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21 October 2018

From Hostility to Reconciliation

The Application of the Blood of His Cross

Scripture: Colossians 1:21-23

Sermon Series: *Colossians*

Topic: Reconciliation



Colossians 1:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ 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.

Introduction

Does high doctrinal truth make any difference in how you live your life? Does what you read in the Bible make any difference in your daily choices of what to do or not do?

What does it matter that “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”¹ in Jesus? What difference does it make that God, through Jesus, “reconciled all things to himself” and “made peace by the blood of His cross?”

Are people basically good or basically evil? Is the default possession of humanity one of moral goodness, moral neutrality, or moral corruption?

Why did Jesus have to die? What, if anything, did he accomplish by his death? If he did accomplish something by his death, then who are the beneficiaries of his effort and can I be one of them?

Review

Our focus this fall is given to the apostle Paul’s letter to the Christians who live in the city of Colossae, which is located today in what is southwestern Turkey. He’s writing around A.D. 62 from Rome where he is a prisoner. Paul has never met these Colossian Christians to whom he is writing, but he has been informed about them by Epaphras, who is the man who planted this church. He also Paul’s friend and fellow minister.

Paul opens this letter by praising God for this new church (v.3-8). Next he wrote out a prayer for the church (v.9-14) and then shares with them either a short, hymn-like creed or maybe it’s a poem, which zeros in on the identity of Jesus. Jesus is vastly more than a mere carpenter from Nazareth. Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. He is the source, goal, and sustainer of all creation. He is also the leader of the church. Jesus is the beginning of God’s new creation and therefore *He is the preeminent, sovereign ruler over all things*.

Two Reasons for the Preeminence of Christ

Then Paul points out two additional reasons for the preeminence of Jesus. First, because God was pleased to cause the all fullness of His divine essence to dwell in Jesus. Second, he is preeminent because through Him God brings about the reconciliation of all things. How does God achieve this reconciliation? He did it through the cross of Jesus, by the shedding of His blood, and by his death (v.19).

¹ Col. 1:19

Reconciliation: The Linking Thought

The notion of **reconciliation** is the thought that links the next paragraph, verses 21-23, which is our focus this morning. Upon thinking about this idea of reconciliation, Paul, being led by the Holy Spirit², senses the need to pause and explain it a bit. Paul wants these Colossian Christians to know what happened to them when they became believers. He wants them to know how they were saved and by what means their lives were transformed.

Remember, this letter is an *encyclical*, which means that this is a letter that the author intends to be passed around and read among all the churches in a particular geographic region.³ Since this letter was intended for all God's churches, then God also wants us to hear what He is saying through it. What Paul teaches about reconciliation to the Colossians is necessary for us to know today.

Defining the Word Reconciliation

The word '**reconcile**' (ἀποκαταλλάσσω, *apokataallaxai*) essentially means "to change: from enmity to friendship."⁴ It means,

To reestablish proper friendly interpersonal relations after these have been disrupted or broken; to restore original friendly relations; to remove hostility; to make things right with one another.⁵

Or as Paul explains in verse 20,

Colossians 1:20 (ESV)

and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, *making peace* by the blood of the cross.

This is what Paul means. God was at work **making peace** with humanity as Jesus was dying. As the blood of Jesus was flowing, God was at work making provision for peace by the reconciliation of all things. The cross of Christ is crux of human history. As Jesus hung on the cross at Calvary He was fulfilling the words that God spoke through the prophet Isaiah,

Isaiah 53:5 (ESV)

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;

² 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Ptr. 1:20-21.

³ Col. 4:16.

⁴ Curtis Vaughan, "[Colossians](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 186.

⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 501.

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.

Peace with God is only possible through the piercing of Christ. Only by the substitutionary punishment Jesus endured on the cross can reconciliation between God and mankind be possible. Jesus shed His precious blood, enduring the punishment for the sins of the saints, so that sinners could enjoy peace with God. Jesus suffered and died so that those who were once enemies of God could be transformed into *friends* with God. This is what Paul wants the Colossian Christians to know. This is what God wants us to know this morning.

And You

Paul speaks directly to the Colossians.

Colossians 1:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ *And you*, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled...

