

Colossians 1:21-23 - Remembering Our Reconciliation

This morning we are coming to the final of 10 statements the apostle Paul makes about the Lord Jesus Christ. If you remember, these statements all revolve around either who he is and what he has done as the Creator God, or what he has accomplished through his work on the cross.

This last attribute of Jesus is one that we celebrate so dearly. This is all revolves around the work of Christ in salvation. And Paul uses the term reconciliation to describe what Jesus has done for us.

If you remember last week, we looked at **Vs. 20** where Paul also used this concept of reconciliation. **Read**

And although it's the same word in both sentences, they are different ideas altogether. **Vs. 20** is not a statement of universal salvation. The Bible nowhere teaches universal salvation where everyone eventually ends up in heaven. Rather, it's a statement of universal evaluation and judgement. It's where Jesus will hold every creature - specifically, fallen angelic creatures - to account. It's a reckoning that Jesus began at the cross and will bring to completion at his return.

In **Vss. 21-23** Paul uses same exact word, but here the issue is specifically salvation. He is talking about how through the crucifixion Jesus has secured a relational reconciliation. A relational coming together.

So the first reconciliation is like reconciling your checkbook. It's an evaluation of all that's happened - for better or for worse. The second reconciliation is like bringing two people together who have had a falling out; and making things better.

That's what Paul is talking about in **Vss. 21-23**. He's talking about the amazing reconciliation that Jesus has accomplished between God and man. And that reconciliation is available to any who want it. But here's the deal: that reconciliation is only available for those who persevere in the faith. It's available only for those who keep going, keep clinging to Jesus and his work on the cross.

So this morning we're going to focus in on this one last work of Jesus because Paul spends the most time on it. We'll see the need / means / goal / evidence of reconciliation.

1. Need for Reconciliation. **Read 21-22a**

So the first thing that Paul points us to here is that there is a universal need for reconciliation. The primary issue for all people is that they are at odds with the Creator God of the universe. And we know this applies to all people because is talking about the Colossians. **Read 21**

He's saying this was where **you** came from, this is where **you** were at. The Colossians, who once were not believers in Jesus Christ, were alienated, hostile and doing evil deeds. This is where everyone starts life: as enemies of God.

Psa. 51:5: Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Psa. 58:3: The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

Have any of you parents ever had to teach your kids how to sin? Isn't it amazing that sinfulness seems to come so naturally yet being polite and kind and sacrificial takes years to teach. Why is that? Because our nature is sinful. It's the old saying: We're not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. The reason you breathe air is because you are, by nature, a human and not a fish. The reason we sin is because we are sinners.

Rom. 5:18: Therefore as one trespass - just 1 - led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification for all men.

So everyone who is a son of Adam gets condemnation. Why? Because Adam sinned. And everyone who is a son of God through faith in Jesus gets salvation. Why? Because he obeyed. We were sons of Adam before we were sons of God. We were rightly under the judgment of God.

And, again, I think most of us probably know that. But here's the problem. We usually point to the world and say "they are alienated, they are hostile and they do evil deeds." We read the Bible self-righteously. "This isn't me, this is them." This is the secularizing of society, the downgrade of all things good and godly.

But who's Paul talking about? The Christians in Colossae. It's true this applies to unbelievers, but what this is really about is self-reflection.

Here's what often happens as we follow Jesus: we can slide into moralism and not even know it. We can fall into this "get off my lawn" attitude. Complaining that the world is a train wreck and worse than it was years ago and at the same time we have less love for the Lord than we ever had. How is that possible? How is it possible that the world looks worse than ever and at the same time our desire for the Lord is worse than ever? You want to know how?

Because we forget where we've come from. We forget what God has saved us out of.

I was talking to some guys this week about how we have gas heat at our house. There are a lot of different pieces that go into making a gas furnace work. But you know what's critical for the whole thing to function? The pilot light. This little bitty flame that triggers the rest of the system. If you don't have the pilot light, you can have all gas reserves in the world, all the electrical capability, you can have thermostat that's connected to your smart phone, and a house that's freezing cold.

