

Paul's Letter to the Colossians Study
Bible Study Session 05
 Colossians 1:21-23 : Topic 3.3
 "Reconciled by Christ"

Study By
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Greek NT

21 καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς—22 νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατηλλάγητε ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου— παραστῆσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ, 23 εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἔδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὗ ἠκούσατε, τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν, οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος.

La Biblia de las Américas

21 Y aunque vosotros antes estabais alejados y erais de ánimo hostil, ocupados en malas obras, 22 sin embargo, ahora El os ha reconciliado en su cuerpo de carne, mediante su muerte, a fin de presentaros santos, sin mancha e irreprochables delante de El, 23 si en verdad permanecéis en la fe bien cimentados y constantes, sin moveros de la esperanza del evangelio que habéis oído, que fue proclamado a toda la creación debajo del cielo, y del cual yo, Pablo, fui hecho ministro.

NRSV

21 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him— 23 provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

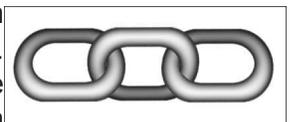
NLT

21 This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions, 22 yet now he has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through his death on the cross in his own human body. As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. 23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand in it firmly. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed by God to proclaim it.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Clearly by verse 21 we have reached the letter body section. But Paul has been slowly transitioning toward this since at least verse 13, and perhaps since verse 9. Each section, however, contains 'links' that tie the units together and thus provide the conceptual bridge for the ideas to move across. God has 'made the Colossian believers fit' for Heaven (1:12) through His Son Jesus Christ who stands as the Reconciler between God and creation (1:20). The Colossians now stand as having been reconciled to God (vv. 21-23).



Our text stands as one of the BC/AD passages scattered across the New Testament, where the past life before Christ (BC) is contrasted with the new life after Christ (AD) has been received through faith commitment. These texts stand as critical sources for understanding the idea of Christian conversion set forth in scripture. Sometimes Paul depicts this in the first person as his own experience; at other times in the second or third person depicting it from the vantage point of his readers. More about this under Genre

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

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concerns below.

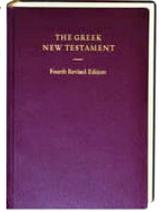
Historical Context:

As is standard for our studies, first in the **External History** section we will examine issues related to the copying of this passage during the first millennium of Christian history. Then we will take a look at time and place issues that surface either directly or indirectly inside the passage in the **Internal History** section.

External History. Over the beginning centuries of the copying of this part of the text of Colossians only one variation in wording appears that the editors of *The Greek New Testament* from the United Bible Societies publishers in the 4th revised edition considered significant enough to call attention to Bible translators.

In verse twenty-two the printed text reading *νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατήλλαξεν*, **but now he has reconciled**, is replaced by a wide variety of alternative spellings of the verb ἀποκαταλλάσσω.² Although this reading makes sense,³ the shift to the second plural passive ἀποκατηλλάγητε, **you have been reconciled**, has important manuscript support in Codex Vaticanus (B), but creates considerable grammar difficulty for the syntax of the sentence here.⁴ Additionally, the double compound nature of the verb ἀπο - κατ - ῆλλαξεν created confusion in the minds of many copyists about the correct spelling of either the active or passive voice forms.⁵ Consequently, the UBS editorial committee assigned the printed text reading a ranking of C as a reflection of the uncertainty of the precise reading with both internal and external evidence divided between the active or passive forms of the verb.⁶

The text apparatus of the Nestle-Aland 27th rev. ed. *Novum Testamentum Graece* lists four additional places where variations of wording surface in vv. 21-23.⁷ As is often the case, these



²“22 {C} ἀποκατήλλαξεν/ἀπεκατήλλαξεν κ A C D2 Ψ 048 075 0150 6 81 256 263 365 424 436 1175 1241 1319 1573 1739 1852 1881 1912 1962 2127 2200 Byz [K L P] Lect it^{ar, f, mon} vg syr^{p, h} arm eth slav geo (Adamantius^{sr}) Chrysostom Severian Theodore^{lat} Cyril; Jerome Pelagius // ἀπήλλαξεν 104 459 (I 921 κατήλλαξεν) // ἀποκατήλλακται 33 // ἀποκατηλλάγητε (P⁴⁶ ἀποκαταλλάγητε) B Adamantius^{lat}; Hilary // ἀποκαταλλαγέντες D* F G it^{b, d, g} vg^{ms} Irenaeus^{lat}; Ambrosiaster Speculum”

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000; 2009).]

³“But you...he has now reconciled in the his fleshly body through death...”

⁴In English it would read, but now you (dir obj) you (subject) have been reconciled...”

⁵“The internal and external evidence are in conflict here. On the one hand, the reading of the text has good manuscript support and it provides acceptable sense. On the other hand, if ἀποκατήλλαξεν were the original reading, it is very difficult to explain why the reading with the passive verb ἀποκατηλλάγητε (you [plural] have been reconciled) should have arisen since the passive creates grammatical difficulties (see the discussion in Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, pp. 220–21). The active verb seems more suitable grammatically in the context and has better external testimony.

“If the reading in the text is followed, it is not clear who the subject of the verb is. The active verb might take up the subject of the preceding hymn, which is God. But this creates a theological difficulty since ‘his body of flesh’ seems to refer to God. But compare ‘But now, by means of the physical death of his Son, God has made you his friends’ (TEV and similarly REB, FC, TOB). It is also possible that the intended subject of ἀποκατήλλαξεν is Christ, who is praised in the preceding hymn (Barth and Blanke, p. 221).”

[Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament : An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 413.]

⁶“The conflicting textual phenomena of this verse are difficult to resolve. On the one hand, the reading ἀποκατήλλαξεν is well supported (κ A C D^c K nearly all minuscules it^{ar, f, mon} vg syr^{p, h} cop^{sa, bo} al) and provides acceptable sense. On the other hand, however, if this were the original reading, it is exceedingly difficult to explain why the other readings should have arisen. Faced with this dilemma, and considering a passive verb to be totally unsuitable in the context, a majority of the Committee preferred to follow the preponderance of external testimony and therefore adopted ἀποκατήλλαξεν.”

[Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament* (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 554-55.]

⁷Kolossar 1,22

* -ῆλλαγητε (P⁴⁶) B (these spellings replace ἀποκατήλλαξεν)

| -αλλαγεντες D* F G b vgms; Irlat Ambst Spec

| -ῆλλακται 33

| txt κ A C D2 Ψ 048. 075. (0278. 104). 1739. 1881 m lat sy

* αυτου κ A P 81. 326. 614. 630. 1241s. 2464 al ar sy^{p, h**}; Ir^{lat} Spec (αὐτοῦ inserted after θανάτου)

| txt P^{46vid} B C D F G I^{vid} Ψ 075. 0278. 33. 1739. 1881 M lat; Tert

Kolossar 1,23

* P^{46vid} 33 (καὶ is omitted in these manuscripts)

variations are primarily stylistic and, to some extent, are harmonizing with similar phrases found elsewhere in Paul's writings.

What these variations do not reflect is any failure to understand the essence of the apostle's words here. Rather, it is a matter of varying opinions by different copyists as to how best to express these ideas. Thus we can exegete the text in full confidence of working from the original wording of this passage.

Internal History. Few historical markers are found in this text concerning specific events related either to Paul or the Colossians. In general terms, the moment of conversion to Christianity by the Colossians is alluded to in verse 22. Also, Paul's personal calling as an apostle is alluded to in verse 21. This goes back to his "Damascus Road" encounter with Christ in AD 33, some twenty five or so years earlier. The conversion of the Colossians -- at least a considerable number of them -- goes back to the initial evangelizing work of Epaphras -- and others most likely including Timothy -- at Colossae (1:7) in the mid 50s, some five or so years earlier.⁸

Paul's conversion. Paul's conversion from a Jewish Pharisee to a Christian is described numerous times inside the New Testament. The descriptions are given from two vantage points. Luke describes the apostle's conversion from a dominantly historical narrative perspective in Acts. But Paul will virtually always describe his own conversion from a theological perspective, since for him the time of his conversion was far less important than the spiritual nature of this experience. He always depicts the conversion as a defined moment in time, never as a process extending over a period of time. And for him the main thing was the spiritual dynamic of that moment, not the historical details.

Historical depictions.⁹

Acts 9:1-21 (NRSV).

1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." 11 The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this

* τη κ² D² Ψ 075. 0278. 1739. 1881 M (ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τη... reads ἐν πάσῃ τη κτίσει τη...)
| txt P⁴⁶ κ* A B C D* F G 33. 326. 614. 1175. 1241s pc

* κηρυξ και αποστολος κ* P M (διάκονος is replaced by one of these three alternative readings)
| κηρ. κ. απ. και διακ. A syh^{mg} sa^{ms}
| διακ. κ. απ. 81 vg^{ms}

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 525.]

⁸For a detailed discussion of 'conversion' and Paul's conversion see my *The Apostle Paul: Servant of Christ*, chapter two, "Conversion" at cranfordville.com.

⁹By 'historical' is meant history in the ancient definition of the term, more than in the modern western definition. While modern history is the depiction exclusively of human activity based upon established factual evidence, ancient history, particularly among Jews, was two dimensional depicting both human and divine actions and interactions with one another.

the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" 22 Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

23 After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him; 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

In this text, Luke provides the first account of Paul's conversion and call to ministry as a part of his narrative depiction of the first three decades of the Christian movement, from AD 30 to 60 appx. Paul's encounter with Jesus happened on one of the major roads leading into the Gentile city of Damascus (vv. 1-9). The subsequent phase was his baptism by the Christian disciple Ananias in the city of Damascus (vv. 10-19a). He spent some time in the city as a new convert to Christianity before returning to Jerusalem (vv. 19b-23). The old Pharisee Saul¹⁰ had a dramatic encounter with the resurrected Christ outside Damascus. His experience was affirmed through his baptism a few days latter in the city by Ananias. Immediately he began serving Christ as a powerful advocate of the Christian faith, much to the surprise and shock of the entire Jewish community.¹¹ Fairly quickly Jewish opposition to him developed and forced him to flee the city with the help of fellow believers there.¹²

This narrative is dominantly historical although theological elements are clearly inserted into the depiction.

Acts 22:1-16 (NRSV):

1 "Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense that I now make before you."

2 When they heard him addressing them in Hebrew, they became even more quiet. Then he said:

3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. 4 I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

6 "While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 8 I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" Then he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting." 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 I asked, "What am I to do, Lord?" The Lord said to me, "Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told

¹⁰Saul was Paul's Hebrew name; Paul was his Greek name. Luke shifts from Saul to Paul in Acts 13:9.

