

“SALVATION SUMMARIZED”

**I. Introduction**

- A. One thing that stands out in these verses is the contrast that Paul makes between what the Colossian Christians once were and what they now are.
1. This is one of Paul’s favorite literary devices.
  2. He uses it to emphasize the great change that the gospel brings about in the lives of those who receive it.
  3. One reason why he uses it in reference to the Colossians is because he wants them to see how ungrateful it would be for them to be drawn away from Christ the new inventions of the false teachers in their midst.
- B. Christians often employ the contrast between what we once were and what we now are when we bear witness to Christ’s saving work in our lives.
1. One famous example of this is found in John Newton’s famous hymn “Amazing Grace,” where we sing,  
  
*I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.*
  2. As we study these verses this evening, we will see how they provide us with a basic summary of the salvation that we receive in Christ.

**II. Alienation**

- A. Our text begins by describing the state of the Colossian believers prior to their coming to Christ.

1. Paul says that they were “alienated” from God.
  2. This is the status of every human being in their fallen condition.
  3. Apart from Christ we are cut off from God and are incapable of receiving any spiritual blessing from him.
  4. While fallen man cannot escape God’s presence, he does not enjoy fellowship with God but is the object of God’s just wrath.
- B. Paul further expounds this by saying that the Colossians were “hostile in mind” before they came to faith in Christ.
1. Here we see that fallen man’s relationship with God is not merely one of estrangement.
  2. It is one of overt hostility on our part.
  3. We view God as our enemy.
  4. Instead of living for God we live for self.
  5. The fact that God lays claim to our obedience and our worship causes us to see him as an oppressor.
  6. As the kings and rulers say of God and Christ in Psalm 2, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”
  7. This is how the people in our culture view the God of the Bible.
  8. It is why they want nothing to do with him.
- C. Of course it is true that most people do not deny the existence of God altogether, but they are not willing to submit to the God who reveals himself in the pages of Scripture.
1. They make God out to be whoever they want him to be.

2. While it may make people feel good to believe in a god of their own imagining, manmade gods have no power to do people any actual good.
  3. To be unwilling to submit to the one true and living God is to be hostile towards him.
  4. There is no neutrality when it comes to a person's standing before God.
  5. As long as a person refuses to live under the rule of the true God, that person is an enemy of God.
  6. And being an enemy of God means living in this world without him and without any hope.
- D. The third thing that Paul says about man in his fallen condition is that he does evil deeds.
1. Our hostility of mind towards God is expressed behaviorally.
  2. This is true of everyone who is apart from Christ, even people who seem to be kind, generous, and respectable.
  3. As long as people remain in their fallen estate, their deeds are evil.
  4. The reason why this is the case is because fallen man does not do anything for the right reasons or with the right goal in view.
  5. Even when people do things that are good, they are not doing them to glorify and honor God.
  6. Moreover, even their best deeds are polluted by sin.
- E. Paul wants the Christians in Colossae to remember what they were before they came to faith in Christ.
1. We need to remember this as well.

2. Even if you have believed in Christ for as long as you can remember, you were not conceived in that condition.
3. What David says of himself in Psalm 51 is true of all of us: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psa 51:5 ESV)
4. If you are no longer alienated from God, if you are no longer hostile in mind towards him, if you are no longer walking in the evil deeds that inevitably flow from a fallen heart, then it is because God has graciously intervened and brought you to himself.

### III. Reconciliation

- A. After explaining what the Colossians once were, his focus shifts in verse 22 to what they now are in Christ.
  1. Now they have been reconciled to God.
  2. "Reconcile" is the same word that Paul used in 1:20 to describe the extent of Christ's redemptive work, saying that through Christ God was pleased "to reconcile to himself all things."
  3. The Christians in Colossae are evidence of the cosmic reconciliation that God is bringing about in Christ.
  4. The same could be said of every Christian.
  5. We are the beginnings of the new creation.
- B. Notice the subject and tense of the verb "reconcile" in verse 22.
  1. Paul says that God has now reconciled the Colossians.
  2. God is the subject of the verb.
  3. God is the one who has brought this reconciliation about.

4. We cannot do anything to appease God or to remove the enmity that stands between us and God.
  5. Only God can do this, and he has done it in Christ.
  6. This is emphasized by the fact that the verb “reconcile” is in the past tense here.
  7. God has reconciled us.
  8. It is an accomplished fact.
  9. God has not merely made reconciliation possible.
  10. He has not done his part and handed things over to us so that we can do our part.
  11. God has secured reconciliation for us.
  12. In Christ, he has done all that was needed in order to restore us to a state of blessed communion with him.
- C. Paul also says that this reconciliation was brought about by Christ “in his body of flesh.”
1. This emphasis on the incarnation suggests that the false teachers in Colossae were either downplaying or denying that Jesus was a real man.
  2. In other words, they were teaching a version of the docetic heresy, which said that Christ only seemed to be human and only seemed to die on the cross.
  3. This teaching was rooted in a gnostic outlook which saw matter as so inherently evil that it would be unthinkable for God to have anything to do with it.

