

Colossians 1 v 23

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[0 : 00] So, as I mentioned earlier, we're in Colossians chapter 1, and we're going to read again verses 21 to 23, verses 21 to 23, so that we can establish what it is that God has to say to us in His Word.

So, from verse 21 of Colossians 1, once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

This is the gospel that you heard, and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. I wonder how many times a day we use the word if. It's a very tiny word, if, isn't it? Just two letters. But upon those two letters, you can hang massive promises.

It's, of course, the great ploy, he says, in a nasty, sort of cynical way, that a politician might use the word if, especially in the run-up to an election.

[1 : 30] He may make promises concerning reducing VAT, income tax, making sure that everybody in the country is better off if the economy continues to improve.

That little if, of course, means that everything that he's promised is he's safeguarded from having to do until he feels fit that the economy has reached the level that he would like it to, which ultimately means he'll never have to keep that promise.

It's just a wonderful thing by sticking in if. But we can use the word if as well, can't we, as a sort of get-out clause for ourselves. We can say to people, well, yes, of course, I'll help you move house if I have the time.

Or, yes, I'll repay you the money I borrowed if I have enough in my bank account. Or, I'll visit you in hospital if I finish work early.

And so we can, again, use this if as a sort of safety net. That means that really we don't have to promise anything. It sort of gets us off the hook.

[2 : 38] It makes everything we say conditional. Well, the trouble is that if that is the case, which it is, when we come to verse 23, we have something of a little problem, don't we?

Because here we have Paul using the word if. And it may be that we may feel, well, this is something of a get-out clause that Paul is using. In verses 21 to 22, he's assured us of this wonderful salvation that we have received through the Lord Jesus Christ, whereby once we were God's enemies, now we have been reconciled, we've been brought into a right relationship to him, and because of Christ's death upon the cross, we are presented and will be presented to God as holy, without blemish, and free from accusation.

But then he qualifies all these blessings by saying, if. So does that mean that our relationship with God is an uncertain relationship?

That there are conditions by which we may, they may be reversed, and that we might become God's enemies once more? Is it up to us?

For he says, if you continue in your faith, is it up to us now to keep up this Christian living, so that Paul in one sense is warning us that we may lose all those things, should we fail or fall?

[4 : 05] And before we answer those questions, we need to realize something which is very important, that all of God's promises are conditional promises. That is, they are real, they are faithful, they are promises that God will keep, but they are only entered into by us when something is fulfilled.

Now I want you to think of the most, probably the greatest promise that we have in the Scriptures, or one of the most popular or common promises, which is this, whosoever calls on the name of the

Lord will be saved.

Now that is a promise, isn't it? A wonderful promise that we tell people about, but it's a conditional promise. Whosoever, well that means anybody, whoever they are, whatever their background, whatever their sin, whoever, whosoever, will be saved.

They'll be forgiven. Their past will be dealt with. No matter how they have lived, or even how they are living, whosoever will be saved. But there's the condition, isn't it? The condition is, if they call on the name of the Lord.

That's why there is no universal salvation. It's not enough for us to take those words and say, whosoever will be saved, anybody will be saved, everybody will be saved.

[5 : 25] It is those who call upon the Lord. The Lord keeps his promise to save anybody who calls upon him. He will save them.

He will keep his promise. So what is Paul saying here? If. What is the condition here that we shall be presented holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation?

What is the condition here for these wonderful blessings that we have in Christ and through his death? Is the condition that we now keep the law or observe certain commandments?

Is it that we do certain religious ceremonies? Is it that we are baptized or go to church or read our Bibles or pray? Is that what he's saying?

No, he's not. He's not. He says, these things are true of us and will be true of us and God will fulfill all that he's promised to do for us if you continue in your faith.

[6 : 26] Therefore, simply, it is by faith that we are saved. And that's all he's saying. The condition for salvation is faith.

It has always been faith. It's never been anything but faith. That is all that God has ever required of any person is that they place their faith in him. That was the principle in the Old Testament and it is the principle in the New Testament.