¹¹Paul's personal account and that of Luke somewhat differ in the details about what happened to Paul in the city after being baptized:

Gal. 1:16b-17. I did not confer with any human being, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι, 17 οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱερουσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους, ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν, καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.

Acts 9:19b-25. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" 22 Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

23 After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him; 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

Ἐγένετο δὲ μετὰ τῶν ἐν Δαμασκῷ μαθητῶν ἡμέρας τινὰς, 20 καὶ εὐθέως ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς ἐκήρυσσεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. 21 ἐξίσταντο δὲ πάντες οἱ ἀκούοντες καὶ ἔλεγον· Οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ πορθήσας ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτο, καὶ ὧδε εἰς τοῦτο ἐληλύθει ἵνα δεδεμένους αὐτοὺς ἀγάγῃ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς; 22 Σαῦλος δὲ μᾶλλον ἐνεδυναμοῦτο καὶ συνέχυνεν τοὺς Ἰουδαίους τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐν Δαμασκῷ, συμβιβάζων ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός.

23 Ὡς δὲ ἐπληροῦντο ἡμέραι ἰκαναί, συνεβουλεύσαντο οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀνελεῖν αὐτόν· 24 ἐγνώσθη δὲ τῷ Σαύλῳ ἡ ἐπιβουλὴ αὐτῶν. παρετηροῦντο δὲ καὶ τὰς πύλας ἡμέρας τε καὶ νυκτὸς ὅπως αὐτὸν ἀνέλωσιν· 25 λαβόντες δὲ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ νυκτὸς διὰ τοῦ τείχους καθῆκαν αὐτὸν χαλάσαντες ἐν σπυρίδι.

¹²In **2 Cor. 11:32-33**, Paul provides a slightly different account of this departure from the city:

³²In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

32 ἐν Δαμασκῷ ὁ ἐθνάρχης Ἀρέτα τοῦ βασιλέως ἐφρούρει τὴν πόλιν Δαμασκηνῶν πιάσαι με, 33 καὶ διὰ θυρίδος ἐν σαργάνῃ ἐχαλάσθην διὰ τοῦ τείχους καὶ ἐξέφυγον τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ.

everything that has been assigned to you to do.’¹¹ Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

12 “A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, 13 came to me; and standing beside me, he said, “Brother Saul, regain your sight!’ In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. 14 Then he said, “The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; 15 for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.”

This text is a part of one of Paul’s defense speeches¹³ and was given to the assembled Jewish people in front of the Roman barracks in Jerusalem after his arrest by the Roman soldiers.¹⁴ As Luke recounts and highlights Paul’s words to the people, the historical orientation of the narrative remains dominate. The historical details are similar to, but not exactly the same as in the first narrative in chapter nine. Some details are added here, while some in chapter nine are omitted. The theological perspective, however, remains the same between chapters nine and twenty-two.

Acts 26:9-18 (NRSV):

9 “Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. 11 By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

12 “With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. 14 When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.’ 15 I asked, “Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord answered, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. 17 I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles — to whom I am sending you 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

This final depiction by Luke is set in another defense speech¹⁵ of Paul. This time the speech is given to King Agrippa and his assembled guests in the ‘audience hall’ of the Roman governor Festus in Caesarea.¹⁶ Once more Luke only highlights Paul’s speech with the details that blend in with his writing objectives for the book of Acts (especially, as set forth in 1:8-9). The depiction remains dominantly historical, but with strong theological elements. A few details are given here that are not found in the two previous accounts, and many of the details in those two earlier accounts are not included here. A stronger theological emphasis on Paul’s calling to the Gentiles is contained here than in the other two narratives.

From these three sources a relatively clear picture emerges of how Paul came to Christ. The supernatural aspects of the encounter of Paul with the risen Christ dominate the narrative. His immediate interaction with the Christian community is a major element as well. That interaction centers on Paul’s baptism by Ananias.

Theological depictions.

Gal. 1:13-24 (NRSV):

13 You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. 14 I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. 15 But when God, who had set me apart before I was born

¹³The speech here is found in 22:3-21.

¹⁴**Acts 21:34-40** (NRSV): 34 Some in the crowd shouted one thing, some another; and as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. 35 When Paul came to the steps, the violence of the mob was so great that he had to be carried by the soldiers. 36 The crowd that followed kept shouting, “Away with him!” 37 Just as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, “May I say something to you?” The tribune replied, “Do you know Greek? 38 Then you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” 39 Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city; I beg you, let me speak to the people.” 40 When he had given him permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the people for silence; and when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying:

¹⁵The speech here is found in 26:3-23.

¹⁶See **Acts 25:1-26:1** for the narrative setting of the speech.

and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; 19 but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. 20 In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, 22 and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; 23 they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." 24 And they glorified God because of me.

This is the primary Pauline text giving a self-depiction of his experience of conversion and calling. The conversion and calling are contained in vv. 13-17, with verses 15-16 as the core declaration. His conversion is defined as "when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, **was pleased to reveal his Son to me.**" His calling is "so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles." The BC description is vv. 13-14, and the AD part is vv. 16b-24 with vv. 15-16a being the conversion turning point. Because of Paul's lengthy defense of his claim to apostleship in 1:11 - 2:21, the recounting of his conversion emphasizes his limited contact with the other apostles, rather than his conversion. The text is dominantly theological with some historical elements. The heart of conversion is a spiritual revealing of Christ to the individual. This is Paul's summation of the longer Lukan accounts in Acts.