And you. These first two words are in the emphatic position⁶ in the Greek. Paul is getting their attention. He telling them that these great and high doctrinal truths which he has just written about Jesus in verses 15-20 have practical application to their lives. If he were writing this today, these two words, "And you," would be in bold font. He is saying, "Hey, listen to this. Pay attention to the truth I am explaining, because your faith in Jesus has transformed you."

Who You Once Were: Enemy

Paul turns his attention to who they used to be before they put their faith in Jesus.

Colossians 1:21 (ESV)

²¹ And you, *who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds*, ²² he has now reconciled...

Paul uses three words to describe the condition of the Colossian Christians prior to becoming believers in Jesus; 1) *alienated*, 2) *hostile in mind*, and 3) *doing evil deeds*." This describes their relationship to God before they were reconciled to Him through Christ.

To be 'reconciled' to God presupposes an original state of goodness and closeness which has been supplanted by a later state of estrangement and alienation. Before reconciliation can be effected, there must first have been some painful event which brought about the initial separation. Paul understands this alienation to have been the experience of all the Colossian Christians. He presupposes them all to have been in a place of alienation, hostility, and active

⁶ Peter T. O'Brien, [Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 65.

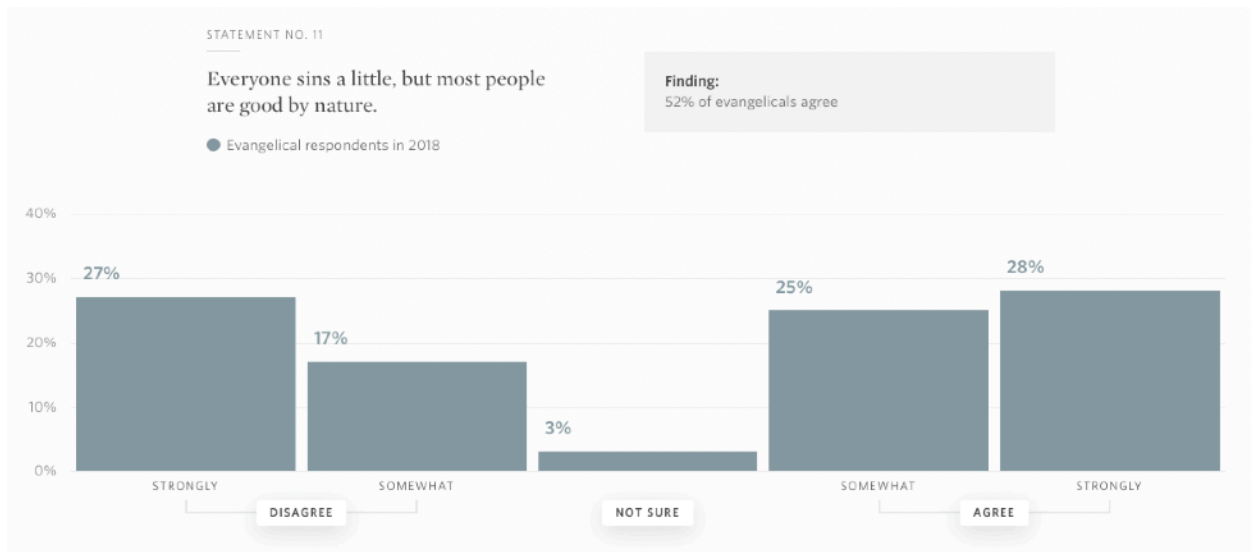
rebellion. *Outwardly* they were *alienated* and separated from God by being distant from him. *Inwardly* they were *hostile* in mind toward God and angry at Him and thinking bad thoughts about him. *Both of these facts* come together in *evil deeds* of active rebellion. In short, Paul describes the Colossians as once being enemies of God. Remember he has never met them, but he assumes this accurately describes their condition.

What Is the Default Spiritual Condition of Humanity?

This raises a question. How does this description inform us of Paul's understanding of humanity's default spiritual condition? How would Paul answer the question, "Are human beings basically good or basically evil?" How would you answer that question?

The State of Theology

This past week Ligonier Ministries released its biannual "State of Theology" report, which details the results of over 3,000 people who were asked if they agreed or disagreed with 34 theological statements. Statement 11 was, "Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature." Would you agree or disagree with that statement?



