

Reconciliation of Believers

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Date: 03 April 2019

Preacher: Lee Roberts

[0:00] Last week we finished our look at Colossians 1 verses 15 through 20.

Let's go ahead and read verses 19 and 20 again.

Here are Colossians 1 verses 19 and 20. They say, For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Verses 19 and 20 do fit with the earlier section. They also fit with the verses that we'll look at tonight. In the earlier verses, Paul spent considerable time establishing that Christ is God.

The false teachers tried to say that the fullness of God was spread out across many spirits. Paul counters the false teachers' arguments by stating that the fullness of deity is not spread out in small doses across a group of spirits, but instead it fully dwells in Christ alone.

[1:29] Because Jesus is God, he's able to do what no mere man could ever do, and that's reconcile lost sinners to a holy God. The natural mind of the unsafe sinner is at war with God.

The sinner may be sincere, religious, and even moral, but he's still at war with God. If there's to be reconciliation between man and God, God is going to have to take the initiative, and God is going to have to take that action.

It's in Christ that God is reconciled to man. But it wasn't the incarnation of Christ that accomplished the reconciliation. It wasn't even his example as he lived among men.

It was through his death that peace was made between God and man. And we see in Colossians 1.20 that it says, He made peace through the blood of his cross.

Verse 20 says that Christ reconciles all things to himself. We talked about last week how this text does not teach that all will believe. It teaches that all will ultimately submit.

[2:38] Even fallen angels and unredeemed men will be reconciled to God for judgment, but only in the sense of submitting to him for final sentencing. Their relationship to him will change from that of enemies to that of the judged.

So fallen angels and unredeemed men participate in the reconciliation because they will be subjugated, pacified, and made incapable of no longer disrupting the harmony and beauty of God's handiwork.

In other words, they won't be able to bring sin into the world and mess things up like they have in the past. Though in the sacrifice of Christ God made provision for the whole world, all persons won't be reconciled to God in the saving sense of being redeemed.

The benefits of Christ's atonement are applied only to the elect who alone come to saving faith in him. And we'll look at the benefits of the atonement for those true believers as we study verses 21 through 23 tonight.

Let's go ahead and read verses 21 through 23. They say, The authors of the New Testament, The New Testament portray for us a before and after.

[4:20] The transformation they repeatedly describe is spiritual and moral in nature, and we go from being unrighteous and at enmity with God to holiness and peace.

So it's the before and after of the Christian who formerly was immersed in immorality and religious apathy, but now is devoted to Christ and conforms to his likeness.

This is a transformation that we can attribute to sovereign, saving, sanctifying grace. Of course, we all may not be as bad as some others, but at one time we all were estranged from God, and we'll talk about that more as we get into the verses.

And we'll break tonight's passage into three sections. In verse 21, in the first part of verse 22, we see the reconciliation. The reconciliation is what we'll look at first.

Let's read that section again. Again, this is verse 21 in the first part of verse 22. Paul said, And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he is now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death.

[5:34] We've talked about how this letter was written to the believers in Colossae. Paul's first two words in verse 21 establish that this passage is spoken directly to them.

The same words apply to every subsequent believer, including us. Paul starts the verse by saying, And you. So he now turns to the small group of believers, the assembly that's gathered in Philemon's house to hear this letter read.

And you, he says, Let's see in your lives the light of Christ that you have come to trust. And let's see you act like the person you have heard about so much.

And here Paul describes the before state of Christians. First, we were alienated. And your next blank is alienation. Alienation means estranged, cut off, or separated.

So before their reconciliation, the Colossians were suffering from complete alienation from God.

They were completely estranged from him. Non-Christians are detached from God because of sin.

[6:42] There's no such thing as an innocent heathen. All unbelievers suffer separation from God unless they receive the reconciliation that's provided in Jesus Christ.

Paul told the Ephesians the same things that he told the Colossians. Listen to Ephesians 2, verses 12 and 13. Paul said in Ephesians 2, 12 and 13, In Israel there were at least God's promises.

There was God's word and the history of God's grace towards them. There was in Israel, at least in principle, knowledge of God. But this wasn't true of the other nations.

There was a time when the other nations made up of Gentiles knew nothing about the gospel of God. We see that more and more today, don't we?

We're becoming less and less a nation that is familiar with God and even somewhat knowledgeable with his principles. So how do you see the people that you encounter every day who have yet to be converted?

[8:08] So often those people seem to be very comfortable with themselves, very much at home in the world, and even secure and happy. Not always, of course, but it seems like that a lot of times, doesn't it?

But it's not like that because we know what the real situation is. The totality of all things and therefore every person must be seen in light of their relationship to Christ.

So we must learn to see the unbelievers as they are. And that's the same way we once were, and that, of course, is alienated. Second, the Colossians, and we also had been hostile in mind.