Phil 3:3-14 (NRSV):

3 For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh — 4 even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Written after Colossians when Paul was in Rome under house arrest, he focuses on the BC and AD aspects without much emphasis on the moment of his conversion. The setting is his warning about false teachers with a Jewish heritage in 3:2.¹⁷ Here the depiction is completely theological with little historical allusion. The stress is upon what has been gained spiritually through coming to Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:1-2 (NRSV):

1 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Here the emphasis is upon the kind of life style and ministry that grew out of Paul's conversion. The main stress is upon integrity in service to Christ, and faithfulness to God's calling to preach the gospel. Chapter four of 2 Corinthians is a more detailed defense of Paul's ministry and provides the setting for these words.

With these texts and a few scattered references elsewhere to Paul's conversion and calling, one can gain a pretty detailed picture of how God moved in Paul's life both historically and spiritually to change him from a persecutor of Christianity to an advocate of Christianity.

The Colossians' conversion. The conversion of the believers at Colossae is not described historically. The closest historical reference is in Col. 1:3-8:

3 In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. **You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you.**

¹⁷Phil. 3:2 (NRSV): "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!"

Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, ***so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. 7 This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.*** He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Epaphras played a foundational role in evangelizing Colossae and in beginning the church there. The Colossians responded quickly and enthusiastically to the preaching of the gospel by Epaphras. A few scattered references will allude to their conversion, such as 2:6 (“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him,”), 2:11-14 (“11 In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, 14 erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.”), and 3:1 (“So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”). But these are theological in orientation rather than historical. Consequently we can learn little more about the circumstances of their conversion beyond the preaching of the gospel to them by Epaphras. Paul provides rich insight, however, into the theological nature of their conversion. It was a ‘receiving Christ’ into their life. It was a spiritual circumcision and a spiritual burial with Christ. Also it was a spiritual resurrection into new life. This new life included the forgiveness of sins.

Literary Aspects:

The literary aspects play an important role in the interpretive process, as is described below.

Literary Form:

The genre of 1:21-23 is undefined by established literary forms at the small genre level. At the broad level the text is a part of an ancient letter that is attempting to communicate the ideas of Paul and Timothy to the believers at Colossae. The text also stands in the letter body. This part of the ancient letter was the primary segment where the letter sender presented his thoughts to the intended readers of the letter. No set pattern for organizing these ideas existed in the ancient world. What the sender wanted to say, and the level of creativity in presenting his ideas determined how the contents of the letter were arranged.

Inside the letters of Paul in the New Testament a considerable amount of variety in presenting ideas can be identified. Randomly used elements have been marked out by scholars and include the following:

Opening Formulae	From early preaching
Request/Appeal	Kerygma
Disclosure	Verba Christi
Expressions of Astonishment	Old Testament Allusion
Formulae of Compliance	Old Testament Citation
Formulae of Hearing/Learning	Paraenesis
Narrative	Lists of Vice/Virtues
Traditions Material	Haustafeln (Domestic Code)
From worship liturgy	Duty Codes (Gemeindetafeln)
Hymns	Judgment Form
Confessions of Faith	Closing
Lord’s Supper Narratives	Eschatological Affirmations
	Travelogue/Apostolic Parousia

Paul typically combined narrative and didactic material, but put these together differently in each letter. The narrative materials will refer to either his ministry and / or to some past event in the life of his readers. Often the event relates to his personal ministry at the church to whom he is writing. The didactic / teaching material makes extensive use of existing literary forms, many of which were commonly found in the ancient world, but many others reflect literary forms that emerged in early Christianity in both oral and written patterns. But the circumstantial nature of the ancient letter means that the content of the letter body is made up of the ideas of the letter sender in order to address specific needs and situations among the readers. Communication of these ideas sometimes makes use of existing literary forms, but often does not. For Paul, a combination of these is the norm in his letters.

The closest pattern to an identifiable literary genre for 1:21-23 is the ‘conversion narrative,’ where the before and after aspects of Christian conversion are presented. This can have a dominate historical focus, but in Paul it mostly will be presented in theological tones highlighting the spiritual conditions before and

after the coming of Christ into the person's life.¹⁸ The form can focus on the conversion of the letter sender or on the readers of the letter. Above under the Historical Aspects we considered those that center on Paul's conversion. Similar in form to Col 1:21-23 is Eph. 2:1-10 with a focus on the religious significance of conversion of the readers of the letter.

Eph. 2:1-10

1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

in Ephesians is upon spiritual death, while in Colossians it is upon estrangement from God. The conversion emphasis in Ephesians is upon being saved by God's grace, while in Colossians it is upon being reconciled to God.

Thus, while the two texts have the same literary form of a conversion narrative, the content and theological emphasis are distinct from one another. This is determined by the literary context and purpose of each passage in its respective letter.

Literary Setting:

The literary context for 1:21-23 is depicted by the chart to the right. Although the issue of whether this passage is the first unit of the letter body or not is unclear, its connection to 1:13-20 and to 1:24-29 is defined clearly. In 1:20, the theme of reconciliation of sinful humanity to God through Christ is asserted. This theme of reconciliation is picked up in 1:21-23 as the focal point of what God has done among the Colossians. At the end of 23, Paul speaks of being made a servant of the gospel, and this provides the basis for his discussion of his ministry in vv. 24-29. In a manner common among Jewish scribes of that time, Paul uses 'headers' to link his ideas together as he moves his thought forward. These headers are normally placed at the beginning of each pericope and link back to something at the end of the preceding pericope.