Of the total respondents, 67% agreed and among those who identified as Evangelical, 52% agreed. So 67% of all respondents and 52% of Evangelicals agreed that humans are basically good by nature. Paul would disagree. In fact, he would *strongly* disagree. He would lovingly say,

"Friends, I must tell you the truth. We humans by nature are *not* good, but rather we are evil. For God's word says, 'There is none righteous, no not even one. No one

understands God nor seeks Him. Every single one of us has turned away from God to do what is right in our own eyes. No one does good, not even one of us."⁷

I know this is what Paul would say because this is what he wrote in his letter to the Romans.

Apart from Jesus We Are All Alienated From God

Paul's description of the condition of the Colossians before coming to faith in Jesus is an accurate description of all of us. Apart from Jesus we are all alienated from God, hostile toward him, and doing evil deeds against him. This is the default spiritual condition of everyone on the planet earth. The whole of humanity is alienated from God, hostile toward Him, and willfully choosing to rebel against Him by knowingly doing evil deeds. ***According to the Bible, all human beings are basically evil, not basically good.*** We are sinners from our earliest days since we inherit a sinful tendency from our sinful fathers. King David wrote,

Psalms 51:5 (ESV)

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me."

What this means is that our innate spiritual condition is one that, apart from gracious, divine intervention, prefers evil over good. If God left each of us to ourselves, from our earliest days, we would each choose evil over good. No one needs to be taught how to do evil, but we must all be trained how to do good. By nature we lie, deceive, steal, or how to love ourselves more than others. No parent needs to teach her two year old how to lie, get angry, bite, kick, poke baby sister in the eye, or be selfish. All of these things come naturally to us. Why? Because from our birth we are alienated, hostile in mind toward God, and more happy doing what we know we should not do than we are doing what we know we should. David's son, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived said,

Ecclesiastes 7:20 (ESV)

Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

The apostle Paul wrote,

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The apostle John wrote,

1 John 1:8 (ESV)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

⁷ Rom. 3:10-12.

This Does Not Mean We Are Unable to Do Good (As Defined By Us)

This does not mean that we cannot do some good deeds, as defined by our definition of good. Sure, every once in a while you can cut your neighbor's grass, or help an old lady across the street, or even say something nice about the jerk at work. We can all do what *in the eyes of man* looks to be good. However, when we stand before God, He is able to look into our hearts and discern the motivations behind those apparently good actions and see that sometimes we do good deeds for bad reasons.

Maybe I decided to cut my neighbor's grass because he likes his grass higher than I like mine and I cut his grass short just to tick him off. Or maybe I slowly helped the old lady across the street because I saw that the guy in the Maserati was in a hurry and I enjoyed making him wait. Or maybe I said something nice about the jerk at work because the boss was standing nearby and I wanted to impress him with how optimistic I am. It's not that we are unable to do good, but rather, apart from God (i.e. in our state of alienation from Him), we are unable to do any *righteousness*.

In the eyes of man, we do all kinds of good deeds for which we think we deserve praise. However, God looks on the heart. He knows the true motives that stand behind the good deeds. In eyes of God, a good deed done with evil motives is just an evil deed.⁸

Who You Now Are: Reconciled

But there is hope. There is a way for enemies of God to be changed into the friends of God. That way is through the reconciliation of the cross of Christ. There is a way for those *alienated* from God to be brought near to God. There is a way for those *hostile in mind* toward God and His people to have their minds changed into an attitude of peace. There is a way for those who are happy *doing evil deeds* to be changed into people who delight to do good deeds. There is a way for the enemies of God be reconciled as friends with God. There is a way to be changed from divine enemy into faithful friend. "*And you, who once were enemies...*"

Colossians 1:22 (ESV)

²² **he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death**, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

The means of reconciliation happened through the body of Jesus, namely through his death on the cross. "**God made peace by the blood of his cross.**"⁹ The rules of the universe that God chose to establish state that "*without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sins.*"¹⁰ We have all sinned against God. Since we have sinned against God, we are then necessarily His enemies. The only way to have peace with God is to remove the enmity,

⁸ See Isaiah 58 where Israel was doing the good deed of fasting but with evil motives and God was not impressed.

⁹ Col. 1:20.

¹⁰ Heb. 9:27; cf. Lev. 17:11.

between His holiness and our sinfulness, through the shedding of Jesus' blood. Sin is so catastrophic (to the relationship between God and man) that the only way to heal the wound it tears open is through someone's death.

