

ROMANCING THE SAINTS AT COLOSSAE

Studies in the Book of Colossians

*“If Ephesians can be labeled the epistle portraying the ‘church of Christ,’
then Colossians must surely be labeled ‘the Christ of the church’”
unknown*

Text

Colossians 1:19-23

Topic

Paul describes how God “pleased” to reconcile
you so you could be presented before Him in Heaven

Title

“Presented and Accounted For”

Introduction

“You don’t make peace with your friends. You make peace with your enemies.”

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said those words soon after Israel signed an historic peace treaty with the PLO in 1993.

Within two years he would pay with his life for his commitment to peace.

It’s been estimated that in the last 3500 years some eight thousand peace treaties have been signed. The average time they remained in force was a mere two years.

There is, however, one ‘peace treaty’ that has been in force going on seven thousand years. Not only that, it can never be broken. It is referenced in our text, in verse nineteen, where we are told that Jesus has “made peace through the blood of His cross.”

The cross was about two thousand years ago but the treaty was made centuries earlier in the Garden of Eden when God promised Adam and Eve a Savior. To be precise, the treaty was conceived in eternity past before the creation of Heaven and earth.

The technical, theological word for what God promised and what Jesus accomplished on the cross is **reconciliation**. We're told He has reconciled all things to Himself (v19) and specifically that He has reconciled **you** if you are a Christian (v21).

As if that isn't wonderful enough we're told something more about reconciliation. We're told something about God's perspective on it. You read (in verse 19) "it pleased the Father." It doesn't mean that reconciliation is something that brings pleasure to God. It's not something done to God but something God did.

The word "pleased" means *to determine something with a gracious and benevolent purpose*. It means that God the Father "pleased," that He determined with a gracious and benevolent purpose, to send Jesus into the world so that you might be reconciled.

I want to talk about reconciliation in the context of it being something God "pleased" so that we understand it is not a cold, formal legal obligation but rather something that reveals the loving, seeking, Father-heart of God.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God "Pleased" That Jesus Would Be Your Reconciler, and #2 God "Pleased" That Jesus Would Be Your Presenter.

#1 God "Pleased" That Jesus Would Be Your Reconciler (v19-22a)

This idea that God "pleased" reconciliation is very important. Here is why. Usually it is two enemies that need to be reconciled by a concerned third party. We might, therefore, mistakenly think that God the Father and the human race are both enemies finally brought together by Jesus Christ.

God is not our enemy. We are enemies of His. Nevertheless He took the initiative to reconcile us while we were yet enemies. God was willing to come in the flesh and to lay down His life for us, His enemies.

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

What God “pleased” was that “in Him,” referring to Jesus Christ, “all the fullness should dwell.” “Fullness” is a word that the false teachers troubling the Colossian believers were using. They were using it to describe the sum-total of divine attributes and power belonging to God. It was synonymous for deity. In their case they were teaching that only God possessed this “fullness” and that He shared smaller portions of it with lesser spiritual beings like angels. They said Jesus was one of those ‘lesser’ creatures.

The word “dwell” means to be at home permanently. Paul’s sweeping statement does not allow for any other interpretation than this: In Jesus Christ the sum-total of divine attributes and power resides permanently. Or, in short, Jesus Christ the human being is fully God.

In His incarnation as God come in human flesh He (and He alone) is able to accomplish what the Father pleased.

Colossians 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.

Look to the end of the verse first. It was “through the blood of the cross” that Jesus was able to “reconcile” and make “peace.”

It goes back to the beginning. When Adam and Eve sinned God discussed what was necessary for them and their descendants to be reconciled. Blood had to be shed. By “blood” we mean death.

But not just any death. No mere man could die for the sins of the human race. First of all, no mere man could live a life to God’s perfect standards. And even if one could, he would only be able to die for himself and not for anyone else.

Only God in human flesh could reconcile the human race with God.

Paul tells us that reconciliation applies to “all things... whether things on earth or things in Heaven.” The entire creation was thrown into turmoil when Adam and Eve sinned. The entire creation is reconciled by Jesus in the sense that by His sacrifice on the cross God the Father is able to fulfill His stated plans for the universe. It doesn't mean everyone and everything is saved. It means that God has removed the barriers and that those who choose Him may be reconciled.

Notice that “peace” is a result of reconciliation. It is foolish to talk about political peace or personal peace apart from Jesus Christ. History is moving towards a predetermined end. We must factor-in prophecy and destiny when developing our worldview. Politically we must seek peace. Personally we ought to try to live at peace with others. But any lasting peace depends upon a belief in Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled
Colossians 1:22 in the body of His flesh through death...

Paul was addressing believers in a church. Before they met Jesus they were “alienated” from God. The word means *foreigner* or *stranger*. It describes everyone in their natural birth. We are born earthly, not heavenly. We are citizens of a fallen planet, descendants of a fallen race. We are aliens when it comes to citizenship in Heaven.

You can be a friendly alien! We weren't. Before we meet Jesus we were “enemies.” In our natural state we are enemies of God, hostile to His will and purposes for our lives.

Our hostility is revealed both in our “mind” and by our “wicked works.”

- By our “mind” is meant the fact that we think selfish, evil thoughts. Or if that's too harsh for you it also means that our thinking is earthbound, fleshly, worldly, and material even though the universe is essentially spiritual.
- By our “wicked works” is meant the fact we act selfishly and for our own benefit. Or if that's too harsh for you it also means that we are not loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

You should realize by now the hopeless, helpless condition of every human being. If there is to be peace, there must be reconciliation. If there is to be reconciliation, God must take the initiative to accomplish it for us. But in order to do so there must be a death and the one dying must be both God and man.

