

Colossians 1 pt. 5 v19-23

Up until now we have been examining Paul's hymn of exaltation to Christ found in verses 15-20. We continue in that endeavor now.

The preceding verses declare Christ's preeminent authority, His creative force, His unmatched dignity, His relationship with the church, and His resurrection power.

We now take a look at the "HOW" and "WHY" of it all. How could a man who lived, breathed, and walked upon planet earth - not simply in the imaginations of mankind - possibly be involved in all of those cosmic events? And, what is the purpose?

V.19 - Jesus Christ is FULLY GOD in agreement with the divine prerogative of the Father.

Douglas Moo suggests, "We might paraphrase, "God in all his fullness has chosen to dwell in Christ."¹

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 132.

Here we are presented with some measure of how the triune God relates to Himself. We get a partial view of the doctrine of the Trinity.

For those who reject the idea of the Trinity on the flimsy ground that the word 'trinity' is not found in the text, let it be understood that the term itself is important only insofar as it succinctly communicates to us the trinitarian concepts that are so plainly presented throughout Scripture.²

What we see through a careful examination of Scripture is that the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal, substantially the same, and unified. (Gen 1:26, 3:22; Isa 6:8; Psa 110:1; Matt 3:16-17, 22:41-46, 28:19; 1 Cor 12:4-6; Eph 4:4-6; Heb 1:8; Jde 20-21)³

How exactly that works out is one of the divine mysteries of our faith. We need to be careful to avoid over-explaining and/or over-simplifying the Trinity because often our best attempts at describing the Trinity unwittingly wander into heretical territory as we fail to maintain the proper measure of consistency or theological soundness in order to make our clever illustrations work.

² Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 23.

³ Ibid, 226-257.

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Now, in simple terms, all that God is, Christ is, was, and shall be forevermore, amen.

But understand, a man did not ascend to Godhood - that is to say, that Christ didn't become God but rather God became a man. That is a very important truth to understand. The other way around presents a works-based theology and even presents the false idea that any person can achieve deification (Buddhism, Mormonism, etc.) if they would just try hard enough, and live good enough.

We know from Scripture that God became man, He emptied Himself, humbled Himself to become like us, to share in our weakness, to be tempted as we are tempted. (Luk 1:28-35; Phil 2:5-6; Heb 4:15, 5:2)

It was God's will to be the Christ, the Messiah, the promised One -- and by that to guarantee reconciliation in and through Himself.

It has been said, “If you want something done right, do it yourself.”
God did that!

V.20 - He is the one who is responsible for reconciliation -- making wrong things right.

Now, the scope of reconciliation through Christ is vast and encompasses ALL THINGS -- whether on earth or in heaven.

Paul’s description of the earthly realm and heavenly realm reinforces an idea that he has already shared with the Colossians (v.16) - the notion of visible and invisible realms and that Christ is over all creation, not just a limited portion.

There are, in fact, other forces at work in creation that are invisible to us, and as indicated here, both the visible and invisible realms are in need of reconciliation. Both have been “touched” by sin.⁴ Both have been damaged in some way that requires repair.

How does God repair the breach in creation? The blood of Christ’s cross.

⁴ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 225.

That answer seems simple enough to most believers. But how exactly does that work? How is the cross effective as a means of reconciliation since many had died upon a cross prior to Jesus, and many after? It was so common and despised. How is it that something so shameful should be the tool God uses to bring about peace?

Martin Hengel writes, “The excessive use made of crucifixion by the Romans in the pacification of Judaea meant that from the beginning of direct Roman rule crucifixion was taboo as a form of the Jewish death penalty...the death of Jesus on the cross is very much more than a religious symbol...it is more than just an ethical model which calls for discipleship, though it is all this as well. What we have here is God’s communication of himself, the free action through which he establishes the effective basis of our salvation. In ancient thought...an ethical and symbolic interpretation of the crucifixion was still possible, but to assert that God himself accepted death in the form of a crucified Jewish manual worker from Galilee in order to break the power of death and bring salvation to all men could only seem folly and madness to men of ancient times.”⁵

⁵ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 85, 89.

