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Read Colossians 1:21–29. I will print the Net–2 translation.

### PAUL'S GOAL IN MINISTRY

21 And you were at one time strangers and enemies in your minds as expressed through your evil deeds, 22 but now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death to present you holy, without blemish, and blameless before him— 23 if indeed you remain in the faith, established and firm, without shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has also been preached in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become its servant.

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I fill up in my physical body—for the sake of his body, the church—what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. 25 I became a servant of the church according to the stewardship from God—given to me for you—in order to complete the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery that has been kept hidden from ages and generations, but has now been revealed to his saints. 27 God wanted to make known to them the glorious riches of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ. 29 Toward this goal I also labor, struggling according to his power that powerfully works in me.

### COMMENTS:

In the previous section Paul's response was to make much of Christ himself. Now, in this new section, Paul makes much of salvation; he emphasizes the greatness of it.

This situation has come about because human beings have a deep-seated attitude problem. The phrase, 'enemies in your mind', is a strong way of saying that at the heart of each one of us there is an inbred hostility to God. From the moment we leave the womb we are God-haters. Christian communicators in the secularized West often refer to a prevailing mood of apathy.

This basic enmity results in behavior that is displeasing to God, 'evil deeds'. At this point Paul echoes the teaching of Jesus himself: 'Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies' (Matt. 15:18-19).

When a person becomes a Christian, he or she undergoes a dramatic transformation. Paul explains in these verses that those who were once engaged in active hostilities against God are now his friends. The warring parties have been 'reconciled' (1:22).

At this point Paul chose three synonymous expressions, 'holy', 'blameless' and 'above reproach', to give added weight to his message. The repetition drives the point home. The most demanding and exacting judge in the universe is completely satisfied with the credentials of those who stand before him.

The if of v. 23 should not be misunderstood. This verse is not saying that we will be presented holy and blameless **if** we remain faithful, as if our eternal salvation depends on our performance. The Greek construction of the if is not an expression of doubt but an expression of confidence and is better translated as since.

Now things are better. Because Christ has died in our place, God has no reason at all to reject us and every reason to embrace us as friends. This was exciting news for the Christians in Colossae and should come as a profound relief to believers today who have been tempted to yield to modern versions of the Colossian syndrome.

V. 24 is difficult to understand. We find its meaning by first dismissing ideas that conflict with other references in Scripture. We know there was nothing lacking in Jesus sacrifice and payment for sin. We remember in other places how Paul says his imprisonment has helped the spread of the Gospel. He is reminding us of that again here. It is for the sake of the church.

V. 25 says that also. The goal of Paul was to make the word of God fully known. The hidden mystery was that the Gentiles were going to be enfolded into the covenant relationship with God. We are to continue in the faith that unites us to him. We are to remain grounded and settled in this glorious Christ.

The word 'hope' here does not have any speculative overtones, as it does in modern English. I can use the word 'hope' without any real expectation that my hopes will come true. In modern English usage, hopes can be misplaced. Paul, however, intended 'hope' to mean confidence. The Colossians needed to recover their sense of certainty and conviction.

The Colossians had not heard a defective gospel because in responding to Epaphras' message they had responded to the very same gospel that Paul preached. The imperative was not to move on to something new and different, but to remain fixed on the ground that they had occupied since first coming to Christ.

Paul says it is also God working in him to remain in Christ. He reminds us that God works powerfully in us. You do not have to depend on self. Just continue to trust in Christ Jesus to see you through.

**REFLECTION QUESTION:** In seeking to reassure the believers in Colossae that what Christ had done for them in saving them was a blessing beyond compare, Paul gave them a working definition of what it is to be a Christian. A Christian was once God's enemy. He has been reconciled to God and owes this transformation entirely to Jesus Christ. He is not to be searching for something, but to go on entrusting himself to the Christ whom he first trusted at the outset. The Christian life begins with faith in Christ; it continues with faith in Christ all the way to the gate of heaven. It never moves beyond, or away from, faith in Christ.