Here's Paul as he writes to the Galatians who were struggling with this concept. Galatians chapter 3 and verse 11. Clearly, he says, no one is justified, that's made right with God, by the law because, quotation, the righteous will live by faith.

It comes from Habakkuk chapter 2. From the very beginning, God has always justified men and women by faith. Whoever placed their faith in him, in his promises, he justified, declared right, and accepted.

And of course, the great example of that, the first example really, in one sense, is Abraham. It's Abraham that Paul turns to in Galatians over and over again about someone made right with God by faith.

[7 : 39] And it's here in Genesis 15 too. Abraham believed the Lord, put his faith in the Lord, his promises, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

righteousness. And so, that's one of the great verses, isn't it? That's probably one of the greatest verses in the Bible, the just shall live by faith. It's the very center upon which the whole of the Reformation took place, whereby there was a restoration of the gospel.

It's the whole of your faith and mine that we are right with God, not by the works we do, not by our own strength, but simply by taking God at his promises and believing he is faithful to do them.

So, when we placed our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that's when we were saved, wasn't it?

Ephesians 1. We looked at it there briefly this morning, but here it is again in Ephesians 1, verse 13. You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having believed. You were marked. We heard the gospel. We believed the gospel.

[8 : 44] We were included in Christ. We received the Holy Spirit. We were saved. And when we heard the gospel, we believed it to be true. We believed that what it said about us as sinners before God was true.

We believed that what God said about himself was true, that he was holy and just, and that the only way we could be forgiven was through Christ dying in our place and taking the punishment we deserve.

This is what the Colossians, of course, had believed, hadn't they? Look back in chapter 1 to verse 5, or verse 4, because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, the love you have for the saints, the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you heard, already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.

So, the question, did your conversion rely upon you doing something for yourself? No.

We know that it didn't. It wasn't because we decided that we were going to become a Christian and we turned over a new leaf. It wasn't because we kept the law and we went through certain ceremonies that made us a Christian.

[9 : 57] No. We were saved because we simply relied upon the promises of God. That's what saved us. We trusted God's promises. We were saved. Ephesians tells us, of course, that that faith was a gift of God too.

It gave us that faith that we might believe him. So, the question is this. If the beginning of our salvation was by faith, what about our ongoing salvation? Has that changed?

Does now our continuing salvation, our continuing relationship with God, rely upon what we do?

Well, no, it doesn't, does it? It still relies upon faith.

Here's what he says. If you continue in your faith. So, the if is simply a matter of having faith. And it's a very real faith, isn't it? It's a faith which trusts in the promises of God.

Here's Paul, back in Ephesians in chapter 2, what he has to say about how he lives the Christian life today. He says this. Ephesians chapter 2.

[10 : 59] No, it's not Ephesians chapter 2 because I got that wrong. It's Galatians chapter 2, sorry. Galatians chapter 2. And he says this. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

So, my ongoing life is a life of faith. Again, Paul speaks, doesn't he, but we do not live by faith or walk, sorry, we do not walk by sight, but we live or walk by faith.

So, we believe God for his promises. To continue in the faith is simply a matter of continuing to trust him who we first put our faith in that he will continue to save us.

But it is conditional if you continue in your faith. There is a condition there, you see, if you continue in your faith.

Someone might say to us, and I'm sure that they have at some time, or to me, they'll say, well, I put my faith in this Jesus when I was young, or as a child, or as a teenager. I put my faith in him then to save me, but now I no longer have faith in him.

[12 : 06] Does that mean that I'm a Christian? Or not? I'm sure you had to face that difficult question. Has that person lost their salvation that they once had?

And the answer to that must be no. The reason that they have no saving faith now is that they did not have saving faith then.

They may have thought themselves Christians, and this is a great tragedy, isn't it? There are many people who think themselves Christians because of something that happened many years ago, or because they were brought up in a Christian home, or because they were baptized, or because they were confirmed, or something else like that.

Because they've done some Christian things, but they never had true, real, Holy Spirit-saving faith. And they're either relying upon that to save them and bring them into heaven, or else the reality is that they've never had faith in Christ at all.

