



How God Reconciles All Things

Colossians 1:19-23

Read the Text

Introduction--Two dilemmas we'll be looking at later:

- v 20 - How are all things reconciled to God when so many things, so many people, seem anything but reconciled to God?
- v 23 - Can true Christians truly leave the faith? Because it sounds like that's what v 23 is saying. It sounds like there's a threat right in the heart of the gospel. But the gospel isn't about threat, but promise; and it seems like an unconditional promise, not a conditional one.

I. The Plan of Reconciliation (19-20)

- God was pleased (19)
 - ...for God the Son to "dwell" (for 2nd person of the Trinity to forever become a man)
 - ...for Jesus to reconcile all things (20) - for him to be the divine agent for the fix of this world
 - ...to himself (20)- relationship, communion, destiny
 - ...through death on a cross
- We said last Sunday, that it is astounding, it is breathtaking, that King and Lord Jesus - the creator of all, infinitely powerful, immutable sovereign over every authority in every place, the one from whom everything comes and to whom everything belongs, the one who is to be preeminent in everything because it's for him - He is the one who was born, who became man, who pursued us, who reconciled us, who brought peace to us. The King came to us, not us to him!

II. The Need for Reconciliation (21)

- What God has done in Jesus (reconcile us) assumes there's a need for that.
- V 22 says that Jesus brought us peace - so this assumes there was a lack of peace.

The Bible tells us this all over, but our experience also tells us there really is a lack of peace (complete peace, fullest peace) in every direction, humanly speaking:

- On our own, our minds and our emotions aren't really at peace
- Our relationships often don't feel perfectly at peace. Or if they right now, just wait.

- By nature (and before Christ), we don't have peace with God. We either *deny his existence*, or assume that he's *not good*, or try to *appease him* to manage him, to keep him off our backs or bound to give us good things
- Bob Dylan song, *Everything's Broken*. That's a great way of describing what we saw last week about how sin has affected the "image of God" that we're created in. It's an image that's still there, but it's broken...like a cracked, distorted mirror.

Verse 21 describes the problem--especially the vertical (our relationship with God) in 3 ways:

1) "Alienated"

- By nature we're all born separated from God.
- What happened when Adam and Eve sinned and the **Garden**? They went and **hid**. And then God came and **found them**. *Oh, that's good - so everything's fine now? God came and found them?* No, he found them to deliver words of judgment (promise too, but mostly judgment). And part of that judgment was that he removed them from the Garden. The Garden = the place of his blessing, the place of his presence (almost a prototypical Temple) - sin had now removed them from that place of blessing and intimacy with God. He even put angels with flaming swords at the entrance to the garden so they could not enter again. Now, cast out. Separated. Alienated.
- Alienated also implies isolation and loneliness; a sense of not belonging.

2) "**Hostile in mind**" (21) - Now, you might say, '*surely this can't describe everyone. Not everyone is hostile. Not everyone is born being hostile to God.*' Well, Scripture insists that we are - all of us.

We just display our hostility to God differently; it takes a few different forms.

- 1) For some, it is overt hostility. They hate God. They're mad at God.
- 2) For some it's pretending he's not there.
- 3) For some, they know that a god is there, but they make him according to their own liking. They like their own god or gods - they don't like the biblical God.
- 4) And for others, they grow up religious, believing in something close to the biblical God but they express their separation from him by trying to appease him; by, really, trying to control him or manipulate him to give and to bless.

These are all forms of opposition to the Jesus. Some look more religious than others or do better about avoiding certain kinds of sins, but they're all expressions of our lostness.

R.C. Sproul: "...we see people all around us who are feverishly seeking for purpose in their lives, pursuing happiness, and looking for relief from guilt to silence the pangs of conscience. We see people searching for the things that we know can be found only in Christ, but we make the [false] assumption that because they are seeking the benefits of God, they must therefore be seeking God. That is the very dilemma of fallen creatures: we want the things that only God can give us, but we do not want him. We want peace but not the Prince of Peace. We want purpose but not the sovereign purposes decreed by God. We want meaning found in ourselves but not in

his rule over us. We see desperate people, and we assume they are seeking for God, but they are not seeking for God. I know that because God says so. No one seeks after God."

