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...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.

Colossians 1:23

There is a lot going on in the first two words of this verse. It says, "If indeed..." On the surface, it seems as if what he has said in the previous verse about being reconciled, and thus presented "holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight" is conditional. However, the word "if" "conveys a supposition hardly hypothetical – 'If as I presume;' 'if, as I trust.' St. Paul cannot refrain from needful warning, be he refuses to anticipate failure" (Charles Ellicott).

The word translated as "if" is noted as a word where "the assumption may only be *portrayed* as valid" (HELPS Word Studies). Stated even more directly, the Expositor's New Testament says that it "expresses the Apostle's confidence that the condition will be fulfilled. This abiding in faith is the only, as it is the sure way, to this presentation of themselves. This is directed against the false teachers' assurance that the gospel they had heard needed to be supplemented if they wished to attain salvation." In other words, what appears doubtful in the English is actually a statement of certainty in Paul's mind.

The same construction of "if indeed" is found in Ephesians 3:2, and 4:21. In both instances, Paul is stating a fact, not something to be doubted. He would not use the grammatical construction as he has unless he was making a point of certainty. Taking the words now in this light, they can continue to be properly evaluated. He says, "...if indeed you continue in the faith." Many translations say "in your faith," and this is what Vincent's word Studies argues for. He says, "The faith is not the gospel system, but the Colossians' faith in Christ. Your faith would be better."

And so Paul is arguing that the Colossians have a hope which is grounded in their faith, not in some external thing that must be applied to, or added to, their faith. He next speaks of this faith as being "grounded and settled." The grounding is in what the faith is

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directed to, which is “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*” (Ephesians 2:20). That which is settled is based on the grounding. The Greek word comes from a root which means “a seat.” The idea is that we are seated on the foundation and are thus immovable. Our faith is what set us firmly and fixedly in this manner.

In this position, he then says, “and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard. Because of our faith which is grounded and fixed, we will not be so moved away. His words, again, are not words of doubt, but of reassurance. The words went out, they were received, and it is these words which have grounded us. Nothing needs to be added to them in order for our hope to be realized. Paul then says that the gospel “was preached to every creature under heaven.”

His words are given with the time-reference of “was” to indicate that which is ideal, not actual. In other words, the gospel was effectively proclaimed “when the Saviour, in His accomplished victory, bade it be done (Mark 16:15)” (Cambridge). In other words, when Christ said that the gospel was to be preached to every creature, it was effectively done at that time. The commission was given, and it will meet its intended goals; nothing can thwart the purposes for which it is intended. This is certain because the words “every creature” are not limited to humans, but to all of the scope of creation. Through the gospel, all things will be reconciled, even those things to which the gospel was not actually preached. But the proclamation that it is to be done is itself sufficient to ensure that it will be accomplished.

Finally, he concludes with, “...of which I, Paul, became a minister.” This phrase is used by him in Ephesians 3:7 also. He has made an emphasis of the gospel being the true and reliable message of God which comes through the work of Christ. It is the only true message of reconciliation among all of the countless false gospels which have been proclaimed. In stating that he has become a minister of this gospel, he is asserting that his commission is valid and authentic. Any message by an evangelist or apostle that contradicts his words is thus a false message.

Life application: There are nuances in the Bible which are intended to keep us from error. If we simply assume that the English translation we are reading is correct, we can easily fall into error. This is especially so because even in the English, there may be several ways of interpreting what is being said. However, the same is true with the original languages. Therefore, a careful study of Scripture with other passages in Scripture are often needed to fully understand what is being conveyed. If one verse assures the believer of eternal salvation, and another seems to imply this is not so, then one or the other must be misunderstood. Study and contemplate the words of Scripture carefully, don't get stuck on a single translation of the word, and don't trust only one

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commentator's views on what is being said. Be well-rounded in your study of this precious word.

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