

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "If You Continue in the Faith" (Colossians 1:21-23)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 2/7/2010

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Introduction

We're coming to the end of the section of Colossians chapter one that deals with the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the church. The section ends with a transition in chapter one, verse 23. But I want to begin reading at verse 21 to give us the context. Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse 21, Paul writes this:

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Our focus today is on verse 23, and especially on the first part: "if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard."

As I often do, I want to give you some insights into the original Greek of this passage that are important in order for us to understand it properly.

If You Continue in the Faith

Paul begins verse 23 with the word "if." Now there are two different words that are both translated "if" in the New Testament. One of those words means, "if this

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happens.” In other words, it speaks of a hypothetical condition, something that may happen, or it may not happen, depending on future circumstances. But that’s not the word the Apostle Paul uses here. The Greek word he uses for “if” means “assuming that something is already true.” Paul is not saying, “*if* you continue in the faith,” but rather, “*assuming* that you continue in the faith.”

What he is saying is that if you continue in the faith, if you continue in the Gospel, that will demonstrate the fact that you are saved. That will demonstrate the fact that you are going to be presented holy, without blame, and above reproach before God at the Last Day. That will demonstrate the fact that you are going to spend eternity on the New Earth with the Lord Jesus Christ. That will demonstrate the fact that you are going to be changed, that your body of corrupt flesh is going to be put off, and you are going to receive a glorified body like that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, Paul is speaking to truly born-again Christians. He is not speaking to mere professing Christians who will prove that they are not truly saved because they will at some point down the line depart from the faith and become apostates.

And let me make something else very clear. Paul is not saying that you are going to keep your salvation through your own efforts. He’s not saying that your works will add anything to what Christ has already done. The work of your salvation is finished, it is complete, it is settled once and for all. Continuing in the faith is going

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to demonstrate the fact that you truly do possess saving faith as the gift of God the Holy Spirit. That is what continuance in the Gospel will mean. You don't stay in the faith in order to remain saved, you stay in the faith as the demonstration that you are saved, once and for all.

The Grounded Christian

And then Paul tells us what characterizes the person who continues in the faith. That person is "grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard."

That word "grounded" means "to be firmly established upon a foundation." The Lord Jesus Christ used that same word in the parable of the house built upon the rock and the sand, in Matthew chapter seven. I want to begin a few verses earlier, at verse eighteen, for the context. Jesus said this:

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

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And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

And that word "founded" is the same word we have translated "grounded" here in Colossians 1:23 – firmly established upon a foundation. But then Jesus continues in Matthew chapter seven with this warning:

But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.

In other words, salvation depends on the right foundation. If you are truly saved, you are resting upon the firm and unmovable foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if you are not saved, then you are resting on some other foundation. That foundation might be a church, or your good works, or your baptism, or a philosophy, or many, many other things. But if you are resting on those things, you have built a house upon the sand. You have built upon a foundation that will not withstand the tests of time, much less the test of eternity, the test of the judgment

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seat of Christ. You need to turn away from those things and turn to Christ, and trust in His finished work alone for eternal life. He is the only sure foundation.

In John chapter fifteen, beginning at verse eleven, Jesus made the same point in a different way. He said this:

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

In other words, if you do not abide in Christ, it proves that you are not His. But, Jesus goes on to say this:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

That is the proof, Jesus says, that you are connected to me, as a branch to the vine. That is the proof Jesus says, that your confidence for eternal life is built upon Me. And then Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

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And so it should be for you today, if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. You have every reason to rejoice in your salvation, and that rejoicing is in Christ alone. You are “grounded and steadfast” – Colossians 1:23 – “and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard.”

The Steadfast Christian

And then in Colossians 1:23 we come to that word “steadfast.” That word comes from the Greek word that means “to sit down.” It means to be in a firm and unmovable position of rest. And that is the position of every true believer in Christ. If you are saved, you have been placed upon the foundation, the rock, the Lord Jesus. The original Greek text tells us that this is a once-for-all act on the part of God, and that is in an act of God that has permanent results. This is what happens to you. This is what happens to every sinner who puts his faith in the Lord Jesus.

If you profess to be the recipient of this work of God, but your life does not show it, then it means your profession does not line up with the facts, and that means you are not rooted and grounded in Christ.

You need to ask yourself the question, “Does my life agree with my profession of faith?” If you have truly been reconciled to God through Christ, you have been made a new creature. 2 Corinthians 5:17 – “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” – new in quality – “old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

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If you have been truly reconciled to God through Christ, then you will have a new way of thinking and acting. There will be, growing within you, a way of thinking and acting that loves God, that hates sin, that desires to obey God, and all of this because God the Holy Spirit is living and working within you.

First John 2:19 tells us that those who fall away from the faith, “went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” But Jesus said, in John 8:32, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 14:15 – “If you love Me,” Jesus says, “keep My commandments.”

In Romans 6:22-23 Paul tells us, “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And James 1:22-25 we have the same thought: “But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

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This is what characterizes the person who continues in the faith. That person is “grounded and steadfast, and... not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard.”

The Unmovable Christian

And that brings us to the phrase “not moved away.” This is a Greek word that is only found in this one place in the New Testament. And once again, it’s a word in the original that has to do with something that happens which gives evidence of what is going on inside of a person. The person who is moved away from the sure foundation of Christ is not truly resting on that foundation. If you’ve moved away from the foundation of Christ, if you’ve gone off into something else or someone else, you need to repent and place your faith and trust in Christ alone for salvation.

Paul says that those who are truly in Christ will not be “moved away from the hope of the gospel.” And that word for “hope” is not a word that means, well, I’m hoping that something will happen, but I’m not sure of it. No, the word that is used for “hope” here – “the hope of the Gospel” – this has to do with the confident expectation, the confident assurance, that God always keeps His promises. It is the confident assurance that God has done what He says He has done, that God is doing what He says He is doing, and that God will do what He says He will do.

Paul has spoken of these things throughout Colossians chapter one as he has proclaimed the preeminence of Christ. God has done what He says He has done. God says that if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, He “has qualified [you]

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to be [a] partaker of the inheritance of the saints in the light" (verse 12). God says that if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, "He has delivered [you] from the power of darkness and conveyed [you] into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (verse 13).

And God is doing what He says He is doing. God says that if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, you now "have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (verse 14). God says that if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, you are now reconciled to Him (verses 19-22). God says that if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, you now have all the resources of His Word and of the indwelling Holy Spirit, so that "you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy" (verses 9-11).

And God will do what He says He will do. He will present you, "holy, blameless, and above reproach" (verse 22). He will keep you from stumbling, and "present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude verse 24).

Believer, rest in Christ. Remain grounded and steadfast. Don't be moved. Remain confident in the glorious expectation that is yours, because of the Gospel of the preeminent Lord Jesus Christ.

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