This is what Jesus has to say. Probably one of the, I think this is one of the most terrifying passages in all of Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 7. Most terrible things. Of all the portions of Jesus' words in the gospel, this is to me the most, most, most terrifying.

[13 : 26] It's Matthew 7, 24, 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, that's the day when the Lord Jesus returns in judgment, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?

Then I would tell them plainly, I never knew you, away from me, you evildoers. Can you grasp just how horrendous that is?

But on that day of judgment, there will be people who will stand before Jesus who will say, we did all these Christian things. We did supernatural things, miraculous things as Christians, and we used your name.

And Jesus said, I never knew you. Do you see, they did not have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

They had no faith in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now there's a problem though, isn't there?

Because then that raises the issue, because Jesus says this, who will be saved then? Who are those who belong to me, who accept me? He says, not by everybody who calls me Lord, Lord, but only he who does the will of my Father is in heaven.

[14 : 38] So are we back now to being saved by works? Is that what he's saying? Whoever does the will of my Father. So we're back to saying, well actually, it's not just you saying you put your faith in Jesus, but are we back to this place saying, if you keep the commandments that God has given and you keep the laws that God has given and you do all those things and you keep it going, then you'll be saved at the end.

No. We've got to remember, of course, this is where it's so important, isn't it? That when we deal with the Bible, we deal with the whole Bible and not just part of the Bible or a verse of the Bible or a word of the Bible, but we bring the whole of the context of the scriptures together.

What is the will of God the Father? Jesus made that very, very clear. What's the work that God wants us to do? Here's John in chapter 6. Then they asked him, those were the Jews who were there, they asked him, what must we do to do the works God requires?

Give us a job to do, give us some law to fulfill and we'll do it and that will make us right with God.

What does Jesus say? Does he point them back to the Ten Commandments? No. He says this, Jesus answered, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he sent.

Faith, isn't it? To believe in the one he sent. That's what's necessary. It's simply, again, putting our faith and trust in Christ and accepting and believing his promises.

[16 : 02] No works. So Paul is writing to these Christians. He's writing to them because of the fact that there are those who are false teachers, as there are now, as there were then.

False teachers and prophets who were teaching a sort of a works-based religion. Christianity that says, if you do these things, then you can be certain you're going to get to heaven, all right.

If you carry out these commandments and so on, and we've read about them here, we'll come to them in the coming weeks, God willing. I hear the Archolossians 2, verse 8. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

He goes on later on in chapter 2, as well, verse 16, therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink with regard to a religious festival, a new moon, celebration, Sabbath day.

These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. In other words, these people are coming and saying, as they did, Judaizers, as Paul calls them, or the circumcision party, people who said, you've got to keep all these Old Testament commandments and laws and ceremonies and probably threw a few extra ones in as well as the Pharisees like to do and that's what's necessary and Paul makes it very, very clear all of these things that we read in the New Testament, in the Old Testament rather, they were simply a shadow.

[17 : 34] They weren't the reality. The reality is found in Christ, in what he has done for us, in his finished work, in his life, perfect sinless life and his perfect atoning death upon the cross for us and all that we have to do is trust him.

Trust him. Don't have to do anything else. Not lift a finger to do anything else for ourselves. Not act in any other way. But Paul uses three phrases here, words or phrases, to describe what it practically means then to continue in the faith.

What does it actually mean? To continue in the faith. What am I saying? Well, I'm saying that we are to have faith and that we are saved and we live by faith. Three phrases here and we just look at them briefly.

First of all, he quantifies or qualifies, if you continue in your faith, established. Well, established means well-grounded. It means having a strong foundation.

It's a word that is still used in the construction industry in some parts of the world today to speak of a building which has already been built and has stood for some time compared to a new build, an established building.

[18 : 47] Sometimes, those of you who are gardeners, it's not the same exactly, but we use the word established for a plant. The plant is established. It's laid down its roots. It's a strong tree or a strong plant. It's established in your God and that's the sense here.

So our faith, to be established, must be, as it were, grounded upon the same place that it began being built upon, the foundation of Jesus Christ. There is only one foundation, says Paul, to Christ Jesus, upon him.

So, is your faith, the question is, in Jesus? That's the question. If it's established, it's still trusting Jesus. It's still trusting him to save me.

