

Lesson 7: “Reconciled In His Flesh”

1:21-23

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Colossians 1:21-23 *And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— if indeed you continue in ^(a)the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, ^(b)was made a ^(c)minister.*

The apostle Paul has concluded his powerful statement about the preeminence of Jesus in both creation and the church, given in 1:15-20. His last thought, in verse 20, was about “*reconciling all things to Himself.*” And now He continues with this thought of reconciliation, going deeper into what it is, and what it means to us. In today’s passage we learn:

1. The NEED of reconciliation (v. 21)
2. The MEANS of reconciliation (v. 22a)
3. The GOAL of reconciliation (v. 22b), and
4. The OBLIGATION of reconciliation (v. 23).

First, let us establish what Biblical reconciliation is at its core:

- ✓ Reconciliation is the bringing back the fellowship of man with God, that has been estranged since the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3)
- ✓ Reconciliation is all of God’s doing – man cannot reconcile himself to God
- ✓ Just as reconciliation of receipts and expenditures is an equalizing of the two, so reconciliation between God and man is an equalizing of a person to positional holiness so as to be able to fellowship with a holy God.

THE NEED OF RECONCILIATION (verse 21)

When one is not saved a person is, according to Paul as led by the Spirit:

1. Alienated to God. This means a non-believer is an alien to the kingdom of God. Literally, it means “estranged,” as in “divorced” or “separated” from God. Such a one is unable to please God no matter how hard he or she might try.

Isaiah 64:6 All our righteous deeds are like filthy rags ...

2. Engaged in evil deeds. This is what most think of when they think of the lost. And it is true that those who don’t know Christ have little if any moral compass as to what is right and wrong in God’s eyes. All are engaged in some kind of evil, whether what the world would call extreme or mild, but nonetheless all are guilty of premeditated sin.

Romans 3:12b There is none who does good; there is not even one.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

3. Hostile in mind. A non-Christian is not necessarily lost because of some great sin, but simply for mental rejection or even mental indifference to God. The unbeliever might think about God on occasion, but certainly doesn’t understand the import or even the possibility of a true relationship with God. Hostility to God causes distrust of those “born again” and aversion to going to

church or reading the Bible. And hostility to God causes justification for moral beliefs and behaviors contrary to God's moral standards given in His Holy Word.

Romans 3:11 There is none who understands; there is none who seeks for God.

THE MEANS OF RECONCILIATION (verse 22a)

The means of reconciliation - in other words, the agent by which reconciliation was enacted by God - is, amazingly, revealed here as: "*in His fleshly body through death.*" Don't miss the import of this!

Redemption, you will remember, was through what means or by what agent? Yes, by Jesus' BLOOD, for blood was the price of the ransom that resulted in redemption.

But reconciliation is said here to be by Jesus BODY – his very flesh given in death.

Do you see? - REDEMPTION is by Jesus' BLOOD. RECONCILIATION is by Jesus' BODY. So in our ritual remembrance of communion, we celebrate our RECONCILIATION in the emblem of His body, and our REDEMPTION in the emblem of His blood. We are brought near to God by Jesus' BODY and bought by God by Jesus' BLOOD. As the Psalmist wrote: "Selah" – think on that!

I see at least 3 important implications of the BODY as the agent of reconciliation:

1. Since His body was the visible "icon" (image) of God, we now have a visible representation of the One to whom we are reconciled. Jesus' physical body gives us a visible picture of the God with Whom we now have an intimate relationship.
2. Since the Colossians were being bombarded with the heresy of a Jesus who was spiritual, but not physical, Paul makes it clear that it was the physical body of Jesus given in death that brought reconciliation to those who would receive it.
3. Just as it was the death of an unblemished physical body of a lamb, bull or goat that brought temporary reconciliation (atonement) with God, so it is appropriate that it is the death of the physical body of the unblemished Son of God that brings permanent reconciliation to all who receive it as such.

