

Intro

Recently the star voice of an animated children's movie vented his frustration over opposition to moral content in the film. People with reservations about the content (that's us) he referred to as idiots who are afraid and unaware. We're trying to hold on and need to die off like the dinosaurs. We should be ignored. We shouldn't be debated. We stand in the way of social awakening and progress.

I don't know what percentage of our population shares these sentiments. But I do know there's real pressure to conform and renounce core elements of the gospel! People are shifting away from core evangelical beliefs.

Paul wasn't ignorant of the struggle. So he urges us not to shift from the faith. This morning Paul urges us...

BIG IDEA: Continue in the gospel

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

Continue in the gospel means cling firmly to core Christian beliefs.

Four points emerge this morning.

Point 1: Remember who you were (1:21)

Explanation

Paul is writing to the Colossian church. Christians who have faith in Jesus, a hope laid up in heaven, and forgiveness of sins (1:4-5, 14). In verse 21, Paul reminds them who they were.

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, – 1:21

Christians, this is who we were! The verb "alienated" is used twice elsewhere in the New Testament. Not part of God's people, not under God's blessing (Eph 2:12). No life of God in us (**Eph 4:18**).

"alienated" = stranger, foreigner, estranged, excluded, separated = an outsider. Excluded from all of the blessings that come with a relationship with God.

"hostile in mind"

- translated enemy: loving your enemy (Matt 5:43-44; Rom 12:20).
- Satan as God's enemy (Matt 13:39).
- the Jews of Paul's day as enemies of the gospel (Rom 11:28).

Meaning: God's enemy, opposed to God, hostile towards God.

"in mind" = in our attitude and thoughts towards God.

Before conversion, we opposed God.

Result

What's the result of opposing God? Evil deeds.

This is the experience of every Christian prior to the time they believed. Hostility, evil deeds are expressed in different ways. Some of you might identify better than others.

Application

Depending on your age when you were converted your experience will look different. Depending on your home life, your exposure to the Christian religion, the company you kept, your experience will look different.

The expression of hostility and evil deeds of a homeschool kid raised in a Christian home, in a healthy church, who believed at age seven will look a lot different than the expression of hostility and evil deeds of someone raised in a non-Christian home, who kept company with "rough" people, who believed at age 47. But hostility and evil deeds will be present in both.

What's Paul's point? Colossians, there was a problem between you and God. But God has changed you! When we meditate on who we were, we see amazing grace.

Personal meditation

These truths moved me to meditate on my expressions of hostility and evil deeds.

Raised Catholic. No detailed instruction on Christian morality. Mainly "treat others the way you want to be treated" and "love others." More ignorance and wrong desires than direct rebellion against known commands.

Evil deeds expressed in violence (school fights) and cruelty and rejecting authority.

When my Dad was converted around the time I was ten, my hostility expressed itself in wanting nothing to do with his Christianity. I wanted to be cool and I knew Christianity wasn't the path to that desire. Hostility expressed in wrong desires.

Hostility expressed in high school music theory class where I mockingly referred to a boy from my Dad's church as "the prophet."

In college I joined a fraternity with evil deeds expressed in the form of drunken partying. Living according to what was right in my own eyes. God was nowhere to be found in my thought life.

Hostility expressed at Daytona Beach when I friend was talking with Campus Crusade people. I said something to the effect of "stop talking with these people...let's go get drunk. My Dad's a born again Christian so I know all about this stuff." I believed three years later.

What about the seven year old prior to belief? They express estrangement from God in the form of selfishness, lying, rejecting parental authority, violence against siblings, etc.

Meditate on your hostility towards God and evil deeds. It may make grace amazing.

Point 2: Remember the cross (1:22)

Explanation

The good news is there's hope for people who oppose God.

And you...he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, – 1:22

Once hostile people were reconciled to God. A broken relationship with God was mended. Like two friends who have a sharp disagreement, cut off contact, and later come to their senses and pursue peace and renewed friendship.

We all come into life estranged from God, hostile, doing evil deeds. That's why we need to be reconciled to God. We reject God and live accordingly while God offers us reconciliation. How is this broken relationship mended? By the death of Jesus on the cross.

he and *his* = Jesus. Jesus, God the Son from all eternity, took on human form (*his body of flesh*). Then he died on the cross (*his death*). The Colossians were reconciled *by his death*. The Son of God had to become man and die to bring reconciliation. He died such that whoever repents and believes receives forgiveness of sins and is reconciled to God.

Reconciliation with God comes through seeing our hostility, seeing our need for God's mercy, confessing our hostility, and trusting in the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

Maybe you're asking what does Jesus' death have to do with my hostility and evil deeds? Our sins are rebellion against God, and God doesn't tolerate rebellion. Our sin violates God's law. And God doesn't tolerate his law being broken. God can't overlook sin or pretend it doesn't exist. Because he's holy. Because he's good. The proof that God cares about sin (lying lips that deceive, stealing like identity theft or looting, violence like child abuse, murder like George Floyd) is God punishes sin. People like Putin may or may not get away with sin in this life. But they won't get away with sin in the next life. Hell is the proof God cares about sin. Proof that God is merciful.

Every sin ever committed will be punished. If we persist in hostility and evil deeds, we'll suffer the punishment in hell. If we trust in Jesus' death, Jesus took the punishment for us. We receive forgiveness of sins and our broken relationship with God is mended. Jesus died as a substitute. To rescue us from the just penalty of our sins. But not just to forgive us. But also to bring us into vibrant fellowship with himself. Peace with God. Joy in God. Trust in God. Learning from God. Our heart changed by God.

How do we respond to this good news of Jesus' death on the cross? We repent and believe. We turn from rebellion to trust in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Grace is amazing when we remember our sin and Jesus' cross.