The Bible insists that the Fall has affected our minds – our wills and our thinking.

3) *"Doing evil deeds" (21)* - Some do more evil deeds than others, some do different kinds than others... but by nature we are all bent in the direction of evil, our minds in opposition to God - and our actions manifest the same. *Sin, rebellion, bent-ness* is the water we swim in, even when we're doing "good." We don't see the sin most of the time, because in a sense, it's all we know. It's like a fish that doesn't understand the concept of water because he's never been dry.

The NIV says *"you were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior."* That reads nicely but the word "because" isn't there in the original Greek. By adding the word "because" the NIV makes it sound like *habitual evil behavior* is what **causes** the *mind to be opposed to God*. But that's not what the Bible says. The Bible says that we born tainted in both our **thoughts** and **actions**. Each pushes the other into further corruption and deception. Our minds are hostile toward God, by nature, and this leads to sinful actions; and such sin leads to further corruption of our minds. It's a deadly cycle.

You see the same thing in:

Eph 4:18 *They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.*

There is **great need for reconciliation** between God and man.

He came to us; we could not go to him. We could not build a tower tall enough to reach the heavens. We would not truly seek him even if we could

Romans 3:11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.

- **Romans 5** - *rarely will a guy die for his friend (though we could imagine it - a good guy might die in the place of his righteous friend). But God shows just how much he loves us in that Christ died for us while we were **sinner**s...while we were still his **enemies**; he died for us... to reconcile us.*
- The Bible insists that we cannot get to God; we will not go to God; he must come to us. And that **couldn't be any clearer** than **when** he **literally** came to us in the **incarnation** - when God took on flesh; he became one of us in order to show us God and bring us to himself.

III. The Means of Reconciliation (22a)

22a *"...he has now reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death..."*

19a *"making peace by the blood of his cross"*

Death - Payment for sin is death. He came to die.

Cross - shame, humiliation, rejection, judgment, agonizing pain, cruel death

We apparently could not be saved by something prettier, something nicer, or something less.

Sacrifice

Rom 8:3-4 ...sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an **offering** for sin, He condemned sin, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us...

IV. The Results of Reconciliation (22b)

We'll keep talking about the how as we talk about the results - too much overlap to separate them.

"to present you holy" - that's **marriage** language; that's **heaven** language

[Jesus will...] *"present the church [his bride] to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27).*

But if we're thinking **with our OT glasses** on, *"present you before him,"* might also make us think of the old priest/sacrifice system of Tabernacle and Temple.

"blameless" - lit. *"without blemish"* (important -- Old Testament language)

- To "present yourself" before God (in the OT) had to do with sacrifices.
- You had to come clean and you had to come with an unblemished sacrifice.
Read Lev 1-16 - Laws for "presenting" yourself before God. You keep seeing "presented". Remarkably thorough! All of this kept reminding the Israelites that they were (like us all) ... "Unclean! Unclean!"

The point in Col 1 is that we're not able to *"present ourselves"* before God; we are *"blemished."*

- Imagine if every sin was actually represented by a pock-mark, a pimple, a blister, a cold soar...and they never went away? Do you think then we'd see that we have a problem; that we'd feel "blemished"?
- *We are all, by nature and by actions, more blemished than we can possibly know. But in Christ, we can be clean, spotless, without blemish.*

"Above reproach" - not able to be called into account

- Above reproach "before him" --that's judgment language
- But we're *presented*, by Christ, before the judge as *blameless*, case dismissed.

Colossians 2:13-14 ...having forgiven us all our trespasses [how?], by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Col 1 is saying that and more. We're not just *innocent*, but *holy, righteous, pure.*

He has done this already, Christian. *"He has now..." (22)* – It's as good as done; though our actions still accuse us, our account, on acct of Christ, is perfectly *clear, holy, without blemish; we're unable to be called into account.*

- Jesus took our **account**, our **debt**. And he gives us his **infinite riches**.
- He swaps "**moral bank statements**" with us, through faith.
- He died the death that we deserved and lived the life we should have lived.
- He was our substitute – both our substitute righteousness and our substitute judgment.