You know what the proverbial pilot light in our worship of Jesus is? The thing that triggers the rest of our worship? It's remembering exactly who we were when God saved us. Seriously, when I feel like I'm going through a spiritually cold time, it's often remembering just how much of a unworthy scumbag I was when God saved me by his grace. The our hearts rise when we sing about God's amazing grace is because he saved a *wretch* like me.

Look at the terms that Paul uses - he uses 3. **Read 21**

When you are alienated, you are cut off from something. You are a stranger, a foreigner, you're not part of the group. In the OT when God was talking about his people Israel he would call them "those who are near." They were near to him, to the Temple, to the Promised Land. And those who were outside of Israel and not God's people he would call them "those who far off" and "aliens" and "strangers." They were outside of the people of God.

And the same thing is true now. It doesn't matter how much a person might go to church, know the Bible or want to know what the truth is. It doesn't matter how sincere they are in their false religion, how devoted they are. If they are not a follower of Jesus they are alienated from God. Just like *we* were.

There's no alternate spirituality outside of Jesus that brings people close to God. And it's not like some unbelievers are closer to God than others. No, before God saved us, we were aliens.

We were also hostile in mind, or enemies in our minds. This more clearly establishes the relationship between us and God prior to salvation. It's not just that God wasn't on our radar or we just weren't thinking about God. We weren't neutral, we weren't innocent. Let this sink in: we were enemies of the God of the universe.

Most of our translations say hostile in mind. When you are hostile to someone you are actively opposed to them. You do things to subvert them and oppose them.

The word "mind" is a unique word. It's not just talking about our thoughts, though it encompasses that. What it really means is our whole way of life. Prior to faith in Christ our whole life was one big act of hostility to God.

And here's the interesting thing: Most of us probably didn't view God as our enemies prior to salvation. I don't know about you, but I didn't go around thinking about how much I hated God and trying to figure out ways to undermine what he was doing. I remember making fun of a Christian friend of mine a little bit, but that's hardly an entire way of life dead-set against God. Or was it? Paul says that's who we were. How did we manifest that hostility toward God? By sinning against God. This is the 3rd description. **Read 21**

There's a connection **between** our hostile way of life and our sin. The NKJV says: **by** wicked works. The NIV says: **because** of your evil behavior. Our hostility was expressed in the fact that we sinned.

I mean, for those of us who follow Jesus, this was what finally dawned on us right before we heard the gospel message, wasn't it? It was this massive realization that our whole life up to that point had been completely filled with sin. We thought our lives were fine, but then the Lord opened our heart to realize just what we had been doing.

I was listening to someone talk about the early days of cigarette advertising. And did you know that in the early days of the 1900s they advertised cigarettes as healthy for people? You could smoke Lucky Strikes could help you lose weight. Pall Mall's were advertised next to fruit for the health benefits. Camel advertised that if you smoked their brand you could live to 100 years old and they helped your digestion. Dentist's recommended Viceroy cigarettes.

And then it was discovered that by smoking you were actually killing yourself. What people thought was so great - and even doctors recommended - was slowly bringing death. When people realized that it was a massive change in their understanding of their whole way of life.

Isn't that what happened when we came to faith? We had this massive paradigm shift - massive change in mind. All those things we thought were fun and good for so long were actually acts of hostility and hatred toward God.

You know what's interesting? Just like most people were ignorant of the effects of smoking in their life, the Bible talks about how before we were saved we were ignorant to what we were doing.