We must take a moment to consider the message of the cross. We must grasp this! After two millennia, the theology of the cross that we present sometimes appears as bright shining glory in and of itself [SHOW PICTURES] - but what Paul is presenting to the Colossians is the idea that God took something common, and shameful in the eyes of the world, and by that, made peace.

This is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of our faith - the message of the cross.

Is it any wonder then that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “[1Co 1:18 NKJV] 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Gayle Erwin puts the cross into context when he writes:

“The cross was never foolishness to me. I saw it everywhere. It gracefully adorned lofty steeples. In polished silver or burnished wood, it decorated the interiors of churches and other religious buildings. It hung in expensive jewelry around elegant necks. It graced the lapels of suits and marked the fancy

stationery of big churches. It was sung about and proclaimed. People carried huge and heavy crosses for penance or publicity. The cross permeated my world. But it was never foolishness. How could that be? Then it occurred to me that I didn't truly understand the cross, primarily because people don't die on crosses in these days. Had Jesus come to this age, we would have treated him far more humanely. We would have electrocuted him or hanged him or gassed him or placed him before the firing squad or at least injected him with a lethal dose of drugs. Imagine the results of such a modern execution. I would now be collaring people on the streets and witnessing in this manner: "Neighbor, my best friend just died in the electric chair for you. If you will believe this and take up your electric chair and follow him, you will be saved."⁶

The message of the cross certainly appears to be foolishness to those who are perishing!

⁶ Gayle Erwin, *The Jesus Style*. (Cathedral City, CA: Yahshua Publishing, 2011), np.

To the first-century mind the cross was anything but peace, wisdom, or blessed assurance. It was an instrument of torture and humiliation.

It **MUST** be the power of God that takes the shameful cross and makes it His instrument of peace.

Peace for who?

V.21-22 - In Paul's letter he is of course addressing the Colossian Christians but the peace that God has made through the cross is felt and declared across time and space, extending even to us.

Remember that God has reconciled **ALL CREATION** through the cross!

This is a promise for our age too.

Paul describes the Colossians of being at one time **ALIENATED** from God. This means that they were estranged from God, separated. They were foreign to God, and God was foreign to them.⁷

⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 132.

Moreover, they were GOD'S ENEMIES. This is quite a harsh accusation. Paul categorizes the human condition, before being reconciled to Christ, as one of hostility.

What we see is that in our own self-governed state, without Christ, we are counted as hostile toward God. This flies in the face of modern thinking (or even ancient thinking) which proposes that one may be agnostic - neither aligned with God nor opposed to Him. That one may simply be uninterested neither for nor against.

That is simply not the case. There is no fence to sit on when it comes to man's standing before the Living God. Either we are His, won to Him by the cross, or we are His enemies.

Now, that truth has led to some pretty terrible behavior on the part of Christians. Because when we discover that the world is divided along these lines we sometimes feel compelled to assault God's enemies -- like He needs us to conquer for Him! In those moments we would do well to remember Jesus' words to a feisty Peter who sought to defend his Lord by force: [Mat 26:52 NKJV]

52 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

AND we should take our cues on how we are to behave from Christ's example. Even though we (they) were enemies and strangers YET HE HAS RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF and He has made PEACE.

The ministry of the gospel is not one of assault but reconciliation.

Paul writes about this to the Corinthians:

[2Co 5:17-19 NKJV] 17 "Therefore, if anyone [is] in Christ, [he is] a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 18 Now all things [are] of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

So then, wherever God's people are found propagating or instigating conflict among humanity - where it is God's express will that we should be messengers of reconciliation and peace - we are found to be out of alignment with God's will and God's word.

We are to be people who are, by the grace of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, endeavoring to bring the gospel to bear in such a way that damaged lives, touched by sin, are made right, in Jesus' name.

One of the early church fathers, John Chrysostom, wrote:

“When thou art minded to war against thy brother, bethink thee that thou warrest against the members of Christ, and cease from thy madness. For what if he be an outcast? What if he be vile? What if he be open to contempt? So saith [Christ] He, ‘It is not the will of My Father that one of these little ones should perish.’ (Matt. 18:14.)”⁸

And all of that centers around the message of the cross. When we lose focus of the cross we lose the focus of the gospel, the focus of the apostles doctrine, and the focus of Scripture.

