

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Reconciliation: Backward & Upward Through Christ" (Colossians 1:20)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 1/3/2009

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Today in our study of the preeminence of Jesus Christ in the book of Colossians, we've come to chapter one, verse twenty. If you've been following this series of messages, you will recall that several times I've mentioned something that is unique about verses 15 through 20.

In the original Greek of the New Testament, these verses are in the form of poetry. They are actually a hymn that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. This hymn speaks of who Jesus is, what He has done, what He is doing now, and what He will be doing in the future. As we prepare to focus on verse twenty today, I want to read the entire passage for you, beginning at verse fifteen:

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. 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.

I've also said many times that these verses are perhaps the richest passage about

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the Lord Jesus Christ in the entire Word of God. They tell us that Jesus Christ is the very image of God. They tell us that He is the eternal God. He is the Creator of the universe. He is the Head of the Church. He is the firstborn from among the dead. He is the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in a body. He is the Reconciler of all things.

And today, we focus on that last thought, Christ's work as the Reconciler of all things: "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and [verse twenty] 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."

The first thing I want to do is give you an exposition of verse twenty. And then I want to move into the area of application: How does this verse apply to you, as you listen to this message today?

### **"Him – By Him"**

First of all, notice that Paul goes to great lengths in this verse to emphasize the fact that reconciliation to God is by and through Jesus Christ alone. Verse 20 begins with the phrase "and by Him." And then later in the verse, in our English Bibles, Paul says it again: "by Him." That second appearance of the words "by Him" takes a highly emphatic form in the original Greek. Literally it reads, "Him – by Him." In other words, Paul in this short verse is saying it not once, not twice, but actually three times: Salvation, reconciliation between God and man, is "by Him" – "by Him" – "by Him" – by Jesus Christ, and by Jesus Christ alone.

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Why does Paul go to such great lengths to emphasize this point? It is because a false teaching about the way to God had wormed its way into the Colossian church. That false teaching said that Jesus was just one of many mediators between God and man. We have this same false teaching in other forms today. Let me give you just three examples. Roman Catholicism says there are many mediators. Rome says that you can go to any one of tens of thousands of priests to have your sins forgiven. Rome says that Mary is a mediatrix between God and man. Rome says that dead saints are mediators between God and man.

A second example is the lie of universalism, which says that there are many ways to God. Just choose any religion you want. All roads lead to God. And a third example is works-based religion, which says in effect that you can be your own mediator with God.

All three of these are false. Paul's point, the point he emphasizes to the extreme in these verses, is that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Jesus Himself said, in John 14:6, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father except through Me." And in 2nd Timothy 2:5 we read, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." It is by Him, and by Him alone, that a person can be reconciled to God.

### **Reconciliation: Backward and Upward**

Next in verse twenty we come to the word "reconcile." The work that Jesus Christ has done, the work that He alone could do, is the work of reconciliation.

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What does that mean? Well this word in the original language is a very interesting one. It is only used in the New Testament in this verse and in one other place, Ephesians 2:16. In that passage, Paul makes the point that Jesus Christ has reconciled Jew and Gentile in Himself. He has "reconciled them both to God in one body, thereby putting to death the enmity" that existed between Jew and Gentile. God has one redemptive plan for both Jew and Gentile, not two separate plans for Israel and the so-called Gentile church.

And the force of this word for reconciliation in the original language is also highly emphatic. The force of the word is "to change something backward and upward into its original condition." "To change something backward and upward into its original condition."

Now this raises the question, just what is it that is being changed backward and upward into its original condition through the blood of the cross of Christ? Paul gives us the answer, and once again, he gives it to us emphatically. He says that "all things" are being reconciled. "All things" are being changed backward and upward into their original condition. And then he adds this for even greater emphasis: "all things" – "whether things on earth or things in heaven." Nothing left out. All things and everything in the physical and material realm of the created universe. All things and everything in the spiritual realm of Heaven itself.

The created universe itself is being redeemed through Christ. And the reconciliation or restoration of the created universe is rooted in the reconciliation of

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sinful man to the holy God. Paul says this, in Romans chapter eight, beginning at verse nineteen:

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because 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. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope... (Romans 8:19-24)

What does it mean for man to be reconciled to God? What it means is this: Man has become the enemy of God, and peace must be restored. That is Paul's focus in the rest of verse twenty.

### **Peace at Last**

Paul says that Christ has brought this reconciliation, this changing of man and the entire created order backward and upward into their original condition, in this way: "having made peace through the blood of His cross." I want you to notice five things about this peacemaking work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me give you the list first, and then we'll come back and focus on each one.

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First, it was necessary for God to restore peace because war has broken out between God and man.

Secondly, the shedding of blood was necessary to bring about peace.

Thirdly, Christ has brought about peace once for all.

Fourthly, this peace is not a matter of mere feelings. It is a matter of objective fact.

Fifthly, the verb in the original language of verse twenty says that Christ has "concluded peace" through the blood of His cross. We need to understand what that means for both the saved and the lost.

So now let's look more closely at each of these points.

First, it was necessary for God to restore peace because war has broken out between God and man. When Adam fell into sin, it was rebellion against God. Man in effect declared war on God. Romans 1:18 says that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Romans 8:7 says that "the carnal mind [the fleshly mind apart from Christ] is enmity [or hatred] against God." Psalm 7:11 says that "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day."

