

RECONCILIATION OF EARTH AND HEAVEN

(SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2014)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 63; Col. 1:19-23

INTRODUCTION

If we are honest, we probably all can say that it can be easy to lose sight of the greatness of God's work of salvation and all that our Lord has done for us.

Why? We might blame it on familiarity. The joy we enjoyed in first coming to salvation doesn't continue in the same way.

We will always battle against sin, which keeps us from fully appreciating our redemption.

Hymn 600 in the Trinity Hymnal written by Robert Murray McCheyne expresses how it will not be until eternity that we realize how great a debt we owe.

When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see thee as thou art,
Love thee with unsinning heart,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much I owe.

The verses that we study today from Colossians 1 help us to consider now the majesty of our Savior, the magnitude of sin, and the mandate that we stand fast according to the hope of the gospel.

Stand fast as you celebrate the fullness of Christ's work of redemption.

We will look at our text in three parts.

First, the majesty of our Savior in verse 19.

Second, the reality of sin and the great need for reconciliation from verses 20-22.

Third, the call that you now stand fast in hope and faith in verse 23.

1. THE MAJESTY OF OUR SAVIOR, V. 19.

Col. 1:19 For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell,

As I have mentioned a number of times, the book of Colossians focuses on two main points.

- 1) Who is Jesus Christ?
- 2) What does it mean to follow Him?

I would encourage you all at another time to look through this short book and see how Paul throughout teaches us who Jesus Christ is and the practical application that comes from this.

If the Christian life is lived in union with Jesus Christ, then the most relevant and practical things for the believer is to learn about our Lord and grow in our love and obedience because of what He has done for us.

Knowledge of God is the most useful and practical of all knowledge!

Now we must also realize that the knowledge of God is not something we will master in our short lives.

No one will come to the point of mastering all that God's Word teaches us.

We can have true knowledge of God. But we will never have exhaustive knowledge of God.

Listen to the Apostle Paul's familiar testimony from the book of Philippians.

Phil. 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; **10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Focusing now on Col. 1:19 we see that the language of this verse is challenging.

The Greek text does not show a specific subject, which is why the NKJV has the words *the Father that* in italics.

Other versions are similar but not identical.

ESV: For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

Interestingly in Colossians 2:9 we have a similar statement.

Col. 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

Commentators are not always in full agreement as to all the details concerning this verse. Did Paul use the word fullness to teach against how heretical teachers in Colossae used this word?

You do find in many pagan religions, the idea that some sort of a mediator is needed to reach from earth to heaven, to reach from man to God.

This is one reason why I don't think it is at all appropriate that pastors or religious leaders today be called priests.

Pastors and teachers have the duty to teach God's truth, but in no way do we stand as mediators between God and man.

We are not holier than thou. Our prayers are not more special or powerful.

There is much dangerous teaching and practice in the name of Christianity that in no way is in agreement with the truth of God's Word. We must carefully stick to Scripture.

Verse 19 then is very important and very practical.

In Jesus Christ, the fullness of God dwells.

All the attributes and activities of God are perfectly displayed in Jesus Christ.

No other mediator between God and man is needed.

Now why is verse 19 needed? Why is it so important that Paul and the other writers of the NT teach so often about Jesus Christ?

The answer is that this instruction is very important in light of two key doctrines that are the heart of the Christian faith –

The Triune Nature of God

The incarnation of God the Son

We must be very careful as we deal with these two important doctrines because there are many who have gone astray and taught all sorts of nonsense.

The instruction found here in Colossians 1 is so very vital.

Let's review briefly from last week starting with verse 15.

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. In Him we see the true nature of the Triune God.

He is the firstborn over all creation. He has a position of authority and honor over all things.

In and through the work of Jesus Christ, all things were created.

The purpose of all of creation is to show forth the glory of God and specifically the glory of Jesus Christ.

As the eternal Son of God He is before all things.

Through His power all things hold together and continue to exist.

In the great work of redemption, He is the head of the church.

He was raised from the dead so that in all things He may have the highest position of honor and praise.

Verse 19 then again sets forth the true majesty of our Lord and Savior as Paul continues to speak of the great work of salvation starting with verse 20.

2. THE REALITY OF SIN AND THE GREAT NEED FOR RECONCILIATION, VERSES 20-22.

Col. 1:20 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, yet now He has reconciled **22** in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—

If we think carefully about verses 15-18, then I believe we can see the reason for verses 20-22.

