

5-Day Devotional — Colossians 1:21–23

Day 1 — Not Neutral: The Truth About “Once”

Scripture to Read: Colossians 1:21, Ephesians 2:1–3, Romans 8:7–8, Genesis 3:8–10, Titus 3:3

Devotional

Paul doesn't ease into this. He starts with what we'd rather edit out: “You once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.” That's not a motivational quote. It's a diagnosis.

Most of us prefer to think we were basically fine—maybe a little off-track, maybe in need of guidance, maybe spiritually untrained. Paul won't let us keep that story. Before Christ, we weren't neutral. We were estranged. We didn't simply lack information. We resisted God's rightful claim on us. And that resistance didn't stay in our heads. It showed up in our lives.

This doesn't mean we were as bad as we could possibly be. It means sin had its fingerprints on everything: mind, desires, will, habits, relationships. You can be polite and still be alienated. You can be successful and still be hostile to God. You can even be religious and still be running the show.

That's why the gospel isn't God offering a few tips to help you become a better version of yourself. The gospel is God rescuing you from a condition you couldn't fix. You can't self-reconcile. You can't talk your way back into peace with God. You need reconciliation from God's side.

And here's the surprising mercy: God doesn't tell the truth about our “once” to crush us. He tells the truth to free us. When the Spirit shows you your alienation, it's not God pushing you away. It's God waking you up so you'll come home.

If you feel the weight of this today, don't dodge it. Don't dress it up. Bring it into the light. Honest sin is where grace becomes sweet.

Reflection Questions

1. Where do you tend to soften Paul's description of your “once”?
2. How has “hostility in mind” shown up in subtle ways (control, excuses, indifference)?
3. What happens to your view of grace when you tell the truth about your need?

Practical Application

Write a one-sentence confession beginning with, “Apart from Christ, I was...” Then thank God specifically for rescuing you from that condition.

Prayer

Father, thank You for telling me the truth about what I was apart from Christ. I confess that I was not neutral toward You. I was alienated and resistant in heart and mind. Thank You for not leaving me there. Expose my self-justifying stories and replace them with humble gratitude for Your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2 — “But Now”: Reconciled Outside of You

Scripture to Read: Colossians 1:22, 2 Corinthians 5:19–21, Romans 5:1, Isaiah 53:5–6, 1 Peter 3:18

Devotional

Two of the most hopeful words in the Bible are “But now.” Paul moves from alienation to reconciliation in a single breath. And he’s careful about the how: God “has now reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death.”

That phrase matters because we’re natural bargain-makers. We assume reconciliation works like every other relationship: “If I clean up, then God will accept me.” “If I get serious, then God will draw near.” “If I prove I’m changing, then maybe God won’t hold my past against me.” Paul says reconciliation doesn’t happen inside your self-improvement plan. It happens at the cross.

2 Corinthians 5 says God was “not counting their trespasses against them.” That raises the obvious question: how can a holy God do that and still be just? Answer: He counts them somewhere else. He counts them to Christ. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin.” Jesus didn’t die as a religious symbol. He died as a substitute.

This means your peace with God is not built on your sincerity, your track record, or your emotional intensity. It’s built on the physical death of the Son of God. Reconciliation happened outside of you, before you ever had your life together. And that’s good news, because none of us ever really gets our life together the way we pretend.

So when your conscience starts making accusations—when shame begins replaying old sins like a highlight reel—don’t answer with, “I’m doing better now.” Answer with, “Christ died.” If God reconciled you through the cross, then the foundation of your acceptance is unshakable.

You’re not on spiritual probation. You’re at peace with God through Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. Where are you tempted to treat obedience like payment instead of fruit?
2. What accusations does your conscience repeat most often?
3. How would your week change if you answered those accusations with the cross?

Practical Application

Memorize 2 Corinthians 5:21 (or write it on a card). Use it as your response when shame rises this week.

Prayer

Father, thank You that reconciliation is Your work, not mine. Thank You for not counting my trespasses against me because You counted them to Christ. Teach me to rest in the cross and to stop trying to earn what Jesus has already secured. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 3 — Presented Before God: The Direction of Grace

Scripture to Read: Colossians 1:22, Jude 24, 1 John 3:2–3, Philippians 1:6, 1 Corinthians 15:51–52

Devotional

Paul says Christ reconciled you “in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.” That word “present” points forward. It tells you where grace is going.

If you’re honest, you probably don’t feel “holy, blameless, and above reproach” most days. You feel unfinished. Inconsistent. Sometimes you feel like you take two steps forward and one weird step sideways. Paul understands that. He said himself, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect” (Philippians 3). So why does he use such strong language?

Because he’s describing God’s goal, not your current status report.

God’s grace doesn’t merely forgive your past. It secures your future. Jude says God will “present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.” John says when Christ appears “we shall be like him.” Paul says we will be changed “in the twinkling of an eye.” That’s not wishful thinking. That’s promise.

Here’s what that means for today: your sanctification is not a coin toss. It’s not “maybe you’ll make it.” The God who reconciled you is committed to finishing you. Philippians 1:6 says the work He began, He will complete.