“Yet now He has reconciled [us] in the body of His flesh through death.” It’s the only possible solution. And it’s been accomplished by Jesus Christ because God “pleased” it.

God has never been your enemy. He has been at work in eternity and in history to reconcile you so you may be at peace with Him.

Five great Bible words that describe what God “pleased” for you:

1. In **justification** you stand before God guilty and condemned but God “pleased” to declare you righteous.
2. In **redemption** you stand before God as a slave but God “pleased” to grant you freedom.
3. In **forgiveness** you stand before God as a debtor but God “pleased” to pay your debt and forgive you.
4. In **reconciliation** you stand before God an enemy but God “pleased” to make peace with you.
5. And in **adoption** you stand before God a stranger but God “pleased” to make you a son.

One day all of this will be fully, finally realized in Heaven. In fact, Jesus will personally present you in Heaven.

#2 God “Pleased” That Jesus Would Be Your Presenter

(v22b-23)

Jesus is working in and through your life to complete you. When you get to Heaven the work will be done.

Colossians 1:22 ... to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight...

The ultimate purpose of God the Father, what He “pleased,” was for His Son to one day “present you” before Him in Heaven. You were an alien enemy but He reconciled you so you could appear before Him and enjoy again what Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden - unbroken, perfect fellowship with God.

The word “present” means *to stand beside*. The Lord, Jesus Christ, will stand beside you and present you to the Father. It sort of reminds me of bringing home your fiancée to meet your parents - except without any of the stress or doubt as to what they might think of your choice. The Father can't wait to meet you in Heaven.

How will you look to Him?

You will be “holy.” Inwardly, internally, you will be perfect. No sin. No intrusive thoughts. No fears. No doubts. No ‘nothing’ that plagues us so much now.

You will be “blameless.” It can mean *without blemish*. Outwardly, externally, you will be perfect. You will have been raised from the dead in a glorified body, or raptured off of the earth in one.

You will be “above reproach.” Upwardly, eternally, there will be no possibility of future sin or selfishness. You will enjoy perfect, unbroken fellowship and communion with God and with every other saved individual.

We've thus far seen what God “pleased” in your past and for your future. Verse twenty-three discusses what is going on right now, in the meanwhile, on your journey home.

Colossians 1:23 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.

Read casually this seems almost to cancel-out everything God has done and desires yet to do. Read carefully, however, it reinforces your security in Jesus Christ and underlines the truth that He that has begun a good work in you will complete it.

Context is super-important when analyzing these warnings in Scripture. The situation in Colossae was that false teachers were suggesting to the believers that the Gospel Paul preached needed supplementing. They were telling the Christians that there was a further, deeper, superior understanding that they must strive to gain if they were to eventually attain the fullness of their salvation. Thus the believers were in danger of leaving the basic and essential doctrines of the faith in favor of these false doctrines.

(By the way, for those who use this passage to teach that a believer might forfeit their salvation through neglect or sin. The false teachers were telling the Christians they were not truly saved because they hadn't achieved certain spiritual standards. Does it make sense that Paul would think to comfort them by essentially saying the same thing? That unless they kept-up their end of the transaction they would be lost in the end? I see no logic or comfort in that).

Paul used an analogy. If we understand it we will have a better idea what he intended. Colossae was in a region known for severe and devastating earthquakes that would level the buildings reducing them to rubble. So Paul used the analogy of a building that could not be destroyed by an earthquake.

The words “grounded,” “steadfast,” and “moved away” are all architectural terms:

- “Grounded” refers to the foundation of a structure.
- “Steadfast” refers to the structure itself.
- “Moved away” can be rendered *shifting* or *shaken*.

The analogy is of a house built on a solid foundation that would endure the very worst earthquake.

We'll come back to the analogy in a moment. First let's understand what the rest of the words in this verse mean.

The “hope of the Gospel” is the message of eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The method God had determined to communicate the Gospel was that it be “preached to every creature under Heaven.” That doesn’t mean it must be preached to every creature, only that preaching is God’s way of getting the message out to the world.

Paul’s preaching was a good example. The Colossians had “heard” the Gospel through him when Epaphras got saved and brought the message back home to them.

So here is what Paul was saying. The simple Gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul preached was like a house that was built on a rock-solid foundation and could not be shaken. It didn’t need any ‘additions’ or a ‘second story.’ All that a Christian need do is “continue” in “the faith,” in the doctrine of the apostles, that he or she had “heard” and received when they were saved.

The Colossians should, therefore, “continue” in the sound doctrine they had already “heard” and not be shaken by any teaching that they were falling short of spiritual truth.

I think Paul was merely but powerfully saying, “Just continue in what you already know, the faith once-for-all preached to you by me and the other apostles.”

What did they know? They knew that God “pleased” to reconcile them and to have them presented in Heaven.

They knew all of that was only possible since Jesus Christ was God in human flesh.

While the false teachers were trying to shake their faith, they could stand fast in the certain “hope” of their past and their future.

So can you!

Do you think of God the Father as “pleased” to reconcile you or forced to because of Jesus?

Do you understand that in that future day when you appear in Heaven God is “pleased” to have Jesus present you complete and perfect?

You should because it is true. And it will help you to reject all the false teachings that diminish the person and work of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.