God's incredible creations – things that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers – did not continue in the purpose for which they were created.

There are two major rebellions described in Scripture.

Genesis 3 focuses on one of those great rebellions but it assumes that another rebellion took place before it.

Where do we read about the rebellion of Satan and of those angels who were allied with him in his rebellion?

Revelation 12:3-4 is one of the passages where we read about an angelic rebellion.

Rev. 12:3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. **4** His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

Two other passages in the OT, Isaiah 14:3-21 and Ezekiel 28:2-19, also seem to describe the fall of Satan even as they are focused on the fall of earthly kings who reigned over Babylon and Tyre.

God's perfect wisdom and plan included this twofold rebellion of man and angels.

This is significant for at least two reasons.

First, salvation will not come through your own spiritual attempts as we see offered in eastern religions and the New Age movement.

The spiritual realm is also fallen. Any promise of salvation that somehow involves escaping from the physical realm to the spiritual realm is pure deception.

Second, God's amazing plan of redemption includes the physical and spiritual world.

Now we must be very careful as we speak on this subject, but verse 20 is one of the verses that shows us the magnitude of God's work of reconciliation through Jesus Christ and His shed blood on the cross.

Let us consider some of the key terms in verse 20.

What does the verb reconcile mean?

Reconciliation here means to subdue those who are at war with God and who stand against His purposes.

Now often when it comes to human relationships, we speak of the need for reconciliation as involving two parties coming together often with the need for both to ask forgiveness.

We must be careful not to speak of this reconciliation as we would speak of human reconciliation.

With both the physical and spiritual aspects of God's creation at war and set against God's purposes, there was the need for a reconciliation involving all of creation. Hostility must be replaced with peace.

Verse 20 says that the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross is the ground for this reconciliation and peace.

What does this mean for the spiritual world and the physical world?

This is answered in the following verses and in the next chapter of Colossians.

In verses 21 and 22, which we will consider in a moment, Paul speaks of how the believers in Colossae were reconciled.

In Colossians 2:15, Paul also speaks of the triumph over principalities and powers that took place also in the death of Christ on the cross.

We do not speak of salvation for angels. Fallen angels are not given saving faith such that they become believing angels.

However, we can speak of a reconciliation, a subduing of the angelic realm in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Satan and his demons believed that the cross was their triumph, and yet it was their great defeat and their mockery.

F. F. Bruce in his commentary writes:

Everything in the universe has been subjected to Christ even as everything was created for him. By his reconciling work "the host of the high ones on high" and sinful human beings on earth have been decisively subdued to the will of God and ultimately they can but serve his purpose, whether they please or not.¹

Recall the great words of the end of Romans 8.

Romans 8:38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, **39** nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 76.

The believer is not to live in constant anxiety and fear even though countless forces are set against, because Jesus Christ has brought all of creation into its divinely and originally created order.

Some ancient and modern commentators have wanted to see in verse 20 a universal salvation for all of humanity and for even fallen angels.

I understand the desire to see this, but we cannot isolate verses from the rest of Scripture. Universalism whether applied to all angels or to all men is not a biblical doctrine. And we know this from passages that teach about the final division of the righteous and the wicked at the day of judgment.

Rev. 21:8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Here we must consider that reconciliation is not identical to eternal salvation for all of creation.

Now let us consider the amazing aspects of reconciliation and eternal salvation described in verses 21 and 22.

Paul reminds the Colossians and all of you, that at one time you were alienated from God and enemies of God.

So many people today would consider this as really no big deal. Who cares that I am an alien and an enemy of God?

Here we might say is the fallacy of ignorance and rebellion brought together. Just because you don't care about something doesn't determine the significance or meaning of truth.

To be an alien and to be an enemy of God is the most dreadful situation in which to be.

Notice that verse 21 shows that this hatred and attempted warfare against God is revealed through evil deeds.

This is another argument against atheism. The fool in his heart says there is no God, but then spends he spends his life fighting against God.

The disgusting picture at the beginning of verse 21 thankfully ends with the beautiful words -

Yet now He has reconciled!

And verse 22 emphasizes how this reconciliation was accomplished.

Reconciliation was accomplished in the body of His flesh through death.