Col. 1:21-23

21 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

22 he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and ir-reproachable before him — 23 provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

Typical to both passages is the pre-conversion depiction (Eph. 2:1-3 // Col. 1:21), that is followed by the after conversion depiction (Eph. 2:4-10 // Col. 1:22-23). The Ephesians passage goes into much greater detail than does the Colossians.

The pre-conversion emphasis

**Outline of Colossians
Praescriptio**

- Introduction: 1:1-2
- Superscriptio: 1:1
- Adscriptio: 1:2a
- Salutatio: 1:2b

Proem

- Thankfulness: 1:3-8

Body

- Intercession: 1:9-12
- Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20
- Reconciliation: 1:21-23

- Paul's Ministry 1: 1:24-29
- Paul's Ministry 2: 2:1-5

- Christian Living 1: 2:6-15
- Christian Living 2: 2:16-19

- Christian Legalism: 2:20-23
- Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4
- Christian Behavior: 3:5-11
- Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

- Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1
 - Husband/Wife: 3:18-19
 - Father/Children: 3:20-21
 - Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

- Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

Conclusio

- Tychicus: 4:7-9
- Greetings: 4:10-17
- Closing: 4:18
 - Letter Validation: 4:18a
 - Prayer Request: 4:18b
 - Benedictio: 4:19c

¹⁸A distinction between (1) narratives describing the conversion of specific individuals and (2) narratives describing the religious significance of the conversion needs to be maintained. Inside the book of Acts the conversion experience (1) of Paul (9:1-21; 22:1-16; 26:9-18), Cornelius (10:1-48), the Philippian jailer (16:25-34), the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40), and Lydia (16:11-15) are described. Among the latter (2) are Col. 1:21-23; Eph. 2:1-10; Gal. 1:13-24; Phil. 3:3-14.

when Paul reaches the core verb that 'you' belongs to. The very extensive flexibility of possible word order in ancient Greek sentences is typically impossible to duplicate in modern western languages, including modern Greek.

Coming after the core verb are the elements of reconciliation that Paul attaches to the core verb. How God reconciled is stated as 'in the fleshly body of Christ' (ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ) and 'through Christ's death' (διὰ τοῦ θανάτου). Why God reconciled is stated as 'to present you as...' (παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ). Temple sacrificial language is used to describe the believers' eschatological appearance before the Judge of this universe. A proviso is attached -- either to the verb 'reconciled' or to the infinitive 'present' -- assuming the steadfastness of the Colossians in the faith commitment coming out of the gospel they first heard when they accepted Christ: "assuming you indeed remain grounded...." (εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἐδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). The gospel (τοῦ εὐαγγελίου) is then qualified three ways: 'which you heard' (οὗ ἠκούσατε); 'which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven' (τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν); and 'which I Paul have become a minister' (οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος).

Thus in a marvelous expression the apostle painted a theological picture of what God had accomplished among the Colossians with the preaching of the gospel to them by Epaphras some years before the writing of this letter. It was this work of God that provided the foundation for a growing spiritual life in the church. And as latter will be seen, it was this foundation that should serve as a defense against the false teaching that was making inroads into the Christian community there.

Exegesis of the Text:

The BC / AD elements provide the foundation for exegetic the passage. Understanding the concept of reconciliation with God is pivotal to the passage.

Before reconciliation with God, v. 21: "And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds," (καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς).

What is the situation of the sinner without Christ? The New Testament provides many answers to this question in order to paint the full details of the horrible predicament the lost sinner exists in outside of Christ. In the somewhat parallel text of Eph. 2:1-4 the emphasis is upon spiritual death:

1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3 All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us.

2. 1 Καὶ ὑμᾶς ὄντας νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν, 2 ἐν αἷς ποτε περιεπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας· 3 ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν, ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιών, καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί· 4 ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς,

The 'you' and the 'we' in Ephesians is typically understood as 'you Gentiles' and 'we Jews and Gentiles.' In this companion letter, Paul underscores that spiritual darkness and death had enveloped both Gentile and Jew outside of Christ. That darkness meant enslavement to the evil powers dominating this sinful world. The result was that all deserved only God's wrath. Elsewhere in Ephesians, Paul will make repeated reference to the nature of spiritual lostness outside of Christ: 2:11-17; 4:17-32; 5:3- 21. In other letters he makes similar points, such as in 1 Cor. 6:9-11:

9 Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, 10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

9 Ἡ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ἄδικοι θεοῦ βασιλείαν οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν; μὴ πλανᾶσθε· οὔτε πόρνοι οὔτε εἰδωλόλατραι

ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, 5 καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν **συνεζωοποίησεν** (1st verb for earlier object) τῷ Χριστῷ— χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι— 6 καὶ **συνήγειρεν** (2nd verb) καὶ **συνεκάθισεν** (3rd verb) ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,...

οὔτε μοιχοὶ οὔτε μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενικοῖται 10 οὔτε κλέπται οὔτε πλεονέκται, οὐ μέθυσοι, οὐ λοιδοροὶ, οὐχ ἄρπαγες βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομήσουσιν. 11 καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε· ἀλλὰ ἀπελούσασθε, ἀλλὰ ἠγιάσθητε, ἀλλὰ ἐδικαιώθητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν.

