

The Work of Reconciliation Accomplished on the Cross

Colossians 1:20-23

Colossians 1:20-23 - *“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works,²² yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—²³ 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.”*

Background Notes

Colossians 1:15-22 is one of the most Christ-exalting passages in the entire Bible. Here the wonder of Christ's Person, the preeminence of Christ's position, and the magnitude of Christ's work is set off. This passage of Scripture certainly refutes any false teaching as to the Person and work of Christ!

One of the reasons why God had the apostle Paul write this letter was to refute the false teaching of the Judaizers and the Gnostics of the early Church period. Today there are modern Judaizers and Gnostics who do their best to lower the Person and work of Christ. Cults like the Jehovah Witnesses, for example, deny the full deity of Christ, and they are sometimes called modern day Gnostics for this very reason.

Colossians, therefore, is an excellent book of the Bible to study when questions come up about the Person and work of Christ. In Colossian 1:20-23, Christ's work of reconciliation is expounded.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord Jesus Christ has reconciled all things to Himself.

Verse 20: *“And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”* The word “reconcile” means to restore to a right relationship - to make peace where formerly there was separation, or alienation, or enmity.

Notice that the basis of the reconciling work of Christ is not His **life** – it is His **death on the cross**: *“Having made peace through the blood of His cross.”* Also verse 22: *“In the body of His flesh through death.”* So the basis of the reconciling work of Christ is not His perfect life, but His sacrificial death on the cross.

In verse 20, it's "things" - not "people" - that are especially in view. Verses 21-22 cover people, but verse 20 is speaking of things – things on earth and things in heaven. This doesn't mean that trees, and rocks, and stars will be saved! But right now the things around us are not the way they will be some day. The effects of sin and the Fall of mankind are upon all creation.

Romans 8:21-22 says, "...the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now." Right now, the stamp of sin is upon this material universe. The second law of thermodynamics is at work - decay and disorder abound. But according to the Bible, there's going to be a change! There is coming a new heaven and a new earth. Read 2 Peter 3 in this connection.

When the new heavens and the new earth are brought in, no discordant or jarring notes will be seen or heard anywhere. Everything will be in complete harmony - and it's all because of Christ's reconciling work on the cross. The Lord Jesus not only died for our sins - He also died for the whole problem of sin and all of its effects, including even the material universe. All of the problems associated with sin were settled at the cross.

What we have here in verse 20, then, is the reconciliation of things. A new heavens and a new earth are coming! The Lord Jesus has reconciled all things to Himself.

2. The Lord Jesus Christ has reconciled some people to Himself.

Verses 21 and 22: "*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.*" In verse 20 we have the reconciliation of the material universe. Here in verses 21 and 22, we have the reconciliation of people.

Notice several sub-points about the reconciliation of people.

a. Not all people are reconciled.

All *things* will be reconciled, but *not* all *people*. Verse 20 says, "*by Him to reconcile all things to Himself,*" but verse 21-22 says, "*and you [the Colossian believers]... has He reconciled...*" The work of Christ is **sufficient** for everyone - but it's only **effective** for those people who believe. Universal salvation for all people is definitely **not** taught here. Universalism for rocks and stars (the material universe) - all "things" will be completely reconciled. But no universalism for "rock stars." [laughter] Seriously speaking, rock stars - or any other person - must personally accept Jesus Christ as Savior to benefit from the reconciling work of Christ.

b. People are alienated from God by bad attitudes and bad actions.

Verse 21: "*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.*" The material universe – all creation - groans, but it is not alienated from God because of bad attitudes and bad actions!

Rocks and trees do not have bad attitudes, but people do. What could be worse than the alienation of rejecting Christ? Romans 1:18 says, “[the unbeliever] suppresses the truth in unrighteousness.”

c. The reconciliation of people has already taken place.

Notice verse 21 again, “*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.*” The material universe awaits the new heavens and the new earth. But if you’re a Christian, if you’re a believer in our Lord Jesus Christ, you are reconciled **now!** You don’t have to wait. We await the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23), but our reconciliation to God has already taken place. We are now, as believers, in a harmonious, beautiful relationship with our Creator.

There’s no better story of reconciliation than the story of the Lost Son (Luke 15). When the lost son came home, his father didn’t say, “OK, you’re forgiven, but you’ll have to live in the barn with the animals.” No! There was **more** than just forgiveness – there was **reconciliation** as well! The son was brought into the family and given all the rights and privileges of a son. He was a rebel, and he had run away from his father, but now he was welcomed back. Not just forgiven – reconciled!

d. Our reconciliation was one-way.

Notice the end of verse 21: “*yet now He has reconciled.*” We usually use the term “reconciliation” in a two-way sense. When a broken marriage is healed we say that the husband and wife are reconciled. But the reconciliation was two-way: he gave a little bit, she gave a little bit, they came to a meeting of the minds and there was reconciliation.

That’s not true in our reconciliation with God. Our reconciliation is **one-way**. It’s not that we gave a little bit, and God gave a little bit, and thus we came to a happy meeting of the minds. No, **God reconciled us!** Our reconciliation was one-way.

e. The ultimate purpose of our reconciliation is perfection.

Verse 22: “*To present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.*” Right now in our earthly bodies, we are not holy, blameless and beyond reproach. But some day we will be, when we stand before the Lord. We’ll live forever and we won’t have to confess our sins anymore. We’ll be blameless, holy, and beyond reproach! This is the ultimate purpose of our reconciliation. Our “positional standing” now will be our “permanent state” then.

Practical Application

Let’s make sure we’re reconciled!

Our practical application comes from verse 23, a verse that some people worry about. “*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.*”

What does “*if you continue in the faith*” mean? Does it mean you can lose your salvation? Does this mean you can lose the reconciliation part of your salvation? If this were the only verse in the Bible on this subject, I might be worried - but it's not! There are plenty of verses in the Bible that indicate that once you are saved, you have been reconciled to God for all eternity. You have eternally secure salvation. You can't lose it. Even the most familiar verse in the Bible, John 3:16, says that when we trust Christ, we have eternal life. Eternal life doesn't begin when we die; we have it as soon as we trust Christ!

Well, if you can't lose your salvation and you can't lose your reconciliation, what does verse 23 mean? Some Christians take verse 22 to refer to the reward of the idea of being holy, blameless, and irreproachable in His sight at the judgment seat of Christ. And you'll only get the rewards mentioned in verse 22 “*if you continue in the faith*”(v23).

However, the context of verse 23 is reconciliation, and verse 22 has to do with the permanent state of all believers, not just those who serve faithfully. It's the ultimate purpose of our reconciliation – to be holy, blameless and irreproachable in His sight.

Furthermore, the construction of the “if” clause in verse 23 is not an expression of doubt. The “if” can also be translated as “since” - “*since you continue in the faith.*” Here's an illustration: You're at a Bible study in our home, and I say to you: “You will experience fellowship if you attend Bible study tonight.” There's no expression of doubt about attending, since you're here –you're already attending. The word “if” is the same as “since.” Since you came to the Bible study tonight, you will experience fellowship.

Some Christians have seen verse 23 as a warning - not a warning that you can lose your salvation or your reconciliation, but a warning that you'd better make sure you're really reconciled. I doubt that Paul wrote this as a warning to the Colossian believers, because there's no expression of doubt here. He's confident that they will persevere. True faith does persevere.

However, even though the proper interpretation of this verse is not meant as a warning, we can still *apply* this verse as a warning. True faith perseveres – so if we're straying, and we're not persevering in following Christ, that may be an indication that we never were reconciled. It's not that we can lose our reconciliation - once we're saved, there is no loss of salvation or reconciliation. But if we're not continuing in the faith, it may be an indication that we never truly trusted in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior.

2 Corinthians 13:5 teaches us that we are to examine ourselves: “*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified.*” It never is wrong to examine ourselves, to make sure whether or not you really have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior. Let's make sure that we're reconciled!