



Theological Thumbnails

Day-to-day doctrine that makes a difference.

Our journey through Colossians 1:21-29 continues this week as we continue our analysis of contextual features and then turn our attention to elements of content. The word studies that begin in this edition will continue next week...

Literary Context / The type and the terrain

William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., draw attention to the fact that Colossians, being categorized as a letter, serves to teach theology and offer ethical instruction.¹ With distinctive literary characteristics like the salutation (1:1-2), expression of thanks and prayer (1:3-14), body (1:15-3:4), exhortation (3:5-4:6), and farewell (4:7-18),² this particular correspondence also falls in line relative to its “occasional” quality in dealing with a specific problem at a particular time.

In giving attention to the surrounding context, one notes that the preceding verses issue forth a majestic declaration of Christological superiority and reconciliatory achievement, with 1:17 asserting that, “*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*”³ John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina describe this literarily depicted biblical social value as “prominence” or “firstness,” citing it as a means by which Paul (and others during his day, such as his hearers) would demonstrate and discern priority.⁴ The succeeding verses go on to describe Paul’s inspirational actions and afflictions as foundational to his subsequent targeted teaching and corporate coaching.

CONTENT

¹ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 426.

² Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 317.

³ Colossians 1:17 NIV (New International Version).

⁴ John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, ed., *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 166.

As our attention turns from context (setting) to content (subject matter), the next steps along our interpretive journey involve an inspection at the points of grammar and association. We begin with a study of key words as elemental ingredients, followed by a broader look at how Paul's ideas are related both in close proximity and in other areas of similar biblical substance. Finally, meaning will be distilled in order to understand fully what is being said and as a preliminary step to crossing the "principlizing bridge" into "our town."⁵

Word Studies^{6,7} / *Reconciled, Mystery, Hope, Proclaim, Struggling*

RECONCILED (1:22) / ἀποκαταλλάσσω (apokatallassō) – to "reconcile completely" (*apo*, "from", and *katallassō*, "to change or exchange"); To change from one condition to another, so as to remove all enmity and leave no impediment to unity and peace; In Colossians 1:21 the union of Jew and Gentile is not in view, but the change wrought in the individual believer from alienation and enmity, on account of evil works, to "reconciliation" with God; The basis of the change is the peace effected "through his blood, shed on the cross" (1:20).

MYSTERY (1:26, 27) / μυστήριον (mustērion) – primarily what is known to the *mustēs*, "the initiated" (from *muēo*, "to initiate into the mysteries"); In the New Testament it does not denote the mysterious (as with the English word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit; This definition is perhaps best illustrated by Colossians 1:26 and its specific language; It is used of spiritual truth, Christ, the church, the rapture, the operation of opposing hidden forces, and the cause of the current condition of Israel.



⁵ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 23.

⁶ James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990).

⁷ W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996).