It's still trusting that he has done the work that I could never do for me. It's trusting that he has reconciled me with God. It's trusting Jesus. Not some new teaching that has taken me away from Jesus, taken me away to another sort of gospel or another sort of saviour.

But that's not continuing in the faith. Continuing in your faith is continuing to trust Jesus. Simple as that. Are you established? Trusting Jesus? Then you're established.

[19 : 58] Then he uses this phrase, and firm. I think some translations have got steadfast, that old-fashioned sort of word, steadfast.

We might speak of dependable, reliable. We speak, of course, of somebody who is, a person who is firm, but fair. In other words, there's somebody who, who doesn't compromise or budge on their principles.

They won't go back on their word. They remain solid in that sense. They are firm. So be firm in the faith means we still hold to what we first believed when we heard the gospel.

We haven't let it go. We still have a firm grip. Whereby established, we put it this way, whereby established refers to the object of our faith, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Firm talks about the, the actual, present day reality of our faith. That we still have faith. Now, it may be weak faith, of course. It may be mustard seed, size faith.

[21 : 01] It may be faith that at times is blown here and there, but it's still faith that is alive today. That's why for somebody who says 20, 30, 40, or how many years ago I put my faith in Christ, but now I have no faith now, they are not somebody who is continued in their faith.

That is almost certain that that faith that they thought was faith was not real. It was just a passing emotion or a feeling or something perhaps even that had been drummed into them. Fear.

But this present faith, this firm faith, is active. It's still living. It's still a daily experience. So as I say, it may well be that that faith of yours and mine has been buffeted and knocked here and there and there have been times we've felt like we've lost our faith, but we know however small it is and however struggling it is, it's still there.

It's firm. And it's established in Christ. And then we have this phrase, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

Now although these three descriptions are very similar to one another, yet it seems to me that as we read this verse, that this third one is more strongly linked with hope rather than faith.

[22 : 20] So in one sense, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope. So in one sense, they're very much connected, but the not moving from the hope is concerning the hope held out in the gospel.

So what does that mean here? What is this hope anyway? What is the hope held out in the gospel? Remember, whenever we consider the word hope in the Bible, it means something which is absolutely certain, we just can't see it yet.

It's a reality, more real than anything that we can touch or see or feel here. It's just we haven't entered into it. It's definite and certain. It's the hope of eternal life, isn't it? Back in chapter 1, verse 5.

The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. It's that gift of eternal life. It's that heavenly inheritance there in verse 12, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints. That's what we're hoping for. So what does it mean then that we are not moved from the hope?

[23 : 26] I'm sure you've seen an owl. Sometimes people, I think I saw, was it here in Whitby? I saw somebody with an owl or a bird of prey. I can't remember. Anyway, if you manage to catch the eye of an owl, I'm sure you've done it, you'll notice, wherever you move, he follows you, doesn't he?

With his eyes. Like that. And of course, the owl has got this ability to almost turn his head all the way around, but not quite. So I'm sure you've done it, you've tried to see how far can you get his head to go all the way around.

But basically, his eyes are following. He's not, he's fixed on you, isn't he? He won't move his eyes off you until, of course, his head's about to pop off and so he realizes he's got to turn it around the other way.

Now, when Paul speaks here of not moved from the hope held out in the gospel, I believe he's talking about the fact that we're not to lose sight of the hope we fixed our eyes upon, which is heaven, eternal life, this world to come.

And again, of course, as Christians, there are real times when that sight of heaven becomes very diminished. The things of this world press in. Not just the comforts of the world and the riches of the world, sometimes it's the sorrows and the trials of this world.

[24 : 41] They squeeze, don't they, our vision of heaven and we lose sight of it for a moment. But the reality is we never lose sight of it altogether, do we? We never ever lose sight of the fact that we are heaven bound, that our hope is not in this world.

Our hope is not in the riches of this world or the pleasures of this world, but our hope is in the world to come. That wonderful paradise which Christ has purchased for us in heaven.

And as we thought last week, this being presented holy in God's sight has a sense of the present because even today, because of Christ, we are holy.

