

Christ-Centered Reconciliation, Part 2

Col 1 and Various Scriptures

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, July 5, 2020

Pray for Wilson family last Sunday

Please turn in your Bibles to Col 1. As we prepare for communion, I read this week a true story from the mission field in Africa a number of decades ago:

‘A missionary who was officiating at a communion service in the church was deeply moved when he looked around him. He saw the chief of the Ngoni, along with many other members of that tribe. He also saw members of the Senga and Tumbuka tribes—singing, praying, and participating in the Lord’s Supper together. In former years each of these tribes loved to brag about how many men, women, and children of the other tribes they had killed, raped, or maimed. The old chief could remember the days when the young Ngoni warriors had gone out to attack their enemies. They had left behind a trail of burned and devastated villages and had come home with their spears bloodied with the death of Senga and Tumbuka people. But as they once were divided by the spilling of each other’s blood, they are now united by the blood of their common Savior, Jesus Christ...

The *NY Times* in 1913 reported missionary Don Fraser’s account of a gathering of these people groups in Africa ‘to which 8,000 natives came – the church held only 2,000 – and sang their hymns to their own tribal music, to the very tunes, in fact, of what were once their war songs.’¹

Col 1:15-20 was probably an ancient hymn sung by the early church. Some think Paul wrote it or others think Paul quotes it. It’s about Christ-centered reconciliation by the Savior’s blood. Communion celebrates blood-bought union in Christ we have from every tribe or tongue, Africans or Caucasians, or in Colossians 3:11: barbarians, Scythians, slave and free, Jew and Greek.

In our divided world, what a blessing we can gather united for a communion service! It’s the first time since March 1st that we’ve gathered as one body in one service (we started with 2 services a month ago)! It’s because of what Jesus did in His body for us that we gather as one body to celebrate Christ.

Col 1:20 says God’s plan was “*through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*”²¹ *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,*²² *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death...*”

I want to pause here another week on reconciliation, as we remember His blood and body of flesh in the bread and up. Gospel reconciliation brings together those who were once enemies, now seated at the Lord’s Table in fellowship. It’s removing enmity and hostility so there’s unity and harmony.

We're studying Colossians verse by verse, section by section. This section's subject of reconciliation could not be more timely, relevant and important. Going through God's Word speaks to what's going on in our world and for today, I want us to take what it's in this text and its context to apply this to our lives, as I've been trying to apply it to mine all week. I said last week don't just think out there in society, think in here in the church. I've lived this week in principles of reconciliation, relationally, and I literally spent a big part of my week trying to follow and talk about reconciling principles and help others. If you've heard 'practice what you preach'-I had to practice before I could even prepare to preach with the little weekend time I had left.

All that to say God's providence and perfect timing has forced me to put in practice last week's message on Christ-centered reconciliation. It's forged this message in what I've been trying to walk through. I didn't have time to dig into the next text and subject but I needed the time to dig more deeply into reconciliation in application. So not just in these verses, I had to think through other verses that relate to reconciling with others or helping people to reconcile before I move on to the next verses in this book. This text says Christ reconciles all things, I can't reconcile all things, but scripture says as much as is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with all.² As we come to communion, it's for Christians reconciled to God and each other

Last week I quoted our Lord's words, applying this key word 'reconcile' to reconciling with our brothers, and I want to unpack that more the way Paul does through this book but also in other books. He says in 2 Cor 5 we have a '**message of reconciliation**' and we're also to be '**ministers of reconciliation**'

OUTLINE: 1. **The message of reconciliation**—the gospel
2. **The practice of reconciliation**—in the gospel

First the message of reconciliation – Col. 1:23 mentions the gospel, good news of His death and resurrection. V. 20 ends through the blood of His cross. In v. 22 reconciliation is through His body of flesh by His death. This is God's power for us in v. 21 who were alienated and hostile in mind toward God. Our world demands justice, as sinners we deserve the justice of God's wrath

Are you saved? Saved from what? Are you saved from God?

Rom 5:8: *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*⁹ *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be **saved by him from the wrath of God.***¹⁰ *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

¹¹ *More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.* This makes us rejoice, once an enemy now seated at His table, Jesus thank you! I didn't befriend God, no, while I was an enemy He reconciled me to God through Jesus who calls me friend. I had to be saved from sin and self, yes, but most of all, the Bible says I had to be saved from God, from God's wrath

for sin. The good news is we can be saved from God *by God*—from His wrath, by God the Son

2 Cor 5 is our message: *'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation...we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God... we beg you...we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain...Behold, now is "the acceptable time," behold, now is "the day of salvation."*'³

It's urgent: I urge you today, be reconciled by receiving the grace of God in Christ. I beg you to beg Christ for mercy. I want to plead with you as if God was pleading through me, as an ambassador for the King, He has pardon for you, but the offer will expire. His terms of peace: surrender in faith to Jesus. Now is the time to repent to be reconciled, let today be your day of salvation

