

THE CROSS OF RECONCILIATION

Colossians 1:19-23

Intro: The Apostle Paul's purpose in writing to the church at Colosse was to remind them of *the preeminence of Christ!* We have seen even here in chapter 1 that the Lord Jesus Christ is preeminent in salvation. He is preeminent as the revelation of God. He is preeminent in creation because He is not only the Creator of the universe, but the Sustainer of the universe. And He is preeminent as the Head of the Church. The Church is the body of Christ, and so we are members of Christ.

He did this because certain teachers had come to Colosse whose object it was to draw them away from Christ, and to get Christ out of the picture altogether! See Col. 2:8-10 and then Col. 2:16-19. Obviously they were trying to put the church at Colosse under the Law, to make salvation a matter of what they should do for God, and to get them to forget all about Christ.

But the teaching of Scripture is that it all points to Christ – not just the NT, but also the OT. The OT from Gen. 3 on anticipated the coming of Christ, the Gospels tell us that He came, and from Acts on through the book of the Revelation we learn all of the results of His coming. If you take Christ out of the Bible, you destroy the Bible. There is really nothing left if you try to take Christ out. The Bible teaches that Christ is at the heart of all that the Bible says.

The Bible teaches that when Adam sinned, man came under the judgment of God (that was the divine side), and secondly man was alienated from God. Man became an enemy of God. So the Lord Jesus Christ came, the Son of God, God in human flesh, to accomplish on God's behalf, two things that were completely beyond what mere man could do, two things which man in his heart was not interested in doing. And the two Bible Words which speak of these works of Christ are *propitiation and reconciliation*.

We are going to be thinking today about the second of these two great words, *reconciliation*. But before we do that I want to say just a word about *propitiation*. And to do that I ask you to turn with me to the book of Romans, chapter 3, and to the verse where the Apostle Paul began to write about justification: verse 21. (Read Rom. 3:21-26.) Here we are introduced to some of the most important words that you and I will find in

the Bible.

Romans 3:19 tells us that the whole world is “guilty before God.” Guilty of what? Guilty of sin. All sin is a crime before God, crimes which call for the death penalty, and when I say “death penalty” in this context, I mean *the penalty of eternal death. No amount of good works can undo our crimes. And sin has so affected us that we are not really interested in doing anything about either clearly the charges against us, nor establishing a new, friendly relationship with God. The Lord Jesus Christ came to do both!*

I am going to re-read Rom. 3:24 and the first part of verse 25. (Read.)

Notice the words, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood.” What does propitiation mean? It means that when Christ died on the Cross, He died suffering the penalty that was charged against by, and that He has completely satisfied the righteousness of God so that there are no longer any charges against those who have faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. God does not excuse our sins, nor does He agree to overlook our sins. Christ paid the penalty, and God is satisfied with what His Son has done for us. And notice that “God hath set forth” His Son to satisfy the righteousness of God concerning our sins by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. No man asked for this. God simply did it “by His grace.”

Read your Bible. You don’t find man seeking God, but you find God seeking man. Abraham did not call upon God; God called him. Moses did not call Moses; God called him. David did not call upon God until God called him. God sent His Son into the world to seek and to save those who were lost.

So by the death of Christ He completely satisfied God concerning the sins of every person who ever will be saved. That is propitiation. Propitiation speaks of the effect of the death of Christ upon God.

Our text in Colossians speaks about another great Bible word. It is the word “reconciled,” or to put it in the same form as propitiation, it is reconciliation. What does reconciliation mean? The simplest definition of reconciliation that I have ever heard is that reconciliation means that enemies have become friends. The dictionary defines reconciliation in the same way, but also means to harmonize two people. This is what the

Bible means by teaching us that to be reconciled is to be made one. But we need to be careful about the way we use that as a part of salvation. And the Apostle Paul has helped us to understand what reconciliation means. He said, speaking to the believers in Colosse, “And you (and the “you” is emphatic), that were sometimes (or, at one time) alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled (“to Himself” understood, but how?) In the body of His flesh (whose flesh? Christ’s flesh) through death.” Let me take it just that far.

You see, God has never been our enemy. We were His enemies, and we showed that we were by the sins, the “wicked works,” which we did. But He has loved His people from eternity past. But the Father sent His Son to die for us that He might take the enmity out of our hearts, so that we would consider God as our Friend! In salvation He is more than our Friend, but He is our Friend! And we tell Him that we love Him. The Father would never have heard those words from us if Jesus had not died to reconcile us to God. We love Him because He first loved us, *but the amazing thing is that we love Him. That is not because of anything that we have done, but it is all due to what God sent His Son to do for us when He died for us on the Cross – and, thank God, when He was raised from the dead – God’s way of telling us that His Son had accomplished that He sent our Lord to do.*

Who else could do, or has done, for us, what the Lord Jesus Christ has done? No one! There is no other like our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God in human flesh. This sinless Son of God Who lost none of His Deity when He became Man. He could be my Savior and your Savior because He was God in human flesh, and therefore was not a sinner like you and I are. He died to satisfy His Father that the crimes against us had been paid for, and He died to take the enmity out of our hearts toward God, and to make us His friends. We could not do this for ourselves, nor could anyone else do it for us; *Christ not only could, but He did!*

But now let us see how Paul developed this truth in the text before us.

First, we have:

I. A SECOND STATEMENT DECLARING THE DEITY OF OUR LORD (Col. 1:19).

The first statement is in verse 15. This second statement is in different

words, but the meaning is the same. (Read.) It also could read without changing the meaning at all, “For in Him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell.” Both statements indicate that the Lord Jesus Christ was fully God. If it could be possible to diminish His Deity, it would not be Deity. So again we have the preeminence of Christ as God, and as the revelation of God. The people who say that Jesus was only a good man, but not God, are doing away with both propitiation and reconciliation. In fact, if Jesus Christ were not God, there is no salvation, no Gospel, no forgiveness of sins. The value of the work of Christ rests solidly on the truth that He was fully God and fully Man.