The language that Paul uses here is significant.

This passage in conjunction with other familiar passages allows us to make the following important observations.

- 1) Jesus our Messiah, shared in our fleshly existence, so that He who knew no sin could endure the consequences of sin through death.
- 2) Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, the one in whom all the fullness of God should dwell.
- 3) The cross is the most powerful outworking of a Holy God and our sin which separated us from God.
- 4) Those who are members of Jesus' body through faith and God's sovereign working have full assurance of peace with a holy God. We have been reconciled and justified!² We have died with Him and our sin was carried by Him.

Verse 22 ends with an amazing contrast with the start of verse 21.

We who once were totally cut off from God and were His enemies will be presented to God as holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

Here we find reference again to a future aspect of our salvation. There is a present peace and justification that we now enjoy.

There is still a future presentation that will be made to the Father.

One commentator has written:

God's purpose, then, is to create a holy people in Christ. This he *has* done in principle, by dealing with sin on the cross and thus already achieving reconciliation. This he *is* doing in practice, by refashioning their lives according to the pattern of the perfect life, that of Christ (see 3:10). This he *will* do in the future, when that work is complete and the church enjoys fully that which at present it awaits in hope.³

² These points taken and modified from N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 12; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 86.

³ *Ibid.*, 87.

3. YOU ARE CALLED TO STAND FAST IN HOPE AND FAITH, VERSE 23.

I recently read an article about a pastor who was going to give atheism a try for one year.

Things were not going exactly well for this man including his marriage, and so he determined that for one year he was not going to pray, read his Bible, or do anything spiritual. In fact, he was going to live as God did not exist.

Now he calls himself a weak atheist.

He states, “The question I am asking right now: Why do I need religion to love.”⁴

This is the foolishness that the world offers to us a profound insight and wisdom.

It is amazing to realize how many people seek religious service who are not true believers in Jesus Christ. Charles Darwin’s father wanted him to become a minister so that he could enjoy a relatively easy life and have the time for other pursuits.

Charles Bridges in his book on Christian Ministry wrote in 1829 about the danger of unconverted ministers.

Now thankfully there is also the testimony of those who are brought to true salvation who once enjoyed only empty professions.

There are those who wander from the truth who by God’s grace are powerfully regenerated and changed. Praise be to God! And some of you in this congregation can give a similar testimony.

The call given to all those who confess the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior is to continue in the faith.

You find throughout the NT what we call conditional language.

If this is the true, then this will be the case.

Verse 23 is an example of this conditional language.

There are different types of conditional statements in the NT, but we need not concern ourselves with all the technical details here.

How are we to understand the language as used here?

⁴ <http://www.addictinginfo.org/2014/12/24/pastor-who-gave-up-religion-for-a-year-to-test-his-faith-says-he-might-not-go-back/>

It is not hypothetical or an expression of doubt, but rather the language of exhortation. You are called to continue in the faith, that is to continue to hold and believe the gospel message as presented by the apostles of Jesus Christ.

This is not earning your salvation. This is not salvation in the end depending on you, either.

This is God's sovereign and gracious call given to you.

“If the gospel teaches the final perseverance of the saints, it teaches at the same time that the saints are those who finally persevere – in Christ.”⁵

Paul uses here the language of building a house, perhaps taken from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grounded and steadfast are metaphors used in connection with building a house.

Moved away is the opposite of being grounded and steadfast.

What did Jesus teach at the end of Matthew 7?

Matt. 7:24 “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: **25** and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.”

Every Christian will be tested. It is inevitable that you will face situation that will try your faith. It may be personal loss, challenges to your health, financial difficulties, or all of the above.

The only way to face these challenges is by keeping in your mind the truth of who God is and the hope that is found in the gospel message.

If your focus is on the glory of Jesus Christ and the promises of His Word, then you will pass through the challenges and testings.

The same glorious message of salvation that Paul said was proclaimed throughout all the world is the same message you are called to receive and persevere in believing.

CONCLUSION:

Stand fast as you celebrate the fullness of Christ's work of redemption.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, 79.

When the praise of heav'n I hear,
Loud as thunders to the ear,
Loud as many waters' noise,
Sweet as harp's melodious voice,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much I owe.

Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe.

Prayer

Hymn: 186

Benediction – Jude 24 & 25

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present *you* faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, *Be* glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.