Look back at **Eph. 2:1-3**. Most of us are very familiar with Ephesians 2 as a great salvation passage. And it is, it's a great place to take unbelievers very simply explain to them the gospel message. But don't miss this: The passage is actually talking to **believers**. It's talking to us to remind us of where we were and what God has done in us. **Read 1-6**

What we often present as a passage that is talking about other peoples' needs for salvation is really just a reminder of how much we needed salvation. And he does it again. **Read 11-16**

Again, who's he talking about? Us. Look over at **4:17-20**. Here's where we see that just like us, most unbelievers act in ignorance. **Read**

So you see this balance of the reality that they are guilty but they are also ignorant of just how guilty they are?

Listen to the apostle Paul talk about his life before he was a Christian:

1 Tim. 1:13: Formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

He was killing people and throwing them in prison. This guy was the ISIS of the early Christian church. He was the chief persecutor.

Can I give just one little encouragement? As those who truly understand the grace of God, who truly understand the depth of our sinfulness when God saved us - of all people we should be the most gracious to others who are acting in sinful ignorance. That doesn't mean we excuse their sin. Many times it means we need to bring people to justice. But it does mean that we have a huge soft spot in our heart for those who are still living the life we lived and desire to show them the grace we received from Jesus.

Back in Colossians, Paul doesn't leave us wallowing in sadness over our sin. He showed the need for reconciliation, now he shows us:

2 - The Means of Reconciliation. **Read 21-22**

So we are the ones who had sinned against God. We are the ones who had offended our Creator by happily disobeying what he had commanded us to do. And so there needed to be reconciliation.

I think there is an ingrained human instinct that when we do something against someone else, we have to try to make it right. We have to try to smooth things over. And we expect the same thing from other people when they wrong us. No one usually thrives on drama and disunity and hatred. There are some, but for most of us, when something goes wrong, we want reconciliation.

If we get into a fight with your friend or spouse or brother or sister what we want is reconciliation. You want them to admit their wrongdoing, you should want to freely admit your own wrongdoing. Ask for forgiveness and move on.

When we realized what we had done against God, that's what we knew we needed. We had a very real sense of our guilt before God. In the book Pilgrim's Progress, when the main character Christian learns about his sin before God it's depicted as though he has a huge backpack on. And he feels the weight of the world on his shoulders and wants to do anything to get it off.

But here's the rub: God is infinitely holy. He is without any sin or stain of sin and cannot dwell in the presence of sin. God only ever does righteousness and goodness and love. We often downplay just how holy God is, but think about this: God is so holy that those who die without having their sins forgiven are punished with an eternity of damnation. It's not like a million years in hell wipes the slate clean. It's not like a billion years wipes the slate clean. Hell is not some sort of debtor's prison where we can slowly over time work off our sin.

No, God is so holy and our sin so offensive to him that punishment for sin is eternal; ongoing forever. There's no way for the unrepentant sinner to ever actually reconcile to God. There's no good

work we could do, no way we could ever make up for the continual offense against God - no matter how ignorant we were when we did them.

So how can we be reconciled? Only one way: God himself has to bear the punishment we deserve.

This is what we just celebrated at Christmas. God the Son took on human flesh. The Son of God became the Son of Man. He was fully God and fully human. And in his suffering and in his death on the cross, the eternal punishment that every believer deserves for our sins Jesus took on himself. Jesus took on flesh so that he could suffer in our place.

That's what was going on at the cross. Jesus was reconciling sinners to God. God didn't do anything wrong, he didn't to make amends. We had done something wrong, we had offended him by our sinful way of life. But instead of leaving us without hope, God himself took on flesh and reconciled believers to God.

3 - Goal of reconciliation. Why did God save us? What was the purpose? A lot of times I think we're quick to answer with things that revolve around us: to give us eternal life. So that we could have our sins forgiven. So that we could have heaven. And those things are true, they're just not complete. You ever wonder what God gets out of the deal? Why does he save us? **Read 22**

Here, God saves us so that we will be presented as holy and blameless and above reproach before him. Paul uses the phrase "so that" or "in order that." Yes, we get eternal life, and heaven, and our sins forgiven. But here the focus is on God reconciling us so that we will stand before him as holy and blameless.