Next in our text Paul declares:

II. THAT CHRIST FULLY ACCOMPLISHED THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION (Col. 1:20-22).

In one word reconciliation means “peace.” The enmity is gone; we are peace with God.

But notice the terrible cost of our reconciliation with God. It was “through the blood of His cross.” In verse 22 Paul said that we have been reconciled to God “in the body of His flesh through death.” Back in verse 14 we are told that we have both redemption and “the forgiveness of sins” “through His blood.” Christ did not deserve to die, as the Jewish leaders claimed. He died in our place, as our Substitute, and it is from His Cross that all of the blessings of salvation have come to us.

In explaining the doctrine of reconciliation, notice the difference between verses 20 and 21. In verse 21 Paul said that Christ died that He “reconcile all things unto Himself . . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” Some explain this as applying to all people who live on the earth, and even to the angels in heaven. But we know that not all are to be reconciled to God, and there certainly is no salvation for angels. But probably what the Apostle Paul had in mind is the fact that the redemption of creation itself is traceable to the death of Christ on the Cross. Paul said in creation “itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). We know that all creation felt the effect of man’s sin. The animal world experienced the effect of Adam’s sin. But someday there is going to be a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness will dwell, and that, too, will be traceable to the work of Christ on the Cross. More was done by

Christ's death on the Cross than we can understand or full appreciate now.

But now look at verses 21 and 22. "And you" is very emphatic in the Greek, pointing to a special result for those of us who are the people of God who have been reconciled to God. We were God's enemies, but now we are reconciled. *But notice carefully what follows!* Our reconciliation does not just deal with the past and the present, but it deals with the present and the future: "to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight," that is, in God's sight. How important it is that we understand what these words mean because they are the outward evidences of a person who has been reconciled to God! Let's see what they mean.

- 1) "Holy" is our sanctification. It means God-likeness and Christ-likeness. As we grow in the Lord we become less and less like we were when the Lord saved us, and more and more like Him who gave His life to save us. Our presentation before God will find us "holy," free from all sin.
- 2) "Unblameable" – without any blemish, having no trace of former sins.
- 3) "Unproveable" – having no charge that can be brought against us.

To state it simply and clearly, a person who has been reconciled to God will be interested in becoming saintly, in being pleasing to God and doing what is acceptable in His sight. Perfection awaits the time of our presentation to the Father, but progress in holy character and holy living is one of the characteristics of a person who has been reconciled to God.

But our text closes with a warning:

IV. THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS (Col. 1:23).

We don't continue to make our reconciliation more secure, but we continue as evidence that our relationship with God and with Christ is genuinely a work of God.

What does it mean to be "moved away from the hope of the Gospel"? It means at least two things: 1) It means that a person ceases to live in the constant expectation of the return of Christ; 2) it means to lose interest in holiness of life which is the primary objective for our reconciliation to God and to our salvation as a whole. We all know of people who made a

good beginning, but they have not continued. Remember what the Apostle John said about some people in his day toward the close of the first century:

19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us (1 John 2:19).

Our Lord's parable of the sower and the seed spoke of four types of people who received the Word, but only one out of the four continued and brought forth fruit. I don't think we can draw percentages from that parable, but it shows that we can't say that people have been saved just because at first they seem to receive the Word. The proof that a person is saved is that he continues in the faith. He continues walking with the Lord. He continues to read the Word, and to pray. He continues to want to please the Lord in a holy life, departing from sin in every form.

Finally, just a word about:

V. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL (Col. 1:23b).

Paul told the Corinthian believers that the preaching of the Cross (the message of how guilty sinners can be reconciled to God) is to them that perish foolishness. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:18. And he told Timothy that the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine, but would look for teachers who would preach what they wanted to hear instead of preaching what they need to hear, which is the truth of the Word of God. In spite of these grim statements, Paul spoke of the Gospel being preached to every creature under heaven, and that it was for that purpose that he, Paul, was made a minister.

Two things need to be said about this statement for our encouragement:

- 1) The Lord had told His disciples to go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature. That was His will and we can be sure that the will of God is going to be done. We judge things by what we see, but we don't see everything that God is doing.
- 2) We can be sure that He is going to see to it that the Gospel message gets out so that God's purposes are being accomplished in every generation. It does not mean that all will be saved, nor that everyone who hears will be saved. But that God's work of reconciling sinners to Himself will not fail, but will continue to the end of time.

Concl: Now we come to the time of personal application. Paul has been dealing with a lot of truth, a lot of theology, in this first chapter of Colossians. What is your response to what he has written? Do you believe that Jesus Christ was and is the Son of God? Do you believe in the sinfulness of the human heart, in the sinfulness of your own heart? Do you believe that you are incapable of saving yourself? Do you believe that Christ had to die for your salvation? Do you believe that salvation is a work which God does for you? Does your life show that you have really been reconciled to God because of your love for God, and your desire to please Him, and that you are looking for the coming of the Lord when at last sin will no longer be a problem to us because when you see the Lord, you will finally become like the Lord? How well are you continuing in life that is pleasing to God?

As we come to the Lord's table this morning, I want to close my message by reading two other NT passages which speak of our reconciliation with God. The first is in Rom. 5:10-11:

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation.

The second is in 2 Cor.5:18-21:

18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

The Lord's Table is for reconciled sinners, those who by faith are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, believing that by His death He has taken the penalty that we should have had, that we might be forgiven and have life instead of death.