Heidelberg Catechism Q. 60 - How are you right with God?

Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.

Christmas song - Charles Wesley: *"Peace on earth and mercy mild; God and sinners reconciled."*

You can settle this right now--right where you are. Believe it and confess it.

V. The Evidence of Reconciliation (23a)

1) All true Christians will keep believing, keep repenting and they will be kept – they cannot be lost.

- *"...no one is able to snatch them out of my hand..." (Jn 10:28-29)*
- *"...and these whom He justified, He also glorified... He who did not spare His own son, but delivered him over for us all, how will He not also with him freely give us things?... Who will separate us from the love of God?..." (Rom 8:30-39)*
- *"...he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion ..." (Phil 1:6)*
- *"Now may the God of peace sanctify you entirely and may your spirit and soul be preserved complete... Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." (1 Thes 5:23-24)*

2) Their **faith** will **never**, until heaven, **be perfect**, but it **will remain**. It won't always be steady; it may have seasons of weakness and doubt, but it will always eventually re-attach itself to Christ if it is the real thing. It won't be perfect, but it will be **genuine**.

- And the same with **repentance**... Repentance and faith...

3) Because true Christians keep believing, **God's Word warns** all Christians to **keep believing/repenting** – to never stop. Because if they stop, if they give up, if they grow hardened and calloused, *they may in fact be proving that they never really had the real thing.*

- The book of Hebrews is loaded with these kinds of warnings.
Don't grow dull; don't give up; pay attention; don't drift away; hold your faith firmly till the end; give diligence to the very end in order to make your hope sure; let us hold this hope unswervingly to the end; don't cast away your confidence.
- Parable of the **4 Soils** (Matt 13; Lk 8)
- **1 John 2:19** *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*
- Example of **Judas**, but **not Peter**

"Continue" in v 23 has the connotation of **location**. *Don't move from that place.* You see, this isn't now a new kind of **works righteousness** (saved by grace but kept in by works). It's not a test that some fail because they just barely missed the cut and weren't good enough with their Christian life; didn't give enough; and didn't pray enough. **Col 1:23** has more to do **faith** and **repentance**, than a **certain degree** of **Christian performance**. Don't move from the *place* of faith.

- True Christians will *"continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel..."*
- Some professing Christians, despite a season of seeming fruit, will eventually desert the faith - they will stop believing; they will move on to another hope. And by doing so, they will prove that it was all a farce; it was all man-made; it wasn't the true work of God.

Christian, that warning is not for someone else. It's for you.

1 Cor 10:12 *...let anyone who **thinks** that he **stands** take heed lest he **fall**.*

VI. The Scope of Reconciliation (20)

Col 1:20 said he is "reconciling all things" - what does that mean, especially in light of this "if" of v 23 that implies that some don't have true, genuine, lasting faith? Four options for Interpretation (from bad to better)

1. *All will one day be saved.* Universalism.
 - See Col 3:5-6
Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming.
 - Read the gospels and the many descriptions of hell and final judgment
2. *We should be busy about reconciling everything in Creation to Jesus - making things right; showing his love in practical deeds; displaying his justice by feeding the poor; doing art as expression of his glory. We're increasingly placing more and more of life and stuff under the Lordship of Christ. After all, it says "all things" not necessarily all people.*

These are all good things, but that's not what this passage is teaching us.

