

Jacob London New Horizon United Reformed Church July 12, 2020

Reconciled in Christ

Colossians 1:19-23

Beloved congregation,

One of the most important questions you and I will ever be asked is “how are we made right with God?”

We have seen in Colossians 1 that Christ is the preeminent sovereign and by his own power he was raised from the dead (v.18). He is Creator God and all things were made by him and for him (v.16). He is Lord over the church (v.18). There is no god more glorious than our God. No king more honourable than our King. No lord more preeminent than our Lord. We have seen, dear Christian, that when we look upon Christ: his person, work, and offices, our response must be humble adoration.

- Adoration because he is holy and glorious.
- Humbled because we are needy and sinful.

This is a twin truth. The more we learn of Jesus, even greater is the reality of sin. There is a chasm of sin between God and man. Sin that brings upon man guilt, wrath, and punishment. If we are ever to be restored to fellowship with God we must be acquitted and delivered. So I ask again, how are we made right with God?

The answer the Apostle Paul gives us is that same wonder of the gospel. That not only is Christ honourable and glorious, but its

Lesson: through Christ's work on the cross that we are reconciled to God.

Our headings are:

1. Christ is the Surety of Salvation (vv.19-20).
2. We are the Partakers of Salvation (vv.21-22).

Point 1: The Surety of Salvation (vv.19-20).

Jesus Christ is the surety of our salvation. Surety means that he stands our place. As Christian people we can sometimes pass over this truth too quickly. Consider that in verse 19 Paul is saying that Jesus Christ has stood in the place of sinners to win salvation for the church. This is the most profound truth. Which leads us to the question, how can this be? And what Paul does in verses 19-22 is explain exactly how Jesus Christ saves lost sinners.

1.1 - *It Pleaseth God the Father*

The young men in our congregation could speak to this, but there is really nothing quite like being the pride of your father. Even now, as an adult, I take deep satisfaction when my father is proud of me. And we know that throughout the scriptures it is testified that God the Father takes delight in God the Son. At Jesus baptism it is said that a voice came from heaven saying “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matt. 3:17). Again on the Mount of Transfiguration this is repeated. We see that this truth is repeated again and again (Ps. 2:7-8; Jn. 17:5; Eph.1:9).

Yet, notice why Paul says that the Father is pleased with the Son in verse 19. He does **not** say that the Father is pleased because of what Christ has done, although that's true (Matt. 17:5), but the Father is pleased to use Christ as his vessel of perfect salvation because of who he is (vv.19-20).

You must remember now the context of the book of Colossians. This was a church dealing with a false teaching that told the people that “Christ was good but not enough for the fullness of knowledge, holiness, power, and joy.”¹ The false teachers told them that there was something beyond what the normal Christian experienced in Christ alone. They taught there was more knowledge to be found in angels. More power in sacrifices. More holiness in the philosophies of the world.

Paul says that God the Father was not pleased to share his attributes with the angels. Or to reveal himself in humanistic tradition. Or any other means. But the fullness of God is manifest in Christ.

“*in Him all the fullness should dwell*” (v.19). Meaning that all that is in God is in Christ. He is inexhaustible in the attributes of God. The treasures of his divinity will never run dry, the supply of his grace is limitless.

Application:

1. Therefore, anyone who has a share in Christ has all that there is of God. If we are joined with him by faith all that is his is ours! All knowledge (1 Cor. 1:30), all holiness (Rom. 15:15-16), all power (Acts 24:15), all joy (Jas. 1:2-3), is ours in Christ Jesus our

¹London, Jacob. *Greetings to the Church!* Sermon: Colossians 1:1-2

Lord. All his attributes are ours to rest in and enjoy. When Christ makes his home in the human heart he brings all of these and more. We have far more in Christ than we have even begun to realize.

Paul tells us that this Christ is the head of the church not because he is the best man, or because he can do miracles, but because of his merit as both true God and true man. So God was *pleased* to receive Christ as the surety.

1.2 - It Pleas'd Christ

“*and by Him to reconcile*” (v.19). Here we see that Christ is willing himself to be the propitiation (appeasement) for the sins of the church. Jesus Christ himself, by the will of God the Father, chose to go to the cross for sinners such as us (Acts 2:23).

Now, we often think of God that Father as the one who is angry with our sins and Jesus is the friend of sinners. And he is the friend of sinners, yet we learn that Jesus himself is also very angry with sins (LD 10). Look to whom he reconciled miserable sinners! “*to reconcile all things to Himself*” (v.19)! Due to sin we were estranged from Christ.

You see, when we sin it is not that we offend some transcendent law, or the powers that be, but we have offended Jesus Christ himself (All the God-head). John Frame describes sin as “Disobedience, self glorification, unbelief and hatred”.² Allow me to add, against Christ. “*sin is lawlessness*” (1 Jn. 3:4) against Christ.

To sin against a holy God, such as Christ is (as we have seen in Colossians 1:1-18), is deserving of punishment (Gen. 3:19). Our God declares “*The soul who sins shall die*” (Ezk 18:4). “*the wages of sin is death*” (Rom. 6:23).

So here we now come to the crux of all human salvation, how does a holy God reconcile, that is restore friendly relations, between sinners and God?

Paul points to but one means, “*having made peace through the blood of His cross*” (v. 20). He reminds us that the *lord of glory* (1 Cor. 2:8) was subjected to tremendous agony on the cross. The divine solution to bridge the chasm of our sinfulness and God’s holiness was to turn an instrument of execution, the Roman cross, into the instrument of peace.