And the word translated hostile could be translated as hateful. So hostile there in your blank could be translated as hateful. Unbelievers are not only alienated by God, but they're also hateful of God in their attitude.

In other biblical texts, God is portrayed as being at enmity with unbelievers. But here it is the unbelievers who are at enmity with God.

[9:18] Contrary to how most non-Christians portray themselves, they're not really neutral about religious matters. They're not indifferent to God or apathetic when it comes to the claims of Christ.

They may talk about a supreme being and say they believe in the existence of that supreme being. But when it comes to the one true God of holiness and justice, actually rage and rebellion dominate their hearts.

Paul described the unbelievers even more bluntly back in Ephesians. Listen to Ephesians 4, verses 18 and 19. Again, this is Ephesians 4, 18 and 19.

Paul said, Let's not miss Paul's point here.

He says that the problem is in the mind and how unbelievers think about God and see his character and reflects on the claims of Christ. Their ideas and our ideas before we were converted are perverted, distorted, prejudiced, and vile.

[10:39] And that leads us to the third thing we see about our condition before Christ and that unbelievers and we were given over to evil deeds. Bad beliefs almost always yield the rotten fruit of bad behavior.

The willful, conscious, intellectual antagonism of being hostile in mind ultimately poisons somebody's conduct. And that's exactly the behavior that Paul described in the Ephesians 4, 19 cross-reference.

That's where he said they had given themselves up to sensuality and greedy to practice every kind of impurity. Before they became believers, not everyone like what we talked about was as bad as what Paul describes here.

But to some degree or another, all unbelievers, including us, exhibited behaviors like these. You can think about it kind of like a medical examination and a pathology report because a medical exam and pathology report can reveal a deadly disease in a person who insists that he's just fine and may even feel just fine.

The gospel actually reveals the true state of affairs for those who are still apart from Christ and we all were once like that. We all needed to be reconciled to God and Christ.

[11:59] But fortunately for us and all believers, the bad news of verse 21 is followed by the good news of verse 22. So let's read verse 21 again, but this time we'll add the first part of verse 22.

Paul said, The ESV and most other translations do a poor job of translating the opening of verse 22. Verse 22 begins literally, But now. If we translated it correctly, he would say you were like this, but now you were reconciled. So this is distinctive and it's characteristic of the New Testament.

What has happened in Jesus Christ means that there's a dramatic contrast between what once was and what now is. So really we've spent a lot of time talking about how bad we once were, but there's really no need to dwell on the once except to appreciate that everything is changed and how much we are changed because of that.

In the past, believers were alienated from God, but now in the present, believers are reconciled to God. And here is where Jesus reconciling himself, all things, gets personal for believers.

[13:26] The critical element in salvation is the sacrificial death of Christ on our behalf. The shedding of Christ's blood was the visible manifestation of his life being poured out in sacrifice.

This might make you think of Romans 5, verses 9 through 11. Listen to Romans 5, verses 9 through 11. Paul told the Romans, Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Jesus took the place of sinners dying a substitutionary death that paid the full penalty of sin for all who believe.

This death satisfied God's wrath. And once again, Paul hammers away at the false teaching of the Colossian heretics that Christ was a mere spirit being.

[14:37] Paul insists that actually, Christ died as a man for men. If that weren't true, there could be no reconciliation for any person. So the first section of this passage tells us what Jesus did.

The second section tells us why. And the end of verse 22 gives us the reason. So the reason is what we see next.

Paul tells us that all believers were reconciled to Christ with God so that in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach for him.

So in other words, Christ made reconciliation with God in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach. This section has a very short length, but it's deep with meaning.

Holy means separated from sin and set apart to God. Once again, holy means separated from sin and set apart to God.

[15:43] It has to do with the believer's relationship with God. As a result of our union with Jesus Christ, God sees Christians as holy as his son.

We really should take a minute to think about the significance of that. Because of our faith union with Jesus, God sees us as holy as Jesus. That's really hard to believe, isn't it?

But that's very clearly what the Bible says. God doesn't make peace so that we can continue to be rebels, though. He's reconciled us to himself so that we may share his life and his holiness.

The next key word there is blameless, and blameless means without blemish. The word translated as blameless was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to speak of sacrificial animals. Remember how the animals had to be inspected and deemed worthy of sacrifice. That same Greek word is used in the New Testament to refer to Christ as the spotless Lamb of God.

[16:50] And in reference to ourselves, reconciliation gives us a blameless character. The next key phrase there is above reproach.

Above reproach or beyond reproach goes beyond blameless. It means that no one can bring a charge against us. Satan cannot make a charge stick against those whom Christ has reconciled to himself.

To think that we will stand in God's presence regarded by him as beyond reproach actually should take our breath away. God sees us now as we will be in heaven when we're glorified.