- We're not actually commanded to do any reconciling here - God does it.
 - It has more to do with what Jesus accomplished on the cross - it's not just a general creation principle or cultural mandate.
3. *The reconciling work of Jesus has a global goal. "All things" doesn't necessarily mean every last human being, but in heaven there "a multitude which no man can number, from every tribe, kindred, people, and nation" (Rev 5). It's similar to what Jesus meant in John 12 "if I be lifted up (on the cross) I will draw all men unto myself" (all kinds of men, not just Jews).*
- This is obviously true. There is a global goal for redemption and reconciliation.
 - But this passage seems to suggest something even more universal than the global representation of the elect in heaven. It's "*in heaven and on earth*" that this reconciliation happens.
 - **Ref. v 16** - "*heaven and earth, visible and invisible - thrones, dominions, rulers, or authorities*" - probably an intended connection with "*heaven and earth*" in v 20.
 - If so, this "reconciliation" even **includes the angelic and demonic realms**.
4. *Reconciliation here in this passage is not limited to redemptive reconciliation. It's broader.*
- He's making things right in heaven and on earth, in heaven and in hell.
 - In the end, at the final judgment, God will reconcile all things; ie, he will settle all accounts.
 - That means he'll reconcile the earth. Earth's curse being removed
 - Rom 8 - creation groans waiting for the day.
 - "Joy to the World" No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground He comes to make his blessings flow, Far as the curse is found
 - He'll fully reconcile his people - by bringing them to himself in the new heavens/new earth, their redemption complete.
 - And he'll reconcile the rest of fallen creation. He'll reconcile accounts with those who rejected Jesus and his gospel - not a redemptive reconciliation, but one of judgment.
 - In the end, all will be right; all justice will be met - either through the substitutionary judgment of Christ upon the cross OR through the just judgment of hell.
 - Satan and his minions will be defeated, and there will be peace.

- God has already basically won, but one day it will be clearly seen;

Sam Storms: *"The point is that 'peace' can be achieved one of two ways: either by the removal of hostility through grace or by the...subjugation of enemies through power and judgment."*

John Murray: *In the NH/NE, "all conflict, enmity, disharmony, warfare will be excluded; it will mean the final triumph of righteousness and peace – in a word, of reconciliation. The powers of darkness will be cast out and [in] judgment...made to 'confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.'"*

Hebrews 2:8-9 *[God is]...putting everything in subjection under his feet. Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we **do not yet see** everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

VII. The Mission of Reconciliation (23b)

The human means of the reconciliation according to this passage is "proclamation"; the message needs to be "heard." It was the gospel that they "heard" because it was "proclaimed."

Some people, especially today, like to quote Col 1:20 ("reconciling all things to himself") to say that we are reconciling things to Jesus when we make things right; when we show his love in practical deeds; when we display his justice by feeding the poor. But we've seen that he did this reconciling "by his blood" and now we're seeing how this reconciliation came to the Col's - Paul proclaimed it in a message of good news - death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. There's a gospel-centrality here. These other good things are good. They are needed. But there's something you unique about gospel proclamation among all the other things God calls us to do. Remember: Col 1:20 says that Jesus is doing this (the reconciling), it never says that we do it or commands us to it.

That's also what we see 2 Cor 5 - Reconciliation comes through human proclamation:

2 Cor 5:18-21 *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Prayer--for boldness in proclamation ...

How God Reconciles All Things

Colossians 1:19-23

Discussion 1: Reconciliation in Ephesians

Using Ryan's sermon outline points as the points of discussion, take a parallel passage from Paul's writings (Eph 2:11-22) and see how they reinforce and complement one another. *First read Col 1:19-23.*

Read Eph 2:11-22. Under each sermon point, review the Colossians text and how it speaks to this point, then go to the Ephesians text and find how it speaks to this same topic.

– ***The Need for Reconciliation***

[Col: "Hostile in mind & doing evil deeds" Eph: "Gentiles/alienated from God's covenant people... having no hope ..." (Also see Eph 4:18) Discuss how after the Fall all rebellious sons and daughters of Adam fit both descriptions]

– ***The Means of Reconciliation***

[Look for "cross" and "blood" ... In each case note who is doing the work and who is the one being "worked upon." He reconciles ... He presents you ... Christ is the author and finisher of our faith. As Ryan quoted Luther last week... we only contribute our sin...]

– ***The Results of Reconciliation***

[Col: "present you Holy..." Eph: "¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" Discuss how they are related to the way that the alienation was described. These are complementary.]