This is what Jesus chose to do for His children. He chose to offer up his own body in order to reconcile to His Father and Himself those who would put their faith and trust in him. He chose to surrender His own body to be beaten and abused, so that our sins could be forgiven. He chose to willingly allow His sinless blood to be poured out for sinful people so that those sinful people could be reconciled to God.

- Jesus took our place as God's enemies so that we could take His place as God's friend. He took our sin so that we could take His righteousness.
- He took our pain so that we could know His pleasure.
- He took our debts so that we could receive His riches.
- He took our wrongs so that in Him we could be made right.
- He became alienated from God so that we could have peace with God.

Paul says Jesus did all this by offering his body of flesh on the cross and by His death. The means of our spiritual reconciliation with God is the pierced physical body and shed blood of Jesus. Apart from His body and blood, there can be no reconciliation with God.

By His Body of Flesh

Paul's language here is curious. In saying that Jesus accomplished reconciliation "**by his body of flesh,**" he is being somewhat redundant. All human bodies are made of flesh. It would be like me saying, "I drove here today on four tires of rubber." Apparently Paul is emphasizing the humanity of Jesus since some of the false teaching floating around in Colossae may have been that Jesus was not actually human, but that he only *appeared* to be human. He was simply a "phantom" or an "apparition" (Greek, *dókēsis*). This belief would later, in the early fourth century, be referred to as Docetism and was condemned as heresy at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.

Jesus Is Fully Human, But Not a Created Being

Paul is emphasizing that Jesus was fully human, but remember He is not a created being. This brings up another statement in the State of Theology¹¹ report that the majority of Evangelicals answered incorrectly.

¹¹ Source: www.theStateofTheology.com

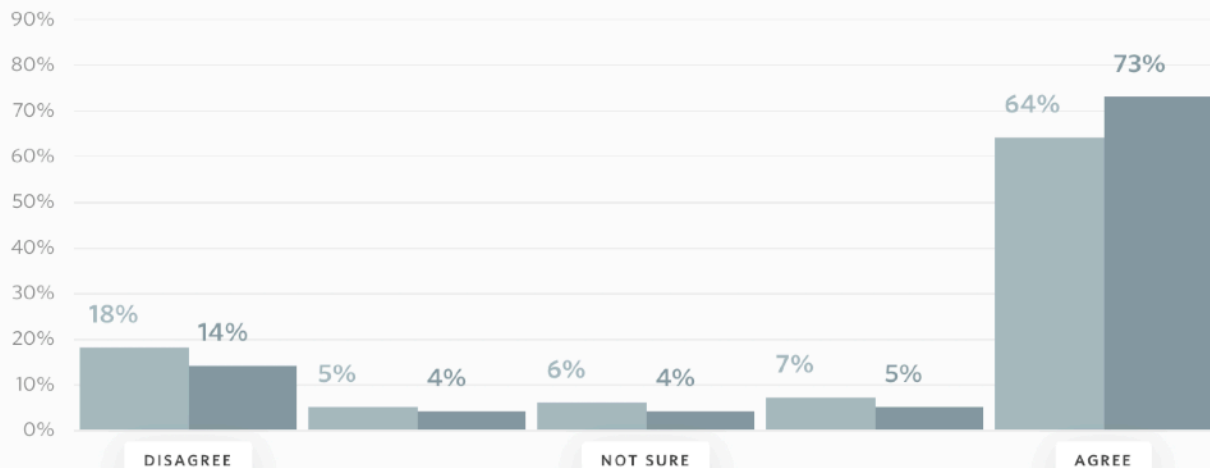
STATEMENT NO. 6

Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.

- Evangelical respondents in 2016
- Evangelical respondents in 2018

Finding:

2018: 78% agree vs. 18% disagree
2016: 71% agree vs. 23% disagree



Let's keep in mind what he just wrote in the previous paragraph. Jesus, though fully human, is a *not* a created being. Jesus is the eternal Word through whom God all created things. "*All things were created through Him*" (Col. 1:16). Jesus existed before all created things began to exist (Col. 1:17). Jesus is not a created being, yet He is fully human. As John says,

John 1:1 (ESV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:14 (ESV)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

It took an extraordinary being to effect reconciliation. It took divine intervention. Reconciliation between God and man could not be effected by man alone. God had to personally get involved. Reconciliation could only be effected by the death of God himself. Jesus is both fully God and fully man and it was only by His holy blood shed on the cross and by His death that reconciliation could be completed.