God looks upon us and sees us and accepts us in Christ as being without sin, justified in his sight. But we also have that second sense in the comes of day when we shall be presented to him as Paul speaks about in Ephesians 5, as Christ presenting his bride to himself without blemish and spot and any such thing.

And so we have this hope. So let me ask you again, dear Christian, have you still that hope, that hope of heaven, that certainty, that though you are a sinner, that Christ has died for you and he will take you to heaven, that you will be there one day in that place with him, is your hope there.

[26 : 04] And that hope, of course, comes from the gospel. That's what the gospel teaches us. It doesn't just tell us that there are physical blessings here like healings and everything going well in your life, but the gospel tells us that it is being made right with God now and being brought into an everlasting and eternal relationship with him which finds its fulfillment.

in his presence, in glory. And this is the gospel. The gospel, says Paul, that you heard. The gospel that you heard.

The gospel that you believed. And it's very clear, isn't it, from when you read Paul's writings and what he has to say here, that there is no other gospel but this gospel.

They themselves, the Colossians, are evidence that this is the gospel that changes lives. again, verse 5. This is the gospel that has power. This is the gospel, the only gospel worth placing your faith and trust in.

That's why, in one sense, to continue in your faith is to continue to believe what you first believed, to believe the gospel that you first put your faith in. elsewhere, Paul states the very same reality.

[27 : 18] One of the great problems he was concerned with with the Galatian Christians was there were people who were preaching and saying that they had a different gospel. Here's what Paul has to say in Galatians 1.

I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all. Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

But, he says, even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let him be eternally condemned. There is no other gospel than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is no other good news. There is no other way of reconciliation with God. There is no other way with peace with God. There is no other way to heaven and to enjoy this hope apart from the gospel that we have heard and that Paul preached and that he says has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.

What does he mean by that? What does he mean by that? How has the gospel been proclaimed to every creature under heaven? How do we understand Paul's statement about this gospel that we put our faith in and we know is faithful?

[28 : 34] Paul knew very well that not everybody who lived in the world had heard the gospel. He knew that. He wasn't being foolish in that sense. He knew that there were those who had not yet heard. But the proclamation given by God has been already sent out and is on its way to the ends of the earth.

Here is Jesus in that wonderful closing chapter in Luke 24. He opened the scriptures to them and he said to them this is what is written that Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations. It's the prophecy and the promise of God throughout the Old Testament that the light to the Gentiles will come. And in one sense Paul is saying it's as sure and as certain as if it's already happened

that this gospel will be proclaimed to every creature.

It's certain that God will keep his word and this gospel will have proclaimers to take it to the ends of the earth. In one sense Paul says I'm one of them as well to take this gospel.

He counted himself a servant of it because it ruled his life. It directed his actions, his activities and of course the message that he lived for was not just a message it was a person.

[29 : 55] Jesus is the gospel. Jesus is the one in whom we have put our faith. Jesus is the one we continue to have our faith in. It's all about him. In 2 Timothy he writes to Timothy and he says this Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead descended from David this is my gospel.

The person of Jesus Christ is the gospel. He's the verbalization of God to the world. He's the revelation of God's character and grace to the world.

And what Paul had received to become a servant of in the gospel has been passed to you and I now. We are those who've heard the gospel but we have heard it for a purpose not only that we might believe it and be saved but also that we might continue to live it out and tell it out to others too.

Because dear friends the Bible that we meet day by day have nothing worth listening to apart from the gospel that you tell them. They have nothing to put their faith in which they can trust apart from the gospel that they see in you and in me.

This is the only gospel worth believing and the only gospel worth telling. So this if is a little word but it has big repercussions.

[31 : 18] Repercussions in our lives today this week in our relationships in our world if you continue. If you're a Christian this evening who's put your faith in Christ Jesus then that if is a certainty.

You have continued. You being here this evening is evidence that you've continued. That God has continued with you and that he will take you through to the fulfillment of all those promises.

Dear friends let us be people of the gospel of Jesus Christ. the Son of God. May God himself the God of peace sanctify you through and through and may your whole spirit soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us now and evermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen.