



Title: Reconciled and Remaining

Scriptures: Colossians 1:21–23

Connection to Unit Theme: Among all the angles of gospel, the doctrine of reconciliation is perhaps the most stunning. All that once separated us from God is removed through Christ's death and resurrection. Now, those who are reconciled to God must remain in Him.

Introduction Idea

N.T. Wright suggests that a first-time reader of Paul's letter to the Colossians might be overwhelmed after making it through chapter 1, verses 15–20. Paul poetically covers the grand sweep of creation and redemption in a few short sentences. Wright says one may read this and think, "Well that sounds impressive, but what's in it for me?" Our text today, Colossians 1:21–23, is Paul's answer to "where the ordinary Christian is located on the map" (Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*, 154).

Lest we think God is only concerned with thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities (1:16), Paul begins verse 21 with "and you." This God who is over all and in all and through all, is passionately concerned with us. In this short passage Paul reminds the Colossian Christians what God has done for them in Christ. Through the gospel, they are now reconciled to God. But, as we will see, that comes with high expectations of faithfulness and perseverance.

Let's look at our text and see what it means to be reconciled to God.

Sermon Division I – We were far from God (v. 21)

Before Paul explained their reconciliation with God, he thought it necessary to unpack what their alienation from God looked like. They were separated and cut off from God. Both their thoughts ("hostile in mind") and their actions ("doing evil deeds") were set against God. Nothing they did pleased Him. In Romans 8 Paul uses similar language where he writes, "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot" (Rom. 8:7).

Why does Paul mention their alienation (cf. Eph. 2:1–10)? One could list several reasons, but mainly Paul wants to magnify God's grace in Christ. He wants his readers to see how far they were from God and thereby appreciate God's mercy and grace in reaching down to them.

Imagine your mail came to my house by accident. I decide to surprise you by paying one of your bills. When I call to notify you, you will surely ask, "Which bill?" Whether or not I paid the water bill or the mortgage will determine your level of appreciation! When we see how far we were from God, we will inevitably exult in God's mercy toward us.

Application: Have you considered how far you were from God? Does it humble you to think that God saw nothing pleasing in you? Let this truth stir you to exult in grace.



Sermon Division II – We were brought near to God (v. 22)

All that stood between us and God fell down when Christ died on the cross, in our place. Through his death God reconciled us to himself in order to present us "holy and blameless and above reproach before him" (v.22). John Murray argues that not only is our reconciliation to God in view, but also God's reconciliation to us. He writes, "It is not our enmity against God that comes to the forefront in reconciliation but God's alienation from us" (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 34). In other words, not only were we alienated from God, but God was alienated from us. We infringed upon His holiness and merited His wrath. But the death of Christ removed the opposition God had toward us. Now we are His beloved sons and daughters. From a human standpoint, we cannot fathom this. Gospel reconciliation is the equivalent to a judge who acquits the young man who killed his son, then adopts him as his own!

Application: What if the doctrine of reconciliation became explosively real in your life? How might God's complete acceptance of you in Christ change how you relate to God, the church, and the world?

Sermon Division III – We must remain faithful to God (v. 23)

Given what Paul just said in verses 21–22, verse 23 sounds strange: "if indeed you continue in the faith." Has Paul slipped into works salvation? Absolutely not! In fact, it's just the opposite. He says they must not shift "from the hope of the gospel" (v.23). The hope of the gospel is that though we are utterly alienated and at enmity with God, we've been brought near through Christ. As long as we remain in the gospel, we are secure and guaranteed to be faultless before God's throne.

Much ink - and blood - has been spilled over the relationship between faith and works. The Reformers argued that we are saved *sola fide*, by faith alone. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. They were clear, however, to emphasize the necessity of works because of salvation. We are saved by faith alone, but faith does not remain alone. Good works do not save us, but they reveal that we are saved. Therefore necessity is laid on us to strive, labor, and work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12–13). It is because of the gospel that Paul does not miss a beat when he calls the Colossians to persevere in the faith. Faith demands works.

Application: The Christian life is sometimes wearisome and difficult. Many of us grow sluggish in our fight against unholiness and unbelief. Keep hoping in the gospel and remain faithful to our great God.



Conclusion Idea

Nelson Mandela spent 27 years (10,000 days) in prison for conspiracy to overthrow the South African government. After his release he said, "As I finally walked through those gates, I felt - even at the age of 71 - that my life was beginning anew." That is a glimpse of the testimony of all who are reconciled to God. We begin life anew with God and now seek to please Him in all things.