The Purpose of Reconciliation

Paul then explains the purpose of this costly reconciliation.

Colossians 1:22 (ESV)

²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, **in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,**

The goal of reconciliation is perfection before God at the last day. Jesus offered up his body and his blood in order to present you **holy, blameless, and above reproach** before his father. In Christ, Christians are **now**—today—holy, blameless, and above reproach. These three words are opposite parallels to the three words Paul used to describe the Colossians before surrendering their lives to Jesus. Before believing in Christ, we are alienated, hostile, and doing evil deeds. After believing in Christ, we are holy, blameless, and above reproach.

If being **alienated** is separated from God, then being **holy** is brought near to Him. Only those who are holy can dwell with God forever. In ourselves, no one is holy, but in Christ his perfect righteousness is credited to us so that we can be looked upon by God as holy. Since, in Christ we are holy, living an unholy life is contrary to our present and eternal identity. Therefore, let us live holy lives or else we will constantly live in a place of dissonance. Peace comes from making daily choices that accord with holiness, because in Christ, dear Christian, you are holy.

If '**hostile in mind**' reflects an inward attitude of enmity toward God, then being '**blameless**' communicates a complete inner transformation of the mind to one of perfect peace and submission to God's will. Through Christ, there is nothing in us that remains blameworthy before God. What Christ achieved for us on the cross is nothing less than perfect innocence before God. Therefore, let us make choices every day that accord with a life that is blameless before God. If we sin and chose to live blameworthy lives, then we are acting against who we truly are in Christ and we will therefore know no peace.

Lastly, if '**doing evil deeds**' reflects rebellion against God, then '**above reproach**' means there is no trace of any evil deeds left in us. In Christ, there are no actions for which God could condemn us. In Christ, we are completely innocent and fully reconciled to Him. Through the cross of Jesus all enmity and hostility is removed and all that remains is peace and reconciliation. Therefore, Christian, if you are toying with sin, then by the Spirit of God put it away today. Stop doing any deed you know to be evil. Live your life completely above reproach.

This is what Christ has accomplished. This is the great grace He purchased.

Whom Is Reconciliation For?

But whom is this reconciliation for? Can I be one of those whom Christ has reconciled to God the Father, who will on the last day stand holy and innocent before God? And if so, what must I do to receive such a blessing?

Colossians 1:23 (ESV)

²³ 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.

Christians, you must continue in the faith that you have heard preached to you. You must remain *stable* in Him and *steadfast* in your walk with the Lord. Do *not shift* from the hope of the gospel. Keep believing in Jesus. Continue to always trust in His goodness. Do not allow certain philosophies and doctrines of the day to cause you to swerve from the hope of eternal life that we have in Jesus. He is able to cause you to stand before His Father holy, blameless, and above reproach.

And you, Christian, who once were alienated, hostile, and doing evil, Jesus has accomplished your reconciliation for you on His cross. He died for you when you were His enemy. He bled for you when you were hostile toward him. He suffered for you while you were doing evil deeds. While you were far from Him, He drew you near to Himself. He transformed you from a person of angry hostility into a person of peaceful reconciliation. He has rescued you from the dark destruction of night and brought you into His glorious kingdom of light. Christian, praise Him for this great deliverance that He has worked for you. Praise Him with all your heart.

And you, who are not yet a Christian, this great and glorious gospel is for you if you will only surrender your life to Jesus and receive it. Salvation and reconciliation is for anyone who will receive it. Jesus said,

John 6:37 (ESV)

"Whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

Some of you have not yet come to Him. Some of you continue to refuse to surrender to Him. Do not refuse Him any longer.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the reasons for the preeminence of Christ? (Col. 1:18-20)
2. What is an encyclical? What are the ramifications today of the fact that this letter was intended to be read by all Christians when it was written?
3. What does reconciliation mean? How would you define it in your own words?
4. By what means did God effect reconciliation?
5. How does Paul describe the human condition before one comes to faith in Jesus? (See also Rom. 5:10)
6. Do you agree or disagree that all humans are basically good? Why or why not?
7. Prior to coming to faith in Jesus did you think of yourself as an enemy of God? What are your reflections now upon this description of your previous life?
8. Do you believe Jesus is a created being? Why or why not?
9. What helps you most to continue in faith and remain steadfast in your belief in God?