THE GOAL OF RECONCILIATION (verse 22b) ... for us to be made:

1. HOLY
2. BLAMELESS
3. BEYOND REPROACH

1. "**Holy**" refers to being set apart in full devotion to God. It speaks of "sinless perfection." This is, of course, a positional perfection – how God sees you in your reconciliation. And it is a challenge in this life for which to strive, until we are indeed made sinless in glory when we get to heaven. The apostle Peter gave us this challenge in his first epistle.

1 Peter 1:15-16 But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I AM holy."

So, believers are seen as holy in God's sight because of the death sacrifice of the body of Jesus. Thus we can enjoy intimate fellowship with Him here and now. AND we are to continually strive in God's strength to be a person of integrity and high moral character.

2. "**Blameless**" refers to the removal of guilt for any crime of action or attitude against God. There are no longer any charges against us. Our sins are as far as "*the east is from the west.*" (Psalm 103:12). The prophet Isaiah described this in this poetic fashion:

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool."

3. **“Beyond reproach”** refers to having immunity against any accusation. The believer is untouchable from and unchargeable for any accusation brought against him by the devil = the accuser. Jesus is the Advocate of every believer, declaring “not guilty” to any accusation of sin.

THE OBLIGATION OF RECONCILIATION (verse 23)

Yes, reconciliation is all of God – He gave His Son as an offering in His physical body to bring all who receive His Son to a position of holiness in God’s eyes. Yet there remains an obligation that we have to live out that reconciliation in intimate relationship with God.

The “if” that begins verse 23 is not stating a condition of our reconciliation, but rather the proof to the believer that he/she has indeed appropriated the work of Christ in receiving Him. In other words, the reconciled believer will “*continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast.*” And he/she will not be “*moved away from the hope of the gospel.*” This is the believer’s continual challenge and obligation in response to Christ’s body given for our reconciliation.

Do you recall the 4-chapter outline given in our opening Colossians lesson regarding our faith?

1. **DOWNWARD** 1:23 – “*firmly established and steadfast*”
2. **UPWARD** 2:7 – “*having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him*”
3. **INWARD** 3:15 - “*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you*”
4. **OUTWARD** 4:5 – “*conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity*”

Here in verse 23 is the emphasis on the “inner life” of the Christian, reaching “downward.” What is it that makes a plant “firmly established and steadfast?” Clearly, a healthy root system, which you cannot see, but can know by the healthy branches above that they are strong. In the same way, a believer must develop a healthy spiritual root system in consistent intimate relationship with his/her God. This is the Christian life that others cannot see, except the results of it revealed in a healthy Christian life. This is the “secret” life of a believer that must be developed. Let me here mention what I consider to be the critical elements of this life.

7 KEYS TO A “FIRMLY ESTABLISHED,” “DOWNWARD” CHRISTIAN LIFE

1. **“Practicing the presence of God”** It was Father Lawrence, a 17th century monk who is credited as first promoting this important practice of continual awareness of God.
2. **Contrition-Confession-Repentance** I put these three together as the complete process of acknowledging our continual battle with sin before God.
3. **Meditation on God’s Word** Psalm 1 tells us that blessed is the one whose delight is in the Law of Lord, and who meditates on it day and night.
4. **Praying without ceasing** The healthy believer must cultivate a continual conversation with God throughout the day, in thanksgiving and petition for His will to guide.
5. **Contentment** In Philippians 4:11, Paul says he had learned in his inner being to be content in whatever the circumstance. We too must cultivate this contentment.
6. **Trust** A healthy believer must learn to trust God in all things – fully believing that He is in control of every circumstance. This is the key to a worry-free life.
7. **Forbearance** This is the predetermined forgiveness and grace given to everyone even before an indiscretion occurs. This should be afforded all, but especially our Christian brothers and sisters. This is the literal command of Philippians 4:5.

SUMMARY

The **NEED** of RECONCILIATION is our estrangement from God because of our **SIN**

The **MEANS** of RECONCILIATION is the sacrificed **BODY** of Jesus

The **GOAL** of RECONCILIATION is the believer’s **HOLINESS**

The OBLIGATION of RECONCILIATION is inner **RELATIONSHIP** with Jesus