You know what these descriptions are? They are descriptions of God's own character. God is holy.

Isa. 6:1-3: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.

1 Pet 1:16: You shall be holy for I am holy.

Here what Paul says is that Jesus has reconciled us to God so that we would be living, reconciled reflections of God's character back to God.

Eph. 1:4: even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Look over at **Jude 24-25**. There are several places where we see this idea that the reason we are saved and reconciled to God is so that we will stand before God as holy and blameless. **Read**

Isn't that interesting language? He will present us blameless. You know what a presentation is? In royalty it's when the king arrives from out of town and all the subjects come out to greet him. And

when the king comes to town you don't put on just any old clothes. You put on the very best of what you have.

Jude has been talking about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's been talking about the return of the King. And Jesus isn't primarily concerned with what we are wearing when he returns. That's not the presentation that will impress him the most. You know what he wants to see? Blamelessness. Holiness. Righteousness.

And not a blameless life that's just going through the motions because we have to. A blameless life that's filled with joy because we have the honor to serve the king who saved us. Look at how Jude mentions joy. **Read 24**

Where does joy in the Christian life come from? It comes from being reminded of what God has saved us from. There's a sense in which we are blameless because Jesus had made us blameless. He has covered our sins and given us his righteousness.

But there's also a sense in which he expects us to live in righteousness and holiness for his glory.

Back in Colossians Paul uses another 3 words to describe this. **Read 22**

Holy is that we are set apart, we are different than the world. Back in the day people would get fine china for wedding presents. And you'd slowly add to your collection over time. And the fine china would only come out for special occasions. It was set apart, it was special. That's the idea of holiness. We are set apart for special use. We are morally pure and different than the world because we reflect God's character.

Blameless, is pretty straightforward: we are without blame. People can't blame us for evil because we aren't doing any evil. Or if we sin, we go and make it right.

Above reproach is essentially the same idea, we are above any accusations of wrong doing.

From God's point of view, this is one reason why he saved us. He wanted a people presented to himself- there's that word again: presented - who reflect his character and his nature.

Why do you think Paul brings that up? Because it's good for us to realize that when God saves us, he's not just giving us an eternal vacation. It's not just that we won the lottery and we go on business as usual. No, God has saved us and he has done so that we might be like mirrors who reflect his holy character.

4 - The evidence of reconciliation. This last part is something of a warning, but more it is an encouragement to keep following Christ. **Read 22-23**

Here Paul warns the Colossians that true reconciliation has only occurred if they continue in the faith. They have to keep going. They have to keep pursuing Christ or everything they thought they had in Jesus is for nothing.

They have to continue stable and steadfast. Stable is the idea of laying a foundation. In San Francisco there's a 58 story skyscraper called the Millennium Tower that is starting to lean. It's leaning 2-4 inches at the bottom and up to 14 inches at the top. That doesn't sound like a lot, but structurally, tower's can't bear that kind of lean. They become unsafe and condemned.

Here Paul says we need to be stable, built on a firm foundation. You know act the firm foundation is? The gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to be careful we don't wander off into weird teachings. Our faith in Christ needs to remain firm.

Steadfast is running language. The Christian faith is like a marathon: we need to keep going, keep striving.

And we need to not shift from the hope of the gospel. The hope is a worldwide hope, it's a hope that is for all people in all nations.

But you know what most people think was probably going on here? It's the same thing that can happen to us. The Colossians were probably losing the joy they first had in following Jesus. One author said "their enthusiasm was dimming." (Bruce).

That happens to us too, doesn't it? We can often just be trudging along in our Christian faith, going through the motions. It's easy to get swayed and discouraged.

You know God says? Keep going. Don't turn from the hope you have, don't forget what you've been saved from, know there's a bigger reality to our reconciliation that just what we get out of. And just like Paul, we can go and proclaim this gospel to every creature under heaven.

Pray