Sinner, how your heart is troubled! God is coming very near;
Do not hide your deep emotion, Do not check that falling tear...
Jesus now is bending o'er you, Jesus lowly, meek and mild;
[He's] the friend who died to save you, Will you not be reconciled?
O be saved, His grace is free! O be saved, He died for thee!⁴
Another hymn says 'His erring child He reconciled, And pardoned from his sin
[and] ... The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win'⁵

The love of God reconciles estranged couples or kids or estranged cultures. We saw last week this Colossian church had different ethnic cultures that overcame animosity and became Christian family. Racism and division in the 1st century was as bad or worse than any in 21st century, but the sin of prejudice must bow before Christ's preeminence (key word, end of v. 18). Ethnic superiority is a thought to take captive to obey Christ's supremacy.

There's **one human race** He created with a diversity that brings Him glory.

Life made in His image matters, including all unborn lives

We should love black, brown, and all, and share Christ's love in the gospel to those who feel oppressed and only know of protests or political answers. The world's movements with radical solutions divide, but Jesus truly unites. Gospel reconciliation replaces alienation in v. 21 with heart transformation. The Roman empire was far more unjust than America but look at chapter 4.

Ch 4, v. 1 calls for slaves to be treated justly, but the key in v. 3 is praying for open doors for the word of Christ. Paul knew injustice and brutality. As police beat him, he brought up his rights, and it wasn't right for him to be in prison for a crime he didn't commit, but he writes in chains about the gospel

4:5 *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. So for us redeemed and reconciled by grace, we're called to speak graciously and wisely, redeeming the time. That includes our communicating on social media; season, flavor with grace*

We can make enemies online easily, let's seek to make friends face to face, and if we offend, let's let it be the message of God reconciling enemies and making peace through Christ and Him crucified. Let's make best use of time and use these times to speak or post graciously about the best news of Jesus.

In ch 3, v. 11, Paul talks about former ethnic tensions in the Colossians past, then v. 12 says put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, patience...

What do you feel when you see crowds of people protesting and crying out for justice? Some have felt harassed because of their skin or helpless in their situation. So many are lost with no spiritual shepherd leading them in how to respond rightly. What does Jesus feel when He sees them? Mt 9: *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [or 'moved with compassion, because they were confused...distressed and dispirited'] Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*⁶

Don't be irked by the crowds, be earnest in prayer, and moved to share

That's the compassionate heart of the Savior to put on for lost multitudes. There's a ripe harvest for us to labor in for the gospel and pray for laborers.

We need to grow in our sympathy and sensitivity to hurting communities so we can tell them of a Savior Jesus who was unjustly arrested, beaten by law enforcement and brutally killed, with blood the same color as all of us. But He rose from the dead conquering sin. His love is the answer to man's hate. I don't join the world's movement, let's give the world this gospel message

That's #1, the message of reconciliation,

#2. The practice of reconciliation

You can go to last weekend, especially Friday on our church blog for more on racial reconciliation but we need to apply this to relational reconciliation. It's one thing to talk about out there, but how are we doing in here, church?

Col 3:13 *'bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.'*

Those are principles of reconciliation scripture fills out. Turn to Heb 12. It starts in Col 1 where it says Christ made peace through the gospel, but that same peace in other scriptures is something we must make efforts to pursue with each other. Instead of striving against others, Heb 12:14 says: *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.* ¹⁵ *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled...*

TALK ABOUT ROOT OF BITTERNESS, TROUBLE, IMPACT OTHERS

This is deadly and poisonous in a church, this bitter cup that's shared. This bitter root grows. I've seen it, bitterness defiles and infects like a virus. It gets passed on from what comes out of your mouth, it spreads in your words

Is there a cure or antidote? Recognize it and repent to sever any bitter root. Peter said in Acts 8 '*see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity...your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.*'⁷ The gospel says Jesus drank the bitter cup reserved for me. On the cross my 'every bitter thought, every evil deed, crowned His blood-stained brow.' That's the power of the cross. Eph 4:32 says put all bitterness away, and instead be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving as God forgave you

Mk 11:25 says: *whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you ...* That's forgiveness from the heart that paves the way for reconciliation, which requires both asking forgiveness and granting forgiveness. Jas 5:16 says confess your sins to one another and pray for one another to be healed.

Ken Sande: 'When I forgive...with God's help I will make these promises

- I will not dwell on this incident.
- I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.
- I will not talk to others about this incident.
- I will not allow this incident to stand between us or to hinder our personal relationship.