It was necessary for Christ to restore peace because a state of war exists between God and man. But Romans 5:10 says that it is when we were enemies that we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. And that brings us to our second point.

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Secondly, the shedding of blood was necessary to bring about peace. Christ made peace "through the blood of His cross." This was the purpose of the Old Testament animal sacrifices that prefigured the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We read this in Leviticus 17:11. God told Israel, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."

But Hebrews 10:4-5 tells us that those sacrifices only temporarily covered over sin, until Christ would come: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin [that is, deal with sin once and for all]. Therefore...[Christ] came into the world..." because, as Hebrews 9:22 tells us, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" of sin. That is how peace between God and man has been made possible, by the shedding of the blood of the Son of God Himself on the cross.

Thirdly, Christ has brought about peace once for all. That is the force of the verb here is Colossians chapter one verse twenty. "Having made peace." In the Greek this is an action that was done once, in the past, never again to be repeated. Christ has done absolutely everything necessary to bring about peace between God and man.

Romans 6:10 – "the death that He died, He died to sin once for all."

Hebrews 7:27 – Christ "does not need daily, as [the old] high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did [offered Himself not for any sin of His own but for the sins of the people] once for all when He offered up Himself."

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Hebrews 9:12 – “With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place [in heaven] once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

Jesus did it all, once for all. You cannot add anything to what Jesus Christ has done. And you need not add anything to what Jesus Christ has done. Jesus paid it all. He shouted out in triumph from the cross, “It is finished!” – literally, “It is paid in full.” Once for all.

Fourthly, this peace is not a matter of mere internal feelings. It is a matter of outward, objective fact. God has declared Himself to be at war with every human being because of man’s sinful rebellion against God and His law. But the great result of justification by faith is that the sinner’s warfare with God is ended forever. We read of this in the very next verses of Colossians chapter one – 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.”

Romans 5:1-2 tells us that this is a present reality: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we [who are saved] have [literally, we are having] peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Fifthly, the verb in the original language of verse twenty says that Christ has “concluded peace” through the blood of His cross. He has “concluded peace.” What does that mean?

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Look back for a moment at the opening words of this hymn about the Lord Jesus Christ, in verses 15-17:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

Here is the picture: All things had been created in, through, and for Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of all the things that He has created. And that means that He is rightfully the Lord of all things in heaven and earth. He is Lord by right of creatorship and ownership. But we understand from the early chapters of the Bible, especially Genesis chapter three, that a disaster happened in that perfect creation. Given the freedom to choose, man chose the path of rebellion against God. Man fell into sin. Man said, "I am lord," and the creation fell into chaos. But God through Christ has made peace. He concluded peace. And the idea of the word "peace" in verse twenty includes not only the absence of conflict, but the idea of pacification, in other words, the subduing of evil.

Christ has *concluded* peace. He has brought it about. There *will* be peace in the universe. But the peace that Christ has purchased with His blood may be put into effect in one of two ways. It can either be freely accepted in salvation, or it can be compelled in judgment. The principalities and powers over whom God has

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triumphed do not willingly surrender to God's grace. They will be "pacified". They continue to exist. They continue to oppose the saints of God. But they cannot finally harm the person who is in Christ, and their final overthrow is guaranteed by the cross.

By God's grace, some from among sinful mankind are freely accepting the peace that God has brought about through the cross. They are believing on, and trusting in, the Lord Jesus Christ alone as their Saviour from sin and wrath.

But the great mass of humanity refuses to willingly accept the peace that Christ purchased with His own blood on the cross. But those who do not bow the knee to receive Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord in this life, will bow the knee at the Last Judgment. We read in Philippians 2:10-11 that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. The saints who are about to enter the glories of the New Heavens and New Earth will do it gladly and willingly. But the lost who are about to be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity, because of their unrepentant rebellion against God, will bow the knee by compulsion.

### **Will You Bow the Knee Now – or Later?**

As we close today, I want to speak to you, especially if you are not trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin today. Or, perhaps you are not sure if you are saved.

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I want to say to you first of all, honestly and also lovingly, that apart from Christ, you as a sinner are at war with God. I say that not on my own authority, but on the authority of the Bible. You may be sincere, you may be religious, you may be a moral person. But unless you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, you are at war with God.

Secondly, I want to tell you that you, as a sinner, cannot reconcile yourself to God. God will not lower His standards. He will not close His eyes to sin. He will not compromise with sinful man. If He did, He would cease to be God, and the universe would disintegrate in an instant. Colossians 1:21 says that by your deeds you are alienated from God. Ephesians chapter two says that you are "dead in trespasses and sins" without Christ. Therefore, you are unable to do anything to save yourself or to please God.

And therefore, if there is going to be reconciliation between you and God, the initiative must come from God. And God has taken the initiative through Jesus Christ. He has "made peace through the blood of His cross."

Because Jesus Christ is God, He was able to do what no mere man could ever do. He was able to reconcile lost sinners to a holy God. The only mediator who could bring God and man together is the One who is both God and Man Himself. When Jesus died on the cross, He met the just demands of the Law because He paid the penalty for man's sins. And so, He accomplished reconciliation on the cross.

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God has the right and the ability both to glorify believers and to punish unbelievers, because of Christ's shed blood. Sin has been dealt with on the cross. But you need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior from sin in order to have Christ's work of redemption applied to you.

You need peace *with* God. You need peace *from* God. You need the peace *of* God. Jesus says this to the believer, in John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

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