Point 3: Remember glorification (1:22)

Explanation

Why did Jesus reconcile us by dying on the cross?

in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, – 1:22

in order to indicates purpose.

Who is the *him*? Ephesians 5:27 suggests *him* is Jesus. Jesus gave himself for the church *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*”

Why does Jesus reconcile sinners? There’s many reasons. Two stand out today. To remove hostility and create relationship. And to present us without blemish to himself when he returns.

Three similar terms (*holy, blameless, above reproach*) express one concept. Morally acceptable to a holy God.

Is he talking about judicial (justification) or experiential holiness (sanctification)? Let’s say both. At salvation we’re declared holy because we’re in Christ. Not holy because of ourselves. Holy because the perfect righteousness of another (Jesus) is credited to our account. In this life we’re in the process of becoming more holy. Becoming more like God and less like hostile rebels. When Jesus returns, we’ll be given glorified bodies that can’t sin and can’t die. Jesus will make us practically holy when he returns and presents us to himself.

Application

These terms speak to our brokenness. We need to be fixed. We need to be changed.

We aim for this manner of life today. Increasing conformity to God’s character is possible because Christ lives in us. We are no longer separated from the indwelling life of God. We will be *without blemish* and we are becoming more and more *without blemish*.

Point 4: Don’t shift from the faith (1:23)

Explanation

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. – Col 1:23

“*if indeed*” is a conditional sentence. You have been reconciled (past event) and you will be presented holy before Jesus (future event) if you (condition) continue in the gospel (present, ongoing event).

Paul isn’t saying if you maintain your salvation, Jesus will present you holy to himself when he returns = genuinely born again believers can lose their salvation.

Paul is saying that past reconciliation is confirmed by ongoing faith in the gospel. Continuing in the gospel reveals past reconciliation. Not continuing in the gospel reveals past reconciliation never happened.

Illustration

So a past event (reconciliation) with a future purpose (glorification) actually occurred, if an ongoing reality persists (continuing in the faith).

A man rebuilds his truck engine for the purpose of trading it in in ten years. Past event = rebuilt engine. How can we tell if the engine was successfully rebuilt? It continues to work for the ten years while he waits to trade it in. What's necessary for the future trade in? The engine must continue to work. What must we conclude if the engine died out after 2 years? It wasn't successfully rebuilt. What must we conclude if it lasted the ten years? It was successfully rebuilt.

Continuing is how we can tell that a past event (reconciliation) occurred and a future event (glorification) is sure to occur.

Continuing

What does it mean to "*continue in the faith*"?

"*the faith*" = "*the hope of the gospel that you heard*" and there's only one faith, not many. Contrary messages of salvation are false gospels. "*the faith*" means more than the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It's these truths and everything attached to them: God's holiness, man's sin, substitutionary atonement, justification by faith alone in Christ alone, final judgment, new birth, glorification, etc. In Acts 2:42 it's "*the apostles' teaching*." In 1 Timothy 6:20-21 Paul says:

*O Timothy, guard **the deposit entrusted to you**. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," ²¹ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.*

"*the deposit*" is a body of truths... "*the faith*" is a body of truths. That's why Palermo Christian Church has a doctrinal statement that its members must agree to. To ensure that we "*continue in the faith*." We might say that church membership which requires agreement with a doctrinal statement ensures Palermo Christian Church and its people don't shift from the faith.

"*stable*" = a faith firmly **rooted** in core gospel doctrines = conviction.

"*steadfast*" = unwavering = a faith firmly **committed** to core gospel doctrines = persistence.

"*not shifting*" = not moving from core gospel doctrines.

"*continue*" = maintaining and persisting in the same commitment to core gospel doctrines. Don't give them up. Don't embrace contrary philosophies. Don't alter the faith.

Application

Paul doesn't say continue to make us fearful we'll fall away. Paul encourages us to reject non-gospels and cling to the one true gospel. Elsewhere Peter speaks to God's keeping power to give us confidence.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. – 1 Peter 1:3-5

We're born again to an imperishable inheritance. We can't be born again and miss out on this inheritance. What does God do for born again people? God's power through faith guards us for this future salvation. What does it mean that God's power guards us through faith? God guards our future glorification through faith = God strengthens our faith so that we will continue and be presented without blemish.

God is doing the guarding = we're not on our own.

Obstacles

Paul is saying reject false worldviews that contradict the gospel. In 2:8 he'll go on to warn them about deceptive philosophy (Col 2:8). Whether religious pluralism (all religions equally lead to God = you don't need to believe in Jesus to go to heaven) or progressive "Christianity" (accommodate progressive morality while downplaying beliefs and doctrinal statements = there's room to revise historic Christian beliefs and morality = we don't need to guard the deposit).

Or think rejecting a cult that comes to your door saying we believe the same things and serve the same God but you have to join our sect. These sects inevitably add to the faith and subtract from it.

Why are Christians warned?

- 1) Local churches are warned because some may not have come to saving faith.
- 2) Local churches are warned because warnings stimulate continuing.
- 3) Warnings are necessary because real threats exist.

Application

Personally, know the core Christian doctrines. Be committed to the core Christian doctrines. Reject false truth claims. If we give up core Christian doctrines, we end up giving up the gospel. We shift from the faith. We must ask ourselves, **am I shifting or am I steadfast?**

What about people who do shift? They may never come back in which case they were never reconciled to begin with. They may embrace error for a time and later come back. In which case God strengthened their faith and ensured their inheritance. If we know people who are shifting, it's our duty to point them to passages like Colossians 1:21-23 and 1 Timothy 6:20-21. Doctrine matters. Our glorification depends on it. No casual matter.

Conclusion

Shifting or steadfast? Continue in the gospel.