

# The Book of Colossians

## Lesson 4: Reconciled to Be Presented Holy -- Colossians 1:21-23

There is a particular kind of ache that comes from a broken relationship, the cold distance with someone who was once close. You walk on opposite sides of the street. You rehearse old arguments in your head. Something that was meant to be warm has gone hard. Now imagine that the relationship is with God Himself, and that the distance is your own doing. That is the picture Paul paints in a single, unsparing phrase. You were, he says, alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. Not neutral. Not merely distant. At odds with God.

Paul does not soften it, because the glory of what comes next depends on us feeling the weight of where we started. We did not drift away by accident; we turned away by choice, and our hostility showed up in how we lived. This is the honest truth about the human condition apart from Christ. And it is precisely this estranged, hostile person whom God moved toward. He did not wait for us to come crawling back. He came to us.

And how did He close that distance? Paul says God reconciled us in Christ's body of flesh by His death. The reconciliation was not a kind word or a softened feeling. It was a body broken and blood poured out. The Son took on flesh and died so that the hostility could end and we could be brought near. Then Paul names the goal, and it is breathtaking: He did it to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him. The aim was never merely to get us out of trouble. It was to make us radiant, to set us before God without a single stain.

But Paul adds two small words that we dare not skip: if indeed. He reconciled you, he says, to present you holy, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel. Reconciliation is a gift, freely given; remaining in it is a path, to be walked. The same gospel that found us calls us to hold fast. Read these three verses and let them do two things at once: let them stun you with how far God came to reach you, and let them sober you with the call to keep holding the hand that took hold of you.

**Group Discussion:** Paul describes our former state in stark terms: alienated, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds (v. 21). Why do you think people, even in the church, are often reluctant to admit how serious our condition was before Christ, and what do we lose when we soften that picture?

**Personal Reflection:** Paul says God reconciled you in order to present you holy and blameless before Him. Where in your life are you content simply to be forgiven, while quietly resisting the harder gift of being made holy? What would it mean to want what God wants for you there?

*Read Colossians 1:21-23*

## Study Questions

1. Paul says the Colossians were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds (v. 21). What does this teach about the human condition apart from Christ, and why does reconciliation assume there was a real estrangement that needed to be healed?
2. Paul does not let his readers forget what they were before Christ. When you remember your own life before Christ, or apart from Him, are you honest about the alienation, or have you quietly minimized it? Why does a clear memory of where we started deepen our gratitude and guard our humility?
3. Paul says God reconciled us in Christ's body of flesh by His death (v. 22). Why does reconciliation with God require the death of Christ? What does this tell us about the seriousness of sin and the costliness of the peace we now enjoy?
4. Reconciled people are called to be agents of reconciliation. Is there a relationship in your life right now marked by distance or hostility that the gospel is pressing you to move toward? What would taking the first step look like, and what is holding you back?
5. Paul says the goal of reconciliation is to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him (v. 22). What does it tell us about God's purpose in salvation that He aims not merely to forgive us but to make us holy? How is being made holy different from simply being let off the hook?
6. God is at work making you holy, not just forgiven. Name one specific area where He is currently doing that work in you. Where are you cooperating with Him, and where are you dragging your feet?
7. Paul grounds everything in the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation, and of which he became a minister (v. 23). What does it mean that our hope rests on a gospel we heard, a definite message proclaimed to the world, rather than on a private experience or a feeling?
8. Paul calls these believers to keep from shifting from the hope of the gospel. What things in your life tend to pull you off that hope, slowly shifting your confidence onto something else? How can you tell when your anchor is starting to drag?
9. Paul says God reconciled us to present us holy, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel (v. 23). What do these words teach about the relationship between God's saving work and our ongoing faithfulness? How do they answer the idea that a saved person can never fall away, no matter how they live?
10. Look back across these three verses. Paul moves from our alienation, to the costly cross that reconciled us, to the holy future God intends for us, to the call to hold fast. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Colossians 1:21-23 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

## **Now or Later**

Reflect on these passages: Romans 5:6-11, reconciled to God while we were still enemies; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, the ministry of reconciliation and being made the righteousness of God;

Ephesians 2:11-22, brought near by the blood of Christ; Hebrews 3:12-14, holding our confidence firm to the end; Hebrews 10:23-25, holding fast the confession of our hope without wavering.