4. Yet the Bible makes it clear that the incarnation was absolutely necessary for reconciliation to be brought about.
  5. We had to have a Mediator who shared our nature.
  6. Only then could he suffer and die as our substitute.
  7. As Paul says in Romans 8, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Rom 8:3–4 ESV)
- D. Paul makes the same point right here in Colossians 1 when he says that Christ reconciled us "by his death."
1. The only way peace with God could be secured was through the offering of a sacrificial substitute.
  2. And because Christ's sacrificial death was the death of a man who was without blemish, his death secured and guaranteed all that our salvation requires.
  3. It even secured the faith that is necessary in order for us to have a share in Christ's saving benefits.
  4. We profess faith, but we do not produce it.
  5. It is granted to us to believe in Christ. (see Phil. 1:29; Jn. 6:65)
  6. While faith is worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit at God's appointed time, it was secured for us by Christ's atoning death.
- E. The next thing that Paul says about those who are now in Christ is that the purpose of Christ's reconciling work is that he might present us holy and blameless and above reproach before God.

1. What is Paul is talking about here?
  2. Is he referring to our justification, our sanctification, or our glorification?
  3. While the terminology that Paul uses here could describe any of these aspects of salvation, the use of the term “present” indicates that Paul has a legal context in view.
  4. This means he is either talking about justification or glorification.
  5. When we look at similar statements elsewhere in the New Testament, we find that they clearly refer to glorification.
  6. For example, Jude 24 ascribes glory to God as the one “who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.”
  7. And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:8 that Christ “will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
  8. In light of this, it is most likely that Paul’s emphasis is upon glorification in this part of our text in Colossians.
- F. Of course, we should never conceive of our glorification as something that is disconnected from our justification.
1. If we have truly been justified, then there is no longer any possibility of condemnation for us.
  2. God has already rendered the verdict of the last day over us.
  3. He has declared that we are righteous in his sight.
  4. Contrary to what some popular teachers today contend, the Bible does not teach a two-stage view of justification, with our final justification only taking place when we stand before the Lord on the day of judgment.

5. Consider this statement from John Piper: “In final salvation at the last judgment, faith is confirmed by the sanctifying fruit it has borne, and we are saved through that fruit and that faith.” [<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-god-really-save-us-by-faith-alone>]
6. While most of that statement is uncontroversial, we should be very troubled to hear Piper say that we are saved through the fruit that our faith produces in our lives.
7. It is certainly true that genuine faith will produce the fruit of a transformed life, but this fruit is only the evidence of our faith.
8. It is never to be conceived as the instrument through which we are saved.
9. To say that the instrument of salvation is faith plus works is to fall back into the Roman Catholic error.
10. As the Belgic Confession of Faith puts it, “although we do good works, we do not base our salvation on them. We cannot do a single work that is not defiled by our flesh and does not deserve punishment.” [art. 24]
11. The reason why we can be confident that we will be presented before God as holy and blameless on judgment day is because Christ has already secured a righteous standing for us.

#### IV. Perseverance

- A. We turn now to the final part of our text, where the focus is upon the importance of persevering in the faith.
  1. In verse 23, Paul attaches a condition to what he said in the preceding verse.
  2. He says that the Colossians will be presented as blameless before God on the last day “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and

steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.”

3. In the Greek, the construction “if indeed” does not imply uncertainty about the result.
  4. On the contrary, it suggests confidence that it is in fact the case.
  5. We see this in Ephesians 4, where Paul says, “But that is not the way you learned Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him.” (Eph 4:20–21 ESV)
  6. The phrase “assuming that” in those verses translates the same Greek words that are translated as “if indeed” in Colossians 1:23.
  7. In the Ephesians text, Paul was not in any doubt over whether or not those Christians had heard about Christ.
  8. He was the one who had taught them about Christ.
  9. He was simply reminding them of something that he knew to be true.
  10. In the same way, Paul is not casting any doubt over the Colossians’ salvation by adding this conditional phrase in verse 23.
  11. He is expressing confidence that they will persevere to the end.
- B. At the same time, there is a warning in what Paul says here.
1. This is an exhortation to continue in the faith.
  2. The Christians in Colossae needed to hear this warning because they were being tempted to shift away from the hope of the gospel.
  3. God gives us warnings like this because he intends for us to take them seriously.
  4. He does not want us to dismiss passages like this by saying, ‘Well, I know that I don’t need to worry about that because I have eternal

security in Christ.'

5. The warnings that God gives us in his Word are not meant to shake our assurance, but they are one of the means that God uses to ensure that we persevere to the end.
6. Just as a person driving along a winding road with a cliff to one side would be foolish to disregard the road signs, so also is it foolish for a person to ignore God's Word when it tells us that we have to continue in the faith in order to enter into heaven.
7. This doesn't mean that we earn our way into heaven by our faithfulness.
8. It simply means that the faith that is worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit is a faith that endures.
9. In the words of New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce, "Continuance is the test of reality."
10. The person who has true faith will never permanently turn aside from the gospel, but will remain stable and steadfast in it to the end of his or her days.

## V. Conclusion

- A. We have received a great salvation in Jesus Christ.
- B. We have been restored to fellowship with the God whom we had offended, the God who is the source of all life and all blessedness and all joy.
- C. And because this reconciliation has been brought about by Christ alone, we must never let the gospel be replaced by anything else.
- D. Our security comes from the fact that our salvation rests upon the rock solid foundation of Christ and his finished work.

- E. This is why the writer of Hebrews says, “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For... how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb 2:1, 3)