He actually views us as clothed with the very righteousness of Jesus Christ. And the process of spiritual growth involves becoming in practice what we already are seen as before God.

So think about that one more time. The process of spiritual growth involves becoming in practice what we are in reality already before God. The most important thing in our Christian lives is not how we look in our own sight or how we look in the sight of others, but how we look in God's sight.

[18:08] Paul's emphasis on our holy standing before God was certainly in another attack on the false teachers. They promised their followers a kind of perfection that nothing else could give.

Paul instead says you already have a perfect standing in Christ so why seek for it anywhere else? So we've seen the reconciliation and the reason.

In the last verse we'll cover tonight we see the requirement. The requirement. And that requirement is in verse 23.

Paul says that a believer will be presented holy, blameless, and above reproach before God if indeed you continue in the faith stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

One of the most sobering truths of the Bible is that not all who profess to be Christians are actually saved. Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 7 verses 22 and 23.

[19:23] Jesus said in Matthew 7 22 and 23 On that day many will say to me Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do mighty works in your name?

And then I will declare to them I never knew you depart from me you workers of lawlessness. Of all the marks of a genuine Christian presented in scripture none is more significant than the one Paul mentions here.

People give evidence of being truly reconciled when they continue in the faith stable and steadfast. The Bible repeatedly testifies that those who are truly reconciled will continue in the faith.

Those who fall away give evidence that they were never truly saved. John wrote about that truth in 1 John 2.19. 1 John 2.19 of course is the familiar verse that says they went out from us but they were not of us for if they had been of us they would have continued with us but they went out that it might become plain that all are not of us.

The phrase there they went out from us most likely points to their willful and voluntary separation. In spite of their external membership or alliance with us says John they didn't share the inner life or spiritual bond of the body of Christ.

[20:52] If they had been of us they would have continued with us he says. So if they had truly and authentically shared our unity and life in Christ it would have displayed itself in fruitful perseverance.

But they went out that it might become plain that they are all not of us. So there was a divine purpose in their succession exposure of those who are merely professors and not genuine possessors of spiritual life and their departure became their unmasking.

So we shouldn't be surprised on those occasions when someone who initially appeared to be a believer leaves the church. Preaching and teaching God's word accurately will help to expose the false believers.

Jesus' own ministry showed that. After hearing some difficult and challenging teaching from Jesus many of Jesus' so-called disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

You can read about that in John 6 verse 66 and by doing so they gave evidence that they had never truly been his disciples. do not imagine that a person who abandons the faith will be presented blameless before Christ.

[22:07] A person whose confidence in Christ has collapsed can have no such hope. At the same time though true believers have assurance in God's word that we will continue in the faith.

Think about what Paul said to the Philippians in Philippians 2.13. Philippians 2.13 is where Paul wrote If Paul's words aren't strong enough for you listen to the words of Jesus himself and these verses are John 10 27-30 and in John 10 27-30 Jesus said My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

I and the Father are one. True believers are in a double grip. No one will snatch us out of Jesus' hand and no one will snatch us out of the Father's hand.

And you can think of the Father's hand figuratively speaking being wrapped around Jesus' hand with us held firmly in both of their grips. For even more proof of that listen to John 17 verses 10 through 12.

[23 : 36] These verses are from Jesus' prayer to God just before Jesus' arrest. Jesus said to God all mine are yours and yours are mine and I am glorified in them and I am no longer in the world but they are in the world and I am coming to you.

Holy Father keep them in your name which you have given me that they may be one even as we are one. While I was with them I kept them in your name which you have given me.

I have guarded them and not one of them has been lost fulfilled. We also know from John 3 16 of course that whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life and if we can lose that life it wouldn't be eternal.

Here's the bottom line of what Paul is saying to the Colossians and us about continuing in the faith. We are not saved by continuing in the faith. Instead we continue in the faith and thus prove that we are already saved.

So it behooves each professing Christian to test his own faith and examine his own heart to be sure that he is a child of God. Examining our own hearts matches what both Peter and Paul taught elsewhere.

[24 : 58] Listen to what Paul said to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 13 5. He said examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

Test yourselves or do you not realize this about yourselves? that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail to meet the test. And here's what Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1 verses 10 and 11.

Peter said, notice how Peter says that if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

that's pretty clear isn't it? So how do we harmonize the fact that true believers cannot lose our salvation with the fact that we also should examine ourselves to make sure that we are in the faith? Well, here's a quote from Sam Storms that gives us a good way of looking at it. Sam Storms says, some people insist that the idea that God will preserve us undermines the urgency to make certain that we continue in our faith.

[26 : 20] I would argue precisely the opposite. The reason I commit myself fervently to the pursuit of holiness of life is because God has assured me that he will be ever present to energize my heart to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So that's the quote from Philipians that we read earlier. And then he closes the quote by saying praise God for his preserving presence and power. Back in our text from Colossians Paul leaves no doubt about what we are to remain stable and steadfast in.

