

## Colossians 1:21-23

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### Introduction

- What evidence can you see in the world today that humanity is in a state of war against God?
- Can you think of an example from your own life where you found yourself estranged (alienated) from someone, but were later reconciled? How did both situations feel at the time?

### Sermon review...

- Are there any questions or comments about the sermon on this passage?

\* If anyone was not in church and missed the sermon they are all readily available in mp3 format on the St Mark's website.

### What you once were, v21

- Does it surprise you that Paul describes the Colossians (and all mankind for that matter) as once being in a state of war with God?

'At war with God' is an idea that the writers of the NT often use to describe man's natural relationship with God. You might like to look up: Rom 5:10, 8:7; Eph 2:13-16; James 4:4 to fill out your understanding.

- Before you became a Christian how was your 'war against God' expressed in your own life?

### Where you now stand, v 22

- Ask one or two people in the group to describe their journey from hostility toward God to reconciliation with him.
- v 22 says that the result of being reconciled to God is that we now stand before Him 'holy, without blemish and free from accusation'.

What difference do you think this should make to our lives?

What implications do you think this has for Christians who wrestle with guilt or who suffer from poor self-image?

- Take a moment in prayer to thank God for what he accomplished by Jesus' death on the cross.

### How you must go on, v 23

#### Explanation...

v 23 is a difficult verse! You could read it and think that Paul is expressing doubt about the ability of some Christians to attain the benefits that come from being reconciled to God (v 22b). Furthermore, you could think that Paul is saying that the promises of v 22b depend ultimately on *your* faith. The thinking goes something like this: 'As long as I continue to have faith, then I will attain the blessings of v 22b... But what happens though, when I have doubts, when my faith falters? Is the promise of v 22b somehow at risk? Read this way, *my faith*, becomes a 'work' which I somehow contribute to my salvation. And if that is the case, then can I ever be sure of my eternal future? You will be glad to know that this reading of v 23 is a long way from what Paul intended.

A couple of things need to be born in mind. Firstly, the words 'if you continue in **your** faith' are better translated, 'if you continue in **the** faith' (the Greek has the word '*the*' before 'faith' – the NIV has left this out). To speak of '**the faith**' was Paul's way of speaking about the gospel, that is the gospel about Jesus (see also 1 Tim 3:9; 4:1; 5:8). My faith or your faith (NIV translation) is not what Paul had in mind.

Secondly, the Greek word translated 'If', at the beginning of v 23, does not express doubt. Rather it is a phrase that expresses confidence that, on the right foundation, a certain outcome will eventuate. One Bible expert paraphrases this in the following way: 'At any rate, if you stand firm in the faith – and I am sure that you will...'

So what does all this mean?

Paul is saying that the promise of v 22b (holy, without blemish, free from accusation) is a promise to all those who 'remain in the faith'. It refers to authentic Christians who stick with the one true gospel, with Christ at the centre. v 23 is a warning to those in Colossae (and today) who, out of their desire for alternative spiritual fulfilment, are tempted to wander from the gospel of Jesus.

- In 1:11 Paul spoke of perseverance in the faith as one expression of what it means 'to live a life worthy of the Lord'.

How can we encourage each other (in Home Group and at church) to 'continue... established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel' (1:23)?

**Conclude by praying about some of the issues people raised during discussion.**