In Colossians, the focus is upon estrangement from God. This idea is present in the pages of the New Testament, but it is not a dominating concept. The term is used on three times in the New Testament: Eph. 2:13, 4:18, and Col. 1:21.²¹ Uniformly the term²² is used by Paul in Ephesians and Colossians to depict the condition of Gentiles outside of Christ. In the Jewish background of this concept, the non-Jewish world stood cut off from God because they did not have Abraham as their forefather. Also, as Friedrich Büchsel notes,²³ “As the parallels ἐχθρός and ξένος show, ἀπηλλοτριωμένος means almost the same as ἀλλότριος. Aristot²⁴. Pol²⁵, II, 8, p. 1268a, 10: ἀλλότριον τῆς πολιτείας is a striking parallel to Eph. 2:12. Light is also shed on Eph. 4:18 by Pol, II, 8, since οὐδενὸς μετέχον in the latter is parallel to ἀλλότριον, and ἀπηλλοτριωμένος in the former means without a share in (the life of God).” The implications of being estranged from God are defined by the related terms ‘enemies’ (Col. 1:21; ἐχθρός) and ‘foreigners’ (Eph 2:12; ξένος). The Eph 4:18 reference, “alienated from the life of God” (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ θεοῦ), throws considerable light on the concept. To be outside of Christ means to be cut off from God and any life-bringing relationship to Him. Clearly this is closely related to being in spiritual death as affirmed in Eph. 2:1-4.

Also, the Colossians were “hostile in mind” (ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ). Literally they were enemies of God right down into their thinking and reasoning.²⁶ The hostility reached inward to the thinking and deciding aspect of their being. Not just in their actions were they hostile to God, but in their attitudes and thinking as well. The result: “doing evil deeds” (ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς). Their evil nature came clearly to the surface in their actions, characterized here not as bad, but as evil, i.e., rotten to the core. Modern western society begins with the assumption of the innate goodness of humanity that has become corrupted. The Bible comes from the reverse perspective of the inherent evilness of humanity through the fall of Adam and Eve that has been passed on to all humanity from Adam.²⁷ The image of God in humanity, from the biblical perspective, means that humanity is capable of random acts of goodness

²¹Eph. 2:13 (NRSV): “But now in Christ Jesus you *who once were far off* have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Eph. 4:18 (NRSV): “They are darkened in their understanding, *alienated from the life of God* because of their ignorance and hardness of heart.”

Col. 1:21 (NRSV): “And you *who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,*”

²²ἀπαλλοτριῶ fut ἀπαλλοτριώσω LXX; 1 aor ἀπηλλοτριώσα. Pass.: aor ἀπηλλοτριώθη; pf ptc ἀπηλλοτριωμένος LXX (Hippocr., Pla. et al; ins [e.g. IMagnSip 19, 5f: A.D. 154/55; ISmyrnaMcCabe .0421, 5]; pap, LXX, TestJob; TestBenj 10:10; Apc-Mos) *estrangle, alienate* τινά τινος (s. ἀλλότριος; SIG 495, 164 [III B.C.]; Sir 11:34; Jos, Ant. 4, 3) γαμετὰς ἀνδρῶν *wives from their husbands* 1 Cl 6:3. ἡμᾶς τοῦ καλῶς ἔχοντος *us from what is right* 14:2.—Pass. (Polyb. 1, 79, 6; Ezk 14:5, 7; 3 Macc 1:3; TestBenj 10:10; Herm. Wr 13, 1 τ. κόσμου) ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ θεοῦ *estranged from the life of God* Eph 4:18. τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ *excluded from the corporate life of Israel* 2:12. W. ἐχθρός Col 1:21. New Docs 3, 62.—DELG s.v ἄλλος, M-M. TW.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 96.]

²³Friedrich Büchsel, “ἀπαλλοτριῶ, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 264–267.

²⁴Aristotle, of Stageiros (c. 384–322 B.C.), with his teacher Plato the greatest of the Greek philosophers and the founder of the peripatetic school, quoted in each case from the comprehensive edition of the Academia Regia Borussica, 1831 ff.

²⁵Politica.

²⁶ἐχθροὺς τῇ διανοίᾳ. While the term ‘enemy’ is on occasion employed in a passive sense meaning ‘hated’ (so Rom 11:28; cf. Bultmann, *Theology* 1, 286) here the word ἐχθροί is best understood in an active sense (so Foerster, TDNT 2, 814) because of the following τῇ διανοίᾳ, to denote a conscious antagonism to the only true God, i.e. ‘hostile in mind.’ As his opponents, they act in open enmity toward him with reference to their thinking (τῇ διανοίᾳ is probably a dative of reference; against Meyer, 309, who regards it as a causal dative) and in their total conduct (ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις πονηροῖς). The word ‘mind’ (διάνοια) which was a very common term in Greek prose was employed in the LXX usually as a translation of *lēb*, (‘heart’: Gen 8:21; 17:17; 24:45; 27:41; Exod 28:3, etc; cf. Behm, TDNT 4, 965, for further references). Both it and the Greek καρδιά (‘heart’) were often related in the LXX (διάνοια was also used with reference to emotions [Lev 19:17; Isa 35:4], acts of will [Exod 35:22, 26; Deut 29:17] or the totality of man’s spiritual nature [Gen 8:21; Deut 4:39]—just like καρδιά), even interchangeable, and in the NT the two terms were repeatedly employed together to designate the thinking and mentality of man (Luke 1:51; Heb 8:10; 10:16; see Behm, TDNT 4, 966). This word ‘mind’ (διάνοια) can have either a positive or a negative meaning depending on the context. Here it is clearly the latter connotation which is in view: the Colossian Christians prior to their conversion were estranged and hostile to God in their thinking, in their cast of mind (cf. Eph 2:3; 4:18).” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 66-67.]