He says we are to be stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel which we have heard. Paul often used the term hope of the!

gospel or from shifting from the hope.

At the end of verse 23 Paul says three vitally important things about the gospel. First he reminds them and us that it's the gospel that we have heard.

[27 : 48] So it's the message that was spoken to you in the Colossians case by Epaphras an ordinary man of Colossae just like they were. The gospel was expressed in words that they could understand and it came to them by the ordinary means of human speech.

It's very important to understand that the gospel that we're speaking about is the same gospel. It's not a mystical experience. It's never an unknowable idea. It's the gospel that the Colossians heard and it's the gospel that we have heard.

The second thing he says that's very important about the gospel is that the gospel is utterly extraordinary. Indeed Paul says it's the gospel which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven.

That's what Paul said earlier back in Colossians 1 6 when he said the gospel which has come to you as indeed in the whole world is bearing fruit and increasing and growing.

The gospel that they had heard and that we had heard is God's word to the whole world indeed the whole creation. The one in whom you have come to believe when you heard the gospel is remember the one in whom through whom and for whom all things have been created and have their existence.

[29:05] We learned about that back in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1. The one in whose death you have been reconciled is the one who has reconciled all things to himself through the blood of his cross.

We saw that last week and reviewed it tonight when we looked at verse 20. The gospel message of what Christ has done is the message that does not just give meaning and purpose to our little lives. It's actually the meaning of the universe. And Paul stating that as this gospel has been proclaimed by him, Epaphras and others around the Mediterranean world, it keeps growing and increasing and it's the same gospel.

So don't just think of the towns and cities they have visited in the context of this preaching. Think about the whole creation under heaven. That's really the audience for the gospel.

Nothing comes close to the importance and significance of the gospel, so we should stick with it. We should never allow some other way of seeing life turn us from it.

[30:09] ! We should never move from the hope that this gospel has given us because it's the hope of all creation. The third thing we notice from the end of this verse is Paul's comment about himself.

Paul says that the Colossian believers are to continue in the gospel of which Paul became a minister. The first words of this letter introduced Paul as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

Now we're starting to see the significance of that designation. The gospel they heard from Epaphras he says is the gospel for the whole of creation and it's the same gospel that Paul serves. Of course Paul's not alone in being a servant of this gospel. He's already described Epaphras as another faithful minister but Paul's unique in his apostleship compared to Epaphras.

In later sections how and why it's important to appreciate Paul's servant role with the gospel.

Meanwhile here's the point to be clear about and that is the gospel of which Paul has said such extraordinary things is the gospel of which Paul became a servant.

[31:21] It's the same gospel that will establish believers. It's the same gospel that will make our faith stable and steadfast and it's the same gospel that gives us unfailing hope.

So this gospel will bring you to the day when you will be presented before him holy spotless and blameless. Those who preach any other gospel stand cursed before God.

And of course if we were to look at Galatians 1.8 we would see Paul say just that. So Colossians 1.21 through 23 is only one of the passages where Paul speaks of reconciliation.

We've looked at a few others already tonight but perhaps Paul's best known passage on reconciliation is 2 Corinthians 5 verses 17 through 21.

So listen to 2 Corinthians 5 17 through 21. Paul wrote there therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the old has passed away behold the new has come so there you see the before and after that we talked about earlier then picking up in verse 18 he said all this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting!

[32:54] to us the message of reconciliation then he says therefore we are ambassadors for Christ God making his appeal through us we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God we hear that verse so often that sometimes it's easy to overlook it just listen to that last part again in him we might become the righteousness of God just like Paul every believer has been given the ministry of proclaiming the message of reconciliation we saw from 2nd Corinthians 5:18 that God gave us the ministry of reconciliation and then in verse 19 we see that God has committed to us the word of reconciliation so especially as we are approaching our spring engage weekend let's remember that

God sends his people forth as ambassadors into a fallen lost world bearing unbelievably good news we know that people everywhere are hopelessly lost in doom and cut off from God by sin that God has provided the means of reconciliation through the death of his son our mission is to plead with people to receive that reconciliation before it's too late Paul's attitude expressed in verse 20 in 2nd

Corinthians 5 should mark every Christian we are ambassadors for Christ God making his appeal through us we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God with that let's close in prayer father we thank you for the reminder of the before that we had before you so graciously saved us and reconciled us we thank you for the reminder of the before because it makes us appreciate even more the after that we have now and let us always be grateful and mindful of the reconciliation that you have provided and let us use that gratefulness to be even more willing to share that possibility of reconciliation with others continue to use us and guide us as we reach out to your community in Jesus name we pray Amen