– ***The Evidence of Reconciliation***

[While Ephesians doesn't give an explicit reference to perseverance as evidence, there are no "some of you" qualifiers, no hint of failure in Christ's work of reconciliation.]

– ***The Plan of Reconciliation***

[OK... you need to go a little farther in Ephesians. v 3:11: ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord" should have you backtracking to find out what "This" is... vs. 7 is speaking of "... this gospel" ... vs. 1 "For this reason..." all referring back to Christ's great work of reconciliation.]

– *The Scope of Reconciliation*

[Ephesians reveals the reconciliation of all people (as *one* body... the Church is not “Plan B,” but the *fulfillment of Israel*¹. *This is a good transition into the next discussion area.*]

Discussion 2: Dilemmas

- v 20 - *How are all things reconciled to God when so many things, so many people, seem anything but reconciled to God?*

[Review Ryan’s notes and remember that neither grace nor righteous judgment are injustices to the recipient. If the Ephesians “all people” reference comes into question (either from a universalist or being made against God’s sovereignty in election) recall that “all” often in Scripture refers to “all kinds” (1 Tim 6:10 kinds/sorts added, “all people” references are aimed at breaking down the divisions between people... not just Jews ... This is demonstrated in Scripture in lists of the “all” people (1 Tim 2:1-4; Col 3:11; Gal 3:28). At other times it is hyperbole similar to the way we use it. “We all do it... all the time!” (Do we really *all* do it *all* the time?) Examples: Acts 17:21; Luke 18:43; 2 Sam 11:1. Did every single person do what is said in these texts?]

- v 23 - *Can true Christians truly leave the faith?* That’s what it sounds like v 23 is saying. Is there a threat right in the heart of the gospel?

[Review Ryan’s notes--He gives only a sampling of the Scriptures² describing the security that God’s children have. One of the best to review is “the golden chain of redemption” in Rom 8:29-30. The “those” are the same “those” from start to finish! “...he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion...” (**Phil 1:6**)]

Discussion 3: Mission of Reconciliation

- *Read 2 Cor 5:18-21*

- *Who is doing the reconciling?*

[God. We load up an impossible burden when we seek to reconcile the world to God (or a specific person to God) in our own strength. It is God who is “mighty to save”]

- *By What Means?*

¹ You can find more information on this here: <http://objectivegospel.org/iron/IsraelOfGod.shtml>

² A more comprehensive list of Perseverance of the Saints texts is available here: http://www.monergism.com/perseverance_of_the_saints_by.php

[What has been given us? ... entrusted to us? It is through the faithful proclamation of the message of reconciliation (the gospel). **1 Corinthians 1:21** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.]

– *How do the following areas of emphasis at Desert Springs Church fit into this?*

- *Church Planting*

[Church planting growth is primarily conversion growth (rather than transfer blown-by-the-latest-wind “growth.” The local church is God’s Plan A for building his kingdom. Discuss how you can get behind the DSC church planting efforts. Financially (1 of 150), prayer, seeking to be a part of the plant ... This is exciting stuff folks!]

- *Community Groups*

[This is the primary area of disciple making. Recall two important truths: (1) “growth” is not just in numbers, but in depth and maturity; and (2) we are called to “make disciples” not just “get decisions” --a tragic error of pop-evangelism. I highly recommend the following video on transitioning from “groups” to “missional communities”: <http://cp4us.org/2010/10/14/video-matt-carter-on-transitioning-from-groups-to-missional-communities/> as it demonstrates how groups that come together under the banner of mission will have community, but those that pursue community only struggle with mission.]



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- *The Need for Reconciliation*
- *The Means of Reconciliation*
- *The Results of Reconciliation*
- *The Evidence of Reconciliation*
- *The Plan of Reconciliation*
- *The Scope of Reconciliation*

Discussion 2: Dilemmas

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 - *Who is doing the reconciling?*
 - *By What Means?*
- *How do the following areas of emphasis at Desert Springs Church fit into this?*
 - *Church Planting*
 - *Community Groups*