²⁷Rom. 5:12: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because of the one in whom all have sinned.”

while remaining essentially evil, while much of modern theology has perverted the idea to suggest that in the essential goodness of humanity occasional sinful actions take place.

Humanity outside of Christ is estranged from God. This carries enormous implications for life on earth and particularly for eternity. Unless the condition is changed, eternal damnation is the fate of such people.

After reconciliation with God, vv. 22-23: “he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him — provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel” (22 νυνὶ δὲ ἀποκατηλλάγητε ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου— παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ, 23 εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἔδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὗ ἠκούσατε, τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν, οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος.).

The critical turning point in spiritual pilgrimage is ‘reconciliation’ with God.²⁸ The term used here ἀποκαταλλάσσω is found only in Colossians and Ephesians, but is a virtual synonym of a more frequently used term for reconciliation especially in Paul, καταλλάσσω. One should note that God does the reconciling, not people. The act of reconciliation is the cross of Jesus; only through Jesus’ death on the cross is reconciliation possible. Related concepts are peace (with God) and forgiveness of sins. The rift between a holy God and sinful humanity has been bridged by the death of Christ, so that the two can come together in peace rather than hostility. The forgiveness of sin achieved by the cross enables the cleansing of sinful humanity so to enable them to stand in the presence of a holy God.

The means of this reconciliation is stated by Paul to the Colossians as “in his fleshly body through death,” (ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου).²⁹ Paul evidently stresses the ‘fleshly body’ of Christ against a tendency at Colossae to diminish the humanity of Christ, as we will notice in chapter two. Christ died for the sins of humanity, Paul asserts clearly. And this death was a real death, not faked.

The purpose of this reconciliation is eschatological: “so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him,” (παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ).³⁰ The ultimate goal of reconciling sinful humanity with God is so that in final judgment reconciled humanity can be presented to God as an acceptable offering, just as in the Jerusalem temple with animal sacrifices. The three qualities

²⁸“ἀποκαταλλάσσω is found in the NT only in Col. and Eph., where → καταλλάσσω does not occur. Since it is never found prior to Paul, it is perhaps coined by him. Its meaning and use are essentially the same as those of καταλλάσσω. A difference is that in addition to God or the πλήρωμα (Col. 1:20) Christ is also the Subject of ἀποκαταλλάσσω (Col. 1:22; Eph. 2:16), whereas God alone is the Subject of καταλλάσσω. Yet in the case of ἀποκαταλλάσσω as well as καταλλάσσω God is never the acc obj, but only men, or they and spirits. In Col. 1:22 also reconciliation is unmistakably of God, since He is the Subject of ἀποκαταλλάσσειν in v 20. In men ἀποκαταλλάσσειν is preceded by alienation and enmity (Col. 1:22). This enmity does not consist in discord or mistrust. It is “in the mind by wicked works.” If ἀποκαταλλάσσειν applies to the one addressed, it is a completed fact. Its purpose is that he might stand in the last judgment (Col. 1:22). Col. 1:20 speaks of the gracious purpose which God had demonstrated (εὐδόκησεν, v 19) to reconcile the whole world to Himself; it does not speak of a reconciliation of the world already concluded. ἀποκατάλλαξαι cannot refer merely to the removal of a relationship of guilt by God, since it is plainly expounded as a conclusion of peace in Col. 1:20 and Eph. 2:15, and as a new creation in Eph. 2:15. Hence it is not something one-sided. It embraces the total life situation of man. It does not refer merely to his guilt before God. In Eph. 2:16 reconciliation to God also brings reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, and in Col. 1:20 the reconciliation of men to God also carries with it that of supraterrrestrial beings.” [Friedrich Büchsel, “ἀποκαταλλάσσω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 1:251–259.]

²⁹“The reconciliation has been wrought through Christ’s¹⁹ death (cf. v 20) which he suffered ‘in his body of flesh’ (ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ). By the addition of ‘of flesh’ (τῆς σαρκὸς) the body is characterized as the physical body which is subject to suffering (cf. 2:11).²⁰ Thereby Christ’s body that was given to death is clearly distinguished from the Church which is the body of the exalted Lord. Since he was a man as we are, he experienced in his body the bitterness of death in all its horror. Yet through this death God accomplished the reconciliation (cf. Rom 8:3); that which once was, has been abolished and the ‘now’ (νυνὶ) has taken its place.²¹” [Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon a Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon.*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 64.]

³⁰“παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς. With the reading ἀποκατήλλαξεν this infinitive expresses the final purpose; comp. 2 Cor. 11:2, ἡρμοσάμην ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἀνδρί, παρθένον ἀγνήν παραστήσαι τῷ Χριστῷ. Here, however, the verb has its judicial sense; comp. 2 Cor. 4:14, ὁ ἐγείρας τὸν Κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἡμᾶς σὺν Ἰησοῦ ἐγερεῖ καὶ παραστήσει σὺν ὑμῖν. As this παραστήσαι is thus included by God Himself in His work as the consequence of the reconciliation which He has accomplished, it follows that there is no room for anything to be contributed to this end by man himself.” [Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (New York: C. Scribner’s sons, 1909), 226.]

mentioned here come out of temple sacrifice language from the LXX, and designate the animals that were considered fit to be offered to God in worship and sacrifice.³¹ The qualities now applied to people rather than animals shift to a moral, behavior emphasis. The cleansing from sin qualifies sinful humanity to be presented to God, but the faith commitment of obedience to the will of God plays a role in this as well, as the final phrase makes clear.