That doesn’t make you passive. It makes you hopeful. You fight sin, not with despair, but with confidence. You repent, not as a doomed person trying to prove yourself, but as a beloved child being reshaped. Grace has direction. It’s headed toward a final presentation—before God—without accusation.

So when you feel the gap between who you are and who you should be, don’t conclude God is done with you. Conclude the opposite: He’s still working.

Reflection Questions

1. Where do you feel most “unfinished” right now?
2. How does knowing God will “present” you change how you view slow growth?
3. What would hopeful repentance look like in your life this week?

Practical Application

Choose one area of growth (speech, purity, anger, anxiety). Pray daily, “Father, finish what You started,” and take one concrete step of obedience.

Prayer

Father, thank You that Your grace has a destination. Thank You that You will present me before You holy and unaccused because of Christ. When I feel discouraged by slow growth, anchor me in Your promise to finish Your work. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4 — The “If” That Tethers: Continuing in Faith

Scripture to Read: Colossians 1:23, John 10:27–29, 1 Peter 1:5, Hebrews 3:14, 1 John 2:19

Devotional

Paul says we will be presented before God—“if indeed you continue in the faith.” That little word “if” makes some people nervous. But Paul isn’t trying to steal assurance from real believers. He’s describing what reconciled people actually look like over time.

Saving faith doesn’t merely start. It endures. Not because Christians are naturally tough, but because God is faithful. Jesus said, “My sheep... follow me... and they will never perish.” Peter says we are “guarded by God’s power through faith.” Notice the balance: God guards, and He guards *through* faith. He doesn’t preserve His people by bypassing their trust. He preserves them by sustaining it.

That’s why the warnings in Scripture are real. They’re not theatre. They’re one of God’s guardrails. When you hear, “continue... stable... steadfast... don’t shift,” that’s not God dangling salvation like a carrot. That’s God keeping you from walking off a cliff.

Continuing doesn’t mean you never struggle. It means you keep coming back to Christ. You keep repenting. You keep clinging. You keep returning to the hope of the gospel when suffering hits, when temptation rises, when disappointment whispers, “God forgot you.”

And continuing also exposes counterfeit faith. Some people love religious benefits but don’t want Christ. Some people start with enthusiasm and then bail when the cost shows up. John says departures reveal they were never truly “of us.” That’s sobering, but it’s also merciful. God warns so people will stop pretending and come to Christ for real.

So hear the “if” as a tether. Stay anchored. Keep walking. Keep trusting. And remember: the same grace that reconciled you will carry you home.

Reflection Questions

1. What tends to “shift” you from gospel hope—suffering, busyness, temptation, disappointment?
2. What does continuing look like for you when faith feels weak?
3. Where do you need to return to simple trust in Christ this week?

Practical Application

Pick one stabilizing habit: daily Scripture reading, prayer, joining Sunday worship consistently, or confessing sin quickly. Do it as an anchor, not a performance badge.

Prayer

Father, keep me continuing in the faith. Make me stable and steadfast. When I’m tempted to

drift, pull me back to Christ and to the hope of the gospel. Guard me by Your power through faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 5 — No “Christ Plus”: The Hope We Don’t Graduate From

Scripture to Read: Colossians 1:23, Colossians 2:6–8, Galatians 1:6–9, Hebrews 10:14, Romans 8:33–39

Devotional

Paul ends this passage by piling up gospel credentials: it’s the gospel you heard, proclaimed widely, delivered through apostolic ministry. Why emphasize that? Because the Colossians were being pressured to “improve” Christianity. Not to deny Christ—just to add to Him.

That’s always the danger. “Jesus is good... but you need more.” More rules. More rituals. More experiences. More techniques. More spiritual hacks. More identity markers. And before long, Christ is no longer the foundation—He’s the starter kit.

But Paul says don’t shift from the hope of the gospel. The gospel is not the first step of the Christian life. It’s the whole road. We never graduate from Christ crucified. We never outgrow the cross. We never move past grace into something “deeper.” Deeper is going further down into what Jesus already accomplished.

Hebrews says, “By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” That’s the balance: perfected in standing, being sanctified in life. That’s why “Christ plus” is so exhausting. It quietly turns your Christian life into a never-ending attempt to prove you belong.

But Romans 8 asks, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” And then it answers: no one. Not because your week was impressive, but because Christ died, Christ rose, and Christ intercedes. The gospel hope is not fragile. It’s anchored in a living Savior.

So if you’ve been living like God’s love rises and falls with your spiritual performance, let that die today. The cross doesn’t just forgive. It frees. It creates worship instead of hustle, obedience instead of anxiety, confidence instead of hiding.

Stand on Christ. Stay with Christ. Finish with Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. What “Christ plus” tendencies creep into your life (performance, control, approval, politics, experiences)?
2. How does the gospel free you from self-proving?
3. Who could you encourage this week with the hope of the gospel?

Practical Application

Invite someone to church this Sunday or send them Colossians 1:21–23 with one sentence: “This passage has been steadying me—thought you might need it.”

Prayer

Father, keep me from shifting away from the hope of the gospel. Expose every “Christ plus” substitute I cling to for safety. Teach me to rest in Christ’s finished work and to obey with joy and freedom. In Jesus’ name, Amen.