Because of mankind's rebellion in Adam and our own personal sins we are classified as being at animosity with God. “*Haters of God*” (Rom. 1:30), wretched and sinful creatures, burdened and bound by our sins. But it is through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross he takes the sins of all who would ever believe upon his shoulders. In so doing he takes holy God in one hand, sinful man in the other, and reconciles us to God through the blood of his cross.

He does this that he might set you free. Free from sin and damnation. Free from Satan. Free from death and hell. Free, that you might live forevermore with him who loved you, “*if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed*” (Jn. 8:36). Jesus is our Prince of peace (Isa. 9:6; Eph. 2:14), and he was pleased to die as our surety for sinners such as us.

Application:

1. By Jesus' death we most clearly see God’s love for the church. “*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom. 5:8). The cross magnifies the grace and mercy of our Triune God.
2. Second, we should note Paul mentions “*whether things on earth or things in heaven*”. We refer to this as cosmological redemption, simply meaning that in Christ’s cross he not only bore the curse of sin but also the curse on the world. But what of the things of heaven? Why do they need a mediator? Job 4:18 tells us that compared to the righteousness of Christ even beings such as angels are inadequate to proclaim his glory (Isa. 6), and therefore need a peacemaker through whose grace they may wholly cling to God.

Point 2: We are the Partakers of Salvation (vv.21-23).

The Apostle then moves to the application of this precious truth, that the Colossian church are true partakers of this marvelous gift of reconciliation. “*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled*” (v.21). This is not salvation only for the wealthy, for those who have their ducks in a row, but even from broken sinners such as the people of Colossae.

Even you who are listening today, Christ is mighty enough a saviour for you as well. Now maybe you say, “Jacob, you don’t know my sin, you don’t know the evils I have done...” That may be true, but God does. He knows the sins of all people and he uses the Colossians as our example. Notice what they were!

²Frame, John. *Systematic Theology: Sin*. Pg. 849.

2.1 - What believers were (v.21).

“*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled*” (v.21).

This is a description of the human condition. This describes how things once were for every Christian, whether in Colosse or Jerusalem then, or Toronto and Sheffield now.

- *Alienated from God (Emotionally)*

To be alienated is to be estranged. You remember of course there was a time when man and God walked together in the Garden in perfect harmony. This union between God and man was fractured due to Adam’s sin. That closeness is no longer felt. Instead, from the moment of birth man is at odds with his maker.

- *Hostile towards God (Mentaly)*

“*enemies in your mind*” (v.21). Meaning, that there is a natural hostility in each of us towards God. Phillip Arthur, a commentator on Colossians says, “From the moment we leave the womb we are God-haters”.³ Our very nature is depraved of godliness, we are by “*nature children of wrath*” (Eph. 2:3).

- *Manifest in Wicked Works (Physically)*

“*by wicked works*” (v.21). This evil nature manifests itself in works that are contrary to the righteous Law of God. If you ever wonder where sin comes from, where all this wickedness started, all we have to do is look at our own hearts (Jer. 17:9).

2.2 - What Believers have become (v.22).

“*yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death*” (vv.22b-23).

- *Reconciled*

Paul again emphasizes that when someone becomes a Christian they undergo a dramatic transformation. We were *once* engaged in active hostility against God but are now regarded as friends of God. The word translated here as ‘reconciled’ is more intense than the normal Greek term. Paul here added a prefix to it, which has the effect of making the term stronger. It speaks of total and utter reconciliation, reconciliation without a doubt. The quarrel between God and his people has been resolved so completely that no question marks remain.⁴

- *Justified*

“*to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—*”

We have the language of the bride of Christ being presented to the God the Father as *holy, blameless, and above reproach*. Which speaks of the legal nature of our right standing. The word *present* has echoes of the law courts, where we the defendant are held up as justified in Christ.

What this means is that God the Father, the most righteous and all seeing judge of the universe looks upon those who are presented before him *in Christ* and sees no fault in them because Jesus has taken the punishment, blame, and unrighteousness of his people.

2.3 - What Believers must continue to Be (v.23).

“*if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister*” (V.23).

³Arthur, Phillip. Pg. 54

⁴Arthur, Phillip. Pg. 55

Remember that the change effected in conversion is not a one time thing but is a lasting change. Now, don't misunderstand Paul here, he is not saying that it's possible for a true believer to fall from the care of Christ. Paul in other places refutes that very idea (Rom. 8:29-30). This inheritance for us in heaven is "*kept by God*" (1 Pet. 1:4-5). Yet we also recognize that we have a duty to preserve in the faith, by the grace of God, as a testimony of his work in us.

They need to continue to abide in Christ. "*not moved away from the hope of the gospel*". Too often we use the word hope as a synonym for wish. When it's used in the scriptures it means confident assurance. Let us not be moved from the confident assurance we have in the gospel.

You see the Colossians had lost that assurance that Christ was enough for their salvation and Paul brings them back into this understanding by showing them the great work of reconciliation accomplished on Calvary for their sake.

Application:

1. If God was pleased to accept Christ then we must also be pleased to accept him. We must also then be willing to be reconciled with those estranged from us.

Conclusion:

Through the work of Jesus Christ friendly relations have been restored with the God of mercy and justice and with his people. Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price, laying down his life, giving us his righteousness and our sins laid upon his shoulders that we might be partakers of salvation. Praise God for this.