The assurance of reconciliation is the steadfastness of the Colossian believers: “provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel,” (εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἑδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). The NRSV translation above is somewhat misleading with the expression ‘provided that you...’. The Greek expression εἴ γε affirms Paul confidence in the Colossians to continue steadfast in their faith, not raises doubt. The expectation is that genuine faith commitment in conversion will express itself in faithful obedience; if it doesn’t then serious questions as to the genuineness of the initial faith commitment exist. Passages like James 2:14-26 and Matthew 7:21-23 clearly indicate that obedience to the will of God is embedded into authentic conversion faith and will follow that commitment to Christ.

Paul’s assumption is that the Colossians will remain (ἐπιμένετε) “fully grounded in their faith,” (τῇ πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι); “firm,” (ἑδραῖοι), and “not being shifted from the hope of the gospel,” (μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). Although popular to link ‘grounded’ and ‘firm’ to faith, the Greek text doesn’t do this. Grounded in their faith means a fully developed, mature commitment to Christ, not doctrinal understanding. Firmness means they are strong, settled believers not capable of being knocked off their commitment by false teaching. This emphasis is similar to the third one of not allowing themselves to be pushed away by false teaching from true hope that came out of the apostolic gospel that Epaphras preached to them earlier. Paul fully expected the Colossians to persevere. Failure to do so would suggest failure to have committed to Christ at the outset.

The gospel preached by Epaphras to them was something “which you heard,” (οὗ ἤκούσατε), “which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven,” (τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν), and “of which I Paul have become a minister,” (οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος). The Colossians had heard the gospel preached to them by Epaphras (1:5-7) and they eagerly accepted the message. Also it was a message being heralded throughout the world of Paul’s day, as Christian missionaries spread out over the Mediterranean world evangelizing the people. Finally, Paul counted himself as being called as a servant, minister (διάκονος) of this gospel. In 1:7, he speaks of Epaphras as διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, and in 4:7 of Tychicus (Τυχικὸς ὁ

³¹“Cultic terminology is employed in this statement. So the words ‘holy’ (ἅγιος) and ‘blameless’ (ἄμωμος) are used to describe the unblemished animals set apart for God as OT sacrifices (LXX of Exod 29:37, 38; cf. Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19). Furthermore, the verb παραστήσαι (‘to present’) was, on occasion, employed of presenting a sacrifice (Rom 12:1; cf. Lev 16:7; see BAG, 633). Lightfoot therefore concluded that these expressions, together with the prepositional phrase κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ (‘before him’), pointed to the bringing of the Colossians in the here and now as sacrifices into God’s presence for approval. God is thus regarded not as a judge but as the ‘examiner’ (μομοσκόπος) who inspects the sacrifices to make sure they are unblemished (Lightfoot, 160, 161).

“It is doubtful, however, whether thoughts of sacrifice are really present in this clause at all. The last term ‘irreproachable’ (ἀνέγκλητος), which probably determines the meaning of the other two (so Abbott, 229), does not belong to the context of cultic statements. It was a judicial word (which came to be used in everyday speech more generally, as the papyri show: cf. MM, 40, 41) denoting a person or thing against which there could be no ἔγκλημα and which was ‘free from reproach,’ ‘without stain’ (Grundmann, TDNT 1, 356, 357). Likewise the verb παραστήσαι (‘to present’) was often employed in legal language with the meaning ‘to bring another before the court’ (some take 1 Cor 8:8, and 2 Cor 4:14 in this way; cf. 2 Cor 11:2; Rom 14:10; 2 Tim 2:15). If the judicial overtones are present in the clause then Paul is asserting that the purpose of God’s work of reconciling the readers through Christ’s death was that they should be irreproachable when they finally stand before him (cf. Rom 14:10). As men and women who are forgiven and reconciled they are declared blameless (cf. Rom 8:33, 34), without fault or stain (the terms ‘holy’ and ‘blameless’ appear to have lost any cultic overtones at Eph 1:4; 5:27; Phil 2:15; Jude 24) on the occasion of the Great Assize. At 1 Corinthians 1:8 where the same word ἀνέγκλητος points to the irreproachability of the Corinthians (cf. O’Brien, Introductory Thanksgivings, 126–30) the Parousia is mentioned explicitly: ‘on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ The same time note is meant here with the phrase “before him” (κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ, cf. Hegermann, Schöpfungsmittler, 194, 196; there is no justification within this context for the view of D. M. Stanley, *Christ’s Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology* [AnBib 13; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1961] 209, that: ‘Paul is probably thinking of the presentation of the Colossian church in the Eucharistic liturgy’!). These words of verse 22 prepare the way for a similar understanding of Paul’s aim in his ministry, namely ‘to present (παραστήσωμεν, the same verb, appears) every man perfect in Christ,’ verse 28, i.e. acceptable to God at his tribunal on the final day (Rom 14:10). God’s work of reconciliation in Christ had as its goal the fitness and preparedness of his people for the Parousia. Paul’s ministry, in which he worked mightily, had the same aim in view—the ultimate perfection of the Colossians in Christ.” [Peter T. O’Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 68-69.]