⁸ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Colossians,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. Ashworth and John Albert Broadus, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 273.

Remember Paul's words: [1Co 2:1-5 NKJV] 1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you **except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching [were] not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (emphasis mine)

“Jesus Christ and Him crucified” is the center of our message -- by the cross, by the blood of Jesus, people may be reconciled to God. They may have their relationship with Him restored. They may be granted that abiding peace that so many people long for.

The cross was the countertop on which the transaction for men's souls took place. Our debt has been paid. Our accounts cleared - reconciled with God.

The result of that reconciliation IS peace. Now we must consider the notion of peace -- what is that all about?

Richard Melick writes, “The peace achieved through the death of Jesus is an objective peace. It is the peace of relationships, not feelings. Although the human heart cries for feelings of peace, the deep need is for a relationship of peace. When relationships are correct, feelings follow...peace brings order and harmony into what is otherwise chaotic and distorted.”⁹

We further see in v.22 that there is a benefit from this peace that God has made through the cross of Christ.

Inasmuch as peace indicates a cessation of hostilities - an end to the battle between our sin nature and our holy God - there is more to it than that.¹⁰ God didn't end the war just to stop the fight so we can sit in our filthy trenches and continue to accumulate dirt under our fingernails waiting for an opportune moment to rage against Him!

He reconciled us and brought peace to us so that He might cleanse us from our wretched filth and set us apart for His purposes. In that reconciliation He allows us to shed our guilt and

⁹ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 227.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Colossians,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. Ashworth and John Albert Broadus, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 272.

stand against any accusation hurled against us (Rev 12:10), and to live in a manner that is reflective of who God is -- holy, above reproach, “without the possibility of anyone accusing you.”¹¹

So, in our text we see both the JUSTIFICATION of the believer and the SANCTIFICATION of the believer through Jesus.

Justification means that on the merit of Christ’s righteousness those who believe in Him are seen as holy in God’s eyes.

Sanctification means that by the work of the Holy Spirit we are made holy, we are constantly and continually conformed into the image of Christ. (Rom 8:29-30)

Those things are the product of a restored relationship with our Holy God through the blood of the cross.

V.23 - Paul addresses the progressive nature of growing in holiness -- IF YOU CONTINUE...

In this exhortation Paul puts a practical bow on all of this grand theological teaching as a reminder that the reader of this letter

¹¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 437.

has a personal responsibility to press into the message of the cross and the godhood of Christ.

All that we have reviewed since v.15 IS THE GOSPEL, in beautiful, lyrical form.

The message is this: Jesus Christ is fully God. He holds the first office over and above all creation. As God, He was and is inextricably involved in creation. Being fully God, and at the will of the Father, He descended from heaven, became a man, and dwelt among His creation. He lived a blameless life marked by holiness. As an act of grace He submitted to a common shameful public execution. His spilled blood, holy as it is, sufficiently paid the penalty for the sins of the world. In His substitutionary death (dying in our place) Jesus restored a right relationship, and established peace, for those who believe upon His name, and He will once and for all bring all of creation into a right relationship with their creator in due time either by judgment or by faith. (Phl 2:9-10) That, by the work of the cross He presents the faithful to God just as He is, holy and unassailable in righteousness, since it is His righteousness that we wear, and He is shaping us into His own image by the Holy Spirit until we dwell with Him in eternity. Amen.

This final “IF” statement that Paul issues the Colossians should give them cause for self-examination. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ and nothing else that is to be the center of their faith.

As we will see, the Colossians had quite a time chasing after other flashy, spiritual sounding topics. That is dangerous!

They must, we must, continue to be grounded, steadfast, not moved away from the gospel -- the good message. Do not be moved to turn to the left or the right. Do not be distracted by flashy sounding Christian-ese things that only have a shadow of the true gospel substance. Cling doggedly, for all you're worth, to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and His grace shall bear you up. (Psa 28:9)

This was Paul's burning purpose as he proclaimed this message widely and freely. Let this be our hearts' purpose as well.