When I am having a difficult time forgiving someone, with God's help I will:

- Renounce the desire to punish the other person, to make that person earn my forgiveness, or to demand guarantees that I will never be wronged again
- Assess my contributions to the problem
- If necessary, talk with that person to address any unresolved issues and to confirm repentance
- Recognize the ways that God is using the situation for good
- Remember how much God has forgiven me, not only in this situation but also in the past
- Draw on God's strength through prayer, Bible study, and, if necessary, Christian counseling

With God's help I will demonstrate forgiveness and practice the replacement principle by:

- Replacing painful thoughts and memories with positive thoughts and memories
- Saying positive things to and about the person whom I have forgiven
- Doing loving and constructive things to and for the person whom I have forgiven⁸

Col 3 says '*put on love*'—1 Cor 13 says love '*does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful* [other versions '*does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered*' / '*keeps no record of wrongs*']. A lot of bitterness and unforgiveness comes when you don't get what you want, when your way meets rejection, that can turn to resentment. Irritations that aren't covered by love can become irreconcilable differences, but biblical gospel love can reconcile. Some of you right now can think of a wrong suffered by you, or a record of wrongs—love covers a multitude of sin

1 Cor 13 goes on '*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*' In other words, love assumes the best, not the worst. If a friend says 'I haven't heard so I have to assume negatively...' no, you don't.

Actually love has to assume positively, believing the best if you don't know. You can ask if not sure but if you assume the worst you're not loving them. This is huge and I've much damage when people assume instead of asking the person. Or they assume based on second-hand information. Pr 18 '*If one gives an answer before he hears* [can include hearing the other side], *it is his folly and shame...one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes.*'⁹ Ecc 10:13: *Fools base their thoughts on foolish assumptions ...* Job rebuked friends '*Stop assuming my guilt, for I have done no wrong*'¹⁰

In the church we're not to assume people guilty until they prove innocence. Agape love assumes the best, believes the best, hopes the best, and endures.

Challies writes: '*Love believes all things*, choosing to believe the best about other people rather than the worst. It puts aside sinful cynicism to assume others are operating out of good motives instead of poor ones. Love *hopes all things* by looking toward other believers with the sincere desire that they are operating out of the best of intentions and the hope that they will accomplish great things for the Lord. And love *endures all things*, by not giving up quickly, but persevering through sin or the appearance of sin. It is quick to forgive, quick to overlook an offense, and slow to cast doubt...

1 Cor 4:5: '*Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden...and will disclose the purposes* [NASB "motives"] *of the heart...*' It is sinful to assume bad motives...grant the grace of believing and hoping and bearing and enduring all things...choose to look for the best possible, not the worst possible, explanation...love calls us to assume the best rather than the worst. Love calls us to regard them with hope rather than suspicion.¹¹

What if someone has something against you? Mt 5:23: *So if you are offering your gift...and there remember that your brother has something against you ...go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* Some of you gave gifts in the offering box today, but if you're unreconciled and unrepentant, God doesn't want your worship in that way. If you're not giving efforts to reconcile with a brother, God says do that before your gift

Acts 7:26 talks about Moses when two of his brethren 'were quarreling [he] tried to reconcile them, saying, "Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?"' That's a good question for us as we try to reconcile brothers.

1 Cor 11:18 *For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you...do you despise the church of God ...Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.* ²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,* ²⁴ *and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* ²⁵ *In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* ²⁶ *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* ²⁷ *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.* ²⁸ *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* ²⁹ *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

A pastor lists some self-examination questions to help prayerfully consider¹²
 'Have I fueled...conflict by my own pride, stubbornness, or defensiveness? Have I contributed to this conflict by hurtful words or...? Have I refused to give someone the benefit of the doubt and instead concluded that I know what the motives of another really are? Have I hindered reconciliation by my bitterness...? Am I acting like I have no responsibility for the problems that exist? Am I...refusing to extend forgiveness and seek reconciliation? Am I guilty of perpetuating this conflict by my laziness? Am I waiting for the other person to make the first move and thus violating Paul's command'
[Rom 12:20 *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all]*

Lam 3:20 says 'Let us test and examine our ways and return to the LORD.'
 Where we need forgiveness, let's ask the Lord and all we've sinned against, and be quick to forgive and seek peace before we return to the Lord's house

Ps 139:23 prays 'Examine me' (NET), 'O God, and know my heart...See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting' (NIV).

¹ John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 67, 69.

² Romans 12:18.

³ 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 ESV, 6:1-2 NASB.

⁴ Fanny Crosby, "O Be Saved!" Pronouns updated to modern English.

⁵ F. M. Lehman, "The Love of God."

⁶ Matthew 9:36-38 ESV [parentheses from NAS, NKJV, NLT].

⁷ Acts 8:23, 21-22 NKJV.

⁸ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 267–268.

⁹ Proverbs 8:13, 17.

¹⁰ Job 6:29 NLT.

¹¹ <https://www.challies.com/articles/please-do-please-dont-assume-motives/>

¹² David McClelland, "Apostolic Conflict Resolution" (www.sermonaudio.com)