospel to everybody created under heaven, "all over the world"; (vv.23; 1:6)
- - - - to suffer, if necessary, to spread the gospel; (v.24)
- - - - to share the gospel in the midst of strong opposition; (1 Thessalonians 2:2)

- - - - to ensure the gospel is being presented truthfully, and thus correctly; (Colossians 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:3-4)
- - - - to foster understanding of the gospel; (Colossians 1:6)
- - - - to appeal to listeners to respond to the gospel; (1 Thessalonians 2:3)
- - - - to nurture spiritual growth in people subsequent to and in response to their hearing, understanding, and believing the gospel; (Colossians 1:6)
- - - - to train other people to be servants of the gospel; (v.1:7)
- - - - to strive to be approved by God as entrusted with the gospel. (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

- - Evangelists and "servants" of the gospel fulfill a vital role within God's kingdom and within the church, because no person can be added to God's kingdom without having "heard" and believed the gospel.

- - So in reality then, every local church that does not have anyone actively doing evangelism is completely failing to contribute adding anyone to God's kingdom.

- - And furthermore, these local churches are completely failing to respond to the desire of God here that the gospel be "proclaimed to every [person] under heaven".

- - "Proclaiming" the gospel is of critical importance for building God's kingdom - a fact that Paul knows and takes seriously, even to the extent of devoting His life and His well-being to being "a servant" of the gospel.

BIG IDEA: God desires that every person hears the "gospel" message and responds in faith, followed by being firmly grounded in the doctrines that comprise the "gospel" and the faith.

APPLICATIONS:

- - For those of you who are true believers, that Jesus Christ died on the cross, rose from the dead, and paid the punishment for your sins, are you "established and firm" in the faith, not moved away from this gospel by following false doctrines?

- - Are you consistently being agreeable, cooperative, and collaborative with God in striving to be "established and firm" in the faith? Or instead, by your behaviors, are you being resistant to what God wants you to be - "established and firm" in the faith?

- - Are you "established and firm" in the doctrines of the faith and the doctrines that are contained in the gospel? Or instead, are you open to and perhaps even looking for new and exciting doctrines?

- - Are you sure all of the doctrines you hold are biblically correct and sound? Or have you been dabbling in questionable doctrines, or divergent doctrines, or experience-based doctrines?

- - Does anyone in this church take seriously the importance and the necessity of proclaiming the gospel?

-- Who in this church is an actual active servant of the gospel? Can you name any?

- - - - Are they regularly given opportunities, requests, and encouragement to engage in the functions of being a servant of the gospel in this church?

- - - Or instead, are they in effect being told to "sit down and shut up"?

- - Do you know what the gospel is, technically? Can you forthright describe it? Accurately? If not, why not?

- - In Romans 1:1, Paul also states that he is a servant of Christ Jesus. So what are you a servant of? Be honest as you think about your answer.

- - For those of you who are not true believers, do you know what the gospel is, technically? Can you forthright describe it? Accurately? If so, what is your response to the gospel?

- - If you are interested in learning what the gospel is or in responding positively to the gospel, then after this meeting perhaps you should ask your ministry leader to further explain the gospel to you, so that you can become reconciled to God by personally placing your faith in Jesus Christ for the payment of your sins on the cross, which was followed by His resurrection from the dead on the third day. (vv.20,22; NOTE to the ministry leader: You can use the surrounding verses 1:14, 18, 21-23a here in Colossians to present the gospel and a personalized invitation for them to place their faith in Christ.)

[Additional Lesson Questions to ponder (optional, if time allows):

- - What would likely happen short-term and long-term in a church if no one in it is an active servant of the gospel?

- - According to one evangelist (this author) from decades of experience, "The most resistant and difficult place to do evangelism is in the church, but the most fruitful place to do evangelism is in the church." How would you respond to that assertion? Why? Analyze.]

Works Cited:

